

# DETECTIVE BOOK MAGAZINE

20c

9 Complete  
**CRIME-MYSTERY**  
STORIES

1 NOVEL  
3 NOVELETS  
5 SHORTS

ANGEL-FACE ALIBI

by TED TINSLEY



THE CRIMSON VAMPIRE

by JOEL ROGERS



D. A.s DIE TOO!

by RICHARD VANCE



DEAD MAN'S BLACKMAIL  
by JOHN STARR





### Five Big Basketball Novelets

"GAWKY" FOR GUARD . . . **Nelson S. Bond**  
 THE BASKET BUSTERS **Harold M. Sherman**  
 GANGWAY FOR GLORY! . . . **Ted Fox**  
 RAZZLE-DAZZLE RACKETEER **William R. Cox**  
 SURESHOT . . . **Linton Davies**

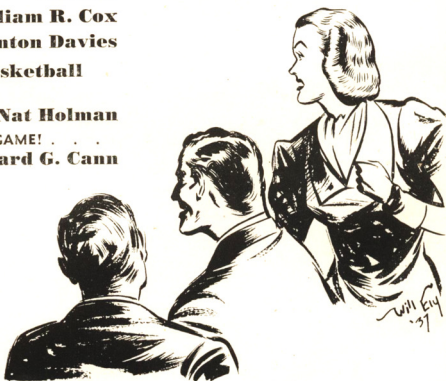
### Three Fast-Moving Basketball Features

COURT PARADE OF '38! . . . **Nat Holman**  
 BASKETBALL—IT'S A GAME GUY'S GAME! . . .  
**Howard G. Cann**

NEW RULES, NEW THRILLS . . .  
**"Specialist"**

### Three Short Stories of the Hardwood Court

100% GRANDSTANDER . . . **Glenn Long**  
 HOODOOD HOOPSTERS . . .  
**John Starr**  
 THE TWO-IN-ONE VICTORY . . .  
**Harry Goldberg**



*Something New . . .*

## BASKETBALL STORIES

Winners are always news—Donald Budge, War Admiral, All-America Clint Frank—and the same goes for a new standout in the magazine free-for-all. It is with pleasure therefore that we announce the publication of a great new magazine built for your pleasure and information . . . **BASKETBALL STORIES.**

This is a magazine of swift, exciting, dramatic fiction of the hardwood courts—campus and pro and town. The stories come hot off the pens of some of the most famed sport-story writers in the business. The articles by Nat Holman and Coach Howard Cann cover up-to-the-minute basketball dope.

**BASKETBALL STORIES** is the magazine you fans have been praying for. You'll find the current issue on all newsstands.

**20c**

THIS IS A MAGAZINE OF FICTION. THE CHARACTERS  
NAMED AND INCIDENTS DESCRIBED DO NOT REFER TO ANY ACTUAL PERSON

# DETECTIVE BOOK MAGAZINE

T. T. SCOTT, Treasurer and General Manager

MALCOLM REISS, Editor

## THREE BIG CRIME NOVELETS

### THE CRIMSON VAMPIRE . . . . . Joel Rogers 59

Foul with human gore, that scythe-clawed Murder-Monster slashed at that once-peaceful countryside—and even skeptical Capt. Sparrow's blood ran cold.

### D.A.'s DIE TOO! . . . . . Richard Vance 77

A five grand reward for an envelope—and a gang bullet for the holder. Marty O'Day followed the taxi girl into a maze of criss-cross murder.

### ANGEL-FACE ALIBI . . . . . Ted Tinsley 110

Major John Lacy, gentlemen! Ex-commander of the 697th Battalion. Decorated twice. Wounded twice. Now fighting the racket rats in a battle to the death!

## DETECTIVE BOOK'S DEMI-BOOKLENGTH NOVEL

### MURDER MADE IN RENO . . . . . Roger Torrey 3

Easy Shean Connell, free-lance dick, knew that where there is smoke there is always a guy fanning it—where there's a shiv through a doll's neck there's more to it than merely murder!

## FIVE RAPID-FIRE DETECTIVE SHORTS

### SO YOU WON'T TALK! . . . . . Barney Barnett 46

"No crook ever out-foxed me!" the Sergeant claimed. But that was before O'Hearne.

### THE MURDER MASTER . . . . . Ted Storrs 51

Johns knew that perfect crimes are bunk, so he set a trap for the Murder Master.

### DEAD MAN'S BLACKMAIL . . . . . John Starr 70

Only one thing could save young Trent from the gallows—a confession from the dead.

### THE FLATFOOT-FRAME . . . . . Dabney Horton 96

They framed Big Bill cold, and even that wasn't enough for that hungry murder mob.

### G-MAN GRAB . . . . . Benge Atlee 102

Dan Gaunt had orders to cover Kalinof. It would have meant following him to Hell.

Volume 2, No. 8  
Spring Issue, 1938



20c per copy

DETECTIVE BOOK MAGAZINE: Published quarterly by Fiction House, Inc., 461 Eighth Ave., New York City. Printed in U. S. A. The entire contents of this magazine are copyrighted 1937 by Fiction House, Inc. All rights reserved. While due care is always exercised, the publisher will not be responsible for the return of unsolicited manuscripts. For advertising rates address: THE NEWSSTAND FICTION UNIT, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York City.

## ACTION STORIES...

Behind each great success lies a reason—intelligence, thrift, or plain hard work. In this, magazines are the same as men. ACTION STORIES, for instance, has several private virtues. One is swift, exciting movement—stories with color and dash and action on every page. Another is high quality—tightly-written yarns by king-pin adventure writers such as Wetjen, Cunningham and J. Allan Dunn. The third quality which keeps ACTION in the front is good value—ninety thousand words in those close-bordered pages—a good buy for anybody's money.

## LARIAT STORY MAGAZINE...



Cowboy stories by men who know the range from Canada to the Mex Line—real yarns of the Wild West, filled with the smell of dust and gun smoke. Pulse-stirring stories of leather-pouring buckos and clear-eyed, wind-kissed cowgirls riding reckless trails. Walt Coburn leads off the current cavalcade with a full-length novel, sided by such other salty buckos as John Starr and Bart Cassidy. "The romance of the West—written with Action!"

## WINGS...

Like the tales of knightly tournaments, the romance and thrill of winged warriors dueling in Flanders' crimson-stained skies will never grow old. For years WINGS has been the ace of war-air magazines. The current issue swings a powerful load of tracer-slashed sky adventure—a gripping, full-length novel by George Bruce and shorter jobs by Joel Rogers, Tom O'Neill and T. W. Ford.

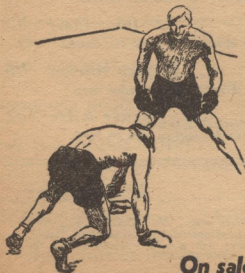
## LOVE ROMANCES...

The WAR TO END WARS was going full blast. Bands were playing **Madelon!** It was all very gay—except for Greta. Beautiful, golden-haired Greta, dodging the hungry spy hawks, waiting for the young Yank that Death had marked for his own... **HOSTAGE OF DESIRE**, by Claire Austen. Also **LOVE VS. MARRIAGE**, a frank discussion of modern-day love by a well-known woman psychiatrist, and novelets and shorts by Peggy Gaddis, Mary Goddard and others.



## FIGHT STORIES...

Here's the magazine that carries the sweaty-leather smell, the sock and the red fury of the Ring. The current issue packs a full-length novel—**RED DYNAMITE**—by Barney Barnett. Also two middle-weight lengths by George Bruce and T. W. Ford, along with a flashy string of shorts, and Jack Kofoed's full-length life-story of **FIGHTING FITZ—THE GIANT KILLER**.



On sale at all newsstands

Get your copy today!



**DETECTIVE BOOK'S  
DEMI-BOOKLENGTH NOVEL**

# MURDER MADE IN RENO

By **ROGER TORREY**

Easy Shean Connell, free-lance dick, knew that where there is smoke there is always a guy fanning it—where there's a shiv through a doll's throat there's more to it than merely murder!

**L**ESTER came in my office with the sun hitting his glasses and making them shine like headlights. He said: "Joey Free and some other men are outside and want to see you."

Joey is big and stocky and with a body like a keg. He was supposed to have a lot of money and was supposed to be spending it on women and liquor far too fast. It wasn't all gossip because I'd been to

parties at Joey's place. The man with him was tall and slat-like and looked very solemn and serious.

Joey gave me his big toothy grin and said: "Hi, Shean! I brought you a customer. We just got in. This is Tod Wendel. Toddy, tell the man your troubles."

I said I was glad to meet Mr. Wendel and Lester put his glasses back on and scurried around and got chairs. I introduced him to Wendel, saw the doubtful look Wendel gave him, and let Lester do the explaining, which he always did. Lester said:

"My great-uncle left me some money so I bought an interest in Mr. Connell's agency. I've always been interested in criminology. It's a fascinating subject."

Lester was a lanky kid that looked sixteen and no older. I could see Wendel's estimation of the Connell agency take a drop but Joey helped things out.

"Shean got himself a partner and five grand along with him. Shean will do anything for money and admits it."

I said to Lester: "Ask Miss Gahagan to come in and make notes, kid," and to Wendel:

"Suppose you tell me about it."

Wendel told his story and it didn't seem to make much sense. According to him, he was in the money; most of it in two little steamships and a South American importing business. He'd married a girl named Ruth Carstairs in New York three years before that and they'd never had a cross word between them. He swore to that, with tears in his eyes. He'd gone to South America two months before, and had recently returned to New York.

And then he went home and found mama gone. Without a word or note left for him. Just a vacant apartment and empty closet space where her clothes had been hanging.

He admitted he went a little goofy then. But he got himself together, found the apartment house manager, and discovered his wife and maid had left for Reno, with the expressed purpose of divorcing him.

So he followed them to Reno.

Here Joey Free took up the tale. He said: "The first I knew about it was when I got a wire here in San Francisco from Toddy. It just said, 'Meet me Golden

Eagle Reno at once. Naturally I joined him there."

"I probably wouldn't have wired Joey," Wendel told me, "except that Joey was in New York just before I left for South America and we saw a bit of each other. I remembered he lived here and I thought he might be able to help me."

I said: "I don't get the idea of you needing help. You must have walked on your wife's pet corn some way you don't remember. Why in hell don't you talk to her and get it straightened out?"

Wendel looked as though he was going to break down and sob. He said, with tears in his voice: "That's just it. I haven't seen her since I got back from South America. She won't see me. She won't talk with me. I tried to see her and I never got into the house. It was then I wired Joey; I was desperate."

"And then what happened?"

Joey grinned and said: "We *both* got thrown out. And boy, what I mean we got thrown out. I've been heaved out of a lot of places during my sinful life but they did a masterful job. See!"

He pointed to his eye and I could see where it had been blacked. He went on with "I argued with two of the tough babies she's got guarding her and that was the wrong thing to do. They weren't fooling. I thought I got a couple of broken ribs out of it, too, but they were just bruises."

**W**ENDEL took up the tale of woe. "And then we went to the police." "And got exactly nowhere," Joey Free put in. "The next morning we left."

I said: "It seems odd to me, Mr. Wendel, that you'd give up your attempt at seeing your wife so easily. After making the trip out from New York and all."

"We didn't have any choice," he told me. "We were practically forced to leave. That's what I want you to do; go up there and investigate this for me and find out what's the matter with Ruth."

"Why didn't you talk with your wife's lawyer?"

"Well, Joey did. I think that was the reason we were forced to leave. Crandall seems to have a lot of influence there."

I wasn't understanding this talk about being forced to leave and I said so. So

Joey said: "We were on a plane for here a half hour after leaving the jail."

"Why the rush?"

Joey lost his grin, for the first time since he'd been there. He said slowly and solemnly: "Well, it was a forced put. A big guy with a mean look and a gun put us on board, gave us tickets, and told us not to come back. He acted as though he meant what he said."

"Why in God's name didn't you tell this to the cops there. There's always one around an airport."

Wendel said: "That was just it. It was a cop that put us on board. I told you that man Crandall has influence."

## II

LESTER and I drove up to Reno from the city and we didn't get in town until after five. So we checked in at the Golden Eagle and got cleaned up and fed before anything else.

"Okay, kid! You stay here and hold the fort and I'll go and talk with the Chief," I told Lester.

Chief-of-Police Kirby was a medium-sized, medium-aged man. No particular coloring or feature that stood out at all. And very quiet. He listened, while I told him all that Wendel and Joey Free had told me and then said:

"You understand, of course, that Mr. Wendel had no legal right to see his wife if she objected? You've got that point straight, haven't you?"

