

DECEMBER 1937



10¢ CLUES DETECTIVE

STORIES

REG. U. S. PAT. OFFICE

Novelettes

CRIME ON SKIS

by Anthony Rud

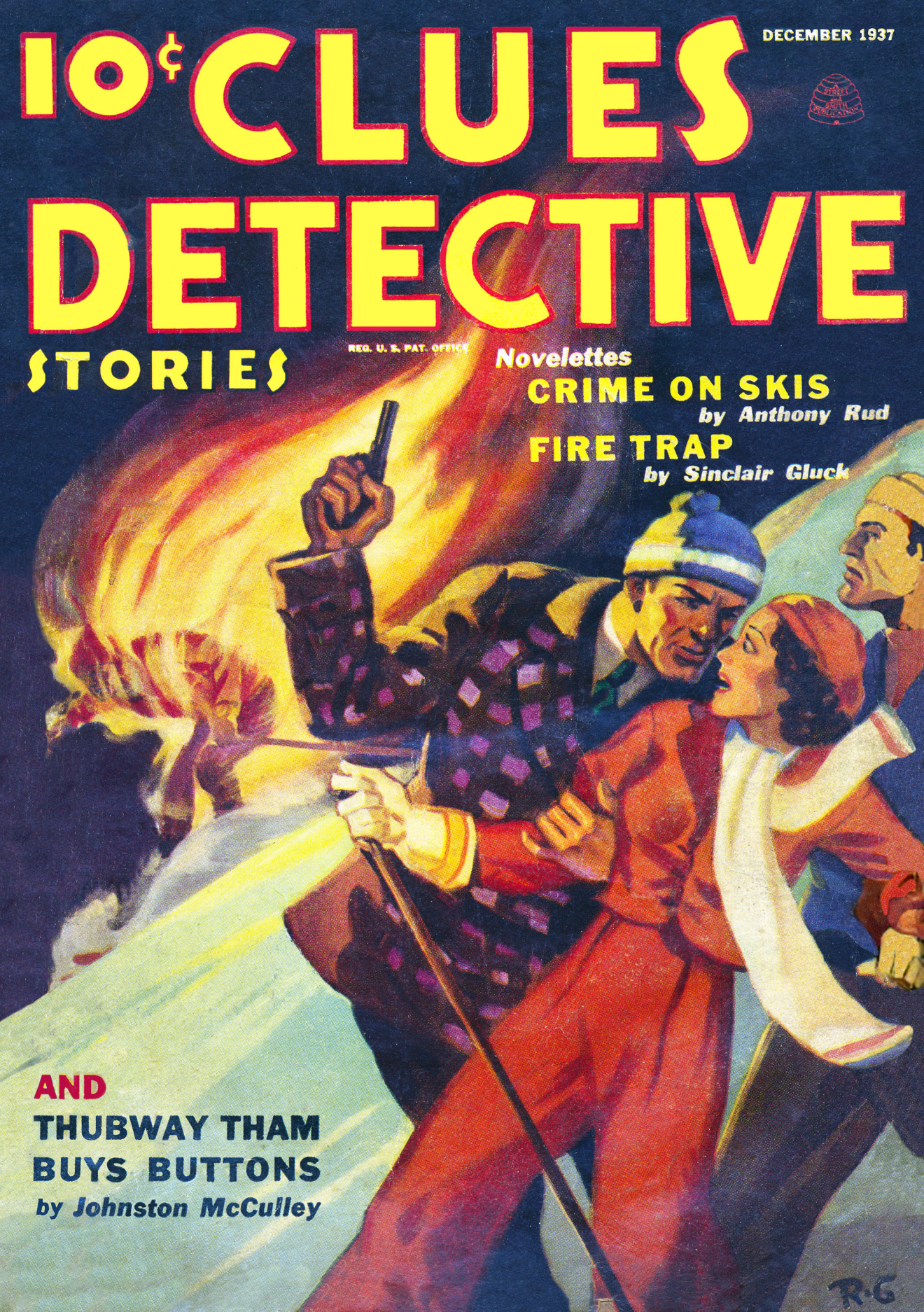
FIRE TRAP

by Sinclair Gluck

AND

THUBWAY THAM BUYS BUTTONS

by Johnston McCulley



R-G

They asked him to turn in his suit...



For ten years Hoppington had acted Santa Claus at the neighborhood Christmas party. A sentimental man, he loved the expansive paternal feeling the role gave him, the laughter of the children, and their caresses . . . And now they were asking him to turn in his suit . . . Olney, a neighbor, was to be Santa Claus this year . . . Hoppington couldn't understand it. They explained it by saying that he ought to give somebody else a chance, but quite by accident, he heard vague rumors that the children themselves had asked for a change . . .

You Never Know

Middle-aged people are more likely to have halitosis (bad breath) than younger ones.

Bridge-work, dental plates, digestive disturbances are factors in causing this unpleasant condition, which, by the way, children are the first to detect. Fermentation of tiny food particles in the mouth, of course, remains the major cause. The insidious thing about halitosis is that the victim never knows when he has it.

To combat halitosis, make a habit of rinsing the mouth with Listerine, the quick deodorant and antiseptic. It puts your breath beyond reproach. Listerine Antiseptic cleanses the mouth, gums, and teeth, halts fermentation and overcomes odors it produces. Use Listerine Antiseptic before business and social engagements. Lambert Pharmacal Company, St. Louis, Mo.

LISTERINE checks halitosis (bad breath)

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"The dog-and-pony number was finishing," writes Stage Manager Frank M. Polhamius, Jr., of 195 Fuller Lane, Winnetka, Ill., "when an overloaded main fuse blew out. As the stage went black, panic threatened the lives of thousands crowding the full house.

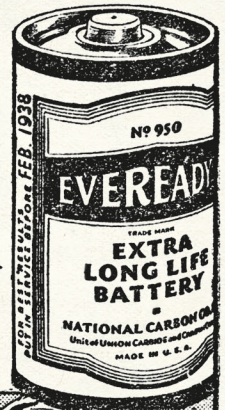
"Part of my equipment as stage manager is my trusty 'Eveready' flashlight. Before the audience could sense that anything was wrong, I called for the curtain, dashed to the wings and played my flashlight on the apron of the stage like a baby spot.

"Fortunately, a dance team was ready to go on. In a split second they were on the stage and going through their routine in the spot furnished by my flashlight. DATED 'Eveready' batteries in that

flashlight had lighted my way around dark theatres for many weeks before they

were called upon to meet this spine-chilling emergency. So you can bet I realized in those critical moments just how much it can mean to buy batteries that are *fresh* and full of life. No one can ever know how many lives were saved by DATED 'Eveready' batteries that night.

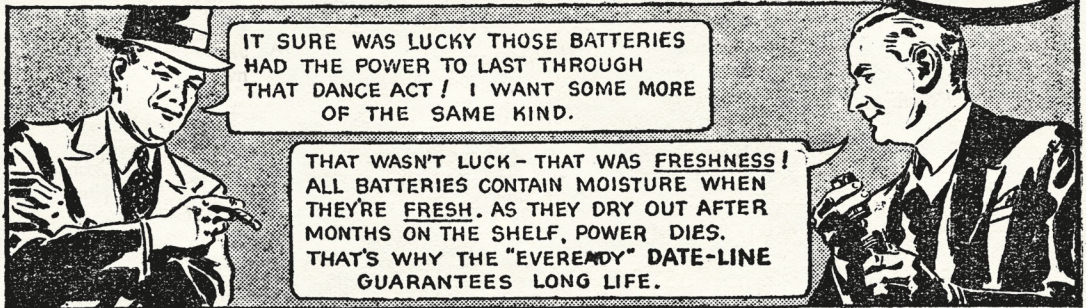
(Signed)
Frank M. Polhamius, Jr.



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NEXT ISSUE ON SALE DECEMBER 8th

CLUES DETECTIVE

Stories

Vol. XXXIX No. 1

December, 1937

A Street & Smith Publication

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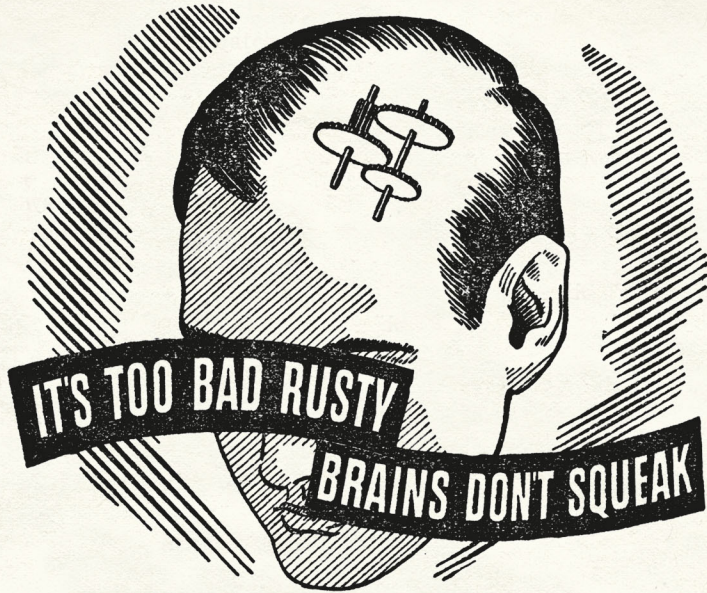
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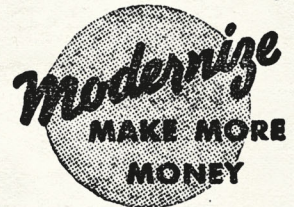
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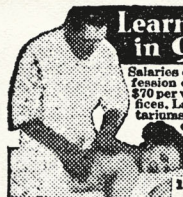
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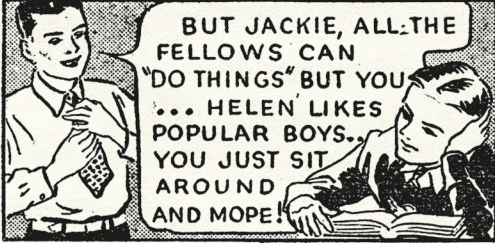
THE HERO OF AMATEUR HOUR

Jack was the "HIT" of Helen's Party ... and he wasn't even there!



YES—THE WHOLE CROWD'S COMING TO MY PARTY... 'CEPT JACK EVANS ... HE'S NOT MUCH FUN.

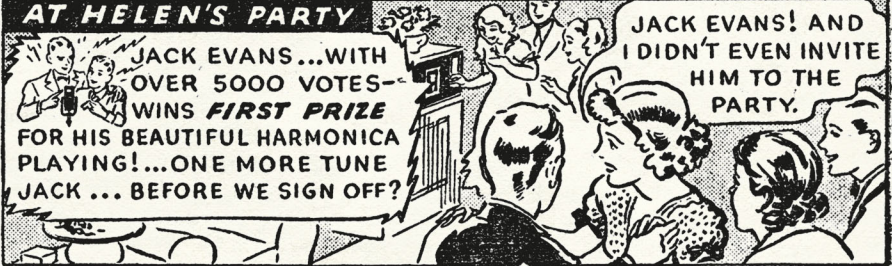
HELEN DIDN'T EVEN SAY HELLO! GUESS I DON'T GET ASKED TO HER PARTY.



BUT JACKIE, ALL THE FELLOWS CAN "DO THINGS" BUT YOU ... HELEN LIKES POPULAR BOYS... YOU JUST SIT AROUND AND MOPE!



WELL, MAY AS WELL PRACTICE UP FOR AMATEUR HOUR. GEE! THERE'S AN IDEA! MY HARMONICA! THEY DON'T KNOW I CAN PLAY!



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 - Drums and Traps
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 - Guitar
 - Saxophone
 - Mandolin
 - Ukulele
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 - Clarinet
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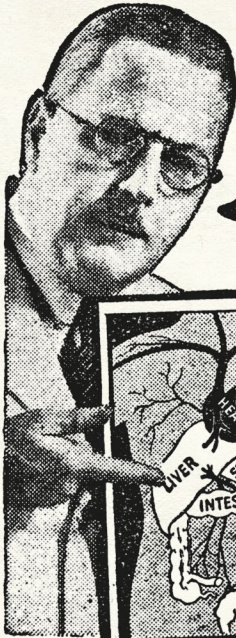
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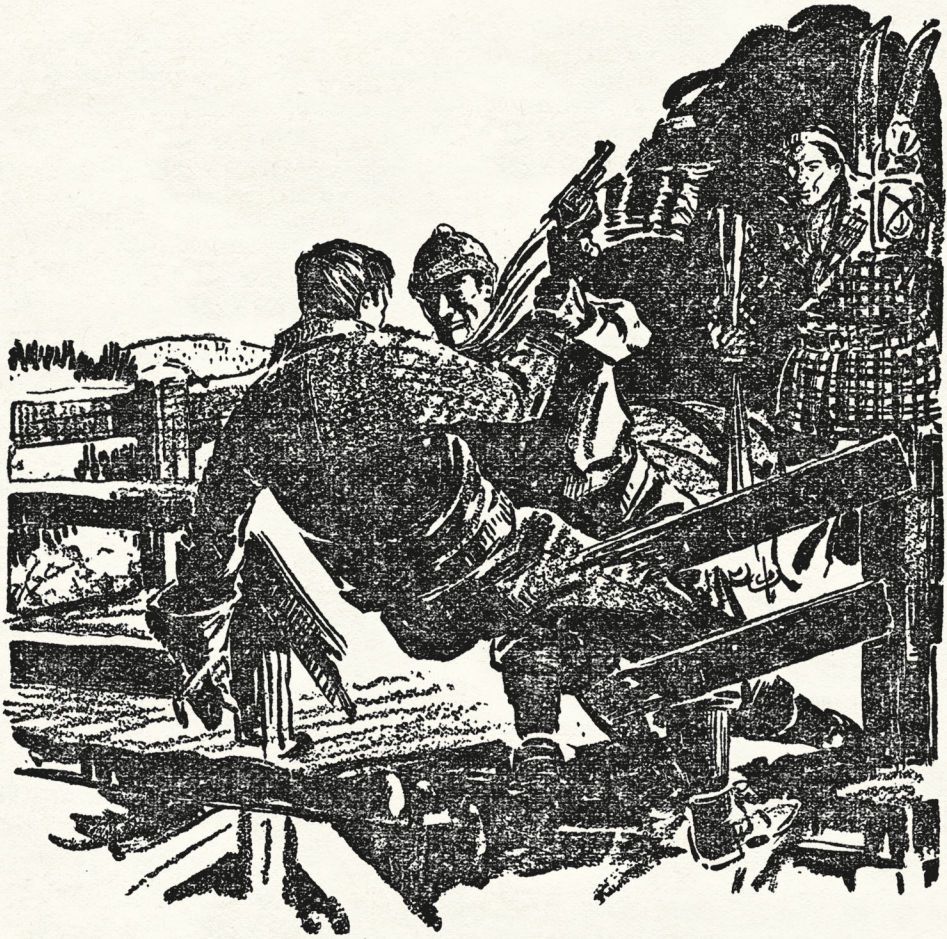
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CRIME ON SKIS

By Anthony Rud

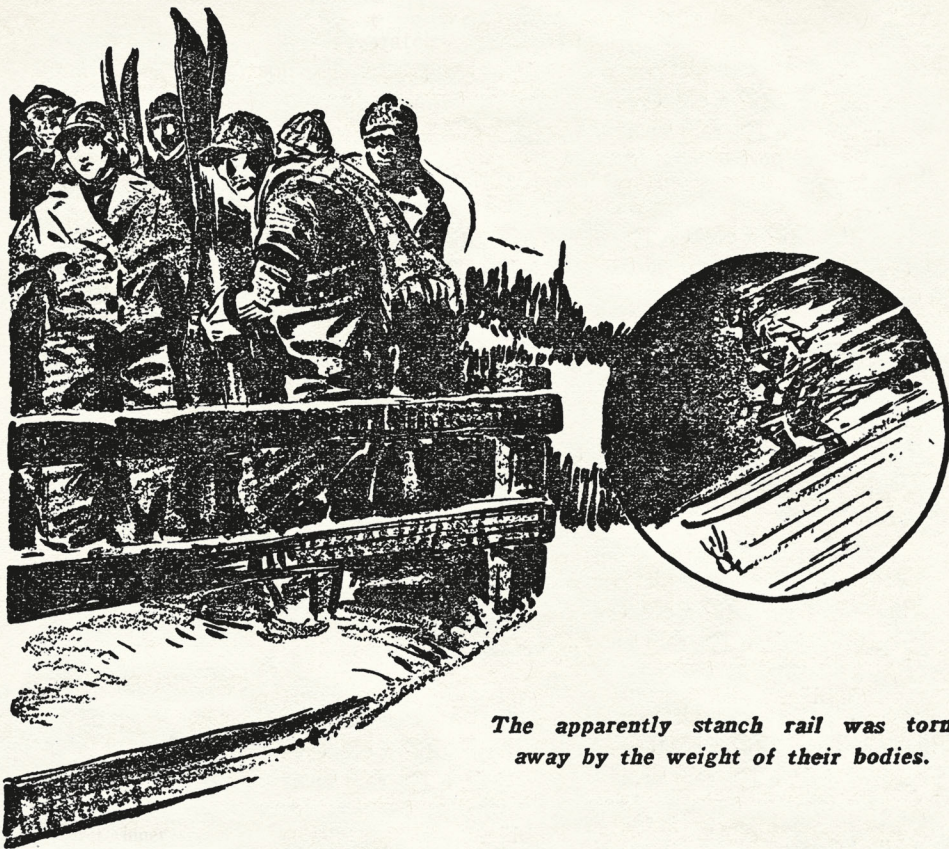
IT was the winter when all America went ski wild, only to have the golf fairways stay green, and the ice gnomes stay prowling in their Norways.

On Long Island we didn't have enough snow before February for rabbits to leave tracks. Even in February you had to go to the Berkshires or the Green Mountains for skiing.

Jigger Masters still had some of

the saddle tan left he had acquired in the Alps, where he had gone for two years after his wife died. Now he got out the skis he had used there until Mussolini suspected him of military spying. Jigger started groping absent-mindedly for the castor-oil bottle.

Jigger's hazel eyes shone. He carefully rewaxed those steel-edged hickory slats. They had a binding with a spring in back, to keep the



The apparently stanch rail was torn away by the weight of their bodies.

heel of each boot down on the wood. Jigger had different waxes for climbing, for schussing, for providing a grip on the snow when doing telemarks, christies, dodging *slalom* flags, or whatever. For a whole month while he waited vainly for snow to cover the slopes of Bethpage Park, those precious imported skis got as much careful attention as the complexion of a *débutante*. When, and if, snow came anywhere, Jigger was ready to go.

Jigger was ski hungry. I could sympathize with him, since during my four years at Dartmouth I'd traveled with the Outing Club—new while I was there—to Moosilauke Mountain, to Mount Washington, and done my bit on the hills and big slide in the Vale of Tempe back of College Park.

Owing to an accident which left me a game left leg, there would be no more skiing, or tennis, or bowling for me. I could tramp a short distance on webs, though. That's about as exciting to an ex-skier as taffy pulling in the kitchen would be to Joe Louis.

However, it was to become important. After the next few words you can figure me toiling around on snowshoes, never an actor in the terrible drama for the simple reason that I did not ski, but doing my best to be on the spot or thereabouts. Some parts of this I did not actually witness. But for the sake of smoother narrative, I have let it all go just as though I had been an all-seeing surrealist eye, frowning down upon everything.

With tall, athletic, and capable

Jigger Masters I've often wished to be just that sort of omnipresent eye. But in all truth, I was never even a *Doctor Watson*, since in all but a couple of rare instances I knew nothing at all about Jigger's cases until they were finished. Then perhaps he'd tell me. Perhaps not.

Jigger rang me at four one rainy afternoon. There was a tingle and thrill in his deep, resonant voice.

"Old man," he said, "it's *snowing* in the northern valley of the Connecticut! Seven inches at Wells River! Five inches at White River Junction! And still coming down! I just got the wire from a chap who maybe is some relative of yours—Lars Jansserud! He's supposed to be teaching skiing at Dartmouth College. I met him at Madison Square Garden when they had that indoor carnival, and he promised to let me know the first time there was real skiing."

No matter what I said while getting used to the idea. Twenty minutes later I was talking long distance to Roger Traill, who has a big all-year home on Lake Conant, near South Effingham, Vermont. Roger had invited me many times. Now I asked if I could come and bring Jigger. While my friend tried out the hills and runs, I probably would sneak down by railway twenty miles to Hanover-Norwich, and have a nostalgic look at Dartmouth in session. A young instructor who had been a good friend of mine in the old days was now a dignified professor and head of the English department. I'd seen him, and—oh, you know the usual things—visit the new frat house toward which I'd kittied in a couple hundred, and never seen; a meal or two at the old restaurant, if they still did business; a prowl out to the Bema; a look at the new football stadium and gym;

and especially an hour in the new library which had replaced the crowded old building I had known.

The temperature stood at forty-four when Jigger's big yellow car crossed the Triborough Bridge, with me and my webs, my friend's ski equipment, and two stuffed suitcases, heading north. It might be snowing way up there, but down here it was muggy and nasty. I foresaw one hell of a night with Jigger driving. He's good, but he believes in getting to a destination.

However, I need not have worried. We had some fish chowder at Danbury. After that I took a nap—which lasted about seven hours. I had meant to drive part of the way, but woke up to look at a beautiful sunrise on snow, and to realize that we were on the White Mountain Highway not far from Claremont, New Hampshire!

Fifty miles to go, straight up the river! Of course I drove then, but I had a guilty conscience all right. When we stopped at the Calvin Coolidge Hotel at "The Junk"—White River Junction—for breakfast, I didn't even suggest going a couple miles out of the way to pass through my old college town. Time enough for that later, or so I thought.

I was a little shocked to find how bald hearty old Roger Traill had become. But he looked more like an English squire out of *Punch* than ever; stocky, bowlegged, and with gray sideburns now. He had a "little house party," he said, none of them up yet. But we were as welcome as the fourteen-inch snow, for which they had been waiting nearly three months.

After a rather awed greeting to Jigger Masters, and ushering us to a big bleak room somewhat brightened by a log fire to supplement a

smallish steam radiator, Roger got me aside.

"Don't tell me he's the detective—the J. C. K. Masters!" he whispered, blue eyes round. "If he is— Dammit, I've been reading too many thrillers, I guess. But, Tony, you know there is—or rather was—some pretty creepy trouble here last week! I— Oh, never mind me. Come on and have a Ku Klux Klan breakfast—kippers, kidneys, and koffee! A second breakfast never harmed a man!"

And he went away, his hearty laugh booming in the upper halls, as I, rather soberly, went to get my friend. Being in a bit of "creepy trouble" isn't always as much fun as hearing about it afterward over pipes and tankards.

But I need not have worried. As I said, I did not ski.

II.

JIGGER ate no second breakfast. Instead, he slept three solid hours. He got up at eleven thirty, just as earringed and corseted Billy Traill—née Rosa Ginsburg—was finishing a dainty breakfast of ham and eggs, with half a cord of buttered toast.

"You're Mr. Masters." She smiled comfortably. "Set! Make it a double order of ham-and, for the gentleman, Martha. He had a long drive last night. Mr. Masters, I'm Billy Traill, who should be having Melba toast and tea. But that first skiing yesterday—hm-m-m! It left me with a positively ravenous appetite! And would you believe it, I haven't a single bruise, in spite of my tumbles! It was my first adventure on skis, you know!"

She chuckled cheerfully across an almost horizontal bosom, deep dimples coming to her powdered cheeks. She was an ivory-blonde, by grace

of a hairdressing genius she called Henri. But her provocative eyes were blue-gray, with a twinkle. It was evident she knew a great deal about men; and in spite of that, liked them in their place—which was paying attention to Billy Traill, naturally.

Masters was right at home with the Billy Traills of the world. He had two cups of coffee and a cigarette, declining the ham and eggs. And in a space of minutes he had the young matron chattering away cheerfully about the house party, herself, her husband Tommy, and the sad occurrence of the previous Saturday.

There had been a tragedy; so if Mr. Masters found the place a little gloomy for a while, he wasn't to mind. Bradford Traill had crashed. His monoplane had gone down in flames. He had bailed out, but too low for his chute to open. They all had gone to the funeral on Tuesday; and for that reason the house party was only really beginning now.

"Mrs. Craigfell wanted to go home and take Roberta with her," said Billy. "But we just wouldn't let her. Brad was a wild one. He'd been asking for it for years. Nobody liked him much—not even his own brothers. So why should we all wring our hands? Why, d'you know, outside of a cigarette case and some money in a bill fold, the only thing that man had in his pockets was a pair of enormous green dice?"

"They'd had come in the mail for him that morning. I saw him open the package, and pretend he was puzzled. But the thing that set me against him was"—here Billy leaned as far forward to whisper across the table, as her frontal projection allowed—"those dice were *loaded!* I saw him practice with them there at

table, and they fell on two and one—craps—*every single time!*”

Jigger was interested. Roger Traill had said something earlier about some creepy business. Apparently Billy Traill had seen nothing strange about it.

There had been five Traill brothers, with Roger the eldest. Remaining now besides our host, were Tommy, Luther, and Henry—the latter known always as “Hank.” Luther was married and the father of a large family. He was the principal of the combined high and grammar schools of Nodd’s Corners, New Hampshire, and, alone of the brothers, never had come near being rated even well-to-do. His family were at home; but being a ski enthusiast, he arranged matters so he could come to this annual house party given by Brother Roger. To look at Luther’s sallow, vulturine face, with black eyes magnified behind steel-rimmed spectacles, or to see him in his long-tailed black coat of Prince Albert vintage, was to wonder why he would come to a ski party.

He was, however, the most accomplished ski performer of the four surviving brothers. Nodd’s Corners was off the main roads, it seemed, and skis were more useful there in winter than automobiles. Fast christies and jump turns were as natural to Luther Traill as mashie approaches were to his scratch golfer of a brother Hank.

Except for Roger Traill, Elsa Taintor, Roger’s middle-aged divorcée cousin, who acted as his hostess and housekeeper, Billy Traill, and a stalwart young strippling named Lens Ackerman—no relative, just a lad here to teach the women skiing—the members of the house party had breakfasted, piled into cars, and gone downriver to Dartmouth. This was the time of

midwinter carnival there; and this year there were Swiss teams entered, in addition to the usual fourteen or fifteen Canadian and American colleges.

The weather had gone below zero where it belonged. Because of the prolonged spell of mild weather, however, even these residents of the north country were apt to feel the change, and come scoting back before the afternoon was over.

Meanwhile, lunch was to be at one o’clock; and Jigger, hazel eyes glistening as he looked out over the virgin snow, was in outdoor attire of peaked cap with fur earflaps, gaudy muffler, sweater, gloves, red-brown corduroys, ski boots and heavy socks. He could not wait till after lunch, but went right out to try a near hill. Roger Traill chuckled, offering a parka or anything else he might lack. Roger had complete outfits for all sizes of men and women, since his guests were rarely equipped, but Jigger had everything brought back from his sojourn in the Alps.

Out there, where Roger had added forty feet of scaffolding and slide to a young natural mountain, with a jump take-off at the bottom where the ground fell gradually away, Jigger found Lens Ackerman.

Jigger learned almost at once that young Lens was a product of a place called Ironwood, Michigan, and that he had found the scholastic going too tough down at Hanover, leaving by request at the end of the first term of this, his freshman year.

“I went for football and skiing, not algebra, anyhow,” he told Jigger frankly, with a disarming grin. “Now the old man says if I can’t make the grade in college, he doesn’t want to see me home. So I guess I’ll gnaw lots of cedar bark till the semi-pro baseball season gets going.”

Roger had seen him ski, learned

that he was broke, and taken him up here to Lake Conant for the month of February. He was supposed to teach the women, in exchange for board and lodging, and a salary that was philanthropy disguised. Jigger was to learn that old Roger did lots of unobtrusive things like that.

Jigger had to be called to lunch, Roger going out on webs to do it. Jigger had been making Len's eyes bug out with some of the Alpine ski tricks he knew. Lens was smiling rather ruefully when he came in, trailing Jigger.

"Gosh," he said, leaning his skis and poles against the wall of the open porch, "this man is a ringer! His name is Ragnar Kalterud Jansserud Omtvedt—an' I don't mean Yon Yonson, either!"

It was a gay lunch, though small in number of guests. Billy Traill was out to add Jigger to her string; and she was really a very attractive woman in spite of weighing close to one hundred and fifty. Roger wielded an enormous carving blade—on a tiny leg of lamb. He was happiest, probably, when acting the country squire. In business he was shrewd. Some would call it crooked and make no bones of it. But at home no one would dream that Roger ran the largest manufacturing establishment specializing in fake antiques, anywhere in the civilized world.

He had inherited a mission-furniture factory from his father. The place was useless, practically speaking, when the style went out. Roger transformed it into a place busily manufacturing wormholes—literally enough. Early American furniture of all kinds was the specialty, though Sheraton, Chippendale, and many other styles, when in particular vogue, were imitated with enormous

success. Truck loads of such stuff, duly cobwebbed and with upholstery rat-gnawed and dusty, were planted in abandoned farmhouses in New England, then "discovered" by some antique dealer coöperating with Roger. When a prospective client was taken out to make his choices right on the ground, with all the history of the place genuine—all except that of the furniture, of course—what really was fifty dollars' worth of creaky junk often brought ten thousand dollars from some dupe so anxious to buy that his vision was blinded by eagerness—until later.

Roger went much further than this nowadays. Old houses on Washington Square in New York, or Riverside Drive, still more ancient houses out in the "one thousand six hundred and forty towns" of Suffolk County, Long Island, or old homes of the Boston Back Bay district about to make room for modern apartments, all were settings for his coups.

Since he had no open arrangement with his dealers, none of this fraud ever was brought home legally to Roger. And, in all truth, he had an immense knowledge of antiques, and an immense contempt for amateur collectors thereof. His own home was furnished in modern style. He had no personal use for spindly and fragile things, no matter how beautiful. And when he, himself, could imitate a five-thousand-dollar high-boy, or a Louis Quinze escritoire so well that even self-designated experts were deceived, furnishing his own place with the genuine articles as an investment did not appeal at all.

"How would I know somebody else wasn't fooling *me*?" he chuckled, letting himself down luxuriously in a wild-looking but comfortable arm-chair of metal, springs, upholstery, and chintz. "There's no sucker like

a man who thinks himself unbeatable in his own line. I do. But I take the same precautions P. T. Barnum took!"

The luncheon was hearty, and except for the memory of last week's sudden tragedy, spirits were good. Then it happened. A servant came up from the big R. F. D. box on the road, bringing the afternoon mail. There were letters, circulars, and newspapers for Roger and the guests. Then there was another thing, which was tossed to Billy Traill. It was a small package addressed to her husband, and bearing the name of a Boston department store on the wrapper.

Billy Traill's eyes widened at first sight of the tiny package. "For my husband!" she almost whispered. "D'you know, Roger, this—this looks just like the little box Bradford got from Boston last—last Saturday morning!"

"Eh? What's that?" Roger half rose, and every shred of his pomposity and good nature fell from him. His skin went gray. "You mean—another of those—those pairs of dice?"

"I—I'm afraid so!" breathed Billy, her fingers trembling. "I'm going to open it! Tommy won't be back for a long while, and I'd just go crazy thinking, wondering if——"

The sentence ended in a crackle of paper, as she ripped open the little container. Then she moaned softly. "The same box!" she said, pulling aside a cord that held together the two halves of a gray box about one and one-half by three inches by one and one-half in depth.

Inside, wrapped in tissue paper, were two very large translucent green dice, with white spots!

Elsa Taintor slipped quietly forward against the table in a faint, but for the moment no one paid her any

attention. Roger had risen, his chair clattering behind him.

"Let me see, Billy!" he cried in a hoarse, croaking voice. He seized the box, dumped the green cubes in one hand, then with a swift motion tossed them out upon the cloth so they rattled against a cut-glass bowl full of fruit. Then every one bent forward to see what had been thrown.

"Oh—my—heavens!" groaned Roger in a stricken voice. "Two aces! That's craps; just the same as a two and a one! The finger has been put on Tommy, too! God help him!"

III.

YOUNG Lens Ackerman was the coolest at table, beside Masters. Jigger gathered up the cubes, made another cast, then three more in rapid succession. There was no doubt of it. A single spot was uppermost every time on each die. The dice were loaded to come craps!

Jigger Masters, his craggy features grave, slid back his chair with just a glance at Elsa Taintor, whom Billy Traill now was fanning, though Billy, white as chalk, looked about ready to topple over herself. Roger was calling for some brandy. All thankfully drank, while Jigger got up and walked out into the little room where Roger had a desk, a safe, and a filing cabinet.

Here was a phone, Jigger asked for information, then got long distance. In fifteen minutes he was talking to the store in Boston, and was connected with the department of games and magician's paraphernalia. He found out quickly enough that one could buy marked cards, decks with other odd features, and dice loaded to fall always on any designated spots.

When he went further, desirous of knowing who had ordered such dice

recently, he ran head-on into department-store red tape. Hanging up, he said grimly that the Boston police would have to investigate that. Did any one here know a responsible officer on the Boston police or detective forces?

Apparently no one did. Masters, his jaw showing lumps of muscle and the hazel eyes narrowing into slits of suspicion, came back to table. He ignored the bell glass with the half gill of brandy in the bottom, and turned directly to Roger.

"This looks serious to an outsider, Mr. Traill," he said restrainedly. "To you and Mrs. Taintor, at any rate, those dice mean something; something that has to do with the past! I think that here and now is the time to get this right out into the open. Do you want to speak before us all? Or would you rather tell me or a policeman in confidence?"

"Oh, no, there's nothing—except the—*the coincidence!*" gasped Roger unconvincingly.

"Oh—do you think—I'm *afraid!*" quavered Elsa Taintor. She was a thin brunette, with rather lined face, and looked every bit of her forty-odd years. Masters had heard that she had divorced her husband at Reno, getting a comfortable alimony allowance, only to have him go stony broke and shoot himself, in 1930. Penniless, she had come then to act as hostess and house manager for Roger Traill. She had been here since, doing her job well enough, but gradually getting soured inwardly, as it became evident she never would interest another man. She had been revived by the liqueur, with a glass of cold water for a chaser. But even with the stimulant she had no color, and looked as though she might drop off again any second.

A suppressed scream from Billy, as she jumped to her feet, both hands pressing her left breast, cut short the possible chance of information.

"Tommy doesn't know!" she cried agitatedly. "He's down there at Dartmouth, and I—I'm afraid he may fly back, if Lew Pinckney has his plane there! Then— She shuddered uncontrollably.

"No," said Jigger reassuringly. "There's no chance to land a plane of any kind. More than a foot of snow, and ice on the river. Your husband won't fly back, though that may not diminish his peril. Tell me, Mrs. Traill, what serious enemies has your husband? Think of them all first. Then particularize. Who hated Bradford Traill, and also your husband, enough to commit murder?"

There it was, said openly. Of course with Jigger Masters around, a specialist in murder mysteries, it was certain the most gruesome of all possibilities would be explored first. Jigger was pretty cynical where strange circumstances were concerned.

"You may as well short cut; and assuming the worst first, is the quickest way home!" had been Jigger's motto for years.

This time Billy Traill looked horrified, but honestly bewildered. "This is the first time—was the first time we'd even as much as *seen* Brad, for almost five years!" she declared. "He's been flying in China, you know. Heavens, he and my Tommy haven't—uh, I mean, *didn't* have a single thing in common, except their last names!"

"Then maybe that's it!" snapped Jigger, looking sidewise at Roger. But in spite of our host's stricken appearance, he seemed to have nothing to say.

"Well, how about you, Mrs. Tain-

tor?" went on Masters, after a silence of several pulsebeats. "Does anything occur to you which would make murder likely? Do you think Bradford Traill was murdered in his plane? And do you suspect that Thomas Traill will die also, now these loaded dice have been sent to him?"

Wrong tactics. With a gasping cry, Mrs. Taintor endeavored to shake her head, then slipped away in a faint for a second time. Jigger looked suspicious and disgusted, but the terrible pallor of the woman was unmistakable. She probably had a leaky heart, and could not stand emotional strain.

Into that disturbed company floated then a welcome sound. It was a two-toned horn—the one on Tommy Traill's car. With a cry of joy Billy rushed from the dining room, and ran out bareheaded into the snow and below-zero temperature of the porch, to welcome the party.

They were all there intact, florid-faced Tommy bellowing out a greeting, and sliding out from under the wheel to assist kittenish and clinging little Roberta Craigfell, and her still handsome mother, the widowed Mrs. Robert Craigfell.

With these were the spectacled and dark-skinned Luther Traill, looking every inch the rural schoolmaster as he got out stiffly; well-groomed, smiling Hank Traill; and a college-widow girl-woman of nearly his own age, whom he had brought from Hanover to be a member of his brother's house party overnight.

Her name still was Cissie St. Lauren, apparently, just as it had been when Hank graduated, thirteen years earlier. He had found her in the college town, taken her along

when they decided to go to the Rogers House at Lebanon for lunch; and there, with the aid of flasks, the decision to bring her to Lake Conant had been easily made.

The ski jumping, which they had gone down to see, would not be held until the following day. That was the reason their stay had been so brief.

Every person in the car, except Luther, was exhilarated by drinks and cold weather. The greetings were noisy, and for some time it scarcely percolated Tommy's consciousness, that his wife was almost frantic with apprehension.

Then, when he heard about the dice, he was interested and curious, but not in the least frightened. He had not ordered any dice, cogged or otherwise. Who could have bought them for him, and why? The shivery answer suggested by Billy, hanging on his arm and whispering her fears, was laughed to scorn. Hell, *he* was no aviator. Wouldn't even ride in one of the damn things. Cars suited him. How were they going to bring him down in flames, eh?

Besides that, he hadn't an enemy in the world! Not one! Maybe a few years back, some of those stockbroker clients on whom he had unloaded some parcels of electric securities, might have itched to tan his hide a bit. But that was all over and written off the books by now. A new boom was coming, and wise money was making plenty more.

No, not a single enemy in the whole wide world! That's me, Tommy Traill! Le's have a drink!

Since the excitement was evidently over for the time being, Lens Ackerman slipped out, saying to each of the women that if they wanted him, he'd be at the slide. He looked around a moment in the long

coat closet, on the way out, said something about his parka being missing, then went on out. He wore a bright orange mackinaw and a toque, and made a cheerful spot upon the crystal white snow of the hillside.

That afternoon was a riot for all these people except Jigger Masters, and, perhaps, Roger Traill. The host looked glum, but he went out with his skis just the same. The women and men all had drinks at intervals. They schussed the hills. Luther, Miss St. Lauren, young Roberta Craigfell and Hank Traill tried the jump, without, however, attempting the added scaffolding slide. On the plain hill, with the take-off, you could whizz through the air some thirty to thirty-five feet, which was plenty for those who rarely alighted on their skis anyhow.

JIGGER spent a good two hours getting long-distance connections. He had to go about his investigation in a roundabout manner; but by four thirty he had fixed matters so that Detective Sergeant Warner of Boston would look into the matter of the loaded dice at the department store.

If something had happened right then, perhaps the case would have galloped to a solution. But nothing did happen. Cissie St. Lauren passed out from an acute attack of unbridled alcoholism, and was put to bed by the sniffing and disapproving Elsa Taintor and one of the maids.

Otherwise nothing happened.

Dinner was gay, Roger providing a good wine, and choice liqueurs. Young Roberta's cheeks were crimson, and her black eyes snapped. It probably was the first experience of her life with heady wine. She flirted hard with Lens Ackerman, but the boy was sleepy, and embarrassed in

presence of his elders. He went to bed. Roberta transferred her attentions to the thoroughly sophisticated Hank Traill.

That bachelor, bereft of his college widow, was not averse to a mild affair with as pretty a young lady as Roberta. So when dinner was over, and a table of duplicate contract was suggested and arranged, Roberta slipped out under the misted full moon with Hank, donning the first of Roger's ski outfits that happened to come near fitting them.

The bridge game was a predestined flop. Tommy Traill could not keep his eyes open more than ten seconds at a time, slumping into a doze during each round of bidding. Elsa Taintor, his partner, did not seem to care much. Their opponents, Billy Traill and Mrs. Craigfell, were up to snuff; but no duplicate foursome can rise above the level of tiddledywinks or monopoly, unless all four players are out for blood.

Out in the billiard room Roger, with Luther Traill and myself, were experimenting with the new balk line carom game lately introduced.

Jigger kibitzed a little while at both games. From the two vertical corrugations on his tanned forehead, it was plain he was worried and would stay worried, no matter how much he told himself fears were baseless. Finally he went up to his room. Then the phone rang. It was long distance for him.

He spent nearly half an hour with the phone.

He had just finished with the call, lighted a cigarette, and was strolling into the billiard room, when he suddenly flattened himself against the frost-covered French window there, the cigarette smoke curling up past his long, twisted nose.

He started violently, the cigarette

dropping to the floor unnoticed as he grabbed the lever handle of the French door.

"Did you hear that? Somebody's screaming!"

Bang! Crash! Billiard cues were grounded. "What?" the players exclaimed in one voice, fear leaping to their faces and voices. And Jigger Masters was trying in vain to unfasten the French door, which had burglar catches top and bottom.

With a dismayed exclamation, Jigger abandoned the door, and ran through the living room, where the card players stared wonderingly up at him. Out to the hallway he dashed and to the front door, which he flung wide open. Every one in the house came hurrying fearfully after him, whispering questions to each other. Fear was there—but fear of what?

"Can't hear anything now," said Jigger abruptly. "Give me a big flashlight. I'm going out there—take webs—something has happened, and I don't like it."

He donned his own ski outfit. Before grabbing up the snowshoes, however, he examined his automatic pistol. Donning only one glove, he sank the bare right hand deep in the pocket of his corduroys where the pistol was hidden. With the big, white turtle-neck sweater pulled over his other clothes, the peaked ski cap, and a pair of overshoes doing the duty of moccasins for the webs, he was all ready and going *whish-whish* over the dry snow in the vague moonlight, before any of the rest of the party had really discovered what was happening.

Then the others dressed and went outdoors.

Jigger had made for the jumping hill. That was probably where young Roberta had taken her middle-aged

beau. So the others started in that direction, their flashlights throwing round, hard cylinders of brilliance against the pale purple-white luster of the snow.

The distance from Roger's house, there among the black pines of the lake shore, to the top of that first two-hundred-foot hill, was about a quarter of a mile. By the time the party of men and women had started, Jigger was out of sight. Then, when the straggling group, making hard going of the climb, was no more than halfway to the top, Jigger appeared there at the crest.

"Stop!" he called hoarsely. He looked gigantic up there with his arms raised, and the beam of his flash angling off into vacancy. A hush fell, and the party halted. Then down came the awesome words that congealed every heart.

"The women better all go back to the house!" Masters shouted. "Henry Traill crashed in flames! He lies at the foot of the jumping hill."

"The girl's skis are there, but *she* has disappeared! I want the men to come quickly and help me search—follow her trail. One of you women phone the police! This is *murder!*"

IV.

MASTERS met the men, and sternly sent back Mrs. Craigfell who was crying hysterically for her daughter. Finally Elsa Taintor managed to get the mother moving downhill toward the house, and Jigger turned abruptly.

"You men," he said, "will have to take my word for what's down there!" He motioned with one arm, throwing the beam of his torch toward what looked from the hill crest like the charred remains of a bonfire.

"Great Heaven!" cried Roger. "You mean—she killed him somehow, and then ran? It's—it's——"

"You said, crashed *in flames!*" cried the high, schoolmasterish voice of Luther. "How could that be? D'you mean she—or somebody—dumped gasoline on him and set it off, after a murder?"

"He's dead," said Jigger harshly. "Very dead indeed, in the worst way a man can die! The police will have to see the snow—the tracks. His tracks. Hers. Mine. There's nobody else's within two yards of where his body lies! We were jumping a little farther over here to the left, earlier to-day.

"But never mind that now. We must find her. Her tracks start there at the bottom, and go *that* way toward the lake!" He swung the flash as a pointer. "We'll pick them up over here. Keep your eyes open, and watch for a can of gas, or alcohol or—or anything! I don't believe you'll find one, but the police will surely ask that the first thing!

"Now we must get the girl Roberta! Follow me!" With that he started downhill in a *plod-plod-plod* of webs, which was a sort of dog-trot. The others followed.

At the bottom of the hill at the side where Jigger led, lay one ski, the kind with just a strap and no binding. Roberta had been using these. Her trail, a sort of plowing in the drifted snow, with now and then a splotch to show where she had fallen and struggled up to her feet again, led around the bottoms of two small hillocks, and then direct to the garage at the side of the road that Roger's men had opened from the main highway.

Fortunately the search had to go no farther. They found Roberta huddled in the back of Tommy's car. At first sight of the people, when

the lights that flashed in upon her wide-eyed, agonized face, she set up a shrill, dry shrieking. She fought the kindly hands, until Roger pinioned her arms, and dragged her out.

She kicked and tried to bite, stopping only to shriek at intervals. She was quite mad, and the realization of this fact brought cold perspiration to the foreheads of the men. Could she have gone mad *before*—perhaps from the drink—and somehow managed to kill an able-bodied man like Hank Trail?

The fire—ugh! That meant premeditation! Perhaps, though, an insane premeditation, though no one had thought her crazy.

There had been no sign of a container in which gasoline or alcohol could have been carried. Yet it could have been thrown a distance to one side, and not seen in this vague light, even with the help of torches.

Truly it was a waking nightmare that followed. Roberta was taken to a bedroom, still gripped by madness and terror, but growing weaker and less able to struggle and scream. The nearest doctor lived in the town of Ely; and he was also the coroner's physician—a Doctor Murdock. He came with Ben Allison, a sort of constable or peace officer of the village of South Effingham. State troopers were on the way, and would take charge. Masters himself returned to watch beside the charred body in the snow, until relieved by Ben Allison and the doctor.

Almost instantly snow started to fall in fine flakes, but with the overcast sky this meant heavy snow was on the way. When it warmed up to ten above, we might get another foot or two.

Jigger called Roger and asked a sharp question. He got an affirmative, then gave directions. Roger

hurried back to the house in bow-legged, puffing haste, to reappear fifteen minutes later with a 4x5 camera on a tripod, a flash gun and some boxes of powder. With this equipment Jigger took two film rolls of pictures from all angles, showing the body, the tracks in the snow; then he backed away to get a broader view of the whole terrible scene.

"Incredible! Monstrous!" I heard him mutter to himself.

Then he was directing Lens Ackerman, who brought sheets and a gray blanket, to lay carefully over the charred thing there in the snow. Coverings to protect any sign, of course, though they looked ironically like swathings to keep a poor fellow who had burned to death warm.

As soon as the authorities took full charge, Jigger had a short talk with one of the State police. It was about a matter of the mails, and the postmaster in the village. The policeman took the phone, called a number, and held the line. The post office was part of a general store, and the postmaster's residence adjoined.

While every person in the party beside Jigger was herded into the big living room, and there watched grimly by two guards, Masters got the word he dreaded, but more than half expected to receive.

Down there at the post office, ready for R. F. D. on the coming morning, were three more of the small, oblong packages—dice from Boston! One, horribly enough, was addressed to poor Hank Traill who already had died. One was coming to our host, Roger, and the last one to the school principal, Luther.

Counting Brad, who was the first to receive the dice and who had crashed in flames, and the scoffing Tommy who had one, but as yet had suffered no catastrophe, every one

of the five Traill brothers had been the recipient of this strange gift!

"Apparently they don't go in exactly the order the mail is received," said Jigger to the State policeman.

"Great heavens! D'you think then that the rest of 'em——"

"Some one wants to make a clean sweep of the Traill family—as far as the men are concerned," said Jigger grimly. "Go in and add yourself to the guards there. Let no one—not even Roger Traill—leave that room for the next half hour. I have just a glimmering of a notion what this terrible thing may be, and I intend to prevent any more of these tragedies!"

"How?" asked the policeman.

"By routing out the murderer!" was Jigger's determined response. He turned his back and strode down the long hall to the closet, where all the parkas, mackinaws, toques, and other paraphernalia for skiing were kept. He went inside, snapped on the electric light, and closed the door.

V.

WHEN Masters rejoined us, his harsh features were graven with lines from his nostrils to the corners of his mouth. His hazel eyes were somber, and his voice seemed deeper and slower than I ever had heard it before.

"Please take separate chairs—anywhere in this room," he directed gravely. "I have asked the police to stop any one who may attempt to leave."

"Here, wait a minute!" broke in red-faced Roger, frowning. "I don't like this, Mr. Masters. Surely the ladies might be excused, and go to their rooms? I am all in favor of helping this investigation by all means in my power, but it must be

plain to you that Mrs. Taintor, Mrs. Craigfall and her daughter——”

“I have a good reason for asking them to stay,” said Jigger simply. “There is not a single one of you who would be safe, if he or she left this room and went outside for a while, let us say!”

“What the hell?” demanded Tommy Traill, aghast. “D’you mean there’s a mob of Heinies out there, waitin’ to douse us with *flammenwerfer*, like they did at St. Mihiel, or somep’n?” He achieved a skeptical smile.

Masters turned and surveyed the speaker, a most curious expression on his face. “Not Germans this time, Mr. Traill,” he said slowly. “But in a way you are not far off the track. Strange you should mention that. You were at St. Mihiel?”

“I was!” snapped Tommy, coloring as if this were a damaging admission. “Second lieutenant, artillery, ex-Mex border, Fort Sheridan, Illinois; Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Eleven months across—Rainbow Division. That makes me a killer, does it?” he sneered.

Just the same he looked as if he were rather frightened of the tall, almost savage-looking detective standing there with arms folded.

“You must have lied about your age?”

Tommy snorted. “What if I did? Only cribbed a couple or three years, Dog-gone it, Mr. Masters——” He started to rise.

“Just a moment. I am going to ask a few questions, and while none of you is forced to answer, it will be much easier here—than later in public. I think if you all cooperate, I can promise you the murderer before this night is done!”

With a nervous shriek Mrs. Craigfall reached from her chair to clutch her nearest neighbor, who happened

to be the spectacled Luther. With an annoyed *tush-tush* he disengaged himself, and then spoke in a lower, more reassuring voice to the unnerved woman. Masters gave only a moment of silence and a side glance to this. Then he went on.

“You are a stockbroker, Mr. Thomas Traill?”

The latter looked more guilty than ever, at this formal address. “Yeah, I am—off and on,” he growled. “And I’m doin’ all right now,” he continued with a trace of belligerence. “I ain’t broke, or anything like that, though there was a time, I’ll admit, that——”

“Thank you,” said Masters definitely. “And you, Mr. Roger Traill, manufacture furniture, I’ve been told. You inherited your father’s factory, and have continued the business.”

All heads turned to the host, who seemed to shift uneasily. “That sounds all right,” he said grudgingly. “My life’s an open book—for the law to read. Only, I wouldn’t want too many of the pages read closely,” he ended with a forced guffaw. No one else as much as smiled. All present knew of his fake antique business, and liked him some the less for it. After all, gullible public and all that, there was no doubt at all that Roger was strictly dishonest, and owed most of his big fortune to that alone.

Masters turned away from Roger, and asked a few questions of Lens Ackerman. The boy had no past life outside a rural high school in the upper peninsula of Michigan, and no connection of any sort with the Traill family, beyond his sport job of the month.

Going around the circle of men only, Jigger elicited from schoolmaster Luther that he had been a civilian in Washington during the last year of War; he taught physics

and chemistry at Nodd's Corners; and eventually he had secured the post of principal, where he had remained ever since. He and Tommy were the only ones of the Traill brothers who were married, or who ever had been.

"So far so good," nodded Masters. "Now, I want to tell a story. Some time long ago there was a dice game between five brothers——"

As he paused, Roger jerked erect. Luther laughed shortly, sourly, and Tommy prophesied that he would be damned.

"I'd forgotten all about that!" he exclaimed. "Great Scott, Roger, you haven't cherished hard feelings——"

What had started as a rough jest, finished in a gulp. Tommy paled somewhat, looked frightened, but plunged on again.

"Hell, you didn't have any reason. Heaven knows you done better by what you got than any of us did. But the dice! D'you realize, Roger, that all these dice are *green*?"

The host had got command of himself, and waved his hand negligently. "I fail to see any connection," he said testily. "But I suppose, now the matter looks as though it could have some queer sort of bearing, you'll have to know about it, Mr. Masters."

"I could bear knowing," said Jig-dryly.

"Well," suggested Roger, "I think we could all stand a drink, if there is to be a story, and the kind policemen will permit." He almost achieved a sneer, but ironed out his round, jolly face into a smile as he saw there was no objection.

He rang for glasses and the wheeled buffet. The butler stopped with this in front of each person, but only Roger, Tommy, and Lens Ackerman took drinks. Then the host resumed.

"It all goes back to my father—our father. He was a cabinetmaker of the old handicraft school, and something of a genius in his line. His business went downhill the latter years of his life, partly due to the fact that he was going blind, and partly because his five sons had no interest whatever in the manufacture of furniture.

"All of us wanted to get out into the world, and start some other sort of business. I remember, it was my ambition then to go to Bennington and become a milkman! Luther, I think, wanted to go to Boston Tech, as we called it then. Brad wanted to start a garage, which was a new business then. And so on. I forget just what poor Hank and Tommy wanted."

"I wanted to run a saloon," put in Tommy moodily. "I'd 'a' done mighty well with it, too."

"Been your own best customer!" said Billy Traill tartly. "No, my dear, I think you are better off as is. You tried bootlegging, remember, claiming you knew enough chemistry to recook rubbing alcohol. Hm-m-m—need I say more? I think not!"

"Oh, so you're a chemist?" asked Masters.

Tommy shook his head. "No. Had some in high school once. But I pretty near cooked my goose when I drank some of the stuff I made. I don't make any claims," he answered sulkily.

Roger had sunk down as if relieved to have the conversation switch, but now Masters turned back to him. "You were telling us about your father and the furniture business," he reminded.

"Oh, yeah. Well, it's quickly finished," growled the host. "None of us wanted the old shop. Dad went

gradually blind, and the business to pot. Finally Tommy persuaded the governor to split up what we would get eventually, parcel it out, and let us do what we wanted.

"The old boy thought it over several weeks, and finally agreed. He wanted to keep the house, and made us promise that the one who got the furniture factory would run it while he lived, and keep house for him. So then he split most of what he had into five parts. The factory that none of us wanted, was one part. Then there were four shares of seven thousand dollars each. He suggested we draw lots to see who was stuck with the factory.

"Well, one night we got together, talked it over, and then threw a pair of dice. Low man was to have the factory. The others would get seven-thousand-dollar shares, and permission to go and do what each one wanted in the world.

"There were two ties at first. Then finally I got stuck, and had to take the factory. The others were very glad."

Silence of two seconds was broken by a growl from Tommy. "Yes, we were glad at first," he admitted. "But why not tell the rest? We were happy until we found out the gov'nor had kept a fifth share to go along with the factory. So you, Roger, took down double, for all the fact you couldn't throw nothin' but craps!"

"That wasn't exactly the way," denied Roger seriously. "Dad didn't want to starve, you know. Also, he realized that the factory had to have a little capital to run on. More than just the inventory, I mean. So he did keep that extra share, and when he became entirely helpless, he gave it to me. That was a later gift, and wasn't even dreamed of in the conference we had."

Elsa Taintor, the rather soured and nervous cousin who kept house for Roger, emitted a dry squeak, and got to her feet, holding to the back of her chair.

"Roger, you!" she said in a quavery voice. "I—I think you are the murderer! Do you people know why-y?" Her voice rose to a raspy scream of small volume, and one thin arm waved in a widespread motion as though she were sweeping aside the rubbish of falsehood.

"Elsa! You are not yourself! Sit down!" commanded Roger sternly. A worried light had sprung into his eyes, however.

"No, I am not myself. I never will be again!" she cried despairingly. "But I am afraid of you, Roger! You know full well why. I am the only one who knows your secret. You knew in advance about that extra share! You persuaded the boys to throw dice that way with you! And then you had two pair of dice to use; one of them loaded so it always would come craps!"

"You're crazy, woman!" he denied roughly.

"I am not! Twice you've boasted about it—when you were drunk!"

"Just a moment." Masters broke into what might almost have become physical violence, so wrought up had Mrs. Taintor and Roger become in a few short seconds. From the look of the host, every one present had a feeling of certainty that Roger had begun his career of crookedness by cheating his own brothers.

"Mrs. Taintor," went on Jigger's slow, deep voice, when quiet had fallen on the room, "I want you to tell me just how many people you have mentioned this to, earlier? How often have you told it?"

"Never! To no one before this," she replied faintly. Her knees suddenly gave way, and she sank down

to the chair she had quitted. "I was a-afraid," she admitted with a dry sob. "Roger is really cruel!"

"You're sure of that? You told no one?" Jigger frowned.

"P-positive," she sobbed, burying her face in a handkerchief, then lifting it momentarily. "But all the servants heard, I think. R-Roger was pretty loud when h-he was drunk!"

"Well, by the saint's whiskers!" exploded Tommy. "To think you were a double-crosser like that! Damn you, Roger! And you got us to make them wills, too! What was the idea? Didja plan even then to get us up here an' kill us all off? I may as well tell you I made another will, time I married Billy! So——"

"Explain that!" snapped Jigger, straightening, and with nostrils flaring momentarily. To one who knew him well, that meant the keystone of the deductive arch was settling in place.

"Aw, hell," growled Tommy, his brief rage cooling quickly into contempt. "I don't think Rog would murder anybody. But he is a damn dirty crook, an' no mistake. The wills? Well, all us fellas were goin' out to make fortunes—maybe. We all figured on livin' dangerously, an' maybe not livin' long, so we all agreed to make holograph wills, leavin' everything we owned, to each other—or to a favorite brother, if we wanted. Now Billy gets what I got. My brothers don't need it."

"I changed my will a few years ago, too, because I have a family," said Luther, looking staid and schoolmasterish behind his horn-rimmed spectacles. "Not that I have very much to leave any one."

"Well, I didn't," growled Roger. "Mine's the same as it was, if any

fond brother of mine wants to bump me off!"

"Never mind that—though in your case, Mr. Traill, I certainly would burn that holograph will immediately," advised Jigger. "It can be only an added temptation now.

"To conclude, then, before we single out the murderer, I want to know one thing. In what order did your male guests arrive, Mr. Traill?"

"Oh, hell, I don't know," growled Roger. Then he stirred himself sullenly, and answered. "First was Hank. Then Luther. Then young Lens here. Then Brad. Then you two. You were ten days after Brad came, and the others were all here in the two days before that. Why?"

"We won't go into my reasons," said Jigger. "Have you any kind of a laboratory in this house—or in any of the outbuildings?"

"Laboratory? You mean for chemistry, or something? No, nothing like that anywhere here. The chauffeur's got a sort of tool shop, with some paints and oils."

Masters started to speak, and rose again to his feet. But those words were drowned in a sudden ghastly roaring and shrieking which came from abovestairs somewhere! It was hair-raising, horrible! Every person downstairs came to his or her feet, crying out aghast. The five or six servants, now retired in their rear wing, came bursting out in night attire, robes hastily thrown over their pajamas or robes.

For perhaps ten seconds the awful screams in a high-pitched, feminine voice, continued. Then they stopped abruptly. But as we all ran for the main staircase, Jigger ahead, and taking the steps three at a time, we knew that the rushing, roaring sound not only continued, but was increasing in volume!

Fire! We saw the smoke pouring

out of Roger's room, the second we reached the transverse corridor of the second floor. That door, usually closed, was wide open. From inside came the stench of burning cloth and human flesh! It was so thick with smoke inside the room that we could see nothing save a licking yellow crown of flame which seemed to be suspended in mid-air about thirty inches from the ground!

Roger Traill's bed was on fire, and burning as if it had been soaked in gasoline!

With the butler, one footman, and the Traill men, Jigger had buckets and fire extinguishers going in just a few seconds. And perhaps two minutes and ten seconds after that terrible, shrieked alarm, the fire was out. But its job had been done.

The bed was just a horizontal char, with the wood licked black at head and foot. And on that bed, twisted and burned till she was unrecognizable, was the blackened body of the college widow, Cissie St. Lauren.

"How in Heaven's name did—did she get into my bed?" cried Roger. "Oh, this is unbearable! She—wasn't she put in the blue room?"

No one answered then, though there were glances of stern anger and suspicion. But a little later the blue room told its own pitiful story. Cissie St. Lauren had been intoxicated when put to bed. She had been ill, as the blue room bed and the adjacent bathroom testified.

Apparently Cissie had recovered somewhat, taken a shower, put on a clean pair of pajamas—her soiled ones were lying on the floor—and then gone blindly into the next room, and crawled into the bed.

That had been prepared, not for a silly old-young woman too full of wine and other beverages, but for Roger Traill himself.

Or—had he fixed it as a blind, and

then whispered a word into the ear of the intoxicated girl? We shivered to think.

VI.

RESERVES of State police had come. Masters had talked long and earnestly with them, before returning to the living room where all the people in the house, including all the servants, and poor, cowering, maddened Roberta Craigfell, were held under doubled guards. But the servants were just innocent victims.

I know now that Masters asked for a free hand in one operation, which he promised would unmask the killer. If it failed Jigger would withdraw from the case instantly. He was given permission to go ahead, but only because none of the police at the place had the faintest idea what to do, short of arresting the whole household and beating out some kind of a confession from each one with rubber hoses.

And the third degree is not much used in Vermont, thank Heaven! As a matter of fact, probably because of New England reserve, the police were less obtrusive here than in any previous case in which Jigger Masters had figured.

So when Masters came to us finally, there was a cordon of silent State policemen about the house, with guards upstairs and down inside, and a shocked-looking peace officer hovering about. But none interfered when Jigger told the assembly in the living room that all of us—excepting Roberta Craigfell, who would remain under the care of Doctor Murdock—were to don our ski costumes, bring lanterns or flashlights, and come out to the summit of the nearest hill.

"We will go in a group. Dress warmly. It's way below zero," said Jigger. "The men all take skis.

The women can go on webs if they wish, or just walk. There is a foot-path to the top now."

"What in the world?" demanded Roger; but he was subdued and apprehensive in manner now, casting side glances at Masters, and also at his two surviving brothers.

Lens Ackerman, with the resilience of youth, took it all as a matter of course. He helped the women get ready, bringing forth their sweaters, parkas, ski boots, and generally being very busy.

Masters put on his own Alpine costume. Rotund Roger swathed himself in two shaker sweaters, and hauled on a parka over that.

"This isn't my parka," he grumbled, "but it doesn't matter. We aren't going to be out long, are we?"

Masters did not answer. He was at the door, one hand on the knob, waiting like a stern statue for them to get through the inevitable fussing of preparation. When they all trooped out, Tommy grousing about not being able to locate his blue parka, and having to put on a mackinaw tight for him, the flashlights cut bright beams through the blue-gray moonlight on the snow.

The cold made one gasp, and breathe shallowly. Only Luther, thin and funereal-looking in a black heavy sweater, black toque, and bear-skin gauntlets, seemed unbothered, tramping out and up at the head of the procession with his skis slanted up and over his right shoulder, and a long nicked flash playing this way and that.

Masters did one odd thing. He was last to leave the porch. He stopped momentarily, and took one blue garment, probably a parka, from a wooden bench. He came out, carrying the garment over his left arm. In silence, save for the creaking and squealing of the snow under our

boots, we tramped slowly up to the top of the ski-jump hill, about a quarter mile from the blazingly lighted house. The police stationed themselves below the hill, but not out in front where the declivity ended. Doubtless they had been instructed by Masters. He was putting on some kind of a terrible show, but what it could be, no one was able to guess. The women whispered, and Tommy grunted painfully in denial. As we neared the top, even whispering ceased.

This hill, perhaps two hundred feet above the level of Roger's house—which was situated on a knoll—was almost perfect for ski enthusiasts. It was only moderately steep, but clear of stumps and brush; and the snow was clear of everything save ski and web tracks, except for the few footprints made at the time of Hank Traill's disaster.

Beginners simply schussed this hill, and learned to balance. The next step, as ambition grew, was to climb the stanch forty-foot stairs to the jump platform above.

This platform was railed, and commodious. From it two slides went down parallel. One of these was the big jump—not a championship affair, of course, but plenty paprika for most tastes. From the take-off below, Masters or Lens Ackerman could soar eighty or ninety feet, before coming down to clip up snow beneath the strips.

The second slide was not quite so steep. And instead of leading to the take-off, it joined smoothly with the hill below. Then, halfway down the natural hill, when a skier was traveling something like sixty miles an hour, there was a long turn, banked to a sheer eighty degrees. Looking at it, no one would think a skier could negotiate it without falling. But almost every skier did

after a few afternoons and mornings of practice. This slide sent a skier off toward Lake Conant.

Silent, save for the scuffing of footsteps, the slight creaking of the wood, and some puffing on the part of Tommy Traill, we all climbed up to the platform.

"Now," said Jigger Masters, "I am going to ask you to do exactly what I say. I have no real authority here, and you may refuse if you think best. However, this is the last chance for this party. Some one here is a murderer! The police, anxious above all to prevent any more of these unthinkable torch killings, are going to take us all to Bennington or Montpelier or somewhere, and lock us up—till the guilty one confesses, which may not be soon!"

"But——" began Roger.

"No questions, please! No protests! Kindly take your instructions, and follow them explicitly. Then I shall show you the murderer! The identity of that person is known to me now. But there are reasons why I wish to go through with this. Lens Ackerman!"

The last words crackled. Young Lens jumped as though he had been stuck with a bayonet.

"Ai!" he cried in surprise. "Me?"

"You," said Jigger grimly. "Go there and schuss the slide!" He pointed to the slide at the right, beyond the jump slide.

For a second, young Ackerman hesitated. He was thinking, as were all of us, of how Hank Traill must have done just this thing—and gone mysteriously and horribly to a blazing death.

But the boy was game enough.

"Right-o," he said, and clapped his skis into position. "Here goes nothin'!"

He moved slowly forward—then faster—faster!

"Come back up when you're through," called Jigger after him.

There was no answer. A black dot, receding fast, went down the twin trails of the prepared slide. Lens kept perfect balance, knees bent, body slightly forward.

He shot around the banked turn, body almost horizontal! Then he straightened out, and went swiftly down the valley in the direction of the black Norway pines which bordered the lake.

A-ah! It was a gasping exhalation from all of us who watched. None had breathed, I am sure, till Lens was down and slowing, safe. But then all eyes turned questioningly to Jigger Masters.

What had this descent proved, if anything? We all had seen Lens Ackerman do it before, though not under the same dramatic circumstances, of course.

"Mr. Roger Traill!" called Masters next.

Our host shivered perceptibly. He was a pretty good skier, but now he shrank from this ordeal, and began to sputter protests. Some one might easily be anxious to kill him; and did Masters really know how those people had been burned? Did he know the murderer? If so, why not name him or her, and have it over?

There seemed a good deal of sense in that, but for once Jigger was implacable. "Go and schuss the slide!" he commanded sternly.

Roger still held back.

Masters stepped up to him. "Do as I say right now," he said evenly, "or I shall call the police—and name you the murderer!"

"Great Heaven!" gasped Roger. He turned, carried his skis to the slide, and fastened the harness to his heavy boots.

"So be it, then," he said bitterly. "But if I burn, damn you, I'll——"

He stopped, took a long breath, then faced the hill. He gave a little cry of dread as he started to move.

But he went on down safely, and nothing happened. Then, while Lens Ackerman, carrying his skis, was climbing up, Tommy Traill took the limelight. He swaggered, though his face was drawn and pale. He kissed Billy, who silently clung to him, and then disengaged himself to take his position.

"Hope I char nicely!" he flung back at us, with a ghastly grin.

Then he was gone, and Masters watched him intently, peering over the rail and far down, until he had actually come to a stop, detached his skis, and was starting back up the slope. Roger, by then, was clambering up heavily, and puffing. He reached the platform just as Masters called the name of Luther Traill.

"What the hell is this all about anyway, Masters?" demanded Roger. "The ladies'll be getting chilled. Seems to me it's pretty far-fetched, hoping anything will come of this—out here at twenty below, and two o'clock in the morning!"

"Never mind that. Just a minute, Mr. Luther Traill, before you take your turn on the slide." Masters pulled back the black-sweatered man just as he shrugged resignedly and started to inch forward toward the slant. "Put this parka on, before you schuss. I wouldn't want any one to catch pneumonia, and you are wearing only that one sweater."

"Don't want it. It isn't mine, and I'm warm enough as it is!" snapped Luther, pushing the blue parka from himself. But I am sure that every one who heard those words, stiffened to alert attention. They had sounded a queer, strained note far different from the ordinary shrinking of normal men from the schuss ordeal they

did not understand. Luther's voice had been pitched higher. It was shrill, near the cracking point.

"I know it isn't yours. It's Tommy Traill's, I believe. But I insist that you obey orders implicitly!" gritted Jigger, still offering the blue parka he had picked up on the porch of the house at the last moment when coming out here. "Put this on—and go!"

"I won't—and what of it!" defied Luther. "You're too damn high-handed to suit me, Mr. Jigger Masters. What of it, I say?"

"Wait then, and I'll tell you in plain words!" retorted Jigger ominously. "Bradford Traill crashed in flames, because some one with a knowledge of chemistry soaked all the fabric and wooden parts of his plane in an inflammable substance. It was no trick, of course, to arrange it so that the heat of the exhaust line from a roaring engine would set afire his plane. That is what happened. Bradford Traill was murdered by some one who hated all the Traill men, and who perhaps hoped to benefit financially by their deaths!"

"Great heavens, you're crazy!" shrilled Luther.

Shocked protests came from the men and women on the platform, but Masters raised one hand for silence.

"Bear with me," he said grimly. "Mr. Luther Traill, at any rate, understands! The coverings of Mr. Roger Traill's bed were soaked, and ready to ignite when the warmth of the human body raised their temperature a few degrees. Poor Miss St. Lauren was not the intended victim, of course. It was just her ghastly misfortune to be ill, and seek a clean bed anywhere, in the nearest room she located. And the chemical fire killed her, too!

"Hank Traill died because he carelessly put on a mackinaw which had

been prepared in the same way. When he got exercising violently the chemical got warmed up, and flared. It burned as fiercely as the head of a match burns, though on a much larger scale. He was shocked to death in just a few seconds by the burn!

"I took the parkas and mackinaws prepared for the others. This blue one is one made ready to murder Mr. Tommy Traill, only he could not find it when he started out here."

There was a whinnying sort of cackle from Luther, and awed, scared words from the other men and women. But Jigger was near the end of his indictment now.

"You, Mr. Luther Traill," he said savagely, "are the only person here with a real knowledge of chemistry. You taught it, before you became principal of your school! You learned how your own brother Roger cheated you of part of your rightful legacy. You also believed all the holograph wills were still effective—all except your own, which you altered secretly. You hoped to kill all four of your brothers, get revenge on Roger, and inherit enough to live in luxury the rest of your life!

"Lies, just lies!" screamed Luther, almost dancing up and down on his skis, then suddenly bending down to unleash the harness. "You know it's all a lie! You can't prove anything! You——"

"Oh, yes, there is proof, all right!" denied Masters. "When I heard you were one of the first to come, I guessed the way you must have worked it. There was no sign of any chemicals mixed or stored on this estate. Therefore you must have had some other place near at hand. I set the State police to searching all available empty houses and summer cottages here on the

lake. There is a little cottage half-way around here to the west, where it is plain that chemicals in jars have been stored. There is one jar there, broken, which still has some traces of a certain chemical on it.

"In a word, phosphorus! The same stuff which once was used on match heads. A chemical which will flame fiercely at a little friction, or when warmed up only a few degrees!

"Of course not just plain phosphorus. This substance is more like the ancient Greek fire, in that it is 'sleepered' a little. That means that the phosphorus has been quieted just a little, in a chemical combination. It is possible to fix this so the substance will explode and burn fiercely at any given temperature—say eighty degrees, for instance—when it is warmed up by the heat of the human body! Unlike plain phosphorus, it has no odor to give warning!

"Phospho-arzene they call it for short, in the munitions manufacturing business. It has been used for all sorts of things, notably in tracer bullets and incendiary shells.

"Now, Mr. Luther Traill, the man who visited that cottage secretly at night, was seen twice! A witness is ready to confront all of you, and say just who it was! I *know* it was you!"

It is bromidic to say a murderer is crazy. Masters denies that Luther Traill was really insane—only savagely bitter at the world which cheated him and held his long, sharp nose to the grindstone. But every one on the high platform who heard that laughing, jeering shriek burst trembling from the brother-killer's lips, must have believed Luther really and violently insane. After the screaming shriek he yelled a torrent of words.

"Yes, yes, yes! You win, damn you!" came the petrifying confession at the top of his lungs. Yanking up the front of his black sweater, surprising even Jigger Masters, I believe, he flashed out a small, blued automatic pistol.

"I *am* the flame killer! You win and I lose!" went on Luther madly. "I don't know and don't care now! I've always lost, and always will! But first, I'll take my dear crook of a brother along with me to hell! Roger!"

At that yelped last word he whirled sidewise, flung up the little pistol, and fired point-blank at his awed and frightened brother. But Masters had foreseen just that. He sprang, striking aside the outstretched arm so the little bullet went away somewhere into the snowclad hills.

But that diving tackle carried Luther back, back—and then came a cracking of wood, and a horrified cry from all of us. The apparently stanch rail had been torn away by the weight of their bodies, and now both men, clutched together, were turning end over end as they fell to the snow forty feet below!

They struck and slid a little way. Then there was quiet for one stricken second, before we all started hurrying down to help if possible.

Perhaps there is some justice. The police, who had been waiting for something they knew not what, and who had started running on hearing the pistol shot, reached the two men first. They were helping Jigger to his feet when we got there, and Jigger, after a few seconds to regain his breath, was completely unharmed!

Luther Traill, murderer, lay there with his head doubled back under his body. His neck was broken and he was dead.

That was the end of the case, except for one small thing. At breakfast time, when Masters was about to leave for Long Island again, having no taste for more skiing this winter, Roger Traill came to him with a check book and pen. Roger had aged. His cheeks were gray, and his eyes furtive.

"The figure on that check should be ten thousand dollars," said Jigger quietly, though several of us heard. "And the person to whom it must be made out is the widow of Luther Traill. I understand she is destitute, and has children to rear.

"For myself I want nothing. I confess I do not like you, Roger Traill. But unlike the case of the famous Doctor Fell, I know the reason very well. I hate petty crooks!"

A CLUE

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Mildred lay bound to an iron bed, her body writhing.

ONE JUMP AHEAD

By Charles Boswell

PETER McQUADE and his girl, Mildred Foster, sat at dinner in a restaurant they frequented on Madison Avenue. McQuade, a detective sergeant, was attached to a near-by detective division covering the silk-stocking district of New York's upper East Side;

his girl ran a tiny dress shop on Fifty-seventh Street.

A radio across the tables from them blared a popular tune, a time announcement, and then the news. McQuade looked into Mildred's eyes, momentarily oblivious of everything else about him—sounds,

people, food. "You're sweet," he said to the girl. "It's swell of you to close up early just to eat with a flatfoot like me."

Mildred, returning his gaze, could see behind him. She gave a coughing signal, and whispered: "At the bar there's somebody you don't think is so nice."

McQuade turned. To his rear the detective saw, leaning over the mahogany, his foot on the brass rail, a drink at his elbow, "Bird Dog" Joe Sclafani, a private investigator—so nicknamed because he made a living retrieving stolen jewelry for insurance underwriters. The man was lean with a warped sort of leanness; his nose and mouth were twisted crookedly; his eyes set deep and close together.

McQuade and Sclafani were arch-enemies. Sclafani's grievance was that McQuade lifted too many rewards from beneath the private dick's nose; McQuade's that Sclafani instigated robberies in order that he might obtain the fat sums offered for the return of stolen goods.

At the sight of Sclafani the police detective's face hardened. He turned back to the girl, romance flown from his thoughts and features. "If they'd lock that guy up," he said, "jewel robberies would decrease fifty per cent in this city. He's tied up with every gang of high-class thieves at large, but he's clever, and so far has kept his own nose clean. We've never been able to corner him in any of the crimes committed. The insurance companies are fools to play ball with him. They make themselves out their own fences when they do, paying him half the value of hot stones to get the stuff back. He conducts the only 'legitimate' holdup I know about."

"It's a racket," Mildred said.

"And a soft one," McQuade went on. "He's no more an investigator than you are. I don't see why the State allows him a license. What he does is this: Gets wind of some dame having a valuable collection of gems, has them stolen, hires himself out as retriever of the stolen goods to the underwriters covering them, holds up the claim agents for his price, then contacts the thieves he hired, and makes a remarkable recovery of the stuff *he* ordered taken."

Mildred nodded in agreement. Sclafani was an old story to her, one of Peter's pet topics of conversation.

McQuade started talking again, but was interrupted by a second signal from Mildred. This time, on turning his head about, he again saw Sclafani. The private detective was nearer, moving from the bar across the room to where McQuade and the girl were sitting. Sclafani approached and stood by their table. "How's things on the beat, copper?" he asked the detective sergeant.

McQuade shrugged his distaste for Sclafani's presence and sneering question.

"And you this evening, Miss Foster?" Sclafani continued the injection of his voice into what had been a private conversation. "How are you?"

"Very well," the girl answered coldly.

Sclafani began another remark in McQuade's direction, but the radio, jumping to higher volume, cut him off. News dispatches, still coming in, suddenly held the interest of each of the trio.

"The Park Avenue residence of Mr. and Mrs. J. Upland Tracy was robbed at approximately six o'clock this evening," a smooth voice over the ether told him. "Mrs. Tracy, sur-

prised in her boudoir, was stripped of more than one hundred thousand dollars' worth of jewelry she had removed from her safe in preparation for a dinner engagement. Mr. Tracy, in an effort to capture the burglars, was severely wounded. His condition is critical. The first police to arrive on the scene state that the crime was committed by professionals. The jewelry, it is reported, was fully insured."

McQuade looked up. His steady eyes met Sclafani's. The private detective's gaze shifted. Without saying a word he left the table and walked out of the restaurant.

McQuade rose from his seat. "I'm sorry, Mildred," he told the girl, "but our dinner isn't going to turn out like I wanted it to. I'm going to the Tracy residence. They'll be needing me."

"I understand," Mildred replied. "Go ahead."

McQuade knew the Tracy house, a pretentious structure near Seventieth Street. He took a cab and was there in less than five minutes. A police cordon surrounded the premises; an ambulance was drawn up to the door.

In the front hall the detective sergeant met his lieutenant, William Curry. His superior greeted him warmly: "Duty called, eh? Couldn't even spend your off hours away from work—is that it?"

McQuade smiled. "Don't guess there was much use in my coming; you've been here an hour. All cleared up now, huh? Who're the guilty parties?"

"They didn't leave their photographs," Curry answered, his brow tightening. "Fact is they didn't leave anything—fingerprints included. No one saw them enter. No one saw them leave. Mrs. Tracy got a good look at one of them when

he was ripping off her dazzlers, but she is too excited to remember what she saw."

"How about Mr. Tracy?" McQuade questioned.

"He doesn't remember either."

"Why not?"

"He's dead!"

"Dead?"

"Yep. Shot through the heart. Never regained consciousness. An ambulance doctor got here ten minutes after it happened and worked on him until a few moments ago. He came out and told me the old boy had passed away. Look. They're taking him out now."

McQuade's eyes jerked to the point indicated by Lieutenant Curry. He saw, coming down the stairs, a procession of figures—white-coated ambulance doctor in the lead, two helpers bearing a still form on a stretcher, a weeping woman bringing up the rear. They passed the detective sergeant, and he glimpsed the pallid, death-drawn features of what had been the wealthy Mr. J. Upland Tracy; he heard the grief-torn sobs of the murdered man's wife.

Lieutenant Curry spoke to him: "It's yours, McQuade. You asked for it by showing up here, and you're getting it. I'm awarding you full charge of the robbery investigation. You'll be assisted by Detective Murdoch and Robinson. There's a bunch up from the homicide bureau looking in on the murder angle, but inasmuch as the motive is pretty obvious, I dare say they'll hand that end over to you also. Go to it."

McQuade heard. His mind, however, functioned in a different direction. He was recalling the shifty-eyed look he'd seen on Bird Dog Joe Sclafani's hard face, the quick slinking step out of the restaurant the private investigator had taken

as the news of the Tracy burglary came in over the radio. These facts McQuade assorted, reviewed, and catalogued in the card index of his orderly brain; these together with the suspicions he had long held of Sclafani's honesty.

Was this another of the private detective's planned crimes? If so, Sclafani had stepped into a fire likely to burn him. Burglary was one thing, murder another. Either was bad enough; both together were another matter. Peter McQuade resolved to discover and bring to justice not only the perpetrators of the double crime but the instigator.

"All right, lieutenant," the detective sergeant told Curry. "You can count me in—in a big way. I start now. Are Murdoch and Robinson here?"

"Upstairs."

McQuade walked over to the foot of the steps and began their ascent. Lieutenant Curry had been right. The murdering burglars had left no clue—no calling card but a single .45-caliber bullet in J. Upland Tracy's heart. The homicide bureau's ballistics man told McQuade about that.

"Impossible to identify," he said. "Very ordinary type bullet, fired from a gun more common among heavy bores than any other in the country. If we had the gun, of course, there'd be a chance of connecting something, but—"

The detective sergeant questioned the servants. At the time of the shooting only two had been in the house—a laundress and the butler. Both were in the basement, so neither had heard the shot. The Tracys had intended dining out; for that reason several of the service staff had been allowed the evening off. McQuade attempted talking with Mrs. Tracy, but she was in such

a state of excitement he got nowhere with her.

Murdoch and Robinson, together with the homicide men, went over every inch of the house. They found nothing of value, not even a jimmyed window where the intruders might have gained entrance, not a single identifiable footmark or fingerprint. The homicide men were happy to shift the entire business to McQuade's shoulders.

A professional job, all right, the detective sergeant thought—too professional. It smacked of much the same character as other burglaries of the past in which Sclafani had ended up playing an important rôle. It was the start of a procedure worn by time: police baffled, insurance men called upon to pay, Sclafani selling his services and the loot.

Suddenly the detective sergeant's fecund mind budded an idea. He reasoned that if this was one of Sclafani's instigated crimes, then, sooner or later, the stolen jewelry would come into the possession of the private investigator. The surest way would be to watch Sclafani. If it was his intention to retrieve the jewelry for the insurers, and if his hirelings were the actual perpetrators, it would be necessary for him to contact them. Watch Sclafani! The private dick would lead him to the murderers, the loot, and would hang himself in the doing. The thought pleased McQuade.

"Listen, Robinson, and you, Murdoch, I've got a tailing job for the two of you," the detective sergeant called his assistants to him, "the most important one either of you've ever had. You know Bird Dog Joe Sclafani? Well I want him followed—close and good. I want you to eat with him, work with him; if necessary, go to bed with him. If you lose him, I'll personally see that

you're both busted back to uniform! Get me? And something else—don't let him know he's being tailed. Remember, you're not shadowing a blind man; he's a private detective. He's got his wits about him, so you've got to keep yours one jump ahead. Don't let him know you're on him, but stick to him like death!

"I want to learn what he does with his time, where he goes, who he sees. I want one or the other of you to report to me personally once a day. Get going!"

Murdoch and Robinson got "going."

McQuade returned to his labors in the Tracy mansion. Again he attempted an interview with its widowed mistress. This time she appeared more composed.

"Mrs. Tracy, I hate to disturb you again," the detective sergeant informed her, "But my questioning you is necessary—for your sake, for the sake of your dead husband, for the sake of society. If it's at all possible I would like to get some kind of a description of the persons who robbed you and shot Mr. Tracy. Could you help?"

The woman was silent for a long while before answering. She closed her eyes in an effort to think and remember. Finally she said: "I believe the man who came into my room, who tore the jewels from me, was short, stocky, and dark. The back of his hands—I saw them clearly—were covered with heavy hair. I think there was a scar on his face; I can't remember exactly where. There was at least one other man. I didn't see him clearly. He must have been the one who shot my husband. I heard the gun when the short person was still in my room. The other man was taller, lighter."

McQuade gave her a description

of Sclafani. "Did either of them look like that?" he asked.

Mrs. Tracy answered immediately. "No," she said.

A week later Peter McQuade was still on the case, no nearer the solution. He exhausted the clue possibilities of the Tracy house, the servants, and the surrounding neighborhood. He began an intensive coverage of jewelry fences, bearing in mind that some criminal gang other than one influenced by Sclafani might very well be involved. He communicated with a dozen or more stool pigeons, promising any and all things for leads as to the identity of the criminals.

Murdoch and Robinson still had Sclafani under surveillance. They worked him in shifts at night, did double duty during the day. They claimed not to have missed a single movement of his routine, getting an ear and eye into every detail of his business and social life.

Murdoch's last telephoned report disclosed no startling developments. "He ain't been out of his office but once to-day," the shadow said. "That was to go to lunch. He met a guy in the restaurant he knew and spoke a few words. We didn't get what he said but nothing passed between them. The guy didn't have no opportunity to slip him the jewels; nothing like that. We're in the office next to his, and we've got his wires tapped. Nothing's happened there. Outside of business hours he's been spending his time in his apartment and in the movies. We've been as close to him as his underwear; he's safe!"

"Has he suspected you? Everything depends on that," McQuade asked.

"Hell, naw," was the answer.

The detective sergeant was satis-

fied. He hung up the telephone in the division office where he'd received Murdoch's call, went to his desk, and sat down to think out the next move he'd make. His thoughts were interrupted by the phone ringing again. Annoyed, he picked up the receiver, bawled "Hello" into the mouthpiece. A strange voice spoke his name, gruffly, menacingly.

"It's me—McQuade," he acknowledged. "What d'ye want?"

"This," the voice rasped out. "Lay off Sclafani. Take them tails off him and stay off yourself."

"Who'm I talking to?" McQuade parried for time. He signaled the office operator to trace the call.

"Never mind names," the voice continued, "Just digest this and maybe you'll do as you're told. We're holding your girl—Mildred Foster. We're going to keep her until Sclafani collects from the insurance company for the return of the Tracy gems. If he don't, it's too bad for her. You're the one that's preventing it. *Lay off!*"

There was a click in the receiver, and McQuade knew the other end of the wire had been hung up. The operator yelled over to him: "Sorry, didn't have enough time."

For a moment the detective sergeant sat stunned to stupidity at his desk. Then he was on the phone again, calling Mildred's dress shop. There was no answer. He called her apartment. Still no answer. He rushed from the office and picked up a squad car outside. Like a maniac he drove across town to Mildred's place of business. The door of the shop was unlocked. There was no one inside. She had no employees. There was no one to question but the merchants on either side of the store she occupied.

McQuade made hasty inquiries.

She had been last seen an hour before. She'd left the shop in the company of two men—one squat and dark, the other tall and blond. They had gotten into an automobile at the curb and driven away.

Mildred—the girl he loved—had been kidnaped! In the hands of the merciless burglary gang, her life was at sacrifice on a stake built by Upland Tracy's murderers; they held the torch of death dangerously close. These thoughts tortured the detective.

Sclafani! Now he knew the sinister investigator had a definite hook-up with crime. Now—to his own mind at any rate—he had definite proof of this connection, but with this proof was an awful inability to put it to use.

If he gave official notification of the information he had, the girl's captors would make short work of her. If the division office swooped down and picked up Sclafani, charged him with implication in the robbery, the murder, the kidnaping, the private detective's confederates would snuff out Mildred's life.

Unless he called Murdoch and Robinson off Sclafani's tail, unless he allowed the investigator's nefarious associates to turn over the jewelry to him, then, too, would his sweetheart's safety be jeopardized.

If he did—if he whistled away his bloodhounds and gave Bird Dog Joe free rein to play his nefarious game, there was no assurance that Mildred would be returned unharmed. Most probably they would murder her anyway. She was in their custody; knew their identities, their hiding place. It was too dangerous ever to allow her freedom. They had killed Tracy; they would have no compunction about killing her!

McQuade was clipped below the belt. He cursed himself for having sicked the shadows—Murdoch and Robinson—onto Sclafani; shadows he believed would eventually solve the Tracy crimes; shadows that now were Death on Mildred's trail. Then he cursed his two detective assistants. He had warned them against allowing Sclafani to discover their presence. They were fools—utter and definite fools! It gave him a certain relief to damn Murdoch and Robinson, but his villification of their names did not bring back the girl he adored.

He *had* to free her! Her safety meant more to him than anything else. He had to do it cleverly, without putting her to further hazard. Where was she? He did not know. Who were her captors? His own question he could not answer.

Sclafani! The private detective held the key to both puzzling interrogations. He must wring it from him.

McQuade decided on a move of desperate boldness. Sclafani, he figured, would be in his office at this time. The detective sergeant drove the squad car to the apartment building where he knew the private investigator lived. He parked the automobile to the rear of the building and ascended to Sclafani's quarters. With a skeleton key he let himself into the suite and closed the door behind. He sat down in a comfortable chair placed to the rear of the hall entrance and waited.

For hours he sat there. It grew dark. McQuade did not turn on a light. He sat eager listening, every sense alert. There were sounds in the hallway. The building's tenants were returning home from their labors. Then there were footsteps

outside the apartment door, the click of a key in the lock.

McQuade rose silently to his feet. The door opened. Sclafani stepped into the room, his back to the detective sergeant. McQuade's arm rose. In his clenched fist was a blackjack. The leather-covered length of lead swung down. There was a single, neat crack as it connected with Sclafani's skull. With one arm McQuade caught the private detective's body as it toppled backward. With the other he closed the door.

By midnight McQuade had Sclafani's unconscious body out of the investigator's apartment and into his own! He had placed it in a roomy dumb-waiter in the kitchen of the private dick's suite, lowered it and himself to the basement of the building. Then he had carried the limp form to the squad car parked out rear, driven to the house in which he himself lived, and taken the body up to his own flat. Despite the grimness of the situation he was forced to chuckle over the plight in which Murdoch and Robinson would find themselves. They were shadowers, huh? He had lifted Sclafani without their knowledge from under their very noses. They deserved such a dilemma for letting Sclafani scent them. He'd let them watch the private detective's empty apartment and would pick them up later.

McQuade lugged the investigator into his bedroom and bound him to a chair placed within a few feet of a night table on which rested a telephone. Then he stretched himself out on his bed and waited for the private dick to come around.

He felt his plan was good. He had kidnaped Sclafani and as long as he had him under observation he would be unable to give the word that would send Mildred to her

death. Further, the investigator's confederates, unaware of what had become of their boss, would necessarily have to mark time. As soon as Sclafani came to his senses, McQuade would make Sclafani understand he was to be held prisoner until his associates were captured and the girl released. Then McQuade would tell the private dick he was being left bound while McQuade went out to search for the girl. Sclafani would be bound, yes, but not in such a fashion that he couldn't reach and use the telephone! If he was clever he could edge his chair over, knock the receiver off the hook, ask the operator for a number. Sclafani was clever! He could put in that call for assistance! The number called was all the detective sergeant wanted. It would be that of the hiding place. From the number he could obtain the address. Then he'd pick up Murdoch and Robinson and they'd go after the gang and Mildred.

He must have hit Sclafani harder than he'd intended. For hours the private detective did not stir, but sat, his head hanging over his bonds like that of a doll with half the stuffing gone.

Seven, eight o'clock. McQuade grew tense with waiting. Suppose he'd knocked all reasoning power out of the bum? What then? Through him, and him alone, McQuade could find the woman he loved. He'd staked everything on the turn of this one crime-dirtied card.

He went to the bathroom and drew a glass of water. He returned and pitched it into Sclafani's face. The private dick's head shook from side to side. His eyes opened and closed. Finally his shoulders straightened, his neck tightened, and his ugly face came up. He was awake.

McQuade shook him roughly, gave him a stinging smack with the flat of his hand. "Listen, you punk!" he bellowed. "Your dirty pals've got my girl and I've got you. I'm keeping you until you either come across with the information I want or I find her on my own, see?"

The private investigator's teeth gritted. "Better watch yourself, copper," he answered. "There's nothing, you know, you can prove. Men have been kicked out of the police department for less than you're doing."

"Police department, hell!" the detective sergeant snorted. "This thing is between me and you. I'm going, now. I'm going out to hunt for Mildred. I've got a *good* idea as to where she is. If I don't find her, I'm coming back with my two partners and we're going to hammer you to a pulp!"

McQuade stepped back, walked into the adjoining living room, closed the door separating the two chambers. For a few minutes he fussed about, then went out into the hall slamming the door behind him. He walked with heavy footsteps down the corridor. A moment later he returned, treading softly. Stealthily he unlatched the door and came again into the living room. He sat on the floor near the closed entrance to the bedroom.

FOR HOURS he sat there. His mantel clock struck noon without his hearing the first sound from Sclafani. Had the man lapsed into unconsciousness again? Had he been bound too tight to edge himself over to the telephone? Did he suspect the detective sergeant's presence? Then, through the partition, he heard a shuffle. The chair legs were moving across the floor, slowly, minutes separating each thump. An

hour of exasperating tedium passed. Finally there was a crash. The detective sergeant knew that the telephone had been knocked from the table. Another louder crash. Sclafani had thrown himself and his chair over. Then came the private dick's voice, low: "Operator, get me CAnal 8-1313."

McQuade sprang to his feet, threw open the door separating him from the private detective. He picked the telephone from the floor, clicked the hook to break the connection, yelled into the mouthpiece: "Wire chief, quick!" he shouted. "This is Detective Sergeant Peter McQuade, Shield Number 8927. Let me have the subscriber's name and address for CAnal 8-1313. . . .Globe Billiard Parlor, 402 Bowery? . . . Thanks!"

He hung up, glared at the surprised Sclafani, and rushed from the room. A second later he was down the apartment house steps and into his squad car outside. Motor roaring, siren wide open, he tore southward down Manhattan. His car slid to a stop before the private detective's apartment house, where he expected to pick up Murdoch and Robinson. They were nowhere to be seen. He questioned the building superintendent.

"Them dicks? They've blown. They was around all night and this morning. Then why went in Mr. Sclafani's apartment—found him gone—ran out cussing at one another!"

McQuade started up his car again. He had no time to waste. At this very moment Mildred might be at the point of an awful death. Murdoch and Robinson—they'd never be able to live down their default in keeping Sclafani under eye. McQuade was willing to bet they were plenty sore at one another and them-

selves. Even now they were probably looking frantically into every nook and cranny they felt might hold Sclafani. Despite the job ahead of him, the seriousness of the business at hand, he smiled.

At Bowery and East Fourth Street McQuade sighted a traffic officer. Hardly stopping the car, he gave an order to the man: "Get headquarters. Send squad of huskies to 402 Bowery. Tracy burglars, kidnapers, killers. Hurry!"

The traffic policeman dashed for his call box. McQuade's car sped swiftly on.

A half block from the address he parked. He slipped his gun from the shoulder holster, and held it in his pocket, his finger wrapped about the trigger. He walked down the street. At 410-12 Bowery, was a secondhand clothing store; 408, a cheap hotel; 406, a saloon; 404, a pawnshop; 402—

There was a crowd of loungers in front of the pool hall; sporting-event advertisements obscured the windows. An odor of stale tobacco and staler bodies emerged through swinging doors. McQuade decided to wait at the curb until the headquarters car arrived. He stepped to the edge of the pavement and faced about, his eyes on the door. It opened. Two men came out; one tall, thin, and blond, the other dark, stocky, hirsute. Mrs. Tracy's description flashed through the detective sergeant's mind. Were they the burglars? Were they the men Mildred was seen leaving her dress shop with? His head averted, his eyes twisted to scrutinize the pair more carefully, the detective sergeant saw a scar on the short fellow's face. They were the killers!

The pool-room door closed behind the gangsters. They started walking

southward down the street. McQuade figured the situation instantly. The gang made the pool hall its point of call; their actual headquarters were elsewhere. It was necessary that McQuade follow the pair to find Mildred. He could not afford to wait for the headquarters car. He must go alone.

The men ahead were traveling hurriedly. The detective sergeant followed a half block to their rear. At Great Jones Street they turned east to Second Avenue, then south again to East Third. Here, near the corner, they ducked into the doorway of a miserable tenement.

McQuade approached the portal cautiously. He peered in, found the dark hallway empty; a flight of stairs lead up into pitch blackness. On tiptoe he started the ascent, his gun out in readiness. Above he heard heavy footsteps of his quarry two flights higher. A door squeaked on its hinges, opened, closed with a slam. He heard a woman's muffled voice. The tone, choked as it was, was nevertheless sweetly familiar. *Mildred!*

Three steps at a time the detective sergeant yeaped upward. He paused before a door visible only by a crack of light beneath it. He listened. Harsh voices of two men rose inside, and the frightened cry of the girl he loved.

Two steps backward he took, then rushed forward. His shoulder hit the rotten paneling of the door like a football guard bucks the line. It splintered; the lock snapped. The door sprang open.

Mildred lay bound to an iron bed, a gag half covering her face, her body writhing. The tall man stood over her, a gun in his hand. The stocky fellow, a dozen feet away, held a dirty shade to one side, peered

out a window. There was a half light in the room, the figures outlined vaguely.

As the detective sergeant plunged in, the thin man's gun arm swung around. His weapon flashed fire—too late. Already McQuade's service revolver had spoken. The other's slug went wild to a wall, the gun dropped, the wiry body slumped to the floor, retching blood.

The stocky man's right arm shot beneath his left lapel. McQuade's second bullet caught him in the elbow. The arm came out, hand empty. The man, twisting in pain, suddenly sat down in his tracks. The detective sergeant stepped to him, jerked an automatic from beneath his coat, threw it all the way across the room.

Then, in a second, McQuade was at Mildred's side. He tore the gag from her lips. "Darling," he panted, "Are you hurt?"

She looked up at him. "No," she gasped, "I'm all right. I'm—" Her thankful eyes froze and she screamed.

"Drop that gun!" A voice as pointed and as cold as an icicle impinged on McQuade's consciousness. A third man was behind the detective—Sclafani! He had escaped!

"Drop that gun," Sclafani repeated, "or I'll bore you and your girl friend, too!"

The detective sergeant whirled, but not in time. A crash of gunfire filled the room. McQuade braced himself against the pain he knew would rack his body. It did not come. Without having opportunity to fire, McQuade saw the private investigator sink to the floor. He looked up. Two heavy figures, guns smoking in their hands, crowded the doorway. Both were grinning. McQuade grinned back. The shadow-

ers, Murdoch and Robinson, somehow, had arrived!

Up the stairs came a stream of uniformed officers—the headquarters squad. Attracted by the shooting, they had left the Bowery address.

Mildred in his arms, McQuade watched the removal of the thieving killers; the tall fellow dead, the short one and Sclafani wounded.

A half hour later, back again on the upper East Side, in the detectives' room at the East Fifty-first Street station house, Murdoch told his story:

"Like you ordered us, me and Robinson were tailing Sclafani. We was on him until he got to his flat. We figured we'd put him to bed. Robinson stuck around all night, and I went home. In the morning I come back, and Robinson tells me Sclafani's still inside. The both of us waited—nine—ten o'clock. He don't come out. In we went. He's gone.

"I call up the precinct. You ain't there. Then I calls your apartment; the line's busy. Me and Robinson goes up to where you live. As we're about to go into your apartment house, by heavens, we see Sclafani tearing the hell out. Me and Robinson follow. He leads us down to that flop on Second Avenue. We're

behind him just like he was behind you. When he's telling you he's going to let you and your gal have it, we get him. Bang! Bang! It was all over."

McQuade, his arm still around Mildred's shoulders, chuckled. He hadn't the heart to tell Murdoch and Robinson of his trick—kidnaping Sclafani away from them. He had no criticism to make of their shadowing ability. They had saved Mildred and himself from certain death.

Lieutenant Curry came in. "Well," he said to McQuade, "Your old suspicions about Sclafani are certainly confirmed. Aside from the criminality of his actions to-day, his presence at the Second Avenue hide-out, we've got a witness to many of his past misdeeds. The stocky fellow who was wounded, in exchange for a clear conscience, wants to talk. Believe me, he's got plenty to say.

"And something else. In searching that pair and the flat they had, the boys found all the Tracy gems. That's quite a recovery, McQuade. The insurance companies ought to pay over a big reward!"

The detective sergeant looked into Mildred's eyes. "I've a more important recovery right here," he replied. "Furthermore, this recovery is its own reward!"



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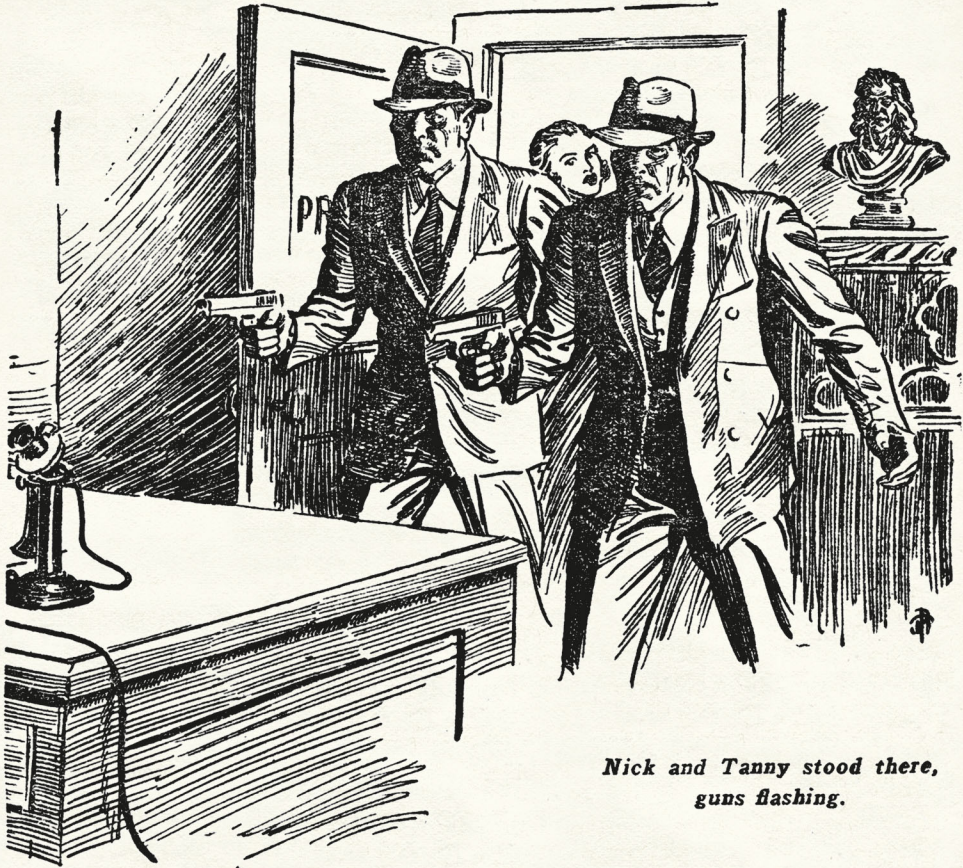
MURDER MESSAGE

By Cyril Plunkett

SHERIDAN was tired to exhaustion. He had just cracked a jewel robbery for Inter-Ocean Indemnity, one of his clients, despite the legal pyrotechnics of Lane Osborn, the ferretlike little lawyer whose nose was more often than not

in something shady. Nor had Osborn been able to prevent a conviction. It was a victory, complete, conclusive, but thought of Osborn, Sheridan's constant foe, left it singularly unpleasant.

Besides his complete fatigue,



*Nick and Tanny stood there,
guns flashing.*

Sheridan was oddly nervous. It seemed as though a psychic pressure hovered over him, tense and heavy. Vaguely, Osborn troubled him.

He entered his apartment in the exclusive Creighton Arms, tossed ulster, hat, suit coat, and tie on the first chair, and strode to the window, opening it wide. The night was warm for late fall, and here, off from the street, tranquil. He had an idiotic desire to climb out on the fire escape and sit there in silent contemplation. Instead he turned on the radio, snapped off the lights, and slumped in the chair beside the cabinet, sighing. Lane Osborn's nasty little smile haunted Sheridan;

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and the glittering jet eyes that seemed to say: "O. K., you won, damn you. But I'll get you yet."

Twenty-eight; with a more than comfortable income; a lean hard body and darkly handsome face—that was Booth Sheridan. Inspector Roberts, homicide squad in Crossland City, was Sheridan's close friend, and he had worked with the police on many a baffling case.

A clock struck twelve. Sheridan hazily remembered counting the strokes. Remembered, too, the radio program changing to music soft and dreamy. A startling numbness followed, veiled with rhythm like the swell of the sea. They were long,

even waves at first; then shorter, troubled. Angrily, determinedly Sheridan fought them. And then came the flowers.

They were nameless, but sweet. There were millions of them, waving in that same curious rhythm, and strangely from their midst rose the voice.

"Help me! You must help me," the voice began.

"I can't," Sheridan muttered. "The waves won't let me help you."

"But you must! I do not matter, but Greving——"

"I don't know Greving. The name means nothing to me."

"Jack Greving! He is captive! He is doomed!"

"To die?" Sheridan questioned. He struck at the waves, but they mocked him with their strength. They beat upon the flowers, seemingly trying to drown the voice.

"To be *murdered!*" the voice cried. "Don't you understand? He's in a building——"

"Building? How perfectly foolish. There are no buildings in the ocean."

"The *city*. A building even I do not know where. Oh, you fool, you fool, I——" The voice ended, and the waves became wilder.

Agonizingly, Sheridan tried to mount their foamy crests, to walk upon them, to reach that voice before the waters washed it away forever, but they were mighty waves and he was like a puppet in their grasp. The voice screamed once, not loudly; despairingly. The waves returned to even, gentle swells, rhythmic and strangely taunting. And Booth Sheridan awoke, taut and staring.

The door was open, light from the hall limning the figure of a man.

Sheridan was instantly in command of his faculties. He stifled a

yawn, grinned, became grim again. A man stood before him, his eyes beaming in a chubby and cheerful face. It was Tommy Manders, who not only owned the Creighton Arms but lived there also. They weren't close friends, but Manders often spent an evening in Sheridan's rooms. He was a real-estate broker, well off, unmarried.

"I had gone out for a spot of late supper"—Manders chuckled—"and coming back I heard the ungodliest moans outside your door. Tummy, Sheridan—or bad dreams?"

"I wonder," Sheridan answered slowly.

He looked at his watch. It was almost two o'clock. He'd plainly been asleep well over an hour. Dance rhythm still came softly from the radio; a breeze wafted the curtains. He took a deep breath, rose from the chair. Manders dropped into another chair, was reaching for the handy glass and decanter.

"You were asleep, weren't you?" he queried, laughing now.

"That's what is bothering me. I was," Sheridan murmured. "Manders, have you ever heard of a Jack Greving?"

"Greving? No, can't say that I have."

"Nor I—before to-night. Strange. The thing was so damned real!"

"You're talking in riddles, Sheridan."

"I'm thinking riddles, too. Do you believe in thought transmission, Manders?"

"Popycock!"

"Yes, that's true. At least, science still has doubt, and yet thoughts have been transmitted. A mind psychically attuned——"

"Still popycock," interrupted Manders. "Have a drink."

"I don't believe a drink will answer my question," Sheridan mused.

Briefly he told of the dream. He had lighted a cigarette, was pacing the room, weariness gone. In its place was an urge, a restlessness he had known before when mystery beckoned. When he finished, Tommy Manders chuckled again, pointed to the radio.

"There's your answer, Sheridan. Probably been listening in your sleep to 'At the howl of the wolf,' or some such program. Ghosts, eerie castles, and all that. Your subconscious mind heard the program, and presto—you accepted it for fact!"

Sheridan paused, crushed out the cigarette, and reached for the telephone. "We'll see." A minute later he had the radio station on the wire.

"We've carried no drama, no commercials, since midnight," a tired voice answered his question. "Nothing but music."

"Is it at all possible a 'Jack Greving' was mentioned over the air?"

"Jack Grev—" The voice became suddenly sharp. "Who is this calling?"

Sheridan mentioned his name. "Then there *is* a man named Greving?"

"There was," came the laconic reply. "Playboy, round-the-world tripper. Since you seem concerned, we haven't mentioned his name—yet. But we happen to know that Mr. Greving sailed for England ten days ago—and not two hours past was accidentally killed near London. We just had a flash, and the news will go out in another fifteen minutes."

Sheridan said dumbly: "Thank you," and hung up. He looked at Tommy Manders, face oddly drawn, saw that Manders was tense.

"I could hear every word he said," Manders whispered. "Sheridan, good Heaven, do you suppose—"

"I'm not even trying to," Sheridan snapped, catching up his tie. "One thing I know, I'm going to talk to the police, to-night."

"But it's fantastic! Listen, mind if I trail along with you?"

"Not in the least. I don't wonder you're intrigued."

"Give me five minutes to get my hat and topcoat. Wait for me!"

He was gone, and Sheridan turned off the radio and fumbled in his pocket for another cigarette. Manders was right. It was fantastic, unbelievable. At almost the precise minute a man had died from apparent accident, a man Sheridan had never heard of, this voice had whispered—"murder." Dressed for the street, Sheridan cursed Manders for the delay, but presently hurried footsteps sounded in the hallway. Manders opened the door, panting.

"Ran upstairs and down—shouldn't—bad for the heart. Ready, Sheridan?"

"Ready," Booth Sheridan answered grimly, and they left the room together.

II.

THERE was a cruising taxi a few yards from the entrance. Sheridan flagged it, dived for the door, leaped inside. He was still on his feet when he saw the crouched figure on the floor behind the driver. Unaware that danger loomed, the chubby Manders had tumbled in after him. The cab jerked before Sheridan could so much as cry out in warning. Tommy caught his arm, and both men swayed back in the seat together. The door still swung open. And Tommy Manders gasped then. Plain in the gleam of street lights was the flashing steel of a gun, a gun trained at Sheridan's heart.

The mouth above it snarled: "Freeze, both of you!"

Manders moaned, but Sheridan was unmoving, silent, taut, as the car rocketed around the first corner. He could see bared teeth now, eyes narrowed and glittering. He could see a grimy finger trembling on the trigger.

"You, the fat guy," the harsh voice went on, "reach for that door and close it."

Tommy Manders's teeth chattered—his only response.

"Close that door!"

Manders shuddered, hesitantly raised his right hand. The cab had reached another corner, was slowing in taking it. Even before Tommy moved, Sheridan sensed his mad plan, saw sudden hope. Manders caught the door, leaped suddenly from his seat. The stocky fellow hit the ground, running, and Sheridan was instantly ready to take advantage of the break.

But the menacing muzzle did not turn. Its owner said sharply: "Nick, get him!" and Nick, the driver, whirled in his seat, revolver in one hand. Twice it spouted flame. The car wavered, raced ahead again, and with a quick turn of his head, Sheridan saw Tommy Manders sway and fall behind them.

"Got him, Tanny!" Nick reached for the door, closed it.

Tanny edged back until he was safely in the other corner.

"We do things to wise guys, brother," Tanny said. Not once had his eyes left Sheridan's figure.

The car wound on, and Sheridan stared at the driver's neck, cursing himself for a careless fool to be taken thus. He was unarmed, but Tanny's steady gun would have prevented even the quickest draw anyway. Taken for a holdup, to-night of all nights, when the strangest problem Sheridan had ever encountered taunted him to be answered.

He wondered, grimly, if Manders had been killed, watched with narrowed eyes for the slightest opportunity to gain the upper hand, and began to feel a faint but prickly doubt. The car was speeding on and on, already deep into the residential district. Crossland's suburbs were close ahead. Holdup? But why deferred?

"Don't move your hands," Tanny said sharply.

Sheridan froze again, aware his nails had been biting flesh.

"What's the angle?" he asked angrily.

"We'll do the talking. You sit tight."

"Give it to him, Tanny," Nick growled from the front seat.

"You leave this to me," Tanny snarled. "I ain't going to have any beat cop hearing shots. Besides, you know we got to wait. It's got to look like suicide, ain't it?"

Suicide! Sheridan was staring in cold amazement. A part of his mind had been frantically telling him these many seconds that with Tommy Manders shot they wouldn't dare let a witness to murder live. "To look like suicide, ain't it?" That sounded as though this thing had been planned! He thought of Lane Osborn's jet and vengeful eyes; he thought of men Lane had crossed long back—but *murder!* It was incredible.

His heart was beating faster, nerves jumping, pleading. And the houses were growing fewer, the lonely night doubly dark ahead. There was no time for further speculation; too soon death would roar from that steady gun. Suddenly those glittering eyes, lighted with the dim light from the dash, like a snake's, unwinking, gave Sheridan a thrill of hope. *Calmly*, seemingly

with despair, he slumped low in his seat, legs outstretched.

"Don't move your hands," Tanny called again.

Sheridan's right foot flashed, struck upward true and viciously at Tanny's gun arm. Even before the toe met steel, Sheridan's shoulders were in motion. The gun roared wildly a split second before his fist met Tanny's jaw.

The bullet sped into the roof. There was a gasp. Quickly Sheridan swung again, and heard the gun clatter on the floor. He was already scrambling beside the prostrate hoodlum, jerking the body between him and the front seat.

Brakes squealed simultaneously. Nick wrenched in his seat, gun flashing. He flung one quick shot before he turned again to steer the careening car. By that time Sheridan had the door open, and his right hand kept moving up, over the meter, clamping on Nick's gun arm an instant before the man could shoot a second time.

Crazily the car rolled across the road and tilted perilously into the ditch. It didn't overturn, but Nick's side was down, and Nick was handicapped. He threw his other fist at Sheridan's chest, cursing shrilly. Sheridan took the blow and responded with a clean left jab. The gun snarled once more, purely reflex action, before Sheridan's steely fingers twisted. He felt the weapon slide across his wrist.

Nick clawed for it, missed, began driving again with that left hand. His curses now were mouthed in blood. All the while Sheridan was edging his body higher, until one knee was free. He drove it down, and Nick shuddered.

There was movement from behind suddenly, fingers clutching at Sheridan's foot. He kicked free, saw,

whirling, Tanny's contorted face. Tanny seemed half dazed, was fumbling blindly on the floor for the fallen gun. Sheridan kicked repeatedly, but Tanny only yelled; and Nick, still gasping for breath, was already twisting to rise and fight again. Caught as he was between them, Sheridan realized that only quick flight was left to him. He lunged for the open door, slipped as he hit the ground, then was up and speeding on across the road.

The first shot came as Sheridan dived into the other ditch. He ran, doubled. Faint footsteps stumbled to the pavement behind him, but the ditch opened abruptly upon a creek, and Sheridan swerved as a fusillade of shots cut the grass in his wake. Here were trees and denser darkness, and minutes later the road was far to his rear.

IT was not yet three o'clock when Sheridan reached an all-night lunch room in Crossland's suburbs. Walking, he had had time to think. Tanny's "ain't it?", the question which precluded a previous understanding, and its obvious answer that the attack had been premeditated, was the one certainty in an otherwise hazy pattern. Who had hired Nick and Tanny, Sheridan could only guess, and Sheridan refused to guess. He was after proof.

Meantime, however, there was still the curious pertinency of the dream, the fate of Tommy Manders to be determined, and the immediate contacting of his friend, Inspector Roberts.

Sheridan phoned for a cab, and waiting for it, phoned the Creighton Arms. There was no answer in Tommy's suite. He called back the lobby desk, but the night operator stated positively that Manders had not returned. Frowning grimly,

Sheridan rang headquarters then, found Roberts in.

Roberts, voice gruff, said that no shooting near the Creighton Arms had been reported—not particularly odd in view of the late hour. Nor had the hospitals reported an injury, nor the cop on the beat a body. Tommy Manders had disappeared!

Sheridan was silent a moment, his plans suddenly changed.

"I was coming to headquarters on another matter, but I've got more urgent work to do now. Can you get up to my place, to-night? It's important, Roberts."

Roberts said he could.

"Good," Sheridan snapped. "Mean-time get the hooks out for a taxicab, doubtless stolen, and two men, doubtless murderers." He described Nick and Tanny, and hung up.

Riding back downtown, Sheridan wondered if a second car had followed the first, if the dead or injured Manders had been picked up in it. At all events, Manders must be found, and he urged the driver to hurry, ordered him to the corner where Manders had made his frenzied break. But a quick search of the dark street revealed no clue to Tommy's whereabouts. Nor was there any trace of blood, and Sheridan paid off his cabbie and walked swiftly toward the Creighton Arms.

Roberts had not yet arrived, nor had Manders returned. Wearily Sheridan left the switchboard and climbed the stairs to his suite. There was light beneath the door!

Sheridan paused, suddenly tense. He distinctly remembered having turned *off* the lights. He tried the door, found it locked. There was no sound within, and quietly he removed his keys and opened it. Stood then on the threshold, staring.

On the divan lay the silk-clad body of a girl!

For a moment he was conscious only of the thready beating of his own heart. He closed the door, reached without looking for the desk beside it, the drawer in which he'd earlier put his gun. His fingers searched, found no gun, and with a deep breath Sheridan advanced toward the divan. The girl, as he had instantly suspected, was quite dead.

But protruding from her bosom, blood around it already caked, was his shining paper knife!

The night had begun with fantasy, a curious voice that whispered murder. Death had struck at him less than an hour afterward, and now, Tommy Manders mysteriously missing, here was murder, satanically contrived, pointing to Sheridan as the man who did it!

He bent over the body, grim as he saw prints, doubtless his own, plainly marking the hilt of the knife. The odor of gardenia, heavy in its cloying sweetness, wafted up from the girl's hair and dress. Her face was young, lovely, if a little hard. Death had frozen it in a look of terrified amazement, but it was a face Sheridan had never seen before. Her purse revealed handkerchief, compact, a slender, gold-stubbed lipstick, the end worn blunt and black at the edge; some change and a bill or two. No clue to her identity. Worriedly Sheridan remembered Inspector Roberts was even now on his way here.

And scarcely had he remembered that when a rap sounded softly on the door.

Thoughts came then, like lightning. However friendly, Roberts was first a police officer, a man of principle and duty. That hilt with its fingerprints—and Sheridan dared not wipe the knife lest other prints than his own might be on it—was damning. Believe in him, doubtless,

Roberts would, but the law had a strict procedure. Meaning jail, questions, time! And already drumming in Sheridan's mind was the realization that his was a cunning foe. There was the all-too-possible chance the frame might stick! Especially if Sheridan's own movements were cramped, and he could not fight back.

"Sheridan!" Roberts's voice, called softly. Roberts rapped again.

Booth Sheridan sighed, turned quickly toward the curtained, but open, window. And, hands on the sill, stood a second, frozen. The window sill was faintly sticky! It seemed a trifling matter, but hurried though his inspection was, he knew at once two things: The sticky surface came from soap, strong soap, hastily and recently applied. The ends of the sill showed darkly stained with sooty dust. The center, therefore, not many minutes earlier, had been washed, scrubbed!

Sheridan was on the fire escape as Roberts's calls were spaced by the sound of pounding fists. For the first time in his life Booth Sheridan was not only about to hunt—but be the hunted.

III.

IN A CAB, blocks away, Sheridan lighted a cigarette, leaned back and closed his eyes. The cards, he knew, were on the table, but the faces were down. He had no conclusive clue—he had had no time to search for further clues—but Death had dealt those cards, and the price of the game had become Life.

The cab rolled on, tires humming softly, drowsily, but Sheridan was wide awake. The time had come for rationalization, and, intently frowning, he went back to the beginning. An incredible dream! A fantasy curiously tied to fact. Per-

sonal disaster had followed that dream, true, but try as he would, he could not connect it to later events. In sequence it came first, logically, but only Manders had known that Sheridan had had it. And Manders had either perished or disappeared.

So, strange as the dream had been, doubly odd that word of Greving's death had followed it, the dream had to be discarded, at least temporarily. It simply had no reason, no real and tangible importance. Even should it have been true, it concerned a happening thousands of miles away. Nor, seemingly, could any one have considered it dangerous as a personal proof, and consequently feared it.

Sheridan paused thoughtfully, stared at the glowing ash of his cigarette. A faint something troubled him. He couldn't put it into words. It was as though the dream did not want to be forgotten, and momentarily he thought of Tommy Manders.

Manders was a well-known figure in Crossland, a man of position and reputation and vast real-estate holdings. Manders, missing, was a stumbling block to the solution of Sheridan's own problem. But Manders must have been shot, kidnaped, or both, and beyond that there was nothing either.

Tanny and Nick! They were real, but hoodlums. Discounting both kidnaping and robbery in his own case—as he had to—only death for revenge was left, and until Tanny and Nick were found, made to talk, they pointed to no one man as the brains behind them.

Unless Lane Osborn? Sheridan wondered. Perhaps in his reasoning he had not gone back far enough tonight? He'd thwarted Osborn earlier in the day; he'd read hatred

in Osborn's dark and wily face. But proof again—*proof*.

And the dead girl. Where she entered the picture, he could not even guess. If murder by seeming suicide was the aim of his unknown foe, then why this actual, planted murder pointing to him? And why had that sill been scrubbed? Fingerprints removed! They would *wipe* off. Blood, from the girl's body? But she'd been killed *in* the room. And, by snap judgment, she had died at approximately the same time he, Sheridan, had been menaced with death. Was more than one force then bent upon his destruction? Striking differently, but simultaneously?

The more Sheridan thought, the more confused he became. Something vital was missing, and that something persistently eluded him. He rapped on the glass and directed the driver downtown again. One thing alone he knew, definitely: the incredible had become fact, and until the newspapers enlightened him there was nothing to do but wait.

He left the cab, and walking well in the shadows, reached a dingy side street hotel. Once in a room, Sheridan threw himself on the bed, and when dawn faintly streaked the sky he finally slept.

The sun was in the western sky when he awoke. He dressed, sent out for papers, and read them avidly. Murder held the headlines, one Vivian Black, ex-showgirl; his own name and picture just beneath. He was wanted for questioning. Sheridan smiled grimly, read on frowning. The girl had an address across town, paid a month ahead, but police had discovered she'd been absent from it almost two full weeks. Where she had spent the interval had not yet been determined.

She had few friends, but the paper said guardedly that the famed detective, Booth Sheridan, was conclusively linked to her murder. Not only because her body had been found in his apartment, not only because he was strangely missing, but penciled on a pad in her room had been found the street and number of the Creighton Arms, Sheridan's address, proving she had had a date with Death!

Had she planned to see him?—Sheridan wondered. Had she been murdered for what she had known and was about to tell? Possibly, but where, regardless, did he fit into the puzzle so as to be framed for her death?

He left the question unanswered, turned to another column. The name J. Thomas Manders had caught his eye.

J. Thomas Manders, wealthy broker, appeared at police headquarters early this morning with a story of attempted abduction and attack. Bruised and still suffering from shock, he stated he had wandered the streets, dazed, apparently for hours. Although claiming he had been shot at, a slight head wound was his only real injury.

Manders offered no explanation for his story, but remained closeted with Inspector John Roberts, homicide ace, for nearly an hour. Police were noncommittal regarding his experience, and Mr. Manders could not be reached later at either his apartment or his downtown office.

Manders then, was safe. Here at least was proof that part of Sheridan's tale would be accepted as true. But Sheridan's keen eyes had become riveted on still another item.

JACK GREVING DIES IN LONDON

The account, London dated, stated Greving's car had crashed, killing

him instantly. His chauffeur, uninjured, was being held, but there was scant suspicion of foul play. Jack Greving's life was briefly reviewed, and two things near the end held Sheridan's rigid attention.

The murdered Vivian Black had been seen often in his company.

In the absence of close relatives, Greving's American solicitors, Osborn, Jackson, Ferguson & Co., of Crossland, were directing return of the body. Lane Osborn had expressed a deep regret.

Sheridan put down the paper and reached for his coat.

IT wasn't a new or a big building, but it was of ornate architecture. Sheridan, hat down over his eyes, ulster collar up, slipped into the entrance. The elevator took him three stories up; he came to a door, entered.

The reception room was luxuriously furnished. A girl crisply inquired his business.

Sheridan said: "To see Lane Osborn, urgently."

"Mr. Osborn is not in. I'm sorry, but— Oh!"

Sheridan had laughed in her face, pushed past her, and toward the door marked: "Lane Osborn, Private."

The interoffice phone was already crackling as Sheridan opened the door, one hand held menacingly in his pocket. Osborn paled, muttered a curse, and cut off the excited communication of his office girl. Sheridan shut the door with his foot.

The man who faced him was in his late forties. A dark-blue coat elegantly fitted his slender figure, a gardenia graced a lapel. Osborn had thin lips and a thinner smile. One manicured hand nervously fingered a waxed mustache; the other waved vaguely at a chair, but Sheridan remained standing, curiously taut.

"So you've turned your talents to murder?" Osborn sneered.

"I was about to ask you the same question," Sheridan said softly, "but I'll change the question to: What do you know about Jack Greving?"

Osborn's brows raised. There was something in his eyes, a quick change, that Sheridan could not instantly read. It seemed a new awareness. Osborn seated himself behind his desk, fumbled with papers as though momentarily startled, then looked up again blandly.

"I'm afraid I can't discuss my clients."

"You can with me," Sheridan snapped, "*and keep your hand from that buzzer.* I've been here before, Osborn. I know your tricks. Talk fast, or—" Sheridan raised the pocketed hand slightly, warningly.

"You know, of course, that before you leave the building I shall have called police?"

"Never mind that! Talk!"

Osborn looked away. The tip of a pink tongue licked nervous lips. He snarled: "O. K. I'll talk, now. But I'll be laughing when you burn for murder, Sheridan. You've had it coming a long time, you damned shamus, and I've a hunch it's going to stick."

"Talk!" Sheridan grated.

Osborn licked his lips again. "O. K. Greving's dead. Killed in England last night. He asked for it." The man's hands were clenching and unclenching. "He lived like a fool and died like one."

"Specifically, in what condition was his estate?"

"Damn you, do you think I—"

"Talk!" Sheridan whispered.

"Well—what we managed, good. But the kid had ideas. In the last few weeks he withdrew most of his securities from our care. I didn't even get a chance to argue with him.

He contacted me by phone or messenger."

"Maybe he didn't trust you," Sheridan ventured ironically.

"I said *most* of his securities; not all the estate. We've been making him, and us, money. I want you to know. The estate was two millions at its peak. So far as we are aware there is half a million left."

"And what happened with those withdrawals?"

"How should I know?"

"Nevertheless," Sheridan said.

Osborn had been anxiously tapping the desk. He, too, had paused, and his eyes had a look of strain in their veiled depths. There were voices in the other room, loud voices, and the tramp of heavy feet toward Osborn's door. Still watching the lawyer's eyes, Sheridan saw them light, and his own heart missed a beat.

"We're the law, see?" sounded outside the door. "And this guy's hot as a firecracker. Baby, get wise, this is a pinch."

The voices were unmistakably those of Nick and Tanny!

IV.

OSBORN had partially risen. One hand was jerking open a desk drawer; the other, inside, clawed frantically at the visible tip of blue-black steel. He clutched the gun, butt out, as Sheridan lunged across the desk. The detective's blow, quick as lightning, clipped the lighter man flush on the jaw. Osborn cracked against the wall and crumpled, soundlessly.

Barely stopping in his rush, Sheridan caught up the fallen gun, whirled as the door swung open. Nick and Tanny stood framed in it, the terrified office girl, open-mouthed, behind them. Both men

pulled hands from pockets, guns flashing. Sheridan pulled the trigger. A click answered him. His weapon was unloaded!

Only the desk and a mind attuned to split-second decisions saved him. Sheridan dropped behind it an instant before those guns roared, dropped flat as lead smacked the wall above him. The girl in the other room was screaming; his own brain seething. Even in this mad moment Sheridan knew that Nick and Tanny somehow had been called to corner him. They were cold-bloodedly out to kill—quickly, ruthlessly, so as to escape before their shots brought police. The desk Sheridan crouched behind was wide, long, and on this side open in the center. It could be a perfect trap, or—

Breathlessly these thoughts came to him, there was not time for more. Both Nick and Tanny had rushed forward, bellowing. Plainly from the sound of their footsteps, the one *around* the desk; the other straight at it, *over* it, the desk quivering with the impact. Instinct, and a cool, if blazing, calculation, drove Sheridan now. Smoothly his body faded into the desk's protective knee space, left hand clutching for the swivel chair beside it. Two charging feet entered his line of vision, the gloating, savage face of Nick high above them. Nick's gun spat instant flame, but Booth Sheridan had already swung the swivel chair. The rollers squealed, blocked Nick's path. The back of the chair struck Nick's gun, deflecting the aim. Simultaneously, Sheridan raised with a mighty heave.

The desk swayed up, over, and Tanny sprawled from the top, cursing. Sheridan still had the empty gun, and he threw it before Nick could shoot again. The butt struck the hoodlum squarely between the eyes. Nick stumbled back, tripped

upon another chair, fell over with a thud.

The unexpected ferocity of Sheridan's attack won him now a slight advantage. He had whirled on Tanny before that individual could scramble to his feet. There wasn't time to measure the distance for a well-placed kick, nor hope to close in to fight with fists. Sheridan knew emergency and met it cleanly, leaping as with muscles of coiled steel. His hurtling body, feet out, flashed for the rising figure. Tanny's arched back cracked. He screamed once, dropped back to the floor, moaning.

Sheridan's lean, hard body had become a fighting machine, galvanized by desperation—but a machine of hair-line precision. Not one move could be weighed, yet his mind was alert as it had never been before, and actually flashed a step beyond each action. Almost with the crack of Tanny's spine, Sheridan's shoulders crashed the wall. He came up, doubled, a heavy smoking stand in one clenched fist.

Nick, half erect, eyes bloodshot, and lips mouthing curses, shot point-blank. The bullet pinged against the metal of the ash stand as Sheridan lunged for him. The weapon barked again, wildly, for the swinging stand had struck aside the muzzle, and Nick's hand jerked, unarmed!

They met chest to chest. They swayed over the still-prostrate Tanny, feet thudding on helpless flesh. They staggered, fell—and Sheridan was on top.

Nick had a frantic strength. He fought with arms, legs, and teeth, his fists like pistons. Little more than a minute had passed, but the cries outside the room were growing louder, and the pulse in Sheridan's temples beat with a new insistence. He winced, caught his

breath as Nick's teeth clamped his lower arm. Grimly Sheridan clawed at Nick's face to break the jaw hold, and blood-sticky, his fingers finally gouged at the gunman's eyes. There was a howl, and Sheridan raised enough to bring the heavy smoking stand down hard.

Sheridan was weak and dizzy as he arose. Osborn was staggering across the room. Tanny sprawled, unconscious, and Nick's quiet face oozed blood. Sheridan swayed toward the door, driving his mind and body by sheer indomitable will. He passed Osborn, who cowered away from him, crossed the outer office, reached the door.

The door was open. There were people outside, milling, their voices topped by the shrill words of Osborn's office girl. But down the corridor, two burly cops were charging from the elevators!

Sheridan darted back, slammed the corridor door and slipped the bolt in one flowing motion. He raced past Osborn, through the private office, to the window. His mind, trained to remember details, recalled the presence of a fire escape. Seconds later, assured that Nick and Tanny would be held by the police, he was running down the black steel steps.

Cries sounded above as he leaped the last ten feet. A bullet whined over his head, but he did not stop. The end of the building was just ahead with its inviting alley. Close to the wall, he made the alley as a truck lumbered out. Sheridan dived across its path, a siren already wailing far around the corner. The truck briefly screened him from behind and above, and moving in its shadow, he saw the face of Tommy Manders waving frantically at him from a parked car a few steps away!

Manders had the rear door open,

the car in gear, before Sheridan reached it. He tumbled inside, shut the door, and the car raced ahead.

"Stay on the floor," Manders called over his shoulder.

"They'll trail your car," Sheridan panted.

"O. K., I can always say I was intimidated, can't I? I don't think they'll get the license, however, Sheridan. It's caked with dirt for one thing, and that truck covered us for another. Gift of the gods, aren't I? Fact is, I've had many dealings with Osborn's firm, and was on my way to his office when I saw you enter the building.

"I wanted to contact you, badly, so I waited outside, happened to see the police running in. I put two and two together, figured if you got out at all you'd take the fire escape, and here I am! Stay on the floor, Sheridan."

Sheridan leaned against the door. The car took a corner, increased its speed again.

"It's terrible, isn't it?" Manders said then. "Great Scott, you're innocent! I suppose you read the papers? Well, I told Inspector Roberts all about you, about that cab last night. Funny, though, he seemed to get the wrong idea. Questioned me about those moans I heard when I was passing your door—your nightmare! He said it could be you had the girl in there then, killed her then."

"Did you tell him about the dream?" Sheridan asked quietly.

"I said you were dreaming, but not what. Good heavens, man, you can't still believe that poppycock! You've got murder hanging over you, and damn little time to think about dreams. Way I got it doped out, somebody you stepped on long ago is out to get your hide. Any-

way, whatever you do about it, Sheridan, you can count on me."

"Tell me more about Roberts," Sheridan urged. He could breathe again, and his eyes were on Manders's chubby neck.

"Well, he said if you had killed the girl before I came into your room, then you'd have wanted me out of the way so you could get rid of the body. He said maybe I was the one those toughies were after. But I managed to get away, stumbling around, dazed, instead of coming back. Only you didn't know I wasn't coming back, and you waited too long to get rid of the body.

"Damned logical, isn't it? I told him he was crazy."

Sheridan didn't answer. The cards had turned at last, there in Osborn's office. Death had grinned at him then. Death seemingly held all the trumps. There wasn't even an ace up Sheridan's sleeve, but it was a game to the death, and Sheridan had to play it out.

"Yep, I'm with you, Sheridan," Manders went on. "I don't know how detectives work, but I got untenanted buildings all over town. I'll see that you get food, papers, money as you need it if you want to hole up. There's a place only a couple of blocks away"—he turned around, grinning—"do I head for it?"

"Right," Sheridan breathed.

V.

THE early dusk had spread until mean streets were crawling shadows. Manders cut the car lights before they turned into the alley. The machine rolled along in a tortuous silence, stopped, a blot in the darkness.

"Got a gun?" Manders asked, getting out.

Sheridan grunted a negative, and Manders, humming softly, said: "I'll see you get one." He unlocked the rear door, stepped inside.

The hallway was inky, but he did not turn on the lights. "Dangerous," he whispered, and Sheridan grunted again.

The stairs creaked, and Sheridan stumbled as he climbed them. Manders helped him to his feet, chuckling.

"Hang on to me," he invited. "I know these dumps with my eyes shut."

Together they moved on again, two more flights. Manders paused, and keys jingled. In a moment hinges softly groaned. Sheridan crossed the threshold behind the other man, stood stiffly as he could hear Manders fumbling for the light switch. Light came on, white and blinding.

There were no windows, but Sheridan realized that only in a part of his mind. On a cot, bound and gagged, lay the figure of a man. Haggard face stubbled with beard, eyes bloodshot and filled with terror stared back at him. Sheridan whirled.

Tommy Manders, still grinning, was holding a revolver!

"I always knew you were a lucky fool," Manders whispered, "but even luck runs out."

The bound man stirred, whimpered, but Sheridan stood quite still.

"You fell for the works," Manders went on, voice growing harsh. "Sheridan, you're going to die."

Still Sheridan did not answer. His hands hung loosely by his sides, shoulders drooping a little. His feet were planted wide apart.

"You wondered about Jack Greving, didn't you, dick? Well, you've found him, but there isn't anything you can do about that now. With

his double dead in Europe, Greving's body won't ever be identified once I get through with him. Moreover, the bullet that takes his life will tie up to Booth Sheridan, too.

"Recognize the revolver? It's your own. The papers are going to get another scoop. Sheridan, the murderer, turned out his own lights, using his own gun. Pretty, isn't it?"

Sheridan spoke then, quietly, though his heart was pounding. Sheridan said: "The funny part of it is, Manders, *I wanted you to bring me here.*"

Manders chuckled. "Go ahead, talk. I got lots of time. Maybe you're right. Maybe you did guess the answer, but it doesn't worry me. I know you've been playing a lone hand. I know I'm safe. Sure, go ahead and talk. It's amusing, because you think you're stalling for time. *I know time won't help you.*"

Sheridan licked his lips. They were dry and cold, but he did talk, he had to talk.

"I was unsure of the motive, but you've already, perhaps unconsciously, told me that. Real estate, too many untenanted buildings. You didn't have cash, and you needed cash or the pyramid would topple. But forgery requires a skill you didn't have either. Greving had to be kept for days, alive, until you could unload your holdings to him in exchange for his gilt-edged securities obtained through his signature. Ten days ago you accomplished that. Greving's signature wasn't needed any longer. Right?"

"Go on," Manders sneered.

"You couldn't simply have Greving killed—here. Coupled with murder, that conversion of funds to you so recently would look suspicious. Nor could you send the real Jack Greving to Europe to be murdered. Even with a guard it wouldn't work.

It had to look as though he bought these rotting buildings of yours, had gone on a trip, and died accidentally—so far from you there could be no suspicion. It doubtless was simple to provide an unsuspecting double, simpler yet to give him Greving's credentials—stolen when you kidnaped him—and provide a hired killer. Your plan was to switch identities, and the true Jack Greving would die an unknown, leaving you clear." He paused, continued grimly:

"Greving's interest in Vivian Black enabled you to get at him in the first place. Perhaps she thought blackmail was your sole end. At any rate, she became frightened of your murder plans, frightened when it was obvious she was virtually a prisoner in the Creighton Arms, with her own life in danger. But she didn't want Jack Greving freed at risk to herself either.

"So she didn't try to get a message to the police; your 'friend', a private dick in the apartment below, was another matter. Naturally she was afraid to run away from you, because of your hired killers, who could easily have tracked her down. Her single purpose was to forestall Jack Greving's death, safely.

"The dream was the vital clue. Once I recognized it for what it was the answer was complete. Vivian Black stole down the fire escape and came to my open window, to me sitting beside it, asleep. I heard her, answered her *in* my sleep. When she realized I hadn't fully awakened, it was too late to waken me an repeat her information. She heard you returning to the suite upstairs. But she took one more precious moment—to scribble a message on the window sill with her lipstick.

"Afterward, I knew a message had been written there. The scrubbed

sill, the sooty ring on the lipstick told me that, but I couldn't understand *what* she had written, or *why*." He sighed again. "Hurrying back, she met you at the upstairs window. She screamed.

"You didn't kill her then, Manders, but you made her tell what she had done. And you had to stop *me*; kill me if necessary before I read that message. So you ran downstairs—and found I'd thought I'd had a dream.

"But I had to die anyway, didn't I, Manders? I was taking the dream seriously. I'd have discovered that you lied, that you did know Greving, had milked him of a fortune. Moreover, I was going to police headquarters. You were desperate, weren't you? If you didn't get me out of the room, I'd find the window message. But I mustn't be allowed to reach police either!

"You knew you had to kill Vivian Black because she was ready to squeal, and now you saw your chance to stop me, too; and at the same time explain her death by placing her body in my apartment. You appeared to escape Nick and Tanny, slipped back into the Creighton Arms, found my knife and gun, murdered the girl, and washed the window sill."

"And it was perfect," Manders gloated. "I made it perfect!" His finger was twitching close to the trigger, but Sheridan tore his gaze away from the gun. Sheridan went grimly on. His words sounded strange, even to himself, words that bubbled to his lips in a sort of frantic hopelessness.

"Not perfect; you got the breaks, Manders. Everything pointed to you, a man who had keys and easy access to the building—for the fire escape ended a full story from the ground and couldn't have been used

to carry in a body. But you were the one man who, on the face of things, couldn't be guilty. Yes, the dream was the vital clue, but as a dream it couldn't be considered a clue. It complicated the entire pattern until I got the answer from Osborn."

Manders was laughing softly. "You're guessing right, but you're still guessing. Osborn couldn't have put you wise to anything, because Osborn didn't know anything."

"He wore a gardenia," Sheridan said quietly. "I had dreamed of flowers. It was the perfume on Vivian Black's person. When I found her later, my conscious mind did not think of perfume as flowers, but the *kind* of perfume—gardenia. But when flower and odor appeared together in Osborn's lapel, the answer clicked. You, not Osborn, had sent Nick and Tanny there to get me. You knew I'd go to Osborn as soon as his name appeared in the papers relative to Jack Greving. You were playing your final card, and staking your own presence outside to make it win."

"It did win," Manders snarled. "You're here, aren't you? You may be slick, Sheridan, but not slick enough to stop my bullet!"

His face contorted, eyes flashing a signal that he would wait no longer. Sheridan gathered himself, sprang straight at the gun!

The trigger tightened, but there was no report.

In that instant, before Sheridan's leaping body reached the other man, Manders looked down, squeezed the trigger frantically, with amazement spreading over his chubby features. Wildly he raised one arm to ward off Sheridan's blow, but the arm was struck aside. Sheridan's fist, backed by every ounce of his strength, crashed Tommy Manders's unprotected jaw.

Manders spun completely around, hit the wall and hung there a moment, while his mouth fell open. Slowly his heavy body sagged to the floor.

In a few minutes Jack Greving was released, the ropes that had cruelly bound him quickly transferred to Tommy Manders.

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"I'd given up all hope," Greving sobbed. "Lying there, knowing we both would die, was agony. Sheridan, why did you wait, why did you talk?"

"I had to wait and talk," Sheridan answered grimly. "There wasn't a shred of real proof against Manders. I had to get his confession, before a witness. My gamble was only that he would take me to you, the perfect witness—and that wasn't such a gamble after all. Obviously, like Vivian Black's death, I was to take the rap for your murder. But to make me appear a murderer who suicided, he dared not kill you until he had my body to prove you were my victim."

"Not a gamble?" Greving quavered. "Great Heaven, man—it was an utter gamble, to the very end!

He had the gun. Except that it missed fire——"

"It had to miss fire," Sheridan interrupted. "Coming up the dark stairway I purposely stumbled against Manders, felt the outline of a gun, knew it was a revolver. A hundred to one, my revolver, since I was positive he had taken it, so that in death the weapon had to point plainly, solely, to me. Seeming suicide was his plan from the beginning.

"The shells were evident in their chambers. Until to-night, Manders had had no reason to use the gun. So, although I was fairly sure of safety all along, the minute he put his finger near the trigger I knew we'd win. You see, I shoot the quicker way, fanning the hammer. The trigger isn't connected!"

A TYPICAL CONVICT

NOWADAYS when we have a craze for types—the typical American girl, the typical business man, the typical housewife, et cetera—there doesn't seem to be any reason for omitting the criminal element in our population. Especially in view of the fact that recent figures released by the Federal bureau of investigation rather mark us as a nation of criminals. Evidently Harry Keller is of this opinion since he has designated himself as the "typical American criminal." While awaiting transfer from the Tombs, New York City, to Sing Sing, Keller appropriated the "honor."

Keller explained that most of his life had been spent in jail. He is thirty-seven years of age, and fourteen of his last fifteen years have been spent behind prison bars. His interviewer, finding Keller full of ideas, an exception to the average criminal mentality, objected to Keller's nomination.

The "typical American convict" never knew either father or mother. The Kentucky poor farm was home to him and is his earliest memory. For stealing some ten-cent-store jewelry he was committed to the Kentucky reformatory. In the World War he served in the navy on convoy transports. Dishonorable discharge was the result of missing his ship at St. Nazaire.

In prisons he has very definite preferences. Dannemora he referred to as the "ice box" of New York prisons, and hoped he would not be sent there. "It's so hopeless up there. Nothing to do; nothing to think about."

As for parole boards Keller thinks they are "plenty tough."



*The officer fell,
his heart stopped
by the impact of
the slug.*

THE PAY OFF

By Bert Shurtleff

ARNOLD HOLMES struggled heavily to consciousness through weighty dreams that had enveloped him for hours. Even now, aware of the sunshine streaming cheerfully in at the window, he was still suffering from the sensation of being as tightly bound as he had seemed to be in the nightmare.

Trying to rub his wrists to soothe
CLU—5

the tingling sensation, he was startled wide awake by the discovery that his wrists were really bound. Fastened together securely over his head, they were lashed to the framework of the bed by what looked like wire. When he tried, in his first startled reaction, to whirl about and brace with his legs against the frame and yank himself clear, he discov-

ered that his feet were bound in a similar fashion at the foot.

The sound of his movement brought a light laugh from his roommate. Holmes could turn his head just enough to see a back, bent to the dressing-table mirror. Holmes's eyes widened in wonder as he stared.

"Say, what is this? Some kind of a joke?" he asked.

His only answer was another laugh from the busy figure.

"Listen, Joe Spooner, a joke is a joke and I'm——"

"A good one, smart guy. At least you will be by to-morrow. Well," wheeling about on the seat, "what do you think of my art?"

Holmes stared incredulously. For an instant he writhed at his bonds, sure that he was dreaming, but the sharp cutting of the wires assured him of the reality of his being awake. He blinked and stared again, half believing that he was somehow looking at himself sitting there smiling.

For a full minute he tried to orientate himself, remembering all that he had had to drink the night before at Spooner's party, wondering if somehow the mixing of drinks had given him this weird sensation.

"Listen," he said and grinned, "is this me?"

"Told you I was a make-up artist, among other things, didn't I? Know me? Boys"—assuming Holmes's easy manner of speech to a nicety—"this is Arnold Holmes, ready to do his little job inside the mutual booths. How're tricks? Bettin' on the winners, boys?"

Holmes laughed this time, a little uncomfortably. The impersonation was slick; as clever a job as anybody could ask to see. But a fool impersonation would hardly account for trussing a pal up like a roasting fowl and keeping him there indefinitely.

"Say, I've got to roll," he called.

"Disconnect me and let me shake along."

Spooner lifted slowly. Holmes recognized the trousers, vest, and shirt as his own. Even the tie was one of his favorites, and his reloading pencil was peeping from the vest pocket.

"This has gone far enough, Joe," he called sharply.

As Spooner swung up from the bench, he turned his head just enough for the light to pick out that purple blotch under the layer of make-up. The imitator had gone so far as to reproduce on his own cheek and throat the disfigurement in dark purple that birth had given Arnold Holmes. Sensitive about the discoloration, Holmes had taken his roommate's suggestion weeks before and investigated the modern make-up materials for hiding such marks. Now he was angered by discovering that Spooner had dared to incorporate even that faint purple touch in his reproduction.

"That's what I thought," snapped the impersonator. "I've hung around listening to your ga-ga just about as long as I can stand it. This is the end."

Holmes stared up at the suddenly transformed figure. This was neither the impersonation of himself, nor the normal behavior of the companion he had known for months of intimate friendship. Suddenly Joe Spooner had grown hard, mean, threatening.

"I don't get you, Joe. What's eating you?" asked Holmes. "It was your idea palling up like this, hiring this bungalow together, and all the rest. What have I done?"

"Done, you sap, you've done just what I wanted you to do. You've played into my hands at every turn. You've spilled what I've been wanting to learn, and set me up for the

best little job of shaking down that anybody ever undertook."

He kicked the bench nearer to the bed and nodded down at his prisoner, who was too white-faced with dawning discovery to gasp in answer.

"You've got a job, kid, that is worth maybe a hundred grand to me—just for one day. I got next to you, thinking maybe I could talk you into playing with me, but I soon found out you're not the type. Too damned honest. Too much conscience. Never make a successful pusher."

"What do you mean, Jack, by 'pusher'?" Holmes whispered, still staring incredulously.

"Queer pusher." Then as the staring eyes remained innocent of understanding. "'Queer' is counterfeit dough. A 'pusher' feeds it to the suckers. That racket of yours is just the dish the doctor ordered for one grand plug and a quick flit out."

Holmes swallowed hard, understanding at last the hundreds of innocent-seeming questions that Spooner had asked him during their months of friendship.

"But you can't push this—this 'queer,' as you call it, at the track, Jack. Those babies in the windows can spot counterfeit cash almost as far as they can see it. Nothing gets by them. You'd be grabbed in no time."

Spooner snorted.

"No imagination, kid. That's why it'll pay you to stick to the honest path. It takes brains to play with real dough."

"Listen, Jack; cut the comedy and let me loose. You can't get away with anything at the track. They're wise to all the games."

"Are they? Well, how about this one? Little Arnold takes the dough

from the take windows to the cashier's office, what?"

"Yeah, but——"

"Never mind the 'buts.' Little Arnold runs with stacks and stacks of currency to the pay windows, what? Neat piles of currency done up in regular bank-type packages, with the brown paper band around the outside and the amount stenciled on the band. Like these?"

He kicked open the grip at his feet and lifted two or three packages. Holmes stared at them as Spooner let them fall back into the bag.

"Between the cashier's office and the pay windows is a men's room. What's to prevent Arnold's dodging in there for a few seconds, swapping bundles, and delivering the queer to the pay-out boys? They won't be examining the dough that has come from their own cashier after being collected by their own window gang. They'll just dish it out to the ticket holders."

Holmes gasped at the audacity of the plan. Under the right circumstances the scheme would work, but he hadn't told Joe Spooner every detail about his job. One feature, one that would prove mighty bothersome to his plan, he had intentionally neglected to relate. He had always hated that detail before, but now he thought it just about the best thing about the job of being cash boy at the track.

"Since you was unapproachable, kid," Spooner continued, "I figured I'd have to do the job myself, while you take a day off."

Suddenly the full import of that make-up artistry struck the bound man. He relapsed with a low moan. While he lay there, lashed to his bed by that ingenious wiring, Joe Spooner meant to take his place at the mutuels. Using his clever gift of impersonation, Joe would pose as

Arnold Holmes, delivering that counterfeit money to the pay-off windows and trying to make off with the real cash.

"I tell you, Joe, it won't work. Let me out of here, and we'll forget it. You're a little drunk still from that hangover. Untie me, and we'll have a laugh at a good pipe dream, and I'll hustle along to work."

Spooner snorted again. Unbuttoning his vest, he exposed a second one under it, a canvas affair with neat little pockets for the reception of those packages he had taken from the bag and thrust into the compartments.

"I walk in with both arms swinging—and I walk out the same way. Only on the way out it's fifty-to-a-hundred grand of real dough, instead of just a lot of junk queer. Easy, eh?"

"Joe, you couldn't do this to me, after the way we've hung around."
"Couldn't I, punk? Just watch me! I'm sick of your smugness. You're too damned good. Maybe a few years in Uncle Samuel's stone mansion for passing the queer will give you a different slant. Look me up when you get out. If I'm not retired I might be able to work you into my racket."

Joe buttoned his vest again, put on Holmes's coat, and turned to survey himself. A trifle slighter about the waist than his roommate, he was padded out by that cleverly concealed counterfeit money into a perfect fit for the clothes.

"I'll toddle along now, Arnie, after giving you something to chew. I told the cleaning woman to come in to-morrow. Thought you'd be cozy here until then. I'll be dropping back to leave your clothes after I'm through."

"Joe, you're really trying to make it look like my work?"

Spooner laughed again harshly.

"You saw me wearing gloves while I handled that packaged dough. Know why? Didn't want to kill your fingerprints. I doped that slug of brandy you took just before you went to bed last night. Before I wired your hands, I took your fingers and pressed them on each of the packages in here. They'll surely find your prints—and you'll get plenty."

Holmes gave him one agonized look of appeal, but Spooner was as hard as nails. All the former friendliness was gone, a part of the clever act for worming his way into confidences given out of sheer friendship. This buddy was suddenly a hard stranger, icy, bitter, dangerous.

Holmes let his eyes sweep over the impersonator. From soft gray hat to tan brogues, he was wearing Arnold Holmes's outfit, except for the shoes. Those, a full size and a half larger than Holmes's, were an exact duplicate.

"In your shoes figuratively, if not literally." Spooner shrugged. "Now lie still here and be a good boy. Take this without biting. Breathe through your nose and don't get restless."

Tying the gag securely in place, Spooner lifted and surveyed his handiwork.

"I'm good, kid," he nodded. "I've got to admit it, I'm good. This is what we call the perfect crime. It's Horatio Alger in reverse. The good little poor boy goes to the can and the bad little villain cops the gravy. Be seein' you."

Arnold Holmes struggled for hours against bonds and gag. The perspiration burst from every pore, and his muscles ached with the strain, but he would not admit defeat. One hope, and one alone, buoyed him as the slow minutes ticked into hours, and the afternoon

crept past. The one thing that he had never told Spooner about his job, the one thing that had always humiliated him, had struck him as being so petty and distrustful, might yet save the day for him.

AT THE TRACK Joe Spooner had little trouble passing himself off as Arnold Holmes. He had induced Holmes to use that cover for his birthmark because he wanted the men and boys inside the mutual offices to get used to seeing the orange make-up on Holmes's face. From the first he had known that he must use make-up himself if he hoped to impersonate Holmes. His cheeks had to be hollowed, his eyebrows lifted a trifle, and his nose raised at the bridge.

Joe chuckled as he took Holmes's pass from his pocket to flip it in characteristic Holmes fashion at the guard, who nodded him in without so much as a glance at that card. Barely two weeks ago he had finally talked Holmes into spreading that make-up over the whole of his face, giving the entire surface that slightly orange tinge. Just in time to let them all get used to seeing it.

"How're tricks? Bettin' on the winners, boys?"

It was the typical Holmes greeting, and delivered with just the right swing of tongue and lower jaw, hardly missing a beat in that gum chewing that he had practiced for weeks.

Unerringly he went to locker seven, spun the dials for the right combination, and extracted the white coat that he was to wear. In the dusk of the locker he did not see the rubber-soled old shoes lying in the corner. Swiftly he changed coats, still chewing gum in the Holmes fashion.

Whistling the monotonous little

ditty that his roommate repeated hour after hour, Spooner hurried away upon his errands. On every hand he passed back the banter he had heard Arnold Holmes deliver to his fellow workers when he met them off duty.

Leaving the cashier's office on his first trip to a distant window, he grunted in disdain as he stepped off the board walk in the semidusk and into the dust. The drop was little more than two inches but it startled him. He had forgotten that detail. Mustn't let another like that get by him. Lucky thing there was nobody to see it and wonder.

He picked his way through the dust, feet lifting high. The building had been thrown up hastily, and a part of it had been left unfloored until after the meet. The roof protected it from any rain, and the gravel soon powdered to a fine yellow dust under the passing of hurrying feet. Have to be careful not to get too much of that dust on his trousers. Holmes was noted for being neat.

Far down at the end of the shed he almost stumbled again, caught himself just in time to save his balance.

"Forgot that ditch again, eh, Arnie," called a fellow worker. "You'll break your neck in that yet."

Spooner could have cursed at his stupidity. He remembered asking Holmes about that trickle of water that came from under the end of the building to be conducted by a pipe to the near-by sewer. Holmes had explained that the digging and leveling had uncovered a tiny spring that ran a constant trickle of bitter water. A pipe had been hastily laid to conduct it under the granolithic pavement where the cash customers crowded to the windows to make their bets, but inside the shed it

was still allowed to trickle down a tiny ditch. To keep the seepage from carrying away the yellow gravel, somebody had lined the tiny ditch with blue clay, tamping it into place and making a hard channel.

Those were the only slight mishaps to disturb him. Everything else went exactly as he had planned. He even laughed at his own caution in bringing along a gun. Nobody even so much as guessed that this lad to whom they passed thousands and thousands of dollars was a crook instead of the honest Arnold Holmes.

He had planned to wait until late in the day before making his exchange. If he attempted it too early there might be a squawk. The suckers getting it from the pay-off window might rush around with it to the betting windows, and cause an investigation. If he waited until the betting windows were closed on the last race, he would still have plenty of chance, and there would be no danger that the money would be spotted as queer for hours. By that time he would be well away.

He caught a glimpse of the tote board as he heard the cry going up that the windows were closing.

"Cash boy!" howled somebody in the cashier's office as the bell rang for the machines to close.

There was better than one hundred and twenty-seven thousand dollars on that race. There ought to be a demand for cash at the pay-off windows.

"Rush this to No. 3, Holmes."

He counted the packages into his open-mouthed satchel swiftly, checking with the list handed him.

"Forty-eight thousand, right!" he called in the Holmes's tone.

Twenty seconds later Joe dodged into the men's room, slammed and bolted a door behind him, deftly switched packages, careful to ex-

change denominations that tallied. Luckily there were a lot of tens and twenties and two packs of hundreds. The hundreds might be a little harder to change, but they would certainly bulk smaller in his canvas jacket.

Half a minute later Joe was delivering the bogus money to the perspiring paymasters who were clamoring for it. Just as he had expected, the money was accepted without even a cursory examination by the receiver.

Once more the opportunity came, and once more he ducked into the men's room to shift packages. When he finished that second shift, he was carrying sixty-two thousand dollars in real money about his person.

"No use hogging it," he said to himself, hurrying on to make still another delivery. "Pushing your luck always leads to a fall. Somebody might see me dodging in there and wonder why I'm going so often."

The anxious part came while waiting to get away, after the last race was over and the cashier was checking. He must make it before that surplus cash came in to be counted. Somebody might spot it then, under the powerful lights, where they were checking carefully. So far there hadn't been a whisper from the grounds. The stuff must have gone easily enough.

He changed into the Holmes's street coat and walked jauntily toward the gate. Old Pat Hennessey, one of the grounds policemen, was standing there grinning at him.

"Sorry to lay a hand on ye, Arnie, me b'y," he said, grinning sheepishly. "But orders is orders, and they all has to stand for it."

Suddenly Joe Spooner stood face to face with the one thing that his roommate had not prepared him to meet. Honest Arnold Holmes,

trusting everybody himself, scrupulously honest in every dealing with his fellow men, had been so heartily ashamed of this nightly frisk by the guard that he had never breathed a word of it, even to his chum.

"Just to make sure ye didn't take a few thousand by accident, Arnie," joked old Pat.

But Joe Spooner was not to be stopped at this stage of the game by a fumbling old fool whose pawing hands would surely discover those neatly cached packages about his torso. As old Pat stepped close to paw at him, Spooner dipped a hand into his pocket, locking his gloved fingers around the waiting gun that he *hadn't* been foolish to bring.

The old man started back at the hard glint in the eyes, the unfamiliar expression he had never seen in Arnold Holmes's face. Before his lips could form the cry of alarm the gun barked suddenly, and prodded into the soft old flesh at the level of the heart as Spooner lifted his arm.

The bark was partially drowned by the tramp of hurrying feet, as the disgruntled thousands scuttled homeward. But somebody behind Spooner called out sharply as the old man fell, his heart stopped by the impact of the slug.

"Stop that man! Stop Holmes! He just killed Pat Hennessey!"

Cursing the break in luck, Spooner raced for an exit. The cry was muffled, killed by the echoes. Spooner met the two advancing policemen with a beckoning finger.

"Go look after old Pat Hennessey, boys," he called in Holmes's excited tones. "He just had a heart attack. I'm going for a doctor."

He was through the gate and into the mob. Holmes's roadster was parked some blocks off, and Joe could get away fast, once he reached it. An almost deserted road led off

homeward, evading the jam of traffic on the main highways.

A siren screamed far behind him as he rolled the roadster into the old road and stepped on the gas. That might be the police already. Better make a swift change; no time to lose.

He shot into the yard, vaulted from the car, and ran into the house. Holmes was still writhing feebly on the bed, still helpless and inarticulate.

"Slick as a whistle," exulted Spooner, ripping off the clothes. "Had to plug that fool cop that you forgot to tell me frisked you every night. Reckon the cops are on their way this minute."

He paused in rubbing the cold cream on his face long enough to switch on the radio which had been standing silent in the corner.

"Get the police announcements on the short wave," he ordered, rubbing hurriedly and grabbing for tissue with which to remove the grease. "They don't use bloodhounds today, but you can get the effect of their barking by listening to this."

The monotonous voice of the police announcer broke into the silence of the room during the hurried moments that followed, from time to time announcing the call for some car or motor cycle to stand by.

The make-up was stripped off and the face well scrubbed. The greasy tissue was carefully collected and burned in the grate. Then the Holmes's clothing came off swiftly, to be replaced by Spooner's own garb.

"I'll just add this to the flames. It won't all be consumed but I'll tell them I saw you trying to burn it if they get here before I'm gone."

He took the canvas jacket and dumped it on top of the flames.

"I stopped on the way to hide the dough," he chuckled, kicking at the

jacket. "That's nothing but phony in there. Thought they might like to find a little of the queer in your quarters."

There was the sudden rasp of tires gripping gravel in the yard. A sound of running feet reverberated. A loud knock hammered at the door.

"Little surprise visit," said Spooner, picking up the gun. "Watch me handle this, kid."

He raced to the door, flung it wide, lowering his gun.

"The police," he gasped. "Thank Heaven."

"For what? What're you doing with that gun?"

"I've got a desperate criminal here. Caught him with a lot of counterfeit money and this gun. Snatched it when he wasn't looking and made him prisoner."

The police pressed into the room, staring at the trussed figure. A knife severed the wires. Holmes was yanked into a sitting position.

Despair had flooded over him with Spooner's words. He sensed that he was hopelessly trapped. His defense would sound so fantastic that nobody would believe him.

Then his eyes lighted on Joe Spooner's shoes, and hope came to him. He looked up into the sergeant's eyes.

"Listen, officer," Holmes said in as calm a voice as he could muster. "You can see I've been tied up a long time, if you examine my wrists. I have bled, and the blood has dried, long since, only to have the cuts rip open again and again. I certainly couldn't have done that since this crook claims to have just tied me up."

The sergeant took a swift glance at the wrists.

"He's damned clever with make-up," suggested Spooner quickly.

Look at that ugly birthmark on his face. See how he hides that."

Somehow Holmes mastered the impulse to break into angry bellowing. He must keep cool, must think clearly, must present the case so that the sergeant would see the possibilities.

"Listen, officer, I know this sounds fantastic. You won't think it possible, but a careful check will prove I'm right, and I'll tell you how to go about it. This skunk disguised himself as me and went on my job to-day to pass counterfeit money to the pay-off windows. He shot Pat Hennessey when Pat tried to frisk him as he was leaving.

"If you'll have chemists test those ashes they'll be able to tell that he just burned the make-up he wiped off his face, including the nose putty he used to build up his features. But that's not all."

"He's crazy," snapped Spooner. "Wants to queer me with the little woman. Always was jealous as hell, and knows she'll can me if I don't meet her to-night."

"So he dressed in my clothes and my hat," continued Holmes calmly, "and went in my place. But he missed one little thing. I don't wear my shoes inside the building, because of the dust. Always change to some old rubber-soled ones I keep in the locker. Spooner couldn't wear my shoes, so he bought a pair just like 'em. A size and a half bigger, but just like 'em."

Every eye in that room dropped to the shoes.

"See that yellow dust on 'em? That's from the powdered gravel inside the building. See where they're splashed? That's the bitter water that runs from the spring. And see that touch of light blue on the edges of the soles? That's the blue clay

from the runway where that water seeps off. Chemists can prove all that. It was Joe Spooner did it."

The sergeant looked from the shoes to the weary figure on the bed. Although Spooner had wiped his shoes hurriedly, he had missed the dust, dampness, and clay that were all buried in the tiny crevices.

"I guess we'll take the both of you along," said the sergeant grimly, seizing Spooner just as he started to

grab for the butt of a gun sticking from a near-by police holster. "Here, cut that out, you. You've shot enough men for one day."

"Thanks," said Holmes, grinning, relaxing into his cheerful self. "That's all I want. I'm satisfied an investigation will put the guilt squarely where it belongs. I'm telling you one thing, Joe Spooner, I wouldn't like just now to be in your shoes."

REFUSES TO LEAVE PRISON

A PRISONER who refuses to be paroled! That is the problem that confronted the Massachusetts parole board recently. And what to do with a model prisoner who refuses to leave the prison was a problem the board did not know how to solve. There was absolutely no precedent.

The convict, a man of forty-six, when informed that he had been paroled, refused to be released, saying: "I can make more money in prison than I can on the outside."

The man was sentenced in Worcester, Massachusetts, to from two and a half to four years for breaking and entering with intent to commit larceny. Having served the minimum sentence with no demerit marks, he became automatically eligible for parole.

The parole agent visited the man in prison and urged him to get his "home and work papers" signed.

The prisoner refused saying that he hadn't wanted to come to prison and since they had sent him, they could keep him for the entire term.

An expert carpenter, the man has made several altars and other articles while in prison and sold them at a good profit.

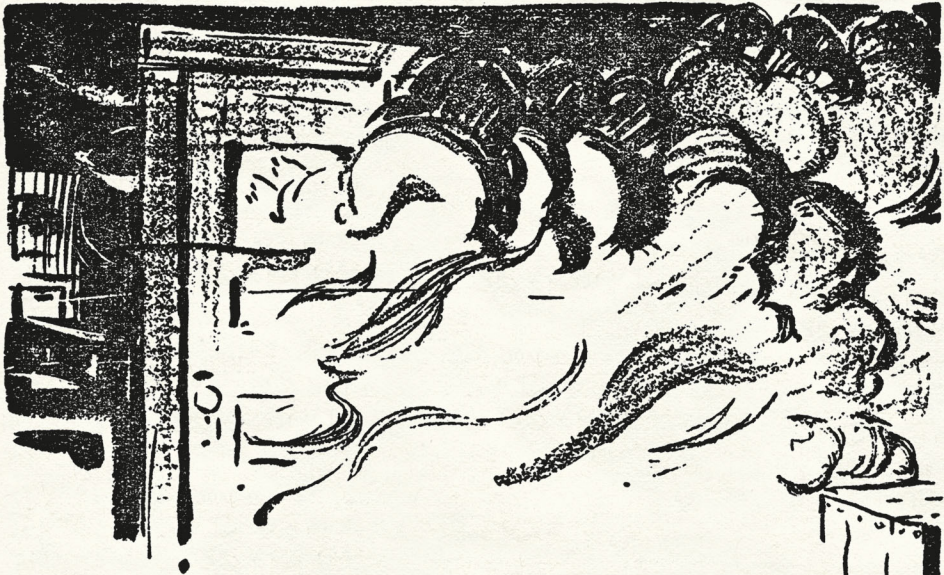


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FIRE TRAP

By Sinclair Gluck

LANCE DAVIS, star news hound of the *Gazette*, stared disgustedly through the windshield of his car. Lance had a long thin face, wind-blown ears, and henna-brown eyes. Dear old ladies often mistook him for an undertaker when he was thinking. Younger ones did not. His homeliness was distinctly attractive.

Weston, city editor of the *Gazette*, usually steamed. To-night he was boiling. So far as local news went, the first morning edition was just plain tripe. As Lance had modestly explained, however, not even he could make news when there wasn't any.

"Well, get some!" Weston had snarled.

Now Lance was making for police headquarters and his pal, Lieutenant Lonninger of homicide. In the eve-

ning's police routine there might be one real news angle missed by the regular card-playing, bottle-fed legmen. The sun had already set. The first morning edition went to bed early. He had about an hour to the dead line.

Lance turned his car into a long, dusky street of loft buildings and warehouses. It was deserted.

A faint glow in near-by windows caught his attention. As he drove along, he saw that it was a reflected glow. He stuck his head out the other side of his roadster and looked up. Then he parked in a hurry, snatched out his keys, and ran for the corner fire box. Next to a murder, Lance could use a good fire. This looked like a good one. He was first on the ground for once, even ahead of the firemen.

No one had seen him turn in the



He hoisted girl and chair in his arms and staggered to the other door.

alarm. He ran back. A side staircase led to the upper floors. The street door to it was locked. So was the entrance doorway to the ground floor. Plate-glass show windows flanked this, displaying linoleum samples. Linoleum made a terrifically hot, smoky fire. Luckily there would be no one left in the building at this time of night.

Lance crossed the street to look up at the five-story building. The fourth floor, where the fire was, must

be an open loft. All the windows showed the same flickering glare. It was much brighter now.

The snap and tinkle of a broken window drew his attention. It was not on the fourth floor, but on the fifth. The western sky was still bright enough to show it clearly. A slim hat-and-coat rack slanted its circle of hooks out the window. Beside it, Lance saw a frantic human face. There was no shout or scream. Eyes, hair, shape of the face looked

like a girl. He could see no mouth or chin.

Lance turned cold. She couldn't scream because her lips were taped! A puff of smoke drifted out the broken window. The white face slipped down out of sight.

Lance raced across the street and kicked in a plate-glass show window, jumping back as it collapsed. Then he was inside. A single light revealed piles of rugs spread on the floor, but no stairs. He swore savagely, and was wheeling for the window and the side stairs when he noticed a fire door.

It was at the back of the show-room, and opened into a fire tower: cement stairs inclosed in a square well of brick.

He bounded up the stairs, hard lips thinned inward with effort. Second floor, third floor, fourth floor—and heat! Top floor at last! He flung himself at the door, and rebounded with a curse at his own forgetfulness. He knew that above the ground level, doors open into a fire tower, but not out of it, so that people escaping a fire can't run back for things and get burned to death.

He remembered something else. Fire towers do open outward—on to the roof. There was still a chance. Smoke had not poured and plumed from the broken window. It had been little more than a lazy puff. Something intervened.

But there wasn't a second to spare. Flash fires spread like lightning. He was wrenching at the trap bolts. The trap crackled upward and fell over. Lance hauled himself out onto the roof and stood up. With a panting gasp of relief he saw that most of the roof consisted of four big skylights. They were of ordinary glass, not wire glass. He ran toward the front. One of the two central skylights showed the fire below, through

smudged glass. The other three were dark.

Lance was kicking in the panes of the front, transverse skylight, when he heard the distant shrieking of sirens. Smoke and gas puffed out in his face. He held his breath, smashed a length of light wooden frame, scraped jutting spears of glass from two lower edges with the side of his shoe. He got his legs in, lowered himself, and hung by his hands.

The red-and-yellow glow of fire through a ground-glass door showed him a long room across the front of the building and a drop of about eight feet to a dim, wide table. There was another door, nearer him, leading toward the back. It was unlighted, but Lance saw it as he let go.

Landing in a supple crouch he vaulted to the floor and raced for the broken window. The air was hot, but not too smoky to breathe. A shy tongue of fire trembled near the inner wall. Smoke fanned under the hall door in a thin sheet. He could hear the crackle and roar of hungry flames beyond.

Close to the leaning hat rack a vague mass lay on the floor. In the flickering light he saw that it was a chair on its side. Taped to it by her ankles and wrists, a girl hung limp, mercifully unconscious now.

The ground glass cracked in the door. It would go in a second, and they would be burned to a crisp by the rushing flames. Engines were thundering into the street below, but no fly ladder could reach them in time.

He hoisted girl and chair in his arms and staggered to the other door. At that instant the ground glass yielded, and a tremendous banner of fire roared through. As though it had eyes, it split, and reached for

the broken skylight, and the broken window where he had just stood.

Face seared by the heat, Lance got the other door open and staggered through it, holding his breath in the rush of smoke. He slammed the door with his heel. This room was full of smoke. The glass in the hall door had gone, and the door was blazing. Afraid to breathe, half-blinded by smoke, he made the length of the room. There was another connecting door as he hoped. He got the girl through, and closed the door.

There was almost no smoke here. Both closed doors were intact. Skylight and rear windows were shut, eliminating draft. Lance set the girl down for an instant, with a sobbing breath. The arrangement of skylights on the roof, the fact that only one showed fire beneath, had let him hope to get around the blazing hall, through connecting rooms, to the fire tower. It would open from this side. They still had a chance.

Lance opened the hall door a little, knees shaking under him. Smoke boiled in lazily over his head, but this end of the hall was not actually afire yet, and the draft was the other way. The door to the fire tower was not three feet from him.

Again Lance lifted girl and chair, plunged through the smoke, holding his breath, and got the metal door open. A blast of heat speeded him into the tower. Huge orange flames were leaping up from the floor below and tearing out through the front. Most of this floor was burning. The fire door clanged shut between.

Gasping and trembling in the cool tower, he paused long enough to kick the rungs out of the chair and wrench out the protruding back legs. He went down two steps, made a last effort, and swung the limp girl over

his shoulder, with the remains of the chair on top of her. As he began to feel his way down in the darkness, he pressed his ear to her side. Her heart was beating slowly, but steadily.

It was hot on the fourth-floor landing, but cool farther down. Though dog tired he was afraid to rest. The whole building seemed to quiver with torment. A big safe might crash through to the ground floor. The girl needed attention.

As Lance blundered out on the ground floor, two firemen stepped in through the broken window. One of them saw the fire tower, wheeled, tried the front doors, yelled out the window. The other reached up for the bound girl.

"Nix!" muttered Lance, weaving on his feet. "Get the chair off her. Needs attention. Get her outside."

He clawed up the ends of the tape and unwound it from her slim ankles. The fireman freed her wrists gently, and tossed the chair aside. Lance eased her down into his arms, and began carefully untaping her mouth. When he finished, there were two spots of blood, one on each delicate lip and not quite opposite.

Firemen with axes and hose came in through the window. They trotted past and disappeared into the fire tower. The man with Lance started after them, but turned back.

"Where in hell did you find her like that, Lance?" he whispered, although the girl was still unconscious.

"Won her at a raffle," said Lance. "Keep still about this, will you, Jack?" As the fireman nodded, Lance staggered to the window, drew a deep breath, and climbed out with the girl.

"Inhalator squad!" he yelled. "Help here!"

II.

FIREMEN hustled Lance and his burden across the street as the water tower thundered into position. There was a shout. A press flashlight winked at him. He swore savagely. Men ran up and took the girl from his arms. He saw they were firemen.

"Watch her!" he warned. "Don't let anybody get her!"

A large hand grabbed his arm. He turned, and looked into the small blue eyes of a huge, rooky cop, a stranger.

"Hey!" growled the cop. "Was it you bruk that windy?"

"Didn't the firemen break it? That's news, Buttons! Got to catch the first edition, but I'll remember you."

Lance tore free and raced for the corner drug store. The sting of wind on his seared cheek vividly recalled the girl. He hadn't seen her face until he untaped her mouth. She was a dream. A lovely face, and honey-colored hair and lots of it, a sweet mouth, silken eyelashes touching a skin like velvet. He had not seen her eyes. One cheek had blushed from the heat.

Slamming into a booth in the drug store, he dialed the *Gazette*: "City desk, Molly. Rush it!"

Weston answered him. "Well? What's the big news?"

"Tear up Page 1!" said Lance rapidly. "This is big. Five-story loft fire on River Street near Third."

"Say, are you loony? Tear up Page 1?"

"Could you listen?" Lance broke in. "This is arson and attempted murder. The fire was on the fourth floor. On the fifth, somebody left a girl bound to a chair and gagged. She hitched along and pushed over a coat rack. It broke a window and

that saved her. It was before the firemen arrived."

"Wait!" Weston was yelling crisp orders. "Lance? Good stuff! What's her name? Who saved her?"

"She's still unconscious. I had to get you quick. But is she a knockout! A real beauty! I'm going after more dope now. Call you later."

Lance hung up to avoid further questions, and raced back to the fire. Flashing his card to a different cop, he ducked under the rope.

Firemen had long since smashed in the door to the side stairs. Wet hose lines trailed in the doorway like worms to a banquet. Two pumpers were hooked to the water tower, for the city had no high-pressure system as yet.

Lance did not see the girl and did not hunt for her at once. The fourth and fifth stories looked like one huge, dying torch. The water-tower jet had smashed the windows. It was hitting the fire with the curious soft thump of water exploding in clouds of steam. Men like gnomes in the ruddy light threw hissing plumes on the fire from the tops of fly ladders. Lance noticed a fire-patrol car. Underwriters' men were covering the rugs on the ground floor with big tarpaulins.

Lance cursed suddenly, peering about for the nearest chief. He saw one he knew and caught his arm.

"Hello, chief!" he urged. "This is important, see? I saw the fire and gave the alarm. Had the luck to spot that girl, too. She was bound and gagged. Keep that dark. I'll wise Lonninger. Somebody tried to murder the girl. I want the tape they used. Fingerprints. It's on the ground floor."

"I saw you bring her out," said the chief. "How did you make it, Lance? This is a hot one."

"Smashed that window, then up

the fire tower and over the roof. Top floor partitioned. Got around the burning hall. I want that tape they used to bind her. Can I go in?"

A heavy hand smacked Lance on the shoulder and spun him around. It was the big, rooky cop, bristling with indignation and self-importance.

"So it was you that bruk that windy!" he growled.

"Wait a minute," said the chief. "What's your name?"

"Clancy, sorr, an' I heard him admit he bruk——"

"Let him go. I broke that window myself, personally." The fire chief looked the cop over slowly. "And don't call me a liar. Go on, Lance." The chief spat deliberately.

Lance brushed the cop's slackening grip off his arm, rounded the front of the water tower through sheets of spray, and stepped into the rug showroom. Most of the piles of rugs were covered with tarpaulins. The fire insurance men worked fast. The owner had arrived and was hopping about, pointing at the streams of water through the ceiling. Lance knew where the fireman had tossed the chair, and where they had dropped the tape. He could not find either, though he flapped up the tarps, to make sure. One of the men asked him what the hell he thought he was doing.

"Looking for tape and a broken chair. Evidence," whispered Lance. "Seen 'em?"

"Nope. There's been a dozen guys pokin' around in here. Wait a minute. I did notice a guy collecting some white stuff off the floor." The man looked around. "He's gone now."

"What'd he look like?" demanded Lance in disgust.

"Hell, just a guy in plain clothes. Kinda dark as I remember. Hell,

looka that water! Lemme finish here."

Lance hunted thoroughly for the broken chair, but in vain. He went out, cursing himself for not having kept the tape. As he crossed the street, Clancy spotted him with venomous eyes and trailed him.

WHEN Lance found the inhalator squad, he recognized one of the men who had taken the girl from him. The fireman answered his question at once.

"She'll be all right. Li'l' bruise on her head, and severe shock. But wouldn't I like to call *her* Mrs. O'Shea!"

"Where is she?" asked Lance. "Got to see her."

"City hospital. Shock case. Kept on fainting."

"Hell! I told you to watch her—guard her, Tim!"

"Keep your hair on, Lance. They took her in the squad car. She's all right. One cheek a bit burned is all."

Most of the firemen knew Lance. So did most of the cops.

Lance shrugged his disgust and started away. Then he turned back. "If she kept fainting, she must have been conscious between, eh? Did you get her name?"

"Say, pal, she opened them big, appealin' eyes fer a minute, but she couldn't get 'em focused. I did get her name. Now wait. It was Susan—Susan Wallace." O'Shea chuckled. "She whispered it real confidential."

"Keep it that way, Tim, will you? I got her out, and I want the exclusive yarn for the *Gazette*. Understand?"

"Sure. Sure I will, Lance. You done a good job."

Lance started for his car, to find the cop prowling at his side, suspicion all over his beefy face.

"Hold ut!" the rooky growled. "I *still* think you bruk that there windy."

"You again?" asked Lance politely. "Listen, copper. You get in my hair once more to-night and see what happens!"

"Oh, yeah? I'm the law, see? Where you goin'?"

"You're the cat's whiskers," said Lance. "I'm going to see my pal, Lonniger of the homicide squad, copper." He got into his car and started the engine. "Want to come along?"

"Pal, is ut!" The cop weakened. "Well, if it was you bruk that windy you——"

"And if I'm wanted," smiled Lance glassily, "you'll find me at the *Gazette*." As the car began to move, he added: "Come up and see me sometime, you nice, fat, horse's wampus!"

There was a grunt of rage. A nightstick banged his rear fender. He jounced over a couple of hose lines and got away from there, red-eyed and soaked to the skin. He stopped once to mop up three straight ryes. With his singed face and the smell of wet smoke on his clothes, he had to fight his way out through the interested bar flies.

At the hospital receiving desk, Lance started to ask for Miss Wallace, but habitual caution made him change it. He asked for the girl just brought in from a fire.

The iron-faced nurse in charge looked him over, got a waft of his breath and sniffed her disapproval. "A Miss Mary Jones arrived fifteen minutes ago, but you certainly can't see her in your condition! In any case, our visiting hours——"

Lance dropped his press card on the desk. "I'll see her at once, if she's conscious. It's vital."

The nurse bristled. "You will not see her!"

"No-o?" Lance draped himself over the rail. "Isn't this the place where that wop kid died because somebody forgot to call the doctor? And there was a young nurse who went from screaming hysterics into convulsions because the older nurses bullied hell out of her. We kinda soft-pedaled those, but—where's your telephone? And by the way, what's *your* name?"

The nurse had turned a delicate lemon-green. "If it's really important," she choked through false teeth.

"I told you it's vital. What room is she in?"

It was on the second floor. Lance took the stairs. A young nurse was just coming out of the room. She stopped him with her hands. Lance caught her warm fingers.

"You can't go in," she said. "Who are you? Good Heaven, you're soaked!"

"I attended the fire, delicious. What's wrong? Why can't I go in? It's important as hell."

The nurse withdrew her fingers reluctantly. "Miss Jones is suffering from shock. She's barely conscious."

"How did you manage to get her name then?"

"Oh, she regained consciousness. But she's just had a relapse. Is she your—sister?"

"No more than you are. What gave her the relapse? Anybody seen her since she arrived?"

"Only the doctor and I. She had a note—there's her light now! Say, I'm glad I'm *not* your sister."

There was a gurgle and a swish of skirts. Lance waited, fuming. After a moment the nurse reappeared: "She's better, handsome! I guess you can come in a minute."

III.

THE GIRL he had carried down the fire tower lay in bed, completely relaxed. Her eyes were closed. One cheek was pale, the other rosy and glistening with ointment. The bell cord trailed from a limp hand. The flushed skin of her wrist showed where the sticky remains of the tape had been removed with alcohol. Her bright hair lay in two thick braids. It was damp near her face. Lance felt his heart do a frog jump.

As he drew near the bed, her lashes wavered up. It was the first time he had seen her eyes. They were deep blue. They stared hazily, like a child recovering from ether.

That finished Lance. Battling cupid had landed a decisive blow to the heart. Like any other masculine set-up, Lance felt exultant, anxious, humble, mentally scrambled.

She grew aware of him and turned her head. "Oh-h! You're the man in the street—who got me out." Her eyes filled with tears. She blinked them away, trying to see him.

"You're all right now," he said unevenly. "Weren't you unconscious while we were skidding around?"

"I saw you just before you got me into the tower—against those awful flames. You looked so savage—like a man fighting—" She began to cry, her mouth tremulous.

Lance was puzzled. She had had a bad shock, but with that firm little chin— He turned his head. "Leave us alone a minute, nurse?"

The dark eyes of the nurse were frankly admiring. "Only a minute!" she warned, and slipped out of the room.

"We'll look after you," he whispered to the girl on the bed. "Why didn't you give your real name, Susan?"

"Don't!" she begged. "Don't tell any one my name!"

"I won't," he assured her, "but you're safe now. Who taped you and left you like that? Nobody can hear us. I'm your friend, Miss Wallace. Who left you up there?"

She looked away. "I *can't* tell you—anything."

Lance hesitated. "You're still in danger? Is that why you gave your name as Mary Jones?" he whispered.

"Please don't ask me! Not any questions! I can't!"

"But you'll have to talk. That was attempted murder! Wouldn't you rather tell me than tell the police?"

Her fingers clutched his arm. "They mustn't know! Don't tell them anything, *please!* You don't understand. I'm at your mercy, but I *can't* explain." Her blue eyes implored, but without coquetry. "I'm sorry. I am grateful. But you don't understand what I'm up against. It'll be you, too."

Lance swallowed. "You'll be up against *me?*"

"No, I do trust you. I d-don't mean that. Please go for your own sake—and mine." She was crying weakly, her eyes haunted. "You'll only do harm—dreadful harm."

"Then I'll go," he whispered soothingly. "May I have your address? See you again?"

"N-no. I'm sorry. I'm *being* grateful, if you only knew it. But please don't tell any one—anything about me."

"Whatever trouble you're in," he said quietly, "I'm going to get you out of it without spilling any beans. Now rest, my dear." He touched her hand lightly and went out.

The nurse stood in the hall, patting her hair.

"Hello, scenery!" he whispered.

"What became of that note she got? It's important as hell."

"You don't want much, do you?" asked the nurse.

"I don't know you well enough to tell you yet. But I'm serious—and her friend. What became of it?"

The nurse frowned. "It was right after she read that note that she had the relapse. Are you from the police?"

"Don't get ideas in your head. Where's that note?"

"She read it and asked for her skirt," said the nurse. "There's a pocket in her skirt. She had no purse."

"I want that skirt. Can you get it for me without her knowing?"

"Certainly not, if she wouldn't show you the note."

"I didn't mention it. Can you keep your mouth shut?"

"Not—always," answered the willing nurse.

He glanced around, and kissed her. "Now get me that skirt, you little disturbance, and don't let her see you."

The nurse pouted, sighed, and went into the room. In a moment she was back with the skirt. Lance took it eagerly, found the pocket, and drew out a crumpled note. It was on cheap paper, crudely written in pencil. He shielded it from the nurse who was leaning against him. It read:

We got yure kid sister. Kepe yure mouth shut or she will cach hell. Kepe this. Don't show it to nobody or elts. The Gang.

Swiftly Lance copied it into his notebook, replaced it, and returned the skirt. "Thanks," he said, "and don't say anything about this to any one, for your own sake. Don't let her see you with that skirt. And—take care of her."

"Sure. Better let me put something on *your* face!"

"O. K., nursie," he said, grinning. "Put your lips on it. They'd cure anything." After an instant he freed himself, patted her shoulder absently, and got out of there.

From the nearest drug-store booth Lance called the city desk. Weston sounded like a man afire.

"Where the hell have *you* been?" he squalled. "Who saved that girl? What's her name? Where is she? What in hell you think we're running here, a weekly?"

"Relax," said Lance. "The fire's out. The girl's in hospital with shock. I'm going to see Lonninger."

"Lonninger, hell!" shouted Weston. "Who saved her?"

"How do I know? Some passer-by. I didn't see him."

"Not interested, huh? What's the girl's name?"

"Mary Jones, believed an alias. Mystery girl, see? The point is, she won't talk! No explanation to offer. It's a wow of a mystery! Our readers'll eat it up."

"Listen!" snapped Weston, controlling himself. "Are you working for me, or on the make for that doll? I want her real name, or don't you even know *that*?"

"Sure, I know it," said Lance complacently, "but I'm not spilling it just yet. I know a lot of other things is why. Stick to Mary Jones, and maybe they won't bump her off. Say she won't talk. She won't. Hold something for a later edition, see? This'll be a *story*! Print her real name, and it'll be just another unsolved murder."

"Hell and damnation!" shouted the editor. "Who's running this sheet? Gimme that name, or you're fired!"

"O. K., I'm fired," said Lance. "But I'll want a fat raise when you hire me back to-morrow. Good

night." He hung up, and pounced on a telephone book, confident that Weston would give up and let it go for the first edition. The attempted murder was an exclusive beat. The other rags would have the fire and the rescue, but not the arson and attempted murder. He didn't think they'd get in to see the girl. Nor would she talk if they did; not about being taped and left up there.

He found three dozen Wallaces in the telephone directory, but no Susan Wallace. The store had a city directory. It listed more Wallaces, but still no Susan. Lance reentered the booth and dialed police headquarters. Lonniger was still on duty but going off soon.

"Wait for me," Lance urged. "Got something on ice, but it isn't on a slab yet. I'll be right down there."

"I'll wait," said Lonniger, "if it ain't a dead fish."

"In the meantime," said Lance quickly, "I want some dope on that loft fire on River Street: names and addresses of owner and all tenants. Station No. 3 will have that."

"No foolin'?" asked Lonniger dryly. "O. K., Lance."

"Thanks, Mike. This'll make you a captain if you can pass the exams. Which I doubt."

Lance came breezing out of the drug store. His shoes were soaked. The basement extended under the pavement and was lighted by thick little squares of glass in the sidewalk. His heel slipped on one of the dead lights, and his leg shot out from under him. He sat down hard and slid halfway under a parked limousine, cracking his shin on the running board.

As he fell, stabs of pale flame spat from the shadows across the street. He heard the first shot. The others were muffled by the ringing: *Spang!*

Spang! Spang! of bullets going through the drug-store window.

The owner's howl of dismay was choked off as he took cover. Down the street a police whistle shrilled. Lance got up and peeked respectfully around the back of the limousine. Up the street, a running figure had just scrambled into a car. It whined around a corner and vanished. Lance stood on one leg, rubbing his shin, and swearing softly, but thinking hard.

Had one of the firebugs and would-be murderers seen him bring the girl out? It would be easy enough in the crowd. They had found him again so quickly because they were watching the hospital. They knew he had been there to see the girl.

They would learn from the early morning *Gazette* that she had given a false name and refused to talk. That wouldn't help Susan. She knew too much, or they wouldn't have left her to burn. But it might protect her kid sister.

Of course Susan wouldn't talk—with her sister in their hands. Of course she was terrified. Rage boiled up in him. Somebody was going to pay for that—all of it.

IV.

The policeman pounding toward Lance was big and had little, malicious eyes like a parrot. The drug-store owner popped out, and began jumping up and down, pointing at Lance.

"That's him, officer!" he shouted. "He done it!"

The hand of the law descended on Lance's shoulder.

"You break that winder?" growled the cop.

"Sufferin' owls!" muttered Lance. "Another broken window!" To the cop he said: "Somebody pumps lead

at me, so *I* get pinched. I'm Lance Davis of the *Gazette*."

A small boy was dodging about. "That's right, Mr. Flaherty!" he shrilled. "This ge'man came outta the drug store and slipped and struck on his side, an' jest then a man shot at him bang! bang! bang! from over there! I seen it! The man got in a car, an' it got away! I seen it all, I did! You a G-man, mister? Was they gangsters? Was they?"

"Thanks, kid," said Lance, winking at the cop. "I guess they were all right. Here's my press card, Flaherty, and take that pound of beef off my shoulder. I'm bound for headquarters in a hurry, you Irish shamrock!"

The cop said: "Sure, I remimber you now!" He freed Lance and wheeled ominously. As Lance made for his car, the owner of the drug store was retreating into it with his hands up defensively and his mouth open.

Lance discovered the boy trotting at his side. Mr. G-man! the kid whispered, "that was just a stall about the press card, huh? I seen you wink! Lemme come with you? Aw, will ya please, mister? I wantt be a G-man!"

Lance got a dollar out of his bill fold and pressed it into a grubby hand. Looking down into excited young eyes behind steel spectacles, he hissed: "Not this time, pal! Too dangerous! We gotta clean up the Purple Spider Gang!"

"Aw, gee, gosh!" the kid breathed. "Thanks, mister! I'll keep mum! Don't let 'em get cha." He darted away.

Speeding toward police headquarters, Lance smiled to himself. It wasn't entirely fiction, what he had told the kid. He was on the spot himself now.

Lieutenant Michael Lonninger was

tall and muscular, with a lean, brown, hunter's face. Deep wrinkles lined each side of his handsome mouth. He had a straight nose, quiet dark-blue eyes, and curly black hair. Kids went for him in a big way.

When Lance entered, Lonninger looked up from a page full of box scores in the evening paper which was spread on his desk. He nodded toward a chair.

"Dunno why I waste my time on this stuff," he said, smiling, folding the paper. "Been swimming, Lance? I've seen you look worse, but not much. What's on your mind?"

Lance closed both doors to the bare little office before he sat down. "Did you get that dope?" he asked.

"I did. Heard you saved a girl up there. So what?"

"Plenty. Only it's got angles. Look, Mike. Can you play ball on this thing?"

Lonninger stared. "I gen'lly do, don't I?"

"Sure; but this is different. I never crossed you either. I won't this time. I need your help, but I'd rather not tell you everything—not just yet, Mike."

"Why not?" Lonninger tipped his chair back and stuck his thumbs in his vest. "Anything to do with that girl?"

"Well, yeah. I gave her my word not to tell certain things. The fact is I'm nuts about her."

"You? Well, I'll be damned! She must be a knock-out. But where do I come in?"

"I'll tell you. She wasn't just trapped by the fire. Somebody left her up there to burn to death. Attempted murder. One wrong move, and they'll try again quick! I'd dislike that."

"Better spill the yarn, Lance. I ain't bullheaded."

"That's why I'm here," said Lance.

He went on to describe the fire, how he had found the girl, how he and the fireman had removed the tape before he carried her outdoors; also how he had gone back and found tape and chair missing.

"Arson to conceal murder, eh?" suggested Lonninger. "Ever see a burned body? She'd have been just a lump——"

"Put away that rubber nose, copper," Lance interrupted. "I'm talking as much as I intend to, even to you."

Lonninger tipped his hat back. "If the tape and chair were missing, the firebug stuck around, eh?"

"I know he did, for other reasons which I'll tell you later. Who are the owners and tenants of that building?"

"Well, Lance, it belongs to the Farjean Brothers Co. Lichter & Hubbel store rugs on the second floor, use the ground floor as a showroom and keep their linoleum stock in the basement. The upper three floors are rented by Solner & Son, wholesale perfumers. Their offices are on the third. The fourth, where the fire started, is used as a stock and storage loft. Their mixing rooms are on the top floor, where you found the girl."

"We can rule out Lichter & Hubbel," said Lance. "The fire won't get them much insurance."

"What makes you think it was an inside job?"

"Both entrances were locked, Mike. I had to smash a window. The firemen had to smash in the side door to the stairs. The men who taped that girl had keys. Either they work there, or somebody sent them who carries keys."

"How did she get in? Maybe she was in on it, and they decided to bump her off. It would lessen the

risk and increase the split." Lonninger was smiling faintly.

Lance refused to be drawn. "She was working late. They came up and caught her. Maybe that was it."

"Yeah? They see lights up there and go right up? There might be ten people working late."

"They maybe work there, too. Why shouldn't they go up? They find only one girl, so they decide to let her burn to death. She might have guessed what they were up to, see?"

"Would she be fool enough to say so?"

"Not unless she knew them, maybe," said Lance. "I want to find out if she worked for Solner & Son. Will you have somebody locate those two? Might as well look up the others at the same time. We've got to work fast."

"On what," asked Lonninger dryly, "if you keep mum on what the girl told you? She's the one to clear this up."

"She won't talk. All I'm keeping dark is something I found out elsewhere. She doesn't dare talk, and neither must you, Mike. You're shrewd and farsighted, but not all the others are. I don't want any police sirens in this—dashing about and tipping our hand. The firebugs will think she's talked. And they know where she is. They sent her a warning not to talk. Get the idea?"

"I know where she is, too," Lonninger smiled. "In the city hospital. She's safe there, Lance. Put her in the hoosegow, and she'll be still safer. Then she can talk."

Lance shook his head. "No, she can't. She isn't the only one threatened in that note."

"Hell, you've seen the note she got? Where is it?"

"I'll show it to you as soon as

you've started a hunt for Solner & Son—and the Farjeans."

Lonniger stared. "What a clam you've turned out to be! Well, it isn't murder yet, but I'll string along."

He reached for the telephone and gave the necessary orders to the switchboard operator below. He asked to have Lichter & Hubbel located also, and word rushed to him.

The moment he hung up, the phone rang. Lonniger answered, and passed the instrument to Lance. "Your boss," he whispered, "with ants in his shoes."

"Lance?" came a gruff snarl. . . . "Oh, it is you, eh? Well, blame it, why didn't you tell me you saved that girl? It's all over the street in the other dirty rags! But you don't tell me! One of these days I'm gonna fire you so hard you'll bounce into Gettysburg! What else you holding out?"

"Wait a minute," said Lance. "With a morning rag you couldn't beat the other dirty rags anyway. But the late evening rags haven't got the big dope. Also, I am fired. Now here's your line. The *Gazette* is published to dish out the news and serve the public, not to build up its own staff. Put that in the next edition. It's why you didn't even mention that one of your men carried the girl out."

Weston snorted. Then he chuckled. "Damned if you ain't right! They'll eat that line."

"Did you put in about the phony name, and that she wouldn't talk?" Lance interrupted.

"Hell, yes. And you come back here and get on the job. There's plenty to do. You gotta find that doll and make her talk."

"You leave her alone," said Lance. "She'll talk when——" He broke off with a sinking heart. "Whadda you

mean—find her? She's in the city hospital."

"Like hell!" barked Weston. "I sent Pete down to see her. She's skipped. Got dressed and sneaked out."

"I'll find her——" said Lance. He hung up slowly.

V.

LONNIGER SAID: "She gave you a phony name, huh? And now she's gone? Better gimme a description."

"Wait." Lance turned blazing red-brown eyes on the detective, his mouth a hard slit. "I know her name. That's what I was keeping dark. I still am. Have somebody ring Flaherty's box. He's on the hospital beat. Ask him if he saw a girl come out. Was she alone? Did any one meet her—pick her up? Step on it, Mike."

Lonniger picked up the phone and gave instructions. "Now," he began, as he hung up, "why not tell me her name?"

"Because I told her I wouldn't," Lance interrupted. "Skip it and listen. That girl's in a hell of a jam. She's terrified—especially of the police. Because of that note. She didn't tell me that. The nurse said the girl had a relapse after she got the note. I got hold of it and copied it without her knowledge. But if they've got her, they'll kill her anyway."

"Where in hell is that note?" growled Lonniger.

"Wait. Get the position. The firebug or firebugs saw me carry her out. One of them slipped in for that tape and the chair. They tailed her to the hospital and sent in that note. That's why I got Weston to print that she *wouldn't* talk. I hoped they'd leave her alone for a day or

two. If they've got her, I've played straight into their hands. When they see that in the *Gazette*, they won't be afraid to kill her. It's too late to stop it—change it."

The telephone rang. Lonniger answered, and spoke to Flaherty, listened a moment, and hung up.

"It's not bad news, Lance," he said. "Flaherty saw her sneak out. He wasn't very near, but he started for her. Before he reached her, she was into a taxi and off. He says she hailed it. He's pretty sure she was alone in it."

"Good for the time being," Lance admitted. "But she'll go straight home. And they know where she lives."

"How in hell do you figure that out?"

Lance opened his notebook and dropped it on the desk. "If she lives with her sister, they do."

Lonniger studied the exact replica of the note:

We got yure kid sister. Kepe yure mouth shut or she will cach hell. Kepe this. Don't show it to nobody or elts. The Gang.

"Well, what do you make of it?" demanded Lance.

The detective looked up. "What do you make of it?"

"That it's written by an educated man, trying to ape a cheap hood. Punctuation perfect. Spelling too lousy. If cops read the baseball news, why not crooks? One word they would know how to spell is 'catch.'"

"Good guess, maybe, but just a guess." Lonniger tapped the notebook. "We gotta call in the Feds on this. It's kidnaping, Lance."

"You don't know it's kidnaping yet. The other girl hasn't been missed. You want the firebug. I want those two girls first. The older

one knows too much. They tried to bump her to-night. They'll try again. If they kill one girl, they've got to kill the other. Call in the Feds, hell! It's a question of hours—maybe minutes."

The phone interrupted him. Again Lonniger answered. He listened, making hard, sharp triangles with a pencil. A word of thanks, and he hung up.

"Lichter was at the fire when you were there," he said crisply. "Hubbel's attending a convention in Chicago. Young Solner's gone to a show with his girl. Pa Solner's on his way to the burned building now. They just located him. The Farjean brothers are at Winonka, twenty miles out. Got a camp there. Haven't been seen in town for days."

Lance leaped to his feet. "Come on, Mike, let's go!"

"Where? You got your girl friend's right address?" Lonniger straightened his hat, got up, and pushed Lance ahead of him through the door.

"I have not," said Lance as they clumped downstairs. "Looked in both directories. Better take my bus."

"Where are we going?" asked Lonniger mildly, as they slid into the roadster.

"To head off Solner and get her address, if she works for him. She was in his place. Want to look around there, too. Wish I had a gun." Lance shot away from the curb.

"Well, you haven't," said Lonniger comfortably. "A good thing for you. Hey! There's traffic rules in this town!"

Lance had skidded around a truck to go through a red light. "I'm suspending 'em," he said.

"Yeah? What's your girl's name, Lance?"

"I'm not saying. I'm funny that way."

"Nuts! You'll have to tell Solner, to get her address. What's the idea?"

"Just gave her my word. You're going to ask Solner for a list of his employees—his pay-roll sheet or something. If her name's on it, I'll know it, and get her address."

"Hell, that's private. I can't demand to see it."

"Nuts to you," chuckled Lance. "If he doesn't want to cooperate, that's something, isn't it? I think he will."

"Maybe you're not so dumb," Lonninger admitted.

"Thanks. The firebug or bugs," Lance added thoughtfully, "know that I know too much. They know I called at the hospital. They saw me come out. But there's a good chance they didn't see the girl come out later."

"Come on! Loosen up," urged Lonninger. "How do you know all that?"

"Because one of 'em tried to burn me down when I came out of the hospital—just after I called you. He skeddaddled in a car that somebody else was driving. Unless they came back, they didn't see the girl come out, if you follow me."

"What a man!" sighed Lonninger. "Why in hell didn't you tell me that before? Just recalled it, huh?"

"What good is it?" Lance slowed to park at the corner nearest the burned building. "I couldn't get the license number. They didn't hit anything but a drug-store window. I guess Flaherty must have reported the shooting by now. Last stop, Mike. Climb out, will you?"

The detective slid out with a laugh. They walked toward the recent fire, reaching the side doors first. Though smashed open, these were unguarded. Lonninger frowned.

"We better take these stairs," said Lance, "but wait a second. I want to see something." He darted toward the ground floor entrance of Lichter & Hubbel.

The doors had been opened. Lance was on the threshold before he noticed the looming figure inside. A flashlight struck his eyes, half blinding him. As he leaped back outside in a hurry, there was a growl of rage. The flashlight went out. Stumbling backward, Lance caught the glint of light on a badge and the uplifted club.

"Back ag'in, huh?" roared Clancy. "I'll fix ye!"

Quick as a panther, Lance ducked under the whizzing nightstick. At the same instant he landed an uppercut, with his twisting shoulders behind it.

Clancy's head snapped back, and he sat down hard. A split second later he was blowing his whistle for all he was worth, scrambling up at the same time.

Lonninger ran up. "What the hell are——"

"The damn fool tried to brain me!" panted Lance.

Clancy was sitting down again, shaking his head to clear it. Lance stiffened. Police were racing down on them, silently, with their guns drawn.

"Stand still!" muttered Lonninger to Lance. "I've trained some of these boys myself." The officers were close.

"Hold it, boys!" came Lonninger's cool, parade-ground voice. "I'm Lonninger of homicide. Take a look."

There was a meager light from the street lamps here on the sidewalk. The cops checked, stared, holstered their guns. One of them scowled at Clancy. The big rookie got to his feet and plucked at his wet trousers,

for the pavement was still soaked. He was muttering uncertainly.

"Now what's the idea of the charge?" rasped Lonninger.

One of the officers stepped forward. "Sergeant O'Brien, lieutenant. The fire chief thought 'twas arson. Thought the firebug might come back. We fixed a bit av a trap. That's why the doors ain't guarded. Clancy wished to be the wan to stay hid. He thought he could identify the firebug."

"An' there he stands!" defended Clancy. "T'was him bruk the windy. I heard him say ut!"

Lance groaned, and then laughed. The sergeant stared at him. "Well, 'tis Lance Davis!"

Lonninger moved nearer Clancy. "My friend, here, did break the window, to save a girl's life. Didn't you know it?"

"I heard tell of ut," admitted the cop sullenly, "but he set the fire, lieutenant. I got a witness."

"Why, you——" began Lance, and gave it up.

"What do you mean, you've got a witness?"

"After *he* skipped out," glowered Clancy, with a jerk of his thumb at Lance, "a guy come an' told me. He seen this man and a girl go into the building about ten minutes before the fire started. He described this man, lieutenant, even to the ears on him. Then I knew 'twas this man."

"The firebug!" exclaimed Lance quickly. "I know too much. He figured on discrediting my evidence."

Lonninger nodded. "This man is a friend of most of us, Clancy. He set no fire. If you hadn't been falling over his heels, you might have caught the firebug. We know he came back. He got into the building and got rid of some evidence. Why, damn it all, you were talking

to him! What name and address did he give? Describe him."

Clancy looked stunned. "Tom Evans was the name," he said hoarsely, "stayin' at the Railroad Hotel. He was of medium height, round a hundred and fifty pounds, smooth face, dark hair and eyes, wore light checked coat and pants and cap, and dark sweater—black shoes."

"O. K.," said Lonninger. "Now did Mr. Davis here make any attempt to resist arrest just now? He did not. You had a personal grievance against him?"

"He called me names. And he knocked me down!" flared Clancy.

The other cops stirred.

"He knocked you down to save his life!" rasped Lonninger. "You tried to brain him without warning. I saw it. You'll hear more of it. He had no time to call you names."

"That was before—whin he skipped!" snarled Clancy.

"Yeah?" Lonninger's tone was silk. "What names did he call you, that you tried to break his head just now?"

"I didn't go for to break his head," Clancy muttered. "Only to knock him insensible. If he *ain't* the firebug——"

"I've told you he isn't!" snapped Lonninger. "Answer the question. What names did he call you?"

Clancy shuffled his feet and dumbly gripped his club.

"He had a right to get sore," said Lance gravely. "I called him a nice, fat horse's wumpus, and asked him to come up and see me sometime."

There was an instant of stunned silence, then a bark of laughter from the sergeant. The cops who knew Lance echoed the laugh. He had turned drama into comedy. Even Lonninger's mouth twitched, though he was still angry.

"Sure, lieutenant," chuckled O'Brien richly, "'tis a bit of a sinse of humor, is all Clancy has the need."

"Forget it, Clancy, and shake hands," smiled Lance.

Clancy hesitated.

"Do you want to charge him with striking an officer," asked Lonninger stiffly, "or shake hands?"

Clancy drew a deep breath. "I'd sooner forgit the uniform an' shake his hand. 'Twas a good clout.

"All the same"—he grinned at Lance as they shook—"it was you bruk that windy!"

VI.

THERE was a telephone in the showroom. Lonninger had called headquarters and asked for a pickup alarm on the man Clancy had described. O'Brien and the other cops had dispersed, leaving Clancy to guard the building which was on his beat.

Lonninger got up from the telephone to find Lance at the back of the showroom. "What you looking for now, you nut?" he grumbled. "And you better cut the comedy with strange cops."

"He got in my hair," said Lance, "but you wouldn't break a good cop just because he thinks with his feet.

"Now look, Mike. There's no sidewalk elevator in front. Lino-leum rolls are heavy. There's a freight elevator back here, see? If the loading platform's behind it, I've got me an idea. Let's take a look."

The freight elevator was locked. The man Lance had seen hopping about among his wet rugs was Lichter. He had gone home. They went outdoors. Lonninger told Clancy to detain Solner, the whole-sale perfumer, if he came down. They walked halfway around the block.

On this side, four-story wooden houses stood cheek by jowl. Between two of them, however, a narrow alley led to the rear of the burned building. It was almost pitch dark.

They felt their way in. Neither had a flashlight. At the far end, lighted matches disclosed a wooden loading platform and beyond it, the outer door of the freight elevator. Lance vaulted up on the platform.

A sloping roof protected it. In spite of the tons of water pumped on the fire, the platform was dry. On hands and knees, Lance sniffed here and there like a hound. An odor of skunk haunted the platform. At length he found the source in a patch of boards. These were dry like the rest, but the smell was very strong and seemed recent. Perfume bases are volatile, but the scent remains.

Lance hopped down.

"O. K.," he said. "Let's go talk to Solner."

The perfumer had not come down. They climbed the side stairs and found him wandering dazedly among the ruins, picking up this and that. He was on the fourth floor, where his perfumes had been stored. The flooring was gone and parts of the third-floor ceiling. The charred, two-by-six beams remained. Everything was soaked. Between the joists, where the third-floor ceiling remained, was a litter of broken glass.

The staircase to the fifth floor was a skeleton of wet black charcoal. Nothing remained of the top-story flooring except the fire-eaten joists. Some of these had snapped when the roof fell in. The place was filled with the acrid smell of wet, burned wood. Lance could not detect the least trace of perfume. However, the place was open to the sky.

Solner stared at them with dazed eyes. He was a fat, round little man with a pleasant face, a fringe of gray hair around his bald dome, and pathetic dark eyes.

Lonniger introduced himself and Lance. Solner shook hands, and told them distractedly that he was pleased to meet them. He would have wandered off again, but Lance held him.

"All my essential oils!" he mourned. "Civet, musk, skunk, even my ambergris! Real ambergris—I had it a little! They cost money, y'understand! My flower essences! Lavender, sweet pea, ginger flower, gardenia! Oy! Everything gone!"

Lonniger caught a waving arm. "Insured?" he rasped.

The tone steadied Solner. "Eighty per cent of the inventory," he stared. "It ain't the loss. It don't break me. But the time and the research! My finished stock, y'understand! My customers waiting! My people idle. It's a nightmare!"

"Got a list of your employees?" snapped Lonniger.

"Sure, sure. My pay-roll sheet. Gentlemen, look at it! Big shipments of 'Spring Night' and 'Rosy Hours' gone up in smoke yet! Thousands of dollars! My good customers! Oy!"

If Solner was acting, thought Lance, it was perfect.

Lonniger said: "We'd like to see that pay-roll sheet."

His tone checked Solner's laments. "That's private." The man stared. "Not even to the police must I show it!"

"O. K.," shrugged Lonniger. "We think this was arson. Maybe for insurance. If you don't want to cooperate——"

"Arson! But who would *do* such a thing like that?"

"Who *could* do such a thing, Mr.

Solner? The doors were locked. How many people had keys?"

Solner was looking more and more aghast. "I have a key; my son, Max, has a key; Joe Liebling, my head mixer, has it a key; and my secretary, Miss Wallace. Sometimes she looks to the mail when I don't feel so good. But none of them would do it! How easy to borrow or copy one of those keys yet!"

"Then you think it was arson?" asked Lonniger.

"No, no. I never thought of such a thing! Arson? For insurance? It's nonsense, Mr. Detective! I lose maybe—two thousand dollars yet. My friend, Mr. Lichter, the same, only worse! Sixty per cent they carry; Lichter & Hubbel!"

"What about the owners of the building?"

"The—the Farjean brothers? I—wouldn't know."

"Come on," urged Lonniger. "You want to help us, don't you? They have keys, too, of course?"

"Of course. But—the building did belong to old Mrs. Rogers, their aunt. She deeded it to George and Maurice Farjean to avoid death duties, I understand. Only she gets the rent as long as she lives. That's in the deed, or maybe not."

"The building's fully insured?" asked Lonniger lazily.

"Sure, sure! For such a wooden kindlings? You bet."

"Then the Farjeans, and not Mrs. Rogers, collect the insurance!" snapped Lonniger.

Solner gaped. "Maybe they could! Unless there was a proviso that the insurance money should be used to rebuild!"

"You don't know about that, Mr. Solner?"

"No, but they're nice fellers—pretty good landlords."

"And they're camping twenty

miles out of town," said Lonninger. His mouth twitched. "This Miss Wallace—is she a pretty girl, Mr. Solner?"

"Oy, just like a rose." The older man smiled. "And smart, too. A sweet girl, y'understand! No monkey business." Solner hesitated. "You wouldn't suspect *her*! It's impossible! She's a *nice* girl—like a daughter to me, in my heart."

"Thanks. May we see that payroll list of employees?" Lonninger smiled. "I'll get a court order if necessary."

"No, no, gentlemen. You're welcome."

Solner led them down to the third floor. Closed doors at the head of the stairs had checked the fire from creeping downward to any extent, although they had burned through in the end. The offices were drowned and covered with plaster, but not badly damaged. Solner opened a safe and found his pay roll. Lonninger glanced down the names and passed it to Lance.

With assumed thoroughness, Lance studied every name, but it took him only an instant to memorize the address after:

Susan Wallace, p'te sec'y.

Lance returned the list with thanks.

Lonninger concurred. "Thanks, Mr. Solner. We won't keep you. I suppose you haven't seen the Far-jeans to-day?"

"No, no, gentlemen! They was out of town."

"Much obliged. Good night. Sorry about your loss."

They clumped down the side stairs, to find Clancy pacing up and down. He saluted at once, although Lonninger did not rate a salute

in plain clothes. All three said good night.

"I forgot something around at the back," said Lance quickly. "Might as well take my bus though, and go on."

As they climbed in, Lonninger spoke with a laugh in his voice: "A pretty name, Susan Wallace, and a pretty girl, eh, Lance? Did you happen to notice her address?"

Turning the corner, Lance scowled. Then he laughed. "O. K., wise guy. You win. I know you'll keep it hush-hush."

He turned another corner and pulled up by the alley. The two houses it separated showed a few lighted windows. They were each remodeled into six flats. Lance tried all the apartments with no success until the last. On one second floor, nearest the alley, a heavy-set, good-natured man in his undershirt answered their knock.

"I didn't see nothin'," the man answered, "but the missus was tellin' me she did." He raised his voice. "Hattie! Come 'n' tell the gentlemen about the truck ye saw in the alley."

A thin-faced, sharp-nosed woman entered primly. In answer to her gimlet stare, Lonninger introduced himself and implied that Lance was his assistant.

The woman was not impressed, but after a little blarney Lance got her news. About half an hour before the engines came—or maybe it was an hour—a truck had backed into the alley. It was a small, black delivery car. She hadn't noticed the name on it, what it did, nor when it left.

Outdoors again, Lance took long strides toward his car. "Now for Miss Wallace. Hope that was worth the delay, Mike."

Lonninger climbed in. "Robbery

and arson, eh? What did you find on that loading platform?"

"A scent of skunk or civet. It smelled fresh."

"Nice going, keed. Now look. I'll hunt up your girl with you. If necessary, I'll wire for the Feds. I'll lend you a good man, too. But I'm on the homicide squad. If a real murder should break and I'm missing, it won't be so good."

Lance had turned a corner to retrace their course. "That's O. K.," he said lightly. He fished for a cigarette.

"Hell, Lance! I'm paid to stick to murder, see?"

At that instant they heard the vicious bark of gunfire from River Street—three quick shots. Lance stood on the gas. They turned the next corner. A heavy car was gathering speed away from them, already going like the wind.

After it a lone shot spat from the sidewalk near the burned building, but spat too high. The car had no rear license plate. It screamed around another corner and vanished.

"You couldn't catch it!" snarled Lonniger. "Stop!"

Clancy lay on his face. There were three tears in the back of his coat where slugs had ripped through him. A wisp of smoke curled from the muzzle of his gun. He was dead.

"The filthy skunks!" Lonniger choked.

"A good cop," said Lance quietly. "He died fighting."

"Stay with him while I call the wagon," said Lonniger huskily. "He never had a chance."

When Lonniger returned from the showroom telephone, they carried the big, dead cop in there to be out of the wet. There was agonized effort in the glazed blue eyes.

Lance cleared his throat. "O. K. to call Weston?"

"Sure. Give 'em the news," said Lonniger quietly.

Lance got the city desk. "Weston? Officer Clancy just shot to death from unknown car in front of that burned building. Farjean brothers own it. Clancy's murder believed connected with attempted burning of mystery girl. Solner & Son lost thousands in essential oils, bases, flower essences, big shipments of completed product. That's all for now. Can't stop. More later." He hung up.

Lonniger came in from the street, carefully wrapping a brass .45-cartridge case in his handkerchief.

VII.

THE WAGON had come and gone. Three cops guarded the building. Lonniger swung heavily into Lance's car.

"I'm in this now," he said. "Step on it, Lance."

Susan Wallace lived across town, in a respectable boarding-house district. On the way Lance and Lonniger stopped by headquarters and left the spent shell to be examined for fingerprints.

In the car again, Lance said: "Clancy gave you a description of the man who told him I'd set the fire. That description went out as a radio alarm. The firebug heard it. His scheme hadn't worked. The description wasn't much. But Clancy—and no one except Clancy—could identify him. So they came back and murdered Clancy in cold blood."

"Why they?" asked Lonniger harshly.

"Because somebody else was driving the car when I got used for a target. It's the same bunch."

"Looks like it. But who the hell are they? The Farjean brothers? Solner? You should have made that girl talk, Lance. She's the only one who knows. I hope we find her. All I want is to get my hands on those skunks."

"So do I hope we find her," said Lance, stepping on the gas. "We don't know it's an inside job, but it sure looks that way; not only from the locked doors either."

"What else? Robbery? The people who had keys?"

"Those and the big shipments waiting to go. Those perfumes are valuable. So are the oils and essences. Solner could have hidden them somewhere and touched off the place to collect the insurance on stock that wasn't there. Anyhow, it wasn't arson to conceal murder. It was murder to conceal robbery and arson by somebody who knows about perfumes." Lance twisted his neck to look at the house numbers.

"Wonder how much the Farjeans know about perfume," said Lonniger. "Two of them! Easy to slip into town. I'll phone Winonka in the morning. Village store'll be shut now."

"Here we are," said Lance not quite steadily.

The boarding-house keeper finally opened the door. She was a buxom, pleasant-faced woman in a flowered wrapper. At the moment she looked sleepy and cross.

"This is a fine time of night to be getting people out of bed," she objected, peering at them. "What you want?"

"We're looking for a Miss Susan Wallace," explained Lance. "Does she live here?"

"And who might you be?" A smile softened her words.

"We," said Lance gravely, "are the police, ma'am."

The woman started. "Has anything happened to her?"

"Why ask that? We're looking for her."

"You mean she's done something? I don't believe it!"

"Nothing like that. We want to talk to her a minute."

"Now wait! She's as nice a girl as you could hope to find! A little lady, and most particular."

"Is she home?" growled Lonniger from his boots.

The woman bridled. "Well, no. She came home, but she received a telephone call and went out again. Most unusual."

"She went out alone?" asked Lance quickly. "Was she frightened? Is that why you asked whether anything had happened to her? We're her friends. She hasn't done anything, Mrs.—"

Something in his eyes made the woman more friendly.

"Mrs. Dipwillow is the name," she said. "Miss Susan did appear agitated. I didn't see her face clearly. She was alone as far as I know. I thought she'd gone for Miss Betty."

"Her young sister? Isn't she at home either?"

"Suppose we come in and sit down," Lonniger grumbled. He showed his badge. With a flustered air, Mrs. Dipwillow led them into a clean but gloomy living room. The only bright spot in it was a crafty-looking parrot. It said *Gwa-awk*, at them.

"Now," said Lonniger, "what time did Betty leave to-day? Why did she leave? Was she alone, too?"

Mrs. Dipwillow sat down, looking breathless, and waved them to chairs. "She left about eight. She got a telegram over the phone. I answered the call first, so I know what it was. She ran upstairs and packed her little bag. When she came down, she

was crying. Oh, I do hope nothing's happened to the girls!"

"So do I," muttered Lance. "Know where she went?"

"No. She said she had to catch a train, and she'd left a note for her sister. Then she ran out."

"Was she alone when she left here?"

"Well, she was and she wasn't. I mean, she went away alone, but there was a man here sent by her sister, to show her some stockings. He had his things spread out in her room, and she couldn't wait. He came down a few minutes later."

The two men exchanged glances. "Could you describe him?" asked Lonninger in frank disgust.

"Why—why, yes, I think so. He was dark, shorter than you are. I didn't see his face clearly. When I let him in, he had a cap—a checked cap—pulled over his eyes. After that his back was turned. I didn't see him go out, just heard the front door close. Please tell me what's wrong."

"The less any one knows, the better for them," Lance said unevenly. "Don't you remember how this man was dressed?"

"Of course I do. He had on a light checked suit and a dark sweater. I remember thinking it was a funny way for a salesman to dress. But he said Miss Susan had sent him."

Lonninger sighed. "Do the girls room together?"

"Yes. They have a nice double room. Miss Susan is putting Betty through high school. They're both sweet."

"Could you show us their room?" Lance interrupted.

"I—I suppose so. Why? It may be untidy."

"We won't mind," said Lonninger grimly. "I'd like to see the note Betty left. There's about one chance

in a million it's still there. She didn't leave it with you?"

"Oh, no. Well, if you'll follow me——"

It was a pleasant room, untidy, but dainty. They searched it thoroughly, but did not find the note.

"Perhaps she took it with her," said Mrs. Dipwillow.

"Perhaps. You said that Susan came home, but she got a phone call and went out again. Wasn't it the phone call that sent her out, rather than her sister's note?"

"Well, I did have that impression. She seemed so agitated by the call. I don't really know, though."

Lonninger stared. "Now, ma'am, you said you thought she'd gone for Miss Betty. Did you think Betty was in some trouble and the telephone call was from her?"

"Ye-es, that passed through my mind."

"If Miss Betty had gone to catch a train, how on earth could she telephone her sister?"

"I—I didn't think of that. Oh, dear, I'm sorry!"

"Then it was some time after Betty left before her older sister came home, Mrs. Dipwillow?"

"Oh, yes. It was. At least an hour, I think. Are those sweet girls in danger?"

"They might be, if you say a word about their being missing to any one," said Lonninger harshly.

The woman stared in bewilderment. "I—I won't then."

"That's fine," he replied, getting up. "Stick to it, and maybe we'll have 'em back here to-morrow."

The men said good night and went out. Going down the steps, Lance felt lower than a worm's nose. He had hoped to find Susan, if not her sister. If they had come straight here after Weston had phoned, they might have caught her—maybe saved

her life. Her sister was only the bait. But once used as bait, she'd be dangerous to them also.

Lonniger had climbed into the roadster. Lance slammed the car door and walked around to the driving seat. The rye had worn off, and he was shivering a little. As he reached for the door, a violent sneeze almost doubled him over. At that instant something kicked one of the metal top supports of his car and screamed off at an angle. He heard the shot dimly.

"Get in and duck!" yelled Lonniger. "He's on that running board ahead. I can't hit him from here."

By this time Lance had the door open and had flung himself into the car in a crouch, speeded by whizzing lead.

"Lights and get her started!" snapped Lonniger. As Lance got in, the lieutenant slipped out, ran around the back of the car, steadied himself and fired. The answering shot was a split second late, spitting wide and too high.

Lance switched on his lights. Crouching, he forced himself to select and insert the right key without fumbling. His engine caught and roared. He recognized the other car now. It was parked well ahead of them and had no license plate. With Lonniger's shot the car had sprung to life, engine roaring, lights on. It was pulling out, exposing the man on the running board. Lance saw the wink of fire come straight at him and ducked. His windshield clanged and starred, a bit of glass stinging his neck. The roadster tipped.

"After him," said Lonniger from the near running board. He fired coolly, as Lance meshed gears. The man on the other car bent backward, clawed for, and missed the door,

tumbled into the street with a hoarse cry.

Lance was gaining speed now. The other car had stopped. "Step on it!" snapped Lonniger. "We've got 'em!"

Then Lance saw the most heartless thing of all his experience. Instead of leaping out to pick up his friend, the driver of the other car fired straight down at him, four shots in swift succession. The wounded man screamed once. For an instant he dragged himself toward the car on his hands. As the bigger car roared off without him, he collapsed and lay still, face buried in his arms.

VIII.

"I'LL get that car!" muttered Lance, shifting to high.

"Nix! Wait!" ordered Lonniger. "He's going like hell, and we're sure of this bird. Pull up, I tell you."

Lance cursed, and slammed on his brakes. They slid to a stop alongside the man, and jumped out. The man lay on his face. As Lonniger rolled him on his back, he tried weakly, blindly to raise his .45 automatic. Lance stepped on it.

The man lay twisted, his legs already dead. There was only a spark of life in his glazing eyes. He wore a dark sweater and a light checked suit. The cap was missing.

"Spick Shaw, huh," said Lonniger quietly. "You're all through, Spick. Do something decent to finish, and I'll buy candles for you. Who rubbed you out like this, Spick?"

"Hate cops," the man whispered, "but one—swell doll. Li'l' house, see? Kill her—far—" A welling up of blood choked him. He turned his head, and lay still.

Lonniger rolled him over swiftly, but it was no use. "Spick" was dead.

Lonniger raised Spick's coat in the back. Spick had been shot in the spine, and higher, through the lung. Two of the treacherous shots had missed. Lonniger's heavy bullets had ripped through one arm and the opposite shoulder.

"Farjean!" exclaimed Lance. "That's what he meant! He said 'far'! The Farjeans have taken her to some little house. It must have been one of them driving the car."

"Maybe. Stick around while I find a telephone, will you?" He got up rather slowly. "An eye for an eye, Mr. Davis. That's how she goes." He strode off through the gathering, buzzing crowd, toward the lighted drug store at the corner.

Some one had already called the police, for a siren whined and screamed, drawing nearer. The crowd had moved away from the body, to examine the bullet-scarred cars. Stooping quickly, Lance caught up the dead man's automatic. He took out the clip. It held only two shells. He felt in the side pockets of the killer, and discovered a full clip. He switched the two clips and pocketed the loaded automatic, just as the prowling car bore down on him.

The police slid out. The crowd fell back before their ominous advance.

Somebody called: "That's him, officer! He killed him and took his gun away! I seen him doin' it!"

The cops drew their guns. "Hands up, you!"

Lance obeyed, standing still until they were close. He could not see their faces, but they recognized him in the glow of their own headlights.

"Lance!" one of them growled. "What the hell——" They holstered their guns.

Lance peered. "Hello, Jim—and
CLU—7

Bert, eh?" In a quick whisper he added: "Get that little guy who said I did it, will you, Bert? I hate that kind of a guy."

The cop wheeled and dived for the crowd. "Who saw this?" he demanded. "Come on! Speak up!"

Lance was playing for time, wanting to keep that automatic. "It's Spick Shaw, sarge," he muttered. "Tried to bump Lonniger and me. Lonniger's gone to phone."

Meanwhile, a wizened little man was trying to lose himself in the crowd. Willing hands thrust him forward toward the cop. Bert Miller grabbed him and led him to Lance.

"Now here," said Lance, "you saw this. Didn't I take his gun before he was shot?"

"Naw!" shrilled the little old man venomously. "I seen you take his gun after he was shot! You're the man!"

"Then what the hell did I shoot him with, grandpa?"

"Your own gun, damn it! Your own gun, you rascal!"

"I haven't got one," said Lance. He turned to wink at the sergeant. "O. K., Jim. Pinch him. I'll charge him. False witness. Misleading the police. Perjury. Indecent exposure, and," as the little man struggled wildly, pulling more of his shirt out, "resisting arrest!"

The crowd yielded, stumbling, as Lonniger pushed his way through. Lance winked at Bert, who loosened his grip. The little man tore free, darted through the crowd and raced away, followed by a howl of laughter.

"Hello, Jim," Lonniger muttered. "Stick around for the wagon, huh? That used to be Spick Shaw. Looks like it was him that burned down Clancy to-night. I got him, but his

own pal finished him—from a dark-blue, four-door Plymrolet. No rear license plate. Watch out for it. Come on, Lance.”

Back in the roadster, Lance honked slowly through the crowd. “Your place, and a phone,” directed Lonninger.

Lance had a small apartment near the *Gazette*. Two shots of rye apiece, and Lance got out of his wet clothes. Meanwhile, Lonninger called the Solner home. He got the son. The old man was in bed. It was after midnight now.

Lonninger finished and hung up. Lance was under a hot shower. The lieutenant made a full telephone report to headquarters and asked for a second alarm on the dark-blue car, with or without license plates. Also on the Farjeans.

When Lance came out in a dressing gown, he made for the phone and called the city desk again. Weston was mild as milk at first, taking the news of the Shaw killing himself before turning it over to a rewrite man. Then suddenly he had doubts. “Say, this is too much for one night!” he bellowed. “If you’re stringin’ me because I fired you—”

“Believe it or not!” snarled Lance. “I’m a reporter! Did I ever— Aw, rats!” He hung up with a crash.

“You and Weston play together nice,” said Lonninger.

Lance scowled. “What did you get from Solner?”

“I asked young Solner who paid the rent. He said the Farjeans usually came round for it and the old man’s secretary paid them. The Farjeans know your girl at least.

“Then I got through to poppa. He says the Farjeans inspected the building three days ago, just before they went camping. Those perfume

shipments were in plain sight—and almost ready. The Farjeans could have seen them.

“I told the Solners to keep quiet. I sent out another alarm on that car, and also to pick up either or both of the Farjeans for questioning if they’re in town.”

“We’ve got to *do* something, Mike,” Lance insisted harshly. “I’ll bet they phoned Susan Wallace to give herself up, and her sister would be released. I’ll bet she fell for it—and now they’ve got both girls.”

Lonninger drew a photograph from his pocket and held it out. “I got this when Mrs. Dipwillow wasn’t looking. One of ’em your sweet Susan?”

Lance made a grab. It showed two girls with their heads together. One was Susan; the other, and younger, was a cute brunette with mischievous eyes and a pointed chin.

“Yeah,” he said. “Guess the younger is Betty. It might help if we had more time. Heaven knows what’s happening to those two right now. They wouldn’t bring much ransom.”

Lonninger took back the photograph. “I’ll show this to the next shift of cops, and as many prowl cars as possible. I’ll wire for the Feds. That’s about all we can do to-night. First thing in the morning, I’ll get a line on all the Farjean properties. Even that’s only a guess. I’ll telephone Winonka, too. Meantime, you get some sleep.”

Lance was pacing up and down, racking his brains. He couldn’t get Susan’s lovely, pleading eyes out of his mind. He had fallen hard for her, almost at first sight. Imagination pictured her being tormented, facing death, as he strode helplessly back and forth.

“Look, Mike,” he said roughly.

"Spick Shaw told Clancy that I set the fire. Clancy described him. He gave his address as the Railroad Hotel. Did he live there? Or did he think of it because that stolen perfume is down at the freight yards? The Farjeans might ship it to themselves, to their camp, maybe, until this blows over. It's another wild guess, but—any port in a storm."

"I'll look into it when I leave here," Lonniger said, "but I don't know how it'll help us find the girls. Frankly, Lance, I'm afraid they're out of the picture. They're too dangerous now, alive."

"They can't be!" groaned Lance. "Twice now, Spick or one of the Farjeans has tried to burn me down. They want me badly for some reason. With both girls alive they might plan a trap for me—make Susan play bait by threatening to harm her sister. Maybe they'll wait till morning. I'm going to walk the streets alone to-morrow on the chance——"

"Without a gun? You're screwy," said Lonniger.

"Just let me find out who he is," muttered Lance, "and you can have your gun. The hell of it is I must know him, must have seen him—the other guy with Spick—or they wouldn't be so damned anxious to get me. I must have seen one of the Farjeans at the fire! That's it! He's afraid I'll recognize him again, when he was supposed to be out of town. Maybe that's it."

"Maybe is," said Lonniger uncomfortably.

"Yeah," Lance snapped, "and maybe the Farjeans are at home in town. Or maybe, if we burgled the place, we'd find a list of their properties. Let's *do* something!"

"Let's run in circles," Lonniger frowned.

Lance grabbed up the telephone book and rifled through it. "Here we are:

"George Farjean, 889 Primrose.

"Primrose, hell!

"Maurice Farjean, 889 Primrose.

"Let's go!"

"Hold it," said Lonniger. "What's their number?"

Lance told him. Lonniger dialed it. The phone rang and rang persistently. Then a women's sleepy voice answered:

"Hello? Who is it? In Heaven's name, what's the matter? Is it you, Mr. George?"

Lonniger said it was a friend. He asked if George or Maurice Farjean had been in town that day.

"In town?" she echoed. "Certainly not. Only this noon Mr. George called from Winonka to have things sent him."

"What things?" persisted Lonniger.

"Underwear and flies. Not house flies—nasty bits of feathers with points in 'em. Who is this?"

"A business friend," said Lonniger. "I'm anxious to get hold of a list of their properties for a customer."

"At this time of night? There's nothing like that here, sir. The idea of getting a body out of bed for a——"

"All right, this is the police, understand? If you don't want us out there to-night, answer my questions. What small houses do the Farjeans own in town?"

"I don't know, sir. A good many, I believe."

"Know the name and phone number of their secretary?"

"Yes, sir. Just a minute."

Lonniger noted the name and num-

ber, hung up, and repeated the conversation to Lance.

"Twenty miles, and they send for stuff? Sounds like an alibi build-up, fishy as the flies. Try the girl."

Lonniger roused a cross, sleepy girl and learned that the Farjeans owned or handled about twenty houses. He could have the list in the morning. *Bang!*

"That's all we can do to-night," Lonniger said. "If we had the list, I couldn't rouse twenty families this time of night. Get some sleep, Lance. I'll call you if anything develops." He picked up his hat and departed.

Lance called the *Gazette*, but there was no news.

He was in bed when the phone rang. It was Lonniger.

"Found the stuff, Lance. Two cases consigned to White & White, Buffalo, to be called for. Marked 'Glass.' Sender's name: Lonsdale. Agent doesn't remember his face. Can't describe him. Nothing else yet. Night, pal."

Lance hung up with a groan, and lay staring into the darkness. Susan had laid hold of him, body and soul.

IX.

THOROUGHLY worn and tired, Lance slid from visions that made him writhe, into nightmares, without being aware of it.

The phone woke him, at eight thirty. He hopped out of bed, still foggy with sleep. It was Lonniger again.

"Lance? 'Lo, guy. Nothing new, but I'll have the list before nine. Hope to get Winonka soon after nine. I can have six men, but it'll take time with all those houses, even if they work alone. If it wasn't just a guess I might get a few more. What's your program?"

"Dress and shave and walk the streets," said Lance grimly. "If you know of a better plan, let's go to it!"

"I don't know any," said Lonniger, "but stick at home until nine, Lance." He hung up rather abruptly.

Lance shaved and dressed, making coffee and toast as he went along. Just before nine he was ready to leave.

Exactly at nine the phone rang, but it wasn't Lonniger. Though shaken and faint with tears, it was Susan's voice, and he knew it at once.

"Mr. Davis," she faltered, "can you be at Eighth and W-Wilmer in five minutes? Don't call any one or—bring any one else. Ju—just be there."

"Susan," he whispered, "where are you? East of the town hall cough once; north, twice; west, three times; south——" He broke off. The receiver had clicked softly.

Lance grabbed his hat, made sure of his automatic, and raced downstairs. Being subject to calls, he was allowed to park his car in front all night. It started at once. To Eighth and Wilmer would take two minutes. He paused long enough to cock the automatic and put on the safety catch. Then he stepped on the gas, exultant and hopeful. She was alive. She could not help acting as bait.

He parked facing the corner and walked on, hands in his side pockets. A taxi wheeled into sight, approaching him smoothly. Behind the meager width of a lamp-post, he waited. The cab drew almost level.

Instead of a shot, he saw Susan through the closed window. She was leaning forward, her face screwed up with pain. Their eyes met for an instant. She shook her head. As she vanished, he heard a faint scream.

Lance raced back to his car, but

there was no use to hurry. When he swung in pursuit, the taxi was bowling along at thirty miles an hour or so. He could see nothing through its rear window which was small and high.

The chase led westward into the suburbs. At last the taxi veered into a little street marked: "No thoroughfare." Slowing down as he passed, Lance saw where the taxi stopped. The street was very short, ending at the bluff above the river. It looked like a handy place to dispose of a weighted body.

Driving on a few yards, Lance parked, and strolled back. The taxi passed him, departing. The driver did not look his way. There was nothing unusual about the taxi. He wrote the license number in his notebook and strolled into the little street. It was quite deserted.

Four small frame houses, widely spaced, made up the development. The taxi had stopped in front of the last house on the right. Approaching it, Lance saw that the door stood ajar. He saw something else. On the sidewalk lay a tiny ball of a handkerchief. Stooping swiftly, he caught it up and sauntered on to the bluff. There he opened it.

One word had been shakily printed with lipstick on the linen.

TRAP!

The letters were small. Under them was the rosy print of a mouth, with two little darker spots of blood that were not quite opposite.

She had reopened those tiny wounds to convince him the warning was genuine—or was that why she had chosen that form of signature? On impulse he kissed the print and thrust the filmy handkerchief into his pocket. Then he sauntered back to that inviting door.

A casual glance at the windows told him nothing. To enter cautiously would be suicide.

Suddenly he bounded up the steps, crashed the door open, and flung himself sideways. There was a startled curse and a thump as somebody hit the wall. Given the advantage of surprise, Lance wheeled to use it, but coming from sunlight into a dusky hall, he could not see clearly at once. During that fraction of a second the tall figure of a man rebounded from the wall and was on him. Lance struck and tried to dodge. Something crashed on his head, a glancing blow that left him dazed but half conscious. One of his arms was seized and twisted behind him, brutally. Sick with pain, he mounted the stairs because he had to. A tremendous push hurled him into a room. He stumbled, and fell on his face.

Lithe as a cat, he rolled and sprang up again. The door banged. A man leaned against it, covering him with a revolver. Above the gun a handsome face smiled at him—handsome at first sight. The lips were too thick, the dark eyes a little too close set. His memory clicked. Again he was stumbling across the street through the spray, with Susan in his arms. Then the flashlight. This man had been standing close at his side when that picture was taken.

Lance turned his head. Susan lay sprawled in a corner, wrists bound, mouth taped, blue eyes despairing.

The man spoke. "So the little reporter got nose once too often, kiddies—and that was that."

"Put away that gun," snarled Lance.

"Presently, sweetheart. You'll have your fun in a minute," the man jeered. "But first we'll tell all to the press. This house belongs to

the Farjeans. It's going up in smoke and you with it. Neat, eh?"

"Solner!" rapped Lance.

"You've hit it, sweetheart. Dear poppa told you I'd gone to the show. If you saw me and saw that flashlight, where was my alibi? If you learned who I was. Get it?"

"Put away that gun, you louse."

"Why, sure. Come and take it, Nosey!"

The gun disappeared. Lance sprang. Quick as he was, he ran into a left-right-left-right that knocked him flat. Solner's mouth was bleeding, his smile gone, but he waited coolly. Twenty pounds or so heavier, he was an expert boxer, able to handle two such as Lance; and Lance knew it.

He got up slowly, shook his head to clear it, sprang in through a red mist of rage. It was no use covering up. He left himself wide open, counting on speed. It helped. Teeth splintered under his knuckles. He buried one fist in a yielding stomach, but the end was the same. A blow like the kick of a mule missed the point of his jaw, but knocked him flat. He rolled an instant and collapsed with his eyes half shut.

Solner touched his mouth, blew on his knuckles and went out. Lance heard the door locked, heard the pound of swift feet down the stairs, and turned his head. The girl lay with her eyes closed, shuddering intermittently.

Lance struggled upright and wove toward the corner. He rolled Susan on her face and ripped the tape from her wrists. She tried to look back at him, making inarticulate sounds.

"Lie as you were," he whispered. "Don't let him know your wrists are free."

A noise on the stairs sent Lance back to his place, as Solner had left him. Only this time the heavy auto-

matic was in his hand, the catch off, his hand and the gun half under his body. The key turned, and the door banged open.

Solner was red and perspiring now as he made for Susan. "She's off," he panted. "I could have burned you last time, kid, but I gave you the chance to suffocate. I won't burn you now. Get ready. I can't help this." He drew his gun.

"Hold it or take it!" yelled Lance.

Solner turned his head, saw the automatic, wheeled and fired. A heavy bullet ripped through his thigh and his shot went wild. He did not fall, though the flesh wound had staggered him. He jumped at Lance clumsily, his gun chopping down. Lance shot him twice in the stomach.

As Solner crashed, there came a voice from the doorway. "Aw, hell," sighed Lonninger. "Late again. I trailed you all the way, but couldn't find the house. Come on!"

With the tape removed and her pretty lips bleeding again, it was Susan who helped Lance out of a burning building this time, her blue eyes adoring him when he looked away. He caught sight of them once.

"Where's Betty?" rapped Lonninger, wheeling.

"All right," Susan gasped. "He phoned her and said it was a telegram that mother was dying. I didn't know that until we got back just now. Before, he said he had her locked up and he'd kill her unless I called poor Mr. Davis. I tried to warn you," she added, not looking at Lance.

"You did," said Lance huskily. "Why were you left up there on the fifth floor?"

"I went back for a dress I'd bought at lunch time. My office is on the third floor. I heard a tinkle of glass

from the fourth. It stopped when I switched the lights on. I turned them off. There was no light up there. I thought it might be a cat knocking bottles over. I ran up and put on the lights. They jumped on me, Mr. Solner and another man. They'd been putting bottles in two cases and breaking a lot of empty bottles. They said I knew too much and—and they were going to—"

"All right," whispered Lance. "Forget it, dear."

Lonniger came back from the nearest fire box with a shrug. The house was blazing already. They crowded into the roadster, and Lance drove Susan home. The pretty young girl of the photograph opened the door and hugged Susan.

"Darling!" she cried. "Where have you *been*? Oh, the strangest thing happened."

"We know all about that," Lonniger growled. "Your sister's had a tough time. We'll take her upstairs."

They did. In the room, Lonniger flashed his badge, and took

Betty's hand. "You come with me!" He scowled.

The youngster looked frightened, until she noticed Lonniger's twitching lips. Then she sniffed and looked at Lance. Her pert little face grew mildly approving.

"All right," she sighed. "My, but you're handsome!"

Lonniger spanked her out the door, embarrassed for once in his life. But he closed the door.

Lance took hold of Susan and kissed her thoroughly. She relaxed for an instant, and shut her eyes. Then she gasped and pushed against his chest, both pretty cheeks burning.

"Please! I've only j-just met you!"

Lance drew her close and kissed her more thoroughly.

"We both know it!" he whispered unsteadily. "So what's the good of pretending we don't?"

Susan hid her face on his shoulder and began to cry.

"It's just b-because I'm happy," she confided.

CELL BLOCK IN SING SING CRITICIZED

CONDEMNED again and again by inspectors of the commission of correction, the old cell block at Sing Sing is still in use, though the roof leaks so badly that water pours in in a steady stream during every rainstorm. Some of the top-tier cells leak so badly that it is necessary to remove the occupants to the old jail cell adjacent to the principal keeper's office when it rains.

In August of this year there were two thousand six hundred and one prisoners confined in Sing Sing, the largest number in the history of the prison. It receives more than seventy per cent of all males committed to State prisons from the courts, and it is necessary to constantly transfer old prisoners to other institutions to make way for newcomers.

Lately it has become increasingly difficult to effect transfers as all the State prisons are operating at capacity.

New arrivals at Sing Sing are always housed in the old cell block until they can be moved to cells in the new prison as they are vacated. At the present time this means waiting for from six to nine months.

The MARCH

DELINQUENCY IN JUVENILES: A survey made by Professor Lowell Julliard Carr, of the University of Michigan, discloses the astounding fact that in that State there are twenty-seven thousand children ranging in age from five to seventeen who are potential problems and require immediate constructive training. It is estimated that from two to nine per cent of the school population is delinquent.

FREEDOM VERSUS LAWLESSNESS: Those countries which allow women the most freedom also show the greatest percentage of women criminals. Whether this is because the majority of women are not capable of governing themselves, or because those countries which restrict women do not happen to afford opportunity to commit crime has not been determined.

SHOULD PRISONERS WORK? That is a question that has long agitated society. Leading criminologists believe that work is the most efficacious discipline possible. Denied it, men in prison would be forced to invent occupations. It has been truly said that the devil finds work for idle hands. Moreover, prisons cost money. The taxes of the law-abiding must pay for them. Is it not more logical that the prisoners be at least partially self-sustaining and thus ease the burden of free citizens?

ANATION OF CRIMINALS? It would seem that we are if the figures concerning the fingerprint file in the Federal Bureau of Investigation as recently published in the newspapers are correct. In the master criminal file at Washington are seven million five hundred thousand five hundred sets of fingerprints. Using as a basis of computation the average family of five, this means that more than one person out of every fifth family is a criminal. An appalling, yes, terrifying situation.

NOTHING IS SAFE FROM THIEVES: Detectives on special duty at Mount Carmel Cemetery, Queens, Long Island, New York, who investigated a strange hammering within the cemetery at night found an old man chiseling bronze letters from mausoleums. He had eleven bronze letters and a screw driver in his possession. Strangely enough all the letters were consonants.

DID YOU KNOW: That nine per cent of American crimes are committed by nonrecidivists? These are accidental offenders, most of them lacking the characteristics of the habitual criminal. Through some unforeseen circumstance they run into conflict with the law; a circumstance which, unfortunately, they have insufficient experience in and lack the proper training to cope with it.

of CRIME

FOR YOUR COLLECTION OF LAW ODDITIES: Before a woman can divorce her husband on the grounds of drunkenness in New Hampshire, he must have been continuously drunk for three months.

TOURISTS ROBBED: American tourists in Paris this past summer were robbed of jewels valued at more than one hundred and fifty thousand dollars. The police say the robberies of hotel rooms, in particular, were, without doubt, the work of a well-organized band of criminals.

ADD TO YOUR CRIME DICTIONARY: Badger game—A swindle in which the victim is placed in an embarrassing position with another man's wife and then blackmailed.

BOOTLEGGING STILL GOES ON: According to Federal tax officials bootlegging did not go out with prohibition. The alcohol-tax unit of the internal revenue department confiscates five hundred thousand gallons of illegal liquor yearly. On an average of from two hundred and fifty to three hundred illicit stills are seized regularly every week, though they are smaller in size. This latter fact encourages the department in the belief that less bootleg liquor is being produced than formerly.

FLEES WITH ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLLARS: Long Island's phantom burglar, who for so long has been successfully helping himself to other people's valuables, walked into the arms of the police in the office of the Polish steamship line. The "phantom" was about to purchase a ticket for his native land, where he planned to retire and live the life of a gentleman on the one-hundred-thousand-dollar proceeds of burglaries covering a seven-year period.

G-MAN COURSE SHOWS EXCELLENT RECORDS: Almost every day Director J. Edgar Hoover receives new proofs of the value of the classes in crime detection sponsored by the department of justice. Many baffling cases have been cracked by graduates of the F. B. I. and most promotions of police officers are the result of training in these classes.

STOLEN GOODS FINGER-PRINTED: The Federal Bureau of Identification has established an index of stolen property information. The file was started a year ago and now contains descriptions of more than sixty thousand valuables figuring in thefts and burglaries. Assistant Director E. A. Tamm says that manufacturers all over the country are cooperating with the bureau's request to mark all valuable articles ranging from gems and goblets to firearms and furs with a secret imprint of identification.



*"Keep away from me,"
Tham howled.*

THUBWAY THAM BUYS BUTTONS

By Johnston McCulley

Author of "Thubway Tham—Model."

THOUGH he seldom mentioned it, especially around his usual haunts, "Thubway Tham" had a certain amount of affection for the cinema. He reveled in the deeds of manly heroes, got a

thrill from stories of adventure translated to the silver screen, and even enjoyed the news reels. The love sequences in photoplays left him cold, but he endured them in order to see the rest.

"Thome people like to thee him grab her in hith armth at the end, tho what?" Tham said. "By that time, the betht part of the picthure ith over, and I can be thneakin' up the aisle and get out ahead of the crowd."

Tham liked comedy and comedians. A good comedy made him forget his cares. He watched the cinema advertisements in the papers, and whenever an ace comedian came out with a new picture Tham went to see it.

So, upon this certain evening, Thubway Tham left the lodging house of "Nosey" Moore, walked to the subway, and journeyed uptown. This was to be a rare evening of entertainment. At a noted cinema theater would be the first showing of a new film featuring Bruce Beloit, the pint-sized famous mimic. And Bruce Beloit, in person, would attend the performance.

Tham had read about it in the paper. The article had pointed out that Bruce Beloit was a comedian at all times, off stage and screen as well as on. When he had to make a personal appearance, it was his habit to disguise himself and sneak into the theater to dodge hero worshipers, adoring young ladies and autograph hunters.

Bruce Beloit got a wage of five thousand dollars each Wednesday morning, according to report. He lived in a palace in Hollywood and had a Rolls Royce especially for his butler to use to haul home the fresh vegetables. But, on preview nights, he was liable to dress as a working man and stand in the crowd waiting to catch sight of him, chuckling at the jest of it.

A clever press agent in this manner keyed the public to catching Bruce Beloit as he entered the theater. So, long before the box office

opened that evening, the street and walk in front of the cinema palace was jammed, and the lobby was a congested mass of uncomfortable humanity. A police detail had been assigned to keep order and keep a lane clear to the box office, and some detectives and plain-clothes men sent to mingle with the crowd, after the usual manner.

Detective Craddock, much to his disgust, received one of these assignments. If there was one thing Craddock detested, it was a crowd. It was his duty to preserve the peace, aid in case of accident, and watch for pickpockets. He was elbowed and jostled and shoved around until he was on the verge of profanity.

"What a chance for a dip," Craddock growled. "A man could steal the false teeth of some of these maniacs and they'd never know it. Who is this Bruce Beloit that he rates all this attention?"

Bruce Beloit, in real life, was an insignificant-looking man who would have passed unnoticed in a group of three. Only when he began his comic antics in front of camera and microphone was he a different man. That blank look in his face, that funny little squeak in his voice, his peculiar mannerisms brought gales of laughter from people eager to laugh their troubles and sorrows away.

Wafted to fortune on the basis of a squint and a squeak, and that suddenly, Bruce Beloit betrayed certain reprehensible traits of character. He was vain, an egotist, unkind, selfish. But those things were known only to his coworkers and close Hollywood associates. Press agents carefully kept them from the hero-worshipping public.

Thubway Tham knew nothing of this, nor did he care. It was the new

film in which he was interested. It would be interesting to see a great star in the flesh—it happened Tham never had seen one—but he was not particularly worked up about it.

Tham left the subway uptown and walked toward the theater. Sight of the crowd appalled him. But he saw that the police were keeping a lane open to the box office and through the lobby to the entrance. So he got in line, almost a block from the ticket window, and began the slow approach.

The crowd jammed on either side of the moving line, keeping up a din of chatter. Eager women, girls with autograph books in their hands, with pens held ready, grinning men and screeching boys were fought back continually by the police.

Thubway Tham felt a touch on his arm, and jerked his head around to find Detective Craddock grinning at him.

"I'd rather see you in line like that, than out here in the thick of the crowd," Craddock said.

"I fail to grathp your meanin'," Tham said. "And what are you doin' here, if I may athk?"

"On duty, Tham. Don't think I'm mixing in this mob of cattle just to catch sight of an ape like Bruce Beloit. We may have to protect him from females who want to kiss him to death."

"He ith a comedian, not a great lover," Tham pointed out, with something like scorn for Craddock's inefficient knowledge of the cinema and its people.

"He's a star, and that's enough for the mob. Going in to see the show?"

"Yeth. I alwayth thee Bruthe Beloit'th filmth," Tham confessed. "He ith thure funny."

"Like to take a squint at it myself, but I'm stuck out here," Craddock

said. "Well, watch your fingers, Tham."

"Thir?"

"You heard me—and understood."

Thubway Tham drew himself up with a show of dignity. "I am here to see a picture," he stated. "Pleathe underthand that I never mix buthineth with pleathure. None of uth big, thuccethful buthineth men do. Learn how to take your fun, Craddock, apart from the daily grind. When you leave your dethk, leave your buthineth on it."

"Yes, yes," Craddock said, peevishly.

"Learn to relaxth mentally——"

"You've been reading a book," Craddock accused, and turned quickly to thrust back a sudden surge of humanity.

The line moved on slowly. Thubway Tham fumbled in a vest pocket and got out a bill, for he was nearing the box office. Here, a double line of theater employees and policemen protected the ticket buyers.

Tham put down his bill, got a ticket and change, and moved on. He stopped a moment to button his coat, and it happened that he was in a small cleared space for an instant. He started to move on briskly toward the entrance.

"There he is!" some woman screeched. "I knew him right away. Oh, you Bruce Beloit! Autograph! Autograph! I saw him first."

Unconsciously, in buttoning his coat and squaring his shoulders, Thubway Tham had copied one of Bruce Beloit's mannerisms. A woman overeager to identify the star had decided Tham was the cinema celebrity. She squealed and hurled herself at Tham, clutching his left arm, shoving autograph book in front of his face.

Like sheep following a leader, others surged forward. They did

not question the identification. And it was not a thing absurd. Tham was about the size the public knew Bruce Beloit to be and had the same general appearance. As to the face, Bruce Beloit worked behind a mask of comic make-up, and the face the public saw on the screen was not his own. Instantly, that mob in the theater lobby assumed that Tham was Bruce Beloit.

Women squealed and fought to get at him. Small boys tugged and pulled at him. Autograph books, pens, and pencils were thrust toward him.

"What ith thith?" What ith thith?" Tham stammered.

He would have retreated, but retreat was denied him. He was the center of a maelstrom. Somebody knocked the cap from his head, and a squealing souvenir hunter pounced upon it. Others grasped it, and the cap was ripped and torn beyond repair, and the successful ones made off with the fragments.

Those behind crowded forward and hemmed Tham in more. He felt a tug, and knew somebody had torn a button off his coat. Another tug, another button. He felt moist lips on the back of his neck.

"I kissed him! I kissed him!" some girl squealed.

"What ith thith?" Tham cried, wildly, trying to thrust aside those nearest him.

They were tearing the clothes off him. Somebody got a handful of his hair and jerked, and Tham gave a howl of pain and tears came into his eyes.

"Help! Help!" he howled.

His howls were drowned in the din. The lobby crowd was rolling in upon him, smothering him. Policemen were fighting to get to the core of the disturbance. Craddock advanced with the others. From

the general remarks they heard, the police gathered that the women in the lobby had caught Bruce Beloit and might do him an injury.

Getting in closer, Craddock saw that the center of the disturbance was Thubway Tham. It flashed upon Craddock that Tham had tried to purloin a wallet and had been caught in the act, and was being badly treated by those around him.

"Gangway!" Craddock barked. "I'm an officer! Gangway!"

Some woman elbowed his stomach and the breath went out of him. Craddock doubled up a moment, then returned to the attack. The surge of the crowd had carried Tham to the wall of the lobby, and there he was cornered.

He had not grasped the significance of the situation yet. He thought he was being attacked for some reason.

"I ain't done nothin'!" he protested. "What ith the matter with you folkth? What ith thith?"

"Isn't he cute?" some woman said. "He's acting for us."

"Pleathe let me get inthide," Tham begged.

"Listen to his funny talk!" another woman cried.

"What ith tho funny about it?" Tham cried, angrily. "You look funny yourthelf. Get away from me!"

He shrieked the last words, for a woman was trying to kiss him. And Tham had no use for "thkirth," as he called them. No "jane" or "frail" or "wren" appealed to him. He was timid around women. And here were scores of them trying to kiss him, and stealing buttons off his coat and vest, and trying to tear out locks of his hair.

"Help! Help!" he howled again. "Polithe!"

He, Thubway Tham, calling for the cops!

He remembered he had spoken to Craddock a short time before. Craddock must be somewhere near. Tham howled again:

"Craddock! Craddock! Help!"

Craddock did not understand the words. He caught sight of Tham's face, a picture of fright. He assumed that Tham, contrary to his usual methods, had risked grabbing some woman's hand bag, and had been cornered by a bevy of outraged femininity.

"What's the trouble?" somebody cried.

"They've caught Bruce Beloit!" another answered. "They're after autographs and souvenirs."

Then, Craddock understood. In the center of that mêlée he stopped abruptly and howled his laughter, tears ran down his cheeks. Thubway Tham mistaken for a movie star! Tham pursued by women who tried to shower kisses upon him!

Tham understood at that moment, too.

"Thay!" he howled. "I am not Bruthe Beloit! You are makin' a mithtake."

"Oh, we know you!" some girl cried, and tried to score a kiss.

"Keep away from me!" Tham howled. "I am not Bruthe Beloit. You kith me again and I'll clout you one. Help!"

Apprised by the tumult and shouting that Bruce Beloit was cornered in the lobby, the worried theater manager summoned some of his employees and charged to the rescue. The police had brushed aside some of the enthusiasts, but had not yet reached Tham, who cowered against the wall, his arms wrapped around his head.

There was another surge of the crowd upon Tham as he tried to move

along the wall and get inside the theater. He felt another button torn off. Once more, fingers tweaked at his hair.

"Help!" he barked. "Polithe! I ain't done nothin'!"

There came a sudden rush of men, many of them in uniform, some of the police and some of the theater. They surrounded Tham, who kept his head covered with his arms, and helped him toward the door of the manager's office, forcing back the crowd. A flashlight bulb glared as some enterprising newspaper photographer got in his work.

The women were thrust back finally. Panting, disheveled, his garments ruined, his hair on end, scratches on his face, Tham was thrust into the haven of the office, and the door quickly closed and locked behind him.

Gasping for breath, he dropped into a chair. He lifted his head. An oily-looking man standing near let out a howl:

"He's not Bruce!"

He was the studio press agent handling Bruce Beloit's personal appearance tour.

"Not Bruce Beloit?" the theater manager cried.

"I thertainly am not," Tham said. "What ith thith? I come to the theater and buy a ticket for the thow, try to get inthide, and a lot of women gang up on me!"

"Calm yourself, sir," the theater manager begged. Visions of a damage suit gave him fear.

"Why thould I calm mythelf? It ith an outrage," Tham declared. "It ith not to be endured."

The manager waved some of his employees out of the room, and through the door came Craddock. Tham caught sight of him.

"Craddock!" he cried. "You know me, Craddock! Thethe thilly

atheth think I am Bruthe Beloit—I mean the thimpth in the lobby did. Look at me, Craddock. My clotheth are——”

Craddock looked, and grinned. “Tham, the ladies certainly take to you,” he said.

“It ith an outrage. I bought a ticket, and I’ve got it yet. A fine thing when a man cannot be protected in a theater when he hath bought a ticket! A fine thing——”

The manager whispered quickly to Craddock: “You know him, officer.”

“Known him for a long time,” Craddock replied.

“And is he—ah—of consequence?”

“He’s the best in his line,” Craddock said, grinning again. “A quiet, modest, retiring little chap, but powerful in his way.”

“This is terrible,” the manager moaned.

“If you’re wondering whether he is in a position to cause you trouble about this,” Craddock whispered to the manager, “I’ll say this much—if I were you, I’d have this settled with him before he leaves this office. I’d be as liberal as I had to be, too. If he ever gets to his lawyers——”

“Yes, yes,” the manager moaned. He turned toward the others. “Gentlemen, please leave us,” he begged. “I—I wish to see this man alone. He has been terribly treated.”

He drove them forth, all except Tham, Bruce Beloit’s agent, and the theater treasurer. Tham was trying to repair his disarranged attire.

“My dear sir, I regret exceedingly ——” the manager began.

But the door burst open and into the office spilled half a dozen men. Newspapermen! This was too hot to be passed up; an unknown taken to be Bruce Beloit and mobbed by admiring women in a theater lobby, causing a riot.

Tham sprang up in alarm and cowered against the wall as they rushed upon him. More flash-light bulbs flared. Questions were hurled at him:

“What’s your name and address? How did it feel? Goin’ to try for a movie contract? Know any of the girls who kissed you?”

“Thtop it!” Tham howled. “Keep away from me! Let me out of here!”

That was what the theater manager did not want to do. Running the risk of offending the press and putting a professional curse on his show shop forever, he battled to eject the reporters and camera men.

This time, he locked the door.

“Now, my dear sir, sit down and calm yourself,” he began.

“If you thay that to me again, I—I’ll throw thingth,” Tham howled, as he dropped into a chair. “A fine thing! I come to the theater and I——”

“Yes, yes. I’m dreadfully sorry,” the manager said. “The silly women! They’re rabid movie fans, and their enthusiasm carried them away.”

“My clotheth! All the buttonth off my coat and vetht! They pulled my hair!”

“We want to do the right thing,” the manager purred. “We will reimburse you for your damaged clothing, of course.”

“Here, take a drink,” the more practical press agent said, offering a small glass he had filled from a flask. “This’ll set you up. It’s the same kind Bruce Beloit drinks.”

Tham gulped the drink.

“Only Bruce drinks it by the gallon,” the agent continued, grinning. “There! Feel better? Now, let’s all be calm.”

“Don’t thay it!” Tham howled. “Let me get my breath. Let me

reth a thecond. Now, I can't thee the thow."

"You'll have the best seat in the loges if I have to throw out somebody else," the manager promised.

"And maybe have them women grab me again?" Tham wailed. "I never heard of thuch a thing! I never——"

Somebody knuckled the door. The press agent unlocked it, opened it a foot, and stepped back.

"Bruce!" he cried. "Get in here!"

Bruce Beloit slipped into the office and the door was closed and locked behind him quickly.

"Walked right through the crowd and came in while all the fuss was going on," the cinema star said. "Not a soul recognized me. What a laugh this is! What publicity, eh? Almost tore the clothes off him, I hear. Is this the poor sap they took to be me?"

"Who ith a thap?" Tham howled, belligerently.

"Bruce was only having a joke," the manager purred. "He wasn't really calling you a sap, my friend. He was laughing at how those people in the lobby were fooled."

"Do I look anything like him?" Bruce Beloit asked, standing in front of Tham with his fists braced against his hips and inspecting him well. "If I do, Heaven help me!"

"Thay——" Tham began.

"Careful, Bruce! Damage suit," the agent whispered.

"Damage suit? Don't make me laugh! I'm the one ought to file a damage suit. This oaf trying to pass himself off as me! Imagine!"

"Who wath tryin' to path him-thelf off ath you?" Tham snarled. "I'd rather try to path mythelf off ath an ape in the thoo. Always the comedian, huh?"

"Please," the manager purred.

"What are you kicking about?"

the star demanded of Tham. "You were mistaken for Bruce Beloit! The thrill of a lifetime! You'll have your picture in the papers. Mistaken for Bruce Beloit! You don't know an honor when it's thrust down your throat."

"Don't say the wrong thing, Bruce," his agent begged. "Please!"

"Why, you poor mithguided thon of thin!" Thubway Tham howled at the star. "Who do you think you are? Let me tell you thomethin'. You were alwayth one of my pet comedianth. But now, I think you're a dirty dog! Get me? A dirty dog! And I'll tell the newthpaper boyth plenty! I'll tell'm jutht how you talk and act, you thtuck up thpeci-men of a he-goat. Let me out of here! I'm goin' to thtart thome-thin'."

"Please—please," the theater manager begged. "Mr. Beloit, really! This poor gentleman has been subjected to indignities. He came here and purchased a ticket to see you and this last film you've made. He was attacked in the lobby of my theater. His clothes were almost torn off him. It was no fault of the theater, yet in a measure we are responsible, and I intend to do the right thing."

"You're a sap," Bruce Beloit told him.

"And I don't care for your insults," the theater manager snapped.

"Get ugly with me, and I'll see that you never play another film of mine," the star growled.

"We'd manage to struggle along without them. The last two haven't been so hot."

"What's that?" Bruce Beloit roared. "Why, you—— Jim!" he barked at the agent. "It's all off! I'll not make a personal appearance in this theater to-night!"

"Now, Bruce——"

"Or at any other time. Let this sap of a manager go on the stage and tell that to this big audience that's waiting to see me—me! Let him pay their money back. Let him——"

"Your contract——" the agent hinted.

"Tear it up! Let the theater sue. The studio can pay the bill if it loses. I'll not make an appearance here!"

"You'll make it, or I'll break you in two!" the manager threatened. "I'll bust your beak, no matter what it costs me. I've run across movie stars before. But for being a cussed fool, an egotistical rat, you take the blue ribbon!"

"Gentlemen," the agent begged.

"Let me get out of here," Tham wailed. "I think all of you are threwey."

"Wait—please wait," the manager gulped. "Everybody keep still now. Sir, I regret this occurrence, and I want to do the right thing. How much money, as a salve, let us say, to your injured dignity——"

"I want to get out of here!"

"It isn't necessary for you to consult your lawyers. We can settle this as man to man. We're both fair. We're both gentlemen, I'm sure—though some are not." He glared at Bruce Beloit.

"Oh, well——" Tham said.

"I know how you feel, sir. Just as a friendly gesture, say, let me reimburse you for—— George!" he howled at the treasurer, "bring me some money."

"How much?" the treasurer asked.

"How much?" the manager asked Tham. "We want to do the right thing."

"Oh, well——"

"A couple of hundred, say?" the manager urged.

"Don't be a sap!" Bruce Beloit howled again. "Give him fifty for

a new suit. That one he's wearing didn't cost more than thirty."

"You keep out of this," the manager howled.

"Well," the star said, listening to the frantic whispering of his agent, "I—maybe I've been too hot about this. But my nerves—my temperament, you understand. You settle with him for the theater, and I'll settle with him for his clothes."

The treasurer had darted to the safe, and was back with a roll of bills.

"Two hundred, boss," he said.

"Ah, here we are," the manager purred. "Two hundred, sir. And just sign this release from all claims on us, please. It is better to settle little annoyances like this in a nice way, don't you think?"

Scarcely knowing what he did, Tham signed the release and stuffed the two hundred into a vest pocket.

"It ith all right with me, ath far ath the theater ith contherned," Tham said. "Thith hath alwayh been one of my pet theaterth."

"I'll give you an annual pass, sir. George, make out an annual pass for the gentleman immediately."

"O. K., boss!" the treasurer said. "Anything else."

"Give him the theater!" Bruce Beloit growled. He went up to Tham again. "My man, in a way I suppose I'm responsible for this also. If I wasn't so famous and admired, it'd never have happened to you. I want to do my share. Your suit is ruined, and you have lost your hat——"

"It wath a cap," Tham cut in.

"The theater has paid for the dents in your dignity, and I'll pay for your clothes."

Bruce Beloit took from the inside pocket of his coat a fine wallet bulging with crisp new banknotes. He extracted a fifty-dollar bill and

handed it to Tham. He thrust the wallet back into his pocket.

Tham accepted the bill, glaring at the star, and put it in his pocket with the other money. He started toward the door.

"A profitable evening for you," Bruce Beloit said. "It wouldn't surprise me a bit if the whole thing was a trick. Maybe some pals of yours started that mob in the lobby. It could be done easily enough."

"What ith that?" Tham cried, whirling upon him. "The more I thee of you and the more I hear you talk, the leth I like you. From thith moment, I thcratch you off my litht of thtarth. I wouldn't watch another film of yourth if you were the only actor on earth. You may be funny to thome folkth, but to me you are a pain in the neck."

"Be on your way," Bruce Beloit told him. "You've got all you're going to get.

"Easy, Bruce, the agent whispered.

Tham whirled toward the star again, brushed up against him as there came another knock at the door. The treasurer opened it and held short speech with an attendant.

"Time for you to get to the stage, Bruce," he called.

"Yeth, your public ith waitin'," Tham growled at him. "You go on the thtage and tell them that I thaid you are an ath. Tell them I thaid you are a thilly thimp!" Thubway Tham grasped a lapel of the star's coat and leaned against him.

"One side," Bruce Beloit ordered.

"Hurry, Bruce!" the agent begged. "We've got to get to the stage."

The others were hurrying through the door. The manager was there with his back turned. Bruce Beloit

tried to thrust Thubway Tham aside roughly. His head was held high. He was thinking of the speech he had to make.

"Jutht tell 'em what I thaid," Tham barked at him.

"One side, dope!" Bruce Beloit hissed at him.

Tham allowed himself to be thrust aside. He stepped to the door behind Bruce Beloit. He brushed past the manager and treasurer in the confusion and got into a dark side aisle of the theater.

His fingers worked swiftly there in the darkness. He extracted a sheaf of crisp new bank notes from Bruce Beloit's extra fine wallet, which he had taken easily while holding the star by the lapel, and tossed the wallet to the floor in the darkness.

A moment later, Thubway Tham let himself out a side exit and made along an alleyway to the street. Craddock was in front of the theater, and met him.

"Do some good for yourself, Tham?" he asked. "I tried to put in a good word."

"Thankth, Craddock," Tham said. "Yeth, I got two hundred fifty dollarth, for damageth. I'll thend you a box of cigarth, Craddock. There ith more than one way of gettin' money out of the movie buthineth."

And, as Tham walked on down the street, he muttered:

"I got a lot of thatithfaction, too."

No buttons remained on his coat or vest, so he hooked a thumb into the pocket where he had the wad of money, to guard it. He grinned.

"I can buy plenty buttonth," he muttered. "Plenty buttonth."

NOTICE—This magazine contains new stories only. No reprints are used.

GREED!

LOUIS CHARLES DURAND supervised and attended his own funeral as chief mourner.

It came about in this way: Durand deserted his wife and child and with Jeanne, his lady friend, betook himself to Algiers.

But business was bad, and something had to be done to meet the depression. The pair put their heads together and devised a criminal scheme. Durand insured his life for 150,000 francs, payable on his death to Jeanne.

Three weeks later Jeanne came running down the stairs of the hotel in which they were staying, to the desk, sobbing: "My husband is sick. Get the doctor quick."

The doctor came and found Durand in a coma.

Durand had taken twenty-four quinine tablets to induce this state.

Next morning the patient was better and ready to go on with the trick. He stained hands and face with a solution, giving them a death-like hue.

"All right," he said, stiffening himself, "you can tell them I'm gone."

She arranged for a cheap funeral and undertaker. Natives brought the coffin, placed the supposed dead in it, and were about to screw down the lid when the sorrowing widow stopped them.

"Leave me alone for a little. Our religion requires that I should place some of his belongings in the coffin, but it must be done in private."

No sooner were the undertakers out of the room and the door closed than Durand got out of the coffin noiselessly and with the aid of Jeanne substituted a dummy stuffed with sand, and put back the lid. Jeanne then locked Durand into a closet and called in the undertaker, who removed the coffin. Durand was let out and managed to get away from the hotel unobserved. Jeanne collected half the insurance.

With these ill-gotten gains Durand bought a little farm near Lyons, and all was going on most comfortably. Only he had to go and spoil the success of his scheme by a miserable trick. He bought a pump for the farm in Lyons and gave a false name to which the bill was to be sent. The false name happened to be that of a former employer of Durand, who was much annoyed by the receipt of the bill and made inquiries at the store, where the buyer was described to him and recognized as Durand—only he had heard this man was dead.

He reported the matter to the police, who began to snoop around, and one day an inspector tapped a shoulder and said: "You're wanted, Durand, dead and alive."



The index finger was poked into the left eye.

EYE EVIDENCE

By Earle Dow

THROUGH the thick morning fog which blanketed San Francisco's bay, Fred Billing caught the sound of the shot indistinctly. Above the single sharp crack, the continuous whistle of an inbound steamer screeched eerily.

The handful of worried officials standing on the dock near the entrance at the Embarcadero paid no attention. Only Customs Officer Billing's alert ears detected the gunshot. As his flat feet suddenly

pounded toward the gangplank he was keenly aware of Death striking without warning on the *Nakobi*, which lay a brown-rusted monster at the trans-Pacific pier.

Breathing wheezingly, Fred Billing climbed to the high deck.

He was no longer spry, and his tight-fitting United States customs uniform was far from new. His prominent nose stood a scrubbed beacon in front of snapping blue eyes, around which the scant brows

and lashes seemed nonexistent. His puffing cheeks were round, red as a two-bit pair of Washington apples. He was fifty, and except for a scraggy gray hedge around the temples, bald.

"Old William" was on board ahead of him; Old William who had sworn that if anything happened to him, he would do his darnedest to leave Billing a clue even in death!

So was the coolie crew still on the ship—pot wrestlers, brass-rail masseurs, the patient little heathens who separated raw rice from the vermin in the third-class galley below the level of the dizzying sea. If Old William had stumbled upon the mysterious heroin source, they might wish him dead.

The *Nakobi* was due for interior fumigation, passengers and ship's officers having already gone ashore and uptown. Every soul must leave the vessel to-day. She would be sealed now in a very few minutes, and flooded with poisonous fumes.

Turning aft, Billing met the last shore-bound coolie crew; he stared at their wiry figures and hard, porcelainlike jaws. They were as alike as a panful of dried peas, from shuffling slippers and pajamalike trousers to the way they clutched their hands behind their backs, bending forward, their big tortoise-shell spectacles hiding the hate in their smoldering eyes.

As he passed them, Billing, his keen customs' mind on the alert for even a trivial smuggling attempt, noted that the tortoise-shell was a cheap imitation from Kyoto and of very little value. He thought how impossible it would be to single any one of those coolies out—if a coolie had committed murder.

He turned toward a dimly-lit crew ladder and descended into the vast hinterparts of the deserted liner. At

a deck landing, "E" Deck by the black sign painted on a bulkhead, Billing saw a vague form slide with serpentine ease into a dark passage. His breath wheezed as he shouted:

"Hey, you!"

There was no answer, only menacing silence.

Leaving the ladder shaft, Billing started after the figure. He wound up in a blind corridor lined with closed doors. He shouted again, then commenced a systematic search for the prowler.

The cabins opening off the corridor were unlocked. They were poorly lighted by small, mist-covered ports, and fitted with wardrobe closets the height of a man. Billing stepped into the first cabin and flung open the wardrobe door.

He sensed some one slipping past in the corridor. Hurriedly he retraced his steps and looked out. A moving shadow, hazily visible for a brief moment on the corridor deck, blended into the ladder shaft and was gone.

Billing wheezed. It would certainly be useless to try to follow, and, on the other hand, almost impossible to locate the person again.

He turned back to the cabin. Might as well do a good job here, and finish one thing at a time. He had approximately ten minutes before the fumigation crew started their work. If Old William didn't get ashore before then—

Billing was perspiring as he stepped into the next cabin, his pudgy fingers reaching for the wardrobe. He pulled the door open, and jerked back with a snap.

His eyes widened, then narrowed. His head slid forward on his short neck and held that position for nearly a minute. He stood rooted by the sight on the closet floor.

Old William lay a mute, twisted heap. Shot through the chest, the wet blood was still oozing and soaking his customs uniform coat. One elbow was propped against the side of the narrow closet, the forearm reaching toward the vacant face, the index finger poked into the left eye. The other, a grotesque death's eye, stared at Billing.

"Old—William—murdered!" Billing finally gasped.

Grief-stricken, his lips twitching, he tried to regain his composure. He removed his uniform cap slowly, and spoke in an unsteady voice.

"I'd—carry on, old boy; find this dope leakage and get the rotten swine that did this to you if it's the last thing I do."

When he was through, Billing stiffened. His keen ears detected barely audible breathing a yard from his back.

No other sound came. No warning word. There was a sudden swish of air, the dull boom of a port wrench slamming against the customs officer's skull, and a Niagaralike roar flooded Billing's brain as he fell.

Half consciousness accompanied a maelstrom of pain pouring through Billing's head. He touched the scraggy gray hair that rimmed his bald pate, and his fingers came away darkly sticky. His pain-filled eyes widened as it occurred to him to wonder just how long he had been unconscious.

Old William's body was still in the closet, the sightless right eye staring. Billing staggered to his feet; tried the door. It was locked from the outside. He stared with growing despair at the open air slits in the panel.

The cabin would not be safe from the deadly cleaning fumes even with the porthole open. He whirled

around. The port glass was tightly closed.

Billing began to search for the wrench, without which he could never open the tightly closed porthole. His heart dropped when he failed to find it. After knocking him out with the heavy wrench, the killer had taken it with him.

Trapped! When the poisonous fumes flowed through the ship, seeping into every crack and corner in the fight against vermin, Billing would die like a rat.

He searched through his pockets. Empty! For one helpless moment he believed he was sunk. Again he saw Old William's staring right eye.

He sprang to the closet. Even in death, Old William could help him. In the dead man's stained coat Billing found a skeleton key. Straightening, his fingers trembling as he tried to make haste, he reached the door.

From above decks Billing heard a faint warning shout. Already the poisonous fumes were pouring through the ship's interior. He would be trapped like a gassed gopher.

He inserted the skeleton key into the lock, turned it. The lock clicked, and he flung open the door. The fumes stung his nostrils, sifted through the corridor like a vapory monster.

Billing clutched his nose, closed his eyes to mere slits, and forced himself to run. He reached the upper deck, his heart pumping. The entire ship was sealed to keep the fumes in. He tried the door to the deck. Locked! Every crack well chinked up. He couldn't hold his breath longer.

He managed to insert the skeleton key, wrench the door open. Then

he was on deck, inhaling laboriously. He ran unsteadily down the gang-plank, his cap gone.

On the dock a few customs officers still hung around. One of the delayed passengers was waiting for a truck to carry away his baggage. The coolie crew had not yet gone.

Joe Mogan, the passenger, looked at Billing out of smoldering black eyes. He was tall and dark, with wide shoulders and slim tapering hips. He owned an exclusive *objet d'art* shop on Grant Avenue.

Mogan traveled twice a year to the Orient to buy merchandise. He appeared rather venomous. Uncoiled, he seemed sleepy and harmless, but once coiled, he would be fast, ruthless, dangerous. His black eyes roved to the porters who staggered under the heavy weight of his trunks as they began carrying them out one after the other.

The coolie crew, jabbering and shrinking away from the policemen who were counting them, were waiting for a sight-seeing bus which just now arrived.

Oriental. United States immigration laws. More particularly, the strict enforcement of the laws in California. If even one member of the coolie crew deserted here the *Nakobi* would be heavily penalized.

Strict precautions were taken. The crew was not allowed any regular shore leave while the ship was in California. But they *must* leave the ship on account of the fumigation. So they were herded in busses and taken around town for a thirty-mile drive under guard.

Billing was watching the perspiring dock porter who thumped Joe Mogan's last heavy trunk down, and returned for his tip. He thought of Old William's body, which must remain now in the poison-filled ship until night.

But Old William was beyond need of help. The killer was Billing's problem now. And he believed that when he traced the murderer, the dope-smuggling plot would be uncovered. A tip-off from the Orient made it almost certain that the stuff was coming through on the *Nakobi*.

The customs officer felt of his wounded head, and stood thinking. Could the way Old William's finger was stuck in his eye have a meaning? Was he trying to leave some word?

Billing had a hunch. He would follow the coolie crew on their sight-seeing tour of the city. They just might have some strange way of getting the dope ashore—some method which Old William had discovered. Billing would watch them, closely.

The coolies were filing into the bus, lifting their hands reluctantly, while the cops frisked them. Billing turned away and spoke to the customs officer behind the desk on the pier.

"Say, Hank, anybody else been around the dock besides the coolies and Joe Mogan?"

"Naw. Joe Mogan makes up for a crowd," Hank answered. "Bringing in six trunks and one of them empty. Beats hell how he can take up so much time."

The bus left. Billing went out and climbed into a taxi in front of the pier. He said to the driver:

"Follow that bus, buddy, and keep on its tail. Take it easy, 'cause you'll have to do it all morning."

"O. K., chief," said the driver, his face lighting at the prospect of a thirty-mile fare.

A pair of motor-cycle officers were waiting in the shadows along the Embarcadero. They roared into the

open, began following behind the bus, making sure there would be no chance of the illegal entry of even one Oriental into the United States.

Billing, holding the taxi a short distance behind the motor-cycle escort, followed the bus up Twin Peaks, through the Marino district, the Presidio, and into Golden Gate Park. He was watching the sides of the bus every minute and was sure that nobody got out.

In the park the road corkscrewed at one point. There was a moment when Billing could see only one side of the bus with the inscrutable coolie faces peering out the windows at the scenery. Then the bus swerved. Now he could see only the other side. The motor-cycle officers had the same view.

Billing suddenly felt that something was wrong. Had one of the coolies leaped out a window while the side of the bus was away from him and the cops?

But when they returned to the dock at noon the coolies were recounted. They were all present. Nothing could have dropped at the roadside, Billing reasoned, for he had kept a strict watch, on all but that brief corkscrew stretch.

In any case, each coolie had been searched before leaving the dock. Yet Billing felt that something was screwy as the coolies huddled to one side of the dock, jabbering excitedly, their hands behind their bent backs, their heads lowered.

"Anything new, Hank?" Billing inquired at the customs desk.

"Naw; only that nobody can find Hito, the second steward," Hank said. "He's supposed to be in charge of this coolie crew, but he disappeared right after he came onto the dock this morning."

Billing decided to make a call at Joe Mogan's art shop uptown.

"Anyway, Hito sent their lunch ashore this morning in baskets," Hank continued. "The bus driver was told to come back and take them around the same sight-seeing route again this afternoon, to keep 'em out of mischief."

Billing left the dock. The taxi was waiting, and the driver grinned when Billing gave him Joe Mogan's address.

The *objet d'art* shop reeked with elegance and strong perfume. Several bland Buddhas looked down upon the customs officer from a red-lacquered shelf. Two overdressed women looked up from an open jewel case, behind which presided a thin Eurasian youth.

Billing passed them and strode into the rear of the shop. He found a door leading beyond.

In the next room sat Joe Mogan, his cold black eyes staring up, his long legs stretched under a massive bronze desk, his arms flung over the back of a leather chair. Billing closed the door, judged that the room was soundproof from the thick draperied walls.

Mogan leveled his eyes upon the customs officer, pulled in his legs.

"What can I do for you, officer?" he said. "Did I leave something behind on the dock?"

Beyond the desk Billing saw Mogan's recently landed trunks, unopened, the customs labels and several hotel stickers from the Kyoto Hotel still intact.

"You can open those trunks again," Billing said. "We forgot to look for something special down there on the dock."

Mogan's shoulders lifted slowly.

"That's your tough luck, officer," he said. "All my trunks were opened and examined, carefully, and passed."

Billing did not answer. He started across the room, his blue eyes snapping.

Mogan's face suddenly grew hard. His muscles bunched, and he seemed coiled like a huge serpent as he rose from the chair.

"You'll have to get a search warrant, first," he hissed, his words venomous with hate.

"Aw, bunk," Billing said. "I'm opening the trunk that was empty when it was examined on the dock. I want to find why the porter staggered under its weight when he carried it out. Why, Mogan? The trunk was supposed to be empty."

Mogan flung himself between Billing and the trunks. A blue, snub-nosed revolver appeared in his hand.

"This is illegal entry, officer," he said. "You move another foot toward that trunk and I'll drill you. Don't think for a minute that my lawyers couldn't find some excuse to cover me, either. It would be burglary."

Billing studied the furious face. What Mogan said was the truth. Billing had no right to force his way in here. If his suspicions were false, he could be canned out of the customs service for this. But, if they were true—

Billing glared at the revolver. The weapon was leveled at his stomach. Then he thought of Old William's drilled body lying in the fumes filling the ship, of the vicious dope smuggler the old boy had died trying to trail.

He started to lift his hands. As they rose, his fingers flared out lightning quick. He seized the gun muzzle, twisting it up.

Mogan fired, and the slug flattened harmlessly on the ceiling. The sharp roar filled the soundproof

room. Billing's other hand wrenched the gun from Mogan's grip, snapping his wrist. Mogan gasped in pain.

As the gun flew across the desk Billing caught a brief glimpse of the silver ring Mogan wore; felt it brush his bare wrist. There was a slight pricking sensation. Then the customs officer's fist slammed up, and missed Mogan, who was leaping over the desk.

A vague numbness swam up the customs officer's arm. The room grew black, stuffy. He grasped the edge of the desk, his legs buckling. He fell.

His drugged senses cleared slowly. His eyes, opening, were heavy, weary. He was still lying on the floor in Mogan's private office.

He pulled himself to his feet, swayed unsteadily, then stumbled to the door. It was locked.

He crossed to the pile of trunks, tugged at the one on top. It was heavy, and as he pulled he unbalanced it so it crashed to the floor. The lock snapped. He threw back the lid.

A man lay doubled up inside. He dragged the limp figure out. It was Hito, second steward aboard the *Nakobi*, and the little man was unconscious.

Billing lifted the water jug from the desk and dashed its contents into his face. Hito opened his eyes, and sat up.

"Think, Hito, and think fast," Billing said. "Tell me exactly what happened."

"Drugged—on—the dock," Hito gasped. "Mogan—he putting me in empty trunk already passed by the customs."

"Why?" Billing drilled. "Why would Mogan want to get you away

from the dock? Could it have something to do with the dope being smuggled off the *Nakobi*?"

The little man rubbed his eyes with his hands, and looked up. "Thinking—I—know," he said finally. "My coolie men all trusting me. If they think I be harmed—then they do anything Mogan say."

Billing went to the telephone on the desk, hoping that it was still connected. The drug Mogan had administered to him with the trick ring was light, but Mogan would plan on its keeping him unconscious for hours, as it had Hito. When the hypodermic needle hidden in the ring pierced his flesh, Billing had wrenched his wrist away quickly, receiving only a fraction of the drug.

He dialed the sight-seeing bus office and said:

"I want some information. There's a bus taking the *Nakobi* Oriental crew out to-day. What time will it—"

He was told to wait, connected with somebody else to whom he repeated his question. He listened, hung up.

Old William's skeleton key was still in his pocket. Mogan in his haste had forgotten to frisk him. Motioning the little second steward to follow, Billing approached the door.

He unlocked and opened it slowly. The two women were still in the shop, their voices raised in argument. Behind the counter the Eurasian's back was half turned, his eyes lowered as he examined a string of amber beads under a light.

Billing led the way across the shop, was near the front door when the young clerk looked up.

"Beg pardon. I'll be with you gents in a minute," he said.

Billing wheezed. The clerk took them for customers who had come in and were tired of waiting.

"Just going to get some chop suey. Be back," Billing said.

Outside, they turned down Grant Avenue, in the next block found a cab, and got in.

"Golden Gate Park and step on it, buddy," Billing snapped.

Half an hour later they had dismissed the cab and were creeping through the tall grass bordering the corkscrewing road. The guarded bus with the coolie crew was due to pass soon.

Billing saw a moving shadow ahead and threw himself flat on the ground. Hito followed his example. They were almost entirely hidden by the deep grass.

Joe Mogan slithered around the bole of a tree, and stood peering out toward the road. Hardly breathing, forced to be overly cautious because both he and Hito were unarmed, Billing waited.

His ears caught the sound of the police motor cycles.

The rumbling bus then swerved around a corner into view. The motor-cycle cops were some distance behind. From his position in the grass, Billing could now see what had been out of his line of vision before.

He saw Mogan step quickly from the tree, raise his arm once, and then step back. The coolies were staring toward him their porcelain faces expressionless in the open windows of the bus.

As the bus rounded the turn the coolies' hands fluttered out of the windows. A sort of prismatic light gleamed briefly and dozens of small speckled objects were quickly pitched into the grass.

Billing's heart dropped. He could not call out or give a signal to the motor-cycle cops who were speeding past. He must wait until Mogan had the evidence on him—evidence necessary to convict him.

After a minute, Mogan left the shelter of the tree. He glanced about apprehensively, then hurriedly leaned over and began gathering the objects which the coolies had flung from the bus. When he had stuffed his pockets full, Billing and Hito sprang up.

Mogan turned, straightened, a snarl on his lips. He whipped out his revolver with the speed of a snake baring its fangs, fired.

Billing flung himself sideways. As the slug zipped between him and Hito, he charged, zigzagging from tree to tree. Mogan fired again.

Hito shrieked, sprawled headlong into the grass. Billing saw the blue muzzle of Mogan's gun rise, and leaped aside as two sharp cracks burst out. The last one got him, and his face contorted with pain the slug passing through his left arm.

But with the arm hanging useless he edged closer, keeping behind the bole of a tree. Mogan fired again. Billing waited for the next shot. Mogan's revolver was empty.

Billing flung himself from the tree and bowled Mogan over. They went down thrashing and rolling over in the grass. Billing's right arm rained blows on Mogan's face. Mogan gripped Billing's throat and began choking him very expertly.

Blackness welled up in the customs officer's head. His last conscious impression was hearing a police whistle, pounding feet on the road, and a shot.

"The police captured Joe Mogan," Hank told him when later he emerged from a taxi on the dock

with his arm in a sling. "They heard the shooting in the park, and got there just as Mogan was strangling you.

"Hito is in the hospital with a flesh wound, and three of his coolies have volunteered the information that they were eyewitnesses to Old William's murder. Another found the murder gun containing the killer's fingerprints in with some garbage that was supposed to be thrown overboard."

Joe Mogan did it.

"Whew! How do you suppose Mogan got the coolies to carry all that heroin ashore for him?" Hank said.

"By snatching Hito—whom the coolies trusted—drugging him and hiding him in the empty trunk when every one's back was turned on the dock," Billing said. "Then Mogan put half of the dope containers in the coolies' lunch baskets on the dock. That was the lot they pitched into the grass this afternoon, during the second bus ride.

"This morning Mogan went back on board to tell the coolies that Hito had been arrested on a smuggling charge. He gave them a chance to help free him; asked them to smuggle off what they supposed was evidence against Hito before the police arrived. Old William caught Mogan at it and was killed.

"Later Mogan tried to kill me because I discovered the body. He was afraid I might block him by preventing the coolies from leaving the pier."

Billing patted his wounded bald pate. He was thinking about Old William's finger being jabbed in his eye when he died. The old boy had propped his arm up in the closet that way, trying to tell Billing to look for the dope in the coolies' eyes.

He had made good his promise to leave Billing a clue, even in death!

Billing's eyes were misty.

"The coolies didn't know they were carrying dope. They thought Hito was only smuggling cheap spectacles ashore."

"Why, I looked at them specs the coolies wore when they passed through the dock," Hank declared. "Those coolies all come from Nagasaki, and the specs were made with Nagasaki tortoise shell, so it looked to me like everything was perfectly natural."

Billing's blue eyes suddenly snapped.

"Hank," he roared, "if you figure making good in the customs game, you'd better start in right now learn-

ing how to tell genuine tortoise shell from imitation.

"Those spectacles led me straight to Joe Mogan. Real tortoise shell comes from Nagasaki, yes. But that kind is an imitation manufactured in Kyoto, and it's *hollow*. With a few dozen pair there's enough space in the frame to store several thousand dollars' worth of heroin.

"Mogan was the only person likely to have brought those spectacles on board, since judging by the hotel stickers on his trunks he was in Kyoto buying up 'merchandise' for his shop.

"I knew those coolies looked different when they arrived back on the dock before lunch. It was because they'd thrown their spectacles away in the park."

PRISON BREAK FAILS

AN unconfirmed report stated that the mutiny at Dartmoor Prison, England's "granite jug," was the result of King George's failure to grant pardons or reduce sentences as part of his accession celebration. However, the secretary of the prison commission disputes this and insists there was not a mutiny, but merely a "minor breach of discipline" that arose after a number of prisoners complained of the food served the prisoners. He also said that only five men were involved in the trouble and that they were properly punished.

"A minor breach" it may have been, but the fact remains that the governor of the prison introduced rifle practice with the guards aiming at a dummy figure representing an escaping convict immediately after the trouble. Guards at Dartmoor have never carried firearms.

Dartmoor is a great pile of bleak, forbidding-looking stone set down in a desolate spot. It is the most hated of all British prisons and shares with Devil's Island the reputation of being escape-proof. Twenty square miles of heather-covered moorland isolates the prison, and bloodhounds soon track down any prisoner who has the temerity to try to escape. Should a prisoner successfully make a get-away, he has little opportunity to procure clothing, food, or drinking water as habitations of any sort are very scarce in that locality.



The door opened and Hamilton found an automatic jabbed into his stomach.

TRAPPED

By Edmond H. Vanwinkle

FROM his hotel room on the fifth floor "Killer" Burke had a perfect view of the swirling traffic in the street below. But it wasn't the traffic, or the strange signs, or the hoarse cry of the newsboy on the corner that caught his attention. Instead, his dark eyes were riveted on two men standing by the news stand.

Burke grunted. Those men might look tired salesmen or business men to most people, but to him, they were far more significant than that. And

just when he was ready to spring a big job!

What a lousy time for a break like this. Pay out good money for an advance man; get a swell, juicy job spotted; spend a week of valuable time in learning the exact routine on location; and then have a bunch of eager flatfeet suddenly surround you.

A broad smile covered Killer Burke's face. Right now, the police thought they had him hemmed in; that he would unwittingly walk

straight into their trap. He started to pack his grip, a grim determination forming in his mind. With half of the cops in town concentrated on the hotel, it would be even easier to hold up the bank and scam from town before they could realize that he had given them the slip.

Suddenly, he straightened and peered at his watch. His pal was due in five minutes. What if he walked into the trap? Hamilton had hitched with him a month ago; and his pal had never had any hitches with the law yet. Thank Heaven, he had picked a man that every cop in the country wasn't looking for.

Burke was a stickler for well-laid plans. The bank must be handled in forty-five minutes—the time they had planned—or not at all. He went to the window. His pal had clipped a big sedan, a black one, almost new. The automobile glided to the curb, and a tall dark-faced man stepped out and crossed the street.

Burke's eyes widened with astonishment as he saw his pal walk over to the two dicks. He was talking to the one in the black suit. The other copper kept his eyes glued on the front entrance of the hotel.

"Well, I'll be——" Burke growled under his breath, "The double-crossing mug!" So that was it! His own pal, crossing him for the ten thousand that was on him, dead or alive.

There was one consolation, however. They wouldn't crowd him at once. He knew those cops down below better than they knew themselves. They were yellow when it came to cornering a man who had killed as many of their clan as Burke.

Burke picked up a .45 automatic, snapped shut his valise, went to the door of the room, listened. Some one was coming down the corridor. So they thought he was a fool. The

door opened, and Hamilton found an automatic jabbed into his stomach.

"W-w-what——" The words were cut short by the roar of the automatic.

Suddenly, Burke froze. A woman was screaming across the corridor. Dashing into the hall, he found her in the door directly across from his room. Pushing her viciously back, he pulled the door behind them and rapped her on the head. He couldn't have any hysterics at a time like this.

They were waiting for him downstairs, expected him to step from the elevator with Hamilton—then plug him! What a joke! The woman began to stir. He rapped her again for good measure, and closing the door behind him, sped down the soft-carpeted hallway, rounded the far end of the hall and dashed toward the rear of the huge building.

A jumble of excited voices and the sound of slamming doors reached his ears as he neared the far end of the second corridor. Luck again; a fire escape! Sliding up a window, he started down. Dumb cops! He could almost see those fool coppers running from room to room, looking under beds, into closets, guarding all elevators. From the jumble and roar of the city traffic came the steady drone of speeding squad cars. Burke laughed inwardly, somewhat nervously. This was one of the tightest jams he had ever experienced; even a double-crossing pal to contend with.

He reached the ground and was filled with sudden panic. Squirming uneasily from the abrupt pressure of something hard and round at the base of his fleshy neck, he heard a heavy voice snap: "Stick 'em up!"

A big man stepped in front of him, pulling handcuffs from his pocket.

Burke could still feel that savage thrust of cold steel on his neck. There were two of them. This was preposterous, impossible—impossible!

He heard his own voice cursing, panting, as he fought. Big hands were pounding, clutching at him, then a crashing blow, blinding light—nothing.

A monotonous voice, ages later, was droning on and on: "Talk about nerve, or maybe you could call it ignorance; he stopped and talked to us in front of the hotel, not ten minutes before we found him, shot through the stomach. Jim, here, found a get-away chart on his pal. They had planned to rob the First National. Lord knows why Burke bumped his own man, but thank

goodness, he did. They would have given us the slip."

Killer Burke was nauseated. He opened his eyes, sat up, picked out the owner of that drumming voice. It was the copper in the black suit. Killer coughed, and the crowd surged to his cell. News photographers flooded the room with new flashes.

Burke pressed his face against the bars of the cell. "What did that mug tell you as he passed the news stand?" he asked weakly.

The big cop's eyes bored through Burke for a moment, his forehead wrinkled in thought. Suddenly his eyes lighted up in astonishment, and he leaned forward in mock sympathy.

"He asked for a match, wise guy."

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Traffic Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Spanish | <input type="checkbox"/> Business Correspondence | <input type="checkbox"/> College Preparatory |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accountancy | <input type="checkbox"/> French | <input type="checkbox"/> Stenography and Typing | <input type="checkbox"/> Illustrating |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cost Accountant | <input type="checkbox"/> Salesmanship | <input type="checkbox"/> Civil Service | <input type="checkbox"/> Cartooning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> C. P. Accountant | <input type="checkbox"/> Advertising | <input type="checkbox"/> Mail Carrier | <input type="checkbox"/> Lettering Show Cards |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> Railway Mail Clerk | <input type="checkbox"/> Signs |

DOMESTIC SCIENCE COURSES

- | | | | |
|---|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Home Dressmaking | <input type="checkbox"/> Advanced Dressmaking | <input type="checkbox"/> Millinery | <input type="checkbox"/> Foods and Cookery |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Professional Dressmaking and Designing | | <input type="checkbox"/> Tea Room and Cafeteria Management, Catering | |

Name.....Age.....Address.....

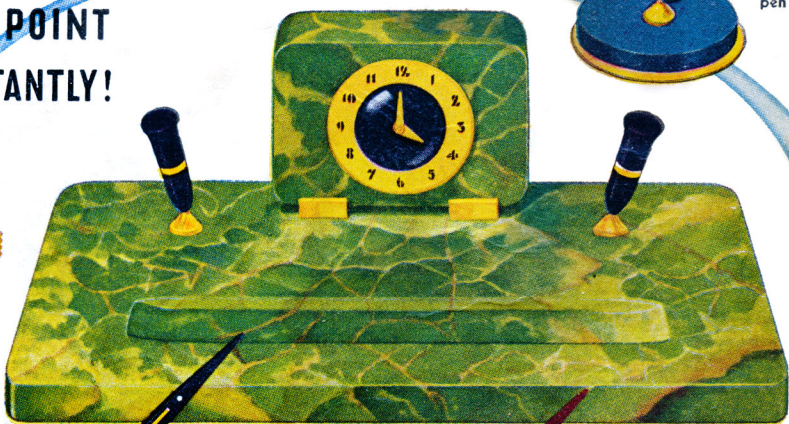
City.....State.....Present Position.....

If you reside in Canada, send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada

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Fountain Pen Desk Sets

**EVERMOIST POINT
WRITES INSTANTLY!**



\$50 with two Lifetime[®] pens—
\$70 with pens and 8-day clock



\$12.50 with Lifetime[®] pen

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Dry-Proof desk pens do not dry out; though unused for a day or a month, they come from their sockets with their tips moist and ready-to-write. This revolutionary advance makes desk sets a pleasure to use, and only Sheaffer sets are Dry-Proof... Years and years from now when other gifts are forgotten, your splendid Sheaffer desk set gifts still will serve, still will keep fresh the thought of you in the daily life of the ones who received them... How satisfying to invest so little and give the lasting pleasure of the finest gift of its kind.

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"Do smokers appreciate the Costlier Tobaccos in Camels?"

A QUESTION ASKED BY MANY PEOPLE —

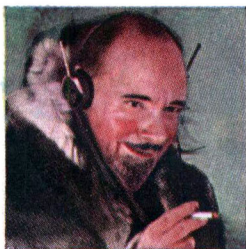


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Camels are the Largest-Selling cigarette in America!



HELEN HICKS, golf champion: "I smoke Camels constantly without a sign of 'jittery nerves.' I know Camels are the last word in mildness."



SIR HUBERT WILKINS: "Where I go, Camels go with me. Camels help make my monotonous explorer's diet digest more smoothly."

Camels have given more people more pleasure than any other cigarette!

AND this didn't happen by chance. Camels are the largest-selling cigarette in America... and in the world... because people *can* and *do* appreciate finer, costlier tobaccos.

Millions of men and women have given Camels the severest test—they have smoked them steadily. And have learned to trust those finer tobaccos to give them more of the pleasure they want in smoking. If you are not a Camel smoker, try them. See if you, too, don't find more enjoyment in *Camel's finer, costlier tobaccos.*

NEW CAMEL CARAVAN—2 great shows in a single hour's entertainment!

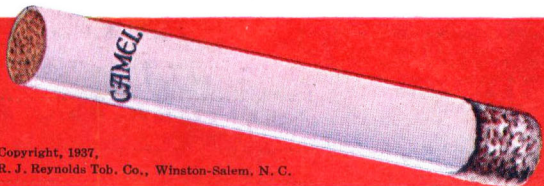
Includes "Jack Oakie College" and Benny Goodman's "Swing School"! Every Tuesday night at 9:30 pm E.S.T., 8:30 pm C.S.T., 7:30 pm M.S.T., 6:30 pm P.S.T., WABC-CBS.



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