

STREET & SMITH'S

# CLUES

DETECTIVE  
STORIES

10¢

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JUNE • 1940

**"BLOODY  
BULLETS"**

A COMPLETE PLANE  
HANDSOME NOVEL BY  
CLIFFORD GOODRICH

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**"RIDE THE  
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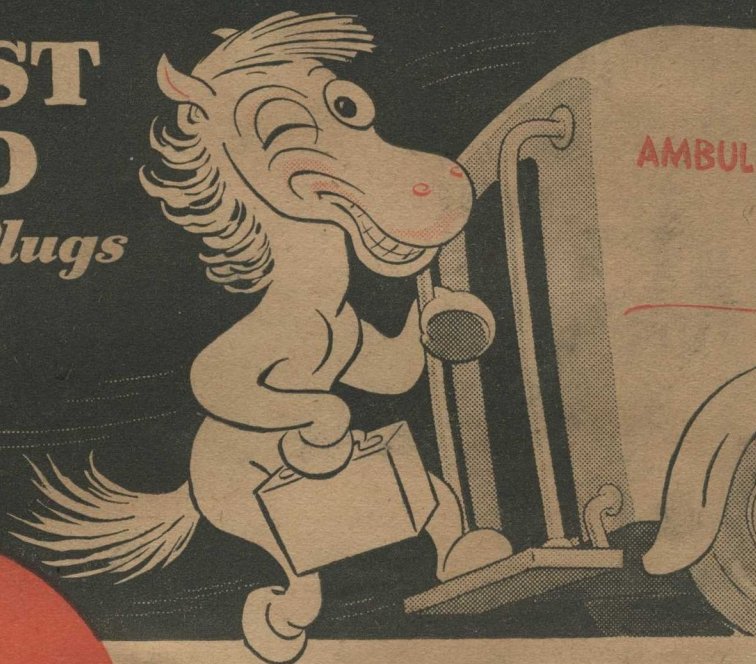
SHORT STORIES AND  
FEATURES  
ALL COMPLETE



This is a place holder for **page 2**

...the advertisement behind the  
front cover

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# CLUES

## DETECTIVE STORIES

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CONTENTS FOR JUNE, 1940

VOL. XLIV NO. 1

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### COVER BY LAWRENCE TONEY

All fictional characters mentioned in this magazine are fictitious. Any similarity in name or character to any real person is coincidental.

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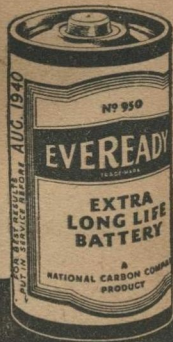


"BUT ONE OF OUR PARTY ON shore brought his flashlight into action. Its powerful beam cut the distance and darkness—and in a minute I was free. I shudder to think of what might have happened except for those dependable 'Eveready' fresh DATED batteries!

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## THE STORY TRAIL

You may or may not believe in ghosts, but after you get through reading "The Seven Ghosts," which is the complete novel to come to you in the July issue of Clues-Detective Stories, you'll sort of feel like believing in them, for if we've read any story that makes such things sound real, this one is it! It's by Norman A. Daniels, who is one of our regular contributors, and who always does a good job. So you can take our recommendation of the lead story in our next issue without any misgivings. We haven't let you down in any of our predictions so far, and we don't intend to start doing that now!

There will be a number of other great tales in our next issue, too. Theodore Tinsley, who gave you such stories as the exciting, "I Want to Burn," in a past issue of Clues, gives you another fine novelette, "Black Moon." It's a story that is packed with mystery, with plenty of action and excitement all through,

and one of the cleverest plots we've seen in quite a while. You'll be surprised at the twists and turns that take you along from one scene to another. Every time you think you've solved the case, a new angle comes up which throws your solution straight out the window. You really have to wait until the very end before you know what it's all about. The title of this novelette is "Black Moon."

The second novelette will be "Background for Murder," by Alan Hathway. You've seen Hathway's stories in Clues as well as other Street & Smith magazines before, and know what he can do. Especially in this yarn, he has packed all the emotional interest and suspense that you can crowd into a story. It's a very unusual tale, with not only action, but intense feeling, self-sacrifice, and the general overtones of something more than the mere story itself. It is one of those occasional yarns that really get under your skin.

Grant Lane, well known to all our readers, will give us a short story, "Siren at Midnight," which you will like. Just so you don't get the wrong impression from the title—that "siren" is the siren of a hospital ambulance, and not an alluring female. Of course, there is a very alluring female in the story, but you won't want to call her a siren.

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Then, of course, there will be the usual clever short stories and other features to round out the issue. We feel quite sure that you'll find the next one ever better than this; and the one after that still better. We've been doing everything possible to make Clues-Detective Stories the finest detective book in the field, and the excellent response on the part of

*Continued on page 129*

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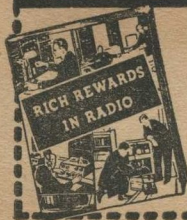
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# Bloody Bullets



A Complete Novel

by **CLIFFORD GOODRICH**

## CHAPTER I. FROM EUROPE—TO DIE!

Along the North River water front, the last taxicab had departed from the great pier entrance. Police were sending the idly curious about their way. Even at eleven o'clock at night the docking of a liner from Europe is sufficient attraction to draw a crowd. But now the thrill was over; floodlights upon the liner's deck were being turned off. The gloom of the river was

again settling over the wide, cobblestoned street.

Thus, when the sound came, there was little other noise to cover its blood-curdling, piercing scream. From somewhere beneath the Express Highway which borders the river, it came, and it was a man's voice stark with terror.

The banging of guns followed seconds later!

A man was seen to stagger several steps toward a parked taxicab that he had evidently been seeking. The

cab was before a dining car across from the ship piers. Behind the weaving man, darkly clad figures were scurrying into a big sedan. Then the heavy car was being wheeled at a furious speed down the street, even as the gun sounds went shattering through the night.

And the one who had been staggering, collapsed in a heap, hands clutched to his chest in a futile attempt to stop the flow of blood from several wounds there. He was a well-dressed person, dark, apparently of some foreign country. For the muttered words that came from lips, as he lay dying, sounded like a Slavic dialect. The words choked off and the man lay still.

The sedan had disappeared into the black tunnel that was the roadway beneath the wide elevator highway. But as the gunshots faded in the night, another car drew up to the curb as a cab driver and a big, round-faced man came tumbling out of the eating place into the street. But the occupant of the sleek-looking roadster was first to reach the dead man in the street. Others who came from the diner stopped short, to divide their attention between the dead man in the street and the towering stranger who had come to a stiff halt nearby. The latter was far more arresting in appearance.

Standing six feet three, he was red-haired and hatless. He had odd green eyes set in an angular, leathery face, and the clothes he wore were of white linen. The stump of a burned-down cigar protruded from a thin-lipped mouth.

The stout man, who had come from the diner with the cab driver, suddenly yelled: "Flame! I've been waiting for you—"

Private Detective George Hardesty, better known as Flame because of the bright-red hair, was

perhaps the greatest man hunter in New York City. And he was even a more important figure than he let on. For he was more than a private detective. Since the new war in Europe, when agents of belligerent nations were known to be in the United States on secret missions, Flame Hardesty had been enrolled as an undercover agent of the United States Secret Service, and in a short time had become an ace among the Feds.

Flame Hardesty swung about now, cool eyes taking in the bulking form of the man who had spoken. "About time you showed up, China," he said. "Eating again, I suppose?"

The fat-looking one had a round, cherubic face. It wrinkled up as its owner complained: "But, chief, I was half starved and I got tired of waiting for you, and—"

Flame Hardesty rapped harshly, "Shut up and give me a hand here. Better yet, keep those guys back."

Off in the distance, a patrolman's shrill whistle echoed through the air. Hardesty worked with swift, deft fingers. He had rolled the dead man over. A slight exclamation of surprise came from his grim lips. Then, quickly, he was going through the dead man's pockets, apparently searching for something. He glanced at a name in the wallet, loosened the vest over the blood-smeared shirt.

One of the patrons from the diner exclaimed: "Say, fella, you can't do that!"

And the stout man, who was pushing the small crowd back, bellowed: "Who the hell says he can't! That's Flame Hardesty, best-known dick in New York. Now stand back everybody before I get rough!"

It didn't seem possible that this heavy man who still had one side of his jaw half full of food could get

rough with anyone. Yet, when one man tried to duck past him, a casual sweep of the fat-faced man's arm sent him staggering.

Red-headed Hardesty had done a sudden, curious thing. His back to the onlookers, his motions momentarily shielded, he had pulled the man's white shirt from beneath his belt and was ripping off a section of the shirt tail. This he stuffed into the side pocket of his linen suit. And barely in time, for at that moment a policeman came running up. Down the street, another whistle blew. Other officers were on the way.

The cop started to say, "Hey, what's the idea of—" Then he looked again at this giant of a man with the odd green eyes and exclaimed, "Hardesty!" The cop's fingers came to his cap in a respectful salute, for Flame Hardesty was perhaps rated higher than any official police officer in the city.

Briefly, Hardesty said, "I heard the shots. This man"—indicating the figure in the street—"came from the ship pier of that liner which docked an hour ago. Apparently he was seeking this cab. He was shot down, and the killers' car escaped before I could get over here. Otherwise—"

Hardesty shrugged. "It's your job now, officer."

He made the remark casually. But no one knew better than Hardesty that this might *not* be the police officer's job from now on. This might be big stuff—a job for a Federal agent.

The cop asked: "Know him, sir?"

Hardesty indicated the man's inside coat pocket. "His name's in his billfold. That's all I know. Now if you'll pardon me—" Hardesty started moving off, seeing that the

cop was busy looking over the corpse.

He gripped the big arm of the one he had called China. This man was China Kelly, Hardesty's partner. He protested, now: "Look, chief, I got half a bottle of cold beer on the counter in the diner there. Now, if you'll just wait a minute—"

Hardesty clipped, "Forget it, you glutton! Back to the car. Hurry!"

A moment later Flame Hardesty was tooling the powerful roadster away from the curb and heading crosstown toward his Fifth Avenue home.

Beside him, China Kelly asked: "Look, partner, what's all the mystery about? Just because a guy gets rubbed out—"

Hardesty said quietly: "Count Carlo von Haugantz to you, mister. He happens to be a representative from the Balkan State of Jurua. *The man we were supposed to meet!*

China breathed: "Holy hell!" and came up on the edge of the seat.

## CHAPTER II. TEN-TON DEATH.

Tim—China—Kelly was an Irishman who had been born in China. Ten years ago he had arrived in the United States. His parents had died in China and left Tim practically penniless. He had thus come to the States in search of relatives whom he thought still lived.

In a dive on the East Side, Flame Hardesty had picked him up, confused, upset by the rushing, hectic pace that New Yorkers lead. Tim Kelly, at the time Hardesty found him, had not eaten a meal in twenty-four hours, and to this day he still spoke of it as the greatest calamity in his life.

A strange friendship had developed between the two men. China

Kelly looked dumb—and was not. He had a brain that was curiously alert and adapted to detective work—when he could get his mind off food for a while. Hardesty had trained that brain until he had in China an ace man hunter who feared neither man nor devil. Fat-looking, easy-going, he, nevertheless, could handle any three men his size. And as Hardesty knew, once you got Tim Kelly “under way” there was no stopping him.

The cherubic expression left China’s face, now, and he asked: “You mean *he* was the one coming to see you about those ammunitions shipments to Jurua?”

“No other,” Hardesty said. He gave China an exasperated look. “And *you* were supposed to wait right there at the pier gate. I missed Count Haugantz and had to go aboard in search of him. Meanwhile he came ashore—and got killed. If you had been there—” Hardesty broke off, shrugging. “But you wouldn’t have known him anyway. I had his picture.”

“And what now?” China wanted to know.

“This is big stuff, important. Jurua has just undergone another bloody purge under its dictatorship. Rebellious underground groups have apparently formed themselves. Those that have been discovered have been found with guns and munitions smuggled in from this country. Haugantz was here to investigate. I was to aid him.”

“So, now, we’re sunk?” China Kelly put in.

Hardesty shook his bared, red head. “Not quite. I think we’ll find it on the shirt tail.”

“Find *what* on the shirt tail?”

China asked curiously.

“The—”

Just then a truck came pounding out of the side street.

On this side of town there was little trucking traffic so late at night. Warehouses were closed. What little traffic there was, moved cautiously out of side streets. Yet this particular truck came across the intersection at a furious clip, suddenly swerved and headed directly toward Hardesty’s expensive car. China yelled: “Look out! The crazy fools are tryin’ to—”

“Run us down!” Hardesty finished. For he had seen the dim face of the man behind the wheel, the hard, set jaw of the driver who was handling the big steering wheel. He saw that wheel yanked over hard, now; heard the burning of rubber as the ten-ton truck swerved at an angle and cut off the roadster’s path.

Yet Hardesty slapped on the gas and his fast car plowed forward, leaped the curb, bounced along the sidewalk. Fractions of an inch had saved Hardesty and his partner from crushing death; a man of lesser courage would have become excited and rammed either the truck or a building.

For possibly fifty feet Hardesty sent the roadster hurtling along the sidewalk, then bounced the car back onto the street.

“They sure aren’t losing any time, anyhow!” he said.

China Kelly looked at him. “What you mean, chief?” And then: “Oh, I get it! You mean they want that shirt tail?”

“Might be that,” Hardesty clipped as he wheeled the car around, shot it back to the corner of the side street down which the heavy truck had continued.

The street was gloomy, deserted. Flame drew to a stop and mur-

mured: "Huh! About a hundred warehouses, and they could have disappeared behind the sliding doors of any one of them!"

"What now?" Kelly asked.

"The shirt," Hardesty offered, "is about our only clue—so far; the quicker we get started on it, the better."

He took out the large piece of torn material from his pocket and held it beneath the dashlight. With the exception of blood on the part that had been above the waistline, the tail of the shirt was blank!

China said: "Swell! There isn't a mark on it. Where'd you ever get this crazy idea about a clue on a shirt tail?"

Hardesty explained: "In a cablegram from Jurua. It came tonight. I was informed that if anything happened to Haugantz, to get the tail of his shirt. It was said to be important."

"Well, look for yourself," China said.

"I will. At the lab." Hardesty had the car in gear and was rolling again. "That new light-ray will bring it out. I still think we've got something."

On the way he stopped at a telegraph office and sent a coded message to Washington.

Ten minutes later Hardesty pulled the car into the basement garage of his large lower Fifth Avenue home.

### CHAPTER III.

#### FLAME GOES TRUCKING.

Flame Hardesty's residence on lower Fifth Avenue was of the old brownstone variety. But inside, the first floor contained a modern office that ran half the depth of the house. Modernistic furniture, the latest in fixtures, short-wave radio and scientific gadgets were in the deeply

carpeted, soundproof room. At one end was a huge desk. Hardesty flicked a switch on a boxlike affair atop the desk. This was a speaker for the interoffice communication system that connected directly with his large, second-floor laboratory.

A young voice answered: "Yes?"

"Got something for you, Chick," Hardesty said into the box. "Come down."

Two moments later a slender young man of about twenty stepped quietly into the large room. This was Danny Edwards, better known as Chick to his chief. An orphan, Chick had been adopted by Flame Hardesty years ago. He made his home with the undercover agent now, and an alert brain especially adapted to science had made Chick of invaluable service. In charge of Hardesty's modern crime laboratory on the second floor, Chick had more than once demonstrated that he had a special gift for solving crime clues.

Hardesty handed his assistant the piece of shirt tail. "See what you find on this, Chick," he directed. "I'm in a hurry."

Bright gray eyes snapping, Chick was already started toward the hall. "Important?" he asked, going out.

Flame Hardesty nodded. "I hope so." Then, looking around, "Now where in hell did that China Kelly disappear to?"

Chick grinned. "Last time I saw him he was headed for the kitchen, chief."

Hardesty grimaced. "Then send him in on your way out."

A few moments later, stout China Kelly ambled into the office. Hardesty was seated behind the big desk, an unlighted cigar jammed in his mouth, his green eyes thoughtful. He saw China's jaw working around a mouthful of food, asked:

"Eating again, eh?"

"Chicken," China mouthed. "As the wise man says, 'Fowl in the mouth of—'"

Hardesty jerked out of the chair, his hard jaw grim. "O. K., China, skip it!" he rapped. "Now if that thing you call a brain can get away from the idea of food long enough, take a look at this." Hardesty was holding out something in his big hand. It was a steel-jacketed bullet, about two inches long.

China Kelly stopped chewing for a moment, looked at the object and commented blandly, "They use them in the army."

"Sure," said the detective. "But do you know which army?"

"Our army, of course."

Hardesty shook his red-thatched head. "No. This is the bootleg stuff, that is being shipped to the discontented faction of Jurua. Apparently they are receiving high-grade gunpowder in *their* shells, stuff that is being shipped in by some gang here in New York that is working some fast and shady deals."

"So?" China queried.

"Well, last night, here in New York, a man named Barlowe—a big munitions manufacturer—had one of his munitions plants broken into and thousands in ammunitions and stuff was stolen. There's a racket going on in this town, China, that no one knows about—"

China interjected: "If the police know it, the newspapers will soon have it spread all over—"

"That's it," stated Hardesty. "The police don't. The hijacking wasn't reported. I got it through one of my agents this afternoon."

"Maybe this bird, Barlowe, himself, is the gent behind the racket," China said.

Thoughtfully, the detective commented: "I wonder." Then, as

young Chick came into the office, "That's what we're going to find out."

Hardesty looked at the piece of white shirt tail in his lab assistant's hand. He said, "Well?"

"It's a map!" Chick exclaimed. "The map of a water front in secret ink. It came out clear as day on the tail of this shirt."

The bland expression dropped from China Kelly's round face. "What location?" he shot out.

Chick shrugged. "That's it," he said. "A city water front. But there are no streets or the name of the city. I've checked it with the North River water front and can't find any location that matches it."

"I'll take a look at it myself," Hardesty offered. He led the way upstairs to the large, expensively equipped laboratory that contained every modern device for the detection of crime.

Soon Chick had arranged the piece of cloth over a square plate of translucent glass, after first treating the material with chemicals. Brightly diffused light from beneath soon brought out the outline of the map. Chick said:

"See! It shows six blocks of a water front. There are no landmarks excepting this blocked-in part which may have been a spattering of invisible ink or it may be a clue."

China's round face was peering close. He asked: "What's the X mark?"

Hardesty explained: "It could be an ammunition dump."

"Or more likely a boat loading with ammunition," Chick suggested. "Wait a minute." He went into a small adjoining room and returned with a map of the Port of New York. Hastily, Chick traced the lines from the shirt. The bit of map

was transposed to a film plate and then projected onto a movie screen and focused the same size as the shirt-tail map.

Immediately, Hardesty said, "Here's where one of Barlowe's ships is loading. And about all that helps is that the murdered man's map does not fit in with any of that section of town. There are forty or fifty other places in port where it might fit."

Suddenly, China Kelly—who had been staring intently at the map—put it: "I got a hunch, chief. I got an idea I know where that place is."

Hardesty was already started toward the door leading out to the hallway. "All right, then," he directed. "Get started on it. Call me as soon as you have something definite."

After China had departed, Hardesty returned to his office and for an hour was busy making phone calls. He talked with various persons of the underworld, men with whom he had excellent contacts. And the startling array of information that Flame Hardesty picked up brought a tense light to his odd green eyes. This thing was bigger than he had figured; crooks behind it were not going to stop at a mere killing—

It was well after midnight, and Hardesty was still pouring over notes that he had made; checking records from his files. It was then that the phone call came through from China Kelly.

"Got something for you, chief," China stated over the wire.

"What—"

"A fresh cartridge, like the one you had there in the lab tonight. An absolute duplicate, in every particular—and gleaming-new."

The wedge-shouldered dick leaned forward on the desk, gripped the

phone tightly. "Where are you?" he asked quickly.

"Truck highway. You know that poolroom at the corner of—"

There was a crack, as of a black-jack striking, a groan, the noise of a loose banging receiver. Then the receiver was replaced; the line went dead.

Hardesty was out of the chair and moving a second after he had replaced his own phone receiver.

The towering dick's mind raced as he went upstairs to his chart room and studied a detailed map of Brooklyn, one containing code marks identifying certain spots.

He knew that old dark truck highway well enough! Somewhere near it, China Kelly was in a pool hall. But the highway was long and the entire section of the city dotted with poolrooms. There was one particular poolroom, though, where Flame Hardesty and China Kelly had once made an important arrest. It was in Brooklyn, and "that" poolroom must be the one described by Kelly. It was worth a chance trying it.

Flame Hardesty glanced at his watch. One o'clock. The trucking business would be starting.

He called a certain garage, clipped orders to be ready with a light and fast truck. Turning into his own private room, Flame spent a little time over a hard-faced make-up which could stand the most rigorous inspection. A minute and he was clothed with a heavy, short leather jacket and cap, looking not unlike any husky truck driver.

He grabbed up a considerable roll of bills, dropped a blackjack in his pocket and patted his guns. He snatched up the copy of the map. A short time later he was making his way through a secret door in the basement of his house, darting along

a small tunnel which brought him out in one of the giant electric conduits.

It was a roundabout way, but safe from observation. He ran along a narrow footpath on the side of the conduit, crouched low to keep from bumping the ceiling. At a certain point he found a small square door, unfastened a padlock, dropped through a thick wall into a ventilating chamber of a subway.

An early train whistled by with a sputter of flaming blue sparks. Hardesty darted around an archway, raced up the track after the train. He came to a station just as the train moved out, vaulted nimbly to the platform. When he left the station it was at the tag end of some late passengers who had just come off the train.

Heading east two blocks, Flame sauntered into the garage, stretched and yawned in the doorway while he lit a cigar and had a word with the manager, one of his secret operatives. To a watcher, it would have appeared that they were good naturedly haggling over a small bill. But quietly, Hardesty was getting a quick picture of trucking gossip.

There was a little of interest until the man happened to mention that there had been a shortage of heavy trailer trucks for the past couple of days. Hardesty's thoughts quickened. Who was hiring them? Where were they being used?

"They tell me they're being used over in Jersey," the manager said. "Haven't checked on it. All cash business. I didn't have any trucks heavy enough; so I haven't had anything to do with 'em."

"Closed or open type?" Flame asked.

"Closed, I guess. The regular heavy-duty, perishable-goods type.

Hardesty ambled in along the

early drivers, careful not to appear too rushed. He bummed a match from one sleepy young husky, handed out a cigarette, passed a couple of wisecracks. But his eyes were green-sharp as he talked.

"Where you working?" one of the drivers asked.

"Between Brooklyn and New York, across the lower bridge," Hardesty said. "And you?"

"I got a double-pay job, but damned if I like it!" the fellow grinned. "Over in Jersey. Jersey to here hauling loads of phosphorous—so they say! But it's out of one of Barlowe's plants, and I'd sure hate to get in a smash-up with that phosphorous."

"Rather early to haul from there, isn't it?" Hardesty queried carefully.

The man grinned and grunted, "Early! Say, they've been working night shifts there for nearly a week! They must be pretty damned hurried to use light trucks like these, too. Most of the ones they're using are heavy. Plants don't open until eight, but the hauling line works straight around the clock!"

Barlowe again! The munitions manufacturer! Of course there might be a legitimate explanation, but it would bear investigation.

Hardesty cranked his truck, climbed in and gave it the gas over the broad avenue southward. This one truck was never used by any excepting himself. He could depend upon it.

Soon he was speeding over the lower bridge, his own lights edging in and out of slower traffic. To the south, the harbor still slumbered, only the riding lights of ships at anchor and the lights of one ship creeping through the fog, looking distant and theatrical in that still

hour. It was now close to two o'clock.

Hardesty came out on the dark trucking avenue, switched on his bright lights. Occasionally other trucks rumbled by, but it was still early for highway traffic. At this hour, most of the city trucks would be loading up. Four powerful, fast trucks of the closed type passed him going in the opposite direction. For a minute, Hardesty was tempted to turn about and follow them. Then his green eyes narrowed. For somewhere over here was easy-going China Kelly!

Hardesty's thin lips were straight and grim as he thought of the abrupt way China's conversation had been cut short.

Ahead lay a fork in the highway. Hardesty slowed his truck, his brow furrowed in thought, for he was recalling an old arsenal that was a mile down one of these roads. It was said that a gangster named Towski had once used the place, and now it was supposed to be abandoned. But with this new racket in smuggled and hijacked ammunitions, could it be possible—

Hardesty, on a sudden impulse, turned in the direction of the deserted arsenal. It had been hidden in a quarter of an abandoned brewery.

Reaching the spot, Flame found the building dark and silent, a grim place of shadows and dirt and imperceptible noises.

Hardesty flicked off his lights and motor, made his way to a stout iron door set in a high wall. For a moment he paused and listened. The fog had reached this far inland, swirled down from above like a drooping shroud of gossamer. The banging of a loose shutter and the moan of a light wind came from inside the wall. Nothing else. No

sound of life; nothing but deep shadows and the eerie, dead silence.

The door was securely locked and barred from the inside. Hardesty's hard fingers probed the brick wall, found an iron ring. A second and he had one foot caught in the loop. His fingers found weather-eaten niches. Quickly, sure-footedly, the powerful Hardesty made his way up the wall, using seams in the border, places where mortar had loosened from between the bricks. Then he was over the top and dropping silently inside. The cigar butt was now a burned-out stub in his grim mouth.

#### CHAPTER IV. TOUGH SPOT.

It was a huge, rambling old building. But Towski was the kind of crook who would have used the sections secure from notice. Hardesty headed toward a cellar entrance, his towering figure moving lightly on the balls of his feet, his senses keenly alert for any sign of trouble.

His flash picked out the dim form of the building through the fog. There was a padlock on the door. Reaching inside his coat for a small, handy tool kit he carried there, he removed a jimmy and wrapped it with a small piece of cloth. He then snapped the lock with only a faint pop, the cloth muffling the sharp snap.

The door squealed open on rusted hinges as Hardesty entered. He paused at the side, listening for any sound. A rat scampered away in the distance. The place was cold, damp and silent. Flame pressed on into the vaults.

In an inner room there was no sign of life. The pungent smell of cordite lingered on the damp walls. But it was not fresh. Cartons lay around, and pieces of factory fur-

niture had been roughly overturned. Beyond were vats in the same condition.

Flame Hardesty turned back out with the thought that he had wasted valuable time. A report which he had recently picked up was accurate then; the place had been used as a manufacturing arsenal and then abandoned. Later, according to Hardesty's same source of information, it had been hijacked. Apparently the raiders had found nothing to take.

The big redhead's light picked out a dulled bit of metal in one corner. Stooping, he picked up a dropped cartridge. It was dull and dirty, damp and beginning to show green splotches. But a sharp exclamation came from Flame's lips. This cartridge was of the same manufacture as the one Haugantz, the representative from Jurua, had carried!

Shortly, Hardesty was back over the wall. A moment later he was racing the truck down the highway. Back past the fork in the road, he turned toward the water front, rumbled out on an avenue lined with small shops, beer joints and poolrooms. Few lights showed in this early hour.

He arrived at a corner coffeepot lunchroom. Along the curb were quite a few cars and several trucks. Hardesty was passing these when his gaze darted into the place, picked out not more than half a dozen figures.

He slammed on the brakes, brought his truck up at the curb, and for a moment sat looking over the neighborhood, trying to puzzle out the exact meaning of so many cars. There were no large buildings in the immediate vicinity. There was a large pool hall sign a full two blocks away. The light of a street lamp showed on it and it glittered

through the fog, though the lights of the building were out.

Or were they? No—even through the fog, the detective could make out patches of light at several back windows. Light sneaking out around the edges of drawn blinds. But there were not many cars down there.

The two men with gruff voices came out of a small tenement behind Flame Hardesty.

The undercover operative watched the men walk into the small lunchroom. They nodded to others in the place. A puzzled frown crossed Hardesty's forehead, as he glanced back at the tenement which two men had just left. The lights of the tenement were out.

Jumping from the truck, Hardesty swung into the smelly lunchroom and ordered a small steak and coffee. Others turned to look at him; turned back to their conversations with lowered voices.

"What time does the poolroom down the street close?" Hardesty asked in a loud voice of the man behind the counter.

Conversation stopped suddenly. One of the two men who had entered the place just ahead of Hardesty turned a pair of bloodshot, hard eyes upon the detective. The man behind the counter gave him a look, took a toothpick from his thick lips and turned to Hardesty.

"One o'clock," he said shortly. "You don't expect to shoot pool now, do you?"

"No," Flame said in a gruff voice. He gave the man back his hard look. "But I had a date to meet a guy there, see? Maybe he said in front."

The man who had turned to stare at Hardesty was glancing outside, studying the dick's light, fast, closed truck. Flame picked his teeth a mo-

ment, reached into his pocket to get change for the food he had barely touched. When he drew the money out, the cartridge he had found, dropped to the floor.

Before he could turn, the tough character had snatched it up and was looking at it carefully. "Where'd you get this?" he demanded.

Hardesty grabbed it back roughly. "What's it to you?" he rapped, a hard edge to his voice.

The man studied him for a moment. There was no sign of backing down in his gaze; but there was a lot of shrewd calculation. "I live around here," he said. "Know everybody. Who was it you was goin' to meet?"

"Don't know his name," Hardesty said after an instant's thought. He was taking a shot in the dark, but it was the only one. "He was a pack rat on loading the *Belle*."

The man turned to the other one with him, gave him a significant look. The other interjected a question about the fellow's looks. Hardesty gave a vague description of any husky stevedore, recalled suddenly one particular suspect he had in mind and added a few more details.

Surprisingly, the two men grinned twistedly. One said: "O. K. That's Bat Cellito. He won't be back for a couple of hours, but I'll show you where you can wait."

Conversation resumed while Hardesty made a show of finishing his steak. He heard one man at the far end of the counter say something about Jersey and get up. "See y'u up the river," he said to somebody and banged out.

Hardesty finished, went out with the two men. He had been studying one who was dressed much as he was. They were silent as they led

the way across to the tenement doorway.

"When you get inside, tell 'em you're waitin' for Cellito," the taller of the two directed. He gave a hard look and a harder laugh. "If you ain't lookin' for him, guy, you better be lookin' for somebody! Because once you get in there, you don't leave until Cellito gets here. See?"

Hardesty said that he saw. "He'll be here, all right?"

"Yeah," the other said. He led the way through a narrow, dark hallway lit by the feeble rays of one gas jet. Then down into the cellar. There was an old, high furnace in the back. He jerked open a full-size door, stepped inside, rapped on the back with a fast signal tap. The sound of an iron bar grating came—and the back opened away from them.

"Waitin' for Bat Cellito," the man rasped.

Hardesty looked down a long passage to where it turned at a corner. Immediately before him were three men, two cradling machine guns in their arms. The one without a gun, who had opened the door, jerked his head toward the passage beyond.

"Is he oke?" he asked the men who had brought Flame.

"Maybe. Maybe not. Bat can tell y'u when he gets here. Don't let this mug get out."

Hardesty stepped through. The door clanged shut behind him.

Government undercover men get in some tough spots. Hardesty realized he was in a tough one now.

## CHAPTER V. TRAPPED!

Flame Hardesty's tall form was tense and expectant as he gave a rough nod and went on down the

dimly lighted corridor. He could feel the cold gazes of the muscle men boring into his wide back. Hardesty made two turns, paused and listened. No footsteps echoed along the way. With lightning fingers, he recombed his hair, took out a small case similar to a modern cigarette case and snatched articles of make-up from the secret bottom.

A moment later he slapped his cap back on his head and looked at his reflection in the case. It was not perfect, but it was good imitation of the more silent of the two men he had met in the lunchroom.

He passed on around two more corners, came to a flight of steps and another door. The door was abruptly jerked open.

"Back again, Cooney? What happened to the mug they phoned was comin' through to wait for Cellito?"

Hardesty gave a hard short laugh. "He didn't like the underground. He's goin' to wait at the other end—for a long time. See?"

"Like that, huh?" The doorkeeper gave a crooked smile. "Lot of 'em tonight! Maybe they're fixin' a raid."

"That won't be so hot," Hardesty scowled.

"What the hell! There's nothin' here. Nothin' over to the place, either. Last load went out a couple hours ago."

Hardesty dared not press the conversation too far. He was standing there in shadow, his back to the light, but the man might look too closely. "Where's the stool pigeon?" he asked.

"Larry clocked him and stuck him in the clink back of the garage. Go in' to wait for the boss to sweat him."

Hardesty gave a short laugh and turned through another corridor. There was another door, iron-

sheeted, but it was open. He came out in a regular bookmaking room, the chalk boards lining the walls cleared of the day's races. There was a grilled pay-off cage at one end, six tables of games around. Only one, a crap table, was running. The atmosphere was heavy with smoke.

Up ahead of that room, probably, was the poolroom. Two men, talking in low voices, lounged against one wall. One was gesticulating forcefully, the other listening with a half shrug. The latter had familiar eyes; Hardesty suddenly placed him. He was one of the lieutenants of Skip Toro, a former mob leader of whom Hardesty had heard nothing in sometime. He had often wondered what had become of Toro, for the gangster had suddenly disappeared from his usual haunts after a city-wide clean-up. But in any case it was damned peculiar to see a man of Toro's here; Towski and Toro had been deadly enemies.

"Come here," the man said, indicating Hardesty, whom he thought was the crook named Cooney.

Flame gave a short nod to the two hard-looking men. One of the two said, "Diamond, here, says he's got to have lead and a couple of violins right off." He gestured at the second man. "I can't get hold of the boss until later. An' there ain't a thing left."

Hardesty thought furiously. Then: "Maybe tomorrow," he suggested, imitating Cooney's deep voice.

Diamond broke in, face red and hard, "Listen, guy, he's already told me that! I got to have 'em tonight—*now*—see? Do I get 'em or do I take my trade to someone else."

"Toro, for example," Hardesty clipped.

"I don't give nothin' to Toro but



*Hardesty raked the cement chamber with his light, and China Kelly, big eyes blinking, looked up from the floor.*

hot lead," Diamond growled. But his voice seemed to be uncertain.

A third man, who had walked up to the group, broke into the conversation, very cleverly headed it away in another direction. Finally, he walked away with the man called

Diamond. Hardesty saw the man nod, leave by the underground exit.

"So the mug who knows Toro doesn't want Toro's name mentioned around here," Hardesty mused.

A heavy-set bull-necked man with a large ring on his left hand, walked

through the room and into the pay-off cage. Obviously, he was somebody of importance in the gang. He answered a phone in a carelessly low voice; then, his attitude suddenly changed to one of respect.

Hardesty watched the man guardedly. The man nodded several times, set the receiver back, while a worried expression crossed his heavy face. He spoke hurriedly to two men in the cage and then came out into the room, walking straight toward Hardesty.

"Here," he said, bringing out a key. "That rat we're going to fry is in the clink underneath the garage. Get him out and bring him across the river with you. The boss wants him. But the boss won't be there before six. Don't get there any earlier."

He turned through the room, speaking quietly to various members of the mob. The table shut down; players cashed in. Some went through a small door toward the front. Others began moving toward the underground passageway.

"Break it up, break it up!" the man said several times. "The river—and don't gang up," he ordered crisply. He saw Hardesty standing there and shouted an order to get a move on.

Flame assumed that the garage he had spoken about was behind the building, took a chance and walked to a rear door. One of the cashiers came out of the cage and looked over with a grin. "Going nuts, Cooney?" he asked. "Or you been hitting the stuff again? Go around through the basement."

Hardesty turned quickly through a door that looked as if it might go to the basement. The cashier was grinning and telling somebody that Cooney was trying to get out the

back door. It seemed to be a good joke. Yet, Hardesty knew that it might draw undue attention to himself.

Out of sight, though, his feet raced. He found a light, switched it on. No door was visible in the basement! And overhead, feet were thumping toward the basement door. Flame's green eyes darted along the bare cellar, flicked across a furnace toward the rear. There was another furnace of different type in the center of the room.

He leaped toward the rear one, tried the door. Like the entrance to the underground tunnel, it came open full length. Flame stepped into the empty shell, felt for a door at the back. It was solid!

And somebody was shouting his name at the head of the stairs; or rather, shouting the name of the man he was impersonating.

Hardesty whirled, capable hands streaking toward his guns. If these rats found the supposed Cooney in an empty furnace, there was going to be close inspection and no mistake!

As he whirled, the furnace moved. It moved a full two feet, like a turntable. Hardesty reached easily overhead, located a securely set bar, twisted his wrist. On silent greased tracks, the furnace turned with the motion. Sound was blotted out. A short tunnel showed directly in front of the furnace door.

Hardesty went rapidly through the tunnel, bending his big form low. He came up in a garage cellar, but no doors showed in the walls he combed with his flash. There was a flight of iron steps at one end with four-step-deep sheet-box bracing on the lower end.

For a fraction of a second, Hardesty looked at those steps out of

puzzled green eyes. Something about them—

Then he knew.

They were like a type of outmoded fire ladder, the kind of lower-flight fire escape that dropped to the ground as a person descending walked out onto the steps.

He leaped across the cluttered room and shook the steps. They were loose, but fixed in some way to the floor. Bending, he covered the iron support box with his flash. He found a spring handle inside the small hole, touched it. The steps came loose and started to slowly swing up. Beneath the place where the support box had rested, a flight of steps extended downward.

Hardesty leaped down, came to a stout, studded door with a small grille. There was an intricate lock carefully embedded in the door—a lock chosen and put there by men whose profession was lock-picking and breaking. He was thankful he had a key.

He threw the door wide, raked the inside of a sizable cement chamber with his light. And China Kelly, big eyes blinking, stared up from the floor. There was a nasty gash behind his ear, a lump on his round jaw. He was bound hand and foot.

"This useless individual walked foolishly into the lion's den," he said blandly. "It has been stated that —"

"Sure, I know," Hardesty said quickly, slashing at China Kelly's bindings. "But let's skip it now. First, we've got to get out of here. And fast! I don't know whether we're going to get away with this. What happened?"

It sure beat hell, Hardesty thought, how calm his stout assistant could be in a jam. China's red face was grinning now, as though his

predicament had been nothing at all. Within a few more hours he might have been a corpse!

He said: "I got a steer that Tow-ski's former mob is hanging out here and might have some guns and ammunition. So I came here, pretended I was a lug from a local mob looking for guns and stuff. A fellow named Larry was taking me in. He showed me a cartridge. I saw right off that it was one of those phonies; so I said I'd call my boss and see if it was O. K. for a deal."

"Why didn't you go outside?" Hardesty asked.

"The booth was double and looked soundproof. But they must have had some listening device hidden behind the panel. I don't remember a thing after they socked me—until I woke up here. It has been written in letters of gold—"

Hardesty's interjected words cut one of China's quotations short. "They must have clipped you for a reason," he said. "Can you think of anything?"

China Kelly rubbed his half-bald head and got up. His round face lit up. "Yes!" he exclaimed. "When I came in and began to palaver, the one called Larry made a phone call. Somebody he showed a lot of respect for. He was just going to the phone again—broke off sharp in a sentence to do it—just before I called."

"Well, the next trick is to get out of here," Hardesty stated. "I've got some ideas, and we've got to work plenty fast."

They headed up into the cellar, hurried toward the tunnel. Flame tossed China one of his guns. They got through the tunnel and back into the upper cellar. Suddenly, there were angry voices, curses somewhere overhead.

"I tell ya I ain't been in here for half an hour!" somebody spat out.

"I sent through a mug looking for Cellito and went back to the lunch-room!"

A string of profanity met this remark. "That's a dick!" growled a voice.

"Cripes!" the other voice yelled. "The boss'll have our hide if *that* guy gets away!"

Flame Hardesty thought that this must be the real Cooney speaking. His sharp gaze darted around, but he saw absolutely no exit from the room. To China, he whispered swiftly: "I looked over the ground before coming in. The garage stair is a blind."

Feet were stalking heavily over the floor above them. Flame leaped back to the furnace, swiveled the entrance inward. They darted behind the stairs as feet sounded at the top.

"Watch the underground, you mugs!" some one grated. "Drill anybody who doesn't give the password! The rest of you follow."

A crowd of half a dozen men, all carrying Tommy guns, came into the cellar. The leader's eyes flew to the furnace. He smiled twistedly. "Trapped!" he said. "We got 'em! Cooney, tag the line."

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE SMUGGLING SHIP.

He whirled the furnace around and the six crowded in. A second, and it was whirling back.

On catlike feet, Hardesty and his stout assistant raced up the stairs. No one was in sight in the gambling rooms. Flame Hardesty's body went cold as he glanced toward the small front door. A heavy steel screen had been dropped over it. That door was sealed—unless one knew the combination to lift the curtain! The underground was guarded. The ace dick had a sudden hunch that

the back door led into something other than a means of egress.

Quietly, Flame and China slipped over the back door under cover of the cellar entrance. The men guarding the underground passage could not see them. But voices floated across plainly. Someone was growling, "Damned lucky they got the place unloaded and the ship cleared!"

"Wonder who this big shot is?" commented another. "He knows plenty!"

"You'll never know who *he* is!" a second voice snapped.

Hardesty's ears tingled. So he was right! There was somebody big, plenty big, behind the crook named Towski.

Flame had been busy with a long, narrow blue-steel instrument. Suddenly, the lock at which he worked, clicked. He opened the back door cautiously, shot his flash into the murky darkness.

A pit twenty feet long, a good ten feet wide, and easily twenty feet deep met Hardesty's gaze. No wonder they'd been laughing at the supposed Cooney!

"We can't risk that. We'd be cornered shot down like rats!" Hardesty whispered. There was a barely audible yell from down below. Larry's mob was returning in a hurry along the tunnel.

"Guess we'll have to," Hardesty said abruptly. "Double pin wheel!"

China Kelly dropped into a sideways crouch on the very threshold. Hardesty took a swift glance around the edge of the stairway housing. He could see the back of the head of one gangster just beyond the open door. There were probably half a dozen between them and the underground entrance. And all with machine guns!

Silently, Hardesty darted twenty feet down the room. He holstered his gun, started to run toward China Kelly. He thought he made no sound, his hard legs pistoned as he leaped on the balls of his feet. But one of the guards heard, looked, yelled a frantic warning.

A burst of bullets tore the planks not a half step behind Hardesty. There were shouts from the basement. Feet thudded up the stairs and across from the underground entrance.

Hardesty's big hands closed over China Kelly's wrists. He vaulted, came around in a hard circle, landed with feet against the doorsill with a jar that shook his teeth. But China had been jerked in a circle, was cartwheeling overhead. The next instant the force of his flying body yanked Hardesty from his feet.

Through the air they pinwheeled, one around the other. Hardesty landed just across the ditch, his balance precarious. The force of the pin wheel was broken. Round-faced China Kelly, still in midair, started to fall toward the pit! Flame Hardesty was leaning over the edge.

He gave a violent wrench. China flew overhead as he toppled toward the black void. But the trick was won. China landed, pulled Hardesty back.

They sprang to their feet, glanced at the door. And at that moment Larry appeared, a Tommy gun swinging in his arm.

Hardesty and his partner split, dashed back into the heavy mists that hung over the place. Orange gun flame cut the dark; there was the low, fast whistle of bullets ripping the air between them, thudding the brick wall of the garage behind.

A second gunner stepped beside the one named Larry. A chunk of

sod was torn loose beneath Flame Hardesty's feet, slapped his face. Hardesty's gun barked once. He dodged across to China Kelly. The second gunner tumbled into the pit, and Larry's gun jerked orange flame in the direction from which Hardesty had fired.

"Garage is a blank wall on this side," China whispered. "Have to go around."

The sound of men racing around the side of the poolroom came to them. Hardesty started to turn after China, suddenly paused. He had fired at the second gunner to hit him in the shoulder. Somebody flashed a light into the pit and Larry's gun blazed down into the depths. There was a half-strangled cry, then silence. Bullets began to trip the ground around them again.

"Shutting him up for safe-keeping," Hardesty gritted tightly. "You can see the mob we're up against!"

Dark figures moved in the darkness of the poolroom shadows. A Tommy opened up; a second and a third spurted flaming death.

Hardesty dropped to his stomach, heard China Kelly hit the ground just ahead of him. China leading, they squirmed toward a garage corner. Flashlights began to appear behind them; but the early morning was still dark and the mist swirled heavily behind them, throwing shadows, distorting the rays of light. The shots went too high.

They gained the corner and raced away on silent feet. Hardesty pulled China up a bare instant at the front corner of the garage facing on the other street. "Can we grab a car in there?" he asked.

"No," said China Kelly. "Not a one in the joint."

Hardesty looked surprised. It was a big garage, and there should be

dozens of trucks leaving at this hour of the morning. But there was no sign of life.

Powerful cars barked on the block behind them, as starters fought against the chill damp. There was the sound of swiftly meshed gears. Lights punctured the darkness, and Tommy guns were still firing away at random.

"Straight through!" Hardesty ordered. They dodged across the street as strong headlights swerved around the corner, passed down a narrow alley, over a fence, through a house and out onto another street. A car raced nearer, somewhere out of sight. As they gained the opposite row of tenements, it swerved the corner with a squeal of slithering rubber.

For five blocks cars covered their trail; barely missed them. Once Hardesty looked back and saw three cars shoot through a street with searchlights raking every shadow. Then there was the distant hooting of an odd horn. A car just coming to the corner of the street across which they pounded, slued to a stop. Hardesty and his partner jerked back into shadow, watched it. It shot its searchlight over the street once, then backed up and turned back toward the poolroom.

"Called in," said Hardesty, puzzled. He figured the time it had taken to hurdle fences, find alleys and entranceways. "Time enough for a call to Towski or the brains behind this," he stated. "The mob's been drawn off. I wonder why?"

"We haven't learned much," China Kelly said dismally.

"We've learned plenty," Hardesty announced. He lifted his red head, smelled of the fog. A dirty gray smudge had appeared in the east.

"We're near the water front," he added.

"Well, at least you know Towski, the gangster, is tied in with this," China Kelly said. "But what else?"

"I know there's somebody else behind Towski. And what about that big garage at the poolroom headquarters? Towski's former mob is headquartering there; yet, the garage is empty."

China's cherubic face beamed. "Probably the garage is convenient and the trucks are in use," he said, shrugging.

"Then convenient to what?" Hardesty rapped. "Convenient to some place of importance? Say the new arsenal?" He took out a copy of the map and pointed to it. They were standing in a dark entrance-way now and Hardesty risked a pocket flash. He indicated the spot on the map. "That's the arsenal. That's what they call *the place*."

Hardesty glanced at the murky sky. Allowing for the heavy mist, it must be about five o'clock. He hesitated. There was no telling what fact of importance would turn up at the arsenal and the place marked X.

Then: "Come on!" he snapped, and started off at a dog trot, in the direction of the water front. It was dark and deserted. They were few ships berthed. The piers and quays were empty; the harbor was not yet alive.

"Say!" China blurted. "How are you going to find the spot?"

Hardesty indicated the map. "See this bend in the water-front street? It's very carefully made as a circle, not a right angle. There ought to be a turn like that along here."

There was, not less than ten blocks down. A ship with steam up lay in the berth. The *Mary L.*, a battered but seaworthy little tramp of

the same tonnage and design as the *Belle*, which was anchored in dry-dock four piers down.

"The smuggling ship!" China Kelly exclaimed.

"And life aboard," added Hardesty. There were lights in several cabins and the sound of voices on the pier. Quietly, they prowled over. A car was parked nearby.

"Custom car," the detective said. A slender, trim-looking man came out the gate just then. Hardesty recognized the man as McGurk, a port inspector.

Hardesty made himself known, and McGurk scratched his head and grinned. "Damned if you don't look like a thug, Flame!" he said. "What brings you over here?"

"That ship," the big dick explained.

"The *Mary L.*?" McGurk asked, surprised. "What's wrong with her? Cargo's inspected and under seal. Clearance papers are in order. Captain's reliable."

"Are you sure?" Flame asked quietly.

"I'm sure about the cargo and papers," McGurk said emphatically. "I've been sitting in those holds a week watching her load. Inspected every crate! Strict orders from Washington to watch for ammunition smuggling, but there's none aboard there. She sails tonight."

Hardesty looked thoughtful. He knew McGurk's reliability. If there was a shell aboard, this was the one man who would spot it.

"Well, thanks," Hardesty acknowledged. "We'll be on our way then." With China, he melted into the damp darkness.

To his associate, Hardesty said: "We can check that later, but it's probably straight."

They headed up along the waterfront street, eyes piercing the light-

ening gray fog to spot the place marked by a blurred spot on the map. It was China who suddenly jerked Hardesty's arm. They had passed nothing but low shacks and long, empty piers for several blocks. To their left the dark shadows of a block-square warehouse were grim and black in the swirling mist.

"That's the spot!" Hardesty said. "And less than a block from the arm of the highway."

No lights showed in the place. It had the abandoned air of a place long unused. But they found hard-packed mud, as though many feet had walked there before their own. They found a door and Hardesty picked the lock. Soon they were inside.

The outer rooms were desolate-looking, dust and dirt lying undisturbed on the floors. But the passageways had seen the recent scuff of many feet. On silent toes, they followed the marks through long rambling corridors.

Then dry air with a sharp scent of cordite hit their faces. They turned through a cross passage, down circular stairs into a semibasement, and came into a gallery of rooms, all dry and heavy with the smell of ammunition.

Quickly, they passed from room to room. There had been a full arsenal here, not only for storing powder, but for making ammunition and assembling guns. The size of the rooms so used and the precautions taken against explosion showed the vast scope of the operations.

"Cleared out, though," Hardesty commented finally.

They found a small room fitted as an office. There was a cot covered with dirty sheets in one corner. Between two drawers in a desk a crumpled sheet of paper had been overlooked in the clean-up. On it was

a crudely sketched plan of some buildings and roadways, one building designated "No. 4" and a string of figures totaling 98,000.

Hardesty whistled softly. "Plant No. 4 of the Barlowe works!" he said. "And ninety-eight thousand. The only thing that can mean is pounds of powder!"

"Barlowe's been giving it to him under cover then," China suggested.

"It looks that way." But Hardesty's thoughts had raced on. "You know, for a man who takes the precautions Towski did—" he swept his big arm around indicating the safety precautions used in the building—"there's something phony here, China."

"What?"

"How did he get powder and ammunition transported? It takes a lot of trucks to handle that amount. Just one accident would give the show away."

Hardesty picked up a telephone, found the line buzzing in order. He dialed his home and office and Chick answered in a moment. Hardesty gave some brief instructions, stood waiting for a moment.

Chick was back on the line soon, his voice showing disappointment. "Your location is just five blocks from Barlowe's plants, but any transportation would be under the eyes of the port authorities. No one on earth could get away with it, even though Barlowe hasn't reported his stolen munitions officially."

Hardesty repeated what was said to China and then commented: "It doesn't make sense. Barlowe has a reliable firm, but munitions are stolen which he doesn't report to get his insurance. Towski is getting munitions; yet, there doesn't seem to be any connection between Barlowe and Towski."

China Kelly scrutinized the map again carefully. "The only thing I can figure out is that Haugantz got a bum steer somewhere along the line. The map doesn't seem to be worth a plugged nickel."

"Dead end!" said Flame grimly.

## CHAPTER VII.

### BARON HUGO ZERISH.

Hardesty called for a taxi, stood on the curb smoking until it arrived. Had he met a criminal who could sit in one spot and move his forces around like chessmen, checkmating Flame's every move? Was the whole picture intentionally confused, a double play on perfectly explainable circumstances?

It would be smart of Towski and the brains behind him, to have an arsenal in the vicinity of the very factory making ammunition for the government they were trying to overthrow. For Hardesty had learned that Towski was associated with international crooks in Europe, involved in a scheme whereby they supplied ammunition and guns to revolutionists.

There would be no suspicion attached to the movement of trucks marked "Explosives" or "Danger."

The taxi arrived and Hardesty climbed in with what, for him, was almost a tired motion. They drove back past the pool hall. "Just to check," Flame commented to China Kelly.

There was no sign of anyone. The trucks and cars had gone. Even Hardesty's truck had been taken. The lunchroom was closed.

Flame mentioned a twenty-dollar bill to their driver and the cab roared back over the bridge to New York. Dawn had fully arrived, but banked clouds darkened the sun and

a heavy mist shrouded the lower section of Manhattan.

"Want me to prowel around that pool hall neighborhood and try to spot something?" China Kelly asked wearily. Then: "Golly, I'm starved!"

"No," Hardesty said, considering that it might be China who would get spotted. The first thing his round-looking associate probably would do would be to seek out a lunch car. And all the force of hell wouldn't move China out of such a place once he got started on some food. Consequently crooks would be able to spot him easily.

Hardesty continued: "I might need you. I want to get a full check on the *Mary L.* later, and keep in touch with things. It'll feel good to get these duds off and wash up. A good breakfast will help."

It was in the middle of the afternoon when Chick, with a hint of surprise in his young eyes, announce to a freshly shaved, freshly dressed Flame Hardesty that the ambassador from Jurua, Baron Hugo Zerish, had arrived.

Flame, himself, was somewhat surprised, in fact. He was accustomed to dealing with important men, but such contacts were usually arranged ahead of time.

He found Baron Hugo Zerish a typical aristocrat. Zerish was a tall, gray-haired man with a soldierly bearing. His features were sharply cut; his clothes impeccable. His gray-blue eyes burned with a deep intensity.

The ambassador was swaddled in a heavy coat, and he wore a heavy scarf.

"You look like you didn't enjoy this weather," Flame commented. "Perhaps you shouldn't have come out in it."

The gray-haired baron smiled,

shook hands and followed Hardesty into the modernly furnished office. "When such things," he said, "as ammunition-smuggling and murder are taking place right under the noses of the police, I think it is necessary that I venture forth in any weather and see what I can do."

He paused. "Besides, I knew Haugantz well, and I have many regrets."

Flame had lighted a cigar and was now settled into a deep chair. He was trying to think of what he knew about Zerish. It was very slight. Hugo Zerish was the latest ambassador from Jurua. In his short time in this country his activity had not been very great, although he had expressed himself continually as a statesman who was interested in peace. Naturally he would be a respected man in society, not only for his position, but, also, as Flame could see, for that deep, vital intelligence which was in his eyes and which indicated a brilliant mind.

He was now telling Flame that his government had told him nothing about the mission of his countryman, Count Haugantz, until after the murder. However, he had already sent out his investigators to work on the matter since that time. Unfortunately, he had to leave town immediately because of rumors of serious uprising in Jurua.

"When are you leaving?" asked Flame, waving away the cigar smoke.

"I shall be leaving tonight on the *Mary L.*" answered the ambassador.

"Rather slow boat," Hardesty said. "Yes, I remember, it's the only one leaving this week."

Zerish suddenly leaned forward in his chair. "But I must get directly to the point. My interest in the situation is obvious, and I have learned much in a short time. I have learned

that this man Towski is not the man behind this secret exportation of munitions. The clue I have to that man, however, is not strong proof. In my position I cannot be too quiet."

"You can depend on my silence," the undercover agent promised.

"Well, it came to my ears that Barlowe, a munitions manufacturer, is playing . . . er . . . playing on both sides of the fence, as I believe you Americans would say. I understand that he has been in communication with Towski and with confederates in Jurua."

Flame Hardesty nodded. Such a possibility had occurred to him, also. "But how could Barlowe get the munitions out of his plants?" he asked. "They're strictly guarded—under government supervision."

"That I do not know, myself," the baron answered. "I know only that this Barlowe could gain not only on the goods he smuggles in, but also on the insurance he could collect on the supposedly stolen materials. That evidence, though, is strong only when the other evidence is uncovered. But I must leave it to you."

After talking a little more on the difficulties of Jurua in averting civil war, Baron Hugo Zerish then stood up and departed. Flame watched him go out the door. There was a puzzled expression on the face of the undercover man. It seemed rather odd that Zerish should call for such a short conversation, though the subject discussed was certainly an important one.

Flame called Chick. "Know off-hand what time the *Mary L.* sails tonight, Chick?" he asked.

Chick answered promptly, "At midnight."

"O. K.," Flame said. He let out

a roar for China Kelly, and China ambled in. Unsuccessfully, he was trying to keep the food he had been eating stored in the side of his cheek.

"Eating again!" Flame snorted.

"The prophets," China quoted, "have rightly said that food in the mouths of children—"

"Wish the prophets had prophesied who was the man behind this munitions tangle," Flame cut in. "Come on. We'll give this Barlowe the once-over. Dress yourself as a laborer, China, and see if you can't cover that stomach so you'll look less well fed."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### SLUGGED!

It was already eight o'clock in the evening when China Kelly and Flame Hardesty banged the door of the house behind them. Fog had already descended over the city. Street lamps were only ugly yellow blotches in the darkneess. Visibility was slight. As they stepped through the door, the sound of a powerful motor throbbed through the dense air. The car was obviously moving at a dangerous speed for such weather.

Then suddenly Flame had pushed China to the side, going to the ground with him, pressing his stomach onto the pavement. A machine gun clattered. A hail of bullets whistled and spanged against the house above them as the car sped away. Broken glass from the outside windows tinkled on the pavement.

China whistled a little as he got up. "They meant business."

"If they're after us that way," said Flame grimly, "they must. Let's get the car."

The fog had lifted slightly a short

time later as they neared the Barlowe plants. Hardesty drove around the neighborhood slowly, studying the territory. From a slight hill they looked down and could just make out the widely spread plants dotting a large tract of former wasteland. The plants ran down to the water front where the munition docks were. Plant 4 was nearest the highway immediately across from a row of warehouses and stores.

China spoke as if to himself. "Why's Barlowe loading on the New York side of the river, and how did he manage to load combustibles in that zone?"

"I checked on that already," said Flame. "He got permission, though I don't know why he should want it."

They had been riding down an empty road to the highway. Now, as they turned off, they came upon two patrol cars. A knot of workmen somewhat to the side had formed about the patrolmen. Flame stopped the car and pushed his way through to the side of an officer standing beside a dead body—the corpse of a young truckman. One side of the head had been bashed in, and blood was puddling about the pavement. Hardesty took a long look at the dead face, studied it.

"Slugged and shot," one of the policemen said to Flame. "Nobody heard anything. Just stumbled on him. Nothing to go on; no identifications. Same as the others we found tonight."

Others! Hardesty's face was grim. "Got descriptions of the dead men?" he asked.

He took notes as the officer gave him complete accounts of their appearances and dress. Apparently, with the exception of one, they were all blond types with procephalic heads.

"What's the idea of the descriptions, Flame?" asked China as they drove off again toward Plant 4. "Think you know any of 'em?"

"No, but all those truckmen, I believe, were from Jurua. The man who was dead was a Slavic type, and the others—judging from the descriptions—seems to conform to his type. I suspect that most of the truckmen hired at first knew nothing of what was happening except that they were being paid well. When these Juruans heard, I suspect that they refused to go on with their work against their government, and were put out of the way because they knew too much."

"I don't think so," said China. "They knew long before this and should have been killed earlier. There's something peculiar about it."

Flame had no comment to make. He himself was not satisfied with his own explanation. Right now they had to think of other things, since they were just entering the munitions-plant yards. At this time of the night there were only a few men about. The official buildings, alone, of the entire factory were well lighted.

Flame and China left the car, looking like a couple of bums in their turtle-necked sweaters and broken caps. They loafed down the block to a greasy restaurant opposite Plant 4. A shifty-eyed counterman served them coffee and crullers. He talked easily.

"Sure ya may hit it good and get a job. Ya look all right. Been runnin' full blast around here lately. When the foreman comes in for coffee, I'll give ya the high sign."

A tall, husky fellow came in shortly after and the counterman put the finger on him. Flame and China approached him, their accents tough.

The foreman looked them over and asked them a few questions about the handling of explosives. Finally he nodded with satisfaction and told them that he might be able to use them.

"Come around in the morning," he concluded.

Flame and China went out and lounged in the shadows between the two buildings.

"Foreman's about your size, Flame, said China.

"I'm thinking, too," answered Flame shortly.

In a few minutes the foreman emerged from the food joint, wiping his mouth. He looked up and down the street carefully. It was fairly well lit, although the fog had sheathed the gas lamps. The foreman began to walk briskly toward Plant 4.

In alley darkness, an arm raised itself slowly and then descended as swiftly as the guillotine. There was a slight thud and the foreman had crumpled to the sidewalk. Almost immediately his body had disappeared in the alley.

"Get the make-up box in the car," Flame whispered. "I'm lugging this guy over to the deserted loading yard."

In a short time Flame emerged into the partial light as another edition of the foreman. He and China began walking toward the executive offices at Plant 4. A peculiar whistle shrilled through the air. In the doorway of a desolated warehouse across the street, a natty, overdressed man was leaning against the doorway, smoking a cigarette.

Flame motioned China to stay back as he walked toward the guy. Not a muscle stirred in his face as he recognized one of the poolroom loiterers.

"What's up?" Flame asked with assumed carelessness.

"The boss wants you at the arsenal as fast as you can make it."

Flame took a chance. "He knows I can't get away durin' work. What's gone wrong?"

The dapper man shrugged his shoulders. "I'm tellin' you what he said, see? That mug you sent up to boss the loadin' don't know much. Maybe that's it."

"Where's the boss?" Flame demanded, trying to keep his voice as much like the foreman's as he could. He fingered the cigars in his pocket regretfully.

"How the devil do I know? He said the arsenal. You know more than I do about that."

"As fast as I can make it, I'll see him."

Flame scuttled over to China as the dapper tough rapidly walked off.

"Trail him, China. Keep Chick informed as to where you are. Take the car, if you have to."

Flame turned through the Plant 4 gates, nodding to the guards as he passed. A checker came up to him softly on cork-soled shoes.

"Boss called over," he said. "Wanted to know if anything except the nitro was swiped last night and said for nobody to be told about the trouble."

Flame went into the executive offices. Apparently his disguise was working perfectly. And either he or China would have something after this evening's work. This shipping of nitro was touchy business, however.

A capable-looking secretary took him directly into the office of the munitions manufacturer. Barlowe was a short, stout man who was looking tired and worried from a case

of strained nerves. He did not look up as Flame entered.

"Sit down, Steve," he directed, and picked up some papers. "You know, ten thousand pounds of nitro gone, and the place is guarded like a prison. Over three hundred thousand pounds of munitions stolen in three months and not a trace of how it's gone out!"

"I haven't been able to find out anything suspicious," Flame said. "I kind o' feel it's my fault, bein' in charge here."

Barlowe looked up then. He did not say anything, but rather seemed to be studying his foreman's face before he spoke.

"Funny, during the war, spies attempted to tunnel beneath some of the plants. We caught them. Of course, we filled the tunnels up to a great extent, and anyhow put in underground aprons. I should think it would be virtually impossible to tunnel through them again. By the way, you didn't know anything about those old tunnels, did you, Steve?"

But before Flame Hardesty could answer, there was a wild commotion of voices in the outer office. Suddenly the door burst open—and Flame had to use a great deal of control to keep from jumping out of his chair.

For the man who staggered in with blood running down his face, was—Skip Toro!

No doubt about it; Toro, all right—the same Toro whom the undercover agent had not seen or heard of for almost a year now. So Toro was back in the rackets again! And his appearance in Barlowe's office certainly seemed to put the munitions manufacturer on the spot.

Skip Toro closed the door behind him. He tried to laugh, but only a faint croak issued from his throat.

"My God!" Barlowe gasped. "What—"

Toro's knees were buckling, and Flame helped the tough racketeer into a chair.

"Well, I got part o' this thing solved," Toro told Barlowe. His tone was still weak, but there was excitement in it. "Don't know yet who's been hijackin' the plants or where they been takin' the stuff—but they've tunneled under the old tunnels."

Toro ripped off his coat—what was left of it; the garment was almost in shreds—and then dropped off a bulletproof vest, heavily plated in both back and front. He sighed and sank back into the chair, rid of seventy pounds of weight.

"Hiya, Steve. You're lucky ya don't have my job." He had turned to Flame with that light, bantering tone which had made Flame always like Toro in spite of the fact that he was a vicious racketeer.

Toro turned back to Barlowe. "String of light trucks spaced five minutes apart were clearing from a warehouse five blocks down. I stumbled on them and they let fly with a Tommy gun. The bullets knocked me unconscious, and when I got up, the warehouse was empty."

Flame didn't know what to make of it, but it seemed like an act. Possibly they had both seen through his disguise. It didn't possibly seem as if Toro could have gone straight. He'd better get out of here as casually as possible. He started to rise to his feet.

The phone rang and Barlowe answered it. He waved Flame back to his chair. A rapid staccato voice crackled over the wire. Barlowe's mouth was beginning to show disturbance and anxiety. When he spoke after hanging up, his voice was hoarse.

"The *Mary L.* has already left port! That's two hours ahead of schedule. My munitions are on board. Everything was carefully checked and with this trouble my own men are on ship. There's something damn phony about all this!"

Toro sprang to his feet. "Come on! I've got a hunch Towski's mixed up in this. We'll use my speed boat."

Barlowe regained his executive poise.

"Steve, take complete charge here. Make proper arrangements for storing shipments."

Flame waited until he heard Toro and Barlowe move out of the corridor. Then he seized the telephone, put through a quick call to Chick, his aid. "Hello, Chick. Has China called? Talk fast. May have to hang up any second."

Chick's words came over the wire clipped and speedy. "Yes. Said to tell you he's tailing that guy you told him to. Overheard the guy tell someone he was headed for Hugenot, on Staten Island. Said for you to get there fast—"

"Hugenot?" Hardesty cut in. "Say, Chick. Take these numbers." From memory, he recited a fairly long list of numbers, putting a "Stop" after each one. At the undercover agent's order, Chick read them back over the wire.

"Correct!" Flame clipped. "Now, send those numbers out. A code message. You know where to." He hung up.

China Kelly, then, for all his stopping to eat at odd moments, was keeping on the job most efficiently. Must mean that the *Mary L.* had headed down the river on her usual route, but instead of moving directly into the Atlantic after passing through the Narrows, she would put

into Hugenot. What she would do there, Hardesty couldn't know. But he'd have to investigate. Hugenot was the place to head for now.

He hurried out of the office. Quickly he sped over to the deserted loading yard. The entire plant seemed to be deserted except for the restless, pacing guards before the gates. The air was thicker and colder with fog than before.

Flame went over to where he had dumped and tied the foreman. Apparently he was no longer there. He struck a match in order to see better. A shadow that was not his own was flickering in vague outline on the loading platform. Flame blew out the match. He started to whirl to the side. A voice spoke huskily out of the darkness.

"Aw right, fella. Put 'em up!"

The guy couldn't shoot in here with the guards just outside. Flame twisted to the side. A stick whistled past his ear and cracked on the pavement. Blindly, Flame dived low. A pair of legs buckled under him. He struck out with his huge fists at the body below him. A groan sounded.

Another guy behind him seized him by the waist. With a furious heave of his body, Flame somersaulted out of the grip. He tugged at his gun. Again the stick came down in the darkness. It raked across the side of his face and smashed against his gun wrist with paralyzing force. Flame's revolver dropped with a clatter. Before him in the darkness Flame could hear heavy breathing. He lashed out with both fists flying, wincing as his injured hand crashed against rocky bone. Blows thudded against his own face. This guy was no weakling.

In back of him feet shuffled. Swiftly Flame side-stepped, and in



*A second gunner appeared, and Hardesty's gun barked once. The killer tumbled into the pit.*

the same motion crashed his fist out. His attacker toppled.

Flame stood there ready for the other man to come at him. There was no seeing in that darkness and fog, but he could listen. There was no sound, only the cold air on his face. He started to work his way toward the entrance, moving cautiously and lightly.

In front of him he heard a sound. With all the power of his arm he lashed out. Suddenly his knees buckled. He could feel no pain in his head, only a sense of flying. Again there was a numbing impact against his skull and he felt himself slumping against legs which stood above him.

## CHAPTER IX. CRIMINAL—OR HERO?

When Flame awoke, he was lying bound and gagged, his head throbbing like a dynamo. Outside the landscape was moving. He was in the back seat of a car.

He kept his eyes closed until he could regain his equilibrium. Then he twisted slightly until he could look out of the window. They were riding through the Holland Tunnel.

The two men in the front seat apparently did not know that he had recovered. The blows they had given him would have been good for an hour more of unconsciousness for anyone except Hardesty.

The thugs—Flame had never seen them before—were talking, now. With the air pressure in the tunnel and the noise of traffic, their voices were just barely audible.

"Do ya think we'll get there on time?"

"Yeah. That boat's a tub. It'll take more than an hour in this fog. Now that it's out of port, the boss ain't worryin'. He sorta don't like

that guy Hardesty around."

"What have we got this fellow for?"

"Towski thinks he's givin' him the double cross with Barlowe."

As the car shot out of the tunnel, the radio drowned out their voices. The weather report was being announced. The fog was going to lift in about an hour.

The car was going over a bridge, now. It must be the Bayonne Bridge leading to Staten Island, Flame thought. Obviously he was being taken to Huguenot, where, as foreman of the Barlowe plant, he had to account for his actions to Towski. Barlowe was after all out of this. Only Toro did not quite fit in to any picture.

Flame tried to free his hands, but his muscles refused to respond with their wonted power. Suddenly he noticed that the car was slowing down, and he lay inert on the floor.

The car stopped and one of the men in the front seat called out of the window.

"Hey, one of you give us a hand with this guy."

Flame felt himself lifted from the car. The ray of a flashlight shot into his eyes. He could not help letting his lashes quiver.

"Hey, this guy's awake! Crack him again." Through the gimlet of his eyes, Flame could recognize one of Towski's men from the poolroom.

"Crack him, hell! Untie him and let him walk. He can't get away. Besides, the boss ain't sure he's given us the double cross."

As Flame groggily emerged from the car, he found himself before a huge arsenal, gloomy in the partial light of scattered electric torches. The arsenal was at the water's edge, from which a dock projected, rocking gently on a slow, heavy sea

swell. Eight launches were awaiting the loading of ammunition cases which were piled just on the bank.

Guns were stabbing Flame in the back as he entered the arsenal. Several men were lounging about smoking and cleaning their revolvers. A dapper man was coming down a flight of stairs at that moment. His call echoed across the arsenal floor.

"Come on now. We begin loading."

It was the same man whom China was supposed to have followed. That meant China had been captured again. What a break! There would be considerably less chance of getting out of here than from the other spot.

Flame was pushed up two flights of narrow circular stairs and then through a dark outer office at the end of which light streamed from a glass door. Inside a voice was speaking.

"Nuts with this waiting! Get that stuff movin'. He's got the money, and he ain't gettin' away with it. I don't care who's boss."

As Flame was led in, the voice ceased. Three pair of eyes were focused on him. Sitting at a plain pine desk was the gangster, Towski. To the side of him was one of his henchman whom Flame had never seen before. On the other side was the lieutenant of Toro's!

"Here's the guy you told us to get," growled one of the men holding Flame by the arm. "What do you want me to do with that other guy that trailed Joe."

Towski leered at him. "All right, bring fatty up here." Towski turned to Flame with a hard, stony glint in his eyes.

"When Joe told ya, I wanted to see ya, that meant quick. You're workin' for me, not Barlowe. Ya only got marbles from him. What

was so important that couldn't wait? Come on, talk!"

Flame thought rapidly, and then replied with a snarl in his voice.

"I didn't tell him nothin'. He wanted to see me about the job last night. He was gettin' suspicious; so I thought maybe it'd be best if I saw him."

Towski's face got red with rage. "Sure he was suspicious, you rat! How'd he get suspicious? That's the question!"

Flame started to protest, but Towski cut him off. "Who told Barlowe about the tunnels so he's throwin' guards around 'em? Why, I'd like to—"

In his anger Towski had stood up and pounded on the desk, and now with his bare hand he cracked Flame across the face.

Rapidly Flame's hand flicked out. Towski's head snapped back.

"What the—"

But Towski was not astonished at the blow. He was looking at his hand, wet with brown make up, which Hardesty had used to simulate the weather-beaten look of the foreman. The big mobster began to draw his gun, cursing like a madman as it stuck in his armpit holster. At his side a huge hand reached out from Toro's lieutenant. It stabbed toward Towski's wrist.

The gun roared. Plaster from the ceiling fell in small pieces. The mob leader's arm leveled again. But Flame had already yanked open the office door.

Briefly Flame stood in the dark shadow of the office corridor, peering out. Steps were coming down the hallway. Hardesty could hear the noise of breaking furniture in the office behind him. His strange aid was putting up a battle.

The footfalls down the corridor

were more distinct now. Three men were approaching. Flame saw that the man in front was China.

Flame dashed from the doorway, running at headlong, reckless speed, yelling at the top of his voice: "Duck, China, duck!"

And as China ducked, Flame hurtled his body through the air with both arms outspread. The two thugs clawed for their guns. It was too late; Hardesty's body hit with terrific force flinging them backward. Hardesty's big hands whipped through the air and cracked their heads together.

"Come on, China!"

At the other end of the corridor there was the pounding of feet. Tow-ski and his henchman had appeared. Flame and China spurted through the semidarkness. Bullets horneted on each side of them as they started to race down the circular staircase. Outside, the *put-put* of motorboats was receding in the distance.

China and Flame were leaping down the stairs three at a time, out-distancing pursuit from above. There could be no effective shooting with the stairs winding as they did.

A voice cursed on the landing below them. The hard face of a thug leered up at them. He was armed with a crowbar. But China's body was already in midair. A sickening thud of crushed bone shook the floor. The gangster's head was flattened out in the back.

Flame stopped to yank the crowbar from his inert hand, and followed China out onto the docks. All but three boats had left, carrying their cargos of munition. Behind them they could hear the clatter of pursuing feet.

Swiftly they cut the anchoring ropes of all the boats. From the door of the arsenal shots rang out.

They sang into the water. Then suddenly Flame whipped the motor into life and the boat leaped ahead. The other two were already drifting idly out to sea.

Another shot cracked out from the arsenal. That was all. Peculiarly, strangely, there were no more.

Ahead, through the lifting fog, were the lights of the tramp *Mary L.*, or what looked like the *Mary L.*, about a mile off shore. The sound of motorboat explosions had ceased. They were apparently loading the ship. The fog was still too low to hear any other sounds.

Flame spoke softly. "Cut along the coast and approach from the starboard side." Then he asked: "By the way, how were you stupid enough to get caught?"

China cleared his throat. "Well, this guy I was following stopped at a wagon. I was sort of hungry, and I stopped, too. When I went out he had the rod on me. That was even before I had finished my sandwich, and—"

China let out an exclamation. From his pocket he placidly tugged forth half of a sandwich and began chewing on it.

Flame grimaced. Without a word he took a small hand-mirror and a pencil light from his pocket and began to patch up the side of the face where Towski had slapped him.

From the *Mary L.* came the sound of the departing motorboats. Their own motorboat was just starting to cut off from shore to the starboard side of the tramp. Winches and chains were already groaning and clanging. The ship was beginning to weigh anchor.

As their motorboat approached, Flame cupped his hands and let out a long cry.

"Hello, *Mary L.* Drop us a line."

A gruff voice sounded from the rail. "What the hell to you want, and who are you?"

Hardesty answered again.

"Special message from Towski. I'm Steve, foreman for Barlowe."

There was no further sound from above. But soon a rope ladder came dribbling over the side. China and Flame both mounted swiftly.

When they had clambered over the rail, a squat man with a scarred face led them amidships without a word. After winding down several passageways, they stopped before a stateroom.

Flame hesitated. There was no sound from the cabin. Only the yellow light from its center lamp streamed over the transom. There was something definitely amiss. Flame started to turn. But already hard metal had needled into his back.

"Go on in!" grated the thug in back of him. Other toughs had appeared from behind, pinning Flame and China in the narrow passageway.

Flame pushed open the door. Facing them in a chair as they entered, with an amused sneer on his face, was the foreman of Barlowe's factory! Lying bound in a corner, still handsomely dressed and with a light scarf about his neck, was Ambassador Hugo Zerish!

The foreman motioned to the thugs. "All right. Tie 'em up." He spoke directly to Flame. "You're a hot actor, Hardesty, but you shouldn't imitate the living."

From the floor Baron Hugo Zerish spoke with dignified anger. "I warn you that my government will take drastic action on this abduction of one of its officers."

Steve, the foreman, sneered. "Your government, after this civil war won't be around!"

Flame and China, trussed and bound, were placed beneath the porthole with Hugo Zerish. The *Mary L.* was not yet moving. Apparently her captain was awaiting orders.

The faint sound of a boat came to Flame's quick ears. Silently he pressed his arm against China's and then broke out into loud, noisy imprecations. He turned to China in wrath.

"You fool! If you had been more careful we wouldn't have gotten into this mess."

China jeered at him in a roaring voice, covering up immediately the sound of fast motors moving through the sea. "You big dope! You wouldn't have come even this close to knowing anything if it hadn't been for me! Why—"

But the foreman had also heard. He cupped his hand to his ear and shouted.

"Shut up, damn you! Shut up!"

The steady movement of several boats, not one, was clearer, now. A powerful beam of light sliced across the window and circled on. Above decks there was the sound of pounding feet.

The foreman had drawn his gun. He leveled it carefully, hate in his eyes.

Then suddenly all the lights on the ship went out. The room was plunged into utter darkness. Flame hurled his body against China's, flattening both of them. But there was no shot.

The stateroom door slammed shut. Guns began to crackle above, and then the spontaneous chatter of a Tommy gun. The entire cabin became illuminated, and from the direction of shore came an enormous explosion. Flame struggled to his feet and gazed out of the porthole.

The entire shore where the arsenal had been was now a mass of flames leaping up into the night sky. Flame spoke and looked down to where Zerish was.

"Too bad, baron, that you had to lose those munitions, too."

But there was no answer. In the partial light of the room, illustrated by the blaze on shore, Flame could see that Baron Hugo Zerish was no longer in the stateroom. He should have expected that. It had only been a matter of time before the baron would reveal himself for what he was.

Deliberately Flame lowered himself to the floor again.

"Listen for footsteps coming toward this stateroom, China," he whispered.

Then he squirmed over to the tin wastebasket beside a dressing table. He turned his back to it, letting one of the ropes which bound him pass along its rim. There was the sudden catch of a metal sliver against the rope. Feverishly, Flame worked the strands across it, pushing the pail against the wall so he could keep it steady.

Upstairs the shooting was incessant. Sniping must be going on around the ship.

Then Flame's hands touched the wastebasket. The strands of one piece of rope had parted. With strong tugs, he loosened the others, and then worked the bonds off his feet.

After he had freed China, cautiously they peered out into the corridor. Nobody was there. The fighting seemed to be limited to the decks.

Rapidly they dashed into a large lounging-room of the ship, and peered through its windows onto the deck. A harbor policeman was trading gun fire from behind a pump

with one of Towski's men. A sailor was creeping up from behind on the officer with a winch handle. Flame's gun spat. The sailor doubled and then slowly weaved to the deck.

A gun flamed outside. Air was now coming in through two holes in the lounge window. A scream echoed in the air as China pumped shots out on deck.

"We're not going to get Zerish this way," whispered Flame. "You take the port side and I'll take the starboard side. Search—"

But a voice had already clipped behind them.

"I advise you to drop your guns."

Flame and China obediently did so as they slowly turned and saw Baron Hugo Zerish, a life preserver strapped about him and his hand wrapped about a revolver. There was a gleam of fanaticism in his eyes, but his voice was toneless when he spoke, even courteous.

"It isn't necessary to search for me. I shall be leaving the ship entirely, very briefly. One day you may find me, but not in this country. But since it is possible that I may not get out of here as easily as I should, it would be best if you were not around to hinder me. You are the only ones that know my position as leader of this organization and therefore—"

The whine of a shell broke over the ship. For an instant the baron's eyes shuttled away from Flame and China, and in the brief second, Flame's body had hit Zerish. The baron's gun roared in the small inside room. Hot searing pain pierced Flame's shoulder.

And then both of them were on the ground, rolling over and over. China circling about them for an opportunity to crack Zerish. But the baron was strong and was rolling with the

movement of Hardesty's body, still clutching his gun until the time he could use it.

Flame twisted the baron's arm, his muscles trembling under the strain. Snapping his body like a snake, the baron kned Hardesty in the groin. Hardesty doubled up.

The baron jumped to his feet with strange oaths. China was on him with the butt of his gun, ready to strike. Zerish leveled his gun.

But then he stumbled to the ground. Flame had seized him by the leg. The baron's gun shot up and the bullet buried itself in the ceiling. Outside shots had ceased, and the metallic clatter of guns falling on the deck resounded.

Zerish and Flame again were battling on the floor of the cabin. But now Hardesty seemed the stronger, and the baron had let the gun fall from his hand and flailed about with his empty fist. Flame gradually worked him up against the cabin wall, rolling furiously. Then suddenly the undercover operative had his arm free. Once, twice—he cracked the skull of Zerish against the wall and then leaped free of his body. He picked up his gun.

"All right, baron. You can get up."

Hugo Zerish arose groggily. He seemed to be listening. Footsteps outside were nearing the cabin. Then suddenly he plunged his hand into his pocket and stabbed it toward his mouth.

Flame's gun roared. Blood began to appear on the front of the baron's shirt below the preserver. He sank slowly to the carpet again. There was a strange smile on his face as some white grains of powder spilled from his relaxed hand. He spoke softly as his blood dripped on the ship's carpet.

"It would have been more graceful

dying by poison, although since I have committed offenses against the law of your country, it is right, I suppose, that I should die at the hands of that law."

Flame and China watched him with the feeling that they had killed no ordinary criminal. The dying baron seemed to interpret their gaze.

"I am not a criminal in the real sense of the word. I have only found it necessary to be one because the stakes were high. I, myself, was fighting the greatest criminal in the modern world, that madman whose unlicensed dictatorship in our country threatens to destroy all civilization. The civil war I have helped to create in Jurua will kill some, but may save innumerable others."

The door to the lounging room swung open. Coast-guard men armed with rifles and Tommy guns stumped in with an officer at their head. Flame showed his credentials. The officer pointed at the dead body Baron Hugo Zerish.

"Who is that?"

Flame explained to him that he was the Juruan ambassador to the United States. Unwittingly he had been caught aboard ship. A stray shot had apparently killed him as he was ready to jump overboard.

"Well, you're lucky we got that message of yours," the officer commented.

Flame Hardesty grinned as he thought over the numbers he had told Chick to telegraph to the Federal authorities.

"I sure was lucky," Flame conceded. The *Belle* must have been cargoed at night and a crew formed in the same way. The port authorities were completely taken off guard, since the *Belle* was due to sail a week later. Besides, her record was clean." He turned to the

captain. "Was Towski captured?" he asked.

The officer smiled wryly. "Of course, we watched and checked the *Mary L.* Then we found out our mistake, when your message was relayed to us, and here we are. Yes, Towski was taken on shore—and by no one less than Skip Toro, who seems to have been working with Barlowe, strangely enough. One of his old lieutenants who had joined up with Towski apparently didn't like the set-up, and so helped break it up. He'll get a pardon."

By launch and car, Flame Hardesty and China Kelly got over to Flame's place in a little over an hour. Flame explained the entire case to Chick, his eager young assistant.

"You see, Chick, Zerish was only one of the leaders in the rebel movement. The government had only lately begun to suspect him of something. That was why Count Haugantz was sent over here—and that was why he was killed. The five Juruan truckmen who were killed must have also learned something about Zerish, and of course he had no compunction about murder, since he felt the ultimate good of his country was involved."

"Looked like a regular guy," Chick said. "Maybe, from his point of view he was partly justified in what he did, at that."

Flame hesitated. "Perhaps—from

his point of view, as you say. At least, I have no intention of putting his name on the criminal records. Towski will be adjudged the leader, and his testimony won't be enough to sway the jury. After all, the work was mostly done by Towski, although it was done so skillfully that for a while I actually suspected Barlowe. Someone had to know the plant well to steal the munitions and, besides, Barlowe did not report the stealings. Of course, it was the foreman who was the inside man for Towski. And Toro persuaded Barlowe to wait before he reported the facts to the insurance company. He hoped that he would get Towski before long."

"But how did you know that Zerish was in back of it all?" Chick asked.

"I wasn't certain at any time. Of course, he seemed anxious to lay the blame on Barlowe. Then, too, he seemed so familiar with the state of the weather. The first time he came to visit me he wore heavy scarves even before the fog had fallen. And on the ship when he was ostensibly a captive, he was wearing light scarves even before the fog had lifted. Of course, he finally had to give himself away completely in the cabin when he found out that the *Belle* had not been mistaken for the *Mary L.* He hoped to go overboard, and if I was killed, then his position was safe. If not, he might make a good case out of being kidnapped."

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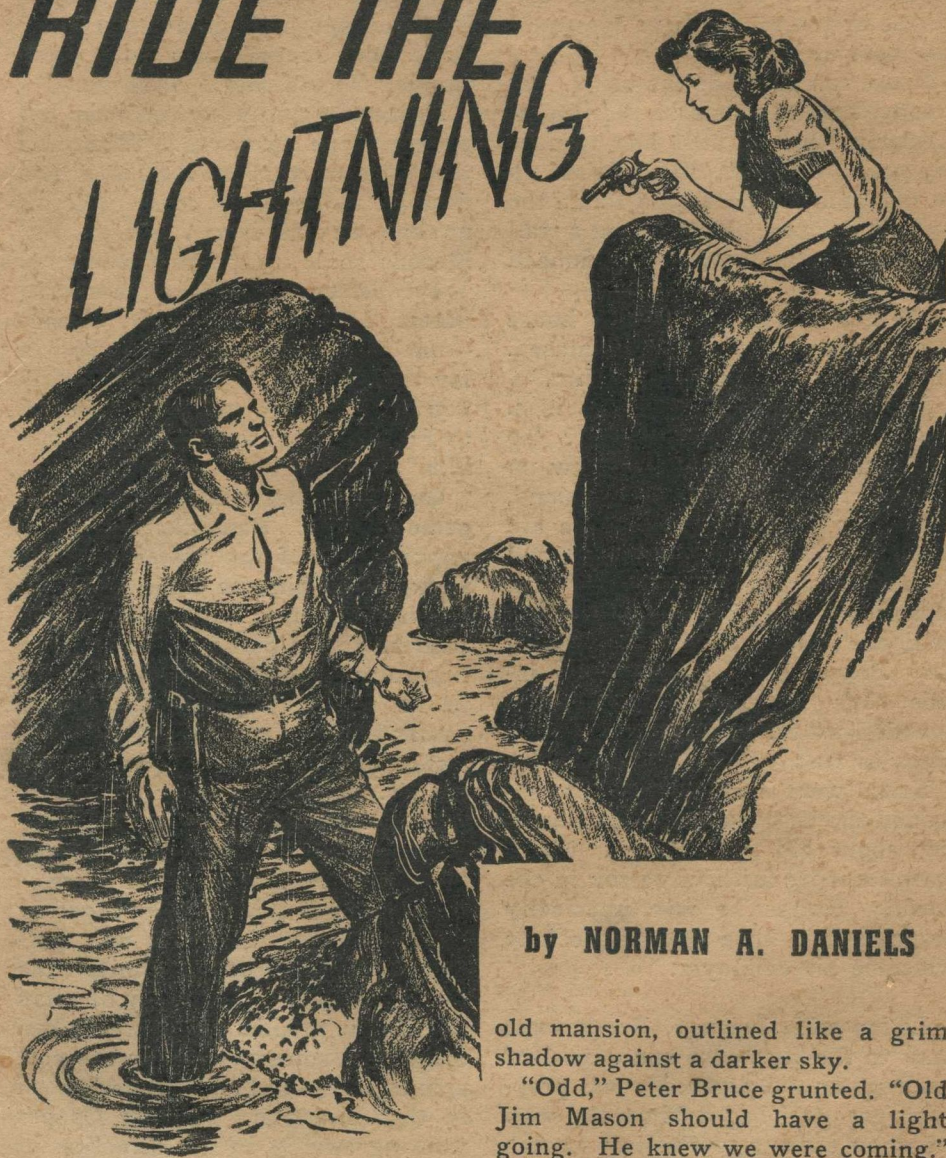
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# RIDE THE LIGHTNING



by NORMAN A. DANIELS

## CHAPTER I.

### ISLAND OF SUDDEN DEATH.

There were four men in the sleek power launch that pulled alongside the small island pier. One of them, young, husky and rugged-looking, jumped ashore to make fast the lines. Then he turned to stare at the huge

old mansion, outlined like a grim shadow against a darker sky.

"Odd," Peter Bruce grunted. "Old Jim Mason should have a light going. He knew we were coming."

"He's probably drunk." Rex Cooper stepped off the launch and then turned to help Fruchot, a lanky, tousle-haired man, to the dock, Cooper rarely condescended to help anyone unless he wanted something from him. This was exactly the case, now. Fruchot meant a lot of money to Cooper. The fourth man, short, pudgy Dr. Haley, was

nothing more than a salaried employee of the millionaire. He could take care of himself.

Bruce ran ahead of the party. As a bodyguard to a man he didn't particularly like, he still had to face any possible danger, first. He ran up on the rambling porch and found the front door open. He snapped a wall switch, and the hallway was flooded with light.

"Which means he left the house during daylight," Bruce mused. "Something has happened to Jim."

Rex Cooper snorted at the idea. "What do I care where he went? To the devil with him. He'll show up sooner or later. This is an island, Bruce, or didn't you know we are three miles offshore? Fruchot and I have business to discuss. Jim Mason is nothing but a caretaker and he doesn't interest me in the slightest. Bruce—bring my golf bag inside. It's damp near this con-founded water. I don't want those clubs to rust."

Bruce went back to the pier, unloaded the baggage and kept worrying about old Jim Mason. There wasn't a more faithful person in the world. Unless he was physically stopped, he'd have been on deck to welcome his employer.

Laden with luggage, Bruce went back to the big house and deposited the bags on the porch. He was propping the golf bag against the wall when an eerie, soul-chilling screech rang out. It sounded like the wail of a man who knew he was going to die; knew nothing could save him and gave vent to his emotions by using his voice. Then the screech was chopped off as thought it had been part of a radio broadcast and someone had turned the dial.

Cooper was the first to reach the porch. "What was that?" he de-

manded. "What was it, Bruce? You're supposed to be a detective of sorts. You should know about these things. That's why I hired you."

Bruce was pulling a gun from his pocket as he answered. "The man who uttered that scream is either dead or unconscious, now. There's no one on the island except Jim Mason; so it must have been him. We'd better organize a searching party. It wouldn't do, Mr. Cooper—not even for you—if Jim Mason lay there in the night, dying, while you talked about selling this island to Fruchot. Let's see if we can find him."

Cooper flushed a trifle, but he was game enough. Cantankerous, fully appreciative of the power that his money gave him, he could be domineering and curt; but even his mind realized that a dying man is still as human as he, himself, was—and had to be saved if possible. Cooper reached for the golf bag, slipped out a steel mashie and swung it through the air.

"All right—we will find him. Better spread out to cover the whole island. I'll head for the golf course."

Bruce loped across the level grassy terrain of the island. It was, perhaps, three quarters of a mile wide and a full mile long. Plenty of room for anyone to hide. The screech had originated somewhere near the east side of the island and Bruce headed in that direction. He saw Cooper walking swiftly in the direction of the small nine-hole golf course that extended along the coast of the island for almost its entire length.

The utter blackness of the night made going slow. Bruce stumbled along, wishing he had a flashlight. His gun was in his coat pocket, and he kept one hand wrapped around the weapon.

There was a narrow, sandy beach

on the east side. Bruce stood on a knoll, overlooking this strip of sand. He peered down at it and saw the shadowy form of someone, sprawled out on the beach.

He didn't stop to summon the others. Instead he raced down off the knoll, crossed the beach and quickly knelt beside the form. He turned the man over, fumbled in his pocket for a match and lit it. The tiny torch illuminated the scene enough to make Bruce gulp and turn his head away. It was Jim Mason, all right, but the back of his skull was crushed as though a ton weight had dropped upon it.

Bruce hastily scraped another match and examined the sand. He saw that Mason had crawled about ten feet before he collapsed. There were vague prints in the swath he had created through the sand. Bruce looked up and turned his eyes toward the water. He had noticed one significant thing: that Jim Mason's clothing was soaked. He had come out of the sea to find death waiting for him on shore.

But why had Mason been in the water? There was no boat. Mason wasn't even provided with a dory. Bruce steeled his nerves and bent over the body once more.

That act probably saved his life, for a gun cracked and the bullet whined through the air just above Bruce's bent form. He dropped flat, almost hugging the corpse. He whipped out his own gun and waited, trying to look in four directions at the same time.

Then it came again—a streak of flame emanating from behind a clump of brush. Bruce heard the slug smash into the sand and send a miniature sand storm slapping against his face. He quickly rubbed as much of the grit out of his eyes as possible, sighted his gun and trig-

gered twice. He was shooting blind, fully aware that the would-be killer had probably moved fast after firing his last shot.

But the slug drew results. There was a crashing sound as if someone ran away, heedless of the noise he was making. Bruce was up in a flash and running in swift pursuit. He caught a glimpse of one man tearing madly straight toward the ocean. He was automatically trapping himself for, unless he ran into the sea itself, he was cut off from all other means of escape with Bruce charging down on him.

At the edge of the water the man hesitated, apparently wondering if he should wait and face his attacker. Bruce came down the slope toward the beach as fast as his legs would take him. His gun was ready for action, and when he saw the stranger raise his weapon, Bruce fired two shots from the hip. Both missed, for he had no time to aim, but they served their purpose. The stranger hurled himself into the water, first running into the tide until he was almost shoulder high. He began swimming with powerful strokes, and in less than a minute he was gone from sight, protected by the darkness that shrouded the ocean. Bruce didn't consider following up the chase. It would have been foolhardy to plunge into the water and try to overtake the stranger. Instead, he turned back, wondering what this was all about. He climbed the slope leading from the beach and reloaded his gun on the way. He knew the shooting should have attracted the others, but, as yet, no one came to investigate.

Bruce plunged into a thick fringe of brush, fighting a path toward the level, green golf course which occupied more than half of the island.

Cooper had spent a small fortune building it. Before Bruce came into the open, he saw a jagged flash of blue flame. It seemed to originate about five or six feet from the ground and flash downward. As if in echo of the crashing sound it made, there came a cry of horror. Fruchot's voice!

Bruce broke through to the fairway, saw Fruchot kneeling beside a fallen figure and ran quickly toward the scene. Fruchot was trying to pick someone up. Bruce recognized the limp figure even in the darkness. It was Cooper!

Dr. Haley hurried to the spot. He always carried a stethoscope curled in a coat pocket, and he drew this out, now, ripped Cooper's shirt open and applied the instrument. Finally, he arose and sighed.

"Cooper is dead! Carry the body back to the house so I can try to find out what killed him."

"I know what killed him," Fruchot cried. "I was about two hundred feet away from him when it happened. He was struck by lightning! I saw the flash."

Bruce frowned and looked up at the sky. There were a few stars twinkling, a few clouds, but certainly no storm hovered over the island. He grabbed Cooper's corpse by the shoulders while Fruchot took the feet. They carried it back to the house. Dr. Haley ran ahead and had the lights going full blast. They put Cooper's body on a kitchen table and Haley went to work.

"Fruchot is right," he said crisply. "Cooper was killed by lightning. Remember that he carried a steel golf club! He was walking across an exposed place. There's no more certain way to draw lightning than by holding a steel golf club aloft, especially on an open golf course. More than one widow knows that."

"But there was no storm," Bruce protested. "How can there be lightning without a storm? I heard no thunder, either—not the slightest. Fruchot, stay here with doc. I'm going back on the golf course and see what I can find."

Bruce searched a supply closet, found an electric lantern and hurried back to the spot where Cooper had fallen. Doc must be crazy. Then Bruce recalled that vivid flash of flame he had seen through the brush. Maybe Haley was right. Perhaps Cooper had been struck, but Bruce had an idea that Cooper's death tied up with that of Jim Mason and the man who fled straight into the sea.

Bruce found the golf club, switched on his lantern and examined the steel mashie. It offered him no clue. He turned the ray of the electric lantern upward. There were two trees about thirty yards on either side of him. He walked over to the one on his left and studied the thick branches intently. As the ray of his lamp came down the trunk and settled on the ground, he saw something glisten dully. Bruce picked up a piece of thick green glass—just a jagged portion of whatever original shape the glass had been a part of.

Bruce sat down on a knoll and pressed both hands against his forehead.

Jim Mason murdered. Cooper struck by lightning when there wasn't a storm. A murderer who runs straight into the sea to escape. What kind of an island is this? What's happened here? What's it all about?

The night gave him no answer. He arose with a long sigh. It would be daylight soon; then he'd search this little strip of land from one end to the other. There had to be an an-

swer to those questions on his mind.

He thought of the power launch tied up at the little pier. That craft probably spelled the difference between life and death to those left alive on the island. Bruce felt chills run up and down his spine as he broke into a run toward the pier. Someone would have to guard the boat from this moment on.

At first, he thought it was the sheer blackness that deceived him until he was close enough to be certain. The power launch was gone! Yet, if anyone had started its motor, the throb of the engine would have been heard all over the island. There had been no such sound. Bruce was certain of that.

He peered out toward the ocean and gasped in astonishment. The power launch had a red light burning on her stern. He could see that light, now, moving slowly about five hundred feet offshore. As he watched, the light seemed to be lifted by an invisible hand until it hovered a dozen yards above the surface of the water. Then it began going down! Finally, it blinked out as the sea closed around it.

There was no sound except Bruce's hoarse breathing. What invisible hand had sent the power launch diving to the bottom? How had it been taken out there so si-

lently, and what made it sink without a sound? For one of the few times in his life, Peter Bruce felt something akin to horror.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE THIRD MURDER!

Dr. Haley was drawing on cleated golf shoes. His eyes were red from lack of sleep. Fruchot, the man who had wanted to buy this island from Cooper, ran nervous fingers through his already badly rumpled hair. Peter Bruce put down his third cup of coffee and glanced into the next room, where two sheeted bodies lay side by side on a table; Cooper, the aristocratic millionaire and poor old Jim Mason, the lowly caretaker. Death recognizes no equals.

"Even if that launch was there, ready to take us back," Bruce said, "I wouldn't go until I found out who or what killed those two men. Cooper may have died an accidental death—from a stroke of lightning. I don't think so, but the possibility remains. However, Jim Mason died from the blow of an instrument that smashed his skull to a pulp. That was no accident! I'm sticking right here. How about you, Fruchot?"

Fruchot looked up with narrowed eyes. "If it wasn't so far to the mainland, I'd swim. I wanted to buy



this island and make a nice little private gambling resort out of it. Now, I wouldn't match a dime against ownership of the place."

Dr. Haley finished lacing his shoes, walked over to the dining-room table and picked up a piece of green thick glass which Bruce had found beneath the tree. He fondled this for a moment and then suddenly replaced it and started for the back door.

"I'm staying too," he announced before he went out. "Right now, I'm having a look at the spot where Cooper died. Maybe it was lightning—maybe it wasn't. See you boys later."

Bruce followed him into the yard and watched the squat, doughty physician march across the ground toward the golf course. Apparently Haley had some kind of a hunch inspired by that piece of green glass. For some unaccountable reason, Bruce kept watching the doctor. Fruchot came out and stood beside him. Neither man spoke. It seemed as if they both felt the approach of impending tragedy.

Haley was approaching the spot where Cooper had died when it happened. The doctor seemed to jerk erect with such force as to almost tear his limbs apart. Then he buckled slowly, doubling up and falling head first onto the ground. Bruce was racing toward him even before he wilted. Fruchot, not as fast a runner, kept doggedly following Bruce's path. Bruce hastily knelt beside the doctor, seized his wrist and felt for a pulse. There was one—very weak and thready.

"He's still alive," Bruce said. "Help me carry him back to the house. Or better yet—you run ahead and get some restoratives ready. Whiskey, hot water—anything you can think of."

Bruce cradled the form in his arms and headed back to the house. Bruce and Fruchot did their best; but ten minutes after Haley was gently laid on the bed, he died without regaining consciousness. Bruce bowed his head and sighed deeply. Fruchot started to pace the floor.

"Whatever it is," Fruchot explained, "it's taking us one by one. There's only you and I left, Bruce. They'll get us next! We've got to do something. We can't just sit here like fools and wait for that invisible killer to strike. Think of something! Do something!"

Bruce walked over to a window, pulled the curtain aside and looked out to sea. Fruchot was right. But what could a man do? How could a murderer who struck with invisible hands, be detected, let alone caught. Bruce turned around to face Fruchot.

"I'm going out and search this island. You stay here. Lock every window and door. Cooper maintained a small arsenal here. There are plenty of guns and ammunition. Help yourself and keep your eyes open. If anyone comes, challenge him. If he won't stop—shoot! If you need me, just point a gun out of a window and let go. I'll come running."

Fruchot nodded mutely and walked over to the glass-enclosed cabinet where the guns were stacked. Bruce heard the front door locked after he went out. Fruchot was scared enough to make a good watchman.

The detective headed north, toward the rocky clifflike end of the island. He knew that the water there was deep enough to permit a good-sized ship to approach close to the island. There had to be a ship hidden somewhere. There was no other method of accounting for the

presence of the killers who could vanish at will or merely wade into the sea and disappear.

He reached the brink of the cliff and peered over the edge. There was no ship—not even a dory. From this position, he could scan the ocean on every side of the island. There was nothing—no thin column of smoke, no flimsy sail outlined against the sky.

Bruce sat down on the edge of a huge, flat rock and wondered what in the world he could do next. He had an idea that below the spot where he was sitting, there might be a cave of some kind. The killer who had waded into the sea might have simply swam around the island to make for this spot. Bruce dropped flat on his stomach and wriggled forward until he hung half off the cliff.

Two feet below him and a little to the right, he saw something that made him blink in surprise. There was a rope ladder, neatly coiled and resting on a small ledge. He made his way to a spot just above it, reached down and brought the ladder up. There was a single tree near the cliff. He studied the bark and noticed that little pieces of it had chipped off. The rope ladder had been tied here before and been used often. Bruce drew his gun, spun the cylinder to be sure it was free and ready for action. Then he shoved it into his belt, hastily tied the ladder to the tree and threw the free end over the cliff. He noticed that it reached all the way down.

As he slipped over the edge, clinging to the ladder, he saw the jagged, dangerous rocks below him. The cliff side extended clear out to the lapping water. There was no beach of any kind—just craggy rocks sharpened continuously by a lashing sea when the weather was bad. To

fall on these would mean quick death.

Bruce wetted his lips and started down. He had descended one third of the distance to the ground when he felt the rope ladder jerk slightly. He raised his head and caught a glimpse of a piece of shining steel. A gloved hand gripped it. Someone was cutting the rope ladder!

Bruce had no time to draw a gun. There wasn't a chance of hitting the murderer, anyway, for he kept well hidden on the cliff above. Bruce suddenly pitched downward a foot and his heart jumped up into his throat. One of the guide ropes had been cut, and he dangled, now, held up only by a single strand which would be severed next.

Bruce quickly set the flat of both feet against the sheer side of the cliff. He glanced below and saw that his gamble with death carried one-to-five odds against him. He used every ounce of strength he could derive from his leg muscles and sent himself and the rope ladder flying outward, away from the cliff. Then he let go.

He plunged down, straight toward those jagged, treacherous rocks! He had one small chance to strike one of the pools between the rocks and hope for a luck which would make that pool deep.

He hit the water and went down fast. His feet touched bottom and he started up again. His lungs were bursting and his senses reeled with the fast-moving events of the last few moments. But he realized that if he showed his head above water and the killer on the cliff was armed, that mad dive to safety would have availed him nothing. He'd be a perfect target!

Bruce swam under water until he circled one of the huge rocks. Clinging to the base of it, he took a long

chance and thrust his head out of water. He sucked in life-giving oxygen first, and then looked around. He couldn't see the top of the cliff, which meant anyone lurking there would hardly be able to spot him, either. A wave of relief swept over him and he relaxed. For the moment, at least, he was safe.

Bruce allowed a full thirty minutes to pass before he quietly submerged again, swam around the pinnacle of rock and risked a quick look at the cliff. The rope ladder still dangled there, by one rope. The murderer hadn't even bothered to pull it up. Apparently the man felt very sure of himself. Why? Did he believe himself to be the sole survivor of the little group who had come to the island the night before? Was Fruchot behind this?

Bruce's feet touched the shore, and he waded onto the narrow strip of stony beach until he reached the chill stone wall. He had to get back to the house and the only way was by swimming. That rope ladder might bear his weight and it might not. It was physically impossible to negotiate the sheer wall of the cliff.

Bruce began removing his water-logged shoes. He parked them under a rock so that the tide wouldn't wash them out. Then he straightened up and looked for a place where he might invade the sea and swim around the cliff side of the island.

A stone moved behind him and rather high above his head. He turned quickly.

"Just stand exactly where you are." A feminine voice with no obvious quaver in it seemed to come from the smooth surface of the cliff wall. "Reach for the gun in your belt and I'll shoot."

Bruce lifted both hands and

grinned tightly. "Lady," he said, "if you've been watching me for the last forty-five minutes, you know I've been in the water most of the time. The gun I carry won't shoot water-logged cartridges. You can come down from wherever you are."

More stones skidded down the side of the cliff. Then Bruce saw a girl's head cautiously poked over a ledge—a narrow shelf of rock that he hadn't even known existed, for it was almost invisible when looking straight up. She arose to a kneeling position and Bruce saw that she was decidedly pretty, even if her features were drawn in lines of fear. She gripped a heavy gun in one hand.

"I . . . I can't get down," she half sobbed. "You . . . you'll have to help me. But if you try any tricks—I know how to shoot a gun. I warn you."

Bruce hurried to a spot directly below the shelf of rock. He tilted his face upward. "The only way is to jump. Never mind the gun. I won't harm you. Slide off the edge, hang on a minute and then let go. I'll catch you."

She hesitated a moment, looking down at Bruce intently. Possibly she recognized the honesty in his face or believed in the reassuring tones of his voice. Anyway, she adopted his suggestion. He caught her, and she clung to him tightly until she recovered her wits. Then she pushed him away and leaned weakly against one of the high rocks.

"You . . . you're not one of them, then?" she asked. "You don't know where Hal is?"

"You're talking in riddles," Bruce told her. "I'm not one of whom, and who in thunder is Hal?"

"My brother. He . . . he came to the island to do some fishing. When he didn't return on schedule, I be-

came worried; so I came out here and . . . and he's gone. There were a lot of men here—big men—all dressed in overalls and jumpers like a gang of prisoners doing road work. They didn't speak one word, but they took me and sunk my boat. I tried to make them understand I was looking for Hal, but either they didn't speak English or they pretended to be deaf. They took me to the big house and locked me up. I . . . I escaped by prying open a cellar window. I stole the gun. I came here and they were looking for me—more than twenty of them. I crawled up on that ledge—how, I'll never know. Then you came, diving like a crazy fool into the ocean."

Bruce took her shaking hands between his own. "My name is Peter Bruce. I'm a private detective of sorts. Until Rex Cooper was murdered, I was his bodyguard. There's a lot of funny things going on here of which you're a pretty big part. I'm going to take you back to the house. Don't worry, there are no men there, now, except Fruchot, who is the guard. Can you swim?"

She nodded. "My name is Irene Arden. If we go back to that awful house, those men will capture us again. They're bound to!"

Bruce shrugged. "If you didn't look and talk so intelligently, I'd say you were a little balmy. There are just two men on this island. I haven't seen any signs of a young army living here, and, believe me, I've searched that house and the island, too. We'd better start before it gets dark and too cold to swim."

### CHAPTER III. EARTH TREMOR!

Two bedraggled figures moved toward the house in the rapidly advancing dusk. Bolts and locks

CLU—4

grated as Fruchot opened up to admit them. He stared at Irene Arden with wide-open mouth.

"An ally," Bruce told him with a grin. "Fix us some hot toddies, will you, Fruchot? This is Irene Arden, a castaway like ourselves. She came here looking for her brother and—Irene, what's the matter?"

Irene was standing below a huge oil painting of Cooper. Her face paled as she pointed to it.

"That . . . that's the man who asked my brother to come here. I'm positive of it. He came to Hal's shop; and, later on, Hal said he was going on a fishing trip."

Fruchot regained possession of his wits. "Well, he's one man you don't have to worry about, Miss Arden. He's dead! I'm going to get some food ready. Thank heavens there's plenty of that. Bruce—the liquor cabinet is to the left of the fireplace."

Bruce prepared two stiff drinks and watched Irene sip hers slowly. Her presence on this island of sudden death was something he didn't relish. Her story of a score of men clad in overalls and jumpers—men who didn't speak or seem to understand her when she talked—sounded like fantasy; yet, she was no fool. He could see that in the even tenor of her voice and the steadiness of her gaze. She had actually seen those men; had been taken prisoner by them, and they had sunk her boat. What then, of her brother Hal? Why had he come? Why had Cooper sought him out and sent him here, presumably on a fishing trip?

Bruce set his half-finished drink on the very edge of a table and looked down at her. He started to ask questions. There was a crash. The glass on the edge of the table had fallen off and smashed on the

bare floor. At the same moment Bruce became aware that the whole house was shaking—perhaps the whole island. It felt that way, anyhow.

He rushed over to the gun case, opened it and took out a long-barreled target pistol. He loaded this rapidly, handed the weapon to the girl and cautioned her.

"I'm going into the cellar to see if I can find out what shook the house," he said quietly. "You hold onto this roscoe and use it on anybody except Fruchot. Even him—if he get funny. I don't trust that guy."

Bruce armed himself with a hunting rifle of heavy bore and telescopic sights. Cooper had quite an arsenal on the place, and he had been accustomed to use one end of the island as a target range. There were plenty of shells for the gun, and Bruce filled one pocket with them. He felt considerably better, armed this way.

The cellarway led off the kitchen, and Fruchot glanced up in puzzled wonder when Bruce opened the door and disappeared into the blackness of the cellar. He found a light switch and turned it on. Something began to throb deep within the cellar, and Bruce raised the muzzle of his rifle as he made his way toward it. Then he lowered the gun. Cooper had spent a lot of money making this island habitable, and not the least of it had gone into setting up an electric-lighting plant in the cellar.

Bruce made a complete inspection of the cellar, moving every box and barrel, prying into a wine cellar and a subcellar. He had to crawl into this latter place, for it was impossible to stand erect in it. Cobwebs brushed against his face. He wiped them away and then extended a

hand, moving it very gently ahead of him. This place should have been full of cobwebs; yet they only seemed to hang from the very corners of the cellar. Someone had invaded these premises not long before. Bruce hastily backed out of the place.

He was at the bottom of the cellar steps when he heard rapidly moving feet cross the floor above. There was the thud of a body falling heavily, followed by a scream and a single shot—from Irene's gun!

Bruce went up the stairs three at a time, pushed open the door and stepped into the kitchen. He sensed, rather than heard the downward swing of a gun butt. Whirling, he faced two men who had been planted against the wall just inside the doorway. The descending gun butt struck Bruce a swipe that gouged flesh from his cheek, and then hammered with excruciating pain against his left shoulder.

Bruce held a weapon, too—a heavy rifle. The two attackers were too close to permit him to use it as a rifle; so he hastily reversed the weapon and swung it in a wide arc. The butt clipped one man full in the face, sent him shrieking and bleeding out of the battle.

The second man raised his voice in a shout for help, but Bruce banged him across the back of the neck with the stock of the rifle. The man pitched forward on his face, lay still a moment and then seemed to be galvanized into action when Bruce headed toward the other thug who was nursing his wounded face. The man got up and made a wild dive for the back door. He reached it and vanished into the night.

Bruce grabbed the second crook, shook him savagely and then he thought of Irene, that single shot



*A jagged streak of blue flame flashed downward! Cooper crumpled lifelessly to the ground.*

and the scream. He hurled the thug into a corner, darted toward the living room and almost fell headlong over a form lying sprawled out in the doorway. It was Fruchot! There was no sign of Irene nor of the invaders.

Bruce examined Fruchot; found he was suffering from a brutal blow across his forehead, but still breathing and possessed of a strong pulse. He let him lay there and returned to the kitchen. One look at the wide-open door told him the story. His prisoner had gone, too!

He dragged Fruchot to a davenport, propped him up and forced some raw whiskey between his lips. Fruchot shivered violently and opened his eyes. He tried to jump to his feet, but sank back weakly, clapping a hand to the lump on his forehead.

"I don't know what happened," he said dully. "I was just getting ready to carry a tray of food in to Miss Arden. Someone stepped from behind a portiere and slugged me. As I went down, I heard Miss Arden scream and I saw her fire a shot. After that, things became black. Bruce, we've got to get off this damned island. We can't cope with whatever is going on here—not just the two of us. We need help."

"Sure," Bruce grunted. "We swim three or four miles, bucking the tide, now. Then, after we convince officers we aren't crazy, we'll come back. What do you think will happen to Irene—Miss Arden—during that time? Where's that tray of food you were fixing for us?"

Fruchot glanced up and pointed a shaking hand. "I put it on that little table. I swear I did. It . . . it's gone!"

But Bruce was looking beyond the little table. There was another room directly across the hall, where still

another and larger table had supported a grim burden. There had been three sheeted bodies on it—Jim Mason, Cooper and Dr. Haley.

Now, there was only one!

Bruce raced into that room and lifted the sheet. Only Jim Mason's corpse remained!

Why had those body snatchers left him? Bruce's mind worked fast. There was a rapidly forming idea taking shape. When he returned to where Fruchot sat, openly astonished and frightened at this new turn of affairs, Bruce's face was grim. He picked up the rifle he had been carrying, slammed a shell into the firing chamber and thrust the gun under one arm.

"Listen, Fruchot," he said tightly, "I'm going after that girl. I think I know why she was taken and why the bodies of Haley and Cooper were stolen. It seems very odd to me that all this could have been done with you in the house; so I'm warning you—stay right here. Don't step outside because I'm going to shoot first and ask questions afterward, from now on."

"I was unconscious," Fruchot complained. "How could I know they stole those bodies? I didn't even know how many men were here."

"Stay indoors!" Bruce repeated his warning.

He left the house and ran swiftly down the walk until he was deep within the island brush. There, he felt comparatively safe. He headed straight toward the place where Dr. Haley had so mysteriously died. He knelt beside the spot and began patting the ground gingerly. Then he walked over to the tree, beneath which he had found that piece of thick, green glass. Bruce climbed into the tree and swung his legs

from one of the lower branches. He noticed that someone had recently driven a nail into the bark, for the hole exuded sap freely.

He climbed still higher, and, although it was as dark as it had been the night before, he could make out the trees on the island. There was a row of them extending clear across the narrow strip of land. He dropped back to the ground and began running in a straight line with the row of trees to guide him.

His path led directly toward the cliff. The rope ladder still hung there, usable without question, even though only one rope still held it in place. But Bruce lay flat on the level rock and stared down at the sea. His eyes, accustomed to the darkness, made out the jagged pinnacles of rock jutting from the water. He noticed that there seemed to be a channel where there were no rocks—a channel about twenty feet wide.

Bruce arose quietly, ran downhill to a point where the island shore was much lower. Holding his rifle high above his head, he waded into the sea. Then he slowly made his way around the cliff tip of the island until he stood just below the ledge upon which Irene had been hidden. Now, he saw that the channel was even more noticeable. At some time or another—probably several years back—this had been dredged out so that fairly heavy launches could be anchored within only a few feet of the beach.

Then Bruce turned around and surveyed the cliff intently. It was too dark to see much, but as his eyes passed over the smooth rock, he closed them tightly in a prolonged blink. When he opened them again, it was still there. A surprisingly narrow thread of yellow light came from the wall of the cliff. Light

emanating from what seemed to be solid rock. There was something behind that surface of rock. A cavern, perhaps, cleverly concealed by a door that looked like part of the cliff.

This side of the island was to leeward. Three miles ahead lay the mainland where there was all kinds of help. It might have been the same distance as it was to Europe for all the benefit Bruce could derive from the thought. He was one man against many, but there was no hesitation on his part. He started toward the cliff.

Then he heard the soft lapping of muffled oars. Bruce hastily went into action. He practically crawled up the wall until he could reach up and deposit his rifle on the ledge where Irene had been hidden. Unarmed, he jumped back to the ground. Crouched and running lightly, he made his way straight toward the sea and waded into it until he could hide behind a tall rock. From this point of vantage, he watched a dory dragged ashore by four men. There were four other men inside it. They quickly leaped on dry land and approached the cliff. One man stayed with the dory.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### EERIE CAVERN.

Bruce slipped around the big rock, grateful for the darkness, now. He made no noise as he waded through the water. The man at the dory never heard a thing until an iron grip encircled his neck, drew his head back and prevented any attempt to cry out a warning. A fist smashed into his face and he went limp. Bruce hastily lowered his victim, propping him up against a rock. He peeled off his own shirt and trousers and bundled them tightly. Then he

removed the overalls and jumper which his prisoner wore. He donned these, drew on a small round hat that looked something like a sailor's cap; and then, without the slightest hesitation, he dragged the dory farther on shore. He left it there and walked briskly toward the group of men who seemed to be waiting for something to happen at the bottom of the cliff.

One of the men picked up a stone and hurled it straight at the face of the cliff. The narrow chink of yellow light was extinguished immediately. A hoarse voice called a challenge and the ray of a flashlight centered on the group of eight men. Someone called out a warning to be quiet and the party moved forward.

Bruce trailed behind the others, keeping his head down. Not a word was spoken. A gangplank was lowered from the face of the cliff, and they marched up it. Then Bruce saw how cleverly all this had been constructed. Only a small section of the cliff was false and this slid inwardly so that no trace of it could be seen even in broad daylight. Bruce heard men closing the door, and then the place was flooded with light.

He looked around quickly. There were four grinning men seated atop a row of huge metal barrels. Beside each man was a submachine gun. Bruce glanced to the left. The bodies of Dr. Haley and Cooper lay on the earthen floor. Heavy chunks of metal had been attached to their arms, legs and neck. Apparently, their next resting place would be at the bottom of the sea.

Suddenly, the overhead lights dimmed. They were ordinary electric-light bulbs in sockets attached to wires strung along the roof of the cave and disappearing into the farther depths.

At the same moment the whole floor of the cave seemed to tremble.

Bruce was startled enough to look up. None of the others seemed impressed by this phenomenon; but one of the thugs seated on the row of metal barrels was looking at Bruce intently, and his right hand started to edge out toward his submachine gun.

Bruce had no chance to look closely at the other men who had entered the cave. He saw only that recognition was dawning on the face of the thug.

Bruce suddenly moved forward. He wound an arm about the waist of one overall-clad man, felt the smooth surface of a pistol and yanked it free. He gave the man a hard shove, danced back and pointed the gun at the overhead lights. He fired and one bulb blew up. There were two more.

Bruce lowered the gun and aimed point-blank at the nearest of the thugs, all of whom were reaching for their guns. He triggered three times! The thug jerked as the slugs hammered home. He rolled off the barrel and fell on the floor of the cave.

Another shot from Bruce's gun extinguished a second bulb and then he managed to get the third, but it took two more bullets to do the trick. Still, that was good shooting, and he mentally blessed the days he and Cooper had exploded hundreds of dollars' worth of cartridges at the other end of the island, in target practice.

As the cave was plunged into a deeper blackness than that outside, Bruce was already moving forward. He held his gun by the barrel, and, when someone blundered against him, he used it effectively. Bruce was heading to the left of the barrels.

"Two men guard the entrance!" a harsh voice suddenly rang out.

"Everybody connected with this outfit stay away from that section. Nolan—find those flashlights. Watch yourself! That's Bruce in here and he's dynamite. I know him. There's an even grand to the guy who brings him down. Get busy!"

Bruce grinned in the darkness. He heard the denim-clad men muttering in a guttural undertone. Then one of their number said something in a foreign tongue, and the muttering stopped abruptly. Whoever these men were, they knew how to obey orders.

Someone moved by Bruce, almost brushing against him. That would be Nolan, going deeper into the cave after those flashlights. Bruce went after him, following closely and making little noise. The clatter of Nolan's feet against the pebbled surface of the cave drowned out any that Bruce might have inadvertently made.

Suddenly, cold air came rushing out to greet Bruce and he realized he was in a larger cavern. Nolan struck a match. As it flared up, Bruce stepped close and used his gun butt with amazing precision. He caught Nolan as he slid to the floor. He laid him down gently, took a heavy automatic from Nolan's belt and moved

forward. The brief flare of light had showed another, very narrow passage leading through the farther wall.

Bruce reached it, turned sideways and squeezed through. The going was slow and difficult, for the passage was hardly more than wide enough to accommodate his bulk. Then it unexpectedly widened and Bruce heard a sinister whir. He had heard that sound before, and it came back to him vividly. Once he had witnessed a man die in the electric chair. That same whirring noise had accompanied that tortured soul's departure from life.

He found that the passage turned gradually. As he negotiated the corner, he saw bluish light revealing the interior of a large cavern until it looked like the innermost regions of some scientific hell. There were huge metal, giantlike objects in four corners of the cavern. A man, dwarfed alongside this weird apparatus, was hard at work near what seemed to be a big panel equipped with several switches.

He turned swiftly as Bruce came barging in. Automatically, he reached for a thick bar of steel and held it high, using it as a club.

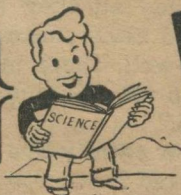
"Wait," Bruce cried. "You're Hal Arden. My name is Bruce, and

# BUTTERFINGER

CURTISS



WHAT IS THE  
OLDEST SCIENCE  
KNOWN TO  
MAN?



IS RICH  
IN PURE  
DEXTROSE  
THE SUGAR  
YOUR BODY USES  
DIRECTLY  
FOR ENERGY



ASTRONOMY

CANDY IS DELICIOUS FOOD

... ENJOY SOME EVERY DAY

we're in the same boat. Where is Irene?"

"I don't know," Hal Arden replied and lowered the steel bar as he spoke. "Have you seen her? Is she all right? Have these devils harmed her?"

"No—not yet. I thought she might be here. Listen, Hal, we've got to battle our way out of here. There are just an even dozen men between us and freedom. I have a gun with a couple of slugs left. That won't help much."

Hal sat down on a crude chair and shook his head slowly from side to side. "I've racked my brains for days trying to find some way out of here. There just isn't any, except through that cliff wall. Bruce—what's this all about? Why was I lured here, taken prisoner and forced to do this work? These are generators, brought to the island piecemeal. I was forced to set them up and get them started. They compel me to keep them running, and I don't even know what for."

Bruce was near the entrance to the cavern and peering down the narrow passageway. He spoke in a whisper and didn't avert his eyes.

"You'll find out, soon enough," he grunted. "I can't tell you now, because your life and your sister's are at stake. You might not want to go on with this work, no matter what the consequences. Wait—someone is slipping toward the cavern."

Bruce's gun leveled. He waited until he heard the sound of the intruder's clothing brush against the narrow rock tunnel. Then he fired a single shot.

"Hold it!" a voice called out. "I just came to talk. Listen, Bruce, you're a fool. We've got you bottled up so you'll never get away. Arden won't help you because we have his sister, and he knows what will hap-

pen if he disobeys orders. We'll bargain. You come out with your paws in the air, and we'll just tie you up until our work is finished here. Refuse and you'll starve—if we don't blast you out."

"You," Bruce declared in an even voice, "are a liar. Your name is Ritter. You used to be a bootlegger, and you used this island as a warehouse. Now, you've found it profitable for another use. It's going to get you a nice long term in the pen, Ritter, if I can't make a murder rap for killing Jim Mason stick."

Ritter apparently withdrew to a safer spot before he spoke again. "O. K.—if that's the way you want it, Bruce. You'll get the same as Jim Mason did. He'd be alive, right now, if he wasn't so pig-headed. What's all this going to get you? Cooper hired you as a bodyguard—but Cooper is dead. You're on your own; so why not be smart? I'll wait just thirty minutes. If you don't show up, we're coming in after you."

Bruce stuffed the gun into his belt and walked over to where Arden was seated. "Looks like I'm finished," he said slowly. "If I refuse to go out, they'll get me sooner or later—you, too, probably. Then your sister won't be of any value as a hostage to make you work. They'll probably murder her. If I could only reach that secret door!"

Arden arose suddenly and walked over to a dark corner of the cavern. "I'm going with you," he said. "They'll kill me once I've accomplished all they require. Alone, I could never make it, but the two of us—well, there might be a chance. Help me coil this wire. I've got an idea."

For twenty-five minutes both men worked frantically. Arden explained his trick as he labored near the big generators. Finally, Bruce headed

toward the tunnel—alone. He squeezed through the narrow portion, emerged into the smaller cavern and cupped both hands to his mouth.

"Ritter," he called out, "call off your dogs. I'm coming out!"

#### CHAPTER V. GOLD BADGE.

The ray of half a dozen flashlights bathed Bruce as he stepped into the main cavern. He couldn't see beyond that curtain of light, but he knew that the mystery men in overalls, who rarely spoke, were still present. He could hear their low, guttural mutterings.

One of the thugs stepped forward, gun in hand. It was Ritter. Bruce had known him for years. Ritter was a hulking brute of a man, thick-necked, thicker skulled. His sole stock in trade was violence, and there was murder written across his wide face as he approached.

"Don't drop your hands, Bruce," he warned. "I know you still have a gun. Side-step to the left and do it slowly. When you hit the wall, put your back against it. Move!"

Bruce obeyed the instructions slowly and deliberately. He was stalling for time. Ritter would never permit him to live, now. Once he backed against the wall, Ritter would open fire. Bruce's life hung by a thin thread and he knew it.

The flashlights followed him with every step he took. Finally, he felt the cold rock wall against his shoulder and he turned slowly until his spine was flat against it. Ritter's lips parted in a grin.

"You get it, Bruce, but because you didn't make us come after you, I'll reward you. It'll be over fast! Boys—line up. We're going to mow this guy down with a volley. Nolan—you hold a flashlight on him and

watch how I pay guys who try to horn in on my rackets."

All the flashlights, save one, were turned out. Apparently when Bruce had shot the ceiling electric-light bulbs to pieces, he had destroyed the entire stock of them.

He lowered his hands until they were only shoulder high, and every nerve and muscle tensed. In thirty seconds he'd either be dead or on the way to becoming a free man. He watched two of Ritter's men line up beside the burly killer. Nolan, in the background, kept the flashlight pointed straight at Bruce.

Three heavy-caliber guns were sighted. Ritter raised his left hand. When he brought it down, Bruce would die!

Then, very suddenly, the ray of the flashlight shot ceilingward and Nolan, who held it, gave a wail of agony. The flashlight dropped from his hand, struck the rock floor of the cavern and went out.

Bruce ducked and veered sharply to the left. Guns rang out, stabbing the inky blackness in a vain attempt to search him out! Bruce crooked one arm and drew it tightly across his face. The darkness of the cavern was suddenly rent by a stupendous flare of bluish light, followed by an ear-splitting crackle of man-made lightning. When that split-second flare died away, Ritter, his men and those other mystery men, were completely blinded. They blundered around, banging into one another and cursing bitterly.

Bruce uncovered his eyes as the crackling died away. He headed toward the secret door, using his fists whenever he encountered anyone. He reached the exit, located its controls and opened the door.

Someone else was battling his way toward the door. It was Hal Arden. As he slipped through it, Bruce

dived after him. They slid down the gangplank, which automatically fell into place, and reached the ground.

Bruce turned to head straight back toward the wall of the cliff. Ritter and his men were scrambling down the gangplank, shooting as fast as their fingers could operate the mechanism of their guns. But they were still somewhat blinded by that intense flare of light, and the darkness outside didn't help them much in locating a target.

Bruce signaled Arden and Arden squatted, braced himself and Bruce jumped first to Arden's shoulders and then to the same ledge upon which Irene had been hidden. He scooped up the heavy hunting rifle he had left there. A cartridge was in the firing chamber, the safety was off and Bruce sent one of the slugs straight toward the gangplank.

Someone shrieked in pain, and there was a general retreat back into the cave. Bruce lay flat on the ledge, reached down and drew Arden up.

"It worked better than you hoped," he grinned. "We blinded them with the electricity they forced you to manufacture."

Arden nodded eagerly. "It was a perfect arc and went off exactly on time. You kept them so busy they didn't hear me set those wires up. But now what? They still have Irene. How can we search the island and keep these rats cooped up at the same time?"

"Irene isn't on the island," Bruce said gently. "Your part of the game is to stay here. The gun is fully loaded and you'll find more shells stacked in a pile behind you. From this ledge, you can watch the cave. Keep Ritter and his men there without risking your own neck. They can't get at you without exposing themselves completely, and if they

do—use the rifle. They're killers; so don't worry if your trigger finger starts itching! Watch them while I made a getaway."

Arden took the rifle, covered the entrance of the cave and waited. Bruce dropped off the ledge, landed with a thud and was up again to streak for the protection of a big rock. Someone stepped out on the gangplank and opened fire. Arden's rifle spoke once, and the gunman ducked back inside.

Bruce raced over to where the rope ladder still dangled. He tested his weight against it, took a long breath and started to climb. He kept watching the edge of the cliff. If anyone cut the last rope of the ladder he wanted to know it before he was catapulted to his death below. But he reached the top of the cliff and streaked back toward the big house.

Fruchot opened the door for him. Fruchot was in a bad state. His nerves were completely gone, and his eyes bulged in terror.

"They're all around the place," he gasped. "They'll get us next, Bruce. What'll we do?"

"You stay right here," Bruce said. "I'm going up on the roof."

He seized one of the lantern-type battery lights, ran up to the top floor and used a ladder to reach one of the windows set in the gabled roof. He crawled out, clawed his way to a ridge and straddled it. He balanced the light, aimed it due east and turned it on. Operating the switch carefully, he sent a blinker message in Morse.

He kept repeating this, but drew no reply from the darkness that hemmed in the island. Bruce yanked a gun from his belt, pointed the muzzle skyward and blazed away until all the cartridges were exploded.

Then he calmly sent his message once more.

This time it was answered. Well out to sea, another flashing light blinked the reply. Bruce spelled out the message.

*"Your — proposition — acceptable. Sending—boat—with—girl."*

Bruce gave a shout of elation, slid down the roof to the window and hurried through the house.

He was on the beach when a dory was rowed ashore. Irene jumped out and rushed up to him. Another of those overall-clad men stepped close and touched his peaked cap in salute.

Bruce put an arm around Irene's shoulders and faced the man. "You're finished here—do you understand? Ritter and his mob of cut-throats are going to prison. The stores of oil, the generators, and all electrical equipment will be destroyed within an hour. Eight of your men are prisoners in the cave. I'll let them out on condition that you get away from this island and these waters as quickly as possible."

The stranger bowed stiffly and saluted again. He spoke good English, although it was heavily accented.

"You cannot blame us for trying. We accept defeat as readily as we do victory. Ritter instigated the en-

tire idea, seeking only to make money for himself. Had it worked, we should have found the arrangement highly profitable; but it did not. I am sorry we had to hold the girl as hostage. It was Ritter's idea."

Bruce led Irene and the stranger back to the cliff at the north end of the island. He indicated the rope ladder and even retied it firmly.

"Go down there," he ordered. "Call out to your men that Ritter and his killers are to be disarmed. Your men may then file out, take to your boat and—well, I'm glad you're taking it this way. I hope you return safely."

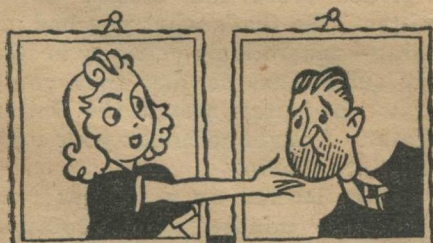
The stranger went down the rope ladder swiftly. He called out orders. The overall-clad men filed out of the cavern, forcing Ritter and his three men before them. Hal Arden, on the ledge below, leveled his rifle.

"What'll I do with 'em, Bruce?" he called out.

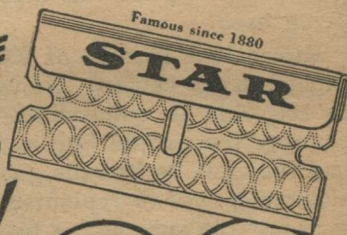
"Hal!" Irene cried. "Hal—you're safe!"

"He's quite all right," Bruce assured her. "Below there, Ritter and his men will climb the ladder. Keep them covered, Hal. If they try any tricks—shoot!"

It required twenty minutes before



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Bruce's work was done. Ritter and his men stood in a row, their hands bound behind their backs, sullen expressions on their faces. Hal grinned broadly as he came up the ladder. Grimly, he and Bruce herded their prisoners back to the big house where Fruchot eyed the procession in amazed perplexity.

"I don't understand," he began.

Bruce pushed him into a chair. "You don't have to, Fruchot, but you very nearly let yourself in for something. You were to be the sucker in these proceedings, though I'll admit I thought you were the head man, for a while. Cooper wanted you to buy this island so if anything happened, he could steer clear of it. Cooper started this whole affair. He died in a manner of his own making."

"The lightning!" Fruchot gasped.

"Sure — man-made lightning," Bruce said. "Cooper was practically broke. Ritter had used the island for hiding liquor during prohibition, and Cooper was his silent partner. That's how Cooper got rich. Anyway, the war in Europe provided a new source of income. Cooper sent Hal Arden here on a ruse. Arden was taken prisoner and forced to set up generators and feed lines from the cavern. He didn't know how that electricity he was making was being used.

Ritter had barrels of Diesel oil cached in the cavern. He was ready to sell this to submarines—to any country that would buy it. If they had the cash, he had the goods. The electricity was to replenish the batteries of the subs and it was just as important as the Diesel oil. Jim Mason got wise, somehow; but before he could do anything, he was taken prisoner and put aboard the sub. I suppose he escaped and swam

ashore only to run into one of Ritter's killers."

"Submarine—Diesel oil—electricity!" Fruchot gasped. "Then it was electricity that killed Cooper?"

Bruce nodded. "Cooper knew what was happening when Jim Mason screamed. He sallied out into the night armed with a steel golf club. Cooper hadn't been on the island since Ritter took over, and he didn't know that high-tension wires had been strung along that row of trees, from the cove straight across to the east side. Cooper's steel club came into contact with the wires and he died instantly. Ritter's men were nearby—also some of those sailors from the sub, perhaps. They stripped the wires down while we carried Cooper back to the house.

"During the night they buried the wires under the sod. Doc Haley went out—wearing cleated shoes. The cleats cut through the sod, hit one of the wires, and he rode the lightning too. I found the wires had been attached to the trees, because a piece of a glass insulator was left behind.

"Our launch was rowed out to sea and scuttled. Then Ritter and his boys tried to rub out the rest of us. They stole the bodies of Cooper and Haley so the real manner of their death would never be known."

Arden arose and walked up to Ritter. "So that's what you had me doing—generating electricity to supply submarines so that they could prowl the waters around the United States. I ought to knock your ugly face into a pulp."

Ritter backed up a step or two. "Wait a minute," he protested shrilly. "This was a swell racket. It still is; there's plenty of dough in it for all of us. Suppose we join, huh? We'll split the take evenly. Why not? Plenty of guys made a

lot of dough out of war profits in 1917. Nobody would suspect. Arden—you're just an electrical engineer without much dough. Fruchot won't mind making some easy money. Bruce—you're just a private dick working for small change—"

Bruce reached into his pocket as he stepped up to Ritter. He opened his fist and exposed a gold badge, incriminated with an eagle.

"I was a private dick," he grinned, "until Uncle Sam decided he had to have a counter-espionage system. That's how I came to work for Cooper. This island was too good a bet as a munitions base, and Cooper was too much in the market for easy money."

Ritter gulped and turned deathly pale. "But . . . but you can't get off the island," he finally managed.

Bruce chuckled softly. "There are several thousand gallons of Diesel oil in the cave, Ritter. It happens to be on the leeward side of the island. Arden can start that oil afire. The flames will be seen for miles. There will be coastguard patrols out here an hour later. Relax, Ritter, you're all done. Cooper is dead. We can't punish him any more. But you and your gorillas murdered Jim Mason. This is United States soil, even if it is three miles off the mainland. You'll die just like Cooper and Doc Haley did. You'll ride the lightning, too."



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# THE MISSING DEAD MAN

by WILLIAM G. BOGART

Barney Penney, detective, was six-foot-three, red-headed and somewhat freckled. He was something that girls turn around and smile at in a crowd. He was in a crowd now—and he was damned hot!

The crowd was jammed up on Pier 15 at the North River; and from beyond a screened-off partition, they watched the docking of the steamship just in from Yarmouth. There had been a little trouble with the docking—delay—and the big detective wiped sweat from his brow with nervous impatience. He elbowed through the throng until he had his nose up against the screen partition. Beyond, he saw the big dock shed where customs inspectors would soon be examining baggage. Also, he recognized Ted Slane, of the customs.

Barney Penney hailed the inspector, was quickly recognized, and shortly the customs man was admitting the towering detective to the cleared space beyond. He queried: "What's up, shamus? You looked all worried."

Barney nodded. "My partner, Judge See, is coming in on this tub."

Slane, the inspector, whistled.

"In that case," he said, "it must be something important. Murder again?"

Barney shook his red-thatched head. "Nope. That little squirt just took himself a vacation. I'm here to meet him." The detective kept watching for the gangplank to be lowered.

The customs man grinned. There

were few officials in New York who did not know of the reputation of two-fisted Barney Penney—who was said to be the toughest dick on the homicide squad—and his little white-haired partner, former Judge See.

Judge See was fondly referred to by Barney as the Professor. Together—and perhaps on account of the fact that the Professor had made criminology his hobby—they had solved a number of tough crime cases. Former Judge See was the brains of the pair; Barney the brawn. Headquarters liked to refer to the two as the "Free-lance Squad." They were usually given a free hand on anything they undertook.

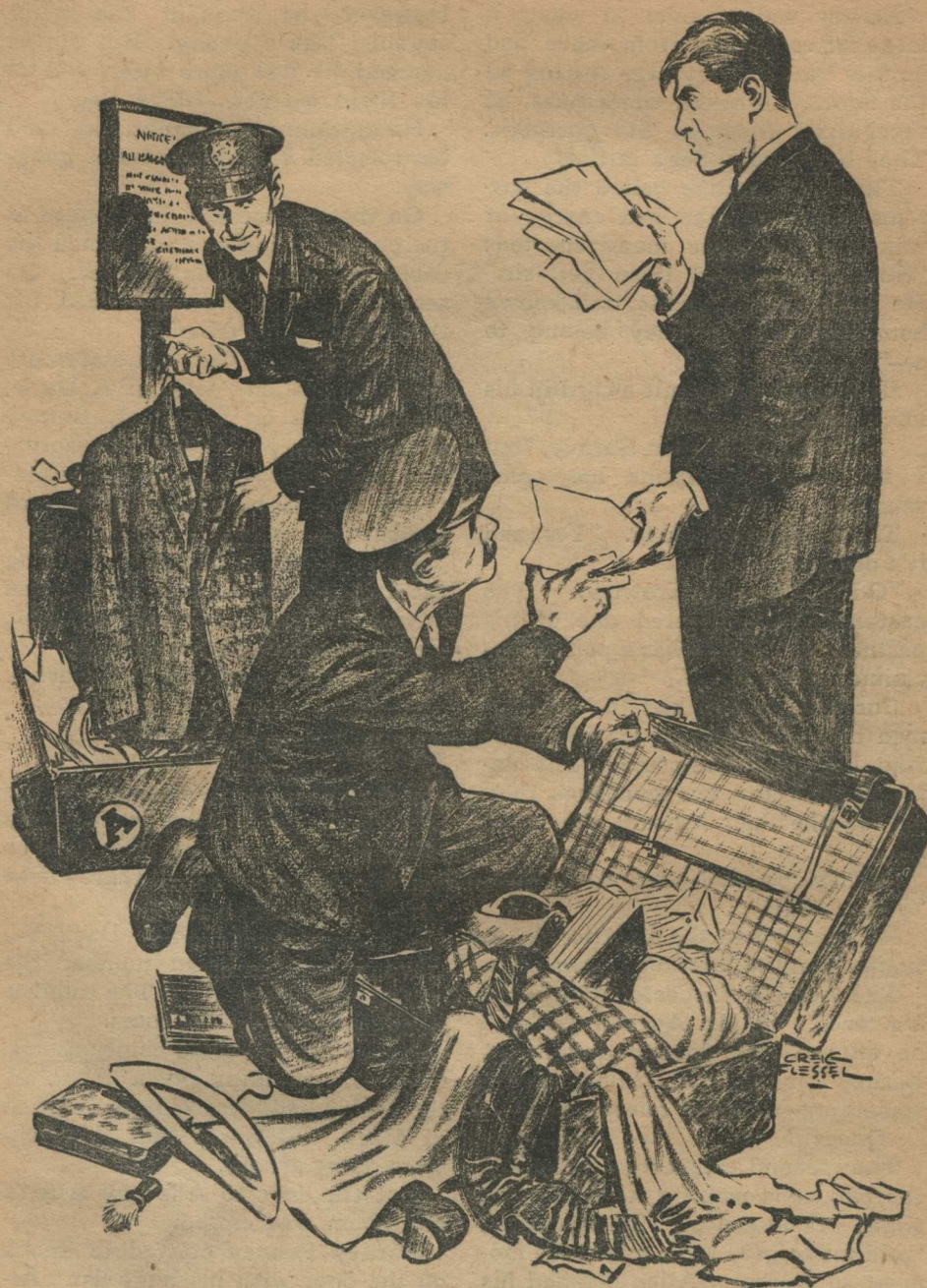
And now the two partners had been separated almost a month, while big Barney had prowled around like a lost mastiff.

Abruptly the customs man excused himself. The gangplank had finally been put down and porters were streaming off the ship with baggage.

Barney stood aside while bags were hurriedly stacked up beneath the various large initials suspended from the rafters. Two-dozen customs men waited. Soon the passengers, themselves, started hurrying down the gangplank.

They kept coming for almost half an hour, while Barney fumed; but there was no sign of his little, bird-like friend. A frown replaced his impatience. The last straggler had left the boat.

Everyone was ashore—and there had been no sign of his elderly, white-haired partner.



A little later, the last passenger had opened his bags, had them O. K.'d, and now had departed. There was no one left on the pier save inspectors, porters and ship's

officers. Barney saw two uniformed cops idling just beyond the exit gates; but then, a couple of patrolmen usually were on hand at every docking.

Barney walked over to where a large letter S hung from above, and he saw the two handbags resting on the floor. Light-tan Gladstones, he recognized them as his partner's. They bore Judge See's initials!

The big detective hailed the customs inspector who had charge of this section. The man reported: "No one's claimed them yet, sir." He had recognized the well-known homicide dick. "They belong to a—"

He started to consult a card in his hand.

"Yes, I know," put in Barney, "but I understand everyone has come ashore?"

The inspector nodded. "Yes, and it's odd, too."

"Odd?" Barney frowned. The customs man indicated one of his partners. "Murphy has a pair of unclaimed grips, also."

Curious, Barney had the customs man take him over to the inspector who had been indicated. The detective saw the two handbags resting on the floor beneath the letter A.

Barney pointed and demanded: "Who's that?"

He referred to the initials: A. A. stamped on the sides of the two bags.

The second inspector consulted his cards. "A Mr. Anthony Allen," he offered. He looked quickly at Barney Penney. "You know, there's something damned queer here!"

"Queer?"

The second inspector indicated the two cops waiting near the exit gates. "Those cops," he explained, "told me to give them a nod the moment an Anthony Allen claimed his luggage. I guess the guy's wanted for something."

Barney Penney's business was homicides; he wouldn't know anything about an Anthony Allen.

However, he thought the name sounded like a phony. But at the moment he was more interested in his little partner, Judge See.

He murmured: "Thanks, pal," and hard-heeled back toward the gangway.

On the quarterdeck, he stopped at the purser's window and learned the cabin number of his partner. On second thought, he also asked for that of Anthony Allen.

He was given the two stateroom numbers. Allen's was on A Deck; his partner's on C. That, Barney thought, was just like his conservative partner—taking a cheaper stateroom, though he could well afford the best.

Barney hurried off, after learning the location of his partner's room. It was forward and down a staircase. He located the room quickly.

The door was open. Barney stared.

The room was deserted!

Barney's thoughts flashed back to the man known only as Anthony Allen. He wondered, thinking of his pal the Professor, if there could be any connection—

He hurried back to A Deck, recalling the stateroom number the purser had given him. The number indicated a large stateroom.

The detective passed empty rooms, the doors standing open. Most of the cabins had already been emptied of linen. Stewards and the help were going ashore.

But the door to Anthony Allen's stateroom was closed.

Barney Penney started to knock on the door with his huge fist. Already a suspicion had entered his thoughts. It would be just like his frail little partner to learn, on ship-board, that one Anthony Allen was wanted by the New York police.

Leave it to the Professor to uncover—

Barney was suddenly tense. His knuckles had barely touched the room door when it swung open beneath the pressure. The detective pushed inside the room.

Obviously it was one of the best staterooms aboard. There were comfortable armchairs, dresser, full-size bed and attractive decorations. An open door showed a private bath. The bed had not been slept in. He moved toward the bathroom.

The well-dressed man was seated in the bathtub. About forty, he had sparse dark-brown hair, ordinary features and was inclined to be a little stout. There was nothing that would distinguish him from thousands of other men who were beyond the young-man stage in life. That is, nothing except one thing.

There was a bullet hole in his ordinary forehead!

A moment later Barney figured, from flexing an arm that protruded over the edge of the dry tub, that the man had been dead since early this morning. It was now a bit past six o'clock in the evening.

Barney bent down, opened the expensively tailored suit coat and started searching through the inside pocket. He found a letter which was addressed:

MR. ANTHONY ALLEN  
c/o GENERAL DELIVERY  
YARMOUTH, NOVA SCOTIA

The envelope had been mailed, from the postmark, in New York City, just one week ago.

It was empty.

Barney frowned, got his big hands beneath the dead man's armpits and tried to get enough purchase on the leaden form to pull it out of the bathtub. By rights, he should have

left the corpse exactly where it was. But Barney Penney was not one to rest on formalities. He preferred to get quick results, and right at the moment he was interested in going through the remainder of the pockets and learning more about Anthony Allen, now deceased.

He had the corpse half from the tub when he sensed the door moving behind him, and he got one brief glimpse of a man with big ears.

The man with the ears immediately went to work on the back of Barney's red-thatched head with a heavy glass water pitcher.

The corpse slipped from the big detective's grasp as the water pitcher connected with the back of Barney Penney's skull. Barney shook his head like a water-soaked dog, then whirled around—to his assailant's amazement.

The red-headed shamus could take it. He liked nothing better than a fight. Getting smashed on the head so unexpectedly, aroused his ire.

He got his huge hands on the other man's shoulders, jerked the fellow toward him, sent a smashing right fist into the big-eared man's heavy features.

Barney, in turn, also got a surprise.

The fellow's face wasn't there to stop the blow. Instead, a heavy fist sank into the tall detective's midriff, and he was driven backward against the tile wall. His attacker came leaping after the fist.

The big-eared man was over six feet. For a big man, he was fast. He wasn't over twenty-five, Barney figured swiftly.

Barney Penney weaved and ducked and swore. He grappled time after time for the young man's dodging form, only to feel another fist clip his jaw. And the detective never

thought of using a gun where his fists would do, instead. Besides, since he had merely planned on meeting his small partner tonight, he was carrying no weapon.

The water pitcher that had cracked at the first blow on Barney's head, now lay in broken fragments on the tile floor. The detective stepped on a section of the broken glass, slipped, doubled forward.

And the big-eared man straightened him with an uppercut that rattled his teeth. It was the first blow that had really jarred the big detective.

Barney snorted, tore into the stranger and started hammering him dizzy against the bathroom door. There was no spoken word. The two fought furiously, grimly.

The man doubled, then, cleverly, straightened and drove his knee into Barney's stomach.

But the detective knew all the tricks. He was practically clear of the punch. His massive arm reached out, grabbed the other man by the collar and dragged him toward him. A short right closed the assailant's eye. Then the other eye. It suddenly looked as if the big-eared man were going to enjoy a lot of sleep. Because he fell down and lay still.

The big redhead dusted off his hands, pulled a towel from the rack, wet it, then wiped the smear of blood from his face. Barney Penney never wore a hat; so he straightened his rumpled hair as best he could, pulled up his tie, took one brief glimpse of the two men he now had on his hands. Then he headed back toward the purser's office.

There, he raised various kinds of hell because no one could explain about his partner's disappearance. He was informed that Judge See had been observed still on the boat not

long before landing time. The purser, himself, had seen him. He could not explain why the professor had not been on the pier to claim his baggage.

Barney told him about the dead man in the stateroom on A Deck. The detective put through a call to headquarters and ordered the morgue wagon; then he returned with the purser and others to the dead man's cabin. Also, Barney figured that perhaps his unconscious assailant could explain something about the death, of one Anthony Allen.

But the man of the big ears wasn't going to explain anything.

He had disappeared!

Up until that moment, Barney had said nothing to the purser about his unknown assailant. And when the detective whirled, now, to dash out of the room, the others stared after him as though he were crazy.

But Barney had an idea. This A Deck was level with the top of the pier roof. The big detective cut through a passageway, out onto the open deck and over to the railing of the big ship.

And he was just in time to observe a racing figure, far toward the front of the pier roof. From ship's railing to roof was only a leap of three or four feet. Barney quickly cleared the space and headed through the gathering gloom of night.

When he reached the spot where he had last seen the running figure, he saw the ladder down which the man must have scurried. He leaned over the roof edge.

Barney saw someone clear the bottom of the long ladder and leap toward a small coupé, parked some distance away from the entrance to the pier. The machine took off like a frightened hare, and it was just

dark enough so that the detective could not distinguish the rear license plate.

Barney growled something beneath his breath, returned to the dead man's cabin and explained about the unconscious man he had left there. Obviously the big-eared fellow had better recuperating powers than Barney had figured on. He ordered the purser to wait until the arrival of the police.

Barney himself returned to the pier shed where he had seen the two bags that belonged to a dead man named Anthony Allen.

The customs men, to whom Barney had previously talked, were still there. The red-headed detective told about dead Anthony Allen.

The customs men stared.

"I want to take a look inside his bags," rapped Barney.

That seemed to be all right with the two officials. The bags were flung open and the detective started pawing through Anthony Allen's belongings.

There were shirts, ties, underwear, socks, two custom-tailored suits. There were a lot of other things that only a man could use. But there wasn't a thing that could further identify Anthony Allen.

The letters written on powder-blue stationery, and tied with blue ribbon, were in the very bottom of the second grip. Barney started glancing through them quickly. His eyes widened, and he passed a couple of the notes to the customs men.

He commented: "Girl loves boy—or did!"

The letters had all been addressed: "Dearest," and ended with the signature, "Alice." There were no envelopes.

Barney growled: "Why the hell couldn't she have said something

about the kind of work he did, or where he lived? There isn't a thing—"

One of the inspectors said: "Lived? Do you want to know where this man lived?"

"Naturally!"

The inspector pulled a card from his pocket. Barney recognized it as one he had consulted earlier. Explaining, "They fill in these cards before the boat docks in New York," the customs man handed the card to the detective.

Barney made a notation of the apartment-house number. It was a street uptown in the Seventies, in Manhattan. Then he hurried out.

Just outside the pier entrance, he bumped into one of the two uniformed cops he had seen earlier. The officer was talking to one of the ship's officers, but turned as the well-known detective approached him.

"What did you guys have on this Anthony Allen?" Barney asked. "What's his record?"

The officer shrugged. "The way I get it, he was just supposed to be picked up for questioning. I don't know a thing about the bird."

"Nothing in the rogues' gallery? No prints?"

The cop shook his head. "Not a blasted thing. Somebody must have just made a complaint, and knew he was coming in on this boat. So we just had orders to pick up a guy by that name?"

"Thanks," Barney said and strode toward his dilapidated flivver.

The red-headed detective was still worried about his little partner, but at the moment explanation as to his pal's whereabouts appeared to be a complete mystery. The only thing Barney had was the address of a dead man; so his plodding brain told him to start with what he had. He

headed his rattling heap toward the Express Highway entrance at Canal Street.

The apartment house was a quiet-looking building on a respectable side street. It was seven stories high, Barney noted as he swung his big frame out of his car. A moment later, the deserted, deep-carpeted lobby told him that it was a fairly high-class place.

Barney had gained admittance through the simple feat of ringing the superintendent's bell, waiting for the buzzer to sound, and then slipping quietly toward the staircase. By the time the superintendent got up here from the basement, he would think some kid had been fooling around with the bells.

In the vestibule, Barney had noted that Anthony Allen's apartment was on the top floor. Back at the pier, he had figured the name was a phony. But now he knew that there was a dead man named Anthony Allen.

On the top floor, the detective noticed that Anthony Allen's apartment ran the entire length of one side of the hallway. And at the rear of the hall was a window. He moved that way.

A fire escape was outside, with a platform that also passed a window at the back of the dead man's apartment. Barney slipped out into the darkness, edged quietly along the iron platform and found himself outside a kitchen window.

The window was open a crack from the top. The detective thought nothing of that, since it had been probably overlooked when the apartment was shut up. Carefully, he pressed his hard fingers against the glass of the lower sash and worked it up from the sill. A moment later he was swinging into the room.

In the kitchen, he stood listening

a moment. There was no sound. Vague night light from outside gave him a partial picture of location of chairs and kitchen table. He stepped around them and reached a closed swinging door on the far side of the room.

The swinging door smashed him in his blocky, hard face!

Barney staggered backward with pain streaking through his face. But at the same time, he grabbed the door edge with one hand and the tall man who was coming through the opening with the other. Light, dim light from the next room gave the detective one brief view of the fellow's face. It was the guy with the ears!

Barney Penney growled an oath, sank his fists into the man's coat collar and dragged him farther into the kitchen. He stumbled over a chair. The tall man shoved. They went into a sprawl over the kitchen table. Wooden legs of the thing cracked and the table became kindling wood beneath Barney's broad, solid back.

Even as the two men fell, the detective saw the blur of a gun leaping into his assailant's fist. Swiftly, his right fist shot out, twisted the man's gun wrist, and a split second later he held the weapon poised above the other man's head. He was ready to bring the gun down in a slashing blow.

Barney snorted, "And now, fella—"

Someone in the adjoining room screamed. It was a girl's terrified cry.

For just a moment Barney, now on his feet, stared toward the doorway. He gulped.

The girl was about five-foot-two, blond, and with the kind of innocent blue eyes that made guys like Barney Penney wish they had been born

handsome. Light in the other room outlined her trim figure.

A soft breeze swept the back of the detective's thick neck. He remembered his big-eared assailant. He spun—to see the curtains fluttering at the kitchen window!

Barney whipped that way, stuck his head out the open window and saw his quarry leaping down the fire escape a good two floors below. He raised the captured gun in his fist. And then paused, frowning.

For down below, in a small yard of an adjoining building, was the summer garden of a neighborhood restaurant. People were seated there drinking beer, cooling off. To fire at the escaping man meant endangering other lives. There was a radio playing loud enough in the beer garden to cover sound of the big-eared fellow's running steps down the fire escape.

Barney's brain worked methodically. It was quite likely that the fellow had his coupé parked nearby. In all probability he would escape before Barney could get down the fire escape. Whereas, there was the girl in the other room, and, in the detective's opinion, she must have a direct connection with the dead Anthony Allen.

Barney remembered the letters found in the dead man's handbags. That girl must be—Alice!

The big detective whirled back through the kitchen, into the adjoining room. It was a nicely furnished living room. Everything seemed to be in perfect order save a small desk which had recently been rifled. Papers were strewn all over the place.

One other thing was out of order—the hall door. It was standing wide open, and must have been the way the girl had escaped.

Barney Penney spun that way,

along the hallway and made a dash for the stairs. He almost bowled over the two people coming up the steps.

His partner, little white-haired Judge See, had just reached the top step. He held the blue-eyed, blond girl's arm. He shook his head sadly at sight of Barney's disheveled appearance and exclaimed:

"Gracious me, Barney, will you ever learn? You shouldn't leap after pretty, young ladies!"

The three of them went back into the apartment.

Standing beside towering Barney Penney, little Judge See appeared like a white-haired rooster. A nice kind of rooster. It was hard to tell whether the Professor—as Barney called his partner—was fifty or seventy. His eyes were dark and bright. Also, he had one of the keenest brains in the detective division. Crime was his hobby, for he had once been a famous judge on the New York bench.

The blue-eyed girl still looked scared. Barney rapped out:

"This dame was looking for some letters. She knows all about a dead guy named Anthony Allen!" He indicated the disarranged desk. "You can see where—"

The Professor nodded somberly. "Yes, Barney. And now will you please keep quiet a moment?"

The big, hard-boiled detective shrugged.

His little partner talked quietly to the blue-eyed girl. Barney watched suspiciously. Those innocent blue eyes had caught him napping a little while ago; they weren't going to mislead him again!

The Professor talked on swiftly, in a low voice. His tone was reassuring to the girl. Once, when he asked Barney to step out of the room

for a moment, the big detective looked like he were going to explode with questions. Too, he appeared as if he wanted to fight somebody.

When Barney returned, he blurted: "Look, pal, bet you *she* killed him!"

His small partner asked: "You mean Anthony Allen?"

Barney gave a start. How in the world his pal found out things so swiftly—

Suddenly remembering something else, he put in quickly, "Say, where were *you* at the pier?"

The Professor spoke patiently. He looked up at Barney. "How in the world could this poor child kill a man when she wasn't even on the boat? Yes, I happen to know about the dead man. But there's more to this than you think, Barney. That's why I left the boat at Hell Gate. I wanted to get up here as quickly as I could. But the launch ran out of gas and we were delayed."

"Launch?" Barney didn't understand.

"An immigration man always boards that boat from Nova Scotia at Hell Gate, up in the East River. I happen to know him; so I got off on the launch that he arrived in. I just reached here in time to bump into this very lovely young lady that you were chasing through hallways!"

Barney winced. "Well, I still think she knows something about the guy's murder."

The Professor turned to the blond girl and said quietly: "You might tell him, my dear. Gracious me, yes; tell him!" He glanced back at Barney. "This girl's name is Alice McKee. She's from Tulsa."

The girl said hesitantly: "I thought I was in love with Anthony. He . . . he was out home once to buy an oil well which I owned. But,

somehow, the deal fell through. We . . . we saw a lot of each other, and we were going to get married. I wrote him some letters—"

Barney nodded quickly. "I'll say!" He remembered the letters he had found in the handbags. "And you were in his apartment tonight trying to find those letters. Why?"

"Because . . . because Anthony was a cad. I learned, later, that he had promised to marry another girl out home. And so I came here to get my letters back."

"How did you get in here?" Barney demanded.

"I told the building superintendent about it. For five dollars, he let me in."

Barney murmured, "Well, I'll be damned!"

He looked at his small partner. "Then who *did* kill Allen?"

His small partner shrugged. "A number of people would have liked to kill the rascal. He was quite a man with the ladies. In most cases he got money out of them by mail or otherwise. His racket, if you like, was blackmail. The trouble is with these kind of cases, the women involved never like to prefer charges. But someone did; so Anthony Allen was ordered picked up."

Barney looked at the blue-eyed girl. "Was it you?"

Alice shook her head.

The Professor offered: "I received a wire from headquarters, while I was on the boat on the overnight trip from Yarmouth. Some woman down South made the complaint. She had never seen Allen, but apparently she had been swindled by mail too."

Barney frowned. "Well, all right," he said, "maybe the guy was a heel. But it's still murder—and

that's our business. What are we going to do about it?"

The Professor smiled patiently. "I think we might try attending the funeral of a dead man, Barney. That's about our only lead. I don't think we're going to learn another thing, until then."

Barney stared. "Funeral? But how in the devil—" He recalled something else. "And what about a guy who escaped from here to-night?"

His partner said patiently: "Barney, I wouldn't worry about that young man. For once, you weren't very observing. Also, have you ever heard about an arsonist returning to the scene of the fire which he has set?"

Things were coming too fast for the red-headed shamus to absorb all at once. But he said: "Yeah, sure. But what has that to do—"

"You might think about that for a while," said the Professor, and he led the way out.

But Barney Penney wasn't the type to sit around thinking. He preferred action. And during the next twenty-four hours he did a lot of running around. He questioned the building superintendent. He talked to people who lived in the apartment house.

No one knew much about Anthony Allen or his activities. The man had been smart enough to conduct the bulk of his questionable business by mail.

At headquarters, he also learned that Allen had been clever enough to avoid ever having been picked up for questioning. Apparently he had no friends or relatives.

But one peculiar thing happened. Allen must have had one person who thought an awful lot of him.

For a large donation was received

by mail, from someone who signed no name, requesting that Anthony Allen be given a decent funeral. There was sufficient money—it was a registered letter containing cash—for plenty of flowers and a nice hearse and casket. There was even the request that the body be buried from a fairly high-class funeral home—and thence be taken to potter's field.

Barney Penney was outside the funeral home an hour before the funeral was to start. But he had first gone inside the place to look at the man in the casket.

It was Anthony Allen, all right. The same plain-featured, ordinary-looking man he had found in the bathtub.

It was a cockeyed kind of funeral, the big detective thought. No one arrived to pay last respects to the deceased. And Barney had sort of figured that the one who had sent the money might be a woman. He watched for a veiled lady. And saw none.

Outside the home he watched for little Judge See. His partner had promised to be here, but even when they had started to carry out the casket his little partner had not appeared.

A small crowd gathered. The morbidly curious who like to watch any kind of funeral—kids, bums and housewives with shopping baskets on their arms. Two dogs scurried around, almost getting beneath Barney's feet. Everyone watched silently as the casket was brought out and slid into the hearse.

And still there was no sign of the Professor. Barney sighed and started to turn away, to return to his flivver. The hearse—the one-car funeral—was already slowly moving down the street.

And so was the car—the small

dark sedan with the man at the wheel. Barney suddenly was staring. In fact, he gulped. For the man at the wheel, believing himself unobserved, was grinning!

The car picked up speed, was swiftly too far away for the big detective to hail the driver. Barney leaped back to where his own car was parked.

Just as he was swinging his heap down the street, a car horn blew behind him. But Barney did not take time to look, for the small sedan ahead had already reached the far corner. It had swung left—and the hearse had gone to the right.

Barney followed the small sedan. The big detective's eyes were still wide; he couldn't believe what he had seen. And yet—

At the corner, he noted that the sedan had suddenly put on a burst of speed! The route led uptown, across side streets, in and out of heavy traffic. Barney had to nick two fenders in order to keep the other car in sight. For the moment, he was merely interested in following the first car.

Abruptly the small sedan swung right at Third Avenue and headed downtown beneath the Elevated. Barney managed to trail the other car to Twenty-third Street. The section of cheap rooming houses and small hotels down here was nothing to brag about.

The detective almost passed the small sedan before he saw it parked before the small commercial hotel. The sedan was deserted.

Barney parked, hurried into the hotel, looked around briefly, then moved toward the desk. He gave the sallow-faced young clerk a view of his badge and said sharply: "I want to see the man who just came in from that small sedan parked out front." He described his quarry.

"And don't try to give me any run-around!"

The clerk looked worried enough at sight of the detective's towering form to show that he wasn't going to lie.

"That's Mr. Royal," he said. "Room 303. Shall I call?"

Barney rapped: "No!" and headed for the stairs. He took them two at a time, not waiting for the elevator which, he had noticed, was on a call.

Barney located Room 303 after losing a moment or so in searching through the wrong wing of the hallway. He rapped on the door.

There was a short, taut silence; then a man's voice said: "Come in."

Barney barged into the room, his hand moving toward his hip holster, for today he was carrying a gun.

But the man standing across the room already had his gun in his hand. He smiled tightly and snapped: "I thought I was followed down here!"

The man was of medium build, ordinary in appearance—but with peculiar pale eyes that were now deadly.

He fired the moment big Barney was inside the room.

But the detective, upon entering, had flung himself sideways in the split second of crossing the threshold. The shot tugged at his sleeve. His own gun was now in his big fist.

Barney growled: "I hate like hell to drill you, rat. It'll be more fun watching you squirm at headquarters. Think it over."

They stood there, facing each other across the room, each with a gun in his hand.

In one fleeting glimpse, Barney had seen the open, packed bags on the bed. They had been all ready to lock up.

But this man—this gunman who

had grinned at a corpse's funeral—didn't seem to be worrying about the luggage now. He backed across the room, still keeping Barney covered, until he was close to a door that apparently led to an adjoining room. The door was open.

Barney knew that the man had been clever enough to rent these connecting rooms. He had a neat way of slipping out while others might be attracted to the entrance to Room 303.

The detective tensed. He knew, instinctively, that the other planned to blast him down at the last moment, then try for an escape. It was either one of them, and the man was willing to risk the chance.

Barney watched the other man's cold, pale eyes. His own finger started to tighten on the trigger—

The expression on the red-headed detective's face never changed when he saw little Judge See step up behind the gunman from the adjoining room and silently swing the gun that he gripped tightly in his small fist.

The pale-eyed man went down in a heap. The Professor stepped around the sprawled form and into the room. He looked from the unconscious figure to Barney's now surprised face.

"Well, mercy me, Barney!" he exclaimed. "You're so impetuous. He might have killed you!"

Barney sighed, put away his gun and stepped toward a wall phone. When the clerk answered, he ordered: "Send a couple of cops up here."

Then he looked at his little white-haired partner. "How did you get here?"

"We were in a cab just behind you when you pulled away from that funeral home. We had a very good driver, Barney, and he managed to

trail you. I figured you might dash right up here and get into trouble; so I learned about this connecting room." He gave a sigh of relief. "Mercy, me! It's a good thing I did!"

Barney grinned sheepishly. Then he jerked his hand toward the unconscious man. "I don't get this. But that bird was happy as hell at seeing a corpse going to a funeral. Bet you he killed Anthony Allen—"

But the Professor was shaking his white head. "No, Barney. You've made a slight error. *This* is Anthony Allen!"

Judge See indicated the unconscious figure. Barney stared. His little partner called: "Alice," and the small, blond girl came in from the next room.

"Is that him?" The Professor asked the wide-eyed girl.

Alice took one look at the sprawled figure. Her innocent blue eyes were frightened. "Yes!" she exclaimed. "That's Anthony!"

Barney said: "What the—"

"You see, Barney," the Professor said, "this Anthony Allen skipped up to Canada to get away from things for a while. Some of his mail love affairs were catching up with him. But he couldn't very well work his racket from another country, and simply had to get back."

"But—"

"No one knew him. He had never been booked at headquarters. He realized that any man on that boat could have been Anthony Allen, for there's little time for identities to become established on only an overnight trip. So he picked a man who was traveling alone, who was apparently unknown to anyone on shipboard—and murdered him! The dead man would become Allen, and Anthony Allen himself would step ashore and be a safe individual."

The Professor spread his hands. "It was so simple. Allen would pay for his own funeral. He would continue his business under another name. The police would drop their search for him."

"But how did you—" Barney started.

"It just happened," said the Professor, "that late that night, on ship-board, I picked up an acquaintance with a man named Gordon Brown. The poor fellow looked so all alone that I felt sorry for him. The next morning, in his cabin, I found him—dead! It wasn't until we were almost into New York that I learned from headquarters about one Anthony Allen. But I had no description—only an address—and figured on beating Allen to his Manhattan apartment."

Barney began to see light. He indicated the handbags on the bed. "Then these things are—"

"Poor Gordon Brown's," explained the Professor. For proof, he rummaged swiftly through the grips. Shortly he was holding a few letters in his hand. It only took a glance to see that they were letters belonging to Gordon Brown.

They were interrupted by the arrival of a patrolman and a police sergeant. Barney ordered the unconscious man, Anthony Allen, taken to headquarters. He stated

that they would be along shortly. The hand baggage was sent, also.

To his partner, Barney said: "That crack you made about a fire bug watching his own fire—"

The Professor smiled. "I kind of thought Allen would be around to see his own funeral. Sorry we were a little late. Shall we go?"

Barney was acutely aware of Alice, of her innocent blue eyes and her sort of helpless, wide gaze. He murmured as they went downstairs: "Guess I owe you an apology, or—"

He stopped short in the midst of that, looked sharply at the girl and demanded, "But, say? Who was that big-eared bird at the apartment who—"

The Professor interrupted with: "Wait a moment." He led the way out to the street. The man with the big ears, Barney saw with a start, was seated in the rear of the cab parked at the curb.

"And *he's* my brother," Alice said. "He was trying to help me. He had heard about this Anthony Allen and—"

Barney grinned good-naturedly. He took the blond girl's slender arm.

"Look, angel, how about you and me having a cup of coffee?"

As he looked down at the girl, those large blue eyes sort of got him.

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# BULLET JOE'S LAST GAME

by GEORGE ALLAN MOFFATT

Patrolman Danny Carson walked down Troost Avenue, twirling his police club with the deft skill of a band leader. It was three o'clock in the afternoon and the air was warm and pleasant. So was Danny's humor and frame of mind.

The uniform he wore was new, and the buttons shone with a dazzling brightness. It was the first day for him to wear his service uniform. And the fact that he, a rookie cop, was wearing it on Troost Avenue was something to make him throw his head high with pride.

Many older men in the service would have been proud of this beat. It was in one of the most important business sections of the city, a section of small jewelry shops and stores.

Danny had been honor student of his cadet class, and that fact had gotten him that beat as his first as-

signment. As he walked down the avenue, he tried to remember the hundred things that a patrolman is supposed to know and do.

He remembered the first diction of his school: courtesy and giving the



helping hand to the old and the poor and the children. The commissioner was strong for courtesy in the force, and the warmth of the afternoon and the brightness of the sun seemed to infuse Danny with an ever-abundance of this qualification.

He passed a newsstand. The old lady standing behind the counter waved at him and said: "Sure, and it's a fine-lookin' lad we have on the avenue, now—a fine-lookin' young cop."

Danny waved back a pleasant answer and felt better. He wondered what his first job would be. He wondered if—

His wondering stopped with a startling abruptness. In fact, everything in his mind stopped with the same abruptness. It seemed to him that a cannon ball had hit him full in the stomach.

It knocked his breath out of his lungs and it doubled him up something like a jackknife. When he managed to undo himself and catch his breath, he was staring at a man crawling to his feet on the sidewalk in front of him.

Danny's idea of courtesy left him with the impact of that man's body against his stomach, but the man was not the type that engendered a feeling of anger.

He wasn't big; yet he wasn't small. He was commonplace-looking, except that Danny never remembered seeing a man quite as frightened as he was.

"Better look where you're going," Danny said a little angrily. "You might hit a building sometime, and if you did—"

"I'm . . . I'm sorry," the man said in a tremulous voice, "but it's a boy—a ten-pound boy. I'm going to the hospital, and I want to catch that street car."

There was a ten-pound boy in Danny's house. The thrill of hearing "it's a ten-pound boy" caused him to forget all his anger against the man that had bumped into him.

The street car had stopped and was starting again. Danny ran out in the avenue, yelled at the street-car motorman, and the car stopped. Danny proudly helped the new father on the trolley.

Then Danny started walking down the street again, feeling a deep sympathy for the new father. He didn't look around at the street car. If he had, he would have seen the new father jump off the trolley at the end of the next block and disappear down a side street!

By the time the new father had made his getaway, Danny was losing pretty much of the feeling of pride in his first act as a policeman. He saw a crowd running down the street where the man had come racing around the corner.

He heard the wail of a radio car; then in the next second it seemed as if radio cars were coming from all directions. Danny felt a funny sensation at the pit of his stomach.

There was a crowd around the door of a jewelry store halfway down the block. The police radio cars were racing for that store with the speed and efficiency of modern police methods.

Danny started to run for the store. As he did, it dawned on him that the man that hit him had come from that direction. When Danny got to the store and wedged his way through the crowd, he heard a man in the store yelling.

"The killer got away," he was screaming at the crowd, "He went around the corner of Dallas and Troost."

"Who got away?" Danny de-

manded of him. "And who was killed?"

The man, an old and gray-haired clerk, pointed inside the jewelry store. Danny saw what he was pointing at, and every part of the rookies's body went numb.

A man lay stretched out on the floor. There was a pool of blood under his head. The man was dead!

Detectives were pushing their way through the crowd. Other detectives were yelling to the crowd to get back. A big car stopped at the curb. Danny gulped. Commissioner Davis was getting out of the car and Chief Inspector Walton was with him.

Inspector Walton, head of the homicide squad, looked around the store and said: "Daylight stick-up! The killer got the safe open and then killed Philip Marden, who had one of the most valuable collections of diamonds on this street."

"Mr. Marden sent me to the bank," the gray-haired clerk said to the inspector. "I just got back and I found Mr. Marden here dead—murdered . . . murdered—"

Commissioner Davis stopped the old clerk's hysterical description of finding Mr. Marden dead. Then the commissioner said to Danny: "All right, Carson. You were on this

beat. What did you see?"

The sensation at the pit of Danny's stomach turned to one of sickening nausea. He saw men in the crowd that had seen him help the killer to get on the street car.

"I don't exactly know what happened, commissioner," Danny explained. "I was walking down Troost Avenue and a man bumped into me. He came from this direction. He looked frightened and then said something about a ten-pound baby boy. I helped him on the street car—"

Commissioner Davis's red face got redder. "You *helped* the killer escape?" His voice was a hoarse whisper.

"I didn't know what had happened," Danny said weakly. "I only remembered that you have taught us always to be courteous on our beats."

"Courteous!" the commissioner found his voice with a roar. "Courteous to a cold-blooded killer. Report to my office at once, Carson."

An hour later Danny stumbled out of the commissioner's office. His brain was as numb as his body. In that hour, the newspapers had plastered the town with a sensational story of the daylight robbery and grilling. And they included the de-



tail about Danny helping the killer get on the street car.

They did more! They ran front-page box editorials, entitled: "Courtesy to Killers," and ribbed the commissioner about teaching his policeman to be courteous to the point of letting killers get away.

The editorials brought Commissioner Davis close to a stroke of apoplexy. He said to Danny: "Go home and take off that uniform, and don't put it back on until you hear from me—and that may be never."

Danny knew it most likely would be never. The latest daylight robbery and murder and the escape of the killer at the hands of a member of the police department would be a blow that the commissioner might not weather.

Only one thought raced through Danny's mind. What did that man look like? He remembered a sharp-featured face and shifty eyes. In the excitement of the collision and the excitement of the ten-pound baby boy, Danny hadn't paid much attention to the killer.

His struggle to remember continued as he walked toward his home in a daze. Home! It was a small house that he and Edith, his wife, had moved into when he was assigned to Troost Avenue. Edith would be working on the curtains and Danny, Jr., the two-months-old, ten-pound baby, would be in his crib.

On his way he turned into a small restaurant, went to a lone table, and ordered a cup of coffee.

He sat with his hands in front of him. He opened them, palms up, a habit he had when he sat at a table. Something on his palm, at the base of the thumb, caught his attention.

It was a streak of red. Blood! The thought caused Danny to feel sick. The blood of old Philip Mar-

den, who had been murdered.

But as he looked at it, it seemed too faint a streak for blood. It seemed more a red discoloration of his skin, rather than a stain of any kind. He touched it with the forefinger of his right hand. A little of it came off on his finger, an amount so small that he could barely see it.

The waiter brought the coffee, sat it in front of him and walked away. Danny didn't touch the coffee. He was staring at his right forefinger. He put it to his tongue.

He gave a gasp of surprise and looked again at the streak of red on his left palm.

His left palm!

He jumped up, tossed a nickel on the table, and rushed out of the restaurant. He didn't continue on his way home. He hailed a taxi and ordered the driver to get him to police headquarters as fast as possible.

At headquarters, he rushed up to the second floor to the criminal laboratory. Sergeant Manning was working at a long white table. He looked up at Danny and said: "Tough break, kid; it could happen to any of us—"

"Tell me what this red streak on my palm is," Danny was too excited to listen to the sergeant's words of kindness.

Sergeant Manning looked at the streak of red. He took a cloth, dipped it in a white solution and then placed the cloth on a glass.

"What's all the excitement, Danny," he said. "And where did you get this stuff on your hand?"

"Tell me what it's made of," Danny said, "and I'll tell you later how I came to get it."

It took the sergeant about fifteen minutes to make the different tests, and when he had finished, he said: "Just plain salt and resin mixed with

a red alkali substance. What's it all about?"

Danny didn't answer. "I'll explain later," he said as he rushed out of the laboratory.

But in the corridor, he came to a skidding stop. Commissioner Davis was walking toward him, and the commissioner's face got redder when he saw Danny.

"Carson!" the commissioner roared at him. "I told you to go home and take that uniform off. If I see you again with it on, I'll—"

"I'm going home," Danny interrupted. "And I'm going to take my uniform off. I'm going to play Ping-pong until you tell me to put the uniform back on."

"Ping-pong!" The commissioner was too angry to roar these two words.

The town had been in the Ping-pong craze for over a year and Danny was the champion player of the department. Commissioner Davis had often expressed his disgust for the game and his men that spent their time playing it.

Danny didn't wait for the commissioner to vent his rising fury out on him. He hurried out of headquarters building and hailed another taxi and went home.

Edith was on a chair, fixing the new curtains, when Danny rushed into the house.

"Danny!" she cried as she jumped off the chair. "What has happened?"

Danny gulped. He had forgotten that he had to tell Edith. "Nothing, honey," he stammered. "Nothing important. I'm going to work on an important case tonight, and I'm going to the cellar."

He passed Danny, Jr.'s crib as he did; Danny didn't feel kindly to Danny, Jr. just then. If Danny, Jr. hadn't been a ten-pound baby, the killer might not have gotten away.

Then Danny grinned at his son, waved at him and said: "We'll get him—both of us together will get him."

The cellar of the house was large, and Danny had planned it for a recreation place for himself and Danny, Jr. There was a Ping-pong table that hadn't been set up.

But Danny wasn't interested in the Ping-pong table. He went to a box and began pulling books out. He emptied that box and then a barrel and in the bottom of that barrel was a pamphlet.

He sat down on a box and read this pamphlet through. When he had finished, he rushed up to his room, changed into his civilian clothes and left the house without an explanation to Edith.

An hour later night had fallen over the city. Danny walked down a main avenue, with his hat pulled down over his forehead. He walked quickly. He came to a newly opened recreation parlor. The first floor was taken up with the usual marble games and in one corner were chess and checker tables.

Danny went upstairs. Billiard tables were in one end of the long room and the Ping-pong tables were in the other end. Danny went to the floor manager. The manager knew Danny as the champion Ping-pong player of the police department and he said: "Well, Carson, are you playing tonight?"

"Not tonight," Danny answered. "I'm on duty. I want to look at your records, and I want you to answer some questions."

Danny left that recreation parlor a half-hour later. He went to another recreation hall and spent a half-hour there; then he went to another.

At eleven o'clock, he was in a section of the city near the river, a sec-

tion of cheap saloons and dives. In his pocket was paper with a list of five men. He had checked on three of these.

He entered a cellar saloon and dive, one famous for its notorious characters. He kept his hat pulled down over his forehead as he walked through smoke-filled air to a side table.

A man sat there. He was small, with a thin face and shifty eyes. Danny sat down.

"No. 14 River Street," the man whispered. "Be careful because Bullet Joe is a bad hombre and shoots to kill."

Danny grunted: "Thanks, Smoky, for the information. I'll take a drink and breeze. Nobody knows me here."

A waiter came over to the table, and Danny ordered a drink. The waiter brought a glass of fire whiskey. Danny passed the glass over to Smoky Allen, a small-time crook. Danny had once done Smoky a favor and the hood had never forgotten it.

Smoky gulped the glass of liquor down. Danny left a dollar bill on the table, got up and left the dive. He knew none of the men there would know him because he had been on the force only a day.

Outside, he examined the Police Positive in his coat pocket, looked up and down the street, and then started to the right for River Street.

Ten minutes later, he moved through the murky darkness of an alley behind the row of dilapidated old houses on the first block of River Street. He had tabbed No. 14 as being the second one from the corner, but he took no chance of entering the house from the front.

He knew that swift death lurked inside all those old houses in that block. They were the hide-outs for

crooks that operated from that section. The ringing of a doorbell was a signal of warning that spread all over the house, and the crooks were given time to escape through the secret doorways.

Danny stopped at the broken fence that separated the rear yard of No. 14 from the alley. Then he crawled through a hole in that fence, darted across the yard and stopped beside the dividing fence in a crouching position. He waited a full minute, and no sound came from the rear of the house.

Then he made another rush through the darkness and stopped near the rear door of the house. The wall loomed above him and from the windows came no lights. Danny knew that meant nothing. The houses on River Street had been dubbed "blackouts" by the police because the crooks hiding there kept the windows covered with blankets.

Danny's hand darted for the gun in his pocket. His face was grim and set. He knew that once inside that house, his chance were ten to one against his getting out alive.

Yet, he knew that if he called headquarters and a riot squad came down with sirens shrieking, that house would be empty when the cops broke in. That was the old story at headquarters about the blackout houses on River Street.

Danny remained in a crouching position, his right shoulder almost touching the rear door. He didn't try this door because he knew it would be locked. It was the rear door that was used most at this house and it would open in a few minutes as some crook would sneak out.

He waited five minutes. His muscles were strained and sore. Once he had heard a vague sound on the other side of the door, but this sound had ceased.

Another minute passed and—the knob of the door turned. Danny could not see it clearly but he could hear it. The door opened and a man's form got halfway outside the door.

Then Danny moved! He moved with the speed of a springing tiger. His gun crashed down on the head of the man that had stepped halfway out of the door. He went down with a muffled groan.

Danny grabbed his right leg, pulled him out of the door and leaped through the threshold. He was in a narrow, poorly lighted hallway. No sounds came from that hall. No sounds came from the dark and silent house.

Danny came to the bottom of the stairs that led to the first floor. He covered the first two steps in one long stride.

Behind him he heard the man he had hit on the head yelling weakly. The voice carried through the hallway, and before Danny could get up the fourth step, the whole house had come to life, with men running and yelling!

Three men came hurtling down the stairs at Danny. He met their attack by dropping down on his knees and charging up the stairs almost on his stomach. His neck and shoulders hit the ankles of the two men and sent them somersaulting to the bottom of the stairs!

Danny jumped to his feet, sent his right out in a paralyzing blow and caught the third man flush on the jaw. The hood slumped to the floor. Danny leaped over him and reached the top of the stairs as two other men came racing out of the door.

Two guns belched in front of Danny! He heard the bullets whine past him. He yanked the gun from

his pocket; fired from his hip. One of the men went down and the second one darted into a darkened room.

Danny jumped back, his shoulders against a wall. Then with a diving leap, he headed for the stairs that led to the second floor. He swerved as he hit the lower step. The gun in his hand roared, and a hood that was bringing a gun up at his back went down.

A man appeared at the top of the stairs. Danny had gotten one look at him.

It was the man that had knocked Danny down on Troost Avenue. The man Smoky Allan had described as Bullet Joe!

Bullet Joe gave a snarl of rage. His gun blasted! Danny fell flat on his stomach and started crawling up the stairs as he blazed at the killer. Bullet Joe fired again. Danny threw himself to the right and the bullet clipped the step where he had been a split second before.

Danny triggered again and the killer jumped back. Danny leaped to his feet and covered the seven remaining steps in three strides.

Bullet Joe turned and ran for the stairs leading to the third floor. Danny swung around the banister, ducked and snapped a shot as he saw Bullet Joe bring his gun down and squeeze the trigger.

The roar of both guns echoed through the halls. Below Danny, the house had suddenly become silent; but he could hear men running out the rear door down in the basement.

Danny made the steps leading to the third floor as Bullet Joe got halfway up the stairs. Bullet Joe turned and brought his gun around and again there was a deafening roar, but the bullet hit the wall a foot from Danny.

Then Bullet Joe swerved and

reached the top of the stairs.

Danny covered the last steps in long strides. Bullet Joe had darted into the small closet where the ladder to the roof was located. He was up this ladder when Danny got inside the closet.

The skylight door to the roof was open. The form of Bullet Joe loomed over this opening in the roof and he snarled: "This bullet will rip—"

He never finished that sentence. Danny had fired from the hip. The bullet clipped the air so close to the killer that it sent him backward and away from the roof opening. Danny went up the ladder with the sprint of a monkey and threw himself out on the roof.

Something crashed down on his head! It sent his senses in all directions and numbness crept over his body.

He whirled himself around with one supreme effort and as he did, he saw Bullet Joe frantically trying to reload his automatic. Danny sent his numbed body slithering across the roof. His hands caught Bullet Joe's ankles.

He yanked the ankles forward. The killer did a half somersault and his gun flew out of his hands. But as he hit the roof, he jerked his ankles away from Danny's hands and landed out of reach of Danny.

Danny brought his Positive up; but he knew it was useless. He had counted his shots and knew that the gun was empty.

Bullet Joe apparently knew this, also, for the gun didn't frighten him as he struggled to his feet.

Danny jumped up and raced across the roof. Bullet Joe had leaped over the low brick wall that separated the two houses. Something gleamed in his hand.

It was a knife. It swished through the air as Danny leaped over the low wall. There was a ripping of cloth followed by a stinging sensation down Danny's left arm.

His right shot out in a swift blow. Bullet Joe ducked the blow and sent one in Danny's stomach. Danny doubled up, and the killer drove in another blow.

Danny went down, rolled over and pulled his right leg under his body. Then he went forward in a movement that carried him to his feet.

He lashed out with his right and caught Bullet Joe on the side of the head. Bullet Joe rolled his head with the blow and chopped down with the knife again. Again there was a ripping of cloth and a burning sensation down Danny's left side.

Bullet Joe came at him with a snarl as Danny sank to his knees, shaking his head to clear his brain. He let Bullet Joe get within a foot of him, the knife within an inch; then Danny lunged, his arms going around Bullet Joe's legs.

Danny brought Bullet Joe up, whirled around and hurled him to the roof. Bullet Joe hit the roof with a sickening thud, the knife flying from his hand. But he moved with the speed of a panther. The next thing Danny knew he had hit the roof again and this time all the strength had left his body.

Bullet Joe's shoe cracked against his jaw. Consciousness was leaving Danny in fitful waves of black that darted in front of his eyes.

He saw the foot coming for his face again. He shook his head weakly to collect his thoughts. His right hand went out almost subconsciously and caught the killer's ankle. Bullet Joe went down with a resounding thud.

Danny struggled to his feet, but

by the time he got up, Bullet Joe was circling him, waiting for a chance for a knockout blow.

He whipped his right out. Danny ducked and lanced out with his own right in a blow that started from his toes.

His fist crashed against Bullet Joe's chin. Bullet Joe grunted, swayed a moment, then pitched head-first to the roof in a limp heap.

Danny remained standing over him, having trouble staying on his feet. His head was ringing; he felt sick at his stomach. His left side was soaked with blood where the knife had slashed his flesh.

But he leaned over, pulled Bullet Joe over on his stomach and somehow managed to get handcuffs on the killer's wrists.

Bullet Joe groaned and his eyes opened in a fluttering movement.

He gasped for breath and mumbled something weakly.

Danny's strength was returning. He pulled Bullet Joe to his feet and said: "O. K., my friend, you and I are going places—and not to see a ten-pound baby boy."

It took Danny a few minutes to get Bullet Joe down the ladder from the roof. When he reached the third floor of the house, it seemed strangely silent and deserted. Danny knew the other crooks had made their escape. He pulled Bullet Joe down the top flight of stairs to the second floor.

Suddenly there was a loud pounding on the front door. Then the door creaked and finally crashed in with the weight of five detectives against it.

Uniformed police followed the detectives into the house. They came



**WAS MY FACE RED**

**SEN-SEN**  
FOR THE BREATH

5¢

THROAT EASE  
VALUABLE TO  
SINGERS AND SPEAKERS

when she  
dodged  
my kiss?

**Don't Offend...Use Sen-Sen**

**BREATH SWEETENER...DELIGHTFUL CONFECTION**

running up the stairs and met Danny on the second flight.

"Danny!" a detective gasped. "What are you doing here?"

"It took you chaps a long time to get here," Danny said weakly. "I came to get the murderer of Philip Marden, and here he is."

An hour later Danny entered the office of Commissioner Davis. Bullet Joe, escorted by two detectives, came behind him. Danny's face was pale and his left side was bandaged.

The commissioner got up from his chair and stared at Danny, not sure whether to get mad again or not.

"You back again?" he finally said.

"Back again, commissioner," Danny answered with a smile. "And this time I have brought the killer of Philip Marden. It's Bullet Joe, an old friend of the department."

The commissioner couldn't find his voice. One of the detectives with Bullet Joe said: "It's the McCoy, commissioner. We got the jewels he stole, and we have two persons that saw him running away from the store."

Danny tossed two small sacks on the commissioner's desk. "Here are the jewels," he said. "We found them in No. 14 River Street where I got Bullet Joe. I can also testify that he is the man that hit me in the stomach right after the robbery."

Commissioner Davis said: "Tell me the rest of the story, Danny."

Danny grinned as he said: "I always told you Ping-pong was a great game—a great game for the muscles and the brain. It teaches you to think fast in a jam."

The commissioner didn't return Danny's grin, but his face was puzzled. "What you trying to tell me, Danny?"

"That when you play Ping-pong, you have to act and think fast,"

Danny replied. "When you sent me home and told me to take off the uniform, I stopped in a restaurant and saw a streak of red on my left palm. At first I thought it was blood, but then it didn't look like blood."

"I remembered that I had helped the killer to his feet on Troost Avenue with my left hand and knew that whatever that red was had come from the killer's palm. I also surmised that the killer was left-handed. It wasn't much to go on, but I got a hunch about that red streak."

"I went to the criminal laboratory and Sergeant Manning examined that stuff and told me it was a solution of plain salt and resin and red alkali. Then I knew what it was. It was a new type of red resin used by some Ping-pong players. They smear it on their hands before they grip their rackets."

"These players, who are few, are called 'red' players at the recreation parlors. I had received a pamphlet advertising this stuff several weeks ago; so I went home and read it to make sure. This pamphlet gave the chemical contents of this resin, and it was the same as Sergeant Manning had found."

"Then I knew three things about the killer. First, he was a Ping-pong player. Second, he was a nut at the game and had played before pulling the Marden job. Also, he was a left-handed player."

"One objection to the use of this red resin is that it stays on your hand. Only water will remove it. If you don't wash your hands, it will stick there for hours, a little coming off each time you run your palm over something. I figured the killer had been in such a hurry when he left the recreation parlor that he forgot to wash his hands."

"With these three things to work

on, I started a check-up of all the left-handed players in the different parlors that used this red resin. I got five names. Three were checked off at once, but the fourth was a man that gave his name as Jim Smith, which was obviously phony.

"I went down to the River Street district, working on the theory that the killer came out of that neighborhood. I got a friend of mine—a hood that is a good informer—to find the name of a left-handed Ping-

pong player that was a crook and who sometimes used the alias, Jim Smith. This informer gave me the River Street address. I went there and found Bullet Joe, whom I recognized as the killer. And here he is."

Commissioner Davis smiled, a rare thing for him to do. "All right, Danny," he said. "You and your Ping-pong win. Go home to your wife and baby. When you have recovered, put on the uniform again and report to me."

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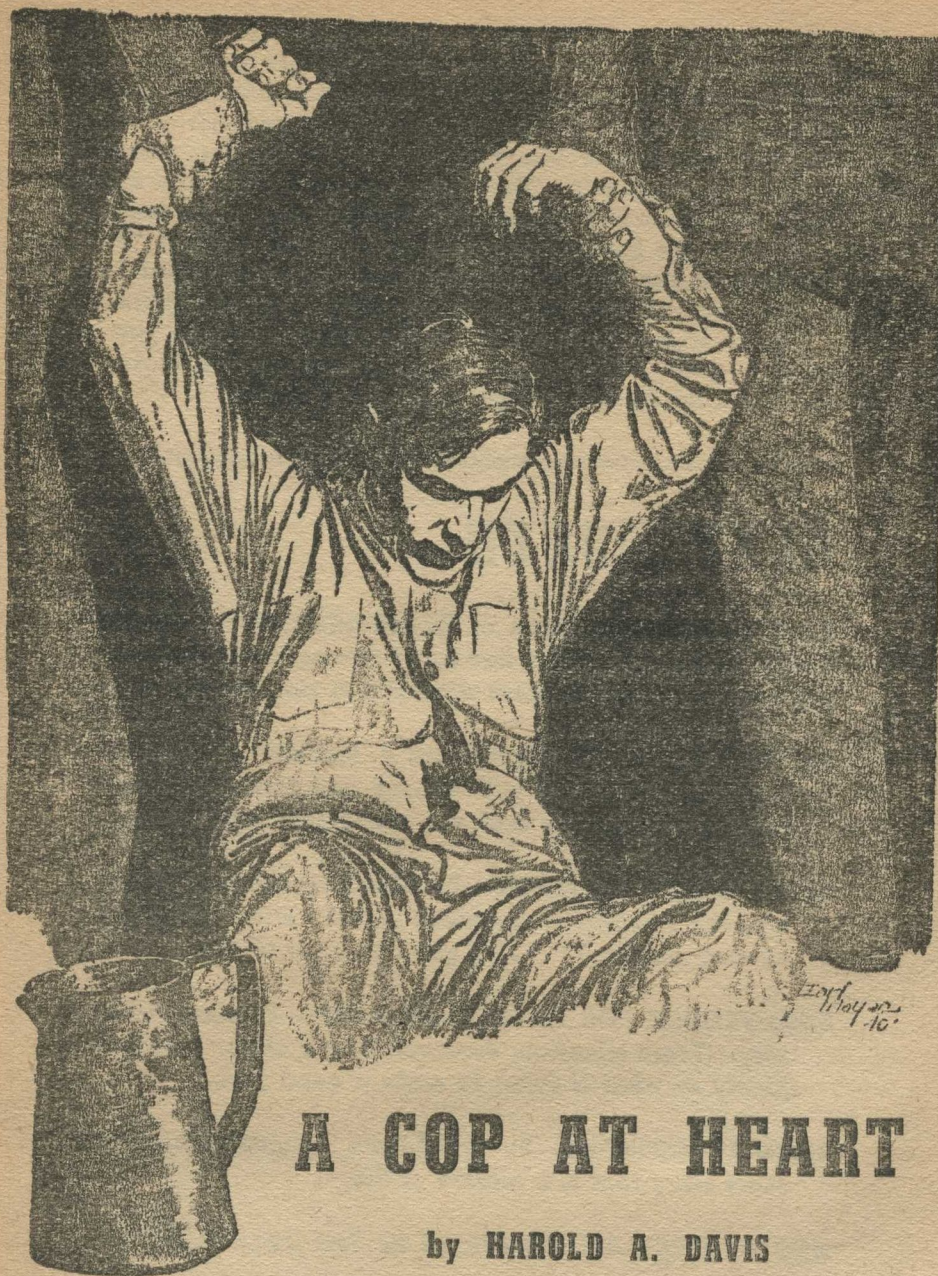
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## A COP AT HEART

by HAROLD A. DAVIS

Matt Monahan skated out from under the radio car, wrench in hand, covered with grease and oil from head to foot. He glanced around as the police department's wrecker zoomed out of the garage and was being waved upstreet by Jeff Ryan,

foreman. The look on Jeff's face told Matt something serious had happened.

"Poor guy!" he heard the foreman mutter.

Then Jeff saw Matt eying him. With a snort of disgust and resigna-

tion, Jeff flung the handful of waste rag into the tin receptacle nearby. For Matt's benefit he added:

"And some dopes want to be cops!"

Matt gripped the wrench harder, feeling the hot blood coloring his neck and face. Ever since he could remember, he had always wanted to be a cop. It was a tough break for him the day he had been rejected. It was a case where the spirit was willing, but the flesh just didn't measure up.

Another inch to Matt's chunky five feet seven would have taken the wrench out of his hand and put a night stick there. As it was, he tried to content himself by tightening brake rods, setting spark gaps and doing the hundred other jobs that came into the police-department garage.

Envy burned in Matt—if envy could be linked to keen disappointment. His heart would do tricks when he overheard how the cops and dicks cornered Snake Crowley, brought him squealing from the West Side apartment; how they nabbed tough Mike Luss in the Eighth Avenue beer joint and wrung a murder confession from him; and how they traded bullets with Augie Lewis, the East Side gorilla, sending him to a morgue slab.

But that wasn't all. The other half of the story, the part in which lowly patrolmen were given inspector's funerals, didn't escape Matt, either.

He couldn't hope for men like Jeff Ryan to understand how he felt. Other men's yearning for a cop's life might be stifled by fear of sudden death. Matt wasn't of that breed. His yearning came from deep down.

An hour later the wrecker returned, towing a twisted, mangled thing that had once been a police

coupé. Matt blinked at it coldly. Frankie Dale's crate, and Frank's blood was on the leather seat! Jagged bullet holes carried mute testimony.

It was then that the fever to avenge killings like this scaled higher in Matt. He wanted to help rid society of killers, put stick-up men where they couldn't cause any more trouble. But he wanted to help directly, not by tuning up motors, changing tires, and aligning front wheels.

He watched while the ballistic expert prodded and extracted a few slugs from the car's body. Even Matt could see they were steel-jacketed .45s. When the expert was about to leave, Inspector Minton showed up to examine the wreckage, himself.

"Same as those taken from the corpses, inspector," said the expert, palming the bullets.

The inspector nodded solemnly. Choked, he could say nothing. Yet, by quitting time, Matt had heard enough to piece together what had occurred.

Frank Dale had been on a special tour of the out-of-the-way business section, keeping his eyes open for the stick-up artists preying upon well-to-do merchants. Something about the sedan and its driver in front of Saul Goldin's fur shop must have made him suspicious. Before he could get out of the police car he spotted a man running from the store to the sedan.

Saul Goldin, dripping blood from his chest, staggered out after him, only to drop dead on the sidewalk. Frank Dale went after the killers. But the chase didn't last long. A hail of steel-jacketed bullets drilled into Dale as he careened a corner.

The killers got away!

"We'll get 'em," Sergeant Zimmer vowed in the locker room, while Matt was changing to street clothes. But Zimmer was talking to the other officers, not Matt. "Those killers didn't get anything from the furrier and something tells me they'll need dough to pay for a hide-out."

"Got an idea who they are?" Matt asked.

The cops turned around. Zimmer scowled. One of the men laughed: "Matt would get them—if he was an inch taller."

Zimmer frowned, shook his head at Matt. "Listen, kid, stick to being wet nurse to engines. We'll take care of guys like Babe Mecini and Ears Wallis."

Matt swallowed audibly, clenched his fists. He fought to keep the lid on his temper, to hold his tongue. It wouldn't get him anywhere to blow off steam. He wasn't foolish enough to think he could tackle killers like Mecini and Wallis, but he hated to be treated like a fifth wheel.

It took him longer to dress than ordinarily. He was alone in the locker room when he reached for his felt hat and got up to leave. A pair of fingerprint charts on the bulletin board near the door caused him to stop.

One of them belonged to Babe Mecini, the others to Ears Wallis. Their pictures were pasted in neat squares under the fingerprints. Matt studied them automatically, as though it was his job to do it, then left after signing out.

All the way home in the bus, Matt kept seeing Babe Mecini and Ears Wallis. Mecini's foxlike face seemed to come alive; sneer at him, black eyes glaring. His pal's image faded in and out, growing more menacing as the flat features receded

so that the cupped ears took on the size of elephant's.

At the table, Matt hardly touched his dinner. His sister wondered what was wrong, and Matt didn't talk. He hardly noticed the baby who gurgled at him from the high chair, banging away with a spoon.

"Do you feel all right, Matt?" his sister asked suddenly.

He looked up, roused. "Er—what?" Then he realized what he had been doing and grinned. "Sure! But I'm not hungry, Grace."

"Because if you're not well, I'll call George and tell him you can't look after the business tonight."

Matt got up, protesting. "I'm O. K., Grace. I'll run down to the place and send George home right away."

He grabbed his hat, planted a kiss on the baby's head, then hurried out. Once a week, he relieved George at the garage; and if he hadn't been mooning, he would have remembered. He owed George a lot. George had taught him all he knew about engines, had sent him through school, and was helping to make a home for him with Grace and the baby.

George was in the office checking the day's receipts. He smiled up at Matt, then continued to balance the accounts in the dual ledger system. Matt picked up the evening paper and read the headlines.

#### COP, FURRIER SLAIN

#### IN DAYLIGHT HOLDUP

"Pretty bad," George muttered. He noticed how Matt's brow had corrugated, the tension of the jawline. "Boy, am I glad you're not a regular cop—for Grace's sake."

Matt's fists were like lumps of

granite. "I'd . . . I'd like to meet those rats who killed Frankie!"

George understood. "You and Frankie Dale went to school together, played basketball—"

Slowly Matt's head drooped. As George talked about the jobs to be done that night, Matt was reminiscing. Frankie used to say that if he missed a play, there was nothing to worry about. "I've got Matt backing me up."

Backing him up? It looked as if this was one time Matt wasn't.

"Better get that wiring job finished first, Matt," George was saying. "Those two guys ought to be back pretty soon. When you get through with that, take down old man Miller's motor."

"What—no grease jobs?" Matt grinned.

"Nope! And, Matt, all cash on stuff that goes out tonight." He pulled off his monkey suit, tossed it to his brother-in-law. "Jimmy'll be in at eleven to relieve you."

"O. K. What about that wiring you started?"

"I had to rip out the old stuff hunting for a short circuit. Funny, too. I couldn't find it. The owner complained about the motor stalling when he least expected—no lights, nothing."

"I'll take care of it," promised Matt. "Regular price?"

"Two dollars extra because they made me drop what I was doing to take it on."

George pocketed the day's receipts, except for the few dollars in singles, then waved to Matt and started out. With a shrug, Matt began to slip into the monkey suit. He had to forget what had happened to Frankie Dale. But it was like forgetting to breathe.

The sedan was on blocks, wire strung out neatly. George was a

stickler for neatness and Matt had learned the habit. It was simple to pick up where George left off, and soon Matt was splicing ends, taping, burnishing terminals for proper contact surfaces. If he stopped to think, his mind went back to Frankie Dale. To avoid it he riveted his attention to the job.

"Hey, ain't that finished, yet?"

Matt didn't like the voice. It had a rasp that grated in his ears. He looked along the floor from under the sedan chassis, saw the two pairs of razor-edged trousers coming toward him. The speaker probably owned the car.

"Ready in about a minute," Matt called out breezily.

"Snap it up, brother," ordered the second man. He sounded jittery. "We're in a hurry."

Not bothering to answer, Matt put the last touches to the job. He rolled out from under, glanced up at the men. For a split second he thought his skin was shriveling, his heart cracking from pounding too hard.

Despite the attempt at disguise, those cupped ears couldn't be mistaken. Neither could Matt be wrong about Mecini's dot-black eyes, the thinness of the foxlike face. Matt lifted himself on his elbows, his brain hitting on every cylinder. He didn't dare give his thoughts away.

Ears Wallis had his hands stowed in his pockets. A gun was in one of those paws, Matt was certain. But he grinned at them, thumbing to the sedan.

"You'd better let me take her around the block once or twice, mister. Check 'er up."

Mecini squinted at him. "Say, where've I seen you before?"

"Here, maybe," Matt laughed. "I'm relief man. The boss told me

about the trouble you've been having with the crate."

"Get her off the blocks," said Mecini. "I'll check the job, myself."

He shot a glance at Ears who nodded slightly. "I'll leave my pal here as security—that I'll be back for the payoff." He laughed.

Matt wheeled the big jack under the rear end, hoisted the car, then removed the blocks and lowered the wheels to the cement floor. Suddenly he realized what the killers had done; why George had not found a trace of a short-circuit in the wiring.

There hadn't been any short!

Knowing that the police would be looking after them hot and heavy, the killers had driven into George's garage with the wiring as an excuse. It took the car off the street and gave the pair a chance to locate a hide-out until the heat died down.

"How about gas and oil?" asked Matt when he pushed the jack to one side.

"Good idea," said Mecini. "Fill her up both places. She drinks oil." He studied Matt oddly. "You know, I'd swear I seen you before some place—and not here."

A chill crept up Matt's spine as Ears Wallis hovered nearer, hands still in his pockets.

"When you remember, tell me," Matt said. "And about the car drinking too much oil, come around for a ring job sometime."

He released the brake and shoved the sedan toward the gas pump near the door. His head began to feel like a chunk of rock as he tried to think of a way to outsmart the killers and tip off the cops.

Sweat broke out all over him as he ran the gas hose to the tank. His brain seemed to have snagged. He couldn't snap out of the fog long enough to map a course for himself.

"How's business?" asked Mecini, getting behind the wheel.

"Fair," gulped Matt.

His hands froze on the hose line. He knew Mecini wasn't asking questions to make conversation. He was fully aware of what was percolating in the killer's mind. Hadn't Mecini said something about coming back to pay off?

Matt lifted the engine hood, yanked out the oil gauge, wiped it on a rag, then stuck it back for a reading. The car could use at least two quarts.

"O. K.," snapped Mecini. "I'll take her for the check-up spin while you get the oil."

Matt pushed the doors wide, blood racing wildly through his veins. Wallis was close to him, in the shadows. They both waited until Mecini kicked the starter, fed gas and raced out into the night.

"I'll get the oil," said Matt.

Wallis trailed him to the office, standing on the threshold while Matt took two cans from the shelf.

Suddenly Matt thought of something. He went to the desk, picked up the soft-lead pencil. With a flourish he scribbled an entry on a sheet of ruled paper.

"What's that for?" demanded Wallis, tensing.

"For the boss' record," said Matt. "I got to make a note of what I take off the shelves."

As casually as possible, he emptied the cans into the half-gallon container equipped with a cabled snout; then he waited for Mecini to bring back the sedan.

Almost immediately, he heard the car being brought in, swung around facing the street again.

"Step on it, bud," Wallis told him.

Matt passed the flat-faced killer, heading for the sedan rapidly. Wal-

lis stayed near the office door from where he commanded a view of the street. Mecini shut off the ignition, jumped out and went to his partner.

"Everything all right?" Matt asked over his shoulder.

Mecini nodded, waved for Matt to put in the oil. Quickly transferring the cabled snout to the inlet Matt stooped over the engine. The killers couldn't see what he was doing. While the oil was draining out of the half-gallon container Matt's hands weren't idle. Finally he drew back, capped the inlet, then lowered the hood.

"All set!" he called out.

He spun around toward the office. Mecini was beckoning to him. "How much, buddy?"

Matt's lips grew taut against his teeth and he inhaled deeply. It might have been his imagination, but he caught a false note in Mecini's question. Walking straight toward the killers Matt felt the heat of their eyes on him. They were standing so he must cut between them to reach the office.

His fingers curled more rigidly on the handle of the oil container as he began to pass them. Mecini's right arm jutted out, hand grasping Matt's monkey suit at the chest.

"Want to know where I seen you before?" Mecini's eyes were filmed with hate. Matt felt Wallis raking his back with a gun as Mecini went on in an undertone. "Downtown, at police headquarters, working in the garage."

Matt Monahan smiled. "You got me mixed up with two others guys. I don't know what you're talking about."

Rage crossed Mecini's face and he spat an oath. His left hand flickered upward, slashing knuckles into Matt's jaw. He rolled with the punch, bobbing his head, then

slumped as though the wallop had knocked him out.

The fox-faced killer held him up, snarled: "Let's finish him. We'll get the cash on our way out."

Matt's pulse ran riot. He was dragged toward the side entrance of the garage, near the grease pits. He guessed that they planned to kill him and toss him down into one of the pits out of sight. His blood raged.

"It'll sound like backfire," Ears Wallis said gleefully.

Mecini warned: "Don't miss!"

The killers let him go. Matt stirred, set himself. His right banged up, nailed Mecini on the mouth. The lower lip spurted blood. Ears Wallis cursed aloud, surprised at the attack.

Matt whirled to him, prepared to rap home a left hook. But Wallis had whipped out a sub-nosed .32. Its hammer was going back. And Wallis was too near to be expected to miss!

Out of the corner of his eye Matt saw the grease pit, the tank of stale oil at the bottom. Without a second thought Matt dived sidewise. His shoulder slashed the stone edge, just as the .32 roared.

Matt screamed in spite of himself. Pain knifed through his left side at the hip. He had been hit! He tumbled over the edge, twisted his legs to upset the tank of stale oil. Above him he glimpsed Ears Wallis drawing a bead on him for the second shot.

The tank rolled at Matt as the gun spat, again! Lead whanged into the metal at Matt's head, ricocheted to the cement wall and away from him. He yelped purposely, flopped an arm, then lay still.

"You got him!" Mecini was gloating. "And he thought I didn't know who he was!"

Matt slit his eyes, saw the gunmen

pivot and hurry to the office. The ring of the cash register reached him, and his jaws snapped irately together.

Crouching low he limped to the stone steps, crawled up them and out of the pit. He saw Mecini getting into the sedan. Ears Wallis was running for the open door at the other side. Then the door slammed. Matt's eyes were like twin diamonds, gleaming.

Five seconds later the sedan was catapulting out of the garage, gaining speed as it swung down the street. Matt bit his lips against the pain in his side. He hobbled to the wrecker he and George had converted from an old hack.

Matt knew it was his duty to call in the cops; that Sergeant Zimmer had been right. Cops were paid to tackle killers like Ears Wallis and Mecini; whereas Matt was paid to wet-nurse a bunch of gasoline babies.

But Matt figured time was too important. Maybe the cops couldn't get down fast enough to capture Wallis and Mecini.

Breathing hard, desperately trying to ignore the pain from the bullet wound, Matt clutched the big steering wheel. The engine hummed a powerful song as he gave her more gas, released the clutch.

The wrecker zoomed out into the night, pointed in the direction taken by the killers. Two blocks away he spotted the sedan under a lamp-post. It was bucking and stalling like a loco steer. Then he saw Mecini hop out, lift the hood and stare at the engine.

Ears Wallis joined him the next second. Matt could see that they didn't know what to do. They twisted around at the sound of the approaching wrecker. Instantly their expression changed, bright-

ened. Mecini started to wave his arms for Matt to stop.

Ears Wallis was palming the .32. Matt slowed down, letting them get a good look at him. Mecini recognized him first, jumped back, hand snaking for his shoulder holster.

"It's that . . . that—" Matt heard him say.

The rest was lost in the staccato *crack-crack* of Mecini's automatic! The windshield suddenly sprouted buds in front of Matt. But it was bulletproof. Ears Wallis was ducking low, darting for the door of the wrecker.

Matt's nostrils dilated, and he ground his teeth. He twisted the front wheels, shot ahead for a yard. The bumper tagged Ears Wallis, dumped him in the gutter!

Babe Mecini guessed what Matt intended to do. Like the rat he was, he wheeled to scurry away. Matt kicked the gas pedal, swept around in a semicircle, cutting off Mecini.

Shrieking, Mecini rushed at the cab, leaped on the running board and grasped the door handle. Matt yanked up the emergency, swiveled around in the seat in time to shove the door. It winged out, throwing Mecini off the running board.

Matt grabbed the wrench off the seat as he slid out of the cab. Mecini was scrambling up, striving to level his automatic. Matt lurched at him, hammering with the wrench!

The killer staggered under the clout, his eyes rolled back in his head. Matt scooped the automatic out of Mecini's grip just as lead whined by his ear. Looking around quickly, he spied Wallis settling himself for the next shot.

Matt didn't hesitate. Flame rocketed from the automatic as he triggered! Once—twice—the third time. Then he had to let go of the gun.

Something had lodged into his forearm at the first shot, but he didn't know much else. He blinked at the place Wallis had been standing. A blurred heap was there, now.

Matt grew dizzy, sick at the pit of his stomach. He wondered if those sirens he was hearing were part of his imagination. Then everything swam and eddied around him and he sagged.

The ground was cool against his cheek. He wanted to stay there; to rest—rest—sleep—

Matt heard a lot of noise that seemed to come closer as he climbed back to consciousness. He wondered why people didn't let a man sleep in peace. The alarm didn't go off because he was sure he would have heard it. Then he heard Grace's voice.

"Matt—Matt!"

He winked open his eyes, was blinded by light. But it wasn't daylight. For a full second fear held him, and he asked himself what had happened. He was sure it was Grace. And there was George, too.

"He'll be all right," said a voice that was familiar.

Matt looked twice to make sure it was Inspector Minton. He was smiling, pleased as a man could be. Then Matt realized he was bandaged on the arm and strapped around the middle. In that second Matt recalled everything.

"Mecini—Wallis!" he blurted.

"You took care of Wallis," said Minton. "The State will take care of Mecini." He paused. "If you're able, I'd like to hear about all this."

Sergeant Zimmer poked his head close, in order to hear. Matt grinned at him, then told everything Ears Wallis and Babe Mecini had done.

Inspector Minton compressed his lips when he heard how cold-bloodedly Ears and Mecini intended to kill Matt.

"But what happened to their sedan—why did it stall and buck the way it did?" Minton asked, puzzled.

"Help me up and I'll show you."

He winced once as he walked to the sedan, lifted the hood and asked for a flashlight. He pointed its beam at the spark plugs.

"When I picked up that soft lead pencil to mark down the two quarts of oil, I had another purpose in mind."

He could see his brother-in-law, George, brimming with laughter.

"It used to be a standard gag years ago to make engines stall and plugs foul out by drawing a line with a soft lead pencil from the top of the spark plug down the porcelain onto the head."

Inspector Minton moved closer for a better look. On three of the six plugs were lead-pencil lines.

"Those lines carry current just as though they were copper wire," explained Matt. "I had to do something that would stump Mecini and Wallis, and it looks as if I did."

It was Sergeant Zimmer who couldn't help saying: "Inspector, this guy, Monahan, is just a cop at heart."

"Well, what's stopping him?"

"Just an inch in height," Zimmer said.

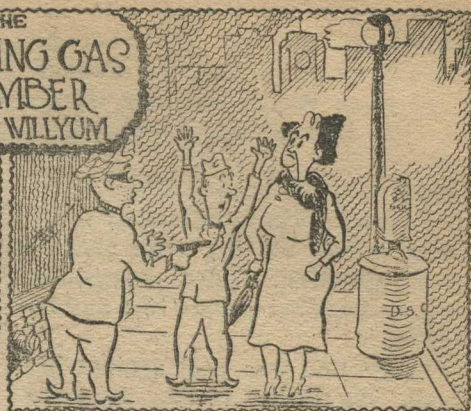
The inspector's eyes glowed. "Seems that what he lacks in length, he makes up in guts and brains. I'll see what can be done. The force has room for men like him."

Matt's throat tightened inside. He was thinking of Frankie Dale, and what Frankie would have said.

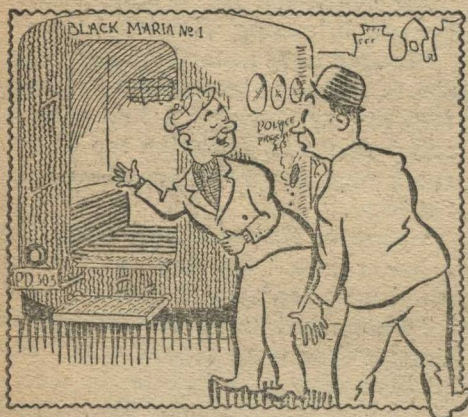
"I don't have to worry, folks. I've got Matt backing me up."



"ALL I KNOW IS WOT I READ  
IN THE PAPERS!"



"SWEETHEART, THIS MAN WANTS MY  
WALLET. MAY I GIVE IT TO HIM?"



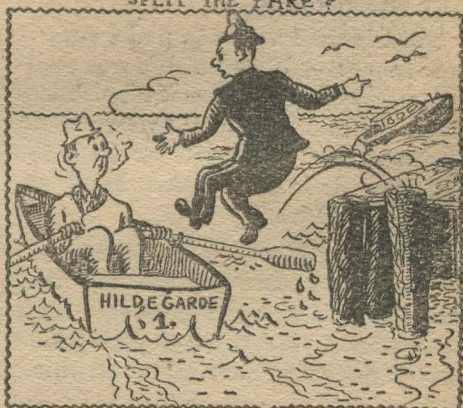
"AFTER YOU, I INSIST!"



"LOOK, SINCE YOU'RE SHADOWING ME  
WHAT SAY WE USE THE SAME CAB AND  
SPLIT THE FARE?"



"IT'S THE CHIEF'S IDEA. WE'RE TO  
SCOUR THE WOODS FOR THAT  
FUGITIVE."



"QUICK! FOLLOW THAT DOAT!"

# MURDER BREEDER



by MARK HARPER

ball these days than in law, I'm bettin' you."

Larry shook his head at the truth in that statement and glanced down at a glaring headline on the latest newspaper.

RECLUSE MYSTERIOUSLY  
MURDERED

Nothing in that for him.

Three persons were standing just beyond the counter. His glance took them in casually; two well-dressed men, one with round face, clipped mustache; the other, taller, dark, and a girl who stood a little apart.

## CHAPTER I.

### WANTED FOR COUNSEL.

Larry Clinton turned the corner toward his office building and swung big shoulders into the lobby. Steve, the cigar man, eyed them enviously.

"You shoulda gone pro, Mr. Clinton," he said. "More money in foot-

Larry had the impression that the tall man was just turning from speaking to the girl as he looked up. He wasn't sure of it, then or afterward; and it was important. But the girl was stepping out to head him off.

"I know you're Larry Clinton," she said, and her smile was nice.

Larry's grin told he was. "Won't you come up?"

"I've just come from your office and must hurry. I am Vivian Knapp. I want to engage your entire time for the next few days. I'll explain later, but if I can get your promise, now, that will be enough."

"I'll have to check my engagements," he told her, trying to look that important. "Will you come back later, or phone?"

She nodded. "But you'll try"—the smile was working again with a hint of concern back deep in her dark eyes—"to hold your time for me and not take anything new?"

"Lord love me, yes," Larry said fervently.

She turned. He liked her walk, too, as she hurried to the street. Larry thought nothing of the two men. Why should he? He thought of nothing at all except the promise of a break in the drought. Steve had said a mouthful.

He burst into the cubbyhole that made his outer office and started slightly at sight of a girl cleaning the accumulated dust from his typewriter. She turned bright eyes up at him. He strode forward and leaned over her.

"You're hired." He brought down a fist with the index finger pointed at her.

"No—really?"

"Well, tentatively, Miss Garland—again."

"Is it the she person who was in here?"

"Yes. Exclusive time job."

"Anything on the line?"

Larry groaned. Outside, the elevator door clanged open. The girl turned an attentive ear.

"More customers," she whispered. "Inside!"

Larry closed the inner door softly. There was only a board partition separating the two offices, but his own had the advantage of size. Just now, it looked to him too large with most of his first equipment gone, one by one. Well, he could buy some more—if and when.

Elsie Garland opened the door and left it ajar. She winked; then one eyebrow went up in a sign of uncertainty.

"Can I interrupt you, Mr. Clinton?" Her clear voice carried well. "Two gentlemen calling—Mr. Pellini and Mr. Krantz."

"All right. Let them come in." Larry used his gruff voice.

He glanced up from some papers with the frown of a busy man when the men were well into the room; then his eyes narrowed slightly as he recognized the two he had seen at the cigar stand downstairs. Besides his own chair behind the flat desk, there were only two others. Larry waved his hands, and the tall, dark man he guessed was Pellini took the one at his right.

"Well?" he asked briskly, and when he got no immediate response: "I don't want to hurry you, but my time is pretty well taken."

Pellini gave him a long, sarcastic stare.

"We don't want your time, feller. We just came to save you money."

"Kind of you, but I'm not buying anything."

"Maybe you'll be buying into trouble and don't know it," Pellini said evenly. "If a case comes up to you,

say, today or tomorrow, I'm tellin' you to keep out of it."

"Will you get the hell out of here?" Larry said very softly.

"Sure! Sure! But we ain't done talkin'."

"You've talked too much already."

Pellini got deliberately to his feet, took a half-step back and started to pull something from his inner breast pocket. Larry saw a black, woven leather handle and came out of his chair! He made a quick stride forward, then stout arms clamped through his arms from behind. Pellini got his sap clear and stepped in.

Larry did a number of things all about the same time. His right heel dug back hard, struck something and slid down. There was a sharp yell in his ears. He ducked as Pellini swung! The sap came down over his head, landed on something with a thud and the weight began to leave Larry's back. But already his long legs were churning and his shoulder was in Pellini's stomach.

They shot across the room in a way that was old stuff to Larry. The partition stopped them, although it split from top to bottom.

Pellini's right arm was flailing. Larry reached up both hands, grabbed the man's swarthy face and began to pound Pellini's head against the wood. It didn't last long. Pellini slumped and Larry let him fall to the floor. He picked up the sap, pulled a pistol from Pellini's pocket and was stooping over Krantz in the same occupation when Elsie Garland came in. For some reason which she probably didn't know, she had both hands up fixing her hair. She goggled around.

"Hm-m-m," she said. "Are you going to kick the goal?"

Larry grinned around at her.

"That's an idea," he said. "Clear the goal posts."

CLU-7

Krantz had got to a sitting position and was trying to put his feet under him. Larry lifted him by the collar with one hand, caught the slack of his trousers with the other and treated him to a Spanish walk to the outer door then swung his right foot hard. Krantz came down on his knees across the corridor. Larry caught a glimpse of another man in the corridor, but he had more business inside.

Pellini was already on his feet. He tried to slide around Larry, but Larry's left hand caught him and twisted him around. His right fist slammed into the small of Pellini's back, and he held it there until the bum's rush ended at the outer door with another kick that landed Pellini beside his companion.

Larry saw a man disappearing into the washroom, but not before a yell of laughter came back to him. Larry wasn't laughing when he went back to his desk. He scowled at Elsie perched on his desk and sizing up the damage.

"Never mind that, now," he said. "Let's think this thing out. Vivian Knapp offers me a job; these palookas tried to fix me so I couldn't take it. I thought Pellini was talking to her downstairs. If I was sure he was or wasn't I might make some sense out of it."

Elsie cocked her head alertly.

"More customers," she said and slid off the desk. Larry put the two pistols and the sap into a drawer and left it a little open.

"Show 'em right in," he said grimly.

A moment later she came in with the opening door and let a solidly built man pass her. "Mr. Haynes," she announced and went out.

Haynes looked to be thirty odd. He had an air of hard efficiency

coupled with confident assurance.

"Got a little job for you, Mr. Clinton," he said. "It needs a fellow who can kick a man ten feet if he has to, plus the lawyer end. I was in the hall, just now; you're the man."

"Who's hiring?"

"Calso Processing Co.'s hiring me; I'm talking to you."

"The job?"

"To take possession of a small test apparatus and the papers covering it. A chemist has been working for a long while on something of great interest to the industry. We've helped him financially and have rights, and, today, we learn he is finally successful."

"Will he sell to you?" Larry asked.

"He'll sell," Haynes said slowly.

"Then why do you need me?"

"He's been working in secret. No one knows where, but we'll know in less than an hour now. We need a lawyer to pass immediately on the papers, and we'll have to work fast."

"Why the rush?"

Haynes laid an evening edition on the desk before Larry. It was the one he'd glanced at downstairs.

#### RECLUSE MYSTERIOUSLY MURDERED

Horatio Farley done to death in impoverished home for no discoverable reason. He lived—

"What about it?" Larry asked, a little uncomfortably.

"All we know," Haynes said, "is that Farley was working for years on the same idea. We don't think he had anything, but that shows the push is on."

Haynes extracted two one-hundred-dollar bills from a fold and placed them on the desk where Larry could read the numbers.

"On the full completion of your part in the matter, Mr. Clinton, a thousand dollars will be paid you in cash. You can forget this retainer."

A thought flashed into Larry's mind. This could be the case Pellini and Krantz were worried about and not what Vivian Knapp might be going to offer him. He couldn't exactly figure the girl in with those hoods; but, if she were, then it did make sense. Both added up to the same thing. She wanted a promise for his time; they tried to get that time for nothing.

He started to reach out his hand for the bills when the phone rang, and he grabbed the instrument, instead.

"Your booth still on the list?" Elsie Garland asked in low tone.

"Uh-huh."

"Then get inside." Larry nodded to Haynes and stepped into the booth after cradling his desk phone.

"Somebody calling for your girl friend," Elsie said. There was a click and another voice spoke.

"This is Jerome Knapp. I understand that my niece has engaged your exclusive services for a few days, Mr. Clinton, and I'm calling to confirm it."

There was something oily and suave about the man's tone.

"I made no promise," Larry said. "I told Miss Knapp I'd have to check my engagements first."

"I trust you have done so. Now, if you don't mind coming to my office, I will take up the matter with you. I'm paying you five hundred dollars if it runs to three days; more if beyond that time."

Through the booth window Larry could see the two bills. Besides he'd made up his mind about the Knapps.

"I have done so," he said, "and I

won't be free until tomorrow at the earliest."

"A thousand dollars."

"I still won't be free."

The oily voice got sarcastic and hard.

"At least wait in your office until I get an urgent messenger to you. He could make you change your mind."

"I've already seen two," Larry told him.

"What do you mean?"

"Have you two men named Pellini and Krantz, Mr. Knapp?"

"Repeat the names, please."

Larry did so.

"I have many employees," Knapp said, "but I recall no such names. Why?"

"I was going to tell you that you'd have to do better than that," Larry said and hung up. He went back to the desk.

"You wouldn't expect me to pass on patent rights offhand?" he asked Haynes.

There won't even be applications until we make them. Christopher Galt is an eccentric old fellow." The name struck a faint chord in Larry's memory, but he couldn't place it. Haynes was still speaking. "But when he says it works, we are satisfied to put money on the line."

"What next?"

"Fine!" Haynes stood up. He gave no address. "Meet me in half an hour. With luck, you'll have your thousand in a few hours."

"Are you paying that?" Larry asked.

Haynes laughed easily. "All in legal form enough to please you, Mr. Clinton. You'll sign a receipt for it on delivery."

Larry frowned over that as Haynes went out. Elsie Garland came in. He gave her one of the bills.

"Get Steve, downstairs, to break

this," he told her. She was back in a few minutes, a little out of breath.

"Steve said those two men waited down there; then a man came to them and they went out in a hurry."

"The plot thickens," Larry said and grinned. "Here—I'm taking fifty, you take twenty-five and bank the rest."

He gave her the little information he had. She looked at him with quizzical eyes.

"Haven't you begun to think why this sudden interest in you?"

"They probably like my style," Larry said and grinned.

"You champions are all the same," she said tartly. "There is a kink in this business and you are right in the kink. I know it! If you had any sense—" The ringing phone interrupted her.

"Not a call in a month," Larry gloated, "and now see them come."

"That's what I'm trying to tell you." She picked up the phone, then cupped the mouthpiece. "Vivian Knapp, and there's trouble!"

He took it from her and gave his name.

"I beg you"—her voice was low and strained—"not to take that assignment for any inducement.

"I don't exactly like your method, Miss Knapp," Larry said coldly. "Your friends like to play rough."

"I can explain that." He could hardly hear her words, but he got their tenseness. "But this is mur—" The rest of the word was smothered, as if a hand had been clapped over her mouth; Larry thought he had heard the slap. There was a sharp click on the wire.

"Are you going?" Elsie Garland asked.

"For a thousand?"

"Damn you!" she said. "You should have a nurse."

Larry opened the drawer, consid-

ered the advisability of taking one of the guns or the sap, then decided against both.

"I'll call you later," he said, "and tell you what we'll do with the thousand."

She made a face at him.

## CHAPTER II.

### MURDER IN THE MAKING!

Going down in the elevator, he thought of Vivian Knapp. It didn't get him anything, except to make him feel a little uncomfortable. There was a slight streak of stubbornness in Lawrence Clinton, Jr. When he headed in a given direction, he usually kept on going. Steve grinned at him from behind the cigar counter.

"Glad things are coming your way, Mr. Clinton," he said.

"I could do without some of them," Larry told him.

As he went toward the exit a man was standing near the door and in the middle of the passageway. Larry had to brush close to him. The man swung toward him and something under his coat jammed hard into Larry's side.

"Le's go back, bud," the man said in a low growl. "We got something to talk over."

Larry said: "Sure," turned, struck down with his left hand and let his right fist fly. As it connected solidly with a chin, there was an explosion, only a little muffled by the cloth, and flame streaked close by Larry's side. He saw the man falling forward, smoke coming from the smoldering cloth. He suddenly decided to let someone else put out the fire, turned and dashed out the entrance.

People on the sidewalk had stopped and were staring uncertainly at the doorway. Larry got behind a taxi, saw a traffic cop running up

with waving arms, then slipped back along the line of cars, skipped behind a passing one and crossed over. He didn't look back. He made the corner, swung into his long stride and thought that Jerome Knapp had been pretty fast on his messenger.

As he came up to the address Haynes had given him, a man leaned his head from a big sedan parked near the entrance.

"Hey, are you Clinton?"

Larry swung around and nodded. The fellow was hardly older than himself, smooth-featured, with a bold, hard stare.

"Cliff said you should get in here and wait."

Larry glanced beyond him to the man behind the wheel and met the same cold, level look. This man was a little older, heavier built, with a nose that had once been broken and since received not too good plastic surgery. But both were of the same type—gunmen.

"Cliff?" Larry said to the first man.

"Haynes."

"All right. I'll wait." He turned to pace slowly, and the young fellow called to him again.

"He said for you to get inside, where you won't be a mark."

Larry stopped beside him.

"You're inside, aren't you?"

"Sure, I'm inside. So what?"

Larry resumed his pacing.

The young fellow turned to his companion.

"For the love of— Smoke, d'you get this guy?" He swung around toward Larry. "Hey, fella—"

"Can it, Ches," Smoke growled. "Here's Haynes, an' he's in a hell of a hurry."

Larry got in. He thought if these lads were going to play on his side, teamwork didn't promise to be too hot.

Haynes was in a hurry. He got the idea, forcibly, over to Smoke, and the big car shot uptown.

Before long they were in the outskirts. The driver turned his head.

"Where you said, Cliff is over by the shore. We gotta go 'way round. Ain't but one road in."

"It's right on the water. Can't help it. Get there as fast as you can."

"We coulda come quicker by boat," Smoke growled and turned back to his driving.

"Hope somebody else don't get the same idea," Haynes said and relapsed into silence.

Larry, thinking of his coolness in the office, thought he was particularly nervous. "What do you value this thing anyway?" he asked abruptly.

"I wish I had it for half a million," Haynes clipped. "But a thousand is good pay for your work," he added quickly.

They soon left any semblance of a highway and struck into a hard dirt road. They had passed no cars, but before long a flivver rounded a curve into sight and came toward them, driven so shakily that Smoke had to slow and swing wide. He cursed volubly.

"Damned clam digger," he swore. "Them an' their Model T's shoulda been outlawed twenty years ago." He spilled a mouthful of oaths from his window and shot ahead.

Larry had a passing glimpse of a gray, old face, imperturbable. Mildly curious, he turned his head. 9T-79-8— he read, then the rest was lost in the dust kicked up by the sedan.

The road twisted, swung lower and skirted a low ridge of scrub hardwood with a brackish marsh close on their left. The sun had set and dusk was not far away.

"Must be getting close," Haynes



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*The gunmen leaped out the doors and started shooting around the sedan, too busy to notice Larry slide through the marsh.*

muttered and sat more upright to peer ahead.

The single roadway was sandy, rough in spots where it was harder and plentifully filled with stones. The car bumped badly, and Smoke

had to slacken speed. With the trees thinning and the way turning to their right, they came to a little dry wash that cut across the road. As Smoke throttled his motor to change gears, there came clearly to their

ears a staccato *putt-putt-putt*.

"To hell with the car, Smoke," Haynes exploded. "Shove her!"

"Sure, if you don't mind walkin'," Smoke threw back at him.

A half mile farther, the trees ended; but the ridge ran on, lower, narrowing to a point with the marsh to the left and beyond it and the sea to the right, visible away out but still hidden close to the shore. On the point, still a few hundred yards ahead, stood a low building; and, a short distance before it, the ridge dipped to a causeway which was probably filled at high tide. Boulders stood out on the top of the ridge and the road clung low to the marsh side until near the causeway, where it appeared to end. Smoke peered keenly ahead.

"Don't see how we'll ever get this tub around, Cliff."

"Never mind that now, Smoke. Get her down there fast."

The driver shrugged and sent the car along, but sand clogged at the wheels and it weaved under their drive. It edged up to the causeway and suddenly stopped. A bullet nicked the frame post near Ches and plowed a furrow across the glass.

The young gunman eyed it for the briefest fraction. Then he tore a big gun from its shoulder holster, and, resting his elbow on the window ledge, poured three shots in rapid succession across the flat ridge. The lead chipped splinters from a boulder where Ches had seen a hand disappear.

Smoke, the driver, snapped open his door and let himself fall sidewise to the running board, then to the ground. Flat down, he crawled under the car and put his gun in action between the spokes of a front wheel.

"Hey, you fools," he called be-

tween shots. "Come outta there and get down here. We can pick 'em easy."

Haynes had gone out of his door, whipping out his pistol. Sinking to one knee, he started shooting around the rear of the sedan. Bullets were whanging into the metal side of the car and smashing the windows. Larry, from the right-hand seat, followed Haynes out and went straight on to the edge of the marsh where the ground fell off a little. He turned in time to see Ches slide out of the driver's door, jerk as a bullet nicked his arm, then get down low to join Smoke. Beyond him, the dark face of Pellini was just disappearing behind a big rock.

By keeping on his hands and knees, Larry was just below the line of fire and he didn't hesitate. For one thing, he had no pistol; besides he wanted no part in the gunmen's battle. Vivian Knapp had tried to warn him that murder lay ahead, and here he was in the midst of it in the making.

Larry had taken a good look at the surrounding area as they had come up. He was heading for the low building on the point. He couldn't go back the way they'd come; couldn't remain where he was. He had no choice, except to get into that building. His greatest danger point was in the causeway, which could be raked from behind the boulders where the other gang was sheltered. It was a risk, but he couldn't avoid it!

He paused for a second as he reached the edge. The battle, now a little behind him, sounded at its peak, and he gambled that they were all too busy to notice him. Flat on his stomach, he started wriggling across the marsh. He had almost made it when a bullet seared his

back. Under the impetus of the hot sting, he dived ahead, got to hands and knees again and crawled as fast as he could to the shelter of the building. He kept on to the rear, having no confidence that Haynes' men wouldn't shoot him if they saw him going where, for the moment at least, they could not follow.

Larry climbed to the higher level where the building stood. He had been wondering about the men who'd started the gun fight, particularly since the bullet had come his way. Now, he saw that the point was flanked on the seaward side by a ledge of rock that made ascent, there, practically impossible. Evidently, the only approach was from the front; and he judged, from the unceasing reports, that it would be a few minutes before anyone would follow the way he'd come.

He made out a door in the rear, went to it and found it unlatched. He entered a long room that seemed to occupy most of the space of the building. As he took a step forward, he noticed a jog at his left hand, making a tiny office. He took another step and saw that the door was half open, inward.

There was the body of a man across the threshold!

Larry caught his breath sharply, for the instant a little stunned and confused. In the seconds that he stood there, gazing down, drawing the back of his hand across his suddenly wet forehead, it again flashed over his mind that Vivian Knapp had started to speak of murder. Had she meant this? How could she, unless it were premeditated and she had known of it?

But Larry knew very well he couldn't waste time there. He bent on one knee to look closer at the murdered man, and his hand brushed a limp hand. It was not cold, and

the discovery gave him a little shock without analyzing it. The man had whitish hair, but the light was too faint to see his features. Larry had no doubt that this must be the eccentric chemist, Christopher Galt, of whom Haynes had spoken; but he was less concerned with the man's identity than he was to learn if he were still alive.

With the battle still in progress outside, he dared not turn on the shop's light. He did not smoke, himself, and he had no matches; but he had been given a lighter, once, and he carried it for the convenience of hoped-for clients. He twisted a little to put his back more to the windows, snapped the lighter on and, by the meager light, saw lined features that were vaguely familiar but not instantly recalled. He saw also that the man was dead beyond any question of doubt.

Something in one outstretched hand caught his eye. He bent closer and saw that it still grasped a torn piece of paper. It was crumpled and torn, but printed words stood out.

Patent No. 987,67—

Issued to Lawrence Clin—

With a swift movement, he removed the fragment of paper, and brought it closer to the tiny flame. Then he stood up, his knee brushing the lighter, extinguishing its flame and knocking it over.

He forgot it for the moment in the face of two impressions: One was that the firing outside had ceased, and he was asking himself how long it had escaped his notice; the other was something that was hammering at his brain, seeking to awaken his memory.

The first obviously demanded his instant attention. He shoved the paper into an inside pocket and turned toward the large room. Then

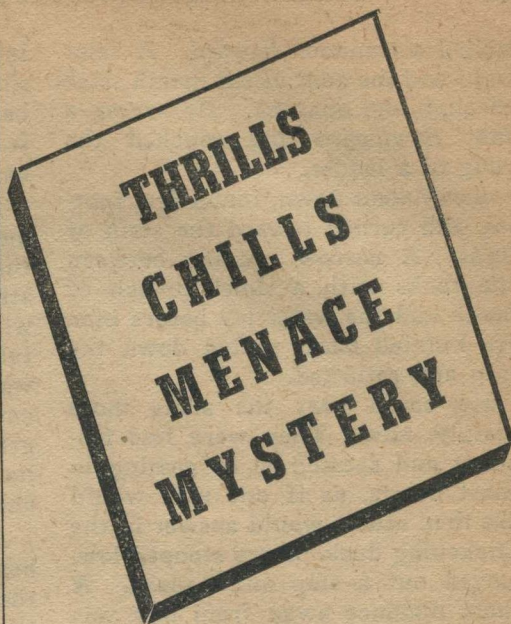
a pistol crashed outside! Another answered, and the fight seemed on again. Larry suddenly wanted to get away from there—to any place where he could think in peace for a few minutes. But the working of his memory told him that he should first discover if there were anything besides this torn sheet of paper that he could take with him.

In the dim light of the larger space, he could make out a bench running along one wall. He could see faintly the outline of objects it held: retorts, burners, long glass tubes, a small motor. He knew, then, that he was looking for the test apparatus Haynes had spoken of. That and the papers covering it, Haynes had told him, were valued at more than half a million dollars. He covered the length of the bench, swept his hand under it all the way back and found nothing that even faintly resembled what he sought.

### CHAPTER III. DODGING THE LAW!

With one ear cocked to outside noises, he shuffled over the whole interior with no better result. He pushed the door wide, stepped into the office and found that while it was narrow, it was longer than he had surmised. He went over the room thoroughly, letting his fingers investigate what he could only dimly see. A shelf at one side seemed to be bare until his groping hand felt what seemed to be a notebook. He shoved it inside his shirt. Of books or other papers he could find nothing.

He started toward the door, suddenly pressed to get away, and observed a hollow sound under his step. Turning back, he tested it again, then stooped and swept a hand over the floor. His fingers encountered a small ring. He dug it up-right, put a finger through it and



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pulled a trapdoor upward. A faint light and the odor of the marsh came through the opening. He swung a foot downward and touched the rung of a ladder.

Larry went down, found firm footing and turned toward the strip of light. A narrow opening between the rocks with a short stretch of beach and the water lay before him. He hurried back, pulled down the trap and returned.

He could hear the shots more plainly, now. They were less frequent and seemed to be coming in short bursts, as if one man would fire then others would answer in the thickening dusk. Larry stooped low, moved out a step and paused. A short distance away from him was the stern of a speedboat. He looked back. The opening he had come through was hardly discernible. Pellini and his men must have missed it entirely.

He moved farther along the beach and waited, his head turned to the right. Then a pistol flashed and, with the report, others answered that he couldn't see. That man, at least, was beyond the flat where the causeway crossed.

Larry crept on. He entered the water and made no sound. Keeping low and moving cautiously, he reached the stern and edged behind the shelter of the low hull. He crept to the bow and felt where the light anchor line ran out.

Drawing a knife from his pocket, he severed the rope. Then he held the boat in the same position until, with his head close to the surface, he was back to the cockpit. He drew a long breath, gave the boat a hard shove seaward, swung one long leg over the gunwale and clambered in.

There was a yell from the shore behind him. A bullet zipped the water alongside; another thudded

into the stern, and still a third smashed into the upright boarding beside the wheel. Larry crawled frantically forward, hugging the cockpit boards.

Between the shots, he could hear more yelling, the shouting of words; then a burst of shots with no bullets striking near him. He reached the wheel, ran his hand alongside it and felt a button. He pressed it. There was a whirl of the starter; the engine caught. Still crouched low, Larry grasped the gear shift and shoved it home, and the speedboat jerked ahead.

A bullet smashed splinters close beside his face. He lay flat, feeling the throb of the powerful engine, the lift and fall of the boat to the slight waves. A few moments later, he pulled himself into the helmsman's seat and stepped up the gas to a louder roar of the exhaust.

He looked backward. There were no more flashes, no reports that he could hear. Apparently, he had broken up the battle. He judged that Haynes and his men had taken advantage of the momentary diversion to scatter the other gang, but with all the firing there had been he wondered how any could be left on either side to pull a trigger.

He was getting out of the cove into open water, and he turned his head for one last look, grinning a little in triumph at his escape. He could see the fringe of trees, a short stretch of the ridge where it was high enough to hit the skyline, then the outline of the low building. And instantly the grin was struck from his lips, and cold sweat broke out on his forehead.

He stood up, slapped one pocket, then another; thrust his hands into them in vain search. He had forgotten his lighter. He had left it there

beside the dead body, a body that was not yet cold.

He cut down the motor, turned the boat around in a tight circle and stole back toward the cove with the engine muffled to its lowest sound and barely speed ahead. He was willing to take time, to give whichever gang had come out the victor time to get away.

Then a doubt struck him. Haynes and his men must have won out, and Haynes would never leave until he had visited that building. As he watched, his doubt was confirmed. A light showed in a window; it moved and showed again at another spot. A flashlight. They were searching the place!

Larry turned the boat, stepped up the motor and fled toward the city.

A considerable time later, Larry headed into a dark landing which looked to be deserted. He made the boat fast at one outer corner, where it could swing with the tide, and hustled ashore. He took the first avenue and went a half dozen blocks before he turned into a drugstore and sought a phone booth. It was a call phone, and he dropped in a nickel and gave his office number. It was late, but he had an idea Elsie Garland would hang around.

There was a click, and a low-toned masculine voice came over the wire.

"Lawrence Clinton's office. Is this Mr. Clinton calling. Hold the phone a minute, please."

Larry took out his handkerchief, wiped the phone and left it dangling. He cleaned the latch, inside and out, and shoved the door closed with his heel. On the sidewalk, he took a quick glance around. Diagonally across the avenue were the lighted windows of the restaurant. He went over, found a table close to the corner window and was half through an

Irish stew when a radio car drew up at the drugstore and a couple of cops jumped out and slid inside.

Larry gulped the rest of his stew as he watched with a sidelong look. The cops came out and stood by the curb, looking up and down the avenue. One started straight across the street; the second, with a hitch at his belt, headed directly for the restaurant. Larry swung around in his chair, stood up with no more show of haste than he could help, and slipped a dollar to the waiter. He grinned down at the man.

"Keep the change, son. Say, that stew was great. Take me in to your chef; I want to tell him so."

He followed the man into a sweltering kitchen, gave another dollar to a stout man in dirty apron, and cap askew on his round head.

At the rear of the kitchen, a door stood open. Larry went out to the dimly lighted side street, then set his long legs driving him away from the avenue and toward the water. On the water-front street he turned downtown and kept going, hugging close to the dark buildings and wary of the cross streets.

He had figured on taking the story to the police, eventually. But he needed more, much more, before doing that. To be hauled in by them and put on the defensive, with the angles all against him, was something he hadn't counted on. And the charge would be murder, first degree!

It didn't make sense to him; not police action that quick. He tried to think back as he hustled along. It must have been Haynes he'd seen prowling the place with a flash. But Haynes would be the last person in the world to call copper in that deal, with half a million dollars at stake and he, himself, up to the neck in it

—to say nothing of what might be laid at his door from the gang battle. No—he didn't see Haynes in the police angle at all.

Haynes was the one man Larry wanted to keep away from, until he had his story more complete. He might figure him for the Galt murder; Larry had counted on that. And if he'd seen the lighter with Larry's initials on it, he wouldn't have removed it on his life. But Haynes would figure more than the kill; he would be sure that Larry had killed, then copped the prize and lammed.

Up ahead, Larry's alert eyes saw the hood of a car nosing around a corner from a side street. It had no lights. He flattened himself, wriggled over and dropped down into a sunken basement entrance, to squat on the lowest step. A cold shiver ran up and down his spine. It might be the same radio car; it might be another, but the fact was evident that they were combing the section for him.

Larry's whole thought had been on how he could keep out of the clutches of Haynes and his men while he dug up the rest of the story to put against some very damning circumstantial evidence. Larry realized that men had burned for less than was stacked up on him. If he should be arrested, now, and Haynes were rounded up, Larry wouldn't have a chance. While he waited the car's approach, his alert lawyer's mind constructed Haynes' probable story: how he'd come on a simple business deal, had been attacked and was defending the lone chemist when Larry had sneaked in, murdered, dropped his lighter and escaped.

Larry caught the soft sound of rubber on the uneven pavement. A flashlight's beam struck the wall

above his head, wavered, went past, then came back.

Then the sound of a racing car drew nearer, came abreast. There were hoarse shouts, and the beam was taken away. An engine roared; gears made a grinding sound. Larry waited. After a moment he stuck his head up cautiously, got his eyes above the level. The tail lights of a taxi were growing fainter down the street; the police car was in hot pursuit.

He was out of there with a leap. He raced to the corner, sprinted the long block back to the avenue, crossed over and slid into a parked cab.

In another part of town, he called Elsie Garland's home.

"Is it a hospital or precinct?" she asked when she heard his voice. "Are you hurt, beaten up, or anything?"

"Listen," he cut in. "Give me the news if you have any; then I've a job for you."

"But are you—"

"Not yet, but the prospects are good. Shoot."

"You do bother a person," she said. "Then her voice got sharper. "Here it is, in order. Nothing until an hour ago. Then Jerome Knapp called to say that if a hundred thousand dollars interested you, to get in touch with him at his country place. Know where it is?"

"Sure! Up the Sound, this side. Keep going!"

"Then a man, who called himself Glover, phoned. Write this number down; it might be important." Larry reached for paper, took out the torn sheet, and wrote as she gave it. Then she went on: "He said it was most confidential but to tell you that if you wanted a quick, sure way out of your present difficulties and were willing to take fifty thou-

sand dollars for value delivered, to call him there. He'd been there all evening, but to call only in person. Make any sense?"

"It may, when I get time to think of it. That all?"

"Then Vivian Knapp called—"

"Now I want you," he cut in.

"Listen. This was the most urgent of all. She didn't offer anything. It was the way she said it, and I believe her."

"That helps. What was it? Hustle. I may have to duck here any second."

"She begged me to try everything I could to get in touch with you quick and tell you not to see anyone, not to talk with anyone but to come to her immediately at her uncle's country place."

"That makes two of them," Larry growled.

"Listen! You are to come up the grounds from the water side. There is a summerhouse halfway to the house. She'll be watching it from her room. She couldn't tell me anything more but that."

"That all?" he asked again.

"Take my advice for once. You go there!" Elsie Garland pleaded.

"Listen. This may take two or three calls and I can't wait around."

"Don't you want to hear the rest?" she broke in.

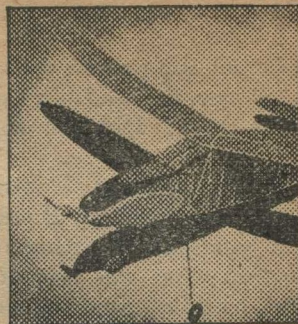
"What?"

"I waited late at the office, then decided to go out for a bite and back. Faithful fool! I rang for an elevator. When it came up, two dicks got out. Asked if I was connected with you. I asked if they knew where you were; said I used to be employed by you, and, knowing you sometimes worked late, I came to see if I could get my job back. A woman can fool a man any time. They let me go; they stuck."

"Yes, I know all that."

"Then I called a friend, newsman on police work. He'd heard a call

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was out for you in connection with a murder, but he hadn't enough then for a story. Did you do it?"

Larry groaned. "Now, you listen. Get hold of David Hollister. He handled my father's affairs and settled what was left of the estate. Tell him I'm mixed in a murder, and he's got to dig up some old information fast. Get what is covered in a patent issued to my father; part of the number is"—he consulted his torn sheet—"987,67—. See if there is any record of employees at about that time—Christopher Galt, Horatio Farley and anyone—"

"That was the man murdered!" Elsie said. "Last night."

"They both were. Tell him I'll call him from somewhere. I'll give him about a couple of hours, but I must have it!"

He hung up on "You go—"

Larry paid a cabby to drive with his flag up while Larry huddled close to the floor. The address he gave was a side street leading from the avenue to the water-front street and a few blocks north of the deserted landing where he had left the speedboat. He had decided to follow Elsie Garland's advice. With two hours to kill, a city full of cops was no place for him to wait.

He scouted the dark landing from the greater darkness of a convenient shrub, saw nothing suspicious and went cautiously down. Unfastening the craft, he shoved it hard away and let it drift as long as it had way before starting the motor.

The fact that the boat was there at all and with no cops on the watch raised another question in his mind. Haynes and his men all knew that Larry had made his getaway in the boat. If any of them had set the police so quickly on his trail, the boat would have been the first thing

they would have been looking for. Then, if they hadn't, who had? Larry didn't have the answer to that, but it occurred to him that Vivian Knapp, who seemed to have uncanny knowledge of things about to happen, might.

## CHAPTER IV. HOUSE OF DEATH!

Larry knew the Jerome Knapp place well, and he approached with lights out and barely headway. He drew in to the shore and skirted it in the shadow of the trees of a neighboring estate; then he headed for an open-ended boathouse that spanned a narrow cove. The speedboat slid between platforms that seemed to have been built to its width and nosed softly against the farther end. Larry made fast his cut rope end and turned toward the grounds.

It was silent there. A hundred yards away, he could see faint lights in a few windows of the main house; he watched but could make out nothing moving against the dim illumination. He started off to his right, still watching the lights from the house. The low roof of a summerhouse bulked into his view midway from the water. He went toward it slowly, moving cautiously from trunk to trunk of the several big trees scattered over the grounds.

He was almost to it, with the purpose of going around the square building to the house side, when a faint sound, off to his left and a little behind him, barely reached his ears. He stopped and turned his head, listening. He made it out as the soft purring of a motor, but whether it was fairly near at hand or at some distance was impossible to tell. He waited, and the sound ceased entirely.

Still he wasn't satisfied. He moved

over a little and saw that both doors of the summerhouse were open, back and front. He also made out that the walls were cut by windowless spaces with their shutters swung high. If a car were really back there, he couldn't have had a better place from which to watch and see if anyone came from it. He stepped soundlessly across the low threshold and turned toward his left.

Then something hard and heavy struck his head a glancing blow; and Larry went down to one knee. He was dazed and momentarily half stunned; but he had been in that condition before and still carried on. One hand was on the floor supporting him. He swept the other long arm around, encountered trousered legs, let his right hand join its mate and heaved. A man came down heavily and Larry tried to throw himself on top of him.

An avalanche of forms came down on him, grasping at arms and legs and throat. There was no word spoken; only the one oath jarred out of the man who had hit the floor. Larry was still dizzy, but he arched his back, gathered hands and knees beneath his body lifting the weight with him as he struggled to get upright. Then a hand grasped the back of his neck roughly. Instinct made him duck his head to one side and again a blow clipped the side of his head, but it was enough to drop him sprawling.

Knees knelt on his outstretched arms. One man put his weight on Larry's shoulders, another on his legs. He felt ropes twisted around his wrists, and he started to struggle again. A fist beat the back of his head, jarring his face against the floor. Larry lay quiet, waiting for his strength to come back to him for a better chance.

He was pulled to his knees, his

arms were yanked to his sides and the rope was wound around his body to pinion them. Larry flexed his muscles against the pull, shaking his head in an attempt to clear it. A trap, and he had walked right into it, baited by the girl, of course. Anger flooded him, but more for his own trust and stupidity than against Vivian Knapp.

Hands held his arms, pulled him to his feet, and he staggered against the men holding him. In a foolish sort of way, for his head was not yet clear, he thought of Elsie Garland and her advice and what he would tell her about it. Then it occurred to him suddenly that he would probably not be given the chance, and that helped more than anything else to bring his mind back to the present.

The hands that had grasped him were holding his upper arms; the rope was around his forearms. He twisted his wrists a little, found that there was a looseness in the bonds where he had held his muscles against them. He turned his head, trying to make out a face beside him, wondering at first who these men could be. His head was clearing fast and in a moment he remembered.

"Pellini!" he said. It was more a statement of fact to himself.

"What you want, mug?" a low-toned voice answered, and a fist crashed into his mouth, jerking his head backward.

Larry said nothing. He caught dimly the start of another swing, ducked his head to one side as far as the hold on him would allow, and knuckles cut his cheek.

"Save it," a low voice growled. "We goin' to work on him anyway. Wait till we get him where we can

do it proper and so's he'll know the answers."

"A good deal his fault Otto got it," Pellini said. "Besides, I owe this mug plenty."

"Then wait till you can see him better." A gun muzzle dug hard into Larry's back. "March, guy! Straight ahead. An' it would tickle me pink if you thought of runnin'."

The gun prodded him and the hands on his arms urged him forward.

Larry saw the tall figure of Pellini slip in between him and the lighter oblong of the front doorway, and they moved toward it. At the threshold, Pellini suddenly stopped and spread his arms wide.

"Back up!" he hissed. "A dame's coming from the house. 'It's that damned nosy girl. Why the boss don't keep her in line's beyond me. She tried to warn this guy from the office," he rumbled, "an' we knew she was watchin'. You palookas made too much noise. Oughta have crowned him in the first place like I said."

"Stop your whinin'," the man at Larry's left growled back. "You go send her back or take her somewhere so's we can slip into the basement."

The gun was still hard against Larry's back; hands pulled him toward the rear of the square building and away from the light from the doorway. The gun shifted a little, but the grip on his arms didn't relax as the men tried to peer past Pellini. Larry drew in his stomach muscles, twisted his right hand hard against them and eased it up slightly inside the rope. When the time came, he would have it free.

And here was a new angle on Vivian Knapp. He couldn't see her beyond Pellini and he turned his head to look out the side opening. A movement out there caught his eye.

He supposed it was the girl, but a moment later he saw a man's figure slide stealthily from one tree to another not far from the main house. He was not advancing toward them, but along the side of the house. As he watched, a second figure followed the first.

"What are you lookin' at, guy?" the man at Larry's left asked in a hoarse whisper. Then he turned his head. "What the hell is that?"

Pellini suddenly ducked to one side of the doorway. Then Larry saw the girl walking straight toward them, though still some distance away. He flashed a glance to the side. The two men had started to run. They were making for the girl, their footfalls soundless on the grass. Larry drew in a breath.

"Look out!" he yelled. A hand slammed over his mouth. The pistol dug viciously into his side.

"One more peep, big feller," the man on his left snarled, "an' I'll spill your guts!"

The hand was still over his mouth, the fingers digging into his cheeks. That didn't bother him; the gun in his side did! He eased his right hand farther; it was almost free, but the pistol was boring into him. He had to stand there and watch, while the two men bore down on the girl, who hadn't heard them. She knew nothing of their approach until a hand clapped over her mouth and arms closed roughly about her, stopping her frantic struggles almost as they began.

It was the work of seconds. The light wasn't strong but Larry could see a cloth whipped about her face, her arms bound. Then the men lifted her and bore her swiftly back through the trees, probably to the car he had faintly heard.

Pellini chuckled in the darkness. His step came nearer them.

"Just like we'd ordered it," he said.

"What's the play, Pellini?" the man with the gun on Larry asked.

"Simple, Nick. They've taken her to play against what this guy's brought us." He laughed, low. "A gal against five hundred grand. The boss don't hold her that high, an' she'll turn up somewhere missin' in the morning, with her throat cut from ear to ear. Those guys ain't foolin'. They got Otto's killin' against 'em, and two or three more won't matter."

"And we ain't neither," Nick told him with an oath.

"You bet we ain't," Pellini confirmed. "Coupla minutes more an' this guy'll give us the works or he'll take it like the gal. This is playin' pretty—right into our hands."

"Think so?" a low voice mocked him from just outside the opening. "Get 'em up, you rats!"

The gun whisked away from Larry's back and blazed into the outside dark. Larry acted as swiftly. His right hand came free and swung viciously at the man on his right. His fist connected solidly. Larry went on with the blow, low down on hands and knees and scrambled toward the farther side of the house. A gun exploded behind him! He heard the bullet thud into the wall above his head before other guns were banging.

Then a stuttering roar broke out from the rear doorway, drowning out the crashing pistols, silencing them one after the other as a machine gun weaved back and forth blasting the huddled men. Larry didn't need that to drive him. With his right arm free to balance him, he swung over the low sill of the opening and dropped to the ground.

With the tommy gun chattering

its song of death, he crawled at frantic speed to the nearest tree, got half erect behind it and ran as he had never run before. His left arm was still bound, but that hampered him little. He was concerned alone with speed and keeping some trunk between himself and the charnel of a summerhouse with its spewing lead. But the trees were few, and the distance to the wall ahead was greater than he could wish.

The tommy gun ceased its burst for a moment. Dodging, Larry risked a glance backward, hearing the shouting of hoarse voices, then seeing a flashlight sweeping the inside of the low building. At once, there was a louder yell, words that had his name. The answer came swiftly. Bark chipped from a tree he was swinging around. The machine gun had started again! Bullets raked about, whipping through the leaves of shrubs that clung to his churning legs, thudding into solid wood, spanging against the rock wall beyond, leaving a breath against his cheek!

He zigzagged, diving from one tree to the next, running with his right hand almost trailing the ground. He swung toward the water side and the greater darkness there. Then, as the tommy stopped for a moment, a pistol crashed from the general direction of the boathouse. He heard feet crashing through the shrubbery, and he turned in his stride and made straight for the wall.

Larry got close to it, and lead came in an endless rain, spattering against the rocks. He weaved away from their pattern, dropped flat into the shadow of the wall's base and worked along as best he could toward a thick shrub that grew close, seeking only the protection of its darkness. The machine gun's bul-

lets sought the opposite direction, then came back at foot-width spaces—closer, closer, creeping up on him fast.

Larry leaped over the wall, letting his knees bend under him as he landed, and as a pistol crashed down along the wall the bullet sped just over his head. He spun and ran again, zigzagging, making for a roadway at the head of the grounds. The tommy gun had stopped, but three more bullets from the pistol sought him out—slow, careful shots with one cutting the flesh of his bound left arm.

Before he made the roadway, he heard the roar of a speeding motor on the other side of the grounds. It came louder as it passed Jerome Knapp's big house. Larry stopped, waiting, crouched low; then the car turned cityward. The sound faded and he became aware of voices, the screaming of women in fright, the hoarser cries of men.

Larry rose slowly, looking about, not so much to see anything as to decide which way he should go. He thought of the speedboat, turning in that direction; then it occurred to him that the man with the pistol had not been given time to reach the car. As he hesitated, the unmistakable puttering of the motor boat sent him around to try his luck at hitch hiking. It seemed his only chance.

With the idea of getting away from that immediate vicinity, first, he hustled toward the main roadway, rounded a smartly trimmed hedge and smacked into a stout policeman, nightstick out, running heavily but silently on rubber-soled shoes. They collided and the big officer's free arm went around Larry's shoulders and stayed there. His eyes went to the rope from which Larry

had not yet been able to free himself. The grip tightened.

"Scrammin' from that shindig, eh? Robbery, huh? And caught right at it. Say, what the hell was the battle anyway?"

There was no help for it. He was caught.

"You're wasting time, officer; Jerome Knapp's niece has been kidnaped. You want to get out the alarm fast."

"Do I now? You couldn't be lyin' by any chance?"

"Don't be a fool!" Larry erred in his exasperation. "The car went toward the city not two minutes ago."

"And what kind of car was it?"

"I don't know. I didn't see it; I heard it. And I saw Vivian Knapp grabbed by two men and carried over to where the car started from. Get a move on!"

"Yeah? And what were you doin' so handy you could see all them things?"

"Oh, hell! I was dodging bullets, if you must know. Aren't you going to get out that alarm? There's a chance to stop them now; there won't be later."

A light shone in the policeman's eyes, a bright light of sudden understanding.

"And I'm thinking you can tell us where they've taken her—if she has been taken at all. Come on, now. We'll go along to the station."

Larry twisted in the grasp that grew tighter. The nightstick came into obvious sight.

"You can't do that," he protested. "I was almost a victim as much as she. And you're wasting valuable time. Why the hell can't you understand it? You've got to get that alarm out!"

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"Oh, I can't, eh?" the officer said to the first protest, ignoring the rest.

Larry considered. If he'd had two hands free, he would have risked it, night stick and all. He'd stopped bigger men.

"Come on, then," he said. "Let's hurry."

"'Tis only a couple of blocks, my lad. And you'd better be savin' your breath for the story you'll no doubt be tellin'."

"And I'm telling you," Larry said wrathfully, "you'll have some explaining to do for letting them get away after I've warned you."

"I'm thinkin'," the officer said, giving up the attempt to match his step to Larry's long stride, "you've enough to worry about on your own account without botherin' over me."

Larry was inclined to agree with him; yet at that moment the plight of Vivian Knapp was foremost in his mind.

## CHAPTER V. ACCUSED!

The small suburban station was empty except for a man behind a tall desk, working frantically at the telephone. Larry jerked his head toward him.

"Cut in and get that alarm going," he said.

The stout officer led him to a door, opened it and shoved him into a small office with a desk, swivel chair and one other. He closed the door behind him. He severed Larry's bonds with a pocketknife and cuffed his wrists. Then he pulled out the plain chair and seated himself with a little grunt of satisfaction. Larry dropped into the swivel and reached for the phone.

The nightstick rapped his wrist.

"You'll be leavin' that alone."

"I want to talk to my lawyer."

"You can tell the chief that."

"For Heaven's sake, man, aren't you going to do anything?"

The stout policeman smiled complacently.

"I'm doing very fine, thanks."

Larry leaned back hopelessly. Then thoughts of his own situation tumbled upon him. Ten minutes passed, fifteen, then twenty.

The door came open swiftly but quietly. A solidly built man with a round, dark face and alert, inscrutable eyes, came in and closed the door softly behind him.

"I've never seen such a mess," he said. "Three men cut to ribbons and the place a shambles. What you got here, Mahoney?"

The stout policeman came importantly to his feet.

"Just the lad we want, chief. Nabbed him at the corner of Knapp's—runnin' away—and brought him in."

"Listen, chief," Larry cut in. "Vivian Knapp has been kidnaped. She was grabbed and carried off in a car that turned toward the city. I've been trying for the last half-hour to get this nitwit to put out the alarm."

The chief turned slowly toward Mahoney's blazing-red face.

"Outside, Mahoney. If I don't call you in fifteen minutes go down and patrol the Knapp place. Send Schlesinger in."

The stout policeman gave Larry a baleful look, tossed the key to the handcuffs on the desk and went out. A wiry man came in, walked over to sit on the window ledge and fixed sharp black eyes on Larry. Larry started to get up, but the chief waved him back.

"What's your story?" he asked quietly.

"I'll tell it gladly," Larry said, "if you will let me call my lawyer."

"Sure—sure! But give us the story first."

"Won't you get that alarm out?" Larry begged him.

"I put it out from the house. Did you see the men who took her?"

"I didn't see anyone except figures. Too dark."

"All right. Shoot!"

"I had a date with Miss Knapp," Larry began. "For some reason, she didn't want her uncle to know that I was coming, and she asked me to meet her in the summerhouse." They listened to the end in silence, and then said nothing.

"Can I call my lawyer, now?" Larry asked.

The chief nodded. "You haven't told us your name," he said, as if off-hand.

"Let me speak to him first."

He put in a call for David Hollister's home and while waiting, turned his head to the chief. "What did Jerome Knapp say?"

"We haven't located Jerome Knapp, yet," the chief said slowly.

David Hollister's grave voice sounded on the wire.

"Were you able to find that information?" Larry asked him.

"Young man," Hollister came back severely, "you will have to put yourself in my hands from this moment on."

"But the information?"

"All in good time. Do you agree?"

"I guess I'll have to, if you hold out on me."

"Very well. Then meet me as soon as possible at—" He added the address.

"But that's the district attorney's home!" Larry blurted.

"Exactly! I have spoken with him. He will give you all the con-

sideration warranted, after listening to you."

"But I can't go until I have more information; my story is incomplete."

"Meet me there immediately. This is a homicide matter."

"Wait a minute." Larry swung around to the chief. "Will you have me taken to the D. A.'s house?"

"Who says so?"

"My lawyer—David Hollister."

The chief shook his head.

"I'm in the office of a suburban chief of police," Larry said into the mouthpiece. "There have been several men killed here, and he wants authority."

"Give me the number and hang up," David Hollister said briefly.

Larry gave it, then said: "Wish you would get me the address of this number." He repeated from memory the phone number which the Glover man had given to Elsie Garland. The inspiration came from a maze of thoughts flashing through Larry's brain. He swung around slowly. His face had grown paler. The three men waited in silence. When the phone rang, the chief leaned over and took it.

"Yes, sir," he said and listened. "About twenty minutes. All right, sir." He stood up and looked over at Schlesinger. I think we'll take him down, Bob. Things here can wait."

Schlesinger stood up. He took a folded paper from his pocket, spread it and laid it on the desk. Larry's name was in three-inch letters, and beneath:

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Some quirk of thought made Larry grin. "Maybe that will bring me some business," he said.

"You're a cool one," the chief said. "That's the dangerous kind."

Then one, perhaps both, had known who he was from the first.

"And you two," Larry said, "have to put up with men like Mahoney."

"He brought you in," the chief reminded him. "Let's go."

The drive was made in silence. On a quiet side street, half a dozen policemen made a double line from curb to the soberly lighted, modest entrance. The car drew up there, and a man threw his cigar butt into the street and came to the door. The chief unlocked the cuffs and Larry got out.

The man nodded to the chief. "You'll get in the record," he said, as he took Larry's arm and led him toward the entrance.

Larry didn't like that remark. It struck a foreboding chill in him. Innocence was one thing; to prove it, he knew, was something else, again. His law had taught him that, but he'd never really appreciated the force of it before.

One flight up, they entered a big library with a deep-piled rug that made their footsteps soundless. Only the opening and closing of the door notified the men inside of their coming.

One man was leaning far back in a swivel chair. The man's face was in the shade, but the strong features stood out, and the sharply intelligent eyes of John Haverstraw, the district attorney.

David Hollister was sitting quietly at one side, but the man in the brighter light before the desk drew Larry's glance. At the moment, his head was bent a little to one side as he followed his process of cleaning polished nails with the blade of a gold penknife. He made no move to look up until Haverstraw waved

a hand and Larry had seated himself in a companion chair, also in the brighter light. He closed the penknife, regarded the effect of his work, then let his glance drift to Larry over his raised fingers as Haverstraw intoned the customary: "You are under no pressure to talk, Mr. Clinton, but I must warn you"—he gestured where a young man was sitting bolt upright, notebook and a dozen sharpened pencils spread on the little table before him—"whatever you say may be used against you."

Larry laughed shortly.

"I am a lawyer, Mr. Haverstraw, and I could construct a hellish circumstantial case against myself. That's why I want to talk. But, with your permission, I should like to speak with Mr. Hollister first. I need some information that will make my knowledge more complete."

"It is possible," the D. A. said, "that we may have the information you need. Suppose, first, we set before you what we already are prepared to present to the court. Captain Pratt, you undoubtedly have more details than I."

"Just a moment," Larry interrupted. "Have you found anything on Vivian Knapp, yet?"

The district attorney gave him a keen glance.

"Nothing, so far," he said.

"Important to your defense?" Captain Pratt wanted to know.

"I hadn't thought of that," Larry said slowly. "No, I believe not. She's just a girl who tried to help me, and fell into pretty rough hands."

"Whose?"

"I wish I knew."

"Suppose you go ahead, captain," Haverstraw intervened.

Pratt, dapper, cold, kept his eyes on Larry.

"I shall ask first degree," he stated bluntly.

"John—" David Hollister started to protest; but the D. A. silenced him with raised hand.

"Here it is," Pratt went on as if there'd been no interruption. "You were a prize athlete in college, which means you were close to the easy money. Your family was wealthy, once. Then you turned lawyer. You got no clients, you are practically broke. A chemist spends his lifetime working out a formula; he is successful, and it's worth a good fortune. You come to him on the day of his success—today. You pretend that a patent once granted to your father plays a part in the final formula. You try to make a deal. He turns you down, flat. You kill him and make off with the stuff. We have proof of every step. How'd

you kill him, Clinton?"

"I don't know how he was killed. I saw blood on his chest, but I did not examine it."

Pratt shot a finger into his face.

"Then you admit you were there!" he almost shouted.

"Of course. I was going to tell you about it."

"What did you carry off with you?"

Larry reached into his side breast pocket, pulled the torn sheet out and gave it to Haverstraw.

"This was clutched in his hand. And the hand, I noticed, was not yet cold. You will see it has part of my father's name."

"Like I said," Pratt said triumphantly. "What else?"

Larry began to undo his shirt. "I hunted as best I could in the dark, through the main room and the small office. The only thing I found and took was what I thought might be

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a notebook. I haven't had a chance to look at it." He pushed it across the desk to Haverstraw.

The district attorney flipped the pages and gave a low whistle.

"This," he said gravely, "has the name of Horatio Farley and seems to be a collection of notes and formulas."

"What!" Pratt shouted. "Did you commit that murder too, Clinton?"

David Hollister stood up.

"I suggest we postpone this informal—er—examination."

"No!" Larry said firmly. "I want to go on with it. No," he said again, to Pratt; "neither that nor any other murder. Let me tell my story."

"Go ahead," Pratt said sarcastically.

"I'll have to warn you again—" Haverstraw began, but Larry waved it aside. Starting with his return to his office building that noon, Larry traced every step he had taken, every action he had witnessed or had been a part of, to the time of his arrival there. One thing only he omitted: reference to the call made to his office by the man calling himself Glover. When he came to it in his summation, he decided on that instant to hold it in reserve. As he finished, he pointed to the D. A.'s desk. "I see you have my lighter. I knocked it over, as I told you, and forgot it."

Captain Pratt laughed, a brittle, mirthless sound.

"Never in all my experience," he declared, "have I had an accused play so perfectly into my hands. What do you expect to get out of this phony story you've told us, Clinton?"

"It being the truth," Larry said quietly, "I expect it may help you clear things up. I don't know who killed Galt. It couldn't have been Haynes or those men of his who were with us. But round them up,

and you'll find out that I couldn't have, either."

"We found the body of Otto Krantz not far from that laboratory. Who killed him?"

"I hadn't known about that until I heard Pellini speak of Otto's being wiped out. I only know now that it must have been the Krantz who came to my office with Pellini. I suppose Haynes or one of his men must have shot him in that fight."

"Do you think Haynes or Ches or Smoke will admit it?" Pratt asked very softly.

Larry laughed grimly.

"I imagine *you* could get it out of them, captain."

"Man," Pratt said, "if we round up Haynes or his men alive, you're finished. Those lads will swear you into the chair."

Larry leaned back in his chair to think this over. Then came away quickly with a squirm of his shoulders.

"What's the matter—nervous?" Pratt jeered.

Larry turned to Haverstraw. He was very quiet, but some desperate idea had come into his mind.

"Have you any iodine, Mr. Haverstraw?" he asked. "I've a couple of bullet nicks and I've been too busy to think about them before." He stretched out his left hand where blood had trickled down his arm and dried on the wrist.

"Why, to be sure. Come with me."

He led the way to a large bathroom and opened a medicine chest. Larry had peeled off coat and shirts and the district attorney glanced at the muscled torso. He brought out a small bottle. "Want me to touch it up?" he asked.

"No, thanks," Larry said. With Haverstraw's back turned, he had

seen through the open window the outline of a fire escape. "I like to gauge the burn, myself."

"Make yourself comfortable," Haverstraw said and went out, closing the door behind him.

Larry turned the bolt softly. He slapped iodine on the cut in his arm, twisted it and streaked it across his back, then fairly threw his clothes on. Then he climbed through the window and went noiselessly downward. There was a drop at the bottom, but Larry swung down on his long arms and took it without trouble. With all the speed he could make, he cut over to a back street, picked up the first taxi and gave a block number across town to the driver.

He had neglected to ask David Hollister the address of Glover's telephone but he knew the general section of the exchange. It had taken him no longer than a second to see the trap he was in. He was gambling on the long chance that Glover was the man behind Haynes and his gunmen, and that he might make a deal with Glover to turn the men in right. A half million dollars made a pretty good argument. If he were right, he would also have a lead to Vivian Knapp. He was in wrong all the way, now; it was worth the try—the only one he could see.

He called the number from a dial booth, and a man's cautious voice answered.

"Mr. Glover," he said. "Lawrence Clinton calling."

"This is Mr. Glover."

"Remember a proposition you made my office this afternoon?"

"Of course." There was a curious intonation to the voice that puzzled Larry. Whether it was eagerness or nervousness he couldn't decide.

"What was the amount mentioned?"

"Fifty thousand," was the prompt answer, "but that need not be the maximum if the delivery can be made clear."

"I want to make a deal with you," Larry told him. "The money end can be half of that. I want Vivian Knapp freed unharmed, and there is one more contingency."

"These are matters we cannot discuss by telephone," Glover said a little sharply. "Can you give me your word that you are alone?"

"Absolutely!"

Glover gave an address. "This is not my home," he added, "but I will talk with you here. Come immediately!"

## CHAPTER VI.

### KILLER BAIT!

Several minutes later, Larry walked up two flights and pressed a button at the door of the one apartment on that floor. It was opened by a Jap, and he walked through a short hallway to a small reception room and from there into a living-room that seemed to take the width of the building. A short, flabby-appearing man was seated before a desk. He had sparse, grayish hair, fish-cold eyes and a round, expressionless face. On a divan, not far from his chair, sat Vivian Knapp. Her wrists and ankles were taped and there was a strip across her lips. Her eyes were frightened, but there was a glint in them as she looked up at Larry.

"Sit over here, Mr. Clinton," Glover invited, and gestured to a chair across the desk.

As Larry seated himself, he heard steps and glanced around.

Haynes walked into the room and took a seat on the divan. The young gunman named Ches followed, his

left arm in a sling; and behind him came the sedan driver, Smoke, and a fourth Larry had not seen before.

"Now ain't this nice," Ches sneered. He stood leaning against the wall, his eyes scowling at Larry. Smoke came down the room.

"I wanted to speak with you alone, Mr. Glover," Larry said coolly.

Glover glanced around.

"I didn't call you," he said. "You can wait outside until I do."

Haynes shook his head silently. Ches was more outspoken.

"Not on your life. We're not taking our eyes off this guy till he's put where he's safe—for us."

"I think," Glover said, and his voice was as cold as his eyes, "I am the one to give the orders here."

"Not this time, boss," Smoke growled. "Ches is right. This guy can send the bunch of us to the chair. He may have a murder tacked on him, but he's seen us in a couple of burnin's."

"It is not my fault or responsibility," Glover said, "if you got onto trouble by exceeding your orders." His glance traveled to Larry.

Ches laughed. "Don't worry about that punk hearin' what we say. He ain't goin' to peddle it anywhere. You gave us your orders, boss, an' we carried 'em out."

"Look, Mr. Glover," Haynes spoke for the first time. "We don't care what you get out of Clinton. We'll help you get it if he don't give easy. But we've got him here, and we're keeping him! With him out, we're in the clear. That's your answer, and that goes for the girl, too."

Glover was looking steadily at Larry. His eyes seemed to be trying to convey some message, but Larry could make nothing of it. He was measuring his chances and finding them hardly worth figuring. There was only one thing he counted

on: they would hardly gun him out here, and that would mean a fight without shooting, first.

"Under the circumstances," Glover was saying, and again his eyes bored hard at Larry, "do you feel like continuing our conversation, Mr. Clinton?"

There was something here; but unless Glover was sparring for time, he did not know what it was.

"I should like to think it over further," he said. "Your offer sounds reasonable, but there are those points on my side I'll have to consider."

"Take your time, punk," Ches jeered. "You got all night—say, till about three in the mornin'."

A light gleamed momentarily in Glover's fish eyes before he dropped them. He pressed a button on his desk, and the Jap padded softly in.

"Bring me—" Glover began, then lapsed into Japanese. It seemed to

Larry a long sentence for a simple order. Smoke, apparently, got the same idea. He scowled after the Jap, looked over at the fourth man and jerked his head.

"Go see what he's doin'."

Glover didn't so much as look at him. In a few moments the Jap was back with a glass of strained orange juice. The gunman, looking a little foolish, followed him in and resumed his place near Ches. But Smoke was not so easily satisfied. He waited a couple of minutes, then jerked his head again.

"Go see where he is now, Al."

Al pushed away from the wall and went out.

Glover sipped a little of his juice. His eyes glanced at Larry, then lowered to his desk with his head turned a little sidewise in the direction of the drawer; but if there were a pistol there, Larry had no idea of trying for it. He wouldn't have time



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for it, and it wasn't his style of fighting.

He glanced at Vivian Knapp and saw that her eyes were closed, her lids fluttering. There was no chance that she could mistake her situation. Larry ground his teeth. He had bungled it. Now both were doomed!

"You still insist on those two conditions, Mr. Clinton?" Glover asked slowly.

Ches shoved away from the wall.

"Say," he said angrily, "these two guys are stallin', both of 'em. If Glover ain't got any business to do, let's get goin'."

Smoke moved nearer the desk to look down the room.

"Now where the hell's Al?" he growled. "It couldn't 'a' taken him that long to see."

"Like I said," Ches cut in. "We're takin' chances waitin'." With a smooth movement a gun appeared in his hand. It was pointed toward Larry. "I'm coverin' him, Smoke, an' I'll burn him if he moves. You crown him."

Smoke wheeled, drew a sap from his pocket.

There was a crashing, tearing sound from another room. Ches and Smoke glanced quickly around, and in that moment Larry saw Glover throw the contents of his glass into Smoke's eyes.

Then Larry was out of his chair. Ches turned like light. His gun hand came up; his eyes blazed behind the barrel.

Glass blew in with a crashing report! Ches jerked, then slumped downward. Larry was across the room, his hands pinioning Haynes' arms, holding one back where a pistol wavered. He heard shouts, the smashing of glass, another report close by his ear. Then a hand came past his hand and clamped steel on Haynes' wrist, pulling it to its mate and fastening both.

Larry sprang to Vivian Knapp where she was slumped against the end of the divan. He tore the tape from wrists and ankles. Her eyes opened, looking up at him. Then he removed the strip from her mouth. Larry turned around and faced Captain Pratt, as dapper as ever. It was apparent that he had entered through the window. He was showing a pistol back in its holster.

A police lieutenant came in from the other room. Pratt ordered him to take charge, with a gesture that included the man with the fish eyes sitting silently at the desk. He turned to Larry.

"We'll go back, now," he said dryly, "and finish our talk with the D. A. And, Miss Knapp, you will come with us."

"Wait a moment," she said. "That man"—she indicated Haynes—"has a receipt in his pocket that should be of interest to Mr. Clinton."

Pratt got the paper, glanced at it, and with a shrug put it in his pocket. A police car was waiting around the corner. On the way over, Pratt spoke once.

"You owe it," he said to Larry, "to the number on the torn paper you gave the D. A., Hollister's memory and a damned lucky break."

Larry's mind was in very much of a whirl as they filed into the softly lighted library. Haverstraw was still tipped far back in his chair, his face stern and inscrutable. David Hollister was seated where Larry had seen him last. He said nothing as they entered, and Larry avoided his eyes. Pratt gave his report, then handed the paper he'd taken from Haynes to the district attorney.

Haverstraw read it carefully, passed it over to David Hollister, snapped erect in his chair and stepping around to Larry, held out his hand.



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"I wish," he said, "that I could have all cases closed as completely."

Larry looked his bewilderment.

"There were three old employees of your father," Haverstraw went on. "Galt, Farley and Thomas Small. I have Small's signed and sealed statement. I'll be brief. Small and Farley were lifelong friends. Both distrusted Galt. All worked separately on that formula. Farley was near the solution. Galt killed him, took his labors, added a patent that has reverted to you through inheritance and found the answer. Small went to Galt with knowledge of his guilt, after Galt had notified two companies of his success and was waiting for the highest bidder. Galt attacked him, so Small has given oath, and he struck Galt in self-defense with a file he snatched from the bench."

"Wait a minute," Larry said. "He must have been the old fellow in a Model T—"

Haverstraw smiled.

The man who passed you as you came in with Haynes. He described the man who looked back at him from the rear of the sedan."

"Hell!" Larry exploded. "Then you knew it all the time."

"We needed your story," the D. A. explained, "to check against Small's. Also, although we didn't know it at the time, we had to have your assistance in rounding up the rest of the scoundrels—and, incidentally, in freeing this fortunate young lady."

"Then we're all cleared up?" Larry asked.

"For the present. But there are certain papers and a small apparatus in my custody, given me by the deponent, in which I judge you and he have sole interest. Suppose I turn them over to Mr. Hollister to act for both of you."

"Er—yes, yes. By all means," Larry said absently. He was wondering if the man Haynes was given to exaggeration; but half a dozen murders seemed to him to argue otherwise. He turned to Haverstraw.

"Then if I am free," he said, "I want to see Miss Knapp safely home, and"—he hesitated—"I'd like to feel sure that she will be quite safe after she gets there."

Haverstraw nodded.

"Your real home is an apartment in town, isn't it, Miss Knapp?"

"Yes. I only went out there tonight—" She broke off and glanced at Larry.

"Exactly. Then I advise that you go to your home for a few days, Miss Knapp."

She turned to Larry.

"And will you see me there? I have much to explain to you. You see, my uncle owns one of the companies bidding on the invention. When Galt was killed, he knew that Haynes would try to frame you for the murder and thereby force you to sign over your patent rights. That's why I wanted to retain you—so that you wouldn't be able to accept their proposition."

Larry said he would. He turned back to Haverstraw.

"What is that receipt that you gave to Mr. Hollister?"

The D. A. chuckled.

"That is a receipt to the Calso Processing Co., mostly owned by James Glover, for one thousand dollars. And if you had signed it you would no longer be interested in what I am turning over to Mr. Hollister. I bid you both good night."

And on the way to Vivian Knapp's real home, Larry was thinking that the advice of Elsie Garland was not so bad after all. He decided he would give her a raise.

## THE STORY TRAIL

Continued from page 6

the readers shows us that we are on the right trail. But we're not letting that encouragement "get" us; we're trying harder every day to get even better stories. We don't intend to stay where we are; we intend to keep going until we're definitely right on top of the heap—and then we'll keep on until we're so far ahead that there won't be any catching up to us! And if you folks out there have any ideas or suggestions, let us have 'em. We like to hear from you.

Let's take a look at some of the yarns in the present issue. Our old friend, Flame Hardesty, is back again in "Bloody Bullets." Right now, with war news in the foreground, many of us realize the many possibilities in the matter of shipments of arms and ammunition to the warring countries. However, it merely brings to the front activities which were fairly common in other days, for there was always some little country planning to get the jump on some other little nation, and arms and ammunition were important. It's just such a spot that is "made to order" for the activities of Flame and his assistant, China Kelly. Good old China Kelly. That bottle-of-beer business of his really seems to be quite the thing for these nice warm days—or at least, we hope they will be nice warm days by the

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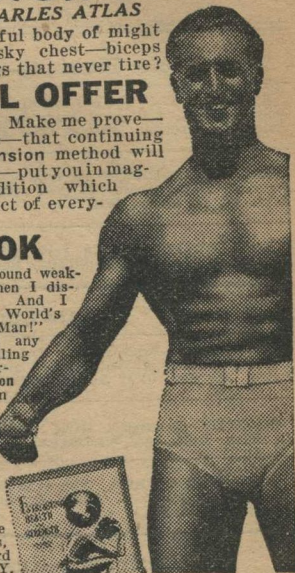
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time this reaches you.

"Ride the Lightning" is a swell novelette, even if we do say so ourselves. We have a rather "unofficial" way of judging stories around the office. If the staff man who checks detail on the story likes it, that's fine. If the artist who illustrates it comes back and says that story was a "honey," that's so much the better. If the proofreaders who check the story in type make comments as to its quality, that's just that much better, and the story rates practically a hundred percent with everyone who comes in contact with it before it reaches the reader. The chances are, therefore, that the reader will think it's a great story, too. "Ride the Lightning" went through the mill exactly that way; now it's up to you.

Another good story is "Murder Breeder," the novelette by Mark Harper. You've all read Mark Harper's work before, so you know he turns out a fine yarn.

The short stories that complete this number are all well selected, and each one has a fine "kicker" in it. A "kicker," in shop talk, is the trick that hits you in the face, proving that the villain isn't the one you thought he was; or that the evidence isn't what you thought it was, but something altogether different.

On Page 96 of this issue we have a cartoon page. We wonder how our readers enjoy something like this. If you want more of them, or have some other ideas, let us know. This is the only one we will print unless we get some good reaction from our readers. A few of them asked for such an item, but not in sufficient numbers to really convince us that it was wanted. In order to play fair, we prepared this one page to give other readers an idea of what could be made of it, and now we are ready to abide by whatever decision our readers give us.

# Is BALDNESS Necessary ? ? ? ?

**"NO"** in many cases, is the opinion of many leading scalp specialists and dermatologists. More surprising still is the ease with which aid can be obtained and baldness often can be prevented. All you have to do is practice elementary health rules which include cleanliness and exercise. Just as improper exercise will do more harm than good for other parts of your body, so will improper massage fail to sufficiently benefit hair growing on the scalp.

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VIDEX TRIPLE ACTION HAIR TREATMENT includes the same products used with much success here at the Institute. The cleansing, stimulating and healthful effect of these preparations when used along with the scalp manipulations effect the greatest benefits.

## STOP BALDNESS At Danger Areas . . .

Remove foreign substances that clog the pores and choke the hair roots. When there is no crusty, scaly coating to interfere with circulation, hair has a chance to grow. Check up your own hair condition. Is your scalp itchy? Are you troubled with excessive dandruff? Is your hair dull, lifeless and brittle? Is your hair getting thin? Is your hair coming out excessively? These are generally healthy hair trouble makers. Use VIDEX'S Hair Treatment to help create and maintain a healthy scalp condition that will encourage healthy hair growth.

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You do not risk a cent using VIDEX. You must be satisfied or your money will be refunded in full after ten days trial. Order TODAY . . . it does so much and costs so little.

## ● IMPORTANT NOTICE ●

If you live in New York, or expect to visit here, you are invited to visit our Fifth Avenue Salon. See convincing proof of the results achieved, giving personal scalp and hair treatments.



## JUST 10 MINUTES A DAY TO HELP KEEP BALDNESS AWAY

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1. Stimulates growth areas: After applying VIDEX you will note a pleasant tingling or "drawing" sensation. Evidence of how effectively your scalp is being stimulated in the areas where blood must nourish the hair roots.
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# Bob Swanson

picks his racing cars for speed—his cigarettes for slow burning



HERE THEY COME in a hurricane of dirt and oil. You can almost hear the whine of motors and shriek of brakes as they streak into the sharp unbanked curves. They may call 'em "midget racers," but there's *speed to burn* underneath those hoods. Leading the pack in the picture above is Bob Swanson, Pacific Coast

champ. In a split second these racers may be somersaulting, flying through fences. Bob Swanson likes a slower pace in his off-time. Smokes Camels a lot. He explains: "I don't like overheating in my cigarette any more than in a racing motor. I stick to Camels. I know they're slower-burning . . . milder and cooler."

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