I said I realized that, but that Wendel seemed sincerely in love with his wife and only wanted to talk with her and find out what he'd done to cause her action. Kirby didn't answer this but just stood up and said:

"Come on and take a ride with me, Mr. Shean."

We climbed in a police car and he drove to where a sign said: "HILLARD MORTUARY." Kirby explained:

"We use this; the city hasn't modern conveniences," and I had a notion of what he was going to show me.

But not who.

A short, smiling little man met us, acting as though we were doing him a favor by calling, and the three of us went in a side room.

The girl was there. The woman, rather. She had been around thirty apparently . . . fair looking, too, except that her nose was too big and beaked. Black hair and rather dark skinned. There was a blue puckered slit a bit to the side in her neck, and Kirby pointed this out to me and said:

"Knife wound. Hit the big artery."

I said: "Nasty thing, a shiv is. Who is she?"

HE said, as though reading from a police report: "Francine Debreaux. French nationality. In this country four years and her passport and papers in order. Mrs. Todhunter Wendel's personal maid for the last year. Had fair references. New York is checking these for me now."

"Where'd you find her? Where'd she get the shiv in her neck?"

The undertaker, who it seemed was also the local Coroner, said: "She was in an alley, back of the MIDNIGHT CLUB. The knife wound didn't kill her at once; she probably took two or three minutes to bleed out."

Kirby said: "Whoever did it, held something over her mouth. Her lips are slightly bruised, if you'll notice. There was a cook and dishwasher in the club, within fifteen feet of where this happened, and they never heard a sound."

"Did you check on them?"

He looked at me as though this was a silly question, which it was. He said he'd checked them, naturally, and that neither had known the woman as far as he could tell. Without anything more he turned away and toward the door and I followed him, with the undertaker bringing up the rear. The undertaker followed us out to the car, shook hands with me and said he hoped to see me again, though under pleasanter circumstances of course, and Kirby drove away, heading back toward the police station.

He didn't say a word during the trip back, but after he'd led the way into his office he said: "Now what d'ya know that'll help on this? We've got an open town here but murder's fairly rare. I want to keep it so."

I said: "I've told you everything I know. What did Mrs. Wendel have to say about this? When did it happen?"

"Between eleven and eleven-thirty last night. Mrs. Wendel doesn't seem to know of a reason for it, nor does Mr. Crandall, her lawyer. What are you holding out on me? What's all this about, Connell?"

I told him I didn't have the faintest idea. That all I knew about the thing was what I'd told him. He listened to me, very quietly. He had a veil over his eyes and I couldn't tell whether he believed me or not. Apparently he didn't, because he said: "I've got no objection to your coming in here and doing a job of work. I don't hold any briefs for your kind of work but you're entitled to make a living the way you want. But that's all. No rough stuff; none of the trick stuff you can pull in the City and get away with."

"I don't understand, Chief," I said.

"You understand all right. No cutting corners and no throwing curves. This woman lives here; you don't. If she wants to talk to you it's fine with me. If she doesn't, let her alone. You're butting in on her business and I want you to remember it. Who did you say sent you up besides Wendel himself?"

I threw the harpoon then; not hard but enough to get under his hide. "A man by the name of Joey Free," I said. "You ought to remember Joey Free, Chief. He's one of the two you bum—rushed out of here. The other was Wendel."

His cheeks reddened, that was all.

I told him I'd better be going then and he followed me to the door of his office.

"You're bucking against quite a man here, mister. I suppose you know that."

I said I'd gathered that. "D'ya think the maid getting killed in that alley has anything to do with Mrs. Wendel's business. Can you see a connection, Chief?"

"I'll know more about it when I get New York's check on those references of hers. It's got me puzzled and I don't like puzzles. Not when there's knife murders mixed in them, anyway."

I said I didn't blame him, thanked him, and started to leave. He called after me:

"I'll be seeing you, Connell."

I left the station and stopped in the first bar on my route. It was called the Rustic and the decoration scheme wasn't too original. Pine logs with the bark on them covered the walls and the bar itself was a big tree cut in half and polished.

Big sugar-pine cones were festooned all over the place with deer heads and guns on the walls. The place even smelled piney and out-doorsy.

### III

BY the time I'd taken my first drink all the way down I'd figured the place was phony. The logs on the wall were just slabs from some sawmill; the bar was geed up in the same way and the pine cones looked as though they'd been dipped in shellac! The guns looked as though they'd come from an Army and Navy auction and the deer were Michigan white-tailed deer instead of the mule deer native around there.

The smell came from pine incense being burned in saucers back of the bar.

I was looking this all over and wondering if anybody could get the real western feeling from a spot like that, when somebody came up from behind me and smacked me on the back and said:

"Shean Connell! Jeeze! Shean, Connell!"

The wallop on the back had been hard and there was a second in which I thought I'd maybe cough up my drink. It stuck, though. I turned around and Kewpie Martin reached for my hand and began pumping it up and down and saying:

"Shean Connell! Well, I'll be damned!"

I'd worked with Kewpie on a roadhouse job four years before that. He was supposed to be a saxophone player and singer as well as being able to Master of Ceremonies a bit. It was all a lie. He had a soggy tone on sax besides having no technique; he sang flat and through his nose, and his M. C. stuff wasn't funny. Just pitiful.

He got by because he was such a swell guy to work with. Everybody would hold him up on the job just to keep him there. He was about five-six but he weighed two-fifty, at the least. He wasn't quite bald but had a little tuft of hair like Kewpie dolls have. Which is why the name, I suppose. I said:

"Well, Kewpie. Where've you been, kid?"

"Around and round. Like the music. How long you been here?"

"Just got here."

"Looking for a spot?"

I said I was looking for a drink, more

than anything else, at least at that time. I bought and Kewpie bought and then he asked me where I was staying and I told him the Golden Eagle. He smiled admiringly and said that I was always one for putting on the Ritz. We started out the door and met Kirby, face to face, and Kirby said:

"Hi! Have a drink, Connell."

If I'd stayed, I'd have had to introduce Kewpie and I was afraid Kirby might crack about why I was in town. It might do no harm, but I hadn't decided just what I was going to do or how I was going to try and do it and I couldn't see any reason for letting Kewpie in on secrets. So I said to Kirby:

"Thanks, Chief! Some other time. I'm late for a date now."

Kirby said: "Too bad!" and strolled to the bar, and Kewpie and I went out and down the street. Kewpie said: "Jeeze! Just in town and you know the Chief already. Are you hot, keed?"

I said I wasn't.

We kept on to the hotel.

Lester was in the room, which I was afraid he'd be. Kewpie and I came in and I said: "Lester, I want you to meet an old friend of mine. Kewpie Martin. Kewpie's an entertainer. Kewpie, this is Lester Hoyt."

They shook hands and I winked at Lester over Kewpie's shoulder. Lester missed it entirely. Kewpie said to him:

"Hi, Lester. You in the music business, too?"

Lester looked puzzled and said he wasn't. I sidled over closer to him, having an idea what was coming.

It came. Lester quit goggling at Kewpie, who was really something to look at, if you like chubby fat men, and said to me:

"Did you see the . . ."

I got him on the instep with my heel when he'd gotten that much out. He yelped, lifted his foot and held it with both hands, glared at me and said:

"Gee, Shean, that hurt."

"I must have stumbled," I said, and winked at him again. It still was a miss. He sat down on the edge of the bed, still holding his foot, and this time he managed to say it. Just: "Did you see the Chief, Shean?"

"Sure," I said, and put my finger up to

my face. And then to Kewpie: "I was telling Lester that I used to know the Chief. We weren't exactly pals, or anything like that, but I knew him. Maybe I told you about it, Kewpie?"

Kewpie looked from Lester to me. And then looked puzzled. The little fat devil was no fool. He smelled something sour. I got on the phone and ordered soda and cracked ice, just to change the subject, and when it came mixed two highballs. Kewpie looked inquiringly at Lester and Lester said:

"I never drink."

This as though he was proud of it. Kewpie snorted, took half his highball down, and said: "Well, man and boy, I've been drinking for thirty-five years. Well, anyway thirty years, if you want to make me a liar for a matter of five years or so. I haven't lost any weight from it."

Lester said, very seriously, that he could see this. Kewpie kept staring at him, as though trying to figure out whether the joke was on himself or Lester. Finally he said to me:

"Look, Shean! The C. C. C. wants a piano player. I'm thinking of moving to that spot myself. I got a bid last week. What d'ya say we talk to them and work together again."

"What d'ya mean C C C? Is it one of these government things?"

"Dope! That's the City and Country Club. It's new and it's getting a play. We can get a guarantee but the cat will run over it easy. What d'ya say?"

Lester showed signs of breaking out in speech and I shook my head at him and said to Kewpie: "Let's go out and look at it. What kind of a play does it get?"

"The big shots. The gals and guys with folding dough. They've got six weeks to spend here and they get tired of the same places. A new place will sometimes go bang for a while. I'll tell you now, Shean, the spot ain't so hot."

He turned to Lester and explained: "Shean won't work in a joint. Or at least he didn't used to."

Lester had finally judged the angle. Of course he'd known I was an ex-pianist. He said: "Do you want me to go along, Shean?"

Kewpie said hurriedly: "You'd better wait for him, kid," and I told Lester the

same. We got outside and Kewpie said:

"Jeese, what a jerk! How come?"

I said: "I just felt sorry for the kid. I picked him up on the highway. He was hitch-hiking and I brought him in with me. I didn't want the poor devil to starve. I'm soft-hearted, Kewpie."

He looked at me and said: "Okey, keed! I get it! I get it!"

"Get what?"

"The idea," he said slowly. "I don't know what the score is and I don't want to know. But don't give me that soft-hearted stall. You've got some reason for having the kid along and we both know it. It's not my business; I haven't got nose trouble."

"You're nuts, Kewpie."

"Maybe so. Any time Shean Connell gets good hearted I'm nuts. I'll admit it."

#### IV

**K**EWPIE hadn't been guilty of any understatement when he'd said the Three C Club wasn't so hot. It was about two miles from town, just a big long barn-like affair sitting by the road. No shade around it. It was painted a bright and nasty red and the front of it was fixed so that it could be opened during hot weather. It was open then. There were a dozen cars parked in front of it and the gravel, in front of the place, was all chewed up in a way to show traffic there was heavy.

I parked my coupe and we went in.

The bar was forty feet long and there were three bar men behind it. All busy. There were at least fifty people in the place and lined up along the bar and it was only about seven-thirty. Far too early for any crowd as yet.

Kewpie led me back, through a partition and into the back room. A dance floor about twenty feet square, a big Steinway grand at the side of it, and the whole thing lined with booths. The booths had curtains.

I went over to the piano, tried it with one hand, and a short dark man that looked Italian, came from one of the booths and said to me:

"You play?"

He saw Kewpie, looked at him as though he didn't want to, and added: "Hi, Kewpie boy."

Kewpie beamed and said: "Hi, Gino.

Can this guy play? He's tops. I worked with him at the Del Mar, in Tia Juana. Four years ago. He's tops. This is Shean Connell."

The short man said eagerly: "Do you want a job? I'm looking for a piano player. To start tonight."

"I just got in town," I said, "and I'm tired. I want to look around a bit before I get myself a spot."

"You'll do better here than any place in town. I'm telling you. Ain't that right, Kewpie?"

Kewpie said that was right and that he'd been telling me the same thing. I said, that if the job was as good as all that, it seemed funny nobody was on it.

Kewpie said: "Hell, Shean, take a few drinks and maybe you'll feel like working. You can knock off a few bucks for yourself tonight as well as not."

We had drinks and dinner . . . on the house. Rucci himself came back to us and asked if everything was okey. Then I ambled over to the piano and started noodling around, getting the feel of it. It was good and in tune.

And then in came Lester. He had his glasses on and they hid his eyes, but I'm willing to bet he was wild-eyed behind them. He looked proud and scared, all at the same time. He was with a big blonde wench that out-weighed him by at least forty pounds. She had on more than just a paint job. She was practically enameled. She had curves in the right places but they curved too much. And she was wearing a slinky sneaky evening gown that brought the curves out to perfection. Far too much so.

He saw me, waved a hand, very weakly, and she took him in tow and headed for a booth. I jerked my head at him and he stopped her and they had an argument for a moment. Lester won out. She went in the booth and he came over to the piano.

I said: "Where did you pick up the gal? Or is it the other way around?"

He blushed and said feebly: "Now, Shean, you shouldn't talk like that."

"Why not?"

"She's a very nice lady."

"For my dough, she's a bum. I'll admit she's a *big* bum, though."

"She's a very nice lady."

"Who is she?"

"Her name is Mrs. Heber. Well, there's more to it than that. It's really Mrs. Hazel George-Wolff-Heber. She's a . . . a divorcee, I guess."

I said: "What d'ya mean guess? You know damn well."

He admitted he knew damn well.

"Where'd you meet her?"

"Well, I was in the lobby. Sitting there and waiting for you to come back. She was sitting by me. She got up and left her purse and I returned it to her. That's all. We just sort of . . . well, sort of got talking and she wanted to come out here."

"Now listen. From now on your story is you're a college kid on a lark. Get it. You started hitch-hiking to Reno, just because your room-mate told you you didn't have the nerve. All right, run along now and have a good time."

"Are you working here?"

I grinned and said: "Anyway for tonight. It's this way, kid. I've got to get close to the Wendel woman in some way. The Chief told me not to try and talk to her."

Lester looked indignant and said: "He can't do that. This is a free country; you've got a right to talk to somebody, certainly."

I said: "Okey, kid, you're right and the world's wrong. Remember this is Reno. Remember this Chief should know what he's talking about."

"What did he say, Shean?"

"He didn't come right out with it but he just the same as said what I told you. Now run along; I'm supposed to be working."

He went back to his booth and blonde.

ABOUT half an hour later two good-sized parties left the bar and headed for the back room and dance floor. Some of them started to dance and some went in the booths and I put in a few more licks for good measure and quit just in time because Kewpie had the mouthpiece on his sax and was showing signs of joining in, dry reed and all.

Lester came over right then. He took off his glasses and started polishing them and his eyes looked as big as saucers. He hissed at me:

"One of them's the Wendel woman! Hazel told me!"

I said: "Go over and sit down."

Things got going good by eleven o'clock. I'd spotted the Wendel woman by then and the crowd she was with and had been paying more attention to them than I had to the music though this didn't seem to make any difference to anybody because they were all too high.

The Wendel party was the exception; apparently they were nursing their drinks. There were six in the bunch, altogether, and my boss, Rucci, and a startlingly blonde gal he seemed to favor sat with them the bulk of the time.

The Wendel girl was prettier than I'd thought she'd be from her picture. Medium sized, quite dark, and apparently not too fond of talking. At least she seemed to spend most of her time either listening or dancing.

There was a big bald-headed man that I thought might well be her lawyer, Crandall. Very voisterous in manner but the kind of manner that doesn't mean a thing. All on the surface. He had light blue eyes that didn't look merry at any time. Just smart and cagy. A tough baby, I figured.

There were two men that might have been twins, though they didn't look at all the same. The same type exactly. My guess was private cops and that they were the guards Wendel and Joey Free had mentioned.

They had two girls with them and the less said about the girls the better.

It bothered me, this last. I couldn't figure why nice people like this Wendel girl must be would be out with trash like that. And apparently friendly with Rucci and his girl friend.

But I kept playing on, sitting sidewise on the bench so I could watch the dancers, and pretty soon I'd decided I had the answer. The whole crowd was the same; just a mixture. You'd see girls that had lady written all over dancing with men that had hustler written as plainly.

And the opposite. Decent looking men playing around with tramps.

I just put it down to Reno and let it go.

Kewpie and I quit at four and there was still a crowd. My arms and hands ached from whaling away at the box and my head ached worse from hearing Kewpie sing and play consistently out of tune. He had damned little more idea of pitch than an alley tom cat.

We ate, then drove back to the hotel, and Kewpie walked on to the rooming house he was honoring, after telling me he'd drop up and see me around noon the next day.

I parked the car and went up to the room and didn't find Lester. He'd been pretty well plastered when he left the Club and when he came in a little later he really had a load. I looked at him.

"Well, well! And you the boy that doesn't believe in drinking. Maybe it was something you ate."

He didn't answer me. He just waved his hands in front of his face and stumbled for the bathroom.

## V

KIRBY called me at ten the next morning. I answered the phone and he said: "This is John Kirby. How about coming down for a little while?"

I said I would, as soon as I was dressed. He said that was fine and hung up, and Lester rolled over in bed and groaned:

"Who was that?"

I said: "The Chief, is all. Go back to sleep."

Kirby wasn't alone when I got to the station. He had a lantern-jawed, gable-shouldered man with him that he introduced as Len MacIntosh. He added: "Len's with the Sheriff, Connell. We work together pretty well."

I said I was glad to meet Mr. MacIntosh, even though I didn't know whether I meant it or not, and took a seat across the desk from the two of them. Kirby tossed a telegram across to me and said:

"From New York. They get action back there, those boys do. Twenty-four hours for this is all."

The wire read FRANCINE DEBREAUX ARRIVED JULY COMMA. THIRTY TWO. STOP TWICE MARRIED. STOP WORKED FOR G. L. STODDARD. STOP DISMISSED FOR THEFT. STOP. WORKED FOR GEORGE ARMBRUSTRE. STOP. DISMISSED FOR THEFT. STOP. TWO YEAR TERM IN SING SING. STOP. SERVED FIFTEEN MONTHS. STOP. NO FURTHER RECORD. STOP. REFERENCES GIVEN US FALSE. STOP.

I said: "Okey, then you've got it. She

had fake references. But now you got it what does it mean?"

He said slowly: "It means this. This French maid was a crook. Or at least she'd been one. I wanted to tell you this, Connell, because I think Wendel is mixed up with this murder someway. I know you're in the clear, of course. But I don't know anything about him."

I said: "My good God! The poor devil's nuts about his wife. That's all that's the matter with him. He couldn't have murdered this girl; he was in San Francisco at the time it happened. You can check it."

"I have," Kirby admitted.

MacIntosh took a long drag at his cigarette and burst forth. "You've backed up my theory, Connell. You admit Wendel loves his wife. Now I say he had an affair with this maid and his wife found it out. That's why she's out here divorcing him. So he had this girl killed to keep her quiet; so his wife couldn't divorce him."

I laughed and said: "And I suppose the wife would keep the gal on her payroll knowing her old man was having an affair with her? That won't hold up. She'd fire her the second she knew it."

We argued about it some more and Kirby asked if I'd seen Mrs. Wendel. I said I hadn't; that I'd made no attempt at seeing her. That I could take a gentle hint without having both shins kicked black and blue. He grinned over at MacIntosh and said:

"I told you he was half smart."

MacIntosh said: "Or maybe just canny," and on that note I left.

BREAKFAST was to be a three-way affair; Lester, Kewpie, and I, so I stopped in the same RUSTIC BAR for a drink on the way back to the hotel. I had plenty of time and I'd had enough to drink the night before to need one. I got inside and to the bar and told the smug looking bird behind the bar what I wanted and happened to look out on the street. There was a Cadillac coupe going by and I could have sworn I saw Joey Free back of the wheel. I didn't think anything about it at the time, feeling sure that Joey was in the city then, but when I got back to the hotel and Lester said: "Miss Gahagan called and wants you to call her," I thought maybe something had come up at that end and that Joey had

driven up to tell me about it personally.

I got Long Distance, and finally the Gahagan and said:

"This is me. What's the matter?"

She said: "You told me to call you if anything came up. That's what I did."

"What's happened?"

I could hear her giggle over the phone. "Oh nothing much. Do you remember giving me a check for a hundred dollars to put in your personal account?"

"Sure. Joey Free's."

"Well, it bounced. No funds."

"You're nuts, Red. He's good."

"You're nuts if you think I'm nuts," she said. "He may be good but his check bounced just the same. D'ya want to protest it?"

"Hell, no. He's good, I tell you. There's some mistake."

"Well, that's the reason I called you. How long you going to stay there?"

"I've got a job, Red. Maybe forever."

She laughed and said: "A break for me! You can't stay longer than six weeks on that expense account. You've been up there two, that leaves you forty more days."

I didn't get it and said so. She said: "It's simple. That woman will get her divorce after she's there six weeks. Forty-two days. I take it that's what Wendel doesn't want. He's not going to pay you after she gets it, is he?"

I said: "This is costing me money," and hung up. And then called back. I got her in five minutes and said:

"Listen, Red! Call up Joey's apartment and find out if he's there. I mean in town. Get it? Then write me a letter about it and send it air mail. I'll get it in the morning."

She said she understood.

I told Lester about thinking I'd seen Joey driving by. He put on his thoughtful look and said: "That seems hardly logical, Shean. I mean, after all, with the police chasing him out and all. He'd hardly turn around and come back, would he?"

I said I'd thought of that myself. The telephone rang then and I picked it up, thinking it would be Kewpie calling from the lobby. A very soft, sweet, and feminine voice said:

"Is it you, honey?"

I told her that I wasn't sure but that it might just possibly be, and the voice froze

up and snapped: "I would like to speak to Mr. Lester Hoyt."

I said to Lester: "It's your honey."

I gathered she was trying to rope him into a car ride, far into the romantic mountains. Where the old hills could look down on young love and so on. I kept snickering and he kept getting redder and redder in the face and his stalling kept getting weaker. Finally I said:

"Tell the old gal you'll go. You only live once and she hasn't got so many more years."

He told her he'd meet her in the lobby in twenty minutes, then told me: "You shouldn't say things like that about her, Shean! She's really very nice."

"Sure. I bet she has you carrying matches pretty soon."

"She's lonesome. She knows very few people here."

"Okey, kid! She's the motherly type, I guess. She's old enough to be yours."

**K**EWPIE and I had breakfast and stalled around until time to go to work. Most of the time I talked with Kewpie about getting that soggy sax tone of his up half a notch and he didn't like it much. Probably no more than I liked the soggy tone he had. We went out to the place about seven and Gino Rucci met us, beaming all over.

"You like the job? You like the girls I introduce you to last night?"

I spit it out at him. "I'd like to meet the only one you didn't introduce. The one in that party you were sitting with last night."

"That is the Mrs. Wendel. She's ah—she's . . ."

He tried to think of a word and I watched his eyes. Usually they were soft and brown and good-natured, but now they looked as though a shade had been pulled over them. Glazed. I said:

"Oh no difference. She was pretty, though."

He beamed again. "Very pretty. Very good customer. She comes out with Crandall. Mister Crandall is a lawyer; a very good one."

I said was that right and went back to Kewpie. There was nobody in back, so we went out to the bar in front and I said to him:

"What kind of a guy is this Rucci? He seems like a good Joe."

"He's a smart egg, Shean! He's made money when there's been others starved. He'll shoot all angles."

"Hustler, hunh?"

Kewpie laughed. "You should ask. That soft soap of his don't fool anybody. He owns a good half of the town. No, not that much dough, but he's well fixed and then some. Part of two banks. This place. A cut in two of the gambling places down town. He's got a piece of the RUSTIC, that bar where I first met you. He's got a dude ranch out in the country and a couple of mines. Rucci is no slouch. He's got a brother in with him. The brother keeps out of sight, mostly."

I said: "He seems friendly with Crandall."

"Crandall's his lawyer, same as he's the lawyer for most of the money men in town. Crandall's good I guess; I don't know him. The brother is Crandall's pal."

I said: "Lawyers are good people to stay away from. Let's get to work."

Crandall and Mrs. Wendel, the two guards and the two the-less-said-the-betters came in about ten and Rucci led them to a booth almost facing the piano. We had a nice crowd and I was working hard but I still could notice Rucci talking and waving his hands and nodding toward me. Finally Crandall and Mrs. Wendel danced and Rucci came over to the piano. He flagged them down when they pranced by.

"Mr. Crandall! Mrs. Wendel! I want you to meet Shean Connell."

I nodded, and kept on playing. Crandall said: "Come on over to the booth and have a drink with us when you get a chance."

I said thank you and took them up on it half an hour later.

Crandall was nice. Too nice. Mrs. Wendel acted as though I wasn't on earth, beyond saying: "Hello!" when I first went over. It wasn't that she high-hatted me; she just ignored me. I was as the dirt under her feet, if actions meant a thing. The two guards were very guarded, saying not a hell of a lot more than she did. The two chippies were swarming over me like bees. And I'd just as soon have had the bees.

I left for the next set of tunes and Rucci came over and shrugged and said: "She is like that, that lady. Very dignified. Very

high class. She is rich; she has the guards with her at all times in case of trouble."

"What kind of trouble?"

He shrugged again. "Hold-ups. Kidnapping. Anything may happen to the very rich."

That was the size of it. The Wendel party left about two, the same as the night before.

THE three of us, Kewpie, Lester, and I, were eating breakfast the next morning when I looked over at another table and saw Bill Maxwell and Charley Howard.

I said: "Those two guys I've known for ten years. They're card dealers. I used to know them when I worked in Eureka. They had a pan game there."

"Pan game?" Lester asked.

"Panguing. It's like rummy only more so. Like a cross between rummy and coon-can. It's insanity and slow death."

I said hello to Bill and Charley and they said they were working at the Bank Club, Bill at the Faro bank and Charley back of the crap layout.

"Come out and see me at the Three C Club. I'm working out there."

Later, after they had finished eating, we walked down the street together. We got almost level with the First National Bank, and I saw Ruth Wendel and her same two guards come out and start toward us. I said:

"Hello!" to the three of them, smiling, and the two guards grunted and stepped in close to her. She looked right through me and kept walking. Bill and Charley and I stared after them, and Charley laughed and said:

"Madge is getting high-hat as hell. She never even spoke to me. I don't blame her for passing up *you*, Connell, but I used to know her old man."

"What d'ya mean, her old man?"

"Her old man. She's Madge Giovanatti. She used to be with Harry Kieth, when he ran that joint on Post Street in San Francisco. That would be five, no six years ago. I guess maybe she's forgotten me."

I said: "You're screwy, Charley. That's Mrs. Ruth Wendel, from New York City. I met her last night. She's got dough in lots. Here for a divorce."

Charley grinned and said: "Maybe that's why she didn't speak to me. I don't know

any New York society women, but this one looks exactly like Madge Giovanatti, I swear."

They dropped me at the hotel and I told them I'd look in on their games, later on. I went inside, found I'd had no calls and read the city papers through. Then I went down to the Bank Club.

I'd dropped sixty dollars on Bill's faro bank, spent four hours doing it, when I felt a tap on my shoulder.

"WHAT'S the matter?" I said unamiably.

It was Kirby, and he didn't look as pleasant as he usually did. He said:

"You can't beat that bank unless you're right. Come on now."

I said to Bill Maxwell: "The law's got me, Bill. I'll be back after my sixty pretty soon."

"I'll save it for you," he said, and I followed Kirby out to the street and to his car. I was a bit hot under the collar. I'd a hunch that I was going to start calling the turn about that time. I said:

"Couldn't this wait, Chief? I hate like hell to have to quit right now. On top of that, I don't like to have a cop take me out of a place, now or any other time."

"It can't wait," he said.

He drove down to the station and neither of us said a word until we were inside. Len MacIntosh was in the Chief's office, waiting for us, and he drawled out:

"Hello, Connell!"

I said hello and took my usual seat. Kirby took his and started out with:

"I tried to give you a break, Connell, and one for myself along with you. You don't want to play it that way, hunh?"

"What d'ya mean?"

"I gave you the dope once. I figured you'd play smart, stick here a while and make yourself a fee out of this Wendel. Instead, you bull ahead and put yourself in bad. And me on the pan. I won't go for that."

This had me down and I asked him what he meant. He said impatiently: "You know damned well what I mean. You try and bust into that woman on the street and she makes a complaint about it. I understand you wangled a introduction to her last night and I can't stop that. But this street business! Insisting on talking to her

when she doesn't want to talk to you! That I can and will stop."

I said: "Now wait a minute!" and told him just exactly what had happened. That I'd said hello and that was all. That I'd been with two friends, who'd tell him the same if he'd ask them. I said:

"It's like this. I'm here and minding my business. It's your town and I know it. But I'm damned if I'm going to get railroaded out of it over a thing like this. There's something screwy about this."

Len MacIntosh said: "Sure there's something screwy about this. There's a murder and murder's screwy to say the least. This time and every time."

Kirby said: "Crandall called me and said you'd annoyed Mrs. Wendel on the street. If you keep on with this, Connell, he'll have you bound over under peace bond and it will be a heavy one. That's what he said, if it means anything. He can do it."

"Am I supposed to be arrested?"

"No."

"Then I'm leaving. You know where you can find me."

"It won't be at the Three C Club," MacIntosh said, grinning.

"Why not?"

"Crandall said not, over the phone. I guess he doesn't want to leave you any reason for sticking around town."

I said to both of them: "Either of you tell Crandall why I'm in town?"

KIRBY shook his head and MacIntosh said: "I never told a soul."

"But Crandall knows I'm a cop that's trying to talk to Mrs. Wendel. Isn't that it?"

Kirby said slowly: "He didn't say that. But I wouldn't bet he didn't know. He gets around; he hears things. I've heard the same thing, for that matter. That you're a shamus, that is. I didn't hear what you were here for."

"Who told you?"

He thought a moment, said: "As I remember, the bar-man in the RUSTIC GRILL. He said something about you not taking a drink with me, that day I met you there. It was some ribbing remark about a private cop being too good to drink with the city force. I didn't pay any attention. I didn't know it was supposed to be a secret."

I said: "At the time, I didn't either. It's no secret now, I can see that."

An excited looking uniformed cop poked his head in the door then and said: "Mr. Kirby. . . . Can I see you?"

Kirby excused himself and went outside. He came back in a moment, looking grim, and said:

*"Connell! You! Come here."*

Both MacIntosh and I stood up. Kirby said to me:

"Damn you! You've started something in this town, all right. What it is I wish to Christ I knew."

I said: "What now?"

He just beckoned and we followed him out to the street.

It was Lester, in the back of a police car. Somebody had shot him through the head from right up close because there was powder tattooed into the skin on his forehead. He looked very dead and more like a gangling over-grown kid than he ever had before. Kirby said to me:

"Now what in hell caused this? The kid was harmless, even if he was your partner."

I said: "He must have stumbled into something, mister. That's the only answer."

"Has he got any folks?"

"Not a soul. I look after him."

"You'll appear at the inquest, of course."

I said: "Yeah, but listen. Fix it so I don't have to answer a bunch of questions. I don't want to have to tell anything about why I'm here."

"Apparently somebody knows why."

I said: "And I want to know who the somebody is, mister, that's all."

I left, and when I started to think about it I started getting sick. The kid was so damned decent always; just wanting to play detective. He might well have made some remark to that big blonde of his and put himself on the spot.

I started back to the hotel—there was no place else to go—and all I could think about was that Lester wouldn't be there to meet me, beaming through his glasses and offering screwy suggestions on the detective business we were in together.

**J**UST before I got to the hotel I had to pass a news-stand and I stopped there to get something to read. I was hoping it might take my mind off Lester. The

magazines were spread out on a sort of platform for display and there was a brick wall back of the platform. Just the space between two stores. I got what I wanted and started to turn back to the stand to pay and something flicked the top of my ear as I did. And right then a brick in front of me spattered red dust.

I heard the gun, then, but until I'd put my hand up to my ear and brought it down and looked at the blood on it I didn't realize what the sound had been. It hadn't been loud; about like the noise a heavy whip makes when cracked.

It didn't occur to me about the slug being aimed my way. Not in that second. But another brick, just at the side of the one already hit, chipped with another bullet and I got smart to what was going on.

I heard the sound again as I turned and ran. I ducked into the corner store—the door wasn't more than ten feet away—and stopped inside the shadow and looked across the street.

There was a rooming house there, set above the one story buildings. Half the windows were open and there wasn't a way in the world of telling from which the shot had been fired. I walked through the store, holding my hand up to my ear and stopping most of the blood, went out the side door and into the first drug store I ran into. I told the druggist:

"I've hurt my ear. Can you put a plaster on it?"

I took my hand away, letting blood pour all over the shoulder of my coat, and he said: "You ought to go to a doctor, man!"

"Patch it up so I can."

He led me into the back room and patched up the ear with tape and said: "It isn't as bad as I thought, mister. There's about half an inch of the top gone but it's taken off clean. I'd go to a doctor, though, just to be sure. I can patch you up in an emergency like this, but I'm no *M. D.*"

I thanked him and paid him and went in the side door of the hotel. And for the first time noticed I still had the magazine I'd picked out and hadn't paid for. I'm willing to bet that news-stand man figured I'd put on an act for his benefit but the Lord knows I hadn't—it had been entirely for my own.

I picked up a letter at the desk from Miss Gahagan, back in the office, and

wondered how I was going to break the news about Lester to her. She'd liked the kid as much as I had. The first of it was a report on some routine work and was fair news, neither good nor bad. And then she went on with something that was not so good.

Joey Free's check had bounced and she was going to try it again in a few days. She'd called Joey's apartment and he hadn't been there. Wendel had answered the phone and told her Joey had gone to Los Angeles for three or four days and that he was holding the fort. Naturally she hadn't said a word to Wendel about Joey's check coming back on us. She said Free had called Wendel that same morning, from Los Angeles, and had said he'd be back in three or four days, and that Wendel had said he'd stick close to Free's apartment, in case I wanted to get in touch with him about anything. I got Long Distance, and said:

"I'd like to speak to Mr. Todhunter Wendel, at Mr. Joey Free's apartment in San Francisco. Rush this through, sister, and I'll send you a box of candy, I'm on an expense account."

She said: "I like flowers better; I'm on a diet. D'ya know the number of Mr. Free's apartment?"

I said I didn't. She said: "I'll look it up, Mr. Connell. Anything for you. And the flowers."

SHE called back in a little while and said: "I like almost any kind of flowers, Mr. Connell. Here's your party," and then after the usual amount of clicking back and forth, Wendel said:

"Hello! Hello!"

I said: "This is Connell. In Reno."

"Oh, yes, Connell."

"Where's Joey Free?"

"In Los Angeles. He called me from there last night and this morning again. I'll ask for his address there when he calls again."

"Never mind. Who's your lawyer here?"

"I haven't one."

"Wire whoever you've got in New York, then, and have them get somebody here to represent you. Anybody but Crandall, tell them. And do it in a hurry and let me know. Is that clear?"

"Of course. I'll do it at once. How are

you coming along? Have you talked with her?"

"Yeah, but I haven't found anything out yet. This is tough, it takes time."

I could hear him groan and then he said: "You haven't much time, Connell. She's been there over two weeks already."

"I've got four more. What d'ya know about your wife's maid?"

"Why nothing at all. Ruth seemed to think she was very satisfactory. Wasn't that terrible?"

"Didn't anybody ask you and Joey questions about her?"

"A few. I couldn't see any connection between the maid and myself and said so, naturally."

I said: "Okey! Get that dope and shoot it to me in a hurry. All right?"

He said all right and I hung up. And then dug out an envelope I'd happened to have in my pocket when I was working at the three Cs Club, and got busy on the phone.

I had four numbers and began to believe I was going to draw a blank. The first two girls I called were busy that night. But the third said she'd just love to go out and so on and I said I'd call for her at eight. I'd taken the numbers more from habit than anything else and couldn't remember just which one of the many Rucci had introduced me to she was, but I figured I'd know her when I met her. I got the house doctor up and had a bit neater job done on my sore ear, and he was just leaving when Kewpie came in.

Kewpie looked glum and said: "We lost out some way at the Club. Rucci told me he had made other arrangements." He looked thoughtfully after the doctor, then at my taped ear, and said:

"Didn't hit you bad, eh?"

"What d'ya mean?"

"So you won't talk. I heard about it and wondered if you were going to crack, is all. I heard that somebody got shot at on the street."

"Where'd you hear it?"

I was worried by then. I thought maybe it was common gossip. He made it all right when he said: "I know the news dealer where it happened. He'd seen you and I together and told me about it. He said you'd been gone five minutes before he figured what had happened and that you owed

him two bits for the Cosmopolitan you'd taken with you."

I told him what had happened, blaming it on some kid playing around and not knowing what he was doing, and Kewpie said: "Sure, that's your story. I won't crack, Shean, but I saw those two bricks. Some guy was aiming for your head and you can't tell me different."

"Maybe so Kewpie. I don't know why."

He said earnestly: "Now look Shean! You and I have worked together a couple of times. I've known you quite a while. If I can help I'll do it and you know it."

I said: "I catch!"

"It was tough about your partner."

"It's going to be tough for whoever was back of doing him in Kewpie. You mix in this, you're mixing in trouble."

"It's okey for my dough."

I said: "All right. You want to go out with the big blonde that Lester was playing around with tonight? Maybe I can fix it up; maybe she'll talk about something that means something? D'ya want to sort of work with me; I'll see you're taken care of on the money if you do."

"You going out, with the kid just killed and all?"

"It's the one way I'll find out who did it."

"Anything you say, Shean; it's you that does the talking."

I said that was fine and got Lester's big girl on the phone. She didn't sound as though she felt good but I told her it didn't do any good to grieve and that a few drinks might cheer her up.

Apparently that was the sort of talk she wanted to hear because she said she'd go.

## VI

MY girl turned out to be a Spanish-looking brunette. Very snaky and very pretty. But she talked as though her mouth was full of mush, which spoiled the effect, and I wished to God I'd tried the fourth number on my list before I'd tried hers. Mrs. Hazel George-Wolff-Heber was about as I had her picked.

Just a good kid, but a bit worn. I couldn't tell whether the gargling effect my gal put on or Hazel's giggles were the worse; both got on my nerves before we'd got once around the track. I didn't feel much like partying, any way.

We moved in the back room and took a look at the man that followed me on the job, and Hazel leaned over and patted me on the cheek and said:

"He doesn't play half as well as you do, honey. Tee-hee-hee!"

Kewpie said the same, very loyally. My gal, who gargled, yessed on it. For that matter, I didn't think he did myself, so we were all even. Then Rucci came over to the booth, smiling and shaking his head, and said:

"Why Connell! I was told you were leaving. I hired this other man in your place, as I told Kewpie."

"Who told you," I asked.

He made a pretense of trying to remember and finally said he didn't remember; that he'd been around all that day and had met so many people. He'd hired the new man to be sure he'd have music and so on. He was very nice—too nice—and bought a round of drinks before he hurried away.

The phone booths were by the hall leading to the men's room and as soon as he dashed into one I made the sneak. He hadn't the door quite closed when I went by and I could hear him say to somebody:

"I tell you he's here now. Right now. In a party. There's the Heber, that sax player. . . ."

I couldn't stand there and listen so I went on. I went back to the booth and by and by the two girls went to powder their noses. I said to Kewpie:

"You wanted to help me, didn't you?"

He said: "Sure!" I said: "You'd better get the hell out of here with these two women, or you're going to find out that it's a hard life."

He brightened and said: "Is it trouble, Shean? Is it trouble?"

"With a capital T I think. I'm on a spot."

He said firmly: "We'll send the girls home and I'll stay with you, of course. You should know that."

I said: "I know it. I told you because I knew I couldn't get rid of you by just telling you to go and giving you no reason. At least you know what to expect."

"What will happen?"

I said: "Dope! Here it comes now."

Three men were heading for the booth, coming across the dance floor and walking as though they were more used to saw dust

under their feet. All three looked like saloon bouncers. That type. The one in the lead was a big burly red-faced bird that would have weighed at least two fifty stripped to the buff. We had two ash-trays, heavy glass affairs, on the table and I palmed the one nearest me and stood up and got clear of the booth. The big guy said:

"You're Connell!" out of the side of his mouth and he didn't make it any question.

I said: "Sure!" and hit him in the face with the tray.

THAT worked just fine and dandy. He went back and down, skidding across the floor and up-setting the man right back of him. The one left side-stepped them and came toward me fast, swinging something in his hand, and I got a couple of feet farther away from the booth so that I'd have room to work in. He cut at me with what he held and I saw it was a sap, even as he swung it. I got in closer than he thought I could in the time I had and I hit him just a little lower than the belly and as hard as I could land.

That worked, also. He doubled up, dropping the sap, and I brought my knee up in his face.

He went down and out.

And then I turned and saw something funny. Kewpie had managed to get clear of the booth and grapple with the second man. The man, the one I'd hit with the ash-tray had upset, and grapple is just the word I mean. He had both arms around him and it looked as though he was trying to climb up him like a kid climbs a tree.

I'd dropped my tray when I'd hit the first one. I circled Kewpie and his partner, waited until I got a clear shot at the partner's jaw, and smacked.

He just shook his head and I wondered if I'd lost my punch. I circled around the two of them again, waiting for another chance, and then I heard a scream, right in my ear, and the Heber woman brought down a hefty handbag across the guy's head.

It hurt Kewpie more than it did the guy because he shook Kewpie off with a sort of wiggle. But it bothered him enough to make him stand still and I got him by the wrist and then turned and threw him over

my shoulder. It wasn't hard. I yanked and stopped at the same time and he went over in the old flying mare. He landed in a heap and I got there and kicked him in the face before he could scramble up.

The first guy was out cold, with blood streaming from his face. The ash-tray, with all my weight behind it, had caught him across the bridge of the nose. He was a mess.

The second was rolling around on the floor and holding his arms wrapped around the lower part of himself.

The third didn't look well either. He was lying flat on his back by the piano and the piano player was staring down at him as though he didn't believe what he was looking at.

I went back to the booth and said to the two women and Kewpie: "Let's get out of here! Quick! Or we'll be mobbed."

The Heber woman was crying out: "He was killing Kewpie! He was killing Kewpie!"

My Spanish looking gal said: "My God, man! Will this happen wherever we go?" and I almost liked her then. We started for the door and Rucci got in the way, just as we got to the door between the back room and dance floor and the bar, and I straight-armed him out of the way. He went whirling back and we got in the bar proper.

The first thing I saw was Crandall, standing at the bar and gawking at us. I said to Kewpie: "There'll be a cab outside. Grab it quick!"

And then I went to Crandall. I said: "It didn't work, mister, but don't give up."

He grinned at me and said: "I won't."

I started to pass at him and somebody grabbed my arm when it went back. I could see I was out-classed, that I couldn't whip the entire bar bunch, so I said:

"I'll be seeing you."

He nodded, keeping his grin, and I dashed outside.

## VII

WENDEL had a long night letter waiting for me the next morning and I found out later he hadn't waited to wire New York but had called them on the phone. It said that his New York lawyers had advised him to consult Amos Mard,

and that he was wiring Mard. I got on the phone, got Mard, and made an appointment for an hour from then, which barely left me time to dress and eat.

He was a young fellow, barely thirty. We talked for a bit, with me being careful not to say anything that might carry to the enemy camp, until finally he said:

"You know, Mr. Connell, this is a bit unusual. Your coming to me like this. Frankly, there's something wrong with the case, though I don't know what it is. I sense that. If it wasn't that I have personal reasons, I'd turn it down."

I said: "Okey, Mard, I guess I can let down my hair. Suppose we get down to cases. You'll be bucking Crandall and Gino Rucci and Lord knows who else. There's something screwy about the thing; there has been, right from the first. And there's been two people killed, so far."

"Why do you think Rucci is interested?"

"He's either a good enough friend of Crandall's to take up the hatchet for him, or he's getting a cut. I'd say the last; money's a better reason for him being in this than anything else. The case is built on money, as I see it."

"Why?"

"The woman's going to sue for a settlement and plenty of alimony. Naturally Crandall will get a big fee or a cut on the settlement some way. He isn't working for nothing. That's undoubtedly why they haven't let her husband talk to her or even see her; they were afraid they'd get the thing straightened out and the divorce idea would be dropped. No divorce; no fee. No fee; no percentage for Crandall. They've probably got that poor gal's head so filled with ideas about her old man that it's spinning."

**I** TOLD him what had happened, right from the start, and when I got to the place where I'd met the Chief and about the warning the Chief had given me he sat up straight in his chair. He said:

"Lord, man, d'ya realize what this means?"

"Sure," I said. "It means you've got a chief here that knows what it's all about. That's all. Every town is the same. He's playing practical politics, which is something that takes a sense of humor and a strong stomach. He's right; this is a tight

little town and he runs it right. A chump in that seat would have this place a mad house in twenty-four hours. Can't you see that?"

"But it means he's working with Crandall."

"It means he's steering a middle course; trying to satisfy Crandall and the other wolves, and trying to do a job for the town at the same time. A bloody reformer in there would raise hell. I tell you, I've seen the same set-up before."

He said he didn't agree and I went on with the yarn. He kept quiet when I told him about Lester, but when I came to the place where the man had taken the two pot shots at me he sat up again. He said:

"There's a point right there, Connell. Why would you lose your job right at that time? Why would Crandall try and force the chief to run you out of town? Why would this attempt be made on your life?"

I said I guess somebody didn't like me and didn't want me around.

He said: "It's the time element, man. I'm no detective, but that means something."

"I'm a detective," I said. "And I think you're right. It means something. But I'll be a dirty name if I know what."

I told him what I'd done the night before and about the brawl at the road-house. And about Rucci calling and having me put on the spot.

I said: "Well, you've got the picture, now. Suppose you make a date with Crandall and you and I talk with him. As Wendel's lawyer, you're entitled to try and arrange some sort of amicable settlement, at least. Crandall can't refuse that. Maybe we can find out something we can use."

He looked discouraged. "Crandall's too cagy to give out anything he doesn't want us to know, Connell. You might as well know, the man's got one of the finest legal brains I've ever known."

"He's stuck you, hunh?"

He said honestly: "I've never beaten him once. I've tried in seven cases."

"Maybe this will be the time."

"Maybe," he said, and didn't sound hopeful.

He called Crandall's office then and we got an appointment in the next hour. Mard

looked a little startled at this action. He acted as though God had condescended to reach down and pat him on the shoulder.

**C**RANDALL had a honey of an office. Just the best. A dignified looking young kid bowed at us when we went in, offered to take our hats, and said:

"Mr. Crandall is expecting you gentlemen. I will tell him you're here."

Mard said: "Thank you!"

I said: "And tell the guy to take that knife out from behind his back. We know him."

The kid looked shocked and left. He came back and led us into a room that matched the reception room for class. Heavy rugs. Big chairs and an Oriental looking affair that was supposed to be a couch. Both the chairs and the couch were decorated with some wild looking covering. Book-cases were recessed into the walls, around three sides, and the fourth looked out on the street. The desk that Crandall sat behind was at least ten feet long and five wide and the top of it looked a foot thick. It was absolutely bare.

The place didn't look like an office, in spite of the book-cases and desk, and it took me a minute to understand why it didn't. It was simple. Instead of law books, with their uniform size and binding, the book-case section held regular books instead of legal stuff. Crandall saw me eyeing this and grinned at me and said:

"That's right, Connell! It's a fake office; just for atmosphere. But I've got a law library as well; Amos, here, can tell you that."

I said: "It's a swell atmosphere," taking the cue from him. The minute I'd gotten over my mad the night before, I'd been sorry I'd picked him in the Three C Club. Of course he'd made the trouble for me and knew I knew it, but things like that do no good and sometimes harm. They give bystanders the wrong impression. Amos Mard said:

"I'm representing Wendel, Crandall."

Crandall raised his eyebrows and looked as though he was enjoying himself. He repeated: "Wendel?" as though it was a question he was asking.

Mard tossed the wire Wendel had sent him in front of Crandall. I'd read it; it only gave Mard authority to represent him.

He'd sent another, right along with it, telling Mard to expect me and work with me. Crandall picked up the wire, read it through, and handed it back to Mard. He said, grinning:

"Well, that's fine now, Amos. I'm always glad to see a brother in the profession do well. But why you show this to me?"

"I wanted to talk to you about a settlement. That is, if Mrs. Wendel decides to go through with her action and we decide not to oppose it."

Crandall kept his grin. "Mrs. Wendel isn't a citizen of this state, Amos. She won't be for another month. Naturally she can't sue now. For that matter, she may never sue. She may change her mind; it's a woman's privilege, I've always heard."

Mard started to get red in the face, which was something I'd been afraid of. The trouble with a young man, going up against an old-timer, is that losing temper business and I'd warned him. I broke in with:

"Now look, Crandall. There's no sense or reason in this screwing around. Wendel, naturally, doesn't want his wife to divorce him. That's understood. But if that's what she insists on doing, I don't think he'll fight it. There's no reason for you two to put on this snarling dog business for my benefit. If she divorces him he'll provide for her as a matter of course. Whatever's right. All we'd like to know is what's your idea of right."

Mard turned and frowned at me. After all, he was the lawyer and supposed to be doing the bargaining. But I frowned back and kept on at Crandall.

"Let's get down to earth on this. What's it going to cost Wendel if it goes through? If it's too steep he'll fight it. He can afford to fight if it will mean a reduced settlement and alimony payments. So let's keep it clean."

Crandall kept that irritating grin. "Now how would I know what Mrs. Wendel wants? What her idea of fair and reasonable is? After all, Wendel is wealthy, or so I understand."

I said to Mard: "He won't talk. Let's go. We're wasting time."

**C**RANDALL held up his hand and said: "I just wanted to see if I could take you over the hurdles a bit, Connell."

You've got that red Irish temper and I always enjoy seeing a man lose control of himself. I'll tell you approximately what Mrs. Wendel thinks is fair. Understand, this is tentative; it will bear discussion."

I'd lost my temper and was sore at myself for doing it. He acted on me that way, as he did on Mard. I've always hated the fat smooth toad type and he was the perfect example. He knew he could drive me crazy mad and gloried in the knowledge and I gritted my teeth and got a bit of control on the ball. I said:

"Okey! What's the bad news?"

He said: "She wants to be fair. Wendel is worth, at a conservative estimate, two million dollars. Of course, that isn't in cash. We think this kind of settlement would be easy on him: one hundred thousand dollars at once, and fifty thousand dollars a year for three years. This, you will understand, will give Mr. Wendel a chance to raise the money without bleeding his business. And it will make income tax payments easier for Mrs. Wendel. Two hundred and fifty thousand dollars in all. With interest, of course, on the delayed payments."

I said, and tried to keep from choking on the words: "Is that all?"

He grinned back at me and said: "Well, of course, that's only the cash settlement. Mrs. Wendel naturally feels she's entitled to alimony as well. But we'll make that a nominal sum."

Mard was as mad as I was. He asked: "Such as?"

"Let us say thirty-six thousand a year. Three thousand a month, though there will be no objection as to how payment is made. Any time convenient with Mr. Wendel will be all right with her, I'm sure. She doesn't want to work a hardship on Mr. Wendel. That is why she's asking for such a ridiculously low settlement."

I said: "I think it's mighty white of her to only ask for chicken feed like that. Of course you know and I know that Wendel hasn't two million dollars. What he has is tied up in property. Foreign property and a steamship line and both are nothing that he can take around the corner. He can't hock that kind of stuff every day in the week. The guy can't pay anything like that and you know damned well he can't."

Crandall shrugged and grinned.

He made a steeple of his fingers and looked over them at us. "Do you gentlemen know that Mr. Wendel spent three days in our little town a short time ago?"

I said: "Sure. He told me about it."

Crandall shook his head sorrowfully. "I advised the father of the girl to make no charges. A scandal would only hurt the girl. But he's very bitter about the matter and may change his mind and press the matter. If he does, it will naturally influence the judge. That is only natural. The girl's a Reno girl and the judge has known her all her life. We respect women in this state. You understand, Amos, the position your client is in."

Mard mumbled something and I said: "Cut this, Crandall. What's the frame?"

He opened his eyes wide, shook his head at me in a pitying way. "I might have known, Connell, you wouldn't have worked for him if you'd known of it. You seem a decent sort. It's merely this. He assaulted a sixteen-year-old girl during the time he was here. Her father, on my advice, didn't press charges. The police rushed him out of town. If the local people had heard of it they possibly would have lynched him. As I said, we respect women in this state."

I said: "Let's go, Mard. This will bear a bit of thinking over."

MARD mumbled something and turned and followed me to the door. Crandall got from behind the desk, came to the door and held it open, then said apologetically:

"I'm sorry about it, Connell, but I thought you knew of the assault. If I'd realized you didn't, that you were here and working for Wendel in good faith, I wouldn't have advised my clients as I did this morning."

"Now what's this?"

"I have three clients. Tony Marsello, Tommy Ryan, and Walter Rans. They happened to be the three men you assaulted last night at the Three C Club. Thinking you were here in an effort to whitewash Wendel on this assault matter, I advised them to file charges against you. Naturally I had no sympathy for you. I'm really sorry about it now."

I said: "This is getting better and better. What charges did they file?"

"Assault with a deadly weapon, I'm afraid."

He was wearing his Cheshire Cat grin and he was just the right distance away. I clipped him on the chin with all I had and he went sailing back and landed all at the same time. Feet, back end, and back of head. He was out colder than any man I ever saw. I said to Mard:

"Well, let's get the hell out of here."

Mard said: "Good Lord, man! They'll hang you for this."

"Nuts!" I said. "He'll probably claim I hit him with a piece of lead pipe, but I've got to expect that in this town. Too much is too much."

We sailed out past his flunkey in the front office and I said: "The mister told me to tell you he wants to be alone. Get it?"

He opened his mouth and gawked and said: "The Mister?"

I said: "Yeah! Mr. —!" and jerked my thumb back over my shoulder toward the inside office and Crandall.

## VIII

LEN MACINTOSH was waiting for me when I got back to the hotel.

"Been here long?"

He shrugged. "A couple of hours, I guess. I got to take you in."

"Why you?"

"The Three C. beef was outside City limits. It's a County case. Get it?"

I said I understood. I turned around and we went outside and started down the street. He said, in a conversational tone: "You know Kirby and I never did like some people in this town, if you know what I mean."

"I've got an idea."

"I've got a notion this charge would be dropped if you left town. It's just a notion, of course."

I said: "That'll be the day."

"Well, hell, what can I do? I get told what to do, you know that."

"Sure, I know."

"If you'd only keep out of sight," he said, plaintively. "Now if you hadn't just come walking into the lobby like that, I wouldn't have seen you. You make it tough on a man."

I said: "I'm going to make it tough on a

man before I leave town. I'll promise you that. If it's the last crying thing I do on this earth I'm going to make it tough on a man. I've run into some cute capers in my life but this one here has got anything beat I ever saw. It's unique. It's so fool-proof there's a hole in it and I'm going to find that hole."

"What d'ya mean, Connell?"

We were about three blocks up from the hotel by then. I said: "It's this. The bigger and better a frame is, the more people there are in it. The more chance there is of somebody forgetting to do or say the right thing. Now there's murder, assault, blackmail, and a few other things in this. Maybe coercion. I know for sure there's another attempted murder in it because I was just about the victim. This beef last night was a frame on me, you know that."

"Kirby and I were talking. D'ya think there's a chance of . . . well . . ." He coughed ". . . well, your doing anything?"

I said: "I'm getting ideas, if that means anything."

"D'ya think that girl getting knifed ties in with the rest of this? Kirby does and always has. That's why he's been sort of . . . Well, you know."

I said: "Don't say it. I know. You mean you and Kirby can't go ahead with me unless you're sure you can make it stick. I don't know that that murder ties in, but everything else has and maybe *that* does. I've got the rest of the frame figured but I'll admit that murder doesn't fit in. I may be wrong on what I think, I'll admit it. But if I haven't walked into as pretty a frame here as there ever was, I'm not the picture in it."

He coughed again, said: "Now we're coming to a side street. I don't suppose I'd happen to notice if you just sort of walked down it. I can't help it if you escape, can I? But for Lord's sake, take your baggage down the back way at the hotel. And when you check in the Palace Rooms, which is two blocks over and in the middle of the block, don't tell Maude I sent you. Out loud, that is. And for Lord's sake keep out of the Three C Club and away from the police station. There's always phones and I suppose either I or Kirby could break away from the desk if we had to do it. Now here we are at the corner."

He nodded and started walking away. His peaked, cocked-up shoulders were swinging, and he was whistling: *When I Leave This World Behind*. It was the first time I'd heard the tune in ten years or more.

I'D stayed in rooming houses before and for two reasons. Lack of money for one and working at the screwy private cop business for another. But the Palace was a bit different. It wasn't bad and it wasn't good, but a room there cost as much as you usually pay in a first-class hotel. And they didn't want their money in advance and that's a rule in all of them. I just said something to the landlady about a man named MacIntosh mentioning the place and I was in with no questions asked.

This landlady was hard looking baggage but she looked smarter than a whip and she proved she was when she looked at me and said with a straight face:

"Don't believe I know MacIntosh. But a lot of people check out after the first night here."

She showed me my cubby hole, said: "The phone's outside in the hall. If you'd like anything to eat and it's too hot to go out or anything, give me a ring and I'll send out for you. If it's anything I can cook in my own place, I'll do it here. I'm always glad to make an extra dollar."

I said: "This will pay for rent," and gave her a twenty. Then I gave her another one and said: "And this will pay for what I send out for. This'll be used up by the end of the week, of course, but I like to keep ahead."

She said: "Thanks, mister," and clumped away.

I'd known the kind of place I was running into when MacIntosh had cracked about it and I wasn't disappointed. I got outside and to the phone and got Kewpie—and he was frantic. He said, with his voice trembling so that I could hardly understand him:

"My God, Shean! Where are you? Don't go home. There's a policeman in the lobby waiting to arrest you. I saw him there."

I said: "Okey, kid, I saw him."

"What's happened, Shean?"

"Nothing much. Get my stuff together and bring it to me. Out the back way and

to the Palace Rooms. 217. Got it?"

"Well, yes. Are you going to stay there?"

I laughed and said I didn't know; that I might be in jail almost any time.

Kewpie came up with my bag and with high blood pressure from excitement. He said: "There were two more cops came, right after you called. One of them was named Ziggy something; I heard the other one call him that."

"That right?"

"Yeah! And Miss Gahagan called and said Wendel had been down at the office. That he said he was coming up here. With Joey Free. That he was leaving right away. The clerk gave me the message."

"And, oh, yes, Shean. The girl you were with last night called and wants you to see her right away."

"What about?"

"She didn't say. Just said to call her."

Rucci had introduced me to her and I wasn't sure whether she was planted on me or not. I didn't think so but I didn't know. I said: "Here's her number. You call her back and say you heard from me and that I was leaving town right then. Get it?"

"Sure. Tell your girl you've left town."

I said: "You call that wench my girl and I'll beat you black and blue. I may have no morals but, by God, I've got a musical ear."

"I don't understand," he said.

I said: "You either have it or you don't. You haven't, or you'd know what I mean. Now get back and get busy. Just call the place here and ask for 217 and tell me. I'll get in touch with you if I want you; if anything comes up call me here. Get it?"

"Sure!"

"And if you can't get me, get in touch with the Chief. Tell him who you are. He'll know about it, probably. But don't go to the station and don't talk to him on the street. He'll tell you what to do."

Kewpie looked worried and said: "I don't like this, you having to hide around like this. It's serious."

"You dope! Murder's always serious. I'd rather hide around like this than take a slug in the head, like I almost did. Or end up in the alley like that poor French gal did, with a shiv in my neck. What the hell; d'ya think I like it?"

THERE was some connection between the French girl's murder and Crandall and Mrs. Wendel, and I spent the rest of the afternoon trying to figure what it could be. And couldn't. I could see why Crandall would try to keep the woman in the notion of divorce. That was easy. He made money that way; probably some percentage of what he could wangle for her on a settlement. I could see Rucci in the picture as a friend of Crandall's. Undoubtedly, Crandall and Rucci had been together in other deals and Crandall had cut him in this. Lester must have stumbled on some proof of the connection and got killed for it.

But I couldn't see why Rucci had hired me as he had. The firing part was easy; Crandall had spotted me in some way and tipped him off, and naturally Rucci didn't want me around the place.

That was another thing. How had Crandall spotted me? The way things had worked out, or rather *hadn't* worked out, it was a cinch that neither Kirby or MacIntosh had spilled any information and somehow I just couldn't imagine the kid had let anything go to his big blonde mama. He'd found something out, not given anything away.

The whole thing was screwy and getting no better fast. I couldn't figure out any information important enough that Lester had been killed over it.

I couldn't figure why I'd been shot at the way I was. That hadn't been any warning; I still had my sore ear to prove the guy had really tried. It gave me a funny feeling to think that somebody I didn't know was running around the town and trying to see me over the sights of a gun. People don't shoot other people over little things. Not that a two hundred and fifty thousand dollar settlement was a little thing, but, after all, Wendel would give his wife the divorce and more than a fair settlement if he was convinced she really wanted it. There was no reason for adding murder to the thing that I could see.

Crandall had poor Wendel cold, anyway. He'd picked some little bum, probably some once nice kid that had gone to hell, and fixed a solid rap against Wendel if Wendel bucked at the divorce. It must have been a once nice girl or the Judge wouldn't have known her since her childhood.

Crandall was smart enough to bring the frame right from the blue sky if he wanted to use it. It was just a question of keeping him from using it.

Len MacIntosh came up around seven. He knocked once on the door, opened it without waiting for me to do it for him, and came in and said:

"You shouldn't point a gun at a policeman. It makes 'em nervous."

"Being shot at has made me that way, too. It does every time."

I put my gun down on the dresser and he picked it up and looked at it. He latched the cylinder open, took out a shell, and whistled. He said:

"Gosh! I've seen plenty of forty-fives before but I'm damned if I ever saw a load like this. What d'ya call it?"

"It's a hand-load. It's a wad-cutter bullet backed with the maximum charge of powder. It's got three times the shocking power of the ordinary load or something like that. I forget just what. But you crease a guy with that slug and it'll knock him down quicker than a smaller slug would if it hit him center."

He put the cartridge back in the gun and closed the cylinder and said: "I can well believe it. You've got the right idea; I never could see any sense in shooting a man more than once. What in hell did you do to Crandall? He was down to the station and I've seen saner people sent away to the goofy house. He was crazy; just stark, raving crazy."

"What did he do?"

"Nothing. I had to tell him you'd escaped and that you undoubtedly had left town."

We talked for a while, just going over things, and he told me Kirby was checking over every sporting man in town that he thought had ever been around New York. In an effort to tie the French girl's murder up with that end of things. He said:

"Kirby believes like you do; that there's a connection here with Crandall, but he isn't missing any chances."

I said: "Listen! You're supposed to be working out of the Sheriff's office, aren't you? You're a deputy. How in hell does it come you and Kirby are so damned chummy? How come you're mixing up with this City stuff?"

He said: "Well, I've heard of a man

having two jobs at the same time, if you know what I mean. I might even just be on the Sheriff's payroll and not really working for him. But I'm not working for the City; there's no provision for extra help and I couldn't very well go to the council and ask for a job."

I said: "I catch."

He was Government, what branch I didn't know or care. I had the notion he was probably a deputy-marshal but it didn't make the slightest bit of difference. It explained why Kirby had dared to go against Crandall as he had. It meant MacIntosh was after Crandall and that he thought I might be a help to him. It was the answer to a lot of things that had bothered me.

I went on with: "That's swell. That's a break. Only I want Wendel here when the blow-off comes."

"Wendel will have to be here, you think?"

"I don't think; I know. We've got to have him."

"Why?"

MacIntosh had cold grey eyes, set under damned near white eyebrows. The eyebrows were bushy and needed plucking badly. They were mean eyes and he turned them on me and waited for an answer and all I could say was:

"I'm not sure yet. I can't crack until I've got more to go on."

"Is the French girl mixed in it?"

"She must be. I'm not sure just how."

"Both Kirby and I have given you every break, Connell. Why not play back?"

I said: "Damn it! I can't tell you something I don't know. I've missed something and I'm trying to figure what it is. I can't get it. Why was Lester killed? Why should somebody try to kill me like that? There's only one answer; I've stumbled into something and haven't brains enough to see it. But it'll come to me."

"Suppose I get help and you and I and Wendel demand to see his wife? Would that bring the show-down?"

"How would it? He'd never get a chance to talk sense to her like that. She'd go ahead and get her damned divorce, which is just what Crandall wants. What are you after him for?"

I rang that last in quick, thinking I could possibly stampede him into telling me something. He just grinned, said:

"That's a sort of secret, Connell. But I'll tell you this: Rucci is mixed in it too."

"It's either white-slave stuff or dope."

"You've got a right to guess. I can't stop you guessing."

I said: "Let's call it a draw. I can't tell you anything and you won't tell me anything. Let me talk to Wendel and work something out."

He stared at me a moment, said: "I want to be in at the finish, guy."

He left, and left me staring at the four blank walls, trying to figure the connection between the murdered French girl, Lester being shot, the attempt to kill me, and Mrs. Wendel's refusal to talk with her husband.

None of it made sense.

**K**EWPIE woke me by calling about ten and what he said brought me wide awake. He said:

"Wendel and Joey Free are here. They want to see you. I waited for them, like you told me to do."

"Joey's drunk, Shean! He told me he has his false whiskers along and that he's going under a disguise. He's going to be the old man of the mountain, he says."

"Oh, Lord!" I said. "What are they registered under? What names? Is Wendel drunk?"

"Wendel's sober. They're registered under the names of O. M. Mountain and Dick Smith."

I wanted to laugh but I was too mad to do it. I said to Kewpie:

"They'll see you again, I'm afraid. Tell Wendel I want to see him. But don't call this number when he or Joey are in the room and don't tell them where I am. This is a secret, kid, I told you that."

"I know, Shean!"

"Did Joey say anything about his rubber check?"

"He took me to the side and gave me the hundred to give to you. I told him you were in trouble and that I met you now and then, where you told me to. Was that right?"

"Sure. Now listen. If Joey's drunk, keep it just with Wendel. Tell him to meet me at the corner of Virginia and K streets at nine tonight. Of course, if Joey is sober, it's okay to tell him too."

I stalled until nine and then drove around to the corner where I was to meet

Wendel. He and Kewpie were waiting on the corner and I pulled in to the curb.

"Climb in."

They did, with Wendel in the middle. He started to cry before I'd even gotten the car away from the curb. He said:

"I'll say now, Connell, that I'm disappointed in you. Free told me you were a good man but I think you've mismanaged this affair most lamentably. I can't get over your partner being killed; he was only a boy. I don't understand your idea in taking a position in that roadhouse."

"I met your wife there."

He shut up for a moment, said in an altered voice: "How . . . How did she look?"

"Okey, as far as I could see."

"Who was she with?"

I knew what he was thinking of and I said:

"Now look! I thought the same as you're thinking when I started out on this. I figured boy friend, the same as you do. But I've seen her several times, twice out there, and she's always been with either her guards or her lawyer. And the lawyer's no boy friend of hers. So get that out of your craw. It's something else. Now did you meet any sixteen-year-old kids while you and Joey were painting the town?"

He stared at me. We were parked by that time and I could watch his face. He said: "Why, of course not. We were in bars and gambling places. Naturally, I didn't meet any children in those sort of places."

"Put it this way: were you out with any woman?"

He said stiffly: "I was not. I was here to effect a reconciliation with my wife. Naturally I would not be with any other woman."

I said: "I thought it was a frame but I had to make sure." I went on and told him of what Crandall had said and his face got redder and redder and he swore in a school-boyish way. But very sincerely. I kept on with explaining, showing him the spot he was on. I finished with:

"Now get it. If you contest this suit, Crandall will get this father of the girl, whoever he is, to swear out a warrant charging you with this mythical assault. You'll be picked up on the charge at once, if you're in the state. They could extra-

dite you on it, if they wanted to do it, but I doubt if they would. They'll be satisfied to have you away. If you fight it, the judge has got two strikes called on you before you open your mouth; Crandall tells me the judge knows the girl they've got working with them. You're going to get stuck with that robbing settlement if the thing goes through. There's no way out of it."

"But this is a pure and simple frame-up."

Kewpie made one of the few wise remarks I ever heard him make. He said gravely: "Pure frame-up, perhaps, but surely not a simple one. It seems very complicated to me."

Wendel ignored him, said to me: "Isn't there anything I can do?"

I cracked it at him then. I said: "If you want to take a chance, we'll try and talk with your wife."

"Where can we see her?"

"At Crandall's place."

He looked bewildered, stuttered: "B-b-ut the guards! I tried to see her before. They wouldn't even let me near enough to lay eyes on her. I've told you that."

I laughed and said: "We're going in the side way or the back way or some way where the guards aren't. I don't know just how and won't, until I case the house. But we'll try it if you've got the guts."

He said very simply: "I want to see her."

## IX

AT about midnight we drove down the street to where we could get a fair view of the Crandall house and switched off our lights. A big sedan came down the street, turned into the drive and stopped in front of the door. We watched lights flick on all over the house and I said:

"Now I'm going to do some guessing. It's a cinch the bedrooms will be on the second floor. The best, which would be the master's bedroom, will be in the front. There's two bedrooms in the front and that will mean that your wife, who's the honored guest, will have one and our Mr. Crandall will have the second. How's that for reasoning?"

Wendel said: "It seems logical."

Kewpie said: "But which is the first and which is the second?"

"That's elementary. Mrs. Wendel is a guest. She'll naturally go to bed first, because Crandall will wander around and see that everything's okey before he tucks in. In common politeness he'd stay up until she went to bed."

The upstairs light on the left of the house snapped on first. We watched it. Ten minutes afterward it went out. A few minutes later the right hand one went on in turn. We watched that. In five minutes it went out. I said: "Check and double check. Mrs. Wendel would put cold cream on her face to take off the make-up. That would take a little while. Crandall would just take off his clothes and pile in bed. It proves my theory."

A half hour was the time we gave the Crandall menage to get to sleep. It seemed more like six before I climbed out and said: "Come on," to Wendel.

I could see his face, there was enough light for that, and I could see he was a bit whiter but looked as though he was going through with it.

At that, he wasn't any more afraid than I was. He couldn't have been. I didn't have any wife to take my mind off the danger.

We pussy-footed up to the side of the house and I started to try windows. This after taking off our shoes.

They all were locked. On both sides. We went to the back of the house, tiptoed up on a broad back porch and tried the back door and found it the same way. I tried the three pass keys I had and no dice. Then Wendel gripped my arm and pointed down the porch.

"That window's open."

It was. And it was a mortal cinch it was a back bedroom and belonged either to some of the house help or the guards. I went to it, peeked in and could see a shadowy outline of a bed and could hear somebody wheezing. It wasn't a snore and from the sound of it I couldn't tell whether it was a man or woman. I took my sap out of my back pocket and whispered to Wendel:

"Let me get by the bed. Then you come in. For Christ's sake, be careful."

I climbed through the window, trying to keep my clothes from rubbing on the sill and making a noise, and got inside with no yowl coming from the bed. I knelt down

by it so I could get the sleeper's face outlined against the wall, and saw it was a woman. I got ready to shove her pillow in her face, if she woke, and Wendel started to come in.

I'll give him credit. He had the instincts of a first class second-story worker. He came through the window like a ghost. The sleeper never stirred.

We slipped through the bedroom door, which made one squeak when I opened it, and saw a hall leading toward the front of the house. I whispered to Wendel:

"Keep about ten feet back of me but keep coming."

He squeezed my arm again.

I WENT down the hall and it jogged, right by the front door, showing a staircase going up. There was a door leading to a front room on each side and from the left I could hear good hearty husky snores and I never heard better music in my life. I went up the stairs, walking close to the wall as I'd told Wendel to do, in order to lessen the chance of a squeaky tread, but the house was old and warped and those damned stairs sounded as loud to me as any brass band I ever heard.

But not a sound, outside of that.

I got to the top and waited for Wendel, and I could hear him coming all the way. Not alone from the stairs but because of his breathing. He was wheezing like he had asthma.

The tough part was coming. What we'd done was kid stuff, compared to waking his wife up and keeping her from waking the household. I said:

"What pet name did you have for her?"

He grunted, made a rattling noise in his throat that sounded like: "E-r-r-r."

"You must have called her something besides Ruth?"

He whispered: "I-I-I called her P-Puzzums."

I said: "Oh, Jesus!" and wanted to laugh in spite of the spot I was on, but I said instead: "Now, when we get inside, you get your face close to her ear and be ready to whisper. Put your hand over her mouth. For Lord's sake, don't let her make that first squawk. She'll come out of her sleep scared to death and she'll sing out, sure as hell. So clamp down on her

mouth until she knows who it is that's talking to her. Understand?"

He said he did.

I went down the hall and got to her door and tried it. It was unlocked, and if I'd been a gal in that den of wolves that door would have been bolted and propped closed with a chair as well. But I thanked God for her trust in men and opened it.

I took plenty of time doing it; at least five minutes. And Wendel was at the back of my neck, breathing like a fire horse after a run. I finally got it cracked enough for us to slip through and I went first, to make sure my Sherlock Holmes stunt had been right.

It had been. It was a warn night. The front windows were open and letting in quite a bit of light, and the gal had kicked off the covers. I couldn't make a mistake; there was no doubt of it being Mrs. Wendel. I slipped around to the other side of the bed, where I could help hold her if she came out of her corner fighting. Wendel knelt down by her.

He put his hand over her mouth, ready to grab, got his face close to the side of her head, then reached over with his other hand and patted her cheeks.

And clamped down over her mouth.

She came out of it all in a bunch. She bridged herself like a wrestler trying to break a hold and started kicking. I'll give him credit. He hung on, now with both hands, but it was the grasp of desperation. His mind had given way under the strain and he was whispering hoarsely: "Puzzums! Puzzums! Puzzums!" over and over again.

I got one hand over his, on her mouth, and leaned across her, trying to hold her so she couldn't get free. She was bucking like a horse. Finally she quieted down and I took my hand away, and *he* got himself together and said:

"This is Tod, honey. I've got to talk to you."

She kept quiet. He repeated his identification and added: "It's all right, honey. We won't hurt you. We just want to talk to you. Now will you whisper and not make any noise?"

Then he said: "*Arrrgghh!*" and it was no whisper. It was damned near a shout. Instead of trying to hold his hand over her mouth he tried to take it away, and she

came right up with it, holding it with her teeth. She was shaking her head like a damned dog and she was screaming at the top of a plenty husky voice.

**I**F I'd been him she'd never have sued for a divorce. She'd never have been able to sue or do anything else in this world.

I said to Wendel: "Come on! Quick!"

I led the way into the hall and there she was, pounding on the door of Crandall's room and making the night hideous with her voice. Wendell ran to her and took her by the shoulder.

"*RUTH!*"

She turned and caught him fair in the nose with her fist and I could hear the good solid sound it made when it landed. He took a couple of steps back toward me and I grabbed him and pitched him toward the stairs.

"Get going. Fast."

We went down the stairs, sounding like a herd of horses, and just when we got to the foot of them the lights snapped on and a guy said:

"Hold it!"

It was one of the plug-uglies I'd met at the Three C Club. He was dressed in undershirt and shorts and a .45 Colts Automatic and the last impressed me because it pointed at me, where I stood above Wendel. The Wendel woman's screams above stopped short, as though somebody had turned off the faucet, and then Crandall's voice came from the head of the stairs saying:

"Hold them, Barney!"

Barney grinned and said: "Yeah!"

The other guard came out of the door behind Barney and this one was dressed in just shorts. He had a mat of hair on his chest that looked absolutely indecent and he held a gun against his hip bone but so it pointed toward us.

"Everything under control?"

Barney jerked his head and said: "Yeah!" again.

Crandall called down: "Tell 'em to turn around so I can see who it is. I can guess, now."

Wendel turned and I could see blood pouring from his nose. I turned also, and Crandall said: "Hagh! I was right. Hold them, Barney, and I'll call the police."

Crandall was wearing about the loud-est suit of pajamas I ever hope to see in this world. Purple and red. He looked like a big fat toad in them. He said to me:

"You should have stayed out of town, Connell. You'll do time for this."

I said: "Call the cops and shut your mouth."

Barney said: "Turn around!"

He took my gun and sap and fanned Wendel, who was clean. He hefted my gun, which weighs forty-four ounces when empty, then slammed it against the side of my head. I rolled with the blow, taking away quite a bit of the punch, but it put me down to my knees. Wendel said:

"Here! Here! That's not necessary."

He sounded calm and cool then. The shock of getting nabbed and straightened instead of doing the other.

Barney made a half-hearted cut at him with my gun, missing him a foot, intentionally. I stayed on my knees, shaking my head to clear it, and Wendel asked:

"Are you hurt?"

I managed to stand up and said: "No. But when I get that bird with no percentage, *he's* going to be."

Barney laughed. "Yeah!"

Crandall called down: "I've called the station and they're sending over. Just hold them, men."

I turned my head and could see Wendel's wife standing by Crandall. Wendel was already looking up at her; not saying anything. She saw us and ducked back out of sight. Wendel, his face puzzled, said to me under his breath:

"She certainly acted queer. But I'm getting over it, Connell."

I said: "Well, it's time."

And then we waited for the wagon.

## X

**I** STAYED in jail not over an hour but I left Wendel there when I left. Purposely. I told Kirby I wanted Wendel kept safe and the jail would be that kind of a place—and that I had things to do that had to be done.

So Wendel stayed in, facing a charge of illegal entry, and I was charged with escaping from the custody of an officer.

Wendel could always be bailed out—I

knew that. And things were now starting to move along a little bit for me.

Crandall had missed a bet when he hadn't done a lot of shooting there in his house. The action came so fast he didn't have a chance to study the angles. If he'd shot, then, he'd have been in the clear, being able to prove we'd broken in and all. He'd have been justified in thinking us burglars and acting accordingly. He'd think of that golden opportunity he'd missed, that I knew, and he wouldn't overlook another chance.

I didn't want Wendel running around the streets giving Crandall that chance.

Kewpie called me in the morning and said: "I've got Joey and he's in pretty good shape. He sobered up quickly."

"He's had a lot of practice," I said. "Where is he now?"

"Here with me."

I couldn't go to the hotel and talk with Joey and Kewpie had my car. I couldn't remember the name of any bar in town, except the Rustic, and I didn't want to go there because of Gino Rucci owning a piece of it. But it was only ten in the morning and I didn't think Rucci would be checking up the place that early and so I took a chance.

"Take him to the Rustic and meet me there. Pick a booth in the back. If you should see Rucci there, stand outside and I won't go in. You get the idea, don't you, kid?"

"Why, yes," he said scornfully. "Do you think I'm a fool?"

"We won't go into that now."

I went out the side way and eased over toward the Rustic. I went damned carefully, too. And, so help me, I just passed a hole in the wall restaurant when somebody called:

"Oh, Shean! Shean, honey!"

It was the Spanish effect. Wearing slacks and a sweater arrangement and looking like a cross between a school girl and original sin.

She was nothing I wanted to see. I dragged her into the doorway of a building and said: "Now look, doll! I'm in a hell of a hurry. Something important."

She pouted and said: "Are you still in trouble?"

"What makes you think I'm in trouble?"

"Well, I know Rucci. He asked me if

I'd seen you. He acted anxious about it."

"Hell! It's just that maybe he wants me to go back to work or something like that."

She said earnestly: "Now listen, Shean! I'm here divorcing my husband because if I'd lived with him one day longer I'd have killed him or he'd have killed me. I'm no kid; I've been around. Now Rucci means trouble for you. And I heard about that shooting. Those things get around. I don't know whether he was back of that or not, but he might have been. I like you, Shean, I don't want you to get hurt."

"I won't, kid! It's just imagination on your part. Now I've got to go."

"I'm worried, Shean."

So was I, but I didn't admit it. I told her that I'd call her and kept on toward the Rustic.

I COULD see the front of the Rustic for two blocks before I got to it and I saw Joey drive up in his own car and go inside. Even at a distance like that there was no mistaking that big solid body and the way he carried himself. He strutted and swaggered and acted like an over-grown bantam rooster that was carrying too much weight around the middle.

I waited until I saw Kewpie drive up in my car and go inside, then waited a while longer to be sure he hadn't been followed.

"Jeese, Shean, I'm sorry you got in trouble over this case," Joey said when I sat down. "And about your kid partner. I wouldn't have dragged Wendel to see you if I'd thought anything about it. I'm sorry, kid."

"I can always quit it. Can you dig up some dough, quick?"

He shot a quick look at Kewpie, who got red in the face. Kewpie said, very stiffly: "I gave Shean that money."

I said: "I got it, Joey. This isn't for me; it's for Wendel. For bail. I may want to get him out in a hell of a hurry and it would take time for him to get it from New York. He's in jail, and it's always hard to get money when you're in the gow."

Joey laughed. "So old Tod's in the sneezer again! I'll bet he thinks these Reno cops have nothing to do but follow

him around and throw him in the can. How much will it cost to get him out?"

"Probably five hundred for a peace bond. Can you get it?"

He said: "I've got it here. It's his money. I wanted to explain that to you, Shean. I went over in my account when I was drinking and I didn't want to sacrifice anything that I was holding. I wanted to wait until I had my regular money due. I didn't realize I'd run over the account when I gave you that check."

"Forget it."

"Old Tod got some money from the East and I'm using it until my money comes in. I'll go down and get him out now."

"Let it go for now. I know where I can find him now and if you get him out I won't."

He rubbed his chin, said:

"Well, I'll go down and find out about it, anyway."

WE left the joint and I started the car and got going down the street. I dropped Kewpie at his hotel and then went to the Palace. Half an hour later the landlady came up and said:

"Somebody on the phone for you right this minute. You in?"

"Sure," I said, and went out to the phone.

It was Kirby. He said: "I'm glad I caught you. Joey Free, this friend of Wendel's, is here and he wants Wendel out on bail. I told him bail wasn't set yet and he's throwing his weight around and demanding action plenty. What am I supposed to do?"

"Joey's got it mixed, Chief. I just wanted him to find out what the bail would be and have it ready. That's all."

Kirby said he understood and hung up.

I went back in the room and by and by the landlady knocked again. She came in. "Just in case you don't know it, you're spotted here," she said. "First I thought I wouldn't tell you. It's no never minds to me. But you're a friend of Mac's and so I'm talking."

"How d'ya know?"

"Right after you came in this morning I saw a car pass by slow. Like the guy was looking the place over. Now there's a guy hanging around across the street

and he's been there for fifteen mintues. They've got the place staked just as sure as God makes little green apples."

"Who's the guy across the street?"

"I don't know him. A big long rangy bird."

MacIntosh and Kirby were on my side and I knew the stake wouldn't be from them. Kirby would be saved trouble if I left town and MacIntosh knew I wasn't going until I had my business finished, one way or the other. That left Crandall, if the landlady was right. So I said:

"I'll watch it but I think you're wrong. It's for somebody else or it maybe isn't a stake."

She said: "Mister, I've run too many spots not to know a stake-out when it's put on my place. That's what it is; I'm telling you."

**K**EWPIE called me about three that afternoon. He said: "I'm at the hotel. Joey Free just was here. He wants to see you. He said Wendel was held under a thousand dollar peace bond and that he put it up. There was no charges filed against you or Wendel and Joey says that he doesn't think there will be any. I've just talked with him."

"Where is he now?"

"In his room, with Wendel."

"Now listen, Kewpie. Go there and hold him there. Wendel, I mean. Don't let him go out with Joey. Not if you have to hit him on the head with something."

"Got it," he said.

I hung up and clicked the receiver until I got the operator. I gave her the station house number, asked for Kirby, and got him.

"Is MacIntosh there?"

"He's right here."

MacIntosh drawled into the phone: "Hello!" and I said: "Look, mister. Wendel's up at the hotel. Can you get him and hold him in jail? Can you charge him with something he can't bail out on to-night?"

He said: "I guess I could take him to Carson City. It's Federal there, and they could hold him for investigation and not book him in a hurry. Why?"

"Will you do it now? Right away."

He said, with the drawl gone: "Okey, fella. I'm on my way down there."

**H**E hung up the phone. I got the operator again, got the hotel and got my fool client, and it was a relief. I stalled him with:

"This is Connell. What happened?"

He said stiffly: "Free got me out, of course. I understand you didn't want him to do this."

"I wasn't anxious about it. That's true."

"So I understand. I'll say now, Connell, I don't like the way you're handling this. I suggest we meet and talk this over. The three of us. You, Free, and myself. There's too many strange things happening here to please me."

I figured MacIntosh would be at least half way there by then. I said: "You hired me to do something and it turned out to be something entirely different. I'm doing the best I can for you, why not work with me."

He sounded stubborn. "There's too much going on that I don't understand."

"We're even. Six-two, and even. There's too much going on that I don't understand. But it's starting to work out, I can tell you that. Did Crandall talk to you?"

"For a moment. He said that he didn't blame me for my action; that it was natural for me to want to speak with my wife. That she was very upset about the entire matter but didn't want to press charges against me, though she has that right. That although you and I broke into his house, he feels the same way about it. He insisted on the peace bond as a matter of routine is all. He was very friendly."

I thought MacIntosh should be in the lobby by then. I asked: "You carry any insurance?"

"Certainly."

"Made out to your wife?"

"Of course."

"She's in your will?"

"Why naturally. Connell, what are you leading for?"

I said: "You dope! I'm trying to show you a reason Crandall has turned friendly. He's decided to go whole hog or none. If you're knocked off, I won't have a client and I'd go home where I belonged. Mama would collect more dough than she would from the settlement and everybody would be ahead. Everybody but you, that is. I'd

win because I'm either going nuts or going out feet first. It would give me an out, you getting killed. Crandall would be ahead and so would your wife."

"You must be crazy, Connell! Crandall wouldn't consider a thing like that. The man was very friendly, I tell you. You're talking about murder, man."

I said: "The maid was murdered, wasn't she? Lester was murdered, wasn't he? They can only hang you once. Though it's gas they give you in this state."

He mumbled something more about me being out of my head, then spoke clearly. "Just hold the wire. There's somebody at the door."

I waited for about five minutes. Then MacIntosh's voice said: "You Connell?"

"Yes."

"Everything's okey. I'll see you."

I said: "You damned fool! I didn't want him to know I put you on him."

He laughed and said: "He doesn't. He put up an argument and I bopped him on the side of the face with a sap. I didn't want to do it but he went off his nut and took a pass at me. I won't take that from any man, much less a man I'm trying to help. I'll see you when I get back."

I CALLED Spanish and told her I'd pick her up in half an hour. She said: "That's fine. Are you bringing your friend?"

I said: "Friend?"

"Well, Hazel's friend. Kewpie! She's here now."

I said I guessed maybe I could and called Kewpie and told him to meet me at the corner below his hotel. That we were going calling.

I picked him up at his corner and he said: "You know, Shean, Hazel's a lovely girl but she drinks too much. She's really nice except for that one thing."

"Why don't you reform her?"

He said earnestly, and meaning it: "D'ya suppose I could? She told me the only reason she does it is because she's so lonesome. Because of feeling so badly over this divorce. