

STREET & SMITH'S

CLUES

APR. '40

**DETECTIVE
STORIES**

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Contents . .

APRIL • 1940

MURDER BEATS A DRUM

Complete novel by
Norman A. Daniels

Two Novelettes:

KILLER'S NIGHT OUT

by Nat Schachner

THE THREE- HEADED MONKEY

by Paul Ernst

short stories and
other features
ALL COMPLETE



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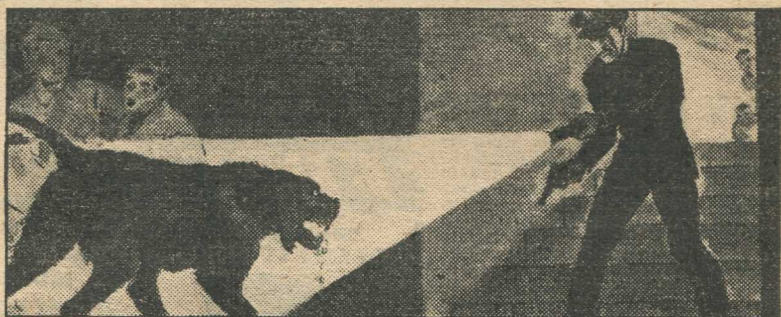


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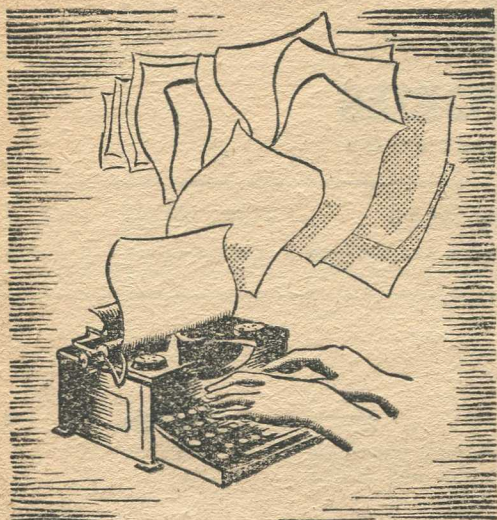
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THE STORY TRAIL

One of the standard ways of getting a very good, hot discussion started among authors, artists, and editorial workers is to bring up the subject of silenced guns. No matter how often we have mentioned this, and no matter in what group—even in groups which include police officers and men who have occasion to use various types of guns as part of their work or as a hobby—there is always a great deal of divergence of opinion.

We got ourselves involved in such an argument just the other day, and to settle it, we had to take the entire group of "arguers" to a man we know who is considered the country's outstanding expert on ballistics. His present connection does not permit us to mention the name, of course, but his explanation was sufficient to prove to every one in the group that ninety percent of the stuff spoken and written about silencers is either hearsay or imagination.

First, silencers are illegal. Most

State laws prohibit them, and then Federal law prohibits their use, and even their possession. In other words, if you are caught with a silencer in your possession, you are guilty of an offense, even though you have no gun to go with it. Most people believe that officers of the law are permitted to own them, but this, we were told, is equally untrue. The actual sale to the public of silencers was stopped back in 1925. Whether people who have bought them before the law was passed had to give them up or not, we don't know. We forgot to ask that question.

However, silencers are effective only on guns of the single-shot variety, in which the breech is tightly closed so as not to allow the escape of any gases. If, as in the case of a revolver, there is any opening, the silencer does no good whatever, because the retort comes out that way. The same is true of an automatic. Since it is necessary for the automatic to eject the empty shell in replacing the new one, and since this action is practically simultaneous with the shot, the sound will come out that way with no appreciable decrease in volume.

Generally, people are willing to admit that a revolver cannot be used with a silencer, but think that an automatic can be used for at least one shot, after which the gun would jam, since the gases are used to run the working mechanism of the gun. They are wrong on both counts. Of course, on most automatics, it would be impossible to attach a silencer, since a silencer has to be screwed on to the muzzle. The sleeves of most automatics work along the muzzle, and would make such attachment impossible. Automatics with long muzzles, and the working action in

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Murder beats a drum

A Complete Novel

by **NORMAN A. DANIELS**

CHAPTER I. UNPLEASANT RECEPTION.

Dennis McClary was one of the first off the gangplank of the Italian liner, now docked at a South American port. Young, good-looking

enough to make a woman turn her head, Dennis McClary found himself more than happy to set foot on American soil again—even if it was South American. Weeks of trying to escape from war-troubled Europe hadn't been pleasant. And here in

Rio was Pat, his older brother. Pat was a career man with the state department in Washington.

Dennis looked around the crowded pier, saw no signs of Pat and frowned. Something of vital importance must have come up, or Pat would be here. Then he saw two men approaching. They were short, militaristic in bearing and had hard, fat faces.

One of them tugged at McClary's arm. "You are Dennis McClary, yes? But of course. You look so much like your brother. He sent us for you."

McClary wasn't given to hunches, but he didn't like the looks of this pair. They kept too close to him, as if they were afraid he might bolt for it; and, very definitely, they were not the type whom Pat would trust.

"I think I'll forego the honor," McClary grunted. "Tell Pat to meet me at the hotel. I'll wait—"

Something prodded McClary's ribs suggestively and one of the squat men lowered his voice when he spoke.

"That is a gun, my friend, loaded with dum dum bullets. You will be wise to come with us."

McClary stiffened and for a moment he got set to swing on these two men, gun or no gun. Then better judgment told him they would shoot—that a human life was of no more value to them than to the war mongers in Europe. Also, the fact that Pat hadn't shown up indicated he might be in trouble. Dead, McClary wouldn't be of much use. He shrugged, picked up his bags and walked between the men toward a waiting car and got in.

The car started off without a word being spoken to the swarthy driver. It proceeded at moderate speed along the busy streets of the South

American city and attracted no attention. Finally it turned into the driveway beside a low, expensive-looking house. The driver braked it to a stop beneath a portico, and McClary was ordered to enter the house.

He found himself in a comfortably furnished place. Then, without a word of explanation, he was led upstairs and into a room in which there were only two articles of furniture—a chair and a heavy table. The door closed and he was alone. McClary walked over to the window and made a wry face. A heavy steel grille inclosed it; and the lock was too far out of reach, even if he could wriggle a hand through the mesh. He shoved his hat to the back of his head, sat down and tried to puzzle it all out.

Someone inserted a key in the door. McClary leaped to his feet as the two kidnapers entered, followed by a tall, fair-skinned man of erect carriage. This man seemed to be in charge. He looked McClary up and down with cold, blue eyes.

"You are not a stupid man," he said finally. "Therefore, I will not mince words. You will write a letter to your brother, directing him to come here at once. You will inclose your passport to identify yourself without question. Is that clear?"

"And if I don't?" McClary asked slowly.

The slender man moved his shoulders contemptuously. "I said you were an intelligent man. Sooner or later you will sign. We have ways to convince you—painful ways. You will remain in a good state of health if you obey—at once."

McClary's fingers slowly curled into tight fists. A quick glance told him that the two kidnapers held no

guns ready. If he could attack, very quickly and with enough force, he might get through. McClary suddenly charged! He shot out a short right jab that sent the slender, blond man careening backward, until he stumbled over the single chair in the room and fell crashing to the floor with it.

The two kidnapers were vainly trying to reach their hip pockets as McClary hit them. He seized one and curled an arm around his throat. As the second man came closer, McClary kicked out and found a target that emitted a grunt of pain. McClary gave the man he held a terrific shove, sent him banging against the wall with such force that the kidnaper bounced back like a rubber ball, made a few ridiculous attempts to find something in thin air to hang onto and then collapsed. The third man was heading for the door.

McClary went into a tackle, wound his arms around the man's legs and brought him down. He straddled the man, drew back his fist and poised it. But the fist didn't crash home. The room was suddenly filled with men. Men who carried guns and were ready to use them. No word was spoken, but these others seemed to know what was expected of them. Three hurled themselves upon McClary, brought him down by sheer weight and a gun butt smashed against his forehead, opening the flesh and sending blood coursing down into his eyes.

Half blinded, half stunned, he no longer made any resistance as they dragged him over to the chair, shoved him into it and someone threw a glass of water into his face. It washed the blood out of his eyes and he could see again. He made a motion to lift his hand, and instantly one of the men fastened onto it.

The slender, blond leader was nursing a swollen jaw and showing his hatred as he faced McClary. His voice was gruff, now, filled with menace. He removed an envelope and a sheet of paper from his pocket and placed both on the table. He set a pen and a bottle of ink down beside it.

"In one minute you shall suffer a broken leg unless you obey," he warned. "One minute later it will be the other leg. Then an arm. You'll die slowly and very painfully. Don't keep on being a stubborn fool. We mean your brother no harm."

McClary laughed ironically. "Of course you don't. You've got me—go ahead and do whatever amuses you. If I send for my brother, you'll have both of us; and I'm not fool enough to think you'll let us go again."

The tall man gestured impatiently, turned his head and issued sharp orders. Two of his men departed and five minutes later they came back with a girl whom they carried on a stretcher. McClary took one look and groaned dismally.

"Helen!" He closed his eyes in resignation.

"Yes," the tall man said with an unpleasant smile. "Your brother's wife. We planned to use her to bring him to us, but unfortunately she was given too stiff an injection of a narcotic. She is in no danger, but we cannot wait until she awakens. Now, my foolishly courageous friend, you will send for your brother or we shall kill the girl—before your eyes. Americans are soft that way. They cannot stand watching a woman suffer."

"I'll write it," McClary said slowly. Inwardly he hoped that something might happen before Pat arrived. He picked up the pen and hastily scrawled a message, giving

the address of this house where he was being held as his captor directed.

The slender man nodded in a gratified manner. Helen was carried out of the room. Everyone left and the door was closed and locked. McClary sat down again and tried to figure some way out. Then he banged the table top with his fist. The grilled window overlooked a small rear patio. Pat would certainly approach the place warily. If he could warn him, somehow—

McClary stripped off his coat and vest, removed his white shirt and spread it on the table. He dipped his finger into the ink bottle and carefully printed two words in tall, dark letters:

PAT—DANGER.

He rolled the shirt into as small a wad as possible and began stuffing it through the grillework inclosing the window. It was slow, nerve-racking work, for Pat might appear at any moment. Finally it was done. The shirt dangled from the window like a flag, displaying its warning prominently. McClary took up a post beside the window, watching the patio intently.

It was dusk when he first caught sight of his brother. They were very much alike in appearance and actions. Pat, four years older, knew the ins and outs of this undercover work; knew how to tackle men like those who formed this ring. Pat slipped from one vantage point to another, rarely in view, but always able to watch the building. McClary found himself saturated with perspiration. Pat looked everywhere except at the window from which the warning fluttered. McClary ran back to the table, picked up the pen and rattled it lightly be-

tween the bars of the grillework. Pat looked up, caught sight of the shirt and instantly vanished.

Ten minutes crawled by. McClary needed some kind of a weapon. He went over to the chair, picked it up and with his muscles bulging, he ripped one sturdy leg off it. He felt better with this club in his fist.

Something rattled outside the window. He ran over to it. All he could see in the almost complete darkness, were two hands hanging off the roof of the low house; hands that worked frantically on the lock that held the grille-window guard in place. Then the grillework swung open and Pat was inside. Without a word the two brothers shook hands. McClary put his lips close to Pat's ear and whispered.

"These devils have Helen here, Pat. They are using us to force you to come here. We've got to get her away."

"It's a bad situation," Pat whispered his reply, while McClary donned his ink-smeared shirt. "There are six or eight of them here. I can't ask for police help—not in this case. Listen, Denny—if anything happens to me, get my brief case in the hotel. Take it to the state department in Washington. Use the clipper plane and be careful that no one tries to get the case away from you. These men would sell their lives to squelch the information I've written into those records. They are spies, Denny! Desperate men, for they can't fail. It means death if they do."

Something creaked behind them. Both men swung around. The rusty hinges on the grillework were doing the squeaking, and an instant later the beam of a flashlight swept across the window. A growled curse came from the patio and then a shouted warning.

CHAPTER II.

DEATH SHOWS NO QUARTER!

Pat gripped McClary's arm. "That's done it. They know I'm here, now, and they'll come for us. Get Helen away. Get those papers to Washington. Never mind about me. I'll hold them back. It's up to you, Denny. Don't fail me! It means the lives of thousands of men if you do!"

McClary patted the tip of his improvised club. "We'll give them a taste of Yankee stubbornness. And stop talk about letting me handle things. You act as though you expect to be killed."

The key in the door turned softly. Pat jerked a heavy .45 automatic from his pocket, thumbed down the safety and grinned at his brother.

"Here goes neutrality to the winds, Denny. Remember—get Helen and yourself away from here. I've only you to rely upon."

McClary nodded grimly, ran over to the door and pressed his back against the wall beside it. He raised the club and when the door opened, he brought it down on the skull of one spy. The man toppled forward without knowing what had happened.

But there were others—many of them. They came through the door in a mass assault. Pat began triggering the automatic. Two of the spies went down, but the others were shooting, too. McClary realized that for one fraction of a minute all their attention was concentrated on Pat. He side-stepped to the door, slipped through it and began running lightly down the hall. He saw a staircase, turned down it and a lone guard at the bottom hastily raised his gun. McClary hurled the chair leg with the accuracy that had once

earned him javelin honors in college track meets.

The guard tried to get out of the way, but he was too late. The club nicked him across the head and he stumbled forward, falling on the stairs and trying to haul himself back to his feet. McClary went down half the staircase in two leaps and then hurled himself through the air. He landed on top of the guard. They both rolled to the floor, and McClary finally fastened the fingers of his right hand about the guard's throat.

"Where is the girl?" he asked in a hoarse, panting whisper. "Tell me where she is or I'll wring your rotten neck."

The guard looked up into McClary's narrowed eyes and had a feeling that this man wasn't merely threatening.

"Room—down hall," he rasped.

McClary sent home a powerful jab to the jaw, left the man on the floor and sprinted down the corridor. He found the room, turned into it and saw Helen prone on a couch. He thrust his arms under her limp form, lifted her and headed for the front door. Upstairs the shooting was terrific. Pat was holding out then. Good old Pat! They'd have to do some fancy stepping to nail him.

McClary was in the corridor when a gun blazed and the bullet struck the woodwork near the front door. It had whined angrily by his face and made him duck for cover. One man stood at the top of the staircase, gun leveled.

McClary suddenly felt all elation leave him. Weaponless, encumbered by Helen, he didn't have a chance. Then a ghastly figure appeared behind the man at the top of the stairs. It was Pat, hardly recognizable, for his face and clothing were covered

with blood. He leaped upon the gunman and both of them went down the steps in one huge, flailing ball of humanity. McClary had the front door open, stood on the porch outside and waited for Pat.

His brother was the first to extricate himself. He was stunned by the blow, weakened from loss of blood and reeling around like a drunken man.

"Pat!" McClary called hoarsely. "Pat—this way! The door! I've got Helen!"

Pat took two steps in the direction of the doorway before a veritable hell cut loose. The spies were shooting from the stairway and McClary saw their slugs hammer into his brother's body. Pat's face disappeared completely. He slid to the floor, slipped in daubs of his own blood. The shooting kept on. McClary gave a jerky sob. He knew death when he saw it. There was nothing in the world that would help Pat, now. McClary considered hiding Helen and returning to take up his dead brother's fight, but he remembered Pat's urgent request. The least he could do, now, was to carry on.

McClary reeled and staggered to the street. Police were rushing toward the house. He stepped into a patio until they passed. He found a cheap, dusty Ford of ancient vintage parked down the street and without a qualm he helped himself to the vehicle.

Ten minutes later he listened to a serious-faced young doctor at the hospital.

"*Si, señor*, the girl, she has been drugged nearly to the point of death. It will be hours before she recovers."

"But she will recover?" McClary asked anxiously.

The doctor smiled. "Ah, *si, si*.

She is young, healthy and so beautiful, *señor*. Your wife, perhaps?"

"My sister-in-law, but I love her as much as if she were my wife. Take good care of her, doc. Don't leave her alone for a second. Those men who kidnaped her may try it again. I'll contact you later on."

McClary rushed out. His mind was a jumble of emotions. There was sorrow for his brother whom he had watched shot down. There was hatred for the men who had killed him. Relief because Helen would be all right and concentrated eagerness to carry out Pat's request to get his brief case. There was no time to go to the authorities for he might be held until the mess was straightened out.

McClary reached Pat's hotel, determined the number of his room from a bellboy and hurried to it. He reached out to try the door and then hesitated. There were fresh scratches around the lock—scratches made by a sharp instrument, perhaps used in picking the lock open. Someone was inside!

McClary's jaws came together with a snap. He let his fingers close gently around the knob and turned it as softly as possible. The door wasn't locked. He pushed it open a crack and found the room illuminated. One man was methodically rifling a desk in one corner. As McClary stepped in, the floor boards squeaked and the man whirled around. He reached for a gun resting on the desk top, but McClary was just a little faster. One hand brushed the gun out of the way, sent it crashing into a corner. Then McClary centered all his attentions on the man. For one of the few times in his life, his brain was flooded by rage. This was the slender, blond spy who had been responsible for his kidnaping, Helen's bat-

tle with death and the killing of Pat.

McClary said nothing, but his fists told the story of the hatred seething within him. He pounded the blond man's face to a pulp. Did it methodically and without any particular pleasure. He could have killed the man, but McClary stopped long before that point was reached. The brief case and the papers it contained were all important, now.

McClary realized that this blond spy had searched at random, not knowing the documents were in a brief case, ready for delivery. Pat found it hanging from a hook in a clothes closet. He eyed the apparently unconscious spy for a moment and then fussed around Pat's desk until he found a flying schedule for the clipper planes. There was one leaving in two hours. He picked up the brief case, glanced at the spy and then left in a great hurry.

Half a minute after the door closed, the spy dragged himself over to a chair and supported by it, hauled himself to his feet. He staggered over to the desk and his cracked lips parted in a nasty smile. He reached for the phone on the desk.

"Foolish amateur," he growled, "to think he could outwit us."

CHAPTER III.

WAR IS MURDER!

The clipper was flying at less than a thousand feet. Painted on her hull were two huge American flags. Though she might be navigating many miles from war-torn Europe, the line took all precautions to indicate that this was a neutral plane. Below, the blue of the Atlantic vied with the blue background for the stars on the flag. The sun had become a ball of orange flame in the

west, but the sea was placid and almost inviting.

There were five passengers aboard. One was middle-aged, gaunt and dressed rather lavishly. Alan Hart had been a star of the silent motion pictures. Now he exhorted the young man across the aisle about the stupidity of the present-day theater audiences. He had gone to South America for work and failed to get it. His words were tinged with the sarcasm of disappointment.

His audience of one man, was dark-featured and had a flashing smile that revealed white, even teeth. He was slender with the suppleness of an athlete who stayed in trim.

"Ah, *si*," he told Alan Hart, "I too must bow to the whims of an audience. but I have been more fortunate, *señor*. I am a jai-alai player. The game has taken in your country. I shall play to packed houses, *si*. Permit me, *señor*, I am Manuel Curzon of Rio de Janeiro. Often I have seen you in the moving pictures—and have admired you."

Alan Hart basked in the praise. He half turned around in his seat to learn if anyone else had heard his name and the plaudits of this interested passenger. Automatically his right hand rose to straighten his necktie and he fashioned his best stage smile for the woman who sat amidships. A magazine rested on her lap and she stared out the window, seemingly wrapped in the beauty that pure space offered to her eyes. She was dark, with thin, arched eyebrows and black eyes that were almost slanted, but which lent her a strange, exotic beauty. Rich, full lips were slightly parted in a smile, but directed at no one. Alan Hart grunted and looked at the passenger who occupied the last seat

on the left. Dennis McClary didn't notice. His mind was too busy with the events of the last few hours.

He replaced the reports in Pat's brief case. They were in code and meant nothing to him. He wondered if Helen was out of her narcotic-induced unconsciousness yet. He realized that the moment she could travel, he'd have to send for her. McClary was determined not to give that spy ring another chance to hold her as hostage.

The exotic woman in Seat 6 couldn't compare with Helen's Nordic beauty, but McClary found himself studying her more than casually. Suddenly the plane dipped down and at the same moment the woman's eyes grew wide and round in amazement. She gave an involuntary cry and half started from her seat. McClary moved over to the port side of the plane, and through the windows he saw a grim scene being enacted on the water below.

A ship was going down! A yacht, it seemed, painted gray as camouflage that hadn't worked very well. A tower of smoke arose from the stern of the sinking craft and McClary could see several small bobbing forms in the water. Apparently there had been no time to launch lifeboats.

His eyes scanned the water again. He groaned and muttered a savage curse under his breath. Not far from the sinking yacht was the grim gray outlines of a submarine.

The plane hit the water. The copilot opened a hatch and ran up the American flag to augment the flags painted on her sides. McClary pushed open the cabin door, climbed out on a wing and shaded his eyes against the setting sun. He saw an arm flailing desperately in the water.

Without a second's hesitation McClary peeled off his coat, vest and shoes. He poised for a second and then dove. With long, powerful strokes, he battled his way toward that man who was fighting death.

The submarine was fully exposed, now. The hatch had opened and several men stood on the small deck. He wondered if they'd dare to shoot.

A moment later he reached the side of the drowning man, passed an arm around his shoulders and turned him over. As his head came above water, McClary shuddered. There was a deep, certainly fatal gash across the top of his skull. Nothing but sheer strength and the determination to live kept this man going. He was broad-shouldered and dressed in tweeds. As McClary eased him against his own shoulder, the man opened his eyes. They were staring and almost blank. Death was reaching out very fast. Though half conscious, he wrapped his arms around McClary's middle.

Then the man's eyes seemed to regain their focus for a few seconds. Recognition seemed to dawn in them.

"Pat . . . Pat, old boy. You were right. Drums did it. Drums . . . drums . . . damned drums—"

"Easy," McClary warned. "You're all right, now. That's an American plane over there. We'll have you shipshape in no time at all."

"No . . . use," the dying man gasped. "Can't do anything . . . for me . . . now. Remember . . . the drums—"

The man's eyes closed and McClary didn't need to make any examination. He was dead! But then McClary felt the dead man's arm suddenly tighten around him. In a last frenzy of panic the man had secured a death grip around McClary and was dragging him under!

with about two hundred pounds of dead weight clinging to him, McClary didn't have a chance. He battled desperately, trying to swim with one arm and free himself of this weight with his other hand. He was young, strong and an excellent swimmer, but he realized that he'd be pulled under in a matter of minutes. As he fought, his eyes happened to dart toward the clipper plane. From one of the windows came flashes of light—like sharp reflections in a mirror. And the men on the bridge of the submarine were watching those signals.

McClary's head dipped under. He exerted every ounce of his waning strength and fought his way back to the surface. He spat out a mouthful of brine and sucked in fresh, life-giving air. But he was going down again! The water closed over him once more. He felt his muscles going limp from fatigue. It was about over then. The man he had risked his life to save was dragging him to the bottom.

Then McClary saw something white flash by his eyes. It was a man and an excellent swimmer at that. Lean, strong hands pried the dead man's fingers apart. McClary felt himself relieved of a tremendous weight and he shot back to the surface. This time it was he who needed help and it came, quickly. An arm encircled him, held his head above water while he cleared his lungs and head with huge gulps of air. Now, for the first time, he recognized the identity of his rescuer. It was the dark-featured jai-alai player, Curzon.

The clipper plane was taxiing toward them. The steward, equipped with a boat hook, stood on the wing ready to snag the two men. Curzon grabbed the hook and indicated that McClary was to clamber aboard first.

Eager hands reached down and hauled him on the wing. Curzon was next. They staggered into the cabin and McClary sank weakly into one of the seats. He felt as though he'd aged twenty years in the last ten minutes.

Curzon was calmly wringing out his clothes and smiling. McClary raised one hand in a salute.

"Thanks! You snatched me from an ocean grave that time. I won't forget it."

Curzon bowed and grinned. "It was nothing, *señor*, after what you tried to do. The poor man—he was dead and dragging you down with him. I am afraid there are no survivors, *señor*. A pity but then—war is war. The yacht flew the flag of a nation of which the submarine was an enemy. We have seen a glimpse of it, now. War is not attractive."

McClary nodded almost absently.

He was watching the exotic woman. She stood near the stern of the cabin and was applying make-up to her lips, using a small vanity mirror to do so. McClary's eyes narrowed. He got up and half reeled over to his own chair. The brief case was not there! He began a frantic search for it and only after ten minutes of this, did he give up.

The steward called warnings. The passengers strapped themselves into their seats and the plane skimmed the water, passing very close to the sub. It nosed up, circled a couple of times and then headed due west. McClary was looking intently out of the window. The submarine seemed to be in motion. It maneuvered sharply and he watched a small dory launched over-side. Two men were in it and one rowed furiously while the other stood erect, with a boat hook in his hand. A moment later he dipped

the hook into the water and fished out something white.

A light touch on his shoulder brought McClary erect with a jerk. It was the exotic woman, and she had one slim hand outstretched.

"You are a very brave man. Never in my life have I witnessed a more daring thing. It is time we met. I am Nathalia Koslof."

McClary pulled himself to his feet. "Delighted. I'm Dennis McClary. What you saw me do wasn't brave. It was downright foolish. I should have known better. Why, that sub might have machine-gunned me into pieces for all I knew. I'm an American. This war is none of my business."

Nathalia shook her head slowly and McClary began to realize just how beautiful she was. "No, Dennis McClary. There was a man drowning out there. No matter what his nationality, he deserved a chance to live and you gave it to him. It was a brave act."

She smiled warmly and returned to her seat. McClary slumped down in his own, eying the passengers suspiciously. What a fool he'd been! There was a spy aboard the clipper who had quickly taken advantage of the moments when the brief case had been left unguarded. Now it was irretrievably gone. Pat wouldn't have muffed it like that. McClary began to really realize just how amateurish his actions had been.

CHAPTER IV. SPY STRATEGY.

Twenty-four hours later Dennis McClary stood before the desk of a state-department official. His right hand was raised and he solemnly repeated an oath after the official. Then the two men shook hands and McClary sat down.

The official handed him a cigarette and then leaned back in his chair. "McClary," he said, "you are now an attaché of the state department. When this is over, you will, of course, sever this connection for it is made only in the face of an emergency. We feel that you, having watched your brother being murdered, will be all the more alert and ready to help. We are afraid that a spy named Shlegel is behind all this. If he is, you are pitted against the cleverest agent we have known for some time. It is necessary that you know other facts."

McClary leaned forward. "Would drums have anything to do with it, sir?"

"Drums?" the official frowned. "Why, no. I was about to tell you that your brother uncovered a spy ring in South America. It was only a branch of another and larger ring here in the United States. It seems that our country has become a clearing house for spy information. The agents all over the world relay their news here where it is assembled and cleared. This is how so many vessels have been intercepted and sunk in mid-Atlantic."

"You mean," McClary asked incredulously, "that spies, here, radio information of sailings to submarines? They can't do that. This is a neutral country. They have no right to—"

The official smiled wanly. "Rights? Since when did spies adhere to rights? We've been attacked, McClary, by an undercover army. Right now they limit their work, so far as we know, to relaying information to their undersea craft. Later they may resort to sabotage. This ring must be cleaned up. Don't think you can do it alone. Your brother couldn't and he was one of the best men in the service. That's

all. You'll report to Major Webb of military intelligence. He'll provide you with whatever information you need."

McClary arose, bowed slightly and walked out of the office. He made his way over to the war department and was ushered into Major Webb's quarters. Webb was an elderly, sharp-eyed man who didn't mince words.

"You are new, McClary. There isn't time to put you through our training school. The spy ring which violates the neutrality of this country must be crushed. Have you anything to start on? Any angle at all?"

"Yes sir," McClary told him. "Pat's brief case was taken from the clipper. I think it was tied to a life preserver, thrown overboard and, later on, picked up by the sub. I saw heliographed signals from the clipper to the sub. Someone flashed an order to the commander and I think I know who it was. Only one woman was aboard and men are not in the habit of carrying mirrors. I know where she is staying. There is my lead."

McClary flew to New York and at dinner hour he strolled into the dining room of the Hotel Splendor. His evening clothes fitted him perfectly, and his features were bland and unexpressive as he threaded his way behind a headwaiter toward a corner table.

"Mr. McClary," someone said and he stopped. Then he smiled slowly, bowed and went over to a table where Nathalia Koslof sat alone.

"A happy coincidence," he said smoothly. "I have been eager to apologize for my curtness aboard the clipper."

Nathalia flashed a smile that had warmed colder hearts than McClary's.

"Won't you sit down? Dining alone is such a bore."

McClary was seated by an indifferent waiter. They talked about the episode at sea and he found the woman an interesting, fluent talker. She knew world affairs to an astonishing degree.

"Excuse me a moment," she smiled as McClary arose with her. "I shall return immediately."

He saw her vanish into the powder room. Ten minutes went by and McClary used every one of them to study the people still in the dining room. It was getting late and the crowd had thinned out.

A dozen tables to the left, McClary noticed a stocky, fat-faced man who seemed to be intently interested in his menu. He held the big card up almost continuously, but McClary knew that trick. Eyes that were seemingly riveted on the menu, were observing everyone in the room. And McClary noticed one other significant thing. The same waiter that served him and Nathalia also served this stranger.

Nathalia returned shortly, carrying her rather large purse under one arm. McClary helped her into the chair and then sat down himself. She looked at him warmly.

"I am sorry, Mr. McClary, but I must go. You will call me up, perhaps? I am in Suite 1104. Oh, yes—I insist on paying the check. Do not reach for your wallet or I shall forbid you to ever see me again. I owe you that much for your bravery."

McClary sensed that this was all part of some scheme, so he merely shrugged and acquiesced to her demands. She summoned the waiter, and he placed a silver salver on the table. A check lay upon it. Nathalia's purse fell off the edge of the table and McClary bent down to

pick it up. She thanked him with a smile. The waiter, holding the check and a bill, zigzagged between tables, heading for the kitchen.

The fat-faced man suddenly came to life. He raised his hand and the waiter hurried over to him. Apparently the man asked for his check and the waiter placed the same salver and the same check on the table. Nathalia was talking rapidly. McClary seemed to be listening to her and only the most careful observer would have noticed that his eyes also watched the fat-faced man.

This man raised a decanter of water and poured some into his glass. He seemed to have a little trouble with the decanter for some of the water slopped out over the table. Instantly the man pulled a dark purple handkerchief from his breast pocket and mopped up the water. But when the handkerchief was saturated, he slowly drew it across the check.

Nathalia arose, shook hands with cool, smooth fingertips and McClary watched her sweep out of the room and head for the elevators. Then he turned to watch the fat-faced man again. He was still trying to mop up the water and plenty of his clumsy swabs with the handkerchief wiped across the check. McClary got up, thrust his hands into his pockets and strolled over toward the man.

A hurrying waiter, tray held high, also approached. McClary's foot shot out. The waiter gave a gasp of horror. The tray tipped and its contents spilled over the fat-faced man's table—and over him. Quickly McClary was at his side, helping him remove some of the food.

"Terribly sorry," he said. "Those stupid waiters—"

"And still more stupid guests," the man growled. Then he grabbed

his check and stalked away.

McClary's lips parted in a grin. He motioned to the shivering waiter and slipped him a five-dollar bill.

"It was my fault," he said, "and if there is any trouble with the management, I'll explain."

"Thank you, sir," the waiter acknowledged. "But five dollars, sir. It's too much!"

McClary laughed. "Brother—it was worth it."

For in those few moments while he fussed around the fat-faced man, McClary's keen eyes had spotted the check. Across it, written in a feminine hand, had been hastily constructed words.

Man with me is McClary's brother. May be dangerous.

And McClary knew just how this trick had been worked. Nathalia had obtained a duplicate check from the waiter, entered the powder room and written the message in a prepared ink that was invisible until treated with the proper chemical. She had knocked her purse off the table and while McClary was busy retrieving it, she had slipped the waiter the prepared check which he, in turn, brought to the fat-faced man. A chemical had been contained in the fat-faced man's purple handkerchief. All his clumsy efforts to sop up the spilled water were to cover the fact that he was using his soaked handkerchief to wipe across the check and bring out the writing.

McClary wondered just how soon they would act. Perhaps the trap was set already. Perhaps Nathalia had reasoned that he would suspect her and seek her out.

McClary walked over to the check room, got his hat and coat and



Police were rushing toward the house. With Helen in his arms, McClary stepped into a patio until they passed.

strolled idly across the hotel lobby toward the revolving doors. He pushed his way through them, and just as he stepped out, he heard a crashing sound. The glass, inches

from his head, had cobwebbed. McClary gave the doors a hard shove and practically hurled himself back into the lobby.

No one else seemed to have noticed

this bit of action. The bullet, McClary realized, must have come from a silenced rifle, and the gunner possessed a nervous, impatient trigger finger or he would never have opened fire so quickly. McClary sauntered over to a big window and stared out into the street.

There was a sedan parked just north of the hotel entrance. Two men were in the front seat and he was sure that at least one other was in the rear. Instinct told McClary that the shot had been fired from that car. He spotted two men lounging against a mail-box post, apparently engrossed in talking to one another. But neither man looked at the other. They kept staring at the hotel entrance.

"Hm-m-m," McClary muttered. "It didn't take them along to get set. They'll have every exit covered. The moment I expose myself, they'll let me have it, and I don't like being shot at twice in forty-eight hours. It's downright unhealthy."

Then he got an idea and it brought a broad smile to his face. He headed for the elevators. Someone ducked back into the dining room. It was the waiter who had cooperated in slipping Nathalia's message to the fat-faced spy. McClary suddenly sprinted after the man. The waiter saw him coming, gave a yelp of terror and reached for his hip pocket. As he drew a gun, McClary was upon him. Diners arose and gasped in fear. A head waiter rushed up, and from the hotel lobby a burly detective came charging across the floor. Meanwhile McClary had wound a strong arm around the waiter's neck, pulled him back and with his other hand gripped the waiter's wrist and twisted it until the gun fell from number fingers. The hotel detec-

tive scooped it up.

"What's the idea, huh? What's the big idea? What's a waiter carrying around a rod for, huh?"

McClary released the waiter's neck, took a firm grip of his arm, and explained suavely. "I merely noticed that a gun butt was sticking out of his back pocket, and so far as I know, there is a law against carrying weapons which extends even to waiters. I suggest you turn him over to the police."

The hotel detective seemed to take great delight in shoving his prisoner toward the lobby. McClary wiped his hands as though he had touched something filthy and resumed his path to the elevators. He got off at the eleventh floor, found Nathalia's apartment quickly and instead of knocking, quickly opened the door.

Nathalia was standing beside one of the windows that fronted on the street. She had the curtain pulled back and was watching the street below. McClary moved softly to her side.

"Nero did that," he said gently and grinned when she jumped in alarm and then turned deathly pale.

"What you are doing, I mean," he went on. "Looking from a window to see a man die. Nero sat in an arena and did the same thing. It's stuffy in here, Nathalia. Don't you think both of us should get a little air? Your company would not only be an extreme pleasure, but a form of life insurance as well. Come—get your wrap."

She said nothing, but oddly enough there seemed to be relief in her eyes. She drew a sable wrap around her slim shoulders and McClary escorted her to the elevator. They crossed the lobby and more than one jealous eye gazed at him. Nathalia's beauty was enough to turn any man's head. At the re-

volving door, McClary pushed himself into the same section with her. When they hit the street, he took her arm very firmly just below the elbow. He moved about half a step behind her. The two lounging men at the curb started up in surprise. But McClary kept Nathalia between himself and the killers. A taxi rolled up and he followed her closely. The taxi sped away and a moment later a siren wailed.

The spy car immediately pulled away too, turned in the middle of the block and raced in the opposite direction. The two spies who lounged near the curb vanished like a puff of smoke.

"Your friends think I have asked the police for an escort," McClary told Nathalia. "It happens they are wrong. The police are coming for a very incompetent waiter given to carrying a gun in his pocket and acting as a sort of undercover mailman for certain parties. I rather think he'll be jailed for some months on that pistol-carrying charge."

Nathalia faced him squarely. "I'm glad—for you," she declared. "But what do you think all this will get you except death, Dennis McClary? Oh, I'm not going to try and deceive you. I should have known you would be much too clever for those simple tricks. But you are up against something that was too big for your brother to handle. How can you hope to win? What we are doing is none of your affair, do you hear? We are not attacking the United States."

"And you'd better not try," McClary answered. "Listen, sweetheart, the activities of spies on this soil happens to be my business. It's the business of any good American. Your intrigue, your plots and murders are a violation of our laws and we have suitable penalties. Order-

ing my death won't help you because if you do succeed in killing me, there will be another to take my place—and another and another and another. Can't you see that, my very beautiful friend?"

She looked less beautiful at that moment, for there was a hopeless twist to her mouth. "And I suppose I shall be taken prisoner, now, and thrown into some smelly prison. Well, Dennis McClary, there will be others to follow me, just as others would follow your footsteps. We are twenty thousand—"

She bit her lip in exasperation. Dennis only grinned pleasantly.

"There are twenty thousand of you in this country. Yes, I know that. But throw you into a cell, Nathalia? It would make a haggard old woman of you. Therefore"—he tapped on the glass partition of the cab and indicated that the driver was to pull up—"we part here. You are a dangerous spy, Nathalia, but a far more dangerous woman. I shall miss you immeasurably. You see—you are quite free. We don't have concentration camps here and pray God we never shall. Until you actually violate some law, I certainly would not detain you. So now—it's good-by."

Nathalie slowly raised a trembling hand to her mouth. Her pretty lips were separated and her mouth hung open slightly in awe.

McClary headed for a telegraph office and a message flashed to South America and to the hospital where Helen was a patient. If she could travel, McClary wanted her, here, in the United States where she might be safer.

CHAPTER V.

MYSTERY RECORDING.

McClary took a cab to the field headquarters of military intelligence

and kept his eyes open every moment for possible pursuers. Captain Blane of the signal corps was waiting impatiently to see him.

Blane smoked a cigarette in three long puffs, showing the excitement that raged within him. He carried a black case and immediately opened it to expose a phonograph.

"Your're new, McClary, but if you're like your brother, we'll go places," he said. "There's something crazy going on. Absolutely mad, I tell you. We can't make head nor tail of it. Maybe you can help."

McClary looked at Captain Blane with interest. "Go ahead. What's it all about?"

Blane removed a record from a brief case, put it on the machine and set it into operation. The beautiful strains of a bolero were transmitted into sound. The half savage rumba rhythms filled the room. Captain Blane shut off the machine.

"That," he said, "sounds all very ordinary, doesn't it? But recordings like this have interrupted all kinds of short-wave broadcasts. These recordings are being played over and over again by some mystery station. It must have some meaning."

"Haven't you checked on the wave lengths?" McClary asked.

"A dozen times. We've put tracers to work and we've located the origin of the broadcasts, but when we got there, we found nothing. Absolutely nothing except wilderness. The location changes. They must have a station on wheels. Now no pranksters would go to that expense, would they?"

McClary turned on the phonograph again. He heard the record through. Then he slowed up the machine, listened again and then

speeded it up for another playback. He frowned.

"It does mean something, Blane, but what on earth it is, I don't know. It's an ordinary recording, but the fact that it is broadcast from a mobile station which you can't trace, indicates this must be important. Leave the record here for further study and make no mention of it. I've a feeling that there is something vast going on here; something so big it may astound us when we get to the bottom of it."

Blane nodded. "And another thing. Maybe I'm just a suspicious old fool, but I'll swear I was followed here. I didn't see anyone, mind you, but when hunches are as strong as the one I had—"

"Watch yourself," McClary suggested.

When Blane left, McClary glanced at his watch. It was after midnight. The building was empty except for a few guards. He picked up the recording that Blane had made of that mysterious broadcast, carried it over to a filing cabinet and was busy for a moment. Someone tapped on the door. Dennis' hand darted to his holstered gun.

"Telegram for Dennis McClary," a boyish voice called out.

McClary sped to the door. That would be the message about Helen. He opened the door and stared into the muzzle of an automatic. Behind it was a sneering, fat face already familiar to him. This was the man who had been in the dining room at Nathalia's hotel. There were two other burly, sullen men with him. McClary backed into the room, was disarmed and forced to sit down. At a gesture from the fat-faced man he was trussed with cord brought especially for the purpose.

The fat-faced man smiled smugly

as he picked up the record on the phonograph.

"So," he said triumphantly, "the captain left it. That is good. There are no other records. Of that I am sure. So we shall destroy this, and you along with it."

McClary said nothing. There wasn't a chance of escape. These men meant business. They worked very silently so that no one else in the building could possibly be aroused. The fat-faced man whipped out a knife and grinned evilly at him.

"No," he smiled. "The knife is not for your throat, McClary. It is too quick and easy. There are other ways."

He walked over to a deeply upholstered leather chair and slit the covering. He gestured to his aids and they fished out wads of padding and horse hair. In a few moments they had a sizable pile of the stuff from this and other chairs in the office. The fat-faced spy walked up to McClary and struck him across the face with savage fury.

"That is for the waiter whom you sent to jail. Clever of you, McClary, but not clever enough."

He pushed McClary off the chair, kicked piles of padding around him then placed two heavy chairs on top of his body.

"You guess what is in store for you?" he asked. "Yes—it is death by the fire. And this record will start it. It shall be a lesson to you and your kind that trying to stop us is dangerous. We have no more time to lose."

The spy wadded several pieces of paper, placed them on the floor and put a lighted match to them. Then he held the record in the blaze until it sputtered and caught. He tossed this onto the piled-up padding, sig-

naled his men and all three of them fled.

The flames spread rapidly. They scorched McClary's face. He exerted himself to the utmost, but those heavy chairs on top of him were almost more than he could manage with his arms and legs trussed so securely. He hunched his body. One chair slid off, but it was on fire, its slashed leather beginning to burn briskly. Even if he fought clear of the flames he was still trapped, for the whole office would turn into a ghastly inferno within a minute or two.

The second chair toppled over. McClary rolled straight through the flaming padding and for a moment he sucked in cool air to revive his spinning senses. He tugged at the ropes, found it was impossible to break them or slip out of them. The carpet was afire and the flames crept steadily toward him. There was no chance of reaching the phone. No alarm would be given until the fire burst out of the office. He looked toward the door. The upper half of it was constructed of glass, but far out of his reach, unless he could pull himself erect, and attempts to do so failed miserably. He had to roll toward one corner of the room to escape the advancing fire. He shouted at the top of his lungs, but he knew these offices were virtually sound-proof. Hope was leaving him fast.

Then there was a crash of breaking glass. The upper part of the door had been caved in. Something sailed through the air and landed close to him. It was a knife, with an open blade. He rolled over on top of it, secured a grip on the weapon with his teeth and sawed at his bonds. In a moment his hands were free. He cut his legs loose, arose and darted into the hallway. The

smashing of the glass had attracted watchmen.

Unlimber the fire hose," McClary called to them. "Get the extinguishers and don't notify the fire department. You can handle things and I don't want any publicity."

McClary drew his arm over his eyes, took a long breath and plunged straight into the devil's inferno. He rushed over to the filing cabinet, jerked a drawer open and thrust a black phonograph record under his coat. He retraced his steps and felt his legs begin to wobble. He sat down while the watchmen fought the blaze. Between his fingers he held the open knife. Who had known of this attack and used the one method that could have saved his life?

"Odd," he muttered. "But I'm certainly grateful to whoever did it."

"You say something?" a watchman asked.

"I was just offering a prayer of thanks," McClary said. He opened his coat and drew out the record. No one would really know just how thankful he was. A hunch, as strong as Blane's, had induced him to substitute another recording for the important one. There was still a transcription of that mystery broadcast in existence.

"You get a wire?" the watchman asked. "A kid came here with one and I sent him upstairs."

McClary whistled. "I didn't get it. The men who set this fire probably tricked the boy into giving them the message and they used his identity to get into my office. Open one of those other offices for me, will you? The fire is practically out, but boy, I came close to being part of those cinders."

In the privacy of another office McClary called the telegraph com-

pany and had the message repeated to him.

HELEN McCLARY ABOARD CLIPPER. WHOLLY RECOVERED BUT WEAK.

McClary hung up slowly. "Perhaps Helen knows something. Pat wouldn't have held back much from her," he mused.

Then McClary's face drained to a dead white. "That wire—the spies go it. They know she is coming and it's too late to stop her."

CHAPTER VI.

DEATH COMES CLOSE!

It was almost two in the morning when McClary reached his apartment. He opened the door and froze. Someone had been smoking cigarettes in there—and not very long before. He didn't turn on any lights and he noticed that the smoke seemed abnormally thick. The curtains were up and some light from the street below flooded the room. He saw a pair of legs sticking out from a chair which was turned away from him. McClary had no gun. He picked up a plaster statue, tiptoed toward the chair and raised his improvised weapon. Then he lowered it with a grin. The man in the chair was dozing. A lighted cigarette was between his fingers and an ash tray on a table beside him was full of butts. It was Manuel Curzon!

The burning ash of the cigarette reached his flesh and he awoke with a start. McClary snapped on the lights at the same time and Curzon leaped to his feet.

He saw McClary and grinned sheepishly. "Ah—you have at last arrived. I persuaded a maid to let me in, *amigo*. I felt that I had to

see you once more. There is something important which I must tell you. You are not angry with me?"

"Certainly not," McClary smiled. "Just make yourself at home while I get out of these clothes. A pal of mine started a fire under me and I was nearly barbecued. I smell like a singed horse."

In the privacy of his bedroom, McClary hid the recording safely. Until another copy could be made of it, the recording was precious. Then he stepped out of his clothes and got under the shower. Ten minutes later he drew on a robe and headed for the living room.

"I'm glad you came, Curzon," he said. "Nothing I could do would repay the bravery you showed in—"

He stopped short. There was no one in the room! His keen eyes darted around, saw that the chair Curzon had occupied was pushed back against the wall and the ash tray on the table spilled over onto the floor. There had been a short, bitter fight here. McClary raced over to a window and looked down. There was a car parked in front of the apartment house and two men were carrying a limp form across the sidewalk.

McClary peeled off his robe, hastily donned his clothes, grabbed a gun and without waiting for the elevator, ran down the stairs. He reached the sidewalk in time to see the kidnap car turn the next corner. McClary yelled at the dozing driver of a taxi down the street.

"Take the next corner and look for a black sedan with 5Y as the first two letters on the license plate. Follow it, but don't let them know you're behind them. Government business."

They picked up the trail of the kidnap car two blocks across town. The taxi driver was good. He never

lost sight of the sedan once. The trail led to the outskirts and beyond them. Finally the kidnap car rolled to a stop before a darkened roadhouse. McClary saw Curzon forced out at pistol point and marched into the place.

Ordering the cab driver to wait and stay parked well off the road without lights, McClary slipped up to the inn. He circled it, selected a back door as the easiest way to enter and found it equipped with a cheap, easily opened lock. Inside the place, he crept forward, carefully guided by the sound of harsh voices. He started to turn into a long corridor, but a shadow flitted across the floor. Someone was coming his way. McClary backed into a dark corner, inverted his gun and waited. A chunky man sauntered by him and McClary leaped. His pistol came down to find a perfect mark. He grabbed the man and eased him to the floor. Then he went forward again.

A quick look into the only lighted room in the building showed Curzon seated in a chair in the middle of the room with four men clustered around him. None of the men were familiar. One held a knife under Curzon's nose.

"All right," he rasped, "you will now talk. Fast and truthful. What have you learned about us, eh? You played that record before it was destroyed and it meant something to you. Speak, or shall I slit your throat?"

McClary thrust his hat far back on his head, gripped his gun firmly and stepped into the room.

"All right," he snapped. "Get 'em up! I'm not fooling!"

Four pairs of arms shot ceilingward. Curzon jumped out of his chair with a shout of elation. He

scurried across the room toward McClary. The room was illuminated by one floor lamp and the cord was stretched across Curzon's path. He tripped over it, yanked the cord out of the socket and plunged the room into utter darkness. Men raced away.

McClary tried to find the light switch and he did—but, somehow, the button had been broken off. He fumbled around the floor, discovered the lamp cord and hooked it up. The light flashed on, but there was only one man in the room and he lay on his stomach, groaning dismally. It was Curzon, and he had been brutally slugged over the head.

McClary ran toward the front of the house. The kidnap car was already turning back into the highway. Pursuit would have been hopeless. He went back to help Curzon.

The Brazilian was sitting up, massaging his head and smiling wryly.

"*Amigo*," he said, "you came barely in time. What manner of devil's broth is this? Three men entered your apartment while you were under the shower. They turned guns on me, forced me to go with them even though we struggled a bit. It was only when they got me here that I realized what happened."

McClary nodded. "I know. When they saw that I wasn't roasted alive, they decided to make another attempt on my life. These men were sent because if I spotted them, I wouldn't recognize them. They were complete strangers. But they didn't know me either and they grabbed you instead. I have one of the beggars in the hall. I'll drag him in."

McClary found the victim of his gun butt trying to get up. He seized him by the arm, piloted him into the lighted room and dumped him into

a chair. He took up a position in front of the man.

"Now I realize," he said grimly, "that no ordinary methods would make you talk. However I have ways; ones that won't resort to violence for we don't believe in that over here. My proposition is this—talk and you'll go into a cell. Refuse and I'll examine your papers, undoubtedly find you are an alien and I'll have you deported. You wouldn't like to go back to your own country just now, would you? They'd put you down as a miserable failure and transfer you into the army and the front lines. Not pleasant to think about, is it?"

"I will talk." The man had grown white with terror. "I will do anything if I am not deported. You are right; they would let me be killed in that war. I do not want to die. Put me in a cell."

"Then what's up?" McClary demanded. "What are you fellows after and who is your leader?"

"I do not know," the spy insisted. "I swear that is the truth. They tell us nothing. But it is big—very big—because all the better agents are at work on it. Our leader? No one knows him, for he remains always in the background. We have never seen him. You must believe me!"

"What have small, mobile short-wave-radio stations to do with it?" McClary asked.

"I do not know except that we play records—real music it is, too. There is a set in this inn, upstairs. Please—you will not have me murdered. You will not send me back home."

"If you're telling the truth, I won't," McClary said. He turned to Curzon and handed him his gun. "Watch this bozo. If he makes a move, shoot him!"

McClary ran upstairs, searched around and found a small room in which a short-wave radio set was installed. He turned it on, fussed with the dial and grimaced at the chatter of amateurs. He glanced at his watch. Four a. m. Then he grew rigid. Faintly he heard the same savage rumba rhythms that had been engraved on Blane's record, the haunting notes of a bolero. He tuned in sharper, listened for a second and rushed downstairs. He used a phone in the small office and got Blane.

"One of those broadcasts is now going on," he said. Then he named the wave length. "Make a recording of it and at the same time check the location of the sending station. I'll hang on. When you've mapped out the spot, let me know. If it's nearby, I'll get over there as fast as I can. Step on it, Blane."

CHAPTER VII.

BATTLE IN THE NIGHT!

McClary hung on for fifteen minutes, pounding the desk top with his fist impatiently. Then Blane called back.

"The recording is being made. That record will be played over and over. Instruments show it originates close to the intersection of Highway 102 and Blythe Lane. That's way out in the sticks. I'll send—"

"I'm in the sticks," McClary answered. "But send out a squad, anyway."

He hung up, called to Curzon. "Keep watch on that weasel in there. I'll be back in a moment or two." He ran out to the road, yelled to the taxi driver and jumped aboard as the cab rolled by. He gave directions, demanded all the speed the taxi could muster and in a moment he was flying down Highway 102.

Blythe Lane was about three miles south.

"Slow up," McClary yelled to the driver. "If you've got a wrench or hammer handy, let me have it. We may run into trouble."

The driver passed back a heavy wrench and stepped on the brakes. The rear wheels of the car squealed and it rocked dangerously. Headlights from a well-hidden lane, suddenly bathed the taxi in their glare. With a roar of its powerful motor, a heavy car shot out across the highway and the driver seemed intent on ramming the taxi with all the speed and force he could muster. The taxi driver yanked the wheel savagely.

"Hit him head on!" McClary yelled. "Head on or we'll be tipped over and crushed."

The driver emitted a wheezing sort of sigh, pulled the wheel back; and when the advancing car struck, bumpers and fenders cushioned the shock. McClary was out of the cab in a split second. There was only one man in the crash car. His face was bloody, but his wits seemed to be intact for he was trying to draw a weapon from his coat pocket.

McClary heard a gun crack and lead whistled by him! He went into a crouch, reached the door beside the driver of the murder car and yanked it open. The wrench he held rose and fell once. He pounced on the gun that dropped from the driver's limp hand.

More flashes of light and the blast of guns split the night. The others of the spy mob had apparently kept hidden to finish off their victims after the crash.

McClary fired pointblank at the source of the shots and drew a yelp of pain in reply. He heard the underbrush move as the men scattered. But that only made matters worse.

Now they could pick away at him from a number of angles. He glanced over his shoulder. The taxi driver was slowly backing the cab around. Apparently the crash hadn't seriously damaged the running power of the crate, although it looked as if a hundred-car freight train had smashed across the radiator.

Two guns blazed! McClary gave a skidding nose dive off the highway and into the soft grass. He wriggled forward until he had the protection of the underbrush. The spies paid no attention to the taxi and its driver, apparently content to snuff out McClary's life, first, and then take care of the only witness.

McClary saw a shadowy form slithering forward. He rested his gun hand on one elbow, aimed carefully and triggered. The shadowy form gave a convulsive leap into the air, fell heavily, but was up again and limping to a safer spot. As he fired, McClary threw himself into a spin, rolling over and over. The spot where he had been lying was peppered with slugs.

McClary held his breath. He was in a bad spot! There were still enough of those men to surround him and they seemed intent on doing just that. The flashes of their guns came from various places, now, indicating that they had spread out even more than before.

The only open territory was that alongside the highway. They couldn't invade that territory for there was no protection. So far none of McClary's slugs had taken any effective toll. Two wounded men perhaps, but neither were seriously hurt. They could still shoot.

Then McClary saw the taxi really beginning to move. He gave a sigh of despair. The driver seemed to have had enough and was intent on

getting as far away from this bullet-riddled atmosphere as possible.

"Hey, mister!" the driver called out. "I can roll this crate. Make a dive over here."

McClary arose and began sprinting toward the road. He was taking his life in his hands, for once he hit the highway, he'd be a perfect target. But to simply wait, crouched in underbrush while man hunters slowly circled him, wasn't much more healthful than taking a bold chance.

He reached the paved road. Guns let go with a fusillade of death! He zigzagged crazily. The cab was coming toward him. Its headlights had been smashed and it was nothing more than a dim blur in the darkness. Now, the spies seemed intent on stopping the cab. McClary heard a portion of the already broken windshield crack some more and bullets spanged a lively tune against the fenders.

He glanced over his shoulder. The spies had gathered in one group again and were converging toward him. McClary fired twice over his shoulder and put a temporary lull to their shooting. He saw that the taxi's rear door was open. As it rolled by, he grabbed the door and hauled himself inside. He leaned over the front seat and grabbed the wheel.

"Duck!" he said hoarsely to the cab driver. "Let me take the wheel."

The driver obeyed without any argument at all. The spies, collected in one group again, stood beside the road, waiting until the cab came well within their range of fire. They probably had few slugs left and were conserving them until they would really count.

"Push the accelerator to the floor," McClary ordered the driver who was

practically lying on it.

The cab jolted forward. McClary turned the wheel quickly and headed straight toward the group of waiting gunmen. These tactics were beyond their comprehension. Stunned, momentarily, they held their fire too long. The cab was rolling down on them. With yells of alarm they scattered in all directions. One of them limped, but he moved fast just the same. Another held his left arm, as though it might be broken.

McClary then straightened out and rolled rapidly down the highway in his original direction.

He stopped at the junction of Blythe Lane, wilted across the wheel and panted his relief. The driver stuck up a grease-smeared head. His lips parted in a grin.

"Did we send those bozos running. Say, what are they—escaped cons or something?"

"Worse!" McClary wiped perspiration from his face. "They're spies. Brother, you thought fast that time. I'm taking your number, and as soon as I can, I'll send you a check for the damages with a nice fat tip for helping me save my life."

"Ours, you mean," the driver said sourly. "Those babies would've burned me, too, and if they're spies, you don't owe me nothing. Listen, mister, I got three kids. Two of 'em are of military age and I don't want them shot up in no war. Maybe I'm a little dumb sometimes, but I think we put a kink in them spies for a while, anyhow. You don't owe me a red cent."

"Thanks," McClary said fervently. "You get your check anyway. Stay here and keep your eyes open in case those men return. I don't think they will."

"How'd they know we were coming, boss?" the driver asked. "They sure laid for us."

"If I knew that," McClary said as he headed up Blythe Lane, "I'd sleep a lot better—when I get a chance to go to bed."

He continued up Blythe Lane, saw that the soft shoulders were wet with dew, and noticed where the spy car had been parked. He saw also that a path had been made through the brush, lining the road. Not a very wide or noticeable path, but the continued passage of bodies had broken twigs off bushes and flattened the high grass.

McClary followed the trail, moving cautiously for these men might have left one or two of their number to waylay any investigators. Nothing happened. Then McClary saw a dark object on a hill top. He raced toward it and let loose a long whistle of astonishment. No wonder Blane and his signal corps couldn't locate the origin of these bootleg broadcasts. They were made by tiny automatic sending sets of the ordinary short-wave type. Probably there was an ultrashort-wave station somewhere, tuned to these portable sets, and through them, broadcasting those eerie recordings of bolero music. Blane would verify or disrupt that theory.

But the fleeing spies had deliberately tried to murder McClary. How could they have possibly known he was on the way? Or did they merely suspect and were taking no chances? He sat down to wait for the arrival of the signal-corps men.

The silence of this deserted spot was ominous. McClary sat there, listening to frogs croaking in some distant swamp. But there was something else. A steady ticking sound that was too mechanical to be that of an insect. He hunched closer to the short-wave set. It came from inside it.

McClary gingerly began pulling the set apart. Deep within its intricate mechanism he found a small clock with wires leading from it. He gasped when he saw the hands of the clock close to the hour. With a savage wrench he pulled the wires out of the clock and breathed deeply in relief.

CHAPTER VIII.

SNATCH!

Captain Blane arrived fifteen minutes later. McClary showed him the device he had found in the short-wave set.

"There is a time bomb hooked up to it. The spy ring doesn't want any of these sets discovered. They probably change the location of them every night, and in the event that the men who guard them are forced to run for it—as they were tonight—the time bomb will take care of the set and anyone who happens to be near it. Blane, I want you to dismantle the set so that I can get that bomb out. It's going to be set off and on time, so you'll have to hurry. If there happens to be anyone hiding within a mile from here, he will believe the set is destroyed."

Blane went to work. Soon he had the bomb removed and planted beneath several big rocks. Blane's men carried the set away and Blane and McClary hurried after them. They reached the official cars in which Blane had arrived, just as the time bomb let go. The countryside was rent by the terrific roar.

Blane tried to explain on the way back. "This set picks up the broadcasts from their main station which operates on an ultrashort wave. It automatically transmits the message or music over a regular short-wave band to be picked up by whomever it is intended for.

"The beauty of this make-up is

that the ultrashort-wave station doesn't have to use high frequencies that would drown out all other nearby bands and, thereby, make its location an easy matter to check on. I tell you, McClary, this is no ordinary spy ring. The man who cooked up this kind of thing is an expert and as crafty as they come."

"I know," McClary answered somewhat absently. "But now that you have one of their sets, you'll be able to pick up their ultrashort-wave broadcast and probably track down their main station. Undoubtedly it is located at their headquarters. What I'd like to know is how that recording can possibly be some sort of a code. Your job is to stand by this set twenty-four hours a day. If no broadcast comes, we'll think up a scheme to make them send another message. Leave that to me. And not a word of this to anyone. We don't know friend from foe, yet; so let the spies believe the set was destroyed."

At McClary's request one of the cars stopped in front of the inn. He found Curzon sprawled in a chair, calmly twirling McClary's gun around one finger while the spy crouched in another chair, eyes bulging, lips drawn back in terror. Blane's men took charge of the spy. McClary and Curzon returned to town in the taxi.

"Thanks," McClary said. "You've been a big help, Manuel. Now I want to ask you a question. Before you jumped off the clipper plane to rescue me, did you happen to notice who was near my chair—who might have stolen my brief case?"

Curzon nodded eagerly. "Si, that is why I came to see you. There was someone near your brief case. Let me see—who was that one who rarely talked? A salesman, I think. He was close by your chair, but so



McClary picked up a plaster statue, tiptoed toward the man and raised his improvised weapon.

was the beautiful Nathalia. I did not see anyone touch your possessions, but of course I was very busy watching you, *señor*."

"John Varick, eh?" McClary pursed his lips. "He's an oil sales-

man and before this shebang started in Europe, he sold plenty of oil, abroad. Perhaps he got so close to one of the belligerent nations that he became one of their number. We'll find out. Suppose you stay

with me for a time, Curzon. I'm going to be very busy for the next day or two. You won't see much of me, but if anything turns up, I certainly can trust you to take care of it."

Curzon was more than eager to comply. They returned to McClary's apartment and went to bed.

In the morning Curzon found a note from his host stating that he might be away for some time.

While Curzon slept, McClary had slipped out of the apartment, taxied far downtown, changing cabs three times to throw any possible pursuit off his trail. He entered a cheap little hotel and was quickly whisked to an upstairs room by a manager who seemed to be expecting him. Then McClary was left strictly alone. The state department and the military intelligence knew how to arrange things quietly.

He removed his clothing first and then went to work. He changed the color of his hair to a dirty gray with powder and rubbed a light grease into his skin until it became swarthy. He donned cheap clothes, in need of a press rather badly, strapped an automatic under his left armpit and surveyed himself in the mirror. It was a simple disguise but extremely effective. He had lost the suave look of Dennis McClary and had become, instead, a man who seemed more like a dock hand—and out of a job, at that.

A cheap nickel-plated pocket watch told him that the clipper plane was due within the hour. Helen would be aboard that ship and McClary was taking no chances. The spies had knowledge of her coming from the intercepted telegram. If they realized that she might know some of her dead husband's secrets, they would be bound

to strike—and hard.

McClary used street cars to reach the air base. He was in time to see the big craft settle down on the water as gently as a bird. She turned and began taxiing toward her berth.

But a harbor police boat, siren screeching, blocked her way. McClary held his breath. He saw uniformed men climb aboard the clipper; then a girl in a neatly tailored, white suit emerged from the cabin and stepped into the patrol boat. McClary began running madly down the pier. He was too late!

The police launch headed upstream, turned sharply toward shore and was lost from sight. McClary's hopes were lost with the craft. Helen, blindly following men she believed sent to escort her, was being kidnaped. McClary's fingers tightened into mighty fists. If ever ruthless methods were needed, it was now. He pivoted, ran back to the street and hailed a cab. He had no time to change his disguise and it was now necessary that he work absolutely alone. He phoned his apartment and got Curzon on the wire.

"I need your active help, Manuel," he said. "Our beautiful Nathalia is an important link which mustn't be broken. Will you go to the Hotel Splendor as quickly as possible and keep her under observation? I've other things to do that will occupy my time for hours."

"Si, si, but of course," Curzon agreed. "I go quickly."

McClary hung up and returned to his apartment house. He used a rear entrance and a service elevator to reach his quarters. That recording—which he had risked his life to keep intact—was now the most important cog in this whole affair. If

he could somehow solve the mystery of the code it must contain, he would, perhaps, obtain a lead that would take him directly to wherever Helen was being held prisoner.

He rushed through the living room, into his bedroom and there he skidded to a halt. For one brief moment he closed his eyes in silent prayer for Helen. His last chance was gone. Every bit of furniture in that room had been pulled apart and—the wall safe which held the recording was broken open. The record was gone!

"That's one on me," he muttered. "They kept the place under observation, and the moment that Curzon left, they broke in and finished their damned work."

Staggered by this adverse turn of events, McClary stumbled out of his apartment. Passing down the corridor he saw a door open and a familiar figure emerged. It was John Varick, the oil salesman who had been a fellow passenger aboard the clipper plane. McClary kept on going, sure that Varick wouldn't recognize him, but Varick's presence in this apartment building was highly significant. By actually being a tenant and neighbor, he could watch McClary's place incessantly.

Varick walked directly over to the elevators, reached out to push the button, but the lift stopped at that moment and two men stepped out. Instantly McClary shrank back behind a corner. He knew these two; they were part of the spy ring and seemed to be headed directly for his apartment. One looked up and down carefully, signaled his companion and they soon had the door open. No more than three minutes later they emerged, puzzled, looking and worried. They talked in a foreign language and McClary un-

derstood most of what they said.

"But who else could have taken the record? We know that he saved it from the fire and took it to his home. Now it is gone and we do not have it. If ever I saw a place burglarized, it was that one. I do not like this. I think Shlegel should at once be informed."

McClary's blood ran cold. Shlegel—the craftiest, most brutal spy of them all. No wonder he had made little headway against the organization. With Shlegel to lead them, they were practically invulnerable. And Helen in the hands of a beast like that—McClary shivered. But now he had at least one thin lead. These two men were returning to whatever rat hole they occupied and they would report to their superiors, who in turn, would notify Shlegel. McClary raced crazily down the steps and was seated behind the wheel of a cheap coupé when the two men emerged from the building.

McClary shifted, shot into traffic and took up the chase. The spy underlings used a taxi and once they changed, so swiftly and cleverly that McClary almost missed them. But when they paid off their driver and walked briskly along a sedate neighborhood street, his eyes followed every step. They walked into a house, on the porch of which was tacked a sign advertising rooms to let. McClary had an idea that anyone who happened to apply would be shown a disagreeable, dirty room and encouraged not to stay. And, yet, that sign would cover up any undue activity of many men coming and leaving the place.

It was broad daylight, but he dared not wait. Helen might be a prisoner in this house and speed was essential. He drove on by the house, stopped around a corner and walked back. He slipped alongside

an empty house, vaulted hedges and reached the rear of the boarding house. There was a flimsy-looking back door, but that might be guarded. The cellar windows were small, but he might wriggle through. McClary sprinted toward the protection of a lilac bush, crouched behind it and studied the situation. He took a bold chance then, banking on the fact that the two newly arrived spies would be reporting such interesting news that all guards might have withdrawn temporarily.

CHAPTER IX.

SPY CUNNING.

He reached the side of the house and crouched beside the cellar window. Then he set his heel against the glass and exerted a steady pressure. Five minutes crawled by and then a noisy truck rolled down the street. McClary shoved hard and broke a hole in the glass.

Gently he created an opening, thrust his hand through and unlatched the window. In a moment he was standing on a cool cellar floor. He could hear voices above and the sound of several pairs of heavy feet traversing the floor.

McClary crept up the stairway, drawing his gun as he did so. The door wasn't locked and he opened it a crack. A man with a holstered pistol against his hip, stood guard at the end of the corridor. There was no use attempting to sneak up on him. He was much too alert for that.

McClary snapped off the safety of his automatic and stepped boldly into the hall. The guard heard him, turned quickly, but he didn't reach for his gun. The threat of McClary's automatic and the smoldering hatred in his eyes warned the

guard that such an act would be suicidal.

McClary beckoned with one hand and the guard obeyed the silent orders by walking slowly toward him. He signaled he was to turn around and emphasized the order with a jab of his gun. The guard turned. McClary's lips parted in a mirthless grin. It felt good to be taking the offensive for a change. He lifted the man's cap from his head and slugged him.

In no manner could this have been construed as a cowardly blow. McClary fought overwhelming odds and silence was his greatest ally at the moment.

He propped the guard up against the wall. Then he slipped forward and stole toward a door that was heavily draped. He parted those drapes a trifle and his eyes narrowed.

There were eight men in that room, all clustered around a short-wave radio set. The operator was speaking in a foreign tongue.

"You will tell Shlegel that the record was gone. Stolen! But of course I know what I'm talking about. And for your own information I do not like working for a man I have never seen. Why must we always contact him like this? Why doesn't he show his face and accept our salutes and praise? I understand perfectly. The orders will be obeyed with no further questioning. I shall keep tuned in and waiting."

The eight men were silent for a moment. Then a slightly built man with some affliction of his leg, limped toward the door and the rest followed him. As they passed through the draped doorway, one of them thrust the heavy curtains back and McClary was completely hidden in their folds.

A moment later someone emitted a loud, explosive curse. The leader of these men gave sharp orders. The men separated, some running to the back of the house, others upstairs and the leader with one aid, came barging into the room where the radio was installed.

"Up with 'em!"

Both men stopped and promptly raised their hands. Those words had been whispered, but plain. The leader watched the swarthy man tiptoe before them.

"If one of your men so much as raises a gun, you die," McClary hissed. "Now talk, damn you! Where is the girl you tricked into leaving the clipper plane? Where is she?"

The leader's coarse features broke into a cunning smile. "Then we are stalemated, my friend. You cannot kill me and yet find that girl. There are six other men in this house, all armed. Do you think you can stand up against such odds? You are a fool if you think I would talk."

McClary's gun slanted upward until its muzzle was within six inches of the spy's fat throat.

"I can kill you and still find the girl," he said softly. "As you say, there are several more of you. One will have a weak backbone and I'll kill until I find that one. I'm starting with you; so if it's a hero's death you wish, it's coming."

"No—no!" The spy lost his composure. "No—do not shoot."

The second spy was very slowly letting one hand drop toward his holstered gun. That hand flew upward as high as it could reach when McClary shifted his gaze for a second. He didn't try that again.

"The girl—I am not sure where she is. You must believe me. Shlegel has her. He was to use her as a hostage so that an agent of the

military intelligence would surrender evidence which he now has. That evidence has been stolen by someone else. I cannot be responsible for what happens to her. I am not the leader here."

"You are part and parcel of this dirty gang," McClary growled. "You've seen fit to invade a neutral country to perform your rotten deeds. In your country it would mean the headsman. Here it means a term in prison—if it happens that an ordinary agent captures you. But I'm no ordinary agent. You and your kind murdered my brother. I can't forget that and I'm in no mood to be patient. Therefore, you will inform me to what address that short-wave radio is hooked up or digest a few chunks of lead!"

"But I swear I do not know," the spy countered nervously. "That is why it is used. We cannot trace our own leader. We do not even know what he looks like. You must believe me!"

He spoke the last four words in an overtone that could have been heard outside the room. McClary's left fist flashed upward and dropped the man like a falling piece of timber. He whirled on the second spy who was drawing his gun.

Someone shouted a warning in the hallway. Men came rushing into the room. McClary's gun blasted a hole through their ranks. Before they could recover their wits, he had rushed by them and was traveling up the stairs three steps at a time. He veered into a bedroom, closed and locked the door and hastily opened the window. He ripped the bed coverings apart, fashioned a rope out of them and lowered it. The whole angry mob was storming the door and it began to crack under their assault.

"In half a second I'll shoot," McClary shouted. "That door is thin. It won't stop a .38 steel jacket."

He fired one shot and heard the men duck inside. He called out again. "I've got ammunition enough left to exterminate all of you."

There was a whispered consultation outside and someone ran downstairs, only to return in a moment. The harsh voice of the spy leader called an ominous threat.

"You cannot get away. Come out with your hands in the air or we shall send a stream of cyanogen gas under the door. You have two minutes."

But McClary was already clambering out the window and lowering himself to the ground. He slipped through the same cellar window, rushed upstairs and into the room where the short-wave radio set was located. If he was lucky enough to find it tuned in on the proper wave length, a quick phone call to Captain Blane would enable the signal-corps expert to trace the signals.

McClary dropped into the chair before the instrument and turned on the switch. He picked up the mike and hoped that his voice would be a replica of the spy leader's.

But before he could speak a word, the amplified crackled and a low, sinister voice came over the air.

"My very clever Dennis McClary," it said, "you are storming an impregnable wall. It was extremely smart of you to trick my men as you did, and you may take them all into custody. I do not wish to be bothered by such stupid swine. As for the girl—she is quite safe for the present. She is much too beautiful to die and I am much too healthy to meet the same fate. While she is my prisoner, I am comparatively safe. Do not take the trouble to trace this warning. It comes from the house

next door. Unfortunately you slid down the opposite side so I couldn't use a gun on you. But I can watch you from where I am, now. Please don't be alarmed. This is a recording which I made as you secured your freedom. I am no longer at this end."

McClary leaned back with a sigh of despair. So near and yet so far. Probably Helen had been in that house, next door, until the fireworks started. Shlegel, crafty and cunning as usual, kept his own men under surveillance and led them to believe he was miles away. No wonder they talked as they pleased over the radio. The low wattage of this set wouldn't be heard farther than a block and Shlegel would have checked to be sure no other short-wave sets were in the vicinity.

Someone headed down the stairs. Although the amplifier had been tuned to a whisper, they might have suspected something had happened. A man, with a gas mask making a grotesque monster of him, plunged into the room, veered crazily and started to run back. McClary's gun covered him.

Three minutes later the whole nest was lined up against the wall while he phoned military-intelligence headquarters. But capturing these men meant nothing especially harmful to Shlegel and it certainly didn't ease McClary's worry over Helen.

CHAPTER X. FRIENDLY SPY.

Shlegel left the neighborhood unobtrusively. He had certainly told the truth. The recording of his voice was still on the play-back machine in the next house when McClary invaded it, but there wasn't the slightest clue to where or who Shlegel really was.

It took but a few moments for McClary to remove his disguise and become himself once more. He taxied back to the center of the city, strolled into the lobby of the Hotel Splendor and found Curzon seated in one of the corner chairs. Curzon showed his lack of restraint and training as an intelligence officer by leaping to his feet and rushing up to McClary.

"I have watched her every moment, *si*. And there are complications, *amigo*. Such complications!" He motioned with all the grace and dexterity of his race. "By the use of a little green paper persuasion, I obtained the help of the phone operator. She has checked every call that the glamorous Nathalia has made, and she has been calling your apartment every five minutes for the past two hours."

"Sounds as though she might be setting a neat little trap," McClary mused. "I suppose I'll see her. Nothing makes much difference now, Manuel. Helen has been taken. They whisked her off the plane under my nose and I couldn't do a thing about it. They kidnaped the crew of a police launch, stole their uniforms and posed as cops who had come to protect Helen. She fell for it. Perhaps Nathalia knows where she is. I'm going to find out."

"But it is death," Curzon protested. "And I have more news. Varick, the so very silent oil salesman has taken an apartment close to your own, *amigo*. Perhaps to watch you, *si*?"

"You'd better go back there and check," McClary suggested. "I'll pay Nathalia a visit. She might help. I've rather played up to her and I think she saved my life, already."

Curzon bobbed his head and disappeared. McClary stepped behind

a tall fern, transferred his gun from his pocket to his hat and held the hat in his hand from that moment on. He reached Nathalia's suite and rapped on the door. Nathalia, clad in a sleek velvet gown, let him in. Her face was impassive, displaying neither hatred nor friendship. McClary sat down in a chair which she offered. She draped herself on a davenport and eyed him coldly.

"I understand," he said mildly, "that you have been trying to reach me. Don't say you've arranged another little trap for which I've fallen so naively?"

"Don't sit there!" Nathalia said and indicated a deep, overstuffed chair. But her actions didn't conceal the sudden alarm in her voice. "Take that chair."

McClary shrugged, got up and sat down again, noticing that she had chosen her own position beneath a large, round mirror that hung above her head. She opened a gaudy zipper bag, extracted equipment necessary to adjust her make-up and with a strange look at McClary, she set to work rouging her lips.

McClary felt ill at ease. He expected something to happen—almost wanted it to happen. Anything which would prove this woman was working against him. He wanted to get her out of his mind.

She seemed to be looking over McClary's shoulder moments later. Then, masking her actions, somewhat, she turned the small mirror in her vanity so that it faced him. McClary's eyes dropped toward it and he read three significant words written in crimson lipstick:

WATCH MIRROR ABOVE.

He glanced up and his eyes narrowed. Two men had parted the curtains behind him. Both were

apish in appearance and both held guns. Limply, perhaps, but McClary wondered what chance he had against them. He could see that Nathalia had difficulty in restraining her emotions. She reached out suddenly and picked up a heavy, metal cigarette box.

"Have one of these, my clever American friend," she said with a slow smile.

McClary reached toward the cigarette box, but instead of dipping his fingers into it, he curled his whole hand around it, turned in his chair and flung the box with unerring aim. It hit one of the advancing men squarely on the temple and he dropped without a sound.

The other man, striving to duck out of the way of that deadly missile, was off balance for half a second, just time enough for McClary to jump out of his chair and charge toward him. He recovered his wits, brought up his revolver and tried to pull the trigger.

But McClary reached him first. His hand dropped. Strong fingers gripped the revolver and kept the killer from pulling the trigger. McClary grinned unpleasantly, looped a long left and rocked the spy's head back with the blow. The grip on the revolver lessened a trifle and McClary yanked the weapon free. He hurled it into a corner, pushed his man against the wall and drove three savage blows to his face. He wound it all up with a haymaker. The spy's head snapped back, hit the wall and his eyes glazed. He slumped down and sat there, like an immobile Buddha, his legs crossed, his arms limp.

McClary walked over to the second killer and made a brief examination of him. He'd be out for minutes, yet. McClary glanced toward Nathalia. She was calmly en-

gaged in pulling thick velvet tie-backs off the drapes. He took these from her, tied up the prisoners and rolled them into the next room. He closed the door, pulled over a straight-backed chair and straddled it.

"Now I know who saved my life when Shlegel's men tried to roast me. It was you, Nathalia. Why? If you are a foreign agent, why try to save me?"

"Because I'm on your side," Nathalia said in a choked whisper. "For months I have worked with Shlegel's men trying to find out who he is. So far I have been unsuccessful and I think he is now aware that I operate against him."

McClary whistled softly. "So that's it. Then you did not send the mirrored code message to the sub commander. Who did?"

"I don't know," she said. "I think it was that man Varick. He may be one of their agents—even Shlegel himself. But I am a spy, Dennis McClary. A foreign government pays my salary. It is my duty to spy upon spies. Here, in the United States, I must determine who works against us. My colleagues have not the slightest wish to hinder or oppose your government. Rather we seek to help protect it."

McClary walked over to her side and took one of her slim hands between his own.

"If Shlegel is wise—and he probably will be when my death isn't reported—he'll suspect you more than ever. Therefore, Nathalia, you are under arrest. I'll have you taken out of here together with your two chums. They'll lock you up, but later you'll be released. There's a girl I'm looking for. A pretty, blond girl who means very much to me. Will you help me find her?"

Nathalia's eyes went wide. She

nodded and said nothing.

"Shlegel's men won't know of your arrest because I doubt he tells them anything," McClary went on. "Find out where that girl is hidden. Get her away from them—or tell me where they have her hidden. Will you do this?"

She merely nodded again. McClary walked over to the phone and called military intelligence. Agents arrived quickly and unobtrusively. The two killers were whisked away. Nathalia waited for them to return for her.

"Dennis," she said softly, "I tried to warn you of this trap. They knew you'd come here sooner or later, and those two men were going to kill you as neatly as possible—without giving you the slightest warning. As for the girl—I promise you I'll do everything."

McClary watched her led away between two agents. Then he sat down and pressed a hand against his forehead. He was slowly rounding up Shlegel's spy ring, but the information he derived from them was meager, except that which Nathalia had told. None of it pertained to Helen. McClary looked at his watch. It was almost nine o'clock.

He picked up the phone and called his apartment. Curzon, anxiety dripping off each word, answered.

"I'm all right," McClary said. "Nathalia talked. It looks like Varick is our man."

"Did Nathalia tell you about Helen?" Curzon asked quickly.

"No! She swore she didn't know where Helen is hidden. Wait for me there, Manuel. I have one last trick left to play. If it fails, I'm licked."

McClary hung up, arose and headed for the door. The shrill jangle of the phone stopped him. He

walked over to the instrument, picked it up and put it to his ear, but he said nothing.

A whispered, stagy voice came over the wire. "Nathalia, my dear, you know who this is, of course. I am afraid you have failed me so badly. I don't tolerate failure; so there is but one way out for you. I am sending men to finish the job if you do not accomplish it. The left temple, my dear, is very quick and painless. Good-by."

The phone clicked. McClary hung up slowly and a grim look stole over his face. He literally tore out of the suite, yelled for a cab when he hit the street and proceeded to Captain Blaine's office as fast as the taxi would carry him.

CHAPTER XI.

PLOT AND COUNTERPLOT.

Armed guards along the pier where the great *King George*, largest of the transatlantic passenger liners was docked, stopped the two men who approached the gate. McClary and Captain Blaine identified themselves and were quickly whisked aboard the huge ship. In the commander's quarters were representatives of the line. McClary addressed them quietly, but there was force behind each word.

"Shlegel, one of the most brilliant of all spies," he said, "is in this country where he has taken command of a section of foreign espionage. Through his efforts the yacht which I saw torpedoed and sunk, was contacted by a submarine. No doubt, he had traced my passage on the clipper and arranged the scene in order to force the plane to land. Then, one of his agents on the clipper stole my brief case while I was trying to rescue a passenger from the distressed yacht.

"Now there is no need to warn you, gentlemen, that I represent a neutral nation and I have no desire to take one side nor the other. But the theft of valuable State papers has been traced to Shlegel. Also, Shlegel, in hatching his fiendish plots on American soil has laid himself wide open to our counter-espionage system. A neutral nation cannot foster a breed of spies who plot murder and violence."

"We are very well aware of all that," an official of the British legation acknowledged. "But as you say, Shlegel, is more than a spy; he is a murderer—so ruthless that neutrality means nothing to him. What do you know, Mr. McClary?"

"Shlegel is a mysterious quantity. His own men can't seem to identify him and he is nothing more than a name to us. He gathers news about the shipping of nations hostile to his country and he transmits this to submarines lurking off American coasts. That is why so much of your shipping has been lost recently. By stopping this, we also end Shlegel, but we must first locate him. I want you to prepare, within the hour, for quick sailing. Don't spread the word around, for it won't be necessary. Shlegel's spies are everywhere. Just make quiet preparations—but under no circumstances must you sail."

The *King George's* captain rubbed his chin. "I gather the significance of it all," he said, "but we really are preparing to sail. In fact, we have only been waiting an opportune moment. Reservists are already aboard and we have a cargo of food in our holds. The enemy spies must know this and it will not be difficult to deceive them."

"At midnight then," McClary said, "weigh anchor and let the tugs take you out into the river. That's all

that will be necessary. By morning we'll have Shlegel and then you may use your own judgment about sailing."

Blane and McClary got into an official car and headed back to their office. Blane looked worried.

"I know what all this means to you, McClary. If Shlegel does broadcast, we have one of his short-wave sets, tuned in to that hidden ultrashort-wave master station. If he stays on the air for five minutes, we'll chart his location, and then, with luck, you'll have Pat's wife. That's what you're looking for, isn't it?"

McClary nodded somberly. "We can't fail. Helen is only being held hostage to keep us in check until Shlegel can transmit important news like the sailing of the *King George*. Once that is accomplished, he'll kill her."

"But why?" Blane asked. "She hasn't harmed him."

"I think Pat told her who Shlegel really is," McClary said. "And her predicament is my fault. I've learned a lot since this mess began, but I was green as a shamrock when I started. I sent for her. I put her in this danger. Shlegel wouldn't dare permit her to live with that knowledge. His greatest asset is in being able to work incognito. Drop me at my apartment, will you, Blane? Then get over to that short-wave set and don't leave it for a second."

McClary found Curzon sound asleep in one of the deep chairs, but the lithe Brazilian awoke as he closed the door.

"Have you found her, *amigo*?" he asked anxiously.

McClary shook his head. "We've got one line out and if Shlegel falls for it, perhaps we'll find her. The *King George* is going to pretend to

sail within the hour. Of course, she is merely going to be shuttled out to midstream and fool Shlegel's agents. We're banking that he'll take the bait. If he doesn't—"

McClary suddenly stared at the telephone table. Curzon followed his gaze and saw that a piece of wadded paper had been inserted under the cradle of the phone so that there was an open connection. Curzon made a grab for the instrument, but McClary stopped him with a quick gesture. He motioned Curzon into the next room.

"Someone heard me talking," he said softly. "While you slept, that person entered the apartment and opened the connection. You go out into the living room and talk. That's all—just talk—as though I might be listening. I'll go down to the lobby and find out to what extension the connection has been made."

McClary closed the door very softly behind him, looked askance at the door of John Varick's apartment and then rang for the elevator. He strolled across the lobby, walked up to the telephone operator's cage and saw a complete stranger at the board. The man seemed unduly nervous. McClary studied the panel intently; but he had only a moment to do so for the operator suddenly glanced up, saw McClary and with one sweep of his arm, disconnected all phones.

McClary leaned against the small counter and looked at the operator very steadily. "You're new here. Mind telling me why 1605 was plugged in when the phone isn't being used in that suite? Or would you rather I wrung your neck before throwing you into a cell?"

The operator gulped, licked his lips and suddenly yanked open a small drawer and reached for a gun. As it came up, McClary went into

action. One fist swept across the counter and clipped the operator flush on the chin. Then, in an agile dive, McClary hurled himself across the counter, grabbed the operator's gun hand and wrenched the weapon away.

A small crowd of onlookers assembled. McClary gripped the spy by the throat, lifted him up and shook him savagely. Someone went for a policeman. McClary turned the spy into his custody.

"Take him to military intelligence headquarters," he said. "Keep your gun handy and don't let him get away. I'll have a little talk with him later."

McClary went back to his floor, shoved off the safety of his automatic and stepped close to Varick's door. He pressed an ear against the panels, heard nothing and rapped smartly on the door. No one came to answer.

He used a passkey which the manager had provided, entered the apartment and the only signs he found of Varick were those that indicated a hasty departure. Apparently Varick had heard about the scuffling in the lobby and escaped while he still had a chance.

Curzon was still talking a blue streak when McClary returned. He waved him into a chair and for a moment both men sat in complete silence broken only by the incessant ticking of the alarm clock beside the telephone. McClary had already broken the connection with Varick's room. Curzon knew what McClary was waiting for.

The American agent kept glancing at that alarm clock every minute or two. The hands were getting close to midnight. He reflected that if that ultrashort-wave station was to broadcast, Blane would call very

soon now. The *King George* must be in midstream, her funnels belching smoke to indicate she was ready to sail. If he failed now—McClary shuddered.

The phone buzzed and he had it off the hook within one second. Blane was on the wire, his voice flat and despairing.

"Nothing! If Shlegel knows the *King George* is sailing, he'd have been in action before this. His spies must have fallen down on the job. I'm sorry."

"Keep standing by," McClary ordered. "It may happen yet. Be on your toes, Blane, in case—"

"Wait," Blane broke in suddenly. "Teagle just bolted into the office. What? You're positive? McClary, listen to this. The commander of the *King George* was tuned in to see if he could hear Shlegel's broadcast. When it didn't materialize, he decided to take advantage of circumstances and he really is sailing. The liner is headed out to sea already. She's taking a northern course toward Halifax where a convoy of British destroyers will pick her up."

"The fools!" McClary shouted. "This might be just what Shlegel is waiting for. But don't radio the ship, Blane. Not even in code. If Shlegel doesn't know she's sailed, everything will be all right. If he does—we can't stop her, now, nor him either. I'll be down just as soon as I can."

"Can I not be of some help?" Curzon asked. "What has happened to make you so excited, *amigo*? Have they found her?"

"They've bungled things beautifully." McClary pulled on his coat and vest as he talked. "The *King George* really is sailing. She's depending on a convoy to pick her up before Shlegel can notify his sub-

marines. Stay here, Manuel. If I need you, I'll call. And watch out for Varick. He was the man who listened in as I told you about the trumped up sailing. No wonder there wasn't a broadcast."

Curzon nodded. "This time," he vowed, "I shall not sleep. If Varick shows his face in here—*poof*—I have him for you. Good luck, and I envy you all this excitement. Jai-alai will never hold the same interest for me again. I thought it the most exciting game in the world, but it is like your children's marbles compared to spy work."

CHAPTER XII.

BROADCAST OF DEATH.

When McClary burst into the signal-corps field headquarters, he found it bustling with excitement. Blane sat behind an intricate panel board, turning dials and listening intently with earphones. He signaled McClary to sit down. Five minutes crawled by. McClary noticed that a recording was being made of whatever broadcast Blane was listening to. Finally it was over.

Blane spun around in his swivel chair. "It's happened," he groaned. "That damned rumba music is being sent by the ultrashort-wave transmitter and being rebroadcast over a regular band to be picked up by Shlegel's submarines. I don't know what in thunder they're saying. It's just dance music again. Those cursed drums!"

"Drums!" Jeff leaped to his feet. "That's it! The dying Englishman raved about drums. Blane—start that recording. Hurry! And are you having the broadcast traced?"

"It will take about fifteen minutes," Blane said. "Here—I'll play this devil's music for you."

A playback machine burst into

life, emitting the throbbing, haunting music. McClary turned the thing off and grabbed the phone. He dialed the code department in another section of the Federal building.

"Send down your best man and have him bring along all the foreign codes we have on file. Hurry! We haven't any time to lose."

McClary turned the playback machine controls until the disk revolved as slowly as possible. Now the music was slurred and weird. But high above it a kettledrum, with its velum stretched as tightly as possible, pounded out beats that were not in complete rhythm with the music.

While the recording was played at normal speed, this wasn't at all noticeable for the rest of the din drowned it out. But slowed up, the steady beat of the drum came clearly. A code expert hustled in, listened to McClary's comments and went to work.

"It's one of their regular codes," he said excitedly. "The spacing between the beats gives me the whole thing. Wait—I'll have it for you very soon."

His pencil flew across a ruled pad, making hieroglyphic symbols that meant nothing to McClary. He kept pacing the floor. Waiting became cruel agony. Then the code expert shut off the playback machine.

"Here she is. They depended on the cleverness in sending and didn't use a new code which would have taken hours to break down. The message is to two submarine commanders, indicating that the *King George* is heading on a direct route toward Nova Scotia and that she is to be torpedoed at a certain location which I'll have in a minute. And—wow—is the *King George* in a spot. Her radio operator is a spy. How

they worked that one, I don't know. He will receive all messages trying to stop the liner, but he won't relay them to the skipper. Good-by, *King George*, this time. Twenty million bucks for Davy Jones' locker."

Blane disappeared for a moment. When he came back, his eyes were cold and uncompromising.

"We've got it! The broadcast originates very close to the corner of Twelfth and White Avenue. I've sent apparatus down to that section to make a final check. They'll be waiting. I've got twenty men ready in fast cars. Let's travel!"

They had to hang on tightly as the official cars swerved around corners and took full advantage of the empty streets. Sirens were cut off long before they were near the vicinity. A flashlight signaled. McClary's car braked to a stop. One of Blane's men poked his head in the rolled-down window of the tonneau.

"There's a photography shop on the corner. We're positive that their sending apparatus is in there. It stopped about three minutes ago."

McClary piled out of the car. The force of agents, armed with automatic rifles, gas guns and side arms, gathered around him. He gave sharp orders. The men spread out, gradually closed in on the corner and covered every exit to the entire building in which the transmitting station was located. Six reached rooftops and covered the area with machine guns.

McClary moved forward with Blane at his side. The photography shop was closed and the curtains drawn. McClary took a long breath, murmured a prayer that he was in time and sent his foot smashing through the glass door. He had it

unlocked in a moment. A watery-eyed, heavy-spectacled man of about fifty came rushing out of a rear room.

"Hold it!" McClary snapped. "You're under arrest. This entire section is covered. None of your men can get away. I'm calling for a complete surrender—or else!"

The watery-eyed man swallowed hard, found that he couldn't talk and raised both hands, instead. Blane turned him over to other agents. Then the mopping-up process began.

McClary left that in Blane's hands while he climbed a dark staircase to the floor above. Someone moved in the shadows and a gun roared. The bullet chipped a chunk out of the banister just above his head. His own gun went into action. There was a howl of anguish, a crashing sound and a man's body smashed through the railing and dropped to the hallway below.

From upstairs came a short, strangled scream. A woman's voice. McClary pounded up the stairs, veered sharply and tried to puzzle out just what room it had come from. He put his back against the wall, took a firmer grip on his gun and began edging his way along. A flitting shadow passed along the wall. Someone had moved lightly across a doorway.

McClary kept his gun glued in that direction and when two men came barging out, he was ready for them. One man fired a single shot before he went down. The other didn't even have time to pull the trigger.

On the heels of the shooting came a moan. McClary's eyes were icy cold, his lips thin and determined. He didn't make the mistake of thinking those two men had been the only ones in the room.

"You out there," someone called

harshly. "I have the girl in here. My pistol is placed against the side of her head. You will throw your gun into the room and enter with your hands high or I shall kill her."

"Listen, stupid," McClary yelled. "I'm not the only guy after your hide. This whole joint is surrounded. Kill that girl and you'll go to the electric chair—if I let you live long enough to reach it!"

"One minute you have," the man's voice warned. "Then she dies."

McClary groaned inwardly. There was no time to get help and a thousand men wouldn't be of much assistance anyway for that spy was just desperate enough to kill. McClary bent down, picked up a Luger pistol dropped by one of the men who had rushed into the hallway to attack him. He threw his own gun into the room, picked up one of the spies by the collar, took a good grip of his trousers and pushed him forward. The man was quite dead and absorbing another bullet or two wouldn't hurt him.

"I'm coming in," McClary said loudly. "I've thrown my gun. Let the girl go and I'll do anything you say."

He raised the corpse completely off the floor, stepped forward another two paces and gave the dead spy a shove through the door. The dead man leaned against the door, much as a living person might have done. Instantly a gun blazed inside the room and the corpse jerked as slugs smashed into it.

"Fool!" the killer spy gloated. "All Americans are stupid fools."

McClary grinned tightly and when he surged through the door, he was moving as fast as a human could. The spy within the room had turned back to menace the girl once

more. Now, he whirled around, bringing up his guns as he did so. He fired one shot that went wild because his target seemed to be flying through the air at him. Then a fist punched him squarely on the nose. Another fist beat a tattoo against one eye. More fists and the spy wondered how many men he was fighting. McClary drove him into a corner, doubled him up with a series of jabs to the midriff and poised his right for the knockout blow.

"I surrender," the spy moaned. "I cannot fight more. I give up. Don't hit me again."

"Walk over and pick that girl up," McClary ordered. "One phony move and I'll break you in half. Pick her up, do you hear?"

The man glared at McClary out of the corner of his eyes, but he obeyed. It was Helen who lay on a small bed. Her eyes were closed, but she breathed normally.

"She is not dead," the spy said. "I swear it. Only a mild drug to keep her quiet. She will be all right."

"If she isn't," McClary growled, "you won't be. Stand just where you are. Never mind if she is heavy."

McClary walked close to the man, drew handcuffs from his pocket and locked the link around Helen's limp

wrist. Then he affixed the other cuff to the spy.

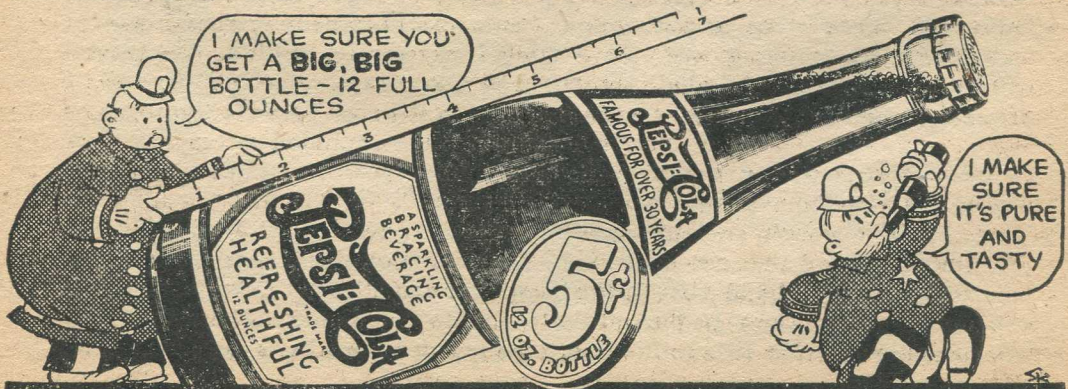
"Outside and down the stairs," he ordered. "Remember, I have a gun trained on you every second."

The spy walked out of the room with Helen cradled in his arms. He stepped over the prone body of one of the men who had gone down under McClary's fire. McClary, watching Helen carefully, didn't notice the wounded man's arm suddenly jerk out. Fingers wrapped around his ankle and gave a terrific tug. Thrown off balance, McClary swayed crazily and then pitched forward to land on his face. The gun he held was jolted out of his hand.

The spy heard the crash, took a quick look and instead of turning down the stairs, he raced for the passageway to the roof. When McClary clambered back to his feet, Helen and her captor were gone.

He scooped up his gun and headed for the stairway to the roof. He went up it fast, stopped and cautiously raised his head. Over against one side of the roof stood four men, their hands raised high. From a building across the street three sub-machine guns menaced them.

But machine guns meant nothing to the spy who carried Helen. She was his shield and protection. He ran clumsily toward the edge of the



roof and McClary's hair almost stood on end as he watched the man drop her body off the side. She dangled, five stories above a cement-paved court, held there by handcuffs which chained her to her captor!

McClary leaped up on the roof and covered the spy with his gun. He waved one hand to the agents on the opposite roof so they'd hold their fire.

"I am not yet finished," the spy snarled. "If you shoot me, I shall fall and the weight of this girl will drag me overside. I shall be killed, yes, but do you think she will live?"

"Name your price!" McClary grated.

"The four men on this roof are to go free. They are to be given a fast car and wait for me in the courtyard. You will throw your gun close so that I can pick it up. Then—and only then—I will raise the girl. She will be hostage so that neither I nor these other men will be shot down when we escape."

McClary weighed the proposition and sighed deeply. Even if he obeyed the terms, Helen's life was still in the gravest danger. These men wouldn't permit her to live once they got clear. She'd be murdered and her body hurled from the speeding car. Yet McClary held his fire, for by shooting the spy, he simultaneously doomed Helen. He advanced three steps and the spy called out a warning.

"One more step and I shall throw myself over. The gun—at once."

Then McClary saw a tall white figure emerge from behind a chimney. It was a woman and she moved cautiously toward the spy. She held something in her hand that looked like a club. McClary had to stifle the warning cry that rose to his lips. He poised, set to make a wild dive.

The approaching figure made not the slightest sound and the spy had all his attention riveted on McClary. The club rose high and held there for a second. A graceful arm reached out and beckoned to McClary. Then the club descended with a violent, cracking sound.

The spy lurched sideways crazily as Helen's weight pulled him to the edge of the roof. He rolled over the eight-inch parapet and was almost on his way down when the figure in white leaped upon him. McClary reached the man's side a fraction of a second later. He hauled him back on the roof, pulled Helen up and with hands that trembled badly, tried to insert his handcuff key to unlock the cuffs.

"Let me do it, Dennis," a calm, soothing voice said. He'd forgotten the white-clad figure who had undoubtedly saved Helen's life. It was Nathalia. She took the key from his unresisting hand, freed Helen and then clamped the other cuff around the spy's ankle, doubling him up in a ball.

"Now he will try no more of those tricks," she said.

McClary stood up and without a word, gathered her into his arms. She tried to push him away.

"This other girl," she said. "She comes first. I searched until I learned she was here. I came, but Shlegel had already warned his men; so I was forced to hide. When you and your raiding squad arrived, I took to the roof because the plans of these men included an escape over the rooftops if they were surrounded."

"Listen, Nathalia," McClary whispered. "You think that Helen is my girl or something. Despite that, you tried to rescue her. She happens to be my dead brother's wife. Now do you get it?"

Moments later an ambulance howled up. McClary watched Helen loaded into the vehicle. He patted Nathalia's hand.

"Stay with her. And don't worry about me. I'm on the homestretch and when I see you again, we'll both breathe easier because Shlegel will be behind bars—or dead."

McClary watched the ambulance roll away; then he walked back into the house.

Blane was as excited as a child with a new toy. In a spacious room, the spy ring had rigged up an ultra-short-wave transmitter, the perfection of which made Blane gasp. But McClary was interested in more animate things. The spies were lined up and Dennis eyed them sternly.

"You men are guilty of violence contrary to the laws of this country. You are spies of a warring nation. The man who organized you is Shlegel. He may be one of your number as you stand here now. If so, will Shlegel step out and admit his defeat?"

"But no," one of the spies said in a quavering voice, "Shlegel is not here. We do not even know him. All his orders come by radio or by messenger. We are guilty, yes—but Shlegel is not among us!"

McClary nodded slowly. "We'll find that out very soon. I think I know who Shlegel is and unless he happens to have assumed a cunning disguise, you speak the truth. He is not among you, now. Take them away. These are the remnants of the spy ring—this section of it anyway."

"And you?" Blane asked. "Where are you going?"

McClary smiled thinly. "To warn the *King George* first. Then I'll get Shlegel. He can't get away, now. We must wait, Blane, before going after him. There are eight hundred

army reservists on the liner. They're prey for enemy subs and ordinarily there would be little we could do, but this scheme was hatched on American soil; so we've a right to break up their party if we can."

"Luck to you," Blane shouted as McClary headed out the door.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SPY CHOOSES.

McClary used one of the official cars and raced to his apartment. He rushed inside, found Curzon seated near a window and holding a heavy statue in one hand.

"What is it?" Curzon recognized McClary's excitement. "What has happened?"

"I've got Shlegel where I want him," McClary cried. "Right now I'm going after the *King George*. There's a navy observation plane waiting for me. Want to come along and be in on the kill, Manuel? You've helped all you could. You deserve the privilege."

"And Shlegel, you have him too?"

McClary shook his head. He was changing into warm clothing as he talked. "Only Helen, and she has been so heavily drugged that she won't be able to talk for hours. That can wait. It's the liner I'm worried about. Come on, we can't waste a minute. The *King George* is well out at sea, right now, proceeding under forced draft to try and outstrip the enemy subs. Shlegel will wait until we return."

Curzon jammed on his hat and followed McClary to the elevators. "True, *amigo*," he panted. "I have made doubly sure that John Varick has not yet returned. I had hoped he would and then—well, I would have had him safely put away for you. As it is, I have not been of much help."

McClary took Curzon's arm and piloted him through the lobby. The official car was still parked at the curb and they headed for it. Then, suddenly, Curzon gave vent to a shout of alarm and raised his hand at the same moment.

A cheap sedan was coursing slowly down the street, hugging the line of parked cars as closely as possible. The window beside the driver's seat was down and a gun glistened in the light of the street lamps. For a fleeting second McClary had a glimpse of the driver's face. It was John Varick, the oil salesman who had done so much business with foreign nations before hostilities put an end to his work.

The gun blazed and the bullet struck a brick wall behind Curzon. McClary whipped out his own weapon, triggered twice and the sedan jerked violently and picked up speed.

"Let's go," McClary said. "He's desperate, now."

They piled into the official car. McClary discovered a hidden siren switch, snapped it home and spread traffic in all directions as he piloted the car down the busy street. The taillight of Varick's car was like a beacon. Gradually they left the busier streets and McClary really leaned on the gas pedal. They gained rapidly.

McClary grinned slightly, transferred his gun to his left hand and thrust it out the window. He blazed away twice. The rear window of Varick's car became cobwebbed.

"Let me take the gun," Curzon breathed. "I am no crack shot, *señor*, but luck is with the right side and perhaps I can hit a tire."

McClary shook his head. "You might kill him and you're no authorized agent of the law. I'll try again—for the gas tank this time."

McClary snapped two more shots. Gasoline spurted from the tank, but at the same moment Varick seemed to have lost control of the car. It veered across the road, hit the curb and one front tire blew out with a loud report. The car kept on going after it hurtled the curb. It lurched across the sidewalk and hit a brick wall with a terrific crash of crumpling fenders.

McClary braked hard, came to an abrupt stop and hastily backed up. Curzon was out of the car in a flash and running toward Varick. McClary saw Varick's left hand dangling limply from the window of the sedan. He kept his gun ready just the same.

Curzon reached Varick's side first. "He is either dead or dying," he said. "It is best that you get a doctor or an ambulance. Shall I go or do—"

McClary shook his head. "I'll stay. Get started, Curzon."

The slender South American nodded eagerly and headed for the official car. Halfway toward it McClary called him back.

"No use," he said. "An ambulance wouldn't do Varick much good. He's dead! Take a look at what I found in his pockets."

McClary extended a brown leather-covered booklet. Curzon flipped it open and scanned the pages.

"A code book," he said. "That proves he is our man. You are one lucky *señor*, *amigo*. Varick is Shlegel!"

McClary stuffed the book into his pocket and sighed. "Not much doubt about it, but we're not finished, yet. There's the *King George*. We've got to stop the sinking. Here comes a radio car. We can get away quickly, now."

McClary identified himself, led one of the officers over to Varick's car and showed him the body. Then he joined Curzon and they raced back to the official sedan.

McClary used the siren to full advantage as he tore off the miles to the naval base. A plane, manned by two pilots, was waiting. Another car roared up as McClary and Curzon got in. Captain Blane darted toward them.

"You're not leaving me out of the finish," he grinned. "I'm seeing this right through. Think you can reach the liner before the subs attack?"

"I don't know," McClary answered. "If her radio operator wasn't in Shlegel's pay, it would be easy; but we've got to contact her personally and, brother, that tub makes speed when she really gets going. Get in and hold onto your hat. This is the fastest plane the navy owns."

Blane and Curzon believed it as the huge ship roared eastward over the sea. Blane sat in one of the rear seats. Curzon occupied another directly across from McClary. The American agent motioned toward the parachutes.

"Better strap yourself in silks, boys. It may be a rough voyage if the subs beat us to it. They carry antiaircraft cannon and our biggest weapon is this .38 I'm lugging around. Heavy doggone thing, too, especially when a man's tired as I am."

McClary casually drew the gun out of its holster and let the weapon rest on his lap. They had veered north, now, and minutes had passed. The three passengers wore their parachutes and all gazed intently down on a dark sea.

Suddenly, straight ahead, the night was cut by a jagged streak of crimson light and the sharp voice

of a heavy gun reached them above the roar of the motors. The pilot swooped down in wide circles. Everyone gazed into the darkness, below. The liner, traveling without lights, wasn't visible at all, nor was the submarine from whose deck that gun had undoubtedly barked a command for the *King George* to heave to.

McClary looked at his watch and his forehead furrowed in anxiety. Then oddly enough the sea was bathed in light. Powerful searchlights on the *King George* danced over the waves and centered on two grim, gray wedges of steel that had sliced the surface of the water. They could see the men manning the deck guns of the subs. One of the guns spoke again and the shell struck the liner somewhere near the stern. A machine gun rapped out death and tracer bullets from the second sub.

Blane wiped his face. "Why don't we do something?" he asked. "Must we sit here and watch those damned subs shell an unarmed liner—kill those hundreds of people aboard her?"

"It's war," McClary reminded him, "and we are neutral. However, those subs may be due for a surprise. Keep watching. They haven't fired a torpedo, yet."

But one of the subs was maneuvering around to do just that. Then, like a flock of falcons swooping out of the night, came eight huge military planes. The subs, bathed in the glare of the *King George's* searchlights, showed signs of activity. Antiaircraft guns boomed, but each sub had only one apiece and those bombers carried tons of death-dealing bombs. There was a tremendous explosion on the water. One sub listed badly, poised for a second

and then slid out of sight on her final dive.

The second sub was trying to get beneath the water. Men were piling down her hatch. But this time all eight bombers cut loose with their hail of death. The sea was turned into a boiling, angry mass of water. When it subsided, there were two giant pools of oil floating on the surface.

Blane shuddered. "Poor devils," he muttered. "They died without a chance."

"It's still war," McClary said softly. "Of course it's horrible.

I've had a bitter taste of war, myself. My brother, Pat, was murdered—shot down because he knew who Shlegel was and what his plans were. Pat intrusted me to deliver a brief case, containing code information about Shlegel's work, to Washington. Shlegel stole the case and put it into the hands of the submarine commander. But now I have Shlegel and his agents; so the United States doesn't need the coded report—and it is valueless to anyone else. I guess that's about all gentlemen. I'd have furnished organ music if I thought I was going into a spiel like that."

"And you were responsible for having those bombers protecting the *King George*?" Curzon asked. "Ah, *amigo*, I envy you. For every man who died in those cursed submarines, a hundred still live on the liner."

"I was not responsible," McClary said slowly. "The line which operated the *King George* was informed as to the nature of the code broadcast and, in turn, notified its government. They did the rest. And, now, let's get back to Shlegel who plotted all this. The ring of spies with whom he worked are all under lock and key. Shlegel clev-

erly prepared for just such an event by not even letting his own men know his identity. He didn't know that we had captured one of his portable short-wave sets and, through it, tracked down the location of his ultrashort-wave transmitter. He didn't believe that his broadcast of rumba music would ever be detected as code. He kidnaped Helen so she wouldn't be able to identify him, but she is safe and will talk."

"But—who is Shlegel?" Captain Blane asked breathlessly.

Curzon waved one hand excitedly. "Then McClary has not yet told you? It is Varick—John Varick. He was killed, just before we took off on this flight. He died trying to get away from us."

The door of the pilot's quarters opened and the radio operator came out with a message for McClary. He took it, read the words and stowed the message into his pocket.

Captain Blane was shaking his head slowly. "I figured it was Varick. Our records showed he was pretty deeply involved in foreign affairs. He had a lot of money tied up. But wait a minute. I thought this Shlegel was an international spy."

"He was," McClary said calmly. "Shlegel was really a man without a country. He was a spy in peace times, selling his information to the highest bidder. He fled to the United States when war broke out in Europe because Shlegel didn't like war. No spy does—not when it strikes too close. Foreign agents hired him for this work, knowing his ruthlessness, but banking on the fact that he usually produced results.

"He did," Blane sighed. "At least six freighters were torpedoed through the advice that Shlegel

radioed to enemy submarines."

McClary studied the gun he still held in his hand. "In doing that he violated the neutrality of the United States. If he happened to be caught, there would have been a prison term staring him in the face. But he'd be released and deported. When that happened—well, you can imagine how the government for which he was operating would feel about a man who had failed so miserably. The strangest thing about it all lies in the fact that Shlegel at one time became a citizen of still another country—one that is an enemy of the nation for which he is working. He'd be sent back to that country and—a brick wall at gray dawn. Spies live hard, gentlemen. They must learn to die hard, too."

Curzon strained forward. So did Blane. Both had their eyes on McClary's automatic. They noticed that his finger was curled around the trigger tightly, despite all the laziness of his speech and his apparent relaxation.

"I have something else to tell you," McClary went on. "John Varick is not dead. He has recovered consciousness and is talking. Varick got himself so involved in foreign affairs that he was compelled to obey

Schlegel's orders. Shlegel used him as a front man, prepared to throw all the blame on him and get away, himself. Therefore, Shlegel is not dead either, but please compose yourselves, gentlemen, for another minute. Shlegel is a strange creature. Now he realizes that he is completely beaten. However I owe Shlegel something. I am quite prepared to pay my debts. Do you comprehend the meaning of my words, Curzon?"

Curzon arose slowly, watching McClary's automatic as though it hypnotized him.

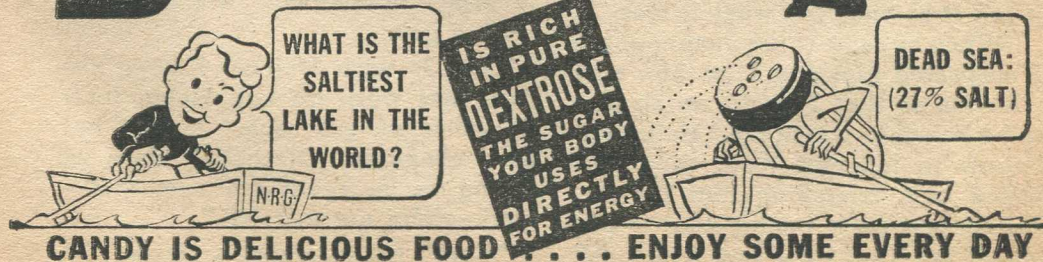
"*Si, señor.* I quite understand," he said. "I believed you as stupid as your brother was brilliant. I am sorry that he had to die. It was not of my doing. I do not care to hear how you discovered me. Ignoble defeat is bad enough without the details. I shall get off here, if you do not mind."

Curzon backed to the door of the plane, unlatched it and put his weight against it. He squeezed himself half out of the plane, raised one hand in a formal, military salute and smiled wanly. Then he let go and vanished from sight.

"What—what—" Blane began excitedly.

McClary heaved a great sigh and

CURTISS Butterfinger



stuffed his gun back into his pocket.

"Yes—Curzon was Shlegel. I knew it almost from the beginning, but I had no proof."

"He's getting away," Blane shouted. "He's wearing a parachute."

McClary glanced out of the window. "He did not pull the rip cord," he said slowly, "and even if he had, we are a hundred and sixty miles off shore. Shlegel took his defeat like a gentleman—and at the very moment when he thought he was safe. You see, captain, Shlegel saved my life, once. When I dove off the clipper to rescue that drowning man, Curzon tucked Pat's brief case under his shirt. He also tied a life preserver under his clothing. Then he pretended that the only reason he dove into the sea was to rescue me. He really wanted to get that brief case in the hands of the sub commander. But after he had tied the brief case to the life preserver and cast it adrift, he swam out and actually did save my life. That wasn't necessary. He could have kept on pretending and no one would have been the wiser."

Blane said: "Oh!" That was all he could think of.

McClary went on. "Varick got wise. He wasn't shooting at me but at Curzon. I pretended Varick was dead. I even planted one of our own code books on him and pretended to remove it from his pocket. Curzon—who should have known nothing about things like that—recognized it at once for what it was.

"When he came to me unannounced I suspected him and I let him stay with me so that I could watch him as he hoped to watch me. Being unknown to his own men, they kidnaped him, mistaking him for me. I'll confess quite readily that it put me off the track for a few moments."

"He put me off the track all of the time," Blane said.

McClary smiled. "Nathalia worked with him, trying to get information, too. He almost finished me off when I stepped out of the hotel; but when he realized he hadn't done so, he hurried to my apartment and proceeded to smoke twenty-seven cigarettes as fast as he could so there would be plenty of butts to indicate he had been there for hours. But he smoked them too fast. My apartment happens to be air conditioned, and even that machinery didn't carry the smoke off completely. When I left him at the inn to watch one of his own men, he used that sending set and warned the spies at the short-wave transmitter that I was on my way. Again, he very nearly got me. So I let Curzon think the *King George* wasn't really sailing and there was no broadcast. Then I told him it was going to sail, anyway, and he promptly came through with the broadcast we needed, not knowing we had one of his short-wave sets. He robbed my safe and destroyed the only recording we had. To trap him I placed an alarm clock on the telephone table. I phoned Curzon from Nathalia's apartment and told him she was through. He immediately phoned back, disguised his voice—thinking I was Nathalia—told her to either commit suicide or be killed. While he talked, the alarm clock ticked away merrily."

"And Nathalia?" Blane asked with a grin.

"She is with Helen. I hope the drug has worn off and Helen feels fit when we get back. I need her as a chaperon. Nathalia's days of acting as an agent are over and—well—we're not married."

"Yet!" Blane added amiably.



the Three-Headed Monkey

by PAUL ERNST

CHAPTER I. TOMBSTONE DECORATIONS.

Artemus Kaye blinked a couple of times and decided that the night-marish little thing wasn't really there. Of course it wasn't there! It couldn't be there! You don't see

things like that on a tombstone in a graveyard at dusk.

But it really did seem that the thing was there. It leered at him with glazed eyes. There was a horrible grin on its lips.

So Artemus Kaye decided that he was seeing something, all right, but

that what he was seeing was a hallucination.

He must have been working too hard at his hobby.

Artemus was a high-school physics teacher and looked it. He was of medium height, but he walked with a slight scholarly stoop. His hair was abundant enough, and it was usually allowed to fall around his head like an untidy dust mop. His eyes were blue, rather light, and were forever blinking behind horn-rimmed glasses.

Artemus was a schoolteacher. But his hobby had to do, in a way, with death. He was a cemetery specialist. He collected facts about graveyards, trends of art as indicated by tomb sculpture; and he collected queer epitaphs.

He was writing a book about these things. Because he didn't get out of school till pretty late, he had to stay in graveyards as long as there was any light at all left, in order to get any facts whatever. He had just collected his last epitaph of the day, with dusk so far advanced that he'd had to light a match to read the weathered letters cut in the stone.

It had been worth it, though. Bending far down, and blinking through horn-rimmed glasses, he had copied the following immortal, if callous, poetry.

Peter Robert Winch

1824 to 1863

Here lies Peter; died in pain.
Born an idler; lived in vain.
Lived in vain; died in pain—
To ye who think, the moral's plain.

He had bent far down behind a big square slab to copy this from a little slab, had straightened up again—and had seen that frantically impossible thing leering at him from atop still another slab.

A monkey's head, it seemed to be.

Or else it was the head of a small child unaccountably equipped with a close-cropped sailor's full beard.

"I don't believe it!" said Artemus Kaye, distinctly and aloud.

He walked toward the slab, picking his way over ground that was now completely night-shaded. He moved with the precision of one who doesn't jump at conclusions, and who prides himself on having an organized mind. He blinked calmly and determinedly through the large glasses.

The head stayed there. It didn't disappear. It was so undeniably there that when he reached out his hand, he could feel it.

A little shiver went up his spine at the touch of fuzzy, cold hairs, and clammy cold skin over the small skull.

"Dear, dear!"

Artemus shook his head in slight disgust as he picked the object up. The head had been rather messily severed from its owner's shoulders. Then it had been equally messily hollowed out.

There were the outer habiliments of fur and epidermis that should normally clothe a monkey's head, but there was nothing in the skull.

"Dear me!"

Artemus was looking around for the shoulders the head had come from. To a logical teacher of a logical science like physics, it was plain enough. Monkey's head—monkey. But there wasn't any headless monkey anywhere around. There was just this grisly, hairy little thing.

Artemus scratched his jaw and tentatively set the head back on the tombstone, which had been put there in 1904 to memorialize one Jonathan Jallopp.

It looked awful; so Artemus picked it up again, fingers shrink-

ing from the dead feel of it. Then he started toward the cemetery gate. There was a caretaker's house near the gate. He'd leave the monkey's head with the caretaker.

It was entirely dark, now. He found it slow going, peering carefully through his glasses to avoid tripping on the smaller slabs. And he had almost reached the one small building in the place housing life when he saw that there was no light in it. Either the caretaker didn't get here till later at night, or there was no caretaker; even cemeteries save money sometimes.

Also, Artemus made the discovery that in his start at seeing a monkey's head grinning at him from on top of a tombstone, he had left his notebook back there by the slab of Peter Winch who had lived in vain and died in pain.

Carefully he turned and picked his way back. And now he decided to return the monkey's head to the slab over Jonathan Jallop's grave. It was right in line with the spot where his notebook must be lying; so he didn't have to go out of his way.

He got within a yard of Jallop's big slab before he could really see it, and then he really did blink.

There was a monkey's head on top of the stone oblong!

He squeezed with his right hand, and then hastily unsqueezed. The monkey's head was still in that hand.

Yet the monkey's head was also on the tombstone.

"My heavens!"

Artemus Kaye bent down within a foot of the thing. At that range he could not only see the little thing but faintly smell it—a musty, dusty odor.

He picked it up, and sighed with an odd relief. This was a monkey's

head, but it had not been recently severed. It was from a stuffed monkey.

Two monkeys' heads, placed one after the other, on a dead man's grave.

"Someone has an eccentric idea of humor," Artemus Kaye told himself solemnly.

He picked the second head up. He couldn't carry two in one hand because the fur was too short for his fingers to grip. He didn't want to go wandering through the night with a monkey's head in each hand.

And, besides, he was curious, now.

He took the second head and went off ten yards. A small mausoleum was there. He went around the corner of it and peered out.

He peered at the tomb of Jonathan Jallop.

By looking a long time through the very dark night, he could see the light-colored stone slab. But he couldn't see anything else. He strained his ears to try to make up for lack of vision.

Would someone come along with a third head? He was sure no one would. That was getting too far into the realm of the fantastic to be conceivable.

He had been there perhaps eight minutes, and he thought he heard something. It was more sensed than heard: a faint sloughing, as of feet over damp earth. At the same time, he thought he saw something—twin blurs, low to the ground, moving rhythmically. And moving away from Jallop's headstone.

After a time when he deemed himself safe—for Artemus Kaye was no adventurer to charge things in cemeteries at night—he went on tiptoe to the tombstone, again.

"Dear me!"

There was the third head! A little

furry thing like a child's small head, only covered with short hair. It looked straight ahead, glazed eyes about chest-high.

This was like the first. It had been freshly severed from some unfortunate monkey, and messily severed, too. Also, the skull had been gruesomely hollowed out.

"A three-headed monkey?" mused Artemus. He could almost have believed it, had it not been for the second head, which had come from a monkey long dead and stuffed.

"I think," said Artemus, "that somebody is as crazy as . . . er . . . hell."

But he wasn't so entirely sure of that, either. There was an undercurrent of something pretty grim suggested by this monkey's head business.

He didn't touch this head. Last time, he had taken the second head and hidden to see if a third would be left. A third was. This time he'd leave the head and see if still another would appear, perhaps beside it, so that two heads would peer into the night from over Jonathan Jallop's grave.

He had scarcely retreated to the mausoleum when he heard more sounds. They were distinct this time. Sounds of dry rustling, like the sounds that might be made by dozens of snakes dragging their scales over rock.

Artemus scratched his jaw and decided that he didn't like that at all. But then the vague dimness of the tombstone was blotted out by an unseen shape that appeared to be human. He felt better. The idea of humans was more acceptable than that of snakes or of something supernatural.

Then, suddenly, Artemus prepared to charge.

As has been said, Artemus Kaye was no adventurer. He was a peaceful physics teacher. Furthermore, he was not one of those athletic, red-necked instructors who briskly open each day with a two-hour workout in a gymnasium. His muscles were about as neglected as those of most office workers.

He had decided to charge for the common-sense reason that he had seen that the person over there by the tombstone was smaller than he. The stone was chest-high to Artemus; the dark blotch of that other person barely topped the slab with its head.

He rushed the dark blotch, got his hands firmly on it.

"Now," he said, in his strictest professional tone, "what is all this? What do you mean by—"

He stopped. He had thought he was holding a boy, and that the monkey's head affair was, after all, a youthful prank. But he wasn't holding a boy. His suddenly distressed and very decorous fingers told him that.

"Let me go!" panted a voice. A girl's voice!

Automatically, he hung on. He tried to see the girl's face. There was some sort of confounded hood half over it.

"Let me go!" she repeated, struggling like a tigress. "I have done what you demanded. You miserable, cold-blooded murderer. Let me go!"

"Dear me," said Artemus.

He hadn't known quite what to do when he got a flock of monkeys' heads thrust at him. He knew even less what to do now that he had a girl, an obviously shapely one, writhing in his hands.

"I will scratch your eyes out," she informed him in a panting whisper. "I will cut you into small pieces!"

Artemus looked at the tombstone.

The monkey's head was still there. Not two, just one. This girl had not come with still another.

"I wish," he said plaintively, turning back to her, "that you would explain, just a little—"

His voice trailed off. The girl was sagging in his arms. He opened his hands and she kept on sagging, ending up on the ground.

"For Heaven's—"

Something zoomed down from the sky and rocketed against Artemus Kaye's skull. Then he started sagging, too, winding up across the prone body of the girl.

CHAPTER II.

DEAD—BUT NOT BURIED.

With a rather shaky hand, Artemus poured brandy into a tumbler in his kitchenette. He had bought the brandy a year and ten months ago and it was still five-sixths full; which tells how much of a toper he was.

Artemus had straggled back to consciousness in the dark graveyard while the girl under him was still out. He had carried her laboriously to the cemetery gate and dumped her in his 1931 roadster, to take her to a drugstore.

However, graveyards aren't usually in the vicinity of business districts. By the time he had reached the store section, she was stirring a little; so he had decided to take her on home to his apartment.

He carried the half-tumbler of brandy back into the living room of his small, neat apartment. The girl was sitting up and looking at him out of dazed eyes.

But dazed or not, there was nothing the matter with the appearance of those eyes. Or of the rest of the girl.

She had flaming-red hair, skin that

would have made milk look slightly soiled, and jet-black eyes. The startling contrast of a blonde's skin and a redhead's flaming tresses, with those black, black eyes, was something to make even an ultraconventional physics teacher rock a little on his toes. Further, she was dressed—or rather, sheathed—in electric-blue silk that outlined a figure as blazingly perfect as her face. She was so shockingly beautiful that Artemus didn't know whether he liked it or not. But he didn't get much chance to think it over.

"You are a pig," said the girl very calmly and distinctly. There was no fog in her black, flaming eyes any more. "You are a pig who steals and lies and murders."

"Eh?" said Artemus, hand jarring so that he spilled a little of the brandy. He stared over his shoulder, blue eyes blinking through the glasses. But there was no one else around but him.

"You are a pig in glasses, and I hate you. Please to give me those emeralds."

"Emeralds?" gaped Artemus Kaye. He didn't know what to do with the glass in his hand. Apparently she didn't need its contents, and there wasn't any place handy to set it down. He passed it fumblingly from one hand to the other.

"Yess, emeralds!" The gorgeously beautiful redhead with the black eyes was a Latin. That was apparent from her speech. Her speech had no accent, save the occasional slurring of an s, as in "yess." But for the rest, it was too precise for any American to use.

"You took the emeralds, pig. And you have no intention of concluding your share of the bargain. Give them back at once!"

"I haven't any emeralds," protested Artemus, going at last to a

table and setting the glass down. "For Heaven's—"

"You struck me in the cemetery and took them."

"No! Somebody else hit you. And then he hit me. Only I came to more swiftly than you did and brought you here to try to help you."

That was all, for a moment.

The girl was up out of the easy-chair and piling into Artemus like a black panther—a couple of black panthers.

He went over backward and his glasses fell off and smashed. He fumbled and scrambled and finally got out from under the attacking fury with no worse luck than a slight scratch over one cheekbone.

He swayed on his feet, fighting her off.

"Look here, now," he said. "Please, look here. This is most undignified. Look at my head. See where I was hit, too? I'm not trying to lie to you."

The girl with the flame-red hair and the jet-black eyes looked thoughtfully at an egg on Artemus Kaye's head. Quite impersonally she rumbled his unruly hair to get a better view of it.

"You could have been hit days and days ago," she said. But there was a different tone in her voice. "Or you could be telling the truth."

She looked around, at the eminently respectable mediocrity of Artemus Kaye's living room. She looked at him, no longer blinking, because now there were no glasses for him to blink through.

Then she sagged groundward, again.

It was so unexpected that Artemus was barely able to get to her in time to break the last part of her fall.

"Look here! Please! Don't faint. Not in my apartment."

He galloped to the table and got

the half-tumbler of brandy. He couldn't get her white, lovely little teeth apart.

There was a drugstore on the corner. He fled out of his apartment to it.

"Smelling salts!" he commanded the clerk. "Quick!"

"Something wrong, Professor Kaye?"

"Yes! A monkey fainted in my rooms—I mean— Give me those!"

He went back and, once more on that fantastic night, was confronted with confusion.

There wasn't any girl there! And there was no order there, either. All was chaos! Cushions were off chairs and divan; pictures hung crooked; drawers were half open; the rugs were in small, scuffed heaps. There had been a whirlwind search, then a completely successful disappearing act on the girl's part.

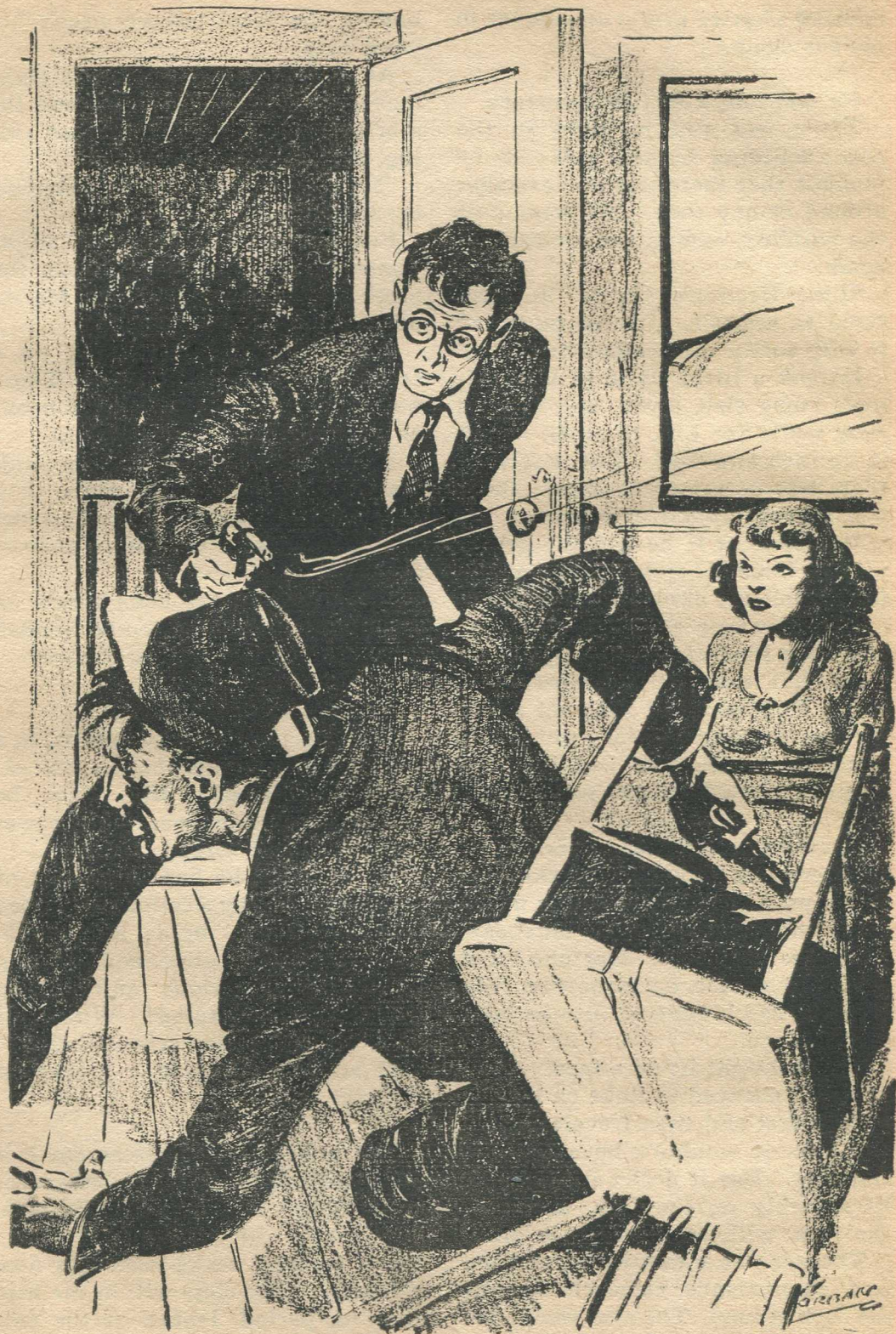
"For Heaven's—"

The fainting spell had been pre-tense. She had come into his life; now she was gone out of it without a trace. Like the three-headed monkey. Or, more accurately, the three monkeys' heads.

The lips of Artemus Kaye slowly assumed a straight, stubborn line. Very straight and very stubborn.

He had fallen into an inexplicable thing. Now it appeared he had fallen out, just as completely. If he didn't do something about it. But he was—er—damned if he wasn't going to do something about it!

He rummaged in a disarranged top drawer and took out another pair of glasses. These, he fitted over his nose, to replace the ones smashed in that most embarrassing tussle with the girl. He got a flashlight from another drawer, and walked—with the sober, pedantic tread of an



The man had a gun halfway out of his pocket. So Artemus shot him. Twice!

aroused physics professor—down to his car again.

He went back to that cemetery.

There was still no light in the small building by the gate; so he guessed that there was no caretaker around at any time. He went past the building, among the tombstones again.

"Like Newton's ghost," he muttered to himself. But he muttered it very softly and walked on tiptoe.

It took a little while to find Jallop's stone slab, again, and quite a long while for him to creep up on it, an inch at a time. But it seemed there was no reason to creep; there was no one around to hear.

It looked as if he had the graveyard to himself; so he peered at the top of Jallop's oblong headstone.

There was no monkey's head, or any other kind of head, on the stone.

He felt around, remembered he had a flashlight and snapped it on. He was looking on the ground for monkeys' heads. He had left two when he carried the girl to his roadster.

They weren't there, either. The cemetery was completely lacking in monkeys' heads. He went on a few steps and looked for his notebook. That was gone, too. Not one trace remained of the outrageously silly thing he had blundered into an hour or more ago.

His flashlight lit on a face.

Had it chanced to light on part of a body first and then traveled up to the face, it wouldn't have been so startling. But it didn't do that. It lit squarely on the face, and only the face, with no warning at all.

There it was, a wax-white, motionless countenance cameoed against the dark ground. The eyes were open and did not move. It looked pretty grim; but Artemus went forward

hoping the face's owner wasn't beyond help.

As he moved forward, the light moved in his hand and glanced for a brief instant off what seemed riding boots.

"My dear fellow," began Artemus, bending low.

For the second time that night something skimmed down from the black sky and ricocheted off his inoffensive head.

When he moaned and sat up a second time, he was alone. There was no face where a face had been; no body around. He was alone.

With a pair of eggs on his skull that would have done credit to a Rhode Island Red, he looked around for his glasses. He found them—smashed.

"*Two pair!*" he complained in fogged annoyance. Then he wended his bemused way back to the gate.

Artemus Kaye was sore.

He himself might have put it, in a more scholarly way, that he was extremely irritated. But what he would have meant was that he was sore. Damned sore!

He felt that he had been kind of pushed around by a callously amused Fate. Monkeys' heads and shockingly beautiful girls and getting knocked unconscious and having your glasses shattered! What sort of stuff is that for schoolteachers? And all happening in a graveyard at night.

The pupils in his classroom felt that old Artie, as he was condescendingly called behind his back, was subtly different today. They didn't try any tricks with this new old Artie. The class wit, in the first morning period, looked at the two lumps on the professional bean and murmured: "Hm-m-m, ran into *two*

doors last night." But he didn't say it audibly.

The instant the day was over, instead of hanging conscientiously around as he usually did, Artemus dashed out and got into his car. Instead of going to the school cafeteria at noon, he had gone lunchless and spent his time phoning.

There were about twenty pet shops in the university-residential city that carried monkeys. There were nine taxidermists. He had called them all.

Yes, said one of the taxidermists, they had sold a stuffed monkey the day before. No, they didn't know who the purchaser was. A voice, neither noticeably masculine nor feminine, had called and ordered one. The stuffed monkey had been sent by messenger boy to a house on the edge of town. The boy came back saying that it was funny: when he knocked, a hand reached out an almost closed doorway with money in it, gave up the money, and took the stuffed monkey. Then the door was slammed; so he never did see who it was.

Artemus got the address of the house.

Yes, said one of the pet-shop owners, they had sold a monkey day before yesterday. Didn't sell many of those. He remembered it well. The address of the buyer? Now, that he didn't know. He thought, however, that the man lived near here, because he had come in on foot. Normally, a man coming for a monkey would go off either in a cab or a private car to avoid crowds, and this man had just walked off with it.

Artemus, out for the day, went to the definite address, given by the taxidermist, first. But he found it a blank: a vacant house in a quiet section.

A stuffed monkey had been de-

livered there, all right. Artemus, having entered through a window, found the headless torso of the thing in the front hall. The person who had received it had torn off the head and left, and that was that. There were no traces, unless the police could collect significant fingerprints.

This brought Artemus squarely up against a thing he had ducked so far. The police. Shouldn't he go and talk to them?

He thought it over in his methodical way.

"I saw three monkeys' heads placed, one after another, on a tombstone. Later they were gone. I caught a girl near the tombstone and she said something about emeralds and, later, vanished into the night. I saw a man who might have been dead, or deeply unconscious and then was struck down by an unseen assailant. And there was no man lying there when I came to."

He shook his head, blinking through his glasses. Steel-rimmed, these were. The probable reaction of the police was obvious. There was assault and battery—he had been knocked out twice.

But why was he in a graveyard at night anyway? And what was all this guff about monkeys' heads? They'd laugh at him.

Artemus left the stuffed torso of a monkey lying in the hall of the vacant house and went back to the vicinity of the pet shop whose proprietor had guessed that the purchaser of a live monkey lived near. Blinking solemnly through his glasses, he went through an identical procedure with owner or janitor of every building in a three-block square around the pet shop.

He wanted a room or an apartment. He wanted a quiet room because he had a pet monkey that was temperamental and went a little in-

sane if aroused by noise. His story aroused refusals to rent, but that was all.

Dinnertime came and went. And at a little before nine, in a one-room-apartment building two blocks from the pet shop, he got something.

"Are you a friend of the other guy?" said the janitor, who was in charge of rentals for the building.

"Other—er—guy?" repeated Artemus, blinking innocently through his large glasses.

"Other guy with a monkey," said the janitor. "He took a place, here, day before yesterday. Said his name was Robert Brown. Good American name, but he looked Spanish or something to me. A chauffeur, I think. He has Apartment 3B, in the back. Haven't seen him since yesterday afternoon."

Artemus blinked.

"Don't know him. But if you rented to one man with a monkey I expect you won't mind renting to another. Give me the keys to whatever vacant rear apartments you have and I'll go up and look them over. No need for you to climb the stairs, too."

The janitor gave him three keys, volubly describing the merits of the three vacant apartments as he did so. And Artemus went up to 3B.

One of the three keys almost fit the lock. Artemus twisted hard, there was a little squeal and the door opened. He went in.

The bareness of the room proved that the place was not a permanent residence. It was almost as vacant, and as clueless, as the vacant house on the edge of town. But not quite, not quite.

On the bathroom floor was a pale-pink smear. That might have been where an unlucky monkey had lost its head—and where blood had not

quite been mopped up. Also on the bathroom floor were banana skins. The man had apparently kept the animal alive for a day at least, feeding it fruit, and had then decapitated it.

There was nothing else in the place.

Artemus looked absently at the banana skins. The janitor had thought the occupant of this bare room was a chauffeur. That jibed with boots like riding boots that Artemus had seen on the man lying near Jallop's grave. They had been puttees; chauffeur's puttees. The man who had rented this room and put one of the monkeys' heads on the tombstone; the twin blurs Artemus had seen had been dim reflections of far light on polished puttees. And that man had been knocked out or murdered, last night, in the cemetery.

He had something, now, to take to the police.

Artemus went to the door, started to open it; then he silently closed it again so that the lock clicked shut. He had heard steps outside, and voices. He doused the lights, and jumped for the window.

Over thirty feet below was hard cement. And that was all.

Artemus stood on the end of the window ledge and hung onto the slight projection of an ornamental ledge over the window frame. He heard a door open and close after what seemed a long time.

Only an Alpine climber would have felt at home on that ledge; and Artemus was no climber. He was afraid to look down into the night. His knees were jello. His fingers felt as if bound to uncurl all by themselves and drop him. And in addition, he had to stand with his body in a question-mark position, out away from the edge of the win-

dow, so that whoever was in the room wouldn't see him through the glass.

Two and a half lifetimes passed, then the door shut again.

He climbed into the room. It seemed untouched. He went to the bathroom.

The banana skins were gone and the tile floor no longer had the pale-pink smear. It had been scrubbed completely clean.

Artemus hurried out of the place and down the stairs. He left the apartment keys on the bottom step, and raced to the sidewalk.

Down the block, a big green sedan was just pulling away from the curb. Artemus got into his car and followed. It looked as if whoever had killed the chauffeur in the graveyard last night—Artemus was more and more sure he had seen a corpse and not an unconscious man—had come here to remove any traces left by his victim.

By following, very discreetly of course, Artemus might have a gang lair or something to report to the police when he told the rest of his tale.

But he began to get more and more uneasy about this course of action as the green sedan went farther and farther out into the country.

The country got more and more open, less and less inhabited, and more and more black trees added to the dark of a moonless night.

It was a perfectly murderous setting!

CHAPTER III.

THE GREEN MOONS.

Artemus stared across fifteen or twenty yards of clearing at a dimly lighted window in an unkempt shack.

The green car was in back of this

place. He could easily find it again, to lead the police back. There was no reason why he should stay around any longer.

But he stayed there at the edge of the clearing and looked at the one window from which light lanced through a drawn shade. He searched himself methodically for fear and, to his vague surprise, didn't find much.

He had shivered and shook on the building ledge, because he was afraid of heights. But here, in the face of a human equation that was almost certainly sinister, he had about the same heartbeat as always.

"Dear me," he muttered. "That's odd. I *ought* to be afraid. I wonder what's in that lighted room?"

He went across the clearing. There was an inch between the bottom of the shade and the window sill. He looked through the small opening and his mouth jerked.

There was the girl, the outrageously beautiful girl with the black eyes and contrasting red hair and white skin.

She sat on the floor, with her back against a wall. She was obviously uncomfortable, but couldn't move because she was bound hand and foot.

Standing and facing her was a man smoking a cigarette. Another man lounged near the door of the room, looking first at his pal and then at the girl. There was a lot of greedy admiration in his eyes for the black-eyed, red-haired beauty. But in the eyes of the man smoking the cigarette there was none.

Artemus got out a little pearl-handled knife, and inserted the blade in the window crack. The window raised a fraction of an inch, and he could hear as well as see, through the resulting opening.

"I say I gave up the emeralds,"

the girl said, wearily, angrily. If there was fear in her heart it didn't show in the snapping black eyes. "I say you got them. You are just trying to get more. But there are no more."

A voice came from somewhere in another room. A child's voice.

"Where is my monkey? I want my Peppe! Where is—"

A solid slap ended that. The bound girl flinched, then stared at the man above her with a tornado of hatred in her eyes.

"You will be cut into pieces for that," she said. "I promise you!"

"That ain't nothin' to what you'll get if you don't kick through those emeralds!" the man snarled back. "And you should see what the kid'll get."

"Aw, cut the chatter," said the man lounging by the door. "Give her something to think about. But do it where it don't show, can't ya? She's about the swellest—"

The standing man ignored the æsthetic sensibilities of his partner. He had a long red cone on the cigarette. He reached with it toward the bound girl's cheek.

"Wait!" said the man at the door suddenly.

The other looked at him.

"She's gonna yell like hell," said the man. "We're a long ways from nowhere, but she might be heard. And that kid—"

The man with the cigarette nodded. "Tell one of the others to take the kid and beat it in the coupé."

The man at the door yelled something. But Artemus didn't hear what was called. He was staring at the cheek that had been threatened. The girl was looking at the cigarette. Her face was as white as fresh plaster.

Why, these things don't happen, Artemus was telling himself, mouth still open with profound amazement. Men don't really do these things. Why, anyone that would do such a thing isn't a man. He ought to be stepped on, like poisonous vermin—

He heard a car start in back, and moved to look around the corner and get the license number if possible. But that move was never made. For then the man leaned near with the cigarette again. It was so near that it made a little reflected red glow on the white, perfect cheek.

Artemus took his knife blade out of the window crack, letting the frame bang back into place. The men in the room whirled, and Artemus turned and ran—for the front door.

There was a low, two-for-a-cent porch. He lay full length at the edge of this, and heard thunderous steps down the porch stairs. Then he got up and ran into the house, clutching the ridiculous penknife as his only weapon.

There was still a man in the room with the girl. Artemus' ruse hadn't drawn all the gang out into the night. The man was at the window, staring out. He turned, and his gun bucked in his hand.

Artemus Kaye, scholarly, stooped physics teacher, felt a bullet practically notch his ear. Then he crouched as the man jumped for him. But the jump was never completed.

The girl leaning against the wall, stretched far enough for the tip of one toe to catch the ankle of the charging man. He fell on his face, and his gun came to Artemus' feet as though he had whistled for it.

Artemus picked it up. The man had another gun halfway out of his pocket. So Artemus shot him. Twice!

"Hm-m-m," he said, frowning. "I suppose I shouldn't have done that." His knife was sawing at rope as he spoke. "It would have been silly, though, to stand up to him. He was much bigger, and I don't know how to fight."

He got the girl to her feet. She was giggling at him, black eyes enormous in her white face.

A countenance showed itself at the window. Artemus shot at that, too. The countenance disappeared, but he feared he hadn't hit it. He was no marksman.

"Come on!"

He slapped out the light bulb of the room and went for the door. A figure appeared, shooting as it came. Artemus went to hands and knees, and the figure fell over him with one foot scraping across his face and knocking off his glasses.

Artemus banged at a floundering head, stepped into the hall, emptied the gun he held out the front door, and then went through the dark room with the girl to the window, which he opened noiselessly.

She didn't have to be helped. She got her dress, the electric-blue one, out of the way of her legs and slid out like an agile boy. Artemus followed.

He pointed her toward the dark-green sedan, a big lump of blackness in the night. They got into it. There were shouts and shots at the door, where Artemus had played army by firing half a dozen shots at nothing.

The car started off.

Artemus suddenly thought it was hailing out of a clear, black sky. Then he realized that not hailstones but bullets were cracking and fogging the glass of windshield and windows.

"Why, they are gangsters," he said, bouncing the car along a road

that was little more than a rutted lane. "This proves it. Only gangsters own bulletproof cars. Are you a gangster's—er—moll?"

The girl was still giggling at him, with her lovely head swaying a little on her gorgeous shoulders.

"You—" she whispered, "you . . . hero."

There was no pretending about her fainting this time. She slid toward the floor of the car like an empty sack.

Not quite an hour later Artemus recognized the house to which the girl directed him. It belonged to some banker or other who was on a world cruise. Artemus had just happened to read about it in the paper. The banker had rented it to a South American person named McCarthy. He had remembered it because McCarthy seemed such an odd name for anyone from Rio de Janeiro.

They went into the house and an aristocratic-looking elderly lady with dark eyes and waved, iron-gray hair stared tearfully at the girl and said:

"I feared you were dead—little Ybano?"

"I don't know," said the girl. And then they were in a living room that looked like a Hollywood set on a small scale. The elderly, aristocratic-looking lady quit crying.

Artemus sat down—and the girl came and sat on the arm of his chair and kissed him, not once but three times.

"I . . . er—" said Artemus.

"Look at him, Mergita," said the girl. "He is heroic. He is fearless! I think I love him. Yes, I know I love him!"

She kissed him again, and the aristocrat with the iron-gray hair

looked anxious but did nothing to stop it.

"You . . . er—" said Artemus.

"The glasses!" the girl said suddenly. "But you are *nice-looking*, without the glasses."

"They got broken," said Artemus, looking at her lips. They were as perfectly, almost as outrageously beautiful as the rest of her. "Third pair. They're my last."

"But you must never get more!" said the girl. "I will not permit it. You hear?" She tightened the white arm she had put around his neck.

"He saved my life, Mergita! He is mine, now. I will not ever let him go!" Then she began to cry.

"Dear me," said Artemus. The sudden changes of mood left him feeling as if someone had pulled the chair out from under him.

"Ybano," said the girl. "My Ybano! They had taken him away before you came to me. Otherwise, doubtless, you would have saved him, too."

And the red lips darted close.

"Now, look! Now, wait a minute," said Artemus, ducking the lips. Badly handicapped by the almost childish trustful beauty draping itself around his neck, he tried to sort out a few things.

"Who is Ybano?"

"My little brother," said the girl. "My father sent him north from Rio to be schooled. He sent me, Ybano's old-maid sister, to look after him."

"Old-maid sister?" repeated Artemus, jarred out of his methodical questioning. "You're not a day over twenty."

"Almost twenty-two," said the girl. "But now I am no longer an old maid. I have found you. If you think I am not keeping you, you are wrong. And if you think that because we have met so short a time

ago, that I do not yet know my own mind, you are wrong, too! I am like that. I do not need years and years to know my mind— Oh, Ybano!"

Artemus came back a bit.

"Your name?"

The girl laughed tearfully.

"To think, my man does not, yet, even know my name. Nor I, his. I am Lorita McCarthy. There are many other names, but those will do." She fluffed out her hair with her right hand, keeping her left arm as firmly around Artemus Kaye's neck as if it had grown there like a lovely arbutus. "My red hair comes from an Irish father. The rest of me from a Spanish mother. And this, brave darling, is Mergita, my duenna."

The aristocratic lady with the waved gray hair nodded her head. Artemus noted her restraint with growing alarm. As duenna, she shouldn't have been caught dead letting Lorita sit with her arm around a man's neck, kissing that man whenever an opening occurred.

"My father sent me with Ybano to watch over him," said the girl. "He sent Mergita to watch over *me*! As if that were necessary! I do not look at men till I find the right one. You!"

"Hm-m-m," said Artemus.

Why didn't that confounded duenna put her foot down? Did this impossibly beautiful thing beside him mean what she said, and did the duenna know it and condone all because a future husband is permitted—

"Childish and impossible," said Artemus.

The girl and the older woman stared at him, particularly at his eyes. The eyes of Artemus were quite different without glasses. They were clear blue; unblinking

blue, now that glasses weren't in front of them.

"You will not wear the glasses again, ever," said Lorita, kissing his ear. "Your name?"

"Artemus Kaye," said Artemus.

Lorita wrinkled a superb nose. "I do not like that. It is—fussy. And you are not fussy. Any man that would do what you have done. Mergita, you should have seen him shoot the poison pig who would have burned me. Bang and bang! And he is dead. My father shall give him all he likes for that. But there is Ybano— My father will kill us both when we go back without Ybano, Mergita. I shall call you Arturo, darling, save when we are alone. Then it is—Art."

"Tell Mr. Kaye more, my dear," said the duenna. "I see that he is not understanding—"

"I think I have it all," said Artemus slowly. "You are rich, Lorita."

"Quite terribly," said Lorita, without much interest. "My father has emerald mines and mahogany and rubber and coffee—"

"A kidnap gang took your brother," Artemus went on. "They took your brother and a pet monkey. Right?"

"Yes! Little Peppe," said Lorita, putting her cheek against his.

"The gang demanded emeralds as ransom?"

"The Six Green Moons," said Lorita. "The finest, most big emeralds my father ever mined. They are beyond price. I suppose, cut in parts, they could be sold for many hundreds of thousands of dollars."

"They demanded the six emeralds. To show that they really held your brother, they proposed to put the head of his pet monkey in that graveyard. It was hollowed out, so I presume you were to put the emeralds in it for them to pick up later."

"I *did* put them in," mourned Lorita. "And I thought you had taken them. Darling, I shall make up for that—"

"Someone else got wind of this," said Artemus in a hurry. "A chauffeur."

Lorita stared in quick alarm at the older woman. The duenna said:

"Juan! He has been gone for many hours!"

"Your chauffeur learned of the kidnap," Artemus said, slowly and methodically piecing it together. "He put a head there, too, hoping to be before the gang and get the stones, himself. I think he has been killed for that attempt. But who could have put the third head there?"

"Third head?" said Lorita.

"Three heads were put on the stone. One, no doubt by the gang. Another by somebody else. A third by the chauffeur, Juan. That was the last, and the one in which you apparently put the Six Green Moons."

"Then Juan has them!"

"Juan," said Artemus, "is dead. I'm sure of it."

"Then those men—"

Artemus shook his head—as well as he could with the exquisite white arm around his neck.

"That was no act, with the cigarette," he said. "The gang doesn't know where the emeralds are, either. I think that whoever put the second head there, has the stones. Perhaps that person got them while the gang was attending to Juan, and later to me. I don't know."

"Those men," said Lorita. "They think I have the emeralds and refuse to give them up. They will kill Ybano. They may have already killed him. And I have not the ransom they desire, any more, to save him."

Her eyes were misted again with tears.

"Arturo, can you not get my brother for me? You can do *anything*, darling. Do I not know? I will always love you, even if you do not get Ybano back safe. But—will you not get him for me?"

Artemus Kaye's eyes had taken on a sort of slate shade. He didn't know that. He had never thought much about his eyes, save to cover them with glasses because he had looked so young six years ago, at twenty-four, when he applied for a teaching job. But they were that shade, and they were rather impressive.

"I wonder how your chauffeur learned of the kidnap, and the plan of the monkey's head?" he said slowly. "How many servants have you, Lorita?"

"A cook, maid, houseman, groundsman, besides Juan. We came north with practically no retinue."

"They all knew of Juan's disappearance?"

"None knew," said Lorita positively. "We have not told anyone—the servants, the police, anyone—for fear Ybano would be killed if we did."

"That is right," said Mergita, nodding her aristocratic, iron-gray head. "No one was told. It was said by us that Ybano was simply away on a visit."

"You kept the Six Green Moons here?" asked Artemus.

"Oh, no," said Lorita. "They are too valuable. They were kept in the bank. When I wanted to wear them, a special detective brought them, walked a distance behind me, and then took them back."

"I have an idea," said Artemus, getting up. "It is a very small idea, but it's worth trying. Wait here for me, Lorita. I may have luck."

CHAPTER IV.

IMPETUOUS LATIN!

It was one thing to tell the imperious Irish-Spanish Lorita to wait there, and quite another to have her do it. When Artemus got to the curb, where he had left the green sedan in the black shadow of a drooping tree, he was conscious of steps and turned. There was Lorita, with about thirty dollars' worth of postage-stamp hat on her head to indicate that she was going, too.

"Take my coupé," she said. "It is dangerous going in that scarred car of evil men. We might get in trouble."

"I'll take the coupé," agreed Artemus. "But 'we' won't get into anything. I'm going alone."

"But of course I go with you," announced Lorita. "You are mine."

Artemus smiled a little. It was a good smile but not one to trifle with. His shoulders had straightened a bit, and his eyes still had that slate shade.

"You're a nice child," he said, patting her hand. "In the morning you'll have forgotten all about me being your . . . er . . . man. But you're a sweet child. Now go back in the house."

"It does not matter what you say," Lorita shrugged perfect shoulders. "I go with you. If you are hurt, I will be hurt, too."

Artemus stopped smiling.

"We haven't time for this. That crew won't risk keeping your brother alive much longer. Get back in the house before I . . . er . . . slug you!"

Lorita's face was one beautiful sparkle.

"But, darling! Magnificent! Always I have dreamed of the man who would—slug me if I needed it.

But none have talked so. I suppose because I look nice."

"I'll say you look nice," said Artemus grimly. "You literally dazzle the eyes. Whoever marries you will have a dozen duels a week over you."

"You can win them all," said Lorita confidently. "You can do anything, Arturo—"

"If you don't get back in that house—" said Artemus.

Lorita's lips drooped. "Very well. Here are the coupé keys. You had better drive the green car more out of sight, then come back for the coupé."

That was good sense. Artemus did so, with Lorita going forlornly into the house as he slid the bullet-pocked green sedan into a dark alley.

He backed a coupé of the block-long variety out of Lorita's garage, and tooled it up the street.

When Artemus had said that he had a small idea to work on, it was all too true. It was very small indeed, though it tied in well with ideas that were slowly forming in his professional brain.

There were about half a million people in the northeastern city where Artemus taught physics. That was a big enough city to have a full-fledged underworld, with not one, but three mob leaders.

There was a Sicilian named Michelo, a scion of a gone-to-seed Tennessee family named Carson, and a Brazilian Portuguese known as Al Campo. The Brazilian was the least important of the three, but it was on him that Artemus intended to pay a call.

He didn't really have a plan of action; he just meant to locate Ybano, if possible, and then see what could be done.

Any child in the city could have

told where to find Al Campo. He owned a night club near the tracks called the Spanish Villa, and he was there nearly all his waking hours. So Artemus parked the overgrown coupé near the Villa.

The doorman looked curiously at him as he entered. A medium-sized man, looking younger than his thirty years, bareheaded and with a couple of noticeable lumps on his skull.

Artemus went through the crowded café room and to a door marked: PRIVATE. A man over six-feet-three in height, and looking like a bear with a bad temper, stepped in front of Artemus.

"Whadda you want, runt?" he growled.

"I would like to see Mr. Campo," said Artemus.

"He's busy—"

"Tell him I want to see him about the Six Green Moons."

That apparently meant nothing to this third-rate hood. He shrugged, hesitated, then went into the office. He came out with one eyebrow up.

"O. K.! Go on in."

Artemus entered an office done in chromium and red leather. Behind a glittering desk was a man with black-varnish hair and sideburns, and greenish eyes. He might have been thirty or he might have been fifty.

"What did you say you wanted to see me about?" said Campo, face as expressionless as a tile floor.

"The Six Green Moons," said Artemus.

The greenish, basilisk eyes traveled over him. First Artemus thought Campo had recognized him from descriptions that must have been given by his men. Then he wasn't sure.

"What are the Six Green Moons?" said Campo curiously.

"Emeralds."

"Ah, yes. Emeralds. Did you want me to buy them?"

Artemus smiled a little. He was mildly exhilarated by the thought that even now his heartbeat was not much faster than normal, and his nerves were steady. Dear me, he thought, I must have had some ancestor who got hung for piracy or something.

"We each know what the other has in mind," he said to Campo. "I have the Six Green Moons. You have something I want in exchange for them. As soon as I see that this something is unharmed, I will trade the emeralds for it."

Campo looked at Artemus for a long time. But Artemus was pretty confident. His story was logical. Campo must know that he had been in that cemetery. He *could* have gotten the emeralds.

"I would like to see the Six Green Moons," said Campo. "They sound interesting."

"Naturally, I didn't bring them with me," said Artemus.

Campo got up slowly, like a snake uncoiling.

"I have no notion of what you mean. But you might describe it further over a drink. Shall we go to my apartment? It isn't far."

Artemus mentally shook hands with himself as he went out the door after Campo. It was working! Campo looked at Lorita's block-long coupé.

"This car belongs to a Miss McCarthy, doesn't it?" he said. "I suppose you came here in it. Shall we use it now?"

Artemus nodded and got in. Campo took the wheel.

"By the way, how did you catch her?" Artemus asked.

"I would have to look in my notebook to find out what you are talk-

ing about, Mr. Kaye," replied Campo.

Artemus stared. It didn't make sense. Then he got it. The notebook full of epitaphs he had dropped in the cemetery! It had name and address in it. Campo's men must have gone to his address and picked up Lorita as she ran from his door. In that case, she'd been held by them for over twenty-four hours when he got to her, and she had said nothing about it. She had stamina, that girl.

Meanwhile, Campo wasn't driving Lorita's coupé in any neighborhood in which he'd have deigned to live. But that was all right, too. Artemus rather expected it; was still sure he had things in his own hands when the car stopped near a corner and Campo walked a block and a half and tapped in complicated code on a dirty door.

The door opened and framed a face. Suddenly Artemus didn't feel so good. It was the face he had seen framed in a window, when he was in the country shack with Lorita. And there was recognition in the man's eyes.

"Company, huh, boss?" the man said, hands making clawing motions at his sides.

"Company," said Campo, still expressionless. "I'm going upstairs with our friend. See that we're not disturbed."

"Yes, sir!" said the man.

Artemus followed Campo up rickety stairs and to a back room. More men poked their heads out of doors as the two passed. Artemus felt an unaccountable dryness at his lips, and an impulse to moisten them often.

Campo opened the door of the rear room, and Artemus went in. There was just one thing in that bare, dusty place. That was the bound

figure of a boy of nine or ten. There was adhesive tape over his lips. Over it, his dark eyes were frightened and feverish. He was dirty and there were bruises on his face. Artemus felt some of the feeling well up in him that had so stirred him at the country shack.

Men don't *do* these things! Human beings don't act like animals toward their fellows—worse than animals. A pack of grown men banging a boy around, ready to kill him without the twitch of a nerve, if necessary.

He heard himself say: "All right. I'll send one of your men for the Six Green Moons as soon as you let me out the door with the boy." And he looked into the muzzle of a silenced gun in Campo's hand.

Campo was shaking his black-varnished head, with something beyond contempt in his greenish eyes.

"You would come and get the boy and go," he marveled. "As easily as that! And you came here with no one following—I made sure of that! I do not understand you."

Artemus looked at the silenced gun.

"There isn't anything to understand about it," he protested. "I have what you want, you have what I want. When I get mine, you get yours—"

"We'll turn that around," said Campo. "You will stay here till one of my men come back with the emeralds. Send out for them—if you really know where they are."

The words seemed to float around the room and hit Artemus in the ears half a dozen times.

If you really know where they are!

He had come here on a guess. It had struck him as being a very logical guess. But he had at no time intended betting his life on it.

Now it appeared he was going to have to.

"All right," he said. And he was surprised to find that his voice sounded quite steady. "Send a man to Lorita McCarthy's house. Her duenna, Mergita, will give him the Six Green Moons."

He saw the frightened eyes of the bound and gagged boy stare up at him, caught a sudden glitter of cold, tremendous rage in Campo's greenish eyes—and knew that he had won. At least for the moment.

"*Madre de—*" Campo whispered.

So Artemus outlined all the foundation of his guess, though he didn't make it sound like a guess.

"Mergita hatched this up in her own aristocratic-looking head. She wanted the emeralds, but couldn't manage to steal them because Lorita did such a good job of having them guarded. She thought of kidnap. Needing someone to handle the rougher details, she turned rather naturally to a fellow countryman in a strange land, the only eligible Brazilian in the city—you. The monkey's head idea was outlined to you, and the head of Peppe was put on the tombstone. But Mergita tried to cheat you. She came to the cemetery, thinking she was ahead of you, and put another monkey's head on the stone. Right afterward, Juan, Lorita's chauffeur came. He had overheard Mergita planning with you and thought he might as well get those emeralds. You took care of him, but while you were doing so, Mergita stole back in the pitch darkness and got the head of Juan's monkey, with the emeralds that had just been placed there by Lorita. So she has them, now."

Campo called to the closed door: "Lacey!"

A man came in. He was the fellow Artemus had banged on the head

at the country place. He glared murder at Artemus.

"You know that old witch, Mergita, at the McCarthy house? Well, go to her and get the Six Moons," said Campo.

The man gasped. "You mean—"

"I mean *she* has them, the—" For half a minute mingled English and Portuguese epithets came in a smoothly vicious flood.

"You're not such a fool after all," Campo said to Artemus, as his man left. "To have guessed that the duenna had the emeralds. It was more than I did."

"It had to be her," said Artemus. His voice was calm but his thoughts were not. Whether or not Campo got the emeralds, it would be risky for the mobster to let him and little Ybano go on living. But he went on talking; meanwhile, trying to figure out what to do next.

"Juan could only have heard the plans right in the McCarthy household. And in that house, only Miss McCarthy and Mergita knew of the kidnaping. He must have overheard her phoning you. I don't know if Mergita meant to double-cross you from the start, but—"

From the window in the back of the room, outside, came a cry of almost physical anguish.

"Mergita do those things? Oh, *no!*"

Campo and Artemus whirled toward the window. Artemus gasped at sight of an almost shockingly beautiful face with great black eyes under flame-red hair. Campo didn't gasp. The silenced gun in his hand went *phhht, phhht*.

The first slug starred the window above Lorita's head. The second knocked a chunk of plaster from the ceiling. You can't shoot straight when a fool of a schoolteacher is

grabbing at your arm.

Lorita came in the window from the roof of a small back porch. The silenced gun was clubbing down toward Artemus' head. She slashed with something that glittered and Campo yelled and dropped the gun. She picked it up.

"Nice," said Artemus. He was at the door, locking it.

He had just gotten away from it when there was a banging at it from the hall side, and then shots tearing around the lock.

"You're pretty wonderful," said Artemus to the girl. "We aren't going to get out of here alive; so I can tell you. I think you're one of the grandest persons I've ever met; even if you do look like a one-girl beauty parade—"

The men outside were suddenly stopping their violence, and there was a sound of frantically hasty steps. Down the stairs. Then there was a commotion at the street door that sounded like Verdun in miniature.

"The police," said Lorita. "I called them some time ago."

"The pol—" said Artemus. "I take it all back!"

"I heard you before," said Lorita. "Darling—"

She should have been watching Campo instead of Artemus. But she wasn't. That was how a lieutenant of detectives, banging up the stairs and charging at a bullet-riddled door, burst in just in time to see a man with slate-blue eyes and rumpled brown hair fold backward from a punch on the jaw, and a girl with red hair and black eyes writhe like a dancer as she sought to get away from Campo's strangling hands.

And that was how, after the lieutenant of detectives had settled

Campo's hash with the butt of his gun, he saw the girl fly to the man and kneel with her arms shielding him while he looked fuzzily around.

"That dreadful Mergita! She has been with us since I was five!" the girl said. "Arturo, darling, are you hurt much? You see, I had to be where you might be in danger. I kept on through the house and out the back and hid in the coupé luggage compartment— That terrible Mergita— My little Ybano! Someone untie him. Arturo, darling, you have saved me again."

"Me? You?" said Artemus. He had been under the impression that it was the other way around.

"You are a hero. I will never let you out of my sight. I called a policeman to get more policemen after my coupé had stopped a second time, here. Now, Ybano, in a minute we shall free you. I am busy with your intended brother-in-law."

The lieutenant of detectives stared at the girl with the melancholy admiration of one looking at something that was marvelous but unfortunately not for him. She was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen outside of a picture frame. She—

"Hey!" said the lieutenant. It had sounded to him as if the man had spoken finally and said: "But of course I'm not going to marry you."

Artemus glared at the lieutenant. "Hey what?" he said.

"Did I hear you say you wouldn't marry her? Her?"

"That's what I said," snapped Artemus. His head felt as if it had been battered into an approximate equare, with that last blow on the jaw. "Of course I'm not going to marry her."

"Why, you dope!" exclaimed the lieutenant.

"She never laid eyes on me till last night," explained Artemus, though he really didn't know why the—er—hell he should bother to explain. "She doesn't know her own mind."

"She never laid eyes on me till just now," said the lieutenant. "But I'll marry her."

"She's a child," said Artemus, rubbing his jaw. Lorita's tapering fingers pushed his aside and began caressing the swelling themselves.

"Some child!" said the lieutenant, looking long at Lorita.

"She's rich. I'm not. I'm a high-school physics teacher, not at all romantic—"

"Boy, you will be pretty soon!" The lieutenant was untying Ybano, but keeping his eyes on Lorita.

"It's mad! It's ridiculous! A girl doesn't fall in love with a man like that—even a red-haired bundle of explosive from South America."

Artemus stopped. She was kissing his ear and his cheek and lovingly soothing his swelling jaw and paying absolutely no attention to what he was saying. It seemed pretty silly to go on protesting to deaf ears, no matter how beautiful the ears.

Next month's issue of **CLUES-DETECTIVE STORIES** will feature "**THE MURDER BOOK**," a complete novel by Frank Gruber, undoubtedly the best mystery writer of the day. It's the finest, most baffling mystery we've seen in many a day—so don't miss it! Be sure to get the May issue of **Clues-Detective Stories** for this feature, novelettes, and short stories—all for a dime!



A MEDAL FOR SNAKE MURILLO

by GEORGE ALLAN MOFFATT

Snake Murillo adjusted his five-dollar blue tie, thumbed a speck of dust from the shoulder of his two-hundred-dollar tailored blue cheviot

suit and looked at himself in the mirror for the tenth time.

What he saw was pleasing and satisfying. Since the days when he

had been merely a paid killer for anybody that wanted to hire him, Snake had had the superstition that one should be immaculately dressed when he went forth to murder.

Times had changed since those days as a paid killer. Now, he was the man that hired others to do his killings. He rode in powerful, bulletproofed sedans and his rackets brought in a flow of money that was little short of fabulous wealth.

On this night, however, he was going forth to kill, and the idea was pleasing to him. This pleasure was registered in his thin, snakelike face, with its beady green eyes that held all the cunning and all the cruelty of a rattlesnake.

A rattlesnake! Murillo had a close affinity to this slinking and deadly creature. He liked to be called Snake Murillo. He wore a belt buckle with the head of a rattlesnake, fangs showing, engraved on it by a famous and internationally known silver firm.

He looked at this buckle, passed his gloved fingers over it and then turned and walked out of the bedroom of his fifteen-room apartment on the tenth floor of the Walton Arms, an apartment house he owned and used exclusively for his henchmen and their families.

The job he was going on was special, so special in fact, that the very structure of his whole system of rackets depended on it. A week before, his men had been forced to rub out an unwilling jewelry man who refused to pay tribute.

They had used Snake's special car. The car had stopped in front of the store as the victim came out. Snake's men had blasted the jeweler to death with their usual dispatch and had disappeared just as quickly.

But Detective Jim Cramer, who was Snake Murillo's pet fear and

hate, had old Professor Theodore de Croucey go to that spot and use a special paraffin mold on the dust to see if he could get an enlarged picture of that tire track. If he could, Snake Murillo would go to the electric chair, a prospect that sent strange and sickening chills down the spine of Snake Murillo.

However, Detective Cramer overlooked one small detail. If Professor de Croucey didn't have that paraffin plate to show to the district attorney, there would be no arrest and no trial.

It was three o'clock in the morning. Snake had a map of Professor de Croucey's home. He knew how to get by the one sleeping cop that was stationed to guard it.

He had a gun equipped with a special silencer. It would be only a matter of minutes to get the plate and send old Professor de Croucey to eternity.

The home of Professor de Croucey was at the edge of the city, in a secluded little woodland that gave the professor the privacy he so much desired. The house was a small, one-story frame structure, built on the bungalow style.

The professor lived alone. His wife had died and his only son had graduated from college and was working in a famous laboratory.

A bedroom at the rear of the house had been equipped as his laboratory. Here, he performed his numerous experiments and assisted the police when they wanted scientific help.

Even though it was three o'clock in the morning, Professor de Croucey was in this laboratory, working over a number of paraffin molds he had made to try to get a picture of the tire tread.

Detective Jim Cramer was with him. Cramer's thin and muscled

face was worried as he watched the professor try his experiments.

"Do you think it will work, professor?" he asked nervously. "It's our only chance."

Professor de Croucey had a pleasant face and manner. His long, iron-gray hair added to his soft and affable manner.

"Stop worrying, Jim," he said to Cramer. "Of course it will work. You go home and get some sleep. I'll have my report in the morning."

"I didn't like the idea of your being here alone," Detective Cramer said.

"There's a policeman outside," the professor answered. "Really not necessary, but certainly he can keep anybody away."

"It's hard to keep a snake away," Cramer answered. "Snake Murillo knows that his rackets and his life hang in the balance of this experiment."

"Go home and get some sleep," the professor said.

Detective Cramer shrugged and walked out of the laboratory. When he left the house by the front door, he saw the cop standing by the sidewalk.

"Keep moving around," Cramer said to him. "You're leaving the whole rear of the house unguarded."

The cop growled something under his breath and started to walk to the rear of the house. As he did, a crouching form darted through the darkness at the rear of the house and went through the kitchen door.

Inside the darkened kitchen, this crouching form straightened, and Snake Murillo thumbed some imaginary dust from the lapel of his coat. He smiled to himself at the ease with which he had gained entrance to the house.

Snake didn't move hurriedly or too rapidly. Always cautious and

never foolhardy, he waited until the cop had circled the house several times, waited until the roar of Detective Jim Cramer's police car was lost in the night.

Then, with snakelike speed, he darted through the door leading to the hall. Moving as noiselessly as a jungle animal, he came to the door of Professor de Croucey's laboratory.

The professor was working on a large paraffin mold. There were other paraffin molds on the table; but on this one mold, there was the clear outline of a tire track.

"Well, professor," Snake said in his low whispered voice, "do you think your little experiment will work?"

Professor de Croucey whirled in startled amazement at the voice to stare into the small round hole in the end of Murillo's silenced gun.

"Don't get excited, professor," Snake sneered, "because you are going to die. It won't hurt much and it'll soon be over."

Professor de Croucey's thin and wrinkled old face showed no fear. His deep-blue eyes gored into Snake Murillo's. For a second, Snake Murillo hesitated to squeeze that trigger. In that second, Professor de Croucey brought his right hand around, and it hit Snake Murillo with a weak, thumping sound.

Snake jumped back, grunted a little unpleasantly; then the gun in his hand jumped. There was no roar, no sound save a sharp intake of air. Professor de Croucey's face went blank, his hand started for his throat; but before it reached there, his knees buckled and he slid to the floor.

His body quivered for a moment, then went limp in death!

Snake Murillo looked down at the lifeless face, kicked it with his foot.

When there was no reaction, he knew that the professor was dead.

He moved swiftly. He saw the large paraffin cast on the table, with the marks of what had been a tire tread on it. There was a paper near it, with a drawing of a tire tread.

He grabbed the paper and the paraffin mold, and a moment later he was at the door of the kitchen. The cop was rounding the house for the front.

Snake slipped out of the door, and the darkness swallowed him completely.

The news of the murder of Professor de Croucey reached headquarters an hour later. The cop on the beat had gone into the house, wondering why the light had been on so long. He had found the body of the professor lying at the foot of the long laboratory table.

Detective Jim Cramer got the news just as he arrived at his home for a few hours sleep. He jumped in his police car and was at the professor's home seven minutes later.

Chief of Police Crawford arrived at almost the same time as Cramer did. The house was surrounded with uniformed men. Plain-clothes men were in the hallway outside the laboratory room.

When Detective Cramer and Chief Crawford entered the room, the body of the professor lay as it had fallen. Cramer's face was tense and the muscles quivered.

He took one quick look at the laboratory table, saw that the paraffin mold with the imprint of the tire tracks was gone.

"Snake Murillo!" he said hoarsely.

The cop on the beat entered the laboratory. "I . . . I don't know how it happened," he stammered to Chief Crawford. "I didn't see anybody.

I didn't hear anything—"

"I told you," Cramer cut in, "that a snake doesn't move like a human, and when it strikes, it doesn't make any noise."

"Report to me in the morning," Chief Crawford said to the cop. "I know you did your best. We should have sent several plain-clothes men, but we didn't."

The cop left the laboratory. Detective Cramer stood near the body of Professor de Croucey and looked first at the table and then at the body.

"The professor had turned around," Cramer said. "He was shot quickly, and he—"

Cramer kneeled down, lifted the left shoulder of the dead professor and picked up a paraffin mold that had apparently fallen to the floor. He laid it on the table; then he studied the body again.

"Snake sneaked in and shot the professor," Chief Crawford said. "He probably used a silencer on his gun. It's an old story. No clues; no traces. Snake moves too quickly for anything like that."

"And he took the only clue he will ever leave," Detective Cramer added wearily. "That tire tread might have sent him where he belongs, and you can be sure he won't leave any more such treads."

"You're right," the chief agreed. "I guess we'd better go through the routine of having the fingerprint men come."

"Just a minute," Detective Cramer said.

He was standing over the different paraffin molds lying on the laboratory table. He was studying them closely.

"Hold everything!" he suddenly cried. "I'll be back in an hour or so. I'm trying to remember something about my boy's playroom.

Don't touch a thing until I get back, except having the body removed."

Detective Cramer left the house, jumped in his police car, and raced for his own home. His wife and son were asleep, and he went up the stairs softly so as not to awaken them. He went to the attic, which was the playroom for his twelve-year-old son.

This son was Jim Cramer's great interest in life. The boy's playroom was complete, with every known gadget to make a youngster happy and also to instruct him.

Detective Cramer went to a table where a glass stood. There were several dry-cell batteries sitting next to it.

Cramer reached in a drawer and pulled out a book. He spent nearly ten minutes reading that book; then he spent another twenty minutes fooling with those two glasses.

When he left the room, he had the glass and the dry cells with him. He climbed into his car and drove to the Walton Arms where Snake Murillo lived in his gorgeous splendor.

Detective Cramer stopped his car a block from the apartment house. He was well acquainted with the place; knew it was Snake Murillo's

stronghold and that nothing had been overlooked to make it just about impregnable.

Nobody lived in the house except his henchmen and their molls. They lived under strange and high-sounding names, but each was ready to do Snake's biddings. Cramer knew that death worked very swiftly and very silently in that apartment house. The bodies of the victims were never found.

Detective Cramer had made several raids on the Walton Arms. He knew Snake Murillo's apartment and that it would be impossible to get to it without Snake's knowing it.

Yet he had to get to Snake before the killer had much warning. He couldn't get a police squad; even if a lone detective walking into that apartment house was something like a fly walking into a spider's web.

Cramer didn't hesitate. He walked quietly to the front of the apartment house and entered the lobby. Two burly elevator men were standing near the elevator. At the sight of Detective Cramer, a man sitting on a couch jumped to his feet and started for the rear of the lobby.

"Not so fast, Mucker!" Detective Cramer said, grabbing him by the shoulder. "Snake will know pretty



quickly that I am here, and you don't have to run to send a message to him. I want you to take me to his apartment; then you can tell him."

The man addressed as Mucker stared at Detective Cramer. He knew Cramer's reputation for getting what he wanted, and he knew something of the detective's reputation with his fists. So Mucker nodded and walked into an elevator, and Cramer followed.

The elevator shot up to the tenth floor. Cramer's fingers were on the automatic in his pocket, though he realized this gun would be of little use in Snake's apartment.

The door to this apartment opened quickly. Cramer crowded past Mucker and walked down a large foyer into a large and elegantly furnished living room. The furniture in this room was a matter of pride to Snake. He had hired a well-known interior decorator to plan it for him and it had cost him a small fortune.

There was a large white baby grand piano in one corner, and the rest of the furnishings were black and white.

Four men were lounging in easy-chairs when Cramer entered the room. He had heard the door close behind him. The four men were reading papers and none looked up at the detective.

Then a door opened to Cramer's right and the neatly dressed Snake Murillo was walking toward Detective Cramer. Snake's face showed his complete satisfaction with life at that moment.

Snake knew the art of killing well enough to know that his murder of the professor had been a neatly executed job and no clues had been left behind. The paraffin mold holding the marks of the tell-tale tire

tread had been melted and destroyed. So had the paper with the professor's notes. The professor was dead and could never testify in court. He knew he had nothing in the world to worry about.

"Well," he said in his whispered voice, "look who we have here."

"Hello, Snake," Cramer said.

Cramer stared at Snake Murillo; looked at the blue tie, the blue serge suit, the expensive shoes.

"O. K.," Snake said. "What do you want?"

Detective Cramer relaxed and smiled. "Just thought I'd drop up and congratulate you, Snake," he said. "Another excellent demonstration of your uncanny ability to kill."

Snake Murillo pulled a gold cigarette case from his vest pocket, snapped it open and offered Cramer a cigarette. Cramer took one, his eyes studying the case closely.

Snake Murillo took a cigarette, snapped the case shut; then tapped the end of the cigarette on the back of his hand.

"Suppose," he said, "you tell me what you are talking about?"

The smile remained on Detective Cramer's face. "You did a good job of killing the professor, Snake," he said. "A very neat job, in every detail."

Snake's face remained expressionless. "Sit down, Cramer. Maybe you'd like a drink."

"I'll remain standing, Snake," Cramer snapped. "And I don't care for a drink. I just came up to give you some bad news. You didn't get the right paraffin mold. I guess you worked too fast to notice another mold that lay there."

Snake Murillo's body tensed, but his face didn't lose its blank expression. "I'm still wondering what

you're talking about," he said softly. "I didn't even know the professor was dead."

"The death of the professor"—Cramer shifted his weight to his right foot as he talked—"isn't going to keep you out of the electric chair, Snake."

Snake Murillo smiled, looked at the end of his burning cigarette, and said: "That's really a very old gag, trying to bluff your way out of a jam, Cramer. You let the professor get murdered and things are not going to be so good for you. I didn't invite you up here, and I don't like your company!"

"But I like yours," Cramer replied affably; "I like it so much that I came up here to take you back to look at that paraffin mold you forgot to destroy."

Most of Detective Cramer's weight was on his right foot. He saw Snake Murillo's little finger twist—and two men get up.

Then the weight Cramer had shifted to his right foot moved. It moved so fast that nobody in that room saw exactly what happened.

There was a crashing thud as Cramer's left hit Snake Murillo flush in the jaw. Snake went down in an unconscious heap. Cramer swerved around, automatic in his right hand, covering the four men that were rushing toward him.

"Take it easy, boys," he growled. "I came up here to take Snake back with me."

The four men backed away; then somewhere behind Cramer was the crunching of a footfall. He started to whirl, but as he did something crashed against the right side of his head with a sickening thud. He went headlong to the floor, his gun falling from his hand.

His senses went in four directions, but they didn't leave him. He

bounced from the floor and came up on his knees, shaking his head. His sight was blurred, but through the blur, he saw a man coming for him.

As Cramer came up, his right came up with him. His fist smashed into the man's stomach, buried itself over an inch. The man gave a grunting scream and came down on Cramer's shoulders.

Cramer continued to get up, the man on his shoulders. He whirled around. Two others had drawn their automatics. Cramer pivoted again and hurled the man on his shoulders at the two men.

The body hit them and sent them to the floor. Cramer's head had cleared and strength had come back to his body. He dived headfirst over the scrambled heap of three men into a fourth man, who was drawing his automatic.

The hood went down with a sickening grunt, the gun falling from his fingers. Cramer scooped up the gun, leaped to his feet.

Only one of Snake Murillo's men was on his feet. He saw the gun in Cramer's hand, and his hands shot up.

Two of the others down scrambled weakly to their feet. All fight had left them. They raised their hands over their heads and backed away from Cramer. Snake Murillo was shaking his head, but he hadn't tried to get up. Keeping the men covered, Cramer walked to where he knelt. There was the click of handcuffs; then Cramer yanked the killer to his feet.

"You men go out ahead of us," Cramer said to the three men. "The first crazy move from you or anybody in the hall and Murillo gets a bullet through his back."

"You fool!" Snake Murillo snarled. "This will cost you your job."

Cramer poked the gun in his back. "Start walking! Remember, one move and you're a dead man."

The three men went out of the apartment ahead of Cramer and Murillo. One of them rang for the elevator. It came shooting up and the door opened.

Cramer shoved Snake in the elevator, then shoved the button that automatically closed the door. The burly elevator man gasped in amazement at Snake's handcuffed wrists, but he said nothing as the elevator descended.

Twenty minutes later Detective Cramer entered the home of Professor de Croucey. He shoved Snake ahead of him. Chief Crawford was in the laboratory, waiting for him. The chief's eyes nearly popped out of their sockets when he saw Snake Murillo.

"Jim!" he gasped, "what does this mean?"

Snake Murillo had regained his cool composure. "It means, chief," he said, "that somebody is going to pay for this outrage. This madman came to my apartment and started shooting—"

"Don't tell stories, Snake," Cramer interrupted. "There was no shooting. I moved too fast for you to start filling me with bullets."

Chief Crawford looked at Detective Cramer. The chief's face looked worried. Snake Murillo was a bad man to arrest if the charge couldn't stick, and the charge of murder against Snake was something that never stuck.

Snake, himself, had suddenly experienced a feeling of relief. He had looked at the molds on the table. They were all small. The one with the tire tread was gone, and he knew Cramer had pulled a bluff.

Detective Cramer said something to a cop at the door. The cop disappeared. "I brought Snake here," Cramer said, "to make a medal for him. He deserves one for pulling as neat a job as he did."

"I thought you said something about a paraffin mold," Snake sneered. "Something about a mold that had tire treads—"

"You melted that mold," Cramer replied. "Naturally, you would do that. That has nothing to do with the medal I am going to make for you, Snake. Interesting little trick, this making a medal. I learned it from my son. His grandmother bought him a chemistry set last Christmas and I've been taking a chemistry course ever since."

The cop returned to the room. He carried a glass, some dry cells, a brush and some test tubes. He set them down on the table. "The trick of making a medal, Snake," Cramer said, "requires a little careful work. It may take me a few minutes."

The expression on the chief's face was a mixture of amazement and doubt. Snake Murillo moved nervously in his chair, but his cool composure didn't leave him.

Cramer connected three dry-cell batteries. Then he took a tube and poured a brown mixture in the glass. After that he filled the glass with water, slipped a copper strip in it, and connected the batteries to the copper.

When all this had been completed, he picked up one of the small molds of paraffin that lay on the table. He took a pencil from his pocket and scraped some of the lead off and then brushed it over the paraffin mold. When he had finished that, the top of the mold was a shiny black.

Then he cut the paraffin mold into a circle about the size of a half

dollar, wrapped some wire around it and connected this to one of the battery wires and dropped the mold into the water.

"In this water," he explained, "is copper sulphate. The electricity going through the water causes the copper sulphate to react. Now watch closely and you will see the water become a copper color. In a few minutes this copper sulphate will gravitate to the paraffin mold and will make a copper medal of every line and impression in the mold. Very simple operation, when you understand chemistry."

The silence that followed his words was deadly. Chief Crawford was looking at Cramer, and Cramer grinned back at him. "Don't worry, chief," he said. "The medal I am making for him will be better than any mold of tire treads."

Snake Murillo's face had lost its coolness. His beady green eyes were beginning to fill with fear. He didn't understand what was happening. He tried to remember everything that had happened, but he couldn't remember any slip. He had killed the professor as neatly as he had ever killed anybody.

"You say you didn't kill the professor," Cramer said to him.

"I don't know what you're trying to pull," Snake snarled. "I didn't kill the professor and I've never been in this room before."

"Never been in here before?" Cramer said with mock astonishment. "That's very strange. When I first came in here and saw Professor de Croucey lying near the table, I found a paraffin mold near his right hand. Just before he was shot, he grabbed this mold as the only weapon he could reach. That mold had a funny-looking circle on it and a deep hole. So undoubtedly

the professor had shoved that thing against something that was round and had a mysterious impression on it. Now, paraffin won't react to plaster; it's mighty hard to have it react to anything but copper sulphate."

Cramer stopped talking and stared at the glass. He watched it for nearly ten minutes and in that time, a pin dropping in the room would have made a roaring noise.

Another ten minutes passed. Then Cramer leaned over the glass, disconnected the dry cells and pulled the mold out. He took his penknife and pried a layer of copper off the mold.

He turned it over, looked at it and smiled.

"Snake," he said, "here is the medal I have made for you."

Snake Murillo rose from his chair and looked at the copper disk. His face paled; lost its cool composure. He sank back in his chair, a cringing and shivering creature of fear.

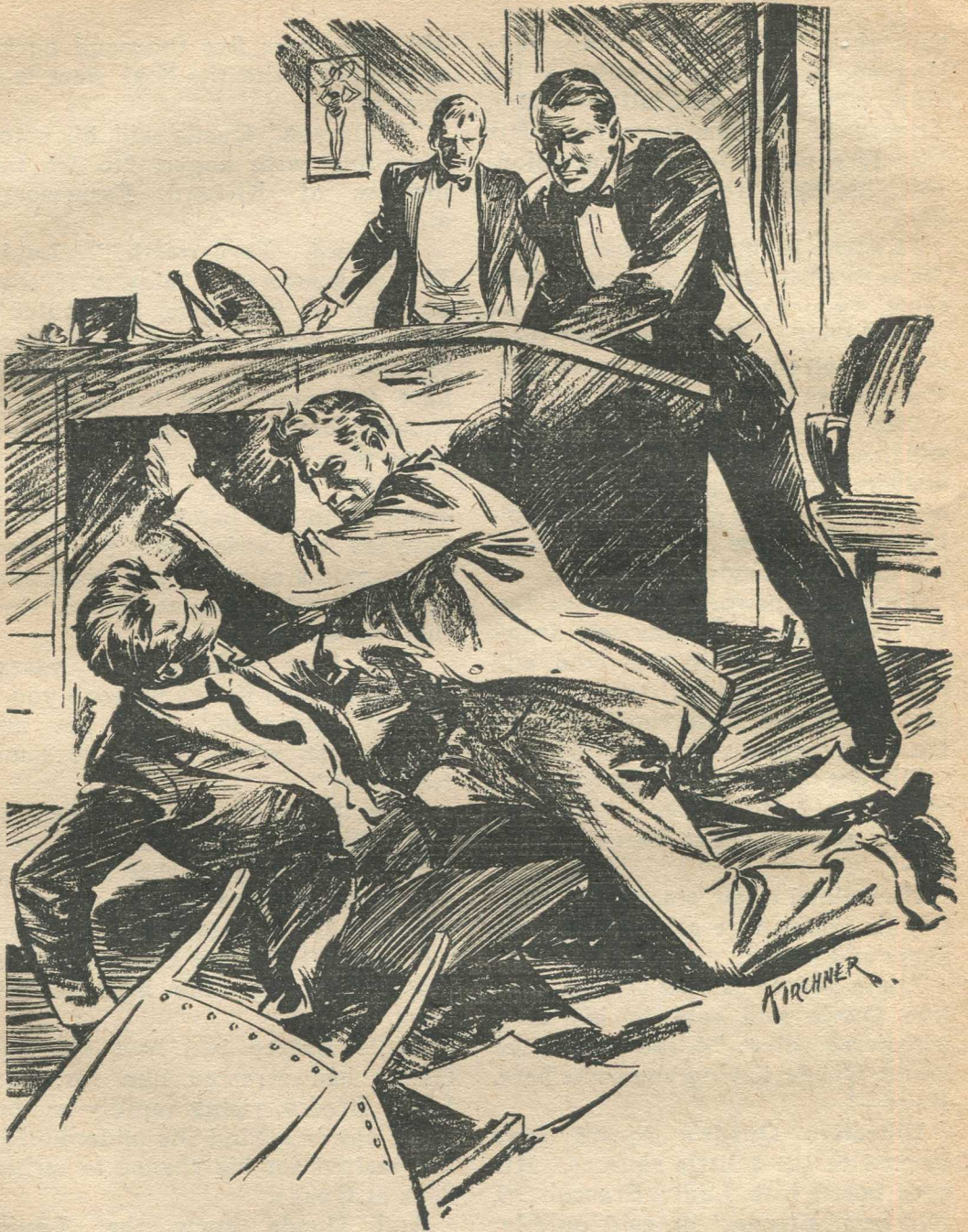
The medal was an exact replica of the snake on his belt buckle!

Then suddenly he remembered something that had not occurred to him before: The push Professor de Croucey had given him just before he squeezed the trigger of his gun. He remembered feeling something hit his belt buckle.

Professor de Croucey had shoved the paraffin mold against his belt buckle. Detective Cramer had seen those marks on it and had come to his apartment first to see what kind of a belt buckle he wore.

It was all clear—deadly clear, now—to Snake Murillo. His mouth was dry. His head was reeling.

He heard Chief Crawford say to Detective Cramer: "So this is the medal for Snake. A fine medal you've made, Cramer. It will put Snake in the electric chair."



A KILLER LEAVES A SCAR

by JACK STORM

Detective Bill Quade crossed the glittering dance floor of the tinselly night club in long and angry strides. At the far end of the room a youth

stood at a table. His young and boyish face was white and his lower lip twitched.

His eyes were dulled with liquor

and they were heavy and red-rimmed. A man was standing at his side. This man was tall and slim, dressed in immaculate style. His thin face was cold and expressionless; his eyes were shifty and ratlike.

"Listen, Jimmy," the man said as Detective Bill Quade approached the table, "you can't be a welsher on these I O U's. The boys want their money, and they want it pretty fast. You can get it from your uncle."

"My uncle!" Jimmy Farnsworth's eyes flashed with youthful disdain. "Sure, I can get it from my uncle. He'll be glad to pay gambling debts now that he is leading the reform movement!"

Jimmy Farnsworth didn't see Detective Quade. He was too drunk to see anything but the cold and leering Louie Bracco, owner of the night club and undisputed king of the city's rackets and vice.

"I'll get the money," Jimmy Farnsworth said hoarsely. "It's my money and I'll get it even if I have to—"

He walked away, staggering a little, his young face ashen-gray from anger and liquor.

Louie Bracco looked up at Detective Quade and said in his soft-whispered voice: "A rather unusual honor, Quade, having you come here. Have—"

Detective Quade's square jaws seemed to get a little squarer. His eyes bored into Louie Bracco. "I told you, Bracco," he said quietly, "to let that boy alone. I told you the next time you enticed him in here I'd bring a squad along to break this place up as a public nuisance."

Louie Bracco smiled. His smile was thin and unpleasant. "What do you want me to do—be a guardian for every young fool that runs loose? I didn't tell him to gamble, but he

did. He owes five thousand bucks to the boys, and the boys want it—tonight."

"I told you," Quade said, his voice trembling with anger, "to let the nephew of Richard Farnsworth alone."

"Richard Farnsworth?" Louie Bracco answered. "Maybe if that old fool let me alone, he wouldn't have to worry about that crazy nephew. I didn't tell him to come here and you're not bringing any squad to break up my place, and you know why."

Louie Bracco's ratlike eyes dropped to his hand, to the ridge between the wrist and the palm. There was a scar there, a small and ugly, jagged, crescent-shaped scar that was a flaming red.

"I've been waiting two years, Quade, to even things up with you," Bracco continued. "I'll get my chance, yet, when you make some fool move."

Detective Bill Quade looked at that crescent-shaped scar. He had given Louie Bracco that scar in a gun fight. Bracco had tried to kill him, but Quade had blown the gun out of his hand and the bullet had crashed through the heel of his palm.

Louie Bracco had beat the rap Quade had arrested him for, but Louie Bracco, rising rapidly as the great power behind the underworld, had waited for his chance to strike back at Quade.

And Quade knew that Louie Bracco had the power and influence in hidden police circles to carry out his threat if Quade made any foolish or rash move.

So Bill Quade turned and walked out of the night club, nursing his impotent anger furiously. He knew Louie Bracco's game. The city had risen in anger at the brutal and

sinister power of Bracco and irate citizens had put Richard Farnsworth, famous lawyer, up as a reform mayor.

Bracco was afraid of Farnsworth. He struck back at Farnsworth's weakest point—his nephew. Detective Quade knew young Jimmy Farnsworth. He had known him since the boy was a baby. He knew that Jimmy was young and foolish and impulsive, but there was nothing bad in the youth.

Jimmy's quick and violent temper had caused him to resent any advice his uncle gave him. Jimmy plunged deeper and deeper in the wild life; and behind him stood the shadow of Louie Bracco, urging him on and on and knowing that Jimmy was Richard Farnsworth's greatest worry in the coming election.

Quade knew all this, but he didn't know why Louie Bracco had gotten the youth mixed up with his professional gamblers, who had gotten the boy's I O U's for five thousand dollars.

Even before Quade had walked out of the night club, Louie Bracco was darting for his office at the rear of the night club. A well-known business man who patronized his night club was waiting for him.

"See you in a few minutes," Bracco said to him. "I have a couple of customers waiting for me in my office."

There were no customers waiting for him in his office. Bracco crossed the room quickly and darted out a door that led to the alley behind his club. A car was waiting for him. The engine was purring softly.

Bracco jumped in the car and the driver shifted gears and the car moved silently out of the alley. When it turned on a wide street, it picked up speed.

Exactly three minutes later, Bracco jumped out of the car as it slowed down at the rear of a modern and rather luxurious home in an exclusive residential section that bordered the business section of the city.

The three minutes used to get to that house were important in the desperate plan Bracco had formed. The time he consumed to get to the rear of that house and through the French windows and into the library was also important.

Bracco covered this distance in less than a minute, and as he walked through the French windows and into the large library, his right hand was gripping a small pearl-handled revolver.

The revolver wasn't his. It belonged to Jimmy Farnsworth! Bracco had gotten it several days before without Jimmy's knowing it. It was a beautiful little weapon, a gift to Jimmy, with his name engraved on the gold butt.

Bracco slipped through the French windows and tiptoed across the long room. A man sat at a large desk, his back to the windows.

This man was Richard Farnsworth, famous lawyer, and the one man that Bracco feared.

He turned suddenly, wheeled around in his chair. Bracco was within ten feet of him. Bracco's face tightened a little and his ratty eyes flashed. The pearl-handled weapon was in his right hand, aimed at the heart of Richard Farnsworth.

The rugged face of Richard Farnsworth seemed to tighten and his eyes narrowed. He was a fine-looking man, with silver-gray hair and a courageous face.

The snarl of an animal came to the thin lips of Bracco. His finger squeezed the trigger. The gun spat fire, but as it did, Richard Farns-

worth had lunged forward. The bullet crashed into his body with a sickening thud.

He seemed to stop in midair, double up, and then fall to the floor. But as he fell, his arms reached out and his right hand grabbed at one of Bracco's ankles. Bracco fell forward. His hand hit the table. There was a breaking of glass, and blood spurted from his left hand.

The gun in his hand belched fire a second time. The bullet crashed through the prone body of Richard Farnsworth, and he groaned weakly. Then his body went limp in death.

Bracco gave a quick glance around the room. His wrist was bleeding. He wrapped his handkerchief around the wound, dropped the pearl-handled gun on the floor, and then darted out of the French windows.

Five minutes later, Louie Bracco, immaculate and unruffled, walked out of the door of his office and motioned to the prominent business man to enter.

And as he did, Jimmy Farnsworth staggered into the large library of his uncle's home to demand five thousand dollars. His red-rimmed eyes blinked drunkenly at the body that lay on the floor.

Somebody was rushing down the corridor. It was a policeman. Jimmy had reached down and picked up his gun. His liquor-crazed mind had been unable to grasp all that he saw.

"Take it easy, me lad," the red-faced Irish cop said. "I heard some shots when I was on my beat several blocks away. Take it easy, and you better let me have that gun."

Detective Bill Quade was in another part of the city when the news was flashed to him that Richard Farnsworth had been murdered.

By the time he arrived at the Farnsworth home, Chief of Police Ripple and District Attorney Flemming were in the library.

The room was filled with detectives and cops stood in the corridor. Jimmy Farnsworth sat between two detectives. His face was an ashen gray. He was sober now, and he stared with startled eyes at the body of his uncle.

"A nasty case, Quade," Chief Ripple said as the detective entered the room. "This young fool lost his head and murdered his uncle. It is the usual story. He needed five thousand dollars and his uncle wouldn't give it to him. He had a scene down at Bracco's night club; and when he left, he said he would get the money or else. And it looks like it was 'or else'."

Quade looked at Jimmy and then at the body of Richard Farnsworth. He wet his lips as he did. He had heard Jimmy make the threat. He knew about the I O U's the boy had given. A dozen other persons had heard the same threat because Jimmy had blurted it out so everybody could hear him.

"Pat Ryan heard the shots," the chief continued. "He came running in and found Jimmy standing over his uncle's body, and holding his own revolver. The servants were gone tonight. Richard Farnsworth always let them off on Thursday night. Jimmy knew that, and that is why he came to demand the money."

Quade shrugged. He walked to the table. Richard Farnsworth had been writing a campaign speech when he was murdered. The pen lay near the paper. There were three pieces of square glass near the pen. One of them was broken and there were faint splotches of blood on the broken one.

"It's a perfect case," District Attorney Flemming said. "The nephew killed Farnsworth and I guess he'll talk after a little questioning."

Quade was staring at the splotches of blood on the table. He picked up one of the pieces of glass. Then he laid it down carefully, but his eyes studied the table and the broken glass.

Finally he said: "Nothing is perfect in crime, Flemming. Let me talk to Jimmy for a few minutes. I mean talk to him alone."

Flemming started to protest, but Chief Ripple said: "Don't be a fool, Quade. The boy is guilty! It was his gun. He threatened his uncle. He—"

"Sure, I heard all that before," Quade interrupted, "but let me talk to him. I'm not going to let him escape."

Chief Ripple shrugged and Quade motioned to Jimmy to follow him out in the hallway.

"O. K., Jimmy," Quade said when they were alone, "what's the truth?"

"I didn't kill my uncle," Jimmy answered weakly. "I came right home—"

"Just a minute," Quade interrupted, "are you sure that you came right home from the night club? That is important."

"Well," Jimmy answered, "I came right home after some of the boys tried to get me sober. They were Bracco's men."

"They detained you," Quade said. "Interesting—very interesting, but the fact remains that your neck is in a noose, and it doesn't look like anything can save you. There is only one chance and that is a piece of glass and a drop of blood. I'm taking that chance, but don't count on it."

Quade turned and walked back in the library. Jimmy followed and

the two detectives waiting for him at the door marched him to the side of the room and sat him down in a chair.

"Well?" Chief Ripple said to Quade.

Quade walked to the desk where Richard Farnsworth had sat. He turned and faced the French windows that opened out on a terrace.

"The murderer," Quade said, "came through those French windows. Naturally, he wore gloves and there won't be any fingerprints. Farnsworth was sitting here, writing his campaign speech. He swerved as the killer neared him and the killer didn't waste any time firing. The first bullet didn't kill Farnsworth. He went down, but he reached for the killer's ankle. The position of the dead man bears that out. The killer fell against the table."

"This," District Attorney Flemming roared, "sounds like childish prattle. The nephew is guilty and we're wasting time."

"There is one peculiar thing about your theory," Quade answered. "The policeman that found Jimmy standing here said that he heard the shots some five or even ten minutes before he came here. The shots were not loud, and it wasn't until he got to thinking about them that he started for the house to investigate. If Jimmy was the killer, do you suppose he would stand here over the body ten minutes, waiting until the cop arrived?"

"Pretty thin, Quade," Chief Ripple retorted. "A jury wouldn't be impressed, in face of the other evidence."

"No, they wouldn't," Quade agreed and then walked to the table. He picked up a piece of broken glass and balanced it in his finger. The broken piece was out of a square of glass about five by eight inches. There

were three such plates of glass on the desk.

"I'm not too old," Quade went on, "to have once been a Boy Scout. There was a trick we played with glass when I was a Scout. I'm going to play that same trick now."

With that he carefully placed the piece of broken glass in a cigarette case, shoved it in his pocket, and walked hurriedly out of the room. At the street, he jumped in his car and drove down to headquarters. He went to his office and took a magnifying glass from a drawer and studied the glass and the splotch of blood on it.

Then he wrapped the glass in a piece of paper, replaced it in the cigarette case, and walked out of the office.

His car moved slowly as it drove away from headquarters. Quade turned it on a wide avenue, drove five blocks, and then parked the car at the curb.

He jumped out and was quickly lost in the crowd that filled the sidewalk. He walked with the crowd for half a block and then darted into a narrow and dark alley.

Quade walked rapidly, keeping deep in the Stygian blackness that clung to the fences and rear walls of the building. He stopped suddenly. Ahead of him, about twenty feet, was the rear of Bracco's night club.

The outlines of the door leading into Bracco's private office could be seen vaguely in the darkness. Quade sidled along a wall, and then crossed a short open space, and stood near this door.

There was no window in the rear wall of the office. Quade knew this door, just as he knew every inch of Louie Bracco's night club from the futile raids he had conducted there.

His hand reached for the door

knob, but it came away with a jerk. The knob turned and the door opened, and a slinking figure darted out in the night. Quade leaped forward, foot going between the door sill and the closing door. The door crashed against his foot and as it did, he grabbed the knob and yanked the door open and strode into Louie Bracco's office.

Bracco was sitting behind a large desk. He looked up quickly. For a passing second a bewildered expression came to his thin face, but it passed in a flash.

"Sorry, Bracco," Quade said easily, "to intrude this way, but the fact is, I wanted to talk to you before you had a chance to move from that desk."

Louie Bracco leaned forward and said in his whispered voice: "It's O. K., Quade. I'm always glad to see you. I understand your boy friend, Jimmy, pulled a fast one and croaked the old man. Now I guess my men won't get their five grand."

Quade sat down, crossed his legs, but didn't remove his hat. "Pretty clever, Bracco," he said. "Devilishly clever, I'd say."

Bracco's delicate fingers picked up a paper weight. He glanced to the door leading out in the corridor to the night club. When his fingers touched the paper weight, the door opened and two men came in. They walked silently, closing the door behind them, and taking a position near it.

"What's clever, Quade?" Bracco asked.

"The murder of Richard Farnsworth," Quade replied and then with a grin added: "I see you cut your hand, Bracco. A very strange coincidence. The murderer of Richard Farnsworth cut his hand in about the same place."

Bracco dropped the paper weight,

but his face showed no surprise.

"Funny that your hand would be cut," Quade continued, "you usually wear gloves when you do jobs like that."

Bracco's face darkened. His face turned almost imperceptibly and his eyes darted toward a drawer, and as they did, the body of Detective Bill Quade seemed to fly from his chair. He went over the table in a headlong lunge, his shoulders crashing against the chest of the startled Bracco.

The two went backward with the chair, with a crash that seemed to shake the room. Quade landed on top of Bracco and before the rat-faced killer could realize what had happened, Quade's right caught his jaw in a vicious uppercut, sending his head back and closing his eyes in semi-consciousness.

The two men at the door started for Quade. He was in a kneeling position on the floor. His right hand yanked the top, side drawer of the desk open and his fingers grabbed a pair of very thin kid gloves.

Quade's fingers had barely touched the gloves when one of the men came charging over the table at him. He dropped to his stomach, raised up suddenly and sent the charging henchman tumbling, headfirst, against the wall.

Bracco had twisted around. With a snarl of rage, he had reached for his automatic, but Quade's foot kicked his hand and the gun crashed to the floor.

But as it did there was a sharp hissing intake of fire over Quade and a bullet grazed his shoulder. He whirled around. The second henchman that had stood near the door was walking toward him, his right hand gripping a gun equipped with a silencer.

His finger was starting to press the trigger again. Quade's body came

up, his shoulder hit the edge of the desk and sent it tumbling back against the killer. The gun spat, but the bullet crashed high on the wall and when it did, the desk had sent the man and the gun to the floor.

Bracco was screaming orders. The man Quade had sent headfirst into the wall had turned and was coming for Quade. Quade side-stepped his charge, brought his right up in a blow that caught the man flush on the jaw and sent him to the floor, limp and unconscious.

Quade had his gun out. It covered Bracco and the man crawling out from under the desk.

"Take it easy, Bracco," Quade said. "I came in that back door so my entrance wouldn't be announced. I wanted these gloves and I didn't want you to have a chance to hide them. Your eyes showed me where they were. You and your henchmen are going with me."

Quade marched the two out in the alley and a shrill blast of his whistle brought three cops on the run. Quade turned the henchman over to them and told them to go inside and get the one that was unconscious.

"You'll go with me, Bracco," Quade said. "I got a little trick I learned as a Boy Scout, to show you."

Chief of Police Ripple and District Attorney Flemming were still in the library when Quade marched the infuriated Louie Bracco in that room. Jimmy Farnsworth was also there, between the two detectives. The youth's eyes looked at Quade with almost boyish pleading when the detective entered with Bracco.

The body of his uncle had been removed. District Attorney Flemming was pacing back and forth in front of the desk. His face was flushed with anger.

"This is all foolish," he roared to Chief Ripple. "We have a perfect case—a foolproof case against the nephew and here Quade brings a man in that could not have committed the murder."

Bracco had regained his cocky confidence. "It's O. K., Flemming," Bracco sneered. "Quade just wants to show me a Boy Scout trick."

Detective Quade tossed Bracco's kid gloves on the table. The left glove had traces of blood on it and it was torn on the palm.

"That broken glass," Quade said to the chief, "shows that the killer cut himself. Bracco was wearing those gloves and the glass ripped them and there is blood on them."

Chief Ripple groaned: "Heavens, Quade, you can't convict Bracco on that."

"I tore the gloves this afternoon on a pair of scissors," Bracco explained with a laugh. "Sure, it was a pair of scissors. I wasn't near this house when Richard Farnsworth was killed. I have one of the best-known businessmen of this city as a witness to my alibi. He was waiting for me while I was in my office."

"Ripple," District Attorney Flemming roared, "how long is this foolishness going to last? You know what this will mean to the department?"

Quade said: "Don't get excited, Flemming. I haven't showed you my Boy Scout trick yet."

Bracco gave a sneering laugh and Flemming groaned and Chief Ripple looked weak and a little nervous.

"Naturally, this torn glove won't convict Bracco," Quade said. "I got those gloves to learn a very important thing about them. I wanted to make sure that the glass, here, ripped the palm of the glove."

"I've never been in this room be-

fore in my life," Louie Bracco snarled.

He looked around nervously. His mind was trying to remember every detail of those moments it had taken to kill Farnsworth. He remembered Farnsworth throwing him against the table and his gloved hand jamming itself down on the piece of glass.

The glass had pierced his flesh and torn his glove; and when he had raised his hand to catch his balance, it had gone down on another square of glass.

"You were in this room tonight," Quade countered, "when Richard Farnsworth was murdered. You planned about as perfect a frame-up as your cunning and brutal mind could conceive. You saw to it that Jimmy, over there, owed your crooked gamblers five thousand dollars. You knew Jimmy would have to go to his uncle.

"You knew, also, that Jimmy was drunk because you saw that he got drunk. You knew Jimmy's temper and you knew Jimmy would come right here after he left your club. You didn't want him to come too fast; so you had your men detain him until you could slip out here, shoot Richard Farnsworth with Jimmy's revolver, and then slip away to let Jimmy walk in on the murder. You knew the shots would bring the police."

Quade reached over and grabbed Bracco's left hand, turned it over so Chief Ripple could see the jagged and crescent-shaped scar.

"I gave Bracco that scar three years ago when he tried to kill me," Quade said. "And now that scar is going to send Bracco to the electric chair because he left the mark of that scar where everybody can see it."

Quade dropped Bracco's left hand, turned and picked up a square of glass.

"When your hand was cut by the first piece of glass and your glove torn," Quade said to Bracco, "you moved your hand a little and the palm rested on this square of glass. Richard Farnsworth was using these squares of glass to preserve certain papers. You will note, if you examine the glass closely, that the glass is covered with a very thin layer of special wax, a wax that is used to preserve paper."

Chief Ripple looked at the glass, and then shook his head. The covering of wax was too thin to record any distinctive lines or prints.

"I see several lines in the wax," the chief said, "but they prove nothing."

"Wait ten minutes and you'll see

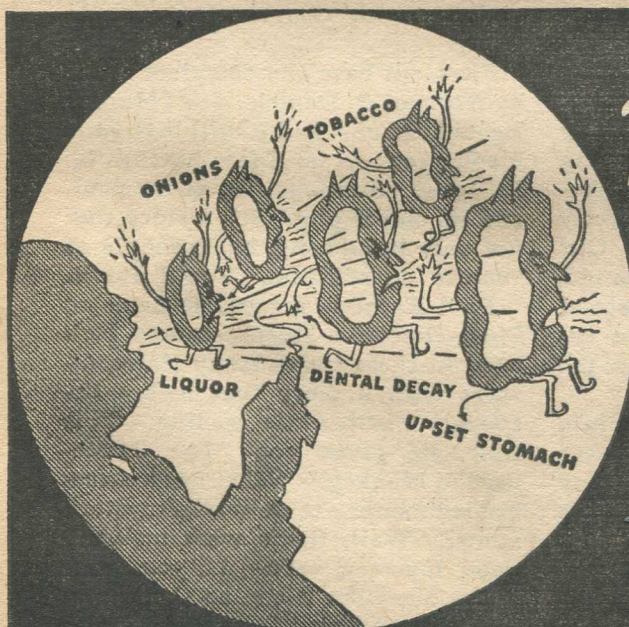
a lot," Quade replied.

He turned and motioned to a man standing in the door. This man was carrying a chemical pan filled with a white-and-yellow solution. He sat the pan on the desk and Quade slipped the glass in it.

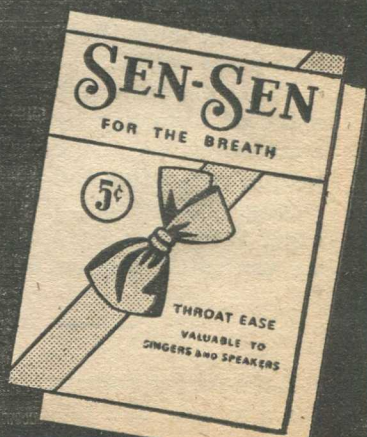
Bubbles rose in the solution, violent and exploding bubbles. Quade's eyes never left the solution. His face was grim and tense.

For ten minutes he watched those bubbles and then finally they stopped. He used two wooden spoons to pick the glass out of the solution. Then he took a rag and wiped the wax off.

"When I was a Boy Scout," he explained, "we learned that we could carve our initials in glass by using wax and hydrochloric acid. The wax is immune to this powerful



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acid, but where it has been scratched away, the acid will eat into the glass.

"In this case, when Bracco placed his palm against the glass, the outlines of his scar rubbed away the wax. In some places, it merely thinned the wax out so that the hydrochloric acid could eat only a little distance into the glass. This process will give us a perfect reproduction of the crescent scar on his hand and will prove beyond any doubt that it was Louie Bracco's hand that pressed on this glass—and that he is the killer."

Quade turned the glass over, and on it, eaten out by the hydrochloric acid, was a perfect reproduction of

the crescent scar on the heel of Bracco's palm.

Bracco uttered a vile curse and made a lunge for the door. Two detectives caught him and handcuffs snapped on his wrists.

"When I saw that waxed glass," Quade said, "I remembered how we used to carve out initials on glass as Boy Scouts. I saw the lines of what looked like Bracco's scar there, but I had to make sure that he had ripped his glove enough so the scar would show. I got the gloves and then I knew Louie Bracco was headed for the electric chair."

"A Boy Scout trick," Chief Ripple grunted. "Not bad, Quade—not bad at all."

THE STORY TRAIL

Continued from page 6

the back, could be used for silencers—but, of course, it would do no good.

One of the members of the party called up an arms manufacturing company to ask the same questions—and got answers which didn't exactly agree with this information. Our expert, however, stood his ground, and probably was right, for a second call to another arms outfit got answers opposite those given by the first place called.

We'll probably get ourselves into a lot of difficulty by making these statements; we just know that many people will write and tell us we are wrong. However, if anyone has other facts, let's have them. Maybe we can settle this once and for all!

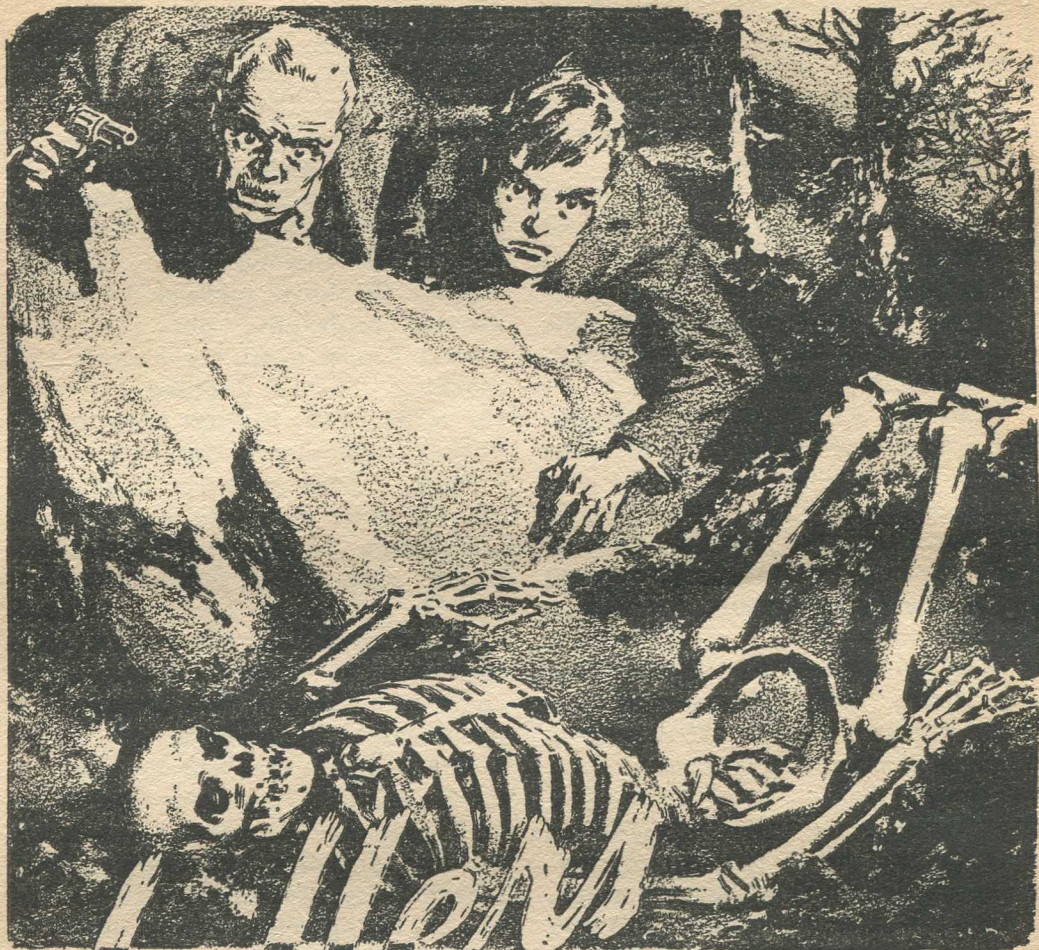
ries which we have for this issue. You've got a list of your favorite authors, with their best stories to enjoy.

First, we have the complete novel by Norman A. Daniels. It's "Murder Beats a Drum," and it will beat your blood pressure up a few notches by its tense situations, its excitement, and its clever plot. It's a story that not only has a bang, but a couple of "booms" in addition. You'll like it.

Paul Ernst is a familiar name to Clues-Detective Stories readers. He's been in these pages many times, always with a story that makes extremely worth-while reading. This time, he gives you "The Three-headed Monkey." What has a three-headed monkey to do with a mystery story? Well, that's what makes a good mystery yarn. If you can't figure out what it can be about, you go ahead and read it, going right to the last line to get the solution. If you can guess what the plot is; if you know just what every character

Let's forget controversial subjects for a minute and look over the sto-

Continued on page 128



Killer NIGHT OUT

by NAT SCHACHNER

CHAPTER I.

DEATH STEALS A CLIENT.

Jerry Case hummed tunelessly as he pecked away at his battered typewriter. When one is young and only recently admitted to the bar; and when one has managed to achieve his first client, a lawyer may be par-

doned for feeling a bit chipper.

In his absorption over the task at hand, Jerry did not hear the door of his office open quietly behind him. The intruder closed it as softly, stood a moment watching the bent head of the typist. Then he inquired: "Counselor Case?"

Jerry whipped hastily to his feet,

buttoning his coat, straightening his tie and smoothing his rumpled brown hair in a single swift motion.

"Yep, that's me! Uh—I mean, yes, I am Mr. Case. Won't you sit down? What can I do for you?"

Jerry was breathless. Another client! Two in two days! Wow! Business sure was picking up!

But the thick, heavy-set visitor made no move to sit down. A pair of keen, cold eyes glared suspiciously in his dead-pan face.

"You had a client name of Bryan Vann?" he growled. Thick, blunt fingers held a bit of pasteboard that Jerry recognized at once as one of his own cards. He had cast many of them hopefully upon the waters and one of them was evidently returning home to roost.

Jerry put on his best professional appearance, coughed, frowned and said: "Bryan Vann? Of course; a very good client, I might add. As a matter of fact"—he waved toward the typewriter—"I am engaged in drawing his will. Er—my stenographer happens to be out for lunch.

"Has Mr. Vann recommended you to me?" he added optimistically.

The man grinned. There was sarcasm in the grin. "Well, not exactly. You see, Bryan Vann is dead. Bumped off! He stopped a bullet smack between the eyes."

Jerry Case sat down weakly. "Dead!" he echoed.

His first client murdered before he had even paid his fee. It hadn't been much of a fee he had arranged with him the day before. Fifteen bucks, to be exact. But then, the will hadn't been much. A matter of about a hundred and fifty dollars in a savings account to be left to a veterinary hospital. Hadn't a relative or friend in the world, Vann had told him. And he liked animals. He was to come back today, at noon, to sign

the will and pay the fee.

The young lawyer stared at his wasted work; then he straightened up suddenly. "You say he was murdered? Where? And who are you?"

The man tilted his fedora back on his head. "I'm Detective Mike Flanders from headquarters. Vann was shot up in Inwood Park. The examiner thinks it must've happened around midnight; but the body wasn't found until six o'clock this morning. He was doubled up among the rocks at the highest point in the park." Flanders watched Jerry keenly. "Your card was in his wallet. I came down to see if your knowledge of his private affairs might give us a motive for his murder."

"Well, to tell you the truth," Jerry said slowly, "I don't know much about him, myself. He just drifted in here by mistake, yesterday. Was looking for another lawyer, name of Cate. Decided to let me draft his will; said one lawyer was about as good as another. All I know is what I needed for drawing the document. Has no living relatives and no property of any kind except one hundred and fifty dollars in the Penny Savings Bank. Left it to a cat-and-dog clinic."

Flanders looked disgusted. "That'll just about be enough to bury him."

"I have a lien for my fee," Jerry said.

The detective grinned. "You oughta know—burial expense comes first. You'll have to whistle."

The young lawyer said "Damn!" with expression. Then, suddenly: "So you don't know who killed him?"

"Who says I don't?" growled Flanders. "We got the guy all right. A guy by the name of Willoughby

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—Dr. Luke Willoughby. Funny thing about it—he's a big-shot heart specialist. You'd never think he'd pull a killing like this."

"Did he say why he did it?"

"Naw! Matter of fact, he yells he's innocent. They all do."

"How do you know he did it then?"

"Easy. We find him lying next to Vann on that heap of rocks, unconscious. There's a gun in his mitt, and it's the one that fired the murder bullet. It's simple enough to figure out! Willoughby followed Vann into the park. Maybe they went up together. Anyway, they had a quarrel. Willoughby pulls his gun. Vann sees it coming, and he smacks the doctor on the jaw. There's a pippin of a welt on the doc's chin, all right. Vann was a pretty hefty fellow from the looks of him. Anyway, the doc fires as he drops and plugs Vann between the eyes. Then he smacks the back of his head on the rocks and passes out until we pick 'em both up. Everything tallies."

He frowned. "Except motive. Willoughby swears he never saw Vann before; don't know him from a hole in the wall. Swears he was sapped in the lower section of the park, while he was out getting some fresh air. Ain't nothing to show they ever met before or why Willoughby killed him."

Jerry's eyes popped suddenly. "Wait a minute there!" he exclaimed. "Vann couldn't—" Then he stopped. His eyes veiled.

Flanders looked at him suspiciously. "What couldn't Vann?" he demanded.

"Nothing! I was just wondering how he expected to leave that money to the clinic when it all would be swallowed up by his funeral."

The detective chuckled: "You got yourself a swell client." His eyes wandered significantly around the small, bare office. "And you even lose the coupla bucks for the will. Well, I gotta be going. Motive or no motive, Willoughby's done the trick and we're gonna make it stick. Better luck on your next client, Case—if any."

Jerry didn't like the man's laugh as he went out. His lean, capable hands clenched in anger. Then he relaxed, grinned. "A smart cop," he said softly. "Too smart for his own good. So I lost my fee, eh? And my client? Will Mr. Flanders be surprised when he meets my *next* client!"

He snatched his well-worn hat off the coat-tree, snapped the brim rakishly over his eyes. His long legs made the door in two swift strides, slammed it shut behind him.

His office was one of a long row along a corridor. The waiting room at the end was in common for all; so was the girl who sat at the switchboard to receive messages. Struggling young lawyers saved money that way. A solitary client was sitting in the corner, waiting for someone.

"Hey, beautiful!" Jerry flung at the girl on his way out. "I'll be down in the Tombs for about two hours or so. If anyone calls, I'll be back at one."

The girl smiled pertly up at him. He was easy to look at; tall, deceptively slender, with muscles like steel springs. His gray eyes were sunny and candid, and his hair was always a rumpled mess that made a girl itch to smooth it out.

"There won't be any calls, Mr. Case," she assured him. "There never are." Her eyes followed his broad shoulders out of the door; and

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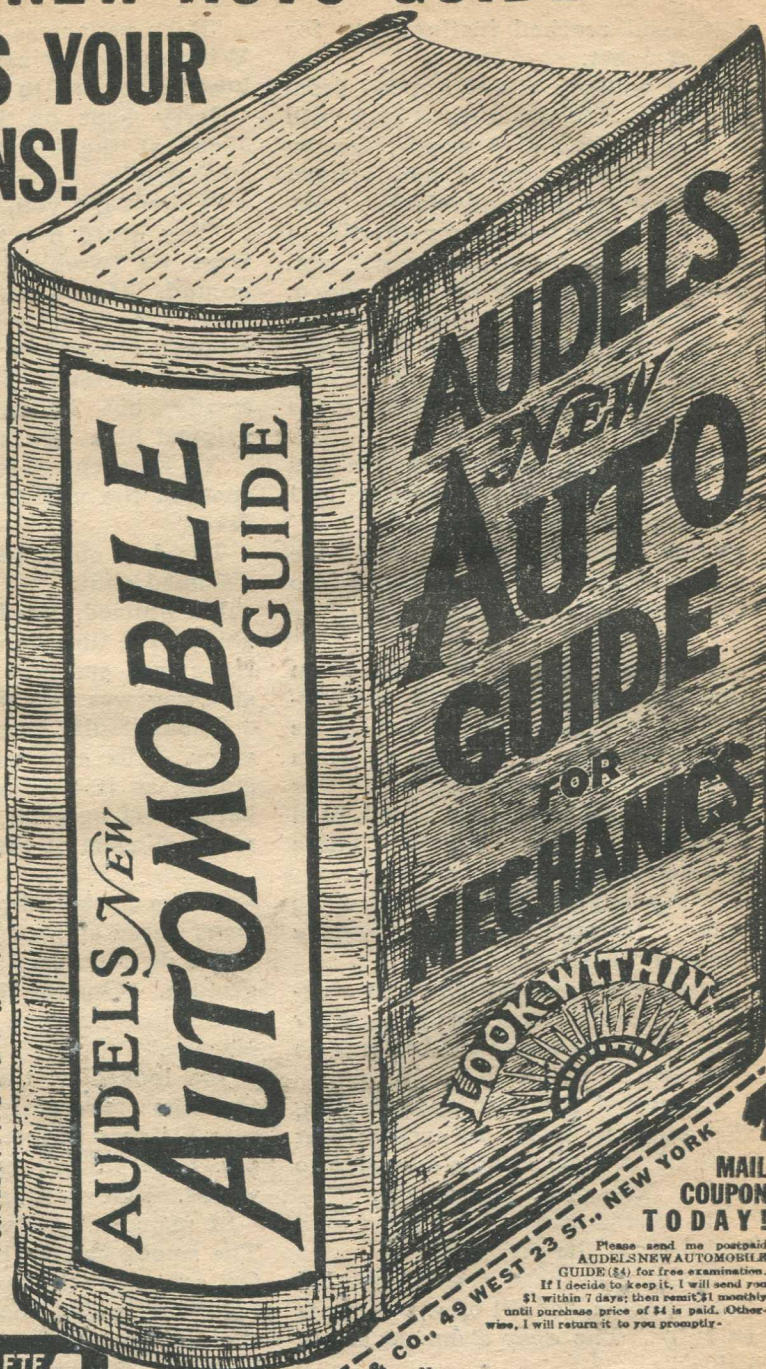
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her hand reached instinctively for her compact.

The solitary client got up from his chair. He was a small man with a sharp nose and a weather-beaten face. It was cracked and seamed with many winds and blazing suns. His right arm was curiously stiff in the flapping sleeve. But when you saw the wooden fist that protruded, you knew why. He had a wooden arm, with a steel spring at the elbow.

He went toward the door very fast. His broad, sailor shoes made no sound.

The girl looked up. "Aren't you going to wait? Mr. Carmichael will be back from court shortly."

"See him some other time," the man mumbled and disappeared into the outer hall.

Jerry whistled as he went down the deserted hall toward the elevator. Perhaps that was why he didn't hear the man come up from behind. But he heard the voice fast enough. And he felt the round, hard muzzle press into his side! There was no mistaking the feel of it.

"Keep on goin', Case," growled the voice. "Straight into the lavatory down the hall."

Jerry kept going. The gun muzzle dug deeper; there was no quiver to it. The man who held it was no amateur.

He pulled the door open, hoping that someone might be inside; that in the first confusion he'd be able to whirl. The place was empty.

He started to turn his head. "Now look here—" he protested.

"Keep your head front!" snarled the unknown, "or I'll blow your guts to hell." The door slammed softly behind.

Jerry stared at the washstand. "All right," he said. "What do you want?"

"Keep your nose out of the Vann-Willoughby business. It won't be healthy for you to go monkeyin'."

Jerry kept on looking straight ahead at the blank wall over the washstand.

"I don't get you," he said calmly.

"You heard me, shyster. I don't want no two-bit lawyer snooping around. If you do, that fat-headed dick, Flanders, will have another corpse to mess over. Understand?"

"I understand," Jerry's voice was steady, but inside flaming anger gripped him. *He* a shyster, eh?

"O. K., then. Keep watching that spot on the wall and count a hundred."

The door opened behind him, then slammed shut.

He whirled, dived for the handle. But by the time he was out, the corridor was empty. The emergency stairway was two doors beyond.

Thoughtfully he rang for the elevator. The case was no longer as simple as it had seemed a minute before. If only he could have gotten a glimpse of his assailant!

At the clerk's office in general sessions Jerry slipped the desk man a Hoya de Monterey with a careless gesture. "One for the book, Joe. A client just sent me up a box from Havana."

Joe looked at the label, smelled the cigar reverently and shoved it into his vest pocket. "Gee, thanks, Mr. Case. They usually hand me weeds. You must be getting along."

"I manage," Jerry said modestly. The smoke had set him back thirty-five cents, which meant no lunch today. He leaned confidentially over the counter. "About this Doc Willoughby, the guy who was hauled in this morning on suspicion of murder. Has any lawyer filed a retainer for him yet?"

Joe patted his vest pocket. "I dunno, but I'll look it up." He was back from the file in a moment. "Nary a one. Don't tell me—"

But Jerry was already filling out a retainer blank. He signed his name with a flourish and shoved it under the clerk's nose. "A maiden aunt of his," he said glibly, "phoned me this morning to take care of her dear nephew."

Joe looked skeptical; but he filled out the necessary authorization.

CHAPTER II.

ONE-ARMED SAILOR.

Doctor Luke Sanford Willoughby was the perfect representation of a successful medical specialist. A big man with a florid complexion, carefully combed hair with a distinguished touch of gray at the temples, a clipped graying mustache and long, capable fingers. His clothes were conservative, but impeccably tailored; and diligent brush marks showed where the dirt and grime of a night's unconsciousness had been eradicated. There was a discolored bruise on the point of his jaw; and a good-sized lump on the back of his head. Otherwise he seemed fully recovered from his session on the rocks in Inwood Park.

He sat down opposite Jerry at the counsel table in the tiny barred and wire-meshed consultation room. There was a puzzled look in his eyes, but he said nothing until the guard had grated the lock behind them and gone away.

"If you're Jerome Case," he began sharply, "let me make things clear. I don't know you, and I don't want to know you. My lawyers are White, White, Slavinsky & Riley. Mr. White is on his way down to see me, now. If you think—"

Jerry grinned at him. "Your aunt sent me down—"

"Young man, I have no aunt!"

Jerry's grin widened. "Check and double check! Then I'll have to lay my cards on the table. You see, Bryan Vann was a client of mine."

Willoughby got up from the table. He said slowly: "So you thought to play a trick on me. You'd pump me, and then—" He raised his voice. "Guard!"

Jerry leaned forward unhurriedly. "I have positive proof that Vann could not have knocked you down. Is that worth a retainer of two hundred dollars?"

The guard came on the run, scowling. "What's wrong in there?"

The doctor shook his head. "Nothing! I have a bad cough."

"Hell of a funny-sounding cough! An' you better make it snappy. There's more customers for this room." He went away.

Jerry nodded. "I thought you'd see it my way. Now, if two hundred is O. K.—"

"Go ahead with your story, Mr. Case," Willoughby said. "If you prove your point, the money is yours."

"Fair enough. You're a medical man. Would it be possible to tell by an autopsy whether the subject had suffered from a hardening of the arteries of the arms so that it would be impossible for him to have lifted his arms without excruciating pain; much less smack another man a solid wallop to the jaw?"

The doctor smiled. "Of course. It wouldn't even require an autopsy. A superficial examination would disclose the sclerotic condition."

"Then you're as good as out of jail, Dr. Willoughby. When Bryan Vann came to my office yesterday afternoon I had to open and shut the door for him. He could barely move

a finger. He told me he'd have to sign the will with a cross, instead of writing his name. The case against you collapses."

Willoughby took a deep breath. "Thank you! The whole thing was an outrageous mistake. Whenever I have the chance I like to walk in the park. It clears my mind, and the quiet is soothing after handling a lot of scared patients all day. I was walking along slowly, looking down at the lights along the Harlem, when something struck me on the chin. It was a shattering blow, not like that from a fist at all." He felt tenderly along his swollen jaw. "It was as though someone had used a club. That's all I know about it until a policeman shook me by the shoulder. I must have been dragged up there among the rocks by my assailant and placed next to the man he had murdered, for some unknown reason." He started suddenly. "I almost forgot; there was the gun—"

"Don't worry about that," Case assured him. "It's an old trick, pressing the murder gun into a victim's hand. The police pay no attention to it, unless they can prove it belonged to you. And they must have checked it by now."

Relief showed plainly on the doctor's face.

He called the guard again, and asked that his checkbook be brought to him. A few minutes later the guard returned with a folding checkbook and Willoughby wrote with a smooth-flowing hand. He tore out the check and handed it over to Jerry.

Jerry folded it carefully into an empty billfold. "Thanks!" he said. "You'll be out in a couple of hours. I'll get hold of Flanders and have the medical examiner take a look at my late client. After that, it's all over, except—"

His face hardened. "Except for the little matter of finding out who shot down Bryan Vann." He grinned apologetically. "After all, he was my client, even though I won't be able to collect."

Then Jerry smiled and got up. "I'll be seeing you—"

But the prisoner had risen with him. His florid face was serious.

"No, you won't," he said.

Jerry stared. "What do you mean?"

"After you've seen Flanders and the medical examiner, be good enough to forget about this whole business. You've been paid, and paid well."

"I see," nodded the young lawyer. "That's a delicate way of telling me not to try to find poor Vann's murderer."

The doctor's eyes were glacial. "I'll attend to that little matter myself, and I don't like competition. You forget the killer tried to get me, too."

"And if I don't take your advice?" queried Jerry.

"You're liable to get hurt." Then the doctor smiled. "Please don't misunderstand me. I'm advising you for your own good. Amateur detectives usually get into trouble. And I'm well able to take care of myself."

Looking at the doctor's broad shoulders, his capable hands, and the cold glint in his eyes, Jerry decided suddenly that Willoughby was right. He *could* take care of himself.

As Jerry climbed the precipitous rocks of Inwood Park, the murky darkness seemed to bear out the weird Indian legends that surround the hill.

"An ideal spot for murder," thought Jerry with a little shiver. The small automatic in his right-hand coat pocket made little clunk-

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ing noises as it bumped regularly against the loose change in his trousers pocket. A complaisant judge, who had known his father, had granted him a quick permit.

He moved stealthily to the little mound of rocks where both Vann and Willoughby had been found. His hand was in his pocket, gripping the automatic. The park was wild, desolate. A half moon dimly sprinkled the open spot with silver spangles of light. Eyes squinting against the intense alternations of light and pitch blackness, he searched the ground.

He found nothing.

He stood a moment, frowning. He really hadn't expected to find anything. The police had gone over the spot methodically in the morning. Yet Jerry wasn't satisfied. He had studied the photograph an enterprising cameraman had snapped of the huddled body, and it had struck him that it wasn't a natural position for a man crumpling into instant death from a bullet plowing out his brains. If the murderer could have dragged Dr. Willoughby's unconscious form up here, why couldn't he have done the same with Vann?

He jumped sideways and whirled in a single motion! His right hand jerked from the pocket, index finger cold against the trigger. The next instant the gun was chopped from his hand, and something solid crashed against his jaw! Great, shooting pains lanced up his chin, flamed into exploding stars in his brain. He went back with a crash, falling heavily against a rubble of stones.

A pounding whirlwind landed on top of him. A raging demon out of the night; a small man with a sharp, weather-beaten face and snapping fury in his voice. "I told yuh to keep your nose outta this, Case." A hard, wooden fist ground on Jerry's windpipe. The assailant's left hand



Pinky had his gun in his coat pocket, but Jerry knew it was pointed at him. "Into the boat, fella!" the albino snarled.

raised and a knife glittered in the drenching moon!

Jerry was choking under the inexorable grind of that wooden knob; but the sight of the descending knife cleared the muddy haze from his mind. He jacked up his knees and heaved suddenly with his shoulder. The man above him was caught unawares. The knife blade smacked solidly against a rock, shearing through Jerry's coat as it lashed downward. The man grunted and slid to one side. The pressure of his clublike arm relaxed.

Jerry heaved to his knees, but the man sprang up again. His right coat sleeve flapped against his artificial arm. The heavy, fistlike knob at the end was a formidable weapon. It shot out toward the young lawyer like a swift rapier. A steel spring manipulated from the shoulder stump through the elbow gave it crushing momentum.

Jerry rolled with the blow. It glanced across his temple.

Jerry's head rang with clanging bells. Groggily he started to his feet, just in time to meet a new rush of his assailant. The terrible fist was swinging again.

Jerry ducked, and came up sharp and short with his left. There was a grunt of pain as the man's head snapped back; then he was on top of Jerry, clawing with his good hand and pounding with the wooden one. He was like a wild cat in his snarling rage. Though inches shorter and pounds lighter, he flailed Jerry back against the rocks again.

Staggered momentarily under the rain of blows, stunned by the bruising impact of the lead-weighted fist, Jerry twisted over on his elbow, and threw all his weight forward, arms scissoring in a football tackle.

The man tried to jump back as steel-strong fingers gripped around

his ankle. Jerry set his teeth, and put all his strength into the jerk. The man's leg went up into the air; he came down with a thud.

"Got you!" said the lawyer triumphantly.

But the one-armed man was like a greased eel. He wriggled and squirmed; there was a ripping sound; and he was free, leaving the cuff of his pants in Jerry's grip.

The two were on their feet simultaneously. But a gun had appeared in the small man's left hand.

"O. K., wise guy!" he gritted. "You asked for it."

The man's eyes were baleful and merciless; his gun hand without a quiver. Jerry knew he couldn't hope to avoid the bullet. Yet his muscles tensed to one last desperate spring. If the leaden missile didn't kill him outright—

The night air was still and the sudden, sharp clang of steel striking against solid rock came like a thunderclap above the muted noises of the city below. It was followed by a thud, a crunching noise and a rattle of earth and pebbles.

The killer's eyes, fixed on Jerry, jerked quickly in the direction of the sound. His wizened, sun-blackened face contorted with alarm and fear. A string of strange oaths spattered like hail from his lips. He whirled on the balls of his feet and dived headlong into the trees, in the direction of the sound. He had forgotten completely about Jerry.

For the split part of a moment Jerry stood stock-still, swaying drunkenly. Death had stared him in the face—and passed him by. A small miracle had happened; and for a reason still obscure. If ever a man had intended to kill, that man was the wooden-armed assailant who had just turned and dived into the trees.

The sounds that had saved his life stopped abruptly. And with their cessation Jerry swung back to normal. He leaped over the intervening rock, bent for the glimmer of metal that lay in a hollow. His gun, bludgeoned from his hand by the crashing blow of that wooden fist.

He caught it up with a grunt of satisfaction, started to straighten.

"Hold it!" said a cold voice that meant business. "Drop that gun again, and turn slowly, hands straight up."

Jerry obeyed. For the second time the automatic thudded into the dirt.

"What is this?" he demanded bitterly. "Killers' night out?"

"A-ah!" said the big, impeccably dressed man who had come up noiselessly behind him. "I thought I told you not to mess around in this business."

Jerry grinned. "That's the second

time tonight someone sang that little ditty to me. And both times they sang it with guns. Now, if you'll stop pointing that nasty looking muzzle at me, maybe I could get together with you on this, Dr. Willoughby."

The heart specialist stared at him with narrowed eyes. "What do you mean by that?" he demanded finally. "And what are you prowling around Inwood Park for, at this time of the night?"

He swung the muzzle away from Jerry, but did not pocket the gun. "I might ask you the same question," retorted the lawyer, "but I won't. You've constituted yourself a one-man revenge squadron for that conk you got on the head last night."

Dr. Willoughby nodded slowly. "That's right. I'm a peaceful man of science, but I don't like to be knocked unconscious—even though I was obviously mistaken for some-

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one else—without doing something about it."

Jerry casually scooped up his gun, hefted it. "Neither do I." He explained rapidly.

The doctor looked thoughtful. There still was a swelling on the point of his chin. "I'd say it was the same chap who knocked me cold. He must have sneaked up in back of me and swung with that damned artificial fist. What does he look like?"

"A small, sharp, weather-beaten face. A sailor, obviously. Both from his leather face and the way he cursed. Know him?"

Willoughby shook his head. "A one-armed sailor? Haven't the least idea."

"Well, he evidently knows you, and he knew poor Vann. There's a tie-up somewhere." Jerry started. "But say, there's something fishy going on up here, right now. Someone's digging, or at least was, until a moment ago."

"Digging?" the doctor echoed blankly. "What for?"

"For Indians, perhaps. Come on! We're going to investigate."

"It must have been your imagination."

"Imagination, hell! It was the only thing that saved my life. But if you want to go home, doctor—"

The medical man swore at him, and they both went carefully through the trees, in the direction where the one-armed killer had disappeared.

Inwood Park is left untouched at the top. The rocks and little hills and shallow valleys are almost as wild and as primitive as they were when the Indians climbed daily up from the shore of the big river with snared game and fish.

It was quiet again; ominously so. Next to him Jerry could hear the hard, quick breathing of his companion. Suppose the sailor were lurking behind one of those trees, waiting to draw a bead on them.

Suppose the mysterious digger were one of a gang.

He shivered, but thrust his way forward just the same. They slid down a declivity into a hollow. The place was a tangle of rocks and bare of underbrush.

The doctor suddenly gripped his arm so hard that he grunted with pain. Then he saw it, too.

A great boulder lay athwart the hollow. And beside it was a hole. A freshly dug hole. A little heap of dirt and rubbly stones lay to one side. The earth was still moist and soft, as though it had been just uncovered.

But it wasn't the hole that brought the sharp exclamation to Jerry's lips. It was the sight of the whitish, glimmering thing that lay outstretched near the pile of stones.

"A skeleton!" husked Willoughby.

Jerry leaped down, forgetting his caution. Had anyone lain there in ambush he would have made a perfect target. But no one was around. Both the digger and the one-armed man had disappeared.

"No question about what it is," agreed Jerry. "It's the skeleton of a man all right." He stared at it with searching eyes. The bones were grayish rather than white, and pitted. The skull was long and narrow, and the bones of the nose extraordinarily prominent.

He bent suddenly, pointed to the base of the skull. "He was killed," he exclaimed. "Look at the way the bones are crushed in and crumbling. Someone hit him from behind with a club or a blackjack." He straightened up. "What do you make of it, Dr. Willoughby? You have had experience with these things. How long has this man been dead; and what hit him?"

Willoughby bent over professionally. "Hm-m-m! I'd say over a

year, at least. A blunt instrument was used; there's no question about it. The whole thing is getting pretty clear, now. A crime was committed. The victim was buried. But the killer or killers were afraid that sooner or later the body would be discovered. They came back to dig it up secretly, and do away with the evidence. I must have disturbed them last night at their work. They knocked me unconscious. Tonight they came back to finish the job, and you interfered."

He pocketed his gun with a relieved sigh. "It's simple, you see. All we have to do is notify the police. They'll remove the skeleton, and sooner or later make an identification. Then they'll be able to track down the killers. The very fact that they were so anxious to get rid of the skeleton shows that they knew they could be identified if it would ever be found."

He made washing motions with his hands. "Thank Heaven! We've uncovered the mystery. Now we don't have to stay out nights any more."

"You're right," said Jerry. "It's simple, as you say. Come on; we'll notify Detective Flanders at once."

CHAPTER III.

PINKY MADDEN.

The next morning Jerry Case showered, shaved, fixed up his various cuts and bruises so that they wouldn't be too evident, ate a hearty breakfast. He even changed to his only good suit, discarding the mud-died and torn tweeds of the night before. He could afford to do so. The two hundred dollars he had received for springing Dr. Willoughby crackled crisply in his pocket.

Then he sallied forth. First he

went to the Public Library and immersed himself in books. Then he went to the New York Historical Society Museum and examined old prints. And finally, he took a cab for the Museum of the American Indian and stared at their displays. He was hungry then, and ate a hearty lunch.

Then he leisurely lit a cigarette and settled back to read the newspaper. The front page had the usual war news, but a small item in Column 1 read:

Pinky Madden, who escaped from Sing Sing Monday night, is still at large. The police, however, are closing in on him and expect to make an arrest shortly.

Madden was a member of the notorious Shorty White gang that specialized in jewelry robberies. The gang was captured in 1937 after some clever sleuthing by Detective Michael Flanders of the headquarters squad. With the exception of the leader, Shorty White, who has never been apprehended, the members of the gang were sentenced to ten to twenty years apiece. Pictures on Page 18.

Neither Pinky Madden nor Shorty White, whose pictures stared out at Jerry from Page 18, looked like his one-armed assailant. Pinky was a white-haired thug, with albino eyes and a twisted face. Shorty had only one thing in common with the man in Inwood Park. They both were short. But Shorty had a fat, self-satisfied grin, and by no stretch of the imagination could he have been taken for a sailor.

Jerry called his office and Nancy Greer, the switchboard operator, answered.

"Hello, beautiful. Any calls?"

"Only from Detective Flanders; but he's called every fifteen minutes. He seems sore."

"Let him stew in his own juice," Jerry declared airily. "He made some dirty cracks about my—er—clientele that I didn't like. O. K.,

Nancy, keep on holding the fort—and I didn't call. Remember that."

Nevertheless, when he had hung up, he fished another nickel out of his pocket and dialed headquarters.

Flanders didn't sound particularly happy to hear from him. In fact, he was almost incoherent with rage on the phone.

"Keep your shirt on," Jerry finally edged in sharply. "What's biting you?"

The detective calmed down sufficiently to explain.

"That skeleton!" yelled Flanders.

"A particularly fine specimen of the *genus homo*, in a state of undress," remarked Jerry.

"Yeah! A murdered man, yeah! Mysterious crime you drop in our laps, you—"

"Your sarcasm positively drips, Flanders. Don't tell me the poor man wasn't murdered?"

"Sure he was," yelled Flanders, "about two or three hundred years ago. That guy's an Indian. Any fool could tell that. You planted him just to get me in Dutch. The medical examiner's been giving me the horse laugh, and every cop around here snickers when he sees me."

Jerry didn't seem at all surprised. "An Indian, eh?" He made clucking sounds of sympathy. "Too bad you fell for it. But then, it's rather natural. What should a cop know about anthropology or the history of Manhattan Island? You see, I suspected it myself last night, and today I checked up on my homework."

Flanders was incoherent again. All that Jerry heard, with the receiver a foot away from his ear, was something about mayhem, sudden death and execution.

When the other had worn himself down, Jerry spoke to the point. "Now look, Flanders, I don't blame

you for being sore. But I had a reason for not shooting off my mouth before. I want you to do me—and yourself, incidentally—a favor. I want you to hush up the Indian angle for another day. Tell the gentlemen of the press you haven't been able to identify the bony person yet, but you're working on several clues."

"You want *me*—"

"Shut up a moment, and I'll tell you why."

At the end of ten minutes' steady conversation Flanders said grudgingly: "All right, Case. We won't spill nothing today. Remember, though, I'm handling this. You keep out—"

But Jerry had already hung up. That was the third warning in two days to keep his nose clean. He grinned. Not bad for an amateur.

The grin froze on his face.

A man wearing a cap low over his face stepped from behind the booth just as he left it. His hands were deep in his coat pockets and he bumped into Jerry. Jerry felt the familiar pressure of something round and hard in his side.

"Keep moving," said the man, low and snarling. "And don't make any cracks."

Jerry sighed. This was getting to be monotonous. Yet he obeyed the command. The drugstore was empty at that hour of the day. The clerk was in the rear, in the little cubbyhole where prescriptions were compounded.

No one saw them walking out, side by side. Out in the street, saunterers saw nothing amiss. There wasn't a cop in sight.

"Get into that car," prodded the man with the cap. A black sedan stood idling at the curb. The man in the driver's seat was slouched low. He, too, wore a cap down over his ears.

"O. K., Al, get going!"

Jerry went in first, the man with



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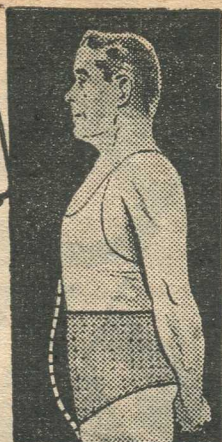
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the gun after him. The driver in front straightened up and meshed the gears. The car rolled away fast, up Broadway.

"What is this—a game?" demanded Jerry wearily.

The gun was out in the open, now, pointing straight at him. The man only grunted, lifted his free hand to scratch his head. The cap shifted to one side.

Jerry gulped, then blurted without thinking: "Pinky Madden!"

Close-cropped, flaxen-white hair associated only with albinos, had been disclosed by that gesture. Pink eyes, watery and fierce, glared at him.

Jerry bit his lip quickly, swallowed his words. But the damage was done.

Pinky Madden gritted his teeth, snarled: "So you recognized me, huh! You done yourself a lousy turn there, fella."

Jerry was sure of that. Whatever chance he had had for life was lost by that unfortunate identification. His thoughts raced on, as the car moved swiftly through traffic.

The picture of Inwood Hill was getting more and more complicated every minute. First Bryan Vann had been killed. There was no sense to it. A retired grocer, alone in the world, living meagerly on a small insurance annuity. No friends, no enemies. Every move of his could be traced for years back.

Then Dr. Luke Willoughby, eminent heart specialist. A successful and busy doctor, respectable, well-thought-of. Many friends, no enemies. Yet he had been knocked unconscious.

The man with the wooden arm—a vicious killer; yet fitting into no known picture.

The digger in the park, who had unearthed an Indian skeleton; and then fled. Who was he? Why had he been digging up ancient bones? Why had the one-armed man gone

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after him like a bat out of hell?

Pinky Madden. He at least made some sort of sense. An escaped gangster from jail. Seventeen years more, with added penalties for a prison break, stared him in the face. He'd kill to prevent that. But what did he want with Jerry? Where did he fit into the puzzle?

Nothing more was said by anyone as the car swung off Broadway, through a maze of side streets, then into a dirt siding that led down to the Harlem River. Inwood Park stretched upward to the west.

A boat was swinging at the end of a dilapidated dock in grimy water. It was a speedboat, built low and rakish, but with plenty of room aft for a large cabin. The boat had seen better days, its paint was peeling and the brasswork was dull with age.

Pinky opened the door behind him, keeping the gun steady-aimed.

"Get out!" he said.

Jerry got out, stretched his legs.

The man in front backed the sedan around and bumped up the dirt road. Not once had he bothered to look at Jerry.

CHAPTER IV.

FIRE TRAP!

Pinky had his gun in his coat pocket again, but the lawyer knew it was pointed at him. "Into the boat, fella!"

Jerry took a deep breath, looked around. The old dock was sheltered on either side by piled rubbish. Out on the river several craft were passing lazily, but an attempted hail would bring spitting death.

"Make it snappy, or I'll let you have it here."

He shrugged his shoulders and went over the taffrail. Pinky followed nimbly. "Down below!"

"Now look here," expostulated

Jerry. "You've made a mistake. I don't know you, and I don't know what this is all about. If—"

"Cut it!" The albino's face was nasty. "You horned in where it didn't concern you. You've gummed up the works for me enough. If you'd kept your trap shut, I might've just kept you quiet until everythin' was set, an' I could lam. But when you shot off about who I was, you cooked your own goose. Get below! I got an awful itchy finger, an' one backfire more or less on the Harlem don't mean nothin'."

Even as Jerry bent to stumble down the narrow stairs, his brain was clicking away at a terrific clip. He'd never come out of that cabin alive! It would be easy enough to shoot him, and dump his body at night into the river.

Behind him came Pinky, gun ready.

The cabin was small, and dirty. Two bunks ranged on either side of the curving walls, and the blankets with which they were stowed showed signs of hard usage. The cookstove was greasy with slopped-over fat, and some beans made a hard, lumpy mass in a frying pan.

Evidently the boat was a regular hide-out, rented by some crooked owner to criminals who were hot or on the lam. From the looks of the interior, Pinky was only the latest of a long series.

A smoky lantern swung from a peg. The glass bowl was half filled with kerosene, but the wick was almost burned out and the light it thrust through the cabin was murky and dim.

Jerry turned desperately, backing against the wall. "All right, so you're Pinky Madden. But you don't have to bump me off to keep me quiet. I'm willing to be tied up and stay here a prisoner until you

go on your travels again. As for up there in the park—"

Pinky said nothing. His albino eyes were narrowed and his expression was wolfish. His gun came up.

Jerry was up against the wall. About five feet separated him from Madden—too much of a jump before a bullet would get him in the guts.

"Up with your hands, fella!" said Pinky.

Slowly Jerry lifted them, edging his body imperceptibly along the wall, his fingers touching the low ceiling. His eyes were wide on Pinky's index finger. It began to whiten!

Jerry swept down with his right hand, flung himself headlong to the left.

The kerosene lamp jerked from its peg, fell with a splintering crash. Simultaneously the cabin was filled with gun roar! The bullet smacked along Jerry's arm, leaving a streamer of pain behind. Then it plowed through the mahogany wall behind him.

Sudden darkness blanked the tiny cabin. Pinky cursed and fired again. The bullet spanged uncomfortably close to where Jerry lay, crouched and holding his breath.

This couldn't continue, he realized. There was no exit except through the steep stairs to the deck. Pinky blocked that path, pumping lead. One of the bullets was bound to get him, or—

A little red tongue of flame ran along the floor. Then it whooshed up as it struck the pool of kerosene. Fire cascaded and billowed. The next instant the cabin was a blazing, crackling, roaring inferno!

Pinky yelled and fled up the stairs with eager torches at his heels. His head banged against the low overhang of the cabin door; then he was out on the deck, his feet beating a

rapid tattoo as he raced for the dock. A flaring curtain of fire draped over the doorway, barring further exit.

The flames roared up and bit hungrily into the tinder-dry walls. Jerry reeled back into the corner, staggering from the scorching heat. The open door was a funnel of racing, seething fury. Any attempt to catapult through that roaring furnace would be suicidal.

He was trapped!

It was a lousy way to die. A bullet would have been better and cleaner. Pinky was in the clear. The boat would gut to a mass of smoking, waterlogged timbers before any aid could come. His crisped bones might never even be found. They'd sink into the mud that underlay the Harlem.

He threw himself down upon the floor, seeking vainly the last thin layers of superheated air. Every breath scalded his lungs; his clothes began to smoke. So far the suction of the open door kept the actual flames away from him. But in a matter of moments they would sweep around and envelop him in a holocaust of fire.

Blinded, battered, he crawled along the inside wall. Desperate fingers probed over the wooden panels. In some of the older boats there was a narrow chamber housing the rudder shaft and the gasoline tank. If this were one of them—

But from the bunks to the cookstove his tapping fingers found nothing. And the flames were shifting, swinging back toward him in a billowing curtain.

He heaved against the round-bellied stove, sent it catapulting directly into the path of the advancing blaze. If there was nothing behind, then he was through.

Feverishly he jerked the wood

with his hand. Something gave. A square panel protested and fell out of place with a thud. Jerry gritted his teeth and pushed head and shoulders into the pitch-dark oblong.

He might make it; he might not. It was touch and go. If he got stuck, if the advancing flames ignited the gasoline—

He was wriggling like an eel through a space never meant for passage. Beneath him, he felt the hard crankshaft. Above, around him, were compressed walls that scraped the clothes and skin from his body. But still he squirmed on and on.

There was a rending crash behind him. A roaring, smashing sound and a fierce crackle of uprushing sparks. Jerry shuddered, and wriggled on. The roof of the little cabin had just collapsed.

Then his head bumped suddenly into hard wood. It didn't yield. Panic-stricken, he tried to bring his arms to the front, to exert pressure on a panel that hadn't been opened in years. But there wasn't room enough. His hands were pressed tight against his sides.

Gripping the side walls with his shoes, he smacked forward again. His skull exploded into a shower of rushing meteors, but the panel groaned and fell outward. Air, stinking of gasoline and bilge, rushed in. And also blessed sunlight!

Painfully he inched his way out. He sprawled gasping and sobbing in the well of the bow. Rotted gear lay coiled along the sides; an ancient chair was swiveled into position before the wheel. Behind him the entire stern was a gutted furnace, and the red demons were lunging forward. Once the tanks were reached, the boat would lift sky-high.

From the river came shouts and hoarse cries of alarm. Men aboard river craft had seen the blazing

CLU—8



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speedboat and were hurrying to the scene. But they wouldn't dare come too close. When the tanks exploded, everything within range would be doused with flaming embers.

Jerry grinned feebly and crawled to the shore side. This would be his first break. He didn't want to be picked up by any well-meaning rescuer. He didn't want Pinky, or anyone else, to know that he had escaped alive. But Pinky might be lurking somewhere in the background, waiting to make sure.

One part of the stem swung almost under an overhang of the dock. Jerry waited until the swing with the tide was completed; then he swarmed swiftly over the edge, scraping his head on the barnacle-incrusted underside of the wharf. With barely a splash he dropped into the oily waters and swam between slimy piles.

He barely reached the other side when the boat exploded. The pier, overhead, rocked crazily. The water convulsed and lifted. He smacked his head hard and went down into the muck, dazed and fighting for breath.

He would have drowned there in the slimy depths had not the wave flung him, tumbling and swirling, clear out into the open on the other side.

Luckily, all eyes from the crowding river boats were fixed in fascinated horror on the burning craft. It was a fountain of flame, geysering sparks and thick, black smoke. Rescuers converged from all sides, speeding to the wreck, certain that no one could possibly have remained alive in the holocaust.

Jerry gulped clean, fresh air and dived again. Swimming strongly under water he made for the mountainous dump that stretched down to the water's edge. When he came up

again, he was around a bend and out of sight of rescue craft or of any possible watchers on shore.

He pulled himself up, and lay panting and spent for a few moments before he could drag himself to his feet and make his way warily through the rubbish.

He slapped his pocket. Luckily his wallet was intact, though soggy. He wouldn't have to go home. He was tired of lurking killers pushing him from behind with cold, hard steel.

It was nearly ten o'clock that night when Jerry, completely outfitted in new clothes, hopped from a taxi in front of the ornate residence of Dr. Willoughby. His gun, carefully cleaned and oiled after its recent immersion and filled with a fresh clip of bullets, nested reassuringly in his coat pocket.

Somehow, he had the feeling that the tide of mysterious assaults would now shift back to Dr. Willoughby. It seemed logical: Vann had been killed. Willoughby had been attacked. And he, himself, had been left for dead. It was obvious that all three had stumbled on something in Inwood Park that Pinky Madden and the wooden-armed sailor were desperately anxious to keep secret.

With Vann out of the picture and he supposedly so, no doubt another attempt would be made tonight to rub Dr. Willoughby out, also.

Jerry grunted a little as he walked up the graveled path. Situated in an acre of lawn and trees, the estate overlooked the dark-flowing Hudson, beyond. A surprisingly secluded spot for a city like New York, Jerry reflected.

The man who answered Jerry's ring seemed uncomfortable in a shiny new butler's uniform and

looked more like an ex-pug than a servant.

He examined Jerry suspiciously. "What d'y'u want?" he demanded.

Jerry clutched his chest. "I've got to see Dr. Willoughby at once," he panted. "I have another one of those attacks. The doctor said if I did, I must come to him at once, day or night. Otherwise, I might die."

The butler's small red eyes were still suspicious. Jerry breathed still faster, hollowed his chest, contorted his face into an expression of pain.

"Hurry!" he gulped. "I must see him at once. These spasms—"

"O. K.," the butler grumbled. "If doc said so, you kin come in."

He led the way into a consultation room, jerked a blunt thumb toward a love seat and growled: "Sit down!" Then he withdrew from the room.

It was obvious that the doctor was scared; knew that he was marked for further attacks. He had hired a bodyguard and was hiding him under the innocuous guise of a butler.

Jerry kept groaning and clutching his chest, in case the suspicious butler was watching him through a keyhole.

Then he heard voices outside in the hall; the butler's muttered explanation, Dr. Willoughby's sharp, clear voice.

"You're crazy, Joe. I haven't given instructions to anyone such as you tell me. This requires investigation."

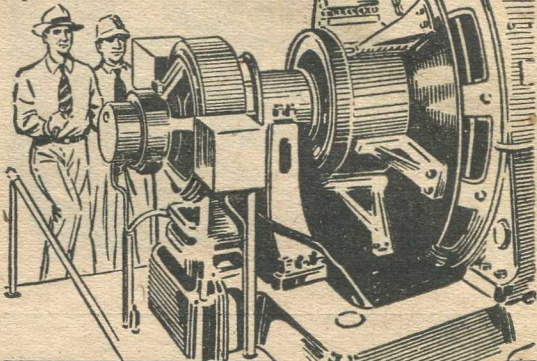
Jerry forgot his pose, straightened up. His hand slid close to his pocket.

The door flung open violently, and Joe crowded in, Willoughby close behind him. A huge .45 snouted in the butler's hand. It looked as big as a cannon.

"All right, wise guy," he snarled. "Stick 'em up an' start talkin'."

Jerry ignored him, slid his glance in back of the butler. "Hello, Dr.

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Willoughby. How's everything?"

The specialist had a gun in his hand also. His glacial eyes swept the lounging young man. "So it's you, eh?" he exclaimed, annoyance making his voice brittle. "What sort of a game are you trying to play?"

Jerry sighed; relaxed. There had been annoyance in the doctor's voice, but no incredulous surprise.

"It's no game, Willoughby," he said earnestly. "But if you'll call off your watchdog I'll explain. I never could talk well with guns ready, able and willing to perform exploratory operations on my insides. My stomach is too delicate."

The doctor said: "O. K., Joe, close the door behind you on your way out."

"But, doc," protested the guard.

"You heard me." There was a finality in his voice that sent the supposed butler hastily through the door. It slammed heavily behind him.

Willoughby wheeled on Jerry. The annoyance had not vanished from his florid face. "I thought I told you I didn't want you to bother me any more, Case," he snapped. "I distinctly made it understood that your job was finished when you proved I couldn't have killed this Vann person. What's the idea?"

Jerry crossed his legs, shoved his hands deep in his pockets. "Just a hunch. I got to thinking that there's more to this business in the park than we think. I came to advise you to get police protection for a while. The killer, or killers," he accented the plural, "won't rest until they get you out of the way."

Willoughby stared. He pocketed his gun; laughed mirthlessly. "Is that all?" he rasped. "Because if it is, you've wasted your time. As far as I'm concerned, the whole matter is definitely cleared up. I don't consider myself in the slightest danger."

"But—"

"Good night, Mr. Case." The doc-

tor jerked his thumb toward the door. "I've had a hard day at the hospital—and with a mess of reporters and miscellaneous police. Tomorrow morning I have certain medical calls to make. I need sleep."

He moved toward the door, making unmistakable gestures of dismissal.

The love seat faced a casement window that looked out on the close-clustering trees in back of the house. Jerry slowly took his hands out of his pocket, started to get up. He had done all he could. If Willoughby wanted none of him—

His eyes widened. A face was peering into the room from the outer darkness. The reflection from the shaded lamp highlighted a thin, sharp face, eyes screwed up with tension. The orifice of an automatic made a round circle against the pane.

"Drop to the floor!" yelled Jerry, and dived for his own gun. A loud report shattered glass and the darkness. On its heels—a split second after—came a second report.

The face at the window disappeared as if by magic. Jerry, smoking gun still in hand, raced over the doctor. Willoughby lay in a flung huddle.

As Jerry reached him, expecting to find him dead, the doctor heaved to his knees, vaulted lightly to his feet. Jerry was amazed.

"Then he didn't get you?"

The florid face was pale, but calm. "I'm a man of swift reactions," he smiled grimly. "I dropped as you started to yell."

Feet pounded outside, the door bounced open and Joe hurled in. "What's going on?" he stammered.

Willoughby said tightly. "You're a hell of a bodyguard. Someone took a pot shot at me. Where were you?"

"Why . . . why, boss, I was just—"

The doctor cut him short. "Never mind the talk. The shot came through the window. Get outside, and comb the grounds, before he gets away."

The three of them raced out of the front door, guns ready, and spread fanwise over the place. But there was no sign of the murderous assailant. He had either climbed quickly down the precipitous slope to the Drive, or he had vaulted the hedge that separated the grounds from a large, tangled growth of woods that lay virgin to the left.

"He got away," said Jerry.

Dr. Willoughby looked keenly at him. "So he did. Did you see who it was?"

"Yes. He was the sailor guy with the wooden arm who tried to bump me off last night."

A look passed between master and man. "Know anyone like that, Joe?"

The guard scratched his head. "Nix, boss. Don't know any guy with a wooden arm; an' as for sailors—"

Willoughby swung suddenly on Jerry. "You're sure this—er—sailor isn't a figment of your imagination, Case? No one else has ever seen him. And as for you, all I know is what you see fit to tell me. I didn't notice anyone at the window."

Jerry exhaled breath. "So that's the way it is," he said quietly. "You think I might have tried to burn you down for reasons of my own."

The doctor's eyes never left his face. "Since you put it that way—"

"There were two shots," Jerry pointed out. "One through the window that missed you, because I yelled, and smacked into the wall behind you. You can find it if you look. The other I fired to save your life. I almost got the assassin with it."

"Look, boss," snarled Joe. "He

might've tried to clip you with one, and then he smacked the winder wid the second to hide his game."

Willoughby looked thoughtful; then he finally shook his head. "No! Maybe Case is right. And then, again— O. K., we'll let it go at that. Now if you'll go, I'll get that sleep I need. Joe, show Mr. Case the way out."

Jerry went, with Joe lumbering watchfully behind.

CHAPTER V.

BURIED TREASURE.

He found himself a moment later on the deserted street. He was indignant, sore. A hell of a guy, Willoughby! He had saved his life, and what thanks did he get? Ugly suspicions.

Then he grinned. Human nature was that way; take it or leave it. But one thing he knew. He had started something, and he had to finish it.

It was no longer loyalty to a client he had seen only once; it was sheer self-preservation. Whoever was in back of the mysterious doings in Inwood Park wouldn't rest until he was safely out of the way. He knew too much; or they thought he did.

Being a firm believer in being one jump ahead of your opponent, Jerry made a long detour ostentatiously to the crowded sections of Broadway. Then, when he was certain that he had thrown any possible shadower off the trail, he dived quickly into a side street and hastened toward Inwood Park.

Jerry looked at his watch. It lacked five minutes of midnight. The night was overcast, and there was no moon. So much the better. He slid silently into the park, scrambling up over rocks and through underbrush, instead of keeping to the

paths. As usual, the place was silent and dark as a tomb. If there were police around, they were not inside the park. Jerry had insisted on that to Flanders. He didn't want to flush his game before the climax.

Fortunately, most of the old tangle of brambles had been recently cleared away by W. P. A. workers. Even on the top, where they had attempted to keep the pristine wilderness flavor, some clearing had been done.

Stealthily, and keeping well within the pools of deep shadows, Jerry climbed above the paths and into the rock and tree-packed pinnacle. Through the interlacing branches he caught glimpses of lights across the river, of Palisades Amusement Park glowing like a gigantic, phosphorescent beetle to the southwest.

He stopped suddenly; listened tensely. The gun butt was cold in his rigid fingers.

Someone was digging, not twenty yards away from him. The sounds were unmistakable. Muffled thuds, small rattles of stones, dull plops as dirt was dumped to one side.

The mysterious excavator was back on the job!

The direction of the sound puzzled Jerry at first. He had carefully orientated himself. The place where the skeleton had been unearthed the night before was to the northwest. This was almost due south. Then he understood. The digger had made a mistake; he had taken his bearings wrong; or they had been changed since he had seen them last.

He crept forward, careful not to make the slightest noise. The man with the spade would be alert for interruptions. He'd have no hesitation in shooting first and looking afterward.

Once Jerry stumbled over an in-

visible rock. The stone teetered and made small, grinding sounds. He stopped and held his breath.

But the noise of digging continued. More and more hurriedly, as though feverish patience were being exhausted.

He went forward again, caught himself at the edge of a tiny clearing, and shrank back behind a tree just in time.

A little hollow lay ahead; something like the one in which the skeleton had been found. A large rock, pointed at one end, slanted over in an outcropping from the ground. Under its overhang, a man was digging furiously.

He made little, cursing sounds as he thrust the keen edge of the collapsible spade deeper and deeper into the soft earth. His back was turned to Jerry, and he paused eagerly over each spadeful as it came up before he threw it away.

Once he straightened up, and Jerry tensed. In the dim, reflected light from the New York glow in the sky, the white, flaxen head made a pale circle.

Pinky Madden, escaped convict!

Though Jerry had expected as much, his jaw went hard and lean. The man was a cold-blooded killer, worse than a snake. He had deliberately attempted to shoot him down, and then, just as callously, had left him to fry inside the burning boat. If Jerry shot him, now, while he had the chance, it would be only proper retribution.

His finger tightened on the trigger, relaxed.

Pinky suddenly uttered a muffled exclamation. The spade fell to the ground; he dropped to his knees and thrust his hands into the hole he had dug. They came up, holding something.

Feverishly he brushed off clinging, damp earth and embedded pebbles. He held up his find, giggling and




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whining with a wild, repressed exultation.

It was an oblong metal box, about the size of one of the larger safe-deposit boxes. From the looks of it, rusted and pitted with clinging bits of rock, it had been buried for a considerable period of time.

Pinky pressed the box tight against his body and swung around to beat a hasty retreat. In his excitement, he forgot the spade lying close to the hole.

Jerry decided it was time for him to take a hand. Gripping his gun a bit more firmly, he started to step out.

At that moment, however, from the opposite side of the little clearing, something moved. Pinky whirled, and Jerry went back into the shadows again, waiting.

The albino's free hand slid upward under his coat.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you," grated a voice. Then a man stepped down into the hollow, a gun very steady in his left hand and his right swinging stiffly in the flapping sleeve of his coat.

His sharp, wizened face was wreathed in a curious grin. "Hello, Pinky; ain't you glad to see me after all these years?"

Pinky's right hand fell away from his coat, empty-handed. He stared at the one-armed man as if he had seen a ghost. His pinkish eyes seemed to start out of his head; his Adam's apple bobbed jerkily up and down.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded the other irascibly. "Do I look as bad as that?"

"Shorty White!" moaned the albino. "You . . . you ain't—"

"A ghost? Of course not." The one-armed man's face twisted into a harsh scowl. "Maybe I did lose a bit of weight an' me old trigger-handler since you took orders from me; but don't go an' be gettin' any ideas. I'm just as quick as ever wid me left."

"Sure, sure!" Pinky said swiftly. "It was just the sight of you, after all these years. I'm really glad to see you again, Shorty. Me an' the boys; we knew you skipped, but we thought you was dead, by now."

Shorty snarled. "Sure! I almost was. I took it on the lam when the bulls got hot. I stowed away on a boat. How should I know it was sailin' for Australia! They found me six days out, an' the captain was a hard case. One of his crew died, an' he needed another hand. Gave me a choice—jail at the next port, or work. I worked." He grimaced. "My arm got caught in some snaking rope while it was blowing fit to kill. The sawbones hadda cut the damn thing off. I been around a lot, I kin tell you."

Pinky hugged the box tighter. "Sure!" he said appeasingly. "It's been tough. The same fer us boys. We been in stir all along, till Finn an' Spider an' Slugs was able to cook up an idea fer a get-away. It was a cinch fer one—poison fer more. So they picked on me."

Shorty nodded. "Seein' as how you hid the ice. Me, I got back to the Big Town only las' week. When I heard you busted outta stir, I says to myself: 'Shorty, one of the boys is out, an' it's Pinky. Now, since you was always a pretty smart guy, Shorty, what does that mean?' An' I answered myself: 'Pinky's gonna make a beeline for that there hot ice he laid aside for us to cool. So, once you find Pinky, you find the ice!'"

The gangster grinned with a self-satisfied air. "An' sure enough—"

"Now look," cried Pinky. "Everythin's on the up an' up. We figgered it out in stir. I was to uncover the ice, divvy it into shares. Four fer y'u whenever y'u came back, an' one fer each of the rest of us. Honest I was!"

Shorty's eyes narrowed into baleful slits. "You wouldn't by any chance, Pinky, have been fergettin' my cut? Or even Spider's an' the other boys up there in the Big House?"

"Where'd y'u get such an idea?" Pinky cried virtuously.

The wizened face split into a cruel grin. "Outta my own head, Pinky," he said softly. "'Cause that's just what I'm goin' to do."

Action followed with the speed of lightning then. It came so fast that Jerry, absorbed in the drama, was caught flat-footed.

Pinky's hand was a blur as it dived for his gun. It was halfway out when Shorty's automatic jerked in his hand. The sound might have been an automobile exhaust back-firing, but Pinky crumpled and fell heavily to the ground. The gun bounced on the rock with a spang, and the metal box rattled and jingled as it smacked the dirt.

Jerry lunged forward. His mouth opened in staccato command. Then his foot caught under an exposed root and he clutched desperately at the tree trunk to save himself from falling.

Shorty, bending over the box, straightened swiftly at the sound. His gun jerked up. Jerry was off-balance. He would never be able to swing his own weapon around in time.

A single shot sounded!

Jerry's flesh quivered in anticipation of the rending impact. Then he blinked.

Shorty White spun on his heel like a wobbling top. A look of pained surprise widened his eyes. For a moment they stared down foolishly at the bright-red stain that spread frothily over the small V of his shirt. Then he coughed and a flood of crimson poured from his

lips. He fell, still wobbling, like a slow-motion picture. As he hit the ground he crumpled suddenly.

"What the devil!" exclaimed Jerry.

A heavy-set, impeccably dressed figure jumped nimbly down into the hollow. The weird reflected glow made little burnished lights dance upon the metal in his hand. A wisp of thin smoke drifted lazily into the night.

CHAPTER VI.

EXPOSE.

Jerry walked out, gripping his automatic tightly, as though it had frozen to his fingers.

"Thanks for the lift, Dr. Willoughby. We've evened scores, now."

The doctor swiveled like a marionette, his still smoking weapon whipping up. For a man of his bulk he was curiously light on his feet. He looked startled, suddenly pale.

"Oh, it's you, Case!" he said with a relieved smile. "You frightened me there. I thought for the moment—er—this desperado had a friend to take a pot shot at me. But what in blazes are you doing here? I thought you were quitting messing around this infernal place."

Jerry answered him with a grin. "I have a very decided aversion to being manhandled; the same as you," he said equably. "When I left you I thought you were going to bed. Your medical practice will suffer from these nocturnal excursions."

Dr. Willoughby said coldly: "I just saved a life. Medical practice can go no further."

"Right, doctor, and I appreciate it. As I said before, now we're even."

Willoughby stooped, picked up the box. He looked uneasily around at the surrounding trees. "We'd

better be moving, Case," he said hurriedly. "These two birds may have some of their accomplices lurking about. We can notify the police later."

Jerry spoke casually. "I suppose you heard what this is all about."

The doctor shook his head. "Not a word. I just happened to blunder in while the—er—fellow I shot was lifting his gat. I recognized him at once from your description as the chap who tried to rub me out; so I fired. You see, I couldn't sleep. The more I thought of it, the more I was sure you were right: That something was going on up here, and that unless I got the jump, the next time our friend with the wooden arm would get me. But come on, we're wasting time."

Jerry, however, didn't seem in any particular hurry. He stretched his long legs lazily. "The albino person," he began with maddening calm, "is Pinky Madden, just escaped from Sing Sing where he was serving a long stretch. The chap with the wooden arm—a most effective weapon, by the way—was Shorty White. White was the leader, and Pinky one of a former gang of crooks who specialized in jewel robberies. Ever hear of them before?"

"Never!" Dr. Willoughby snorted. "As a man of science, I've had little to do with that type of person. But we're wasting time; if we—"

"Just a moment. I want you to get the complete picture before we go calling on Detective Flanders. You see, Flanders broke up the gang before they could get rid of their accumulated loot. Pinky managed to bury it before he was picked up. Shorty White was the only one who got away. He turned sailor through no fault of his own. Pressing circumstances, you might say. In any event, he was a damn poor seaman,

for he was foolish enough to leave an arm at sea."

"Spare me these biographies," begged the doctor. "I don't like this place as a lecture hall."

Jerry didn't seem to hear. He seemed to have forgotten his gun completely. It swung in a short, rhythmic arc as he talked.

"Shorty finally got back to his old haunts. He wanted those jewels desperately. But only Pinky knew where they were. Then he heard that Pinky had escaped. Being a smart leader, he put one and one together. In the underworld he located Pinky's hide-out. Then he trailed him. Pinky intended double-crossing his pals, still safely ensconced in stir. And Shorty wanted the cache all for himself. Who made that crack about honor among thieves?"

"Now look here," Willoughby commenced angrily. "I'm—"

"Wait!" Jerry gestured restrainingly with his gun. "I'm coming to the meat of the matter. Pinky made a mistake the first night he dug. His landmark was a hollow with a huge rock. But he didn't know the W. P. A. had been cleaning up the old park. They dumped a rock from a rather dangerous stance on crumbling earth into a hollow. All that Pinky found was an Indian skeleton."

Willoughby stared. He seemed surprised. "What's that? An *Indian*?"

"Exactly! An original native son, in fact. But tonight he found the right spot—and his death as well."

"Who'd have thought it!" exclaimed Willoughby. "Now let's go."

"Bear with me for another second. That box you've got under your arm, doctor. Know what's inside?"

Willoughby stared down at it as though seeing it for the first time. "No!"

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beries. A clean hundred thousand dollars' worth."

"I don't believe it," said the doctor skeptically. "I'll bet Pinky double-crossed the others even before he buried it. I'll bet it's full of pebbles. When we get down to my house, I'll—"

"It's the McCoy," Jerry assured him. "Unless—the *real* leader of the Shorty White gang already has them in his possession."

Willoughby looked startled. "Real leader!" he echoed. "I don't understand. I thought you just said—"

"Shorty was the front for the brains in the background. The man higher up, who did none of the dirty work, but who had the entree into swanky homes and could put Shorty and his men wise to locations and exact layouts."

Willoughby forgot his uneasiness. He was interested. "Go on," he said. "Do you happen to know the name of the unknown higher-up?"

"Of course," Jerry told him casually. "The real leader is Dr. Luke Willoughby."

The doctor's gun hand came up fast.

But Jerry's weapon stopped short in its slow arc. By a curious coincidence it was dead-centered on Willoughby's stomach.

"Drop it!" he snapped.

Willoughby smiled. His eye flicked past Jerry. "O. K., Joe, let him have it."

"An old trick—" Jerry started, when a thick voice cut across his words.

"A wise guy, huh! I'd plug y'u if there ain't been enough noise already. But if y'u don't let go that gat—"

Jerry dropped his gun slowly. "It looks as though you've won, Willoughby."

The doctor beamed. "It looks that way, doesn't it? You're a smart young chap, Case; but not smart

enough. The same as Shorty and Pinky. You might call the whole thing a triple-triple cross. I also heard that Pinky was out. I located him through Joe and trailed him up here. Your client Vann was, so to speak, an innocent bystander. He stumbled on Pinky while he was digging. Pinky lost his head and shot him. Then he got scared and beat it.

"But I didn't know Shorty was back, or here on the same errand. Shorty caught me unawares. He was the only one who knew me. Since my share of the swag was three sevenths, he thought it was a good time to get rid of me. He left me for dead." He fingered the box complacently. "Now I've got enough to keep me in clover for a while."

He stepped forward swiftly, gun clubbed. "Keep your gun on him, Joe, while I bust wide that smart skull of his. You're right. Another shot might bring the cops along."

The gun butt glinted as he swung.

There was a fusillade of shots. The top of Inwood Park seemed torn to shreds.

Joe gave a short, choking cry. The uplifted weapon went sailing in a spinning arc. Dr. Willoughby looked foolishly at the pumping blood that spurted from his wrist.

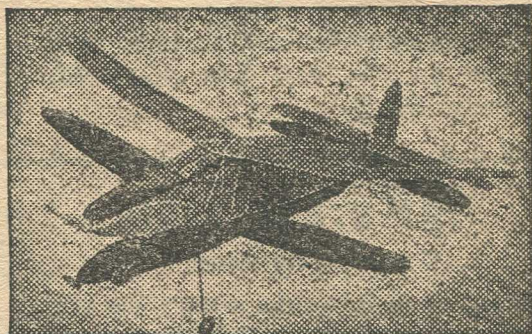
The hollow was suddenly filled with men.

"Good work, Case!" approved Detective Mike Flanders. "I couldn't have done better myself. We've always wondered about the fellow for whom Shorty played dummy. Shorty's gang knew too damn much about Park Avenue houses. Everything's hunky-dory now. The swag recovered, and that eminent heart specialist, Dr. Willoughby, due for a long, long stretch. And, my boy, there's rewards of over ten grand out."

Jerry sat down weakly on the big rock. Now that it was over, he felt a bit shivery. "Whew!" he gasped.

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"I never thought you'd get here in time, Flanders. I had the devil's own job keeping Willoughby here this long. I knew that Joe was somewhere in the background."

Flanders looked at his watch. "I'm right on the dot, like you said. Twelve thirty."

Jerry lifted his wrist watch into the light of the police torches. "I see where there's going to be a crimp in my reward money."

"What d'ya mean?"

"I'll have to buy you a *good* watch, Flanders. Your ticker is five minutes slow."

THE STORY TRAIL

Continued from page 94

is going to do—then what's the use of reading the story? This story is one that you won't guess, unless you're an extra-special Grade A connoisseur of detective plots!

Nat Schachner is another name that detective readers are familiar with. He's been in our magazine on quite a number of occasions, always with a swell yarn. Whenever he has an unusually fine story, his first visit is to our office—and it's his last, for we usually grab the yarn and put it on our schedule at the earliest possible moment. His novelette, "Killers' Night Out," is in this issue.

We've really got a great issue lined up for you next month, with every story listed a real knock-out. If you don't agree with us, just consider these titles and names, and you'll realize that the slim dime you

have to pay for this magazine will give you plenty of returns in the May issue.

"First, we have "The Murder Book," which is a howling yarn by Frank Gruber. It's a complete novel, every bit of it packed with tension and excitement, and using for its basis a most unusual racket, but one that certainly exists, and has been worked many times. Gruber, as you have learned from his previous stories, has an odd method of bringing to your attention things that are pretty much out of the way, but which prove doubly interesting when you learn of them. "The Murder Book" is one of these. A different sort of crime; a different method, and very different in the way it is finally solved. Just as we are writing this, Gruber's latest book, "The French Key," has been issued, and reviews and sales reports are such that undoubtedly it will be one of the best-selling detective novels of the year. And it won't be long before you see it made into a movie—

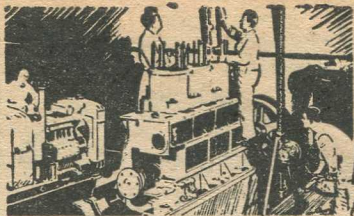
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another to be added to Gruber's list of pictures made from his detective characters.

Following the novel, we have two novelettes. One of them, "Voice of the Robot," is by Robert C. Blackmon. Blackmon gets a tang and bang into his stories that is hard to duplicate. They are not rip-roaring, gun-blasting episodes; but they are the kind of yarns that make you want to read on and on until you find yourself at the end, seeing, at the last moment, the explanation of a clever plot. "Voice of the Robot" is even better than the usual Blackmon yarn.

You probably all remember "I Want to Burn!" the novel which Theodore Tinsley wrote for us in the March issue. We knew that would go over splendidly, and it did! Even though the issue has been on sale only a week at the time of this writing, we already have a bundle of enthusiastic letters about this story. That's why we feel so enthusiastic over the novelette, "The Living Corpse," which we give you in the next issue. It's a honey of a yarn, and it opens (we'll let you in on this much of it, anyway) with the finding of a dead body in—of all places!—an undertaking establishment! What's wrong with that? That's the place where you'd expect to find dead people, isn't it? Sure. But this dead body wasn't there for embalming; in fact, it wasn't supposed to be there at all. That's how the story starts—and boy, wait until you read how it ends!

One of the nicest evenings we've had in a long time came recently when, together with Maxwell Grant, author of The Shadow novels which appear in the Street & Smith magazine of that name, and Frank Gruber,



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who is one of our regular writers (another yarn of his is in the next issue!) we took part in judging a “mystery night” contest at Fort Hamilton, Brooklyn. Several New York police officials were also judges. The unusual entertainment was planned for the benefit of a church building fund, and was a tremendous success. Several thousand people were in attendance, and almost a thousand solutions to the “mysteries” presented there were given the judges. After the contest was over, all of us who took part in the judging were open for questions regarding stories, mysteries, detective practices, and so on. For a while, it looked as if we were going to stay there for three weeks—so many people were asking questions. But luckily, Maxwell Grant is an accomplished magician, having appeared on the stage with the great magicians of the past as well as present, and he started doing a few tricks which got the audience very much interested, and luckily, occupied until it was too late to ask any more questions.

It was good fun, though—and we met many of our readers personally.

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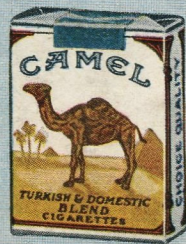
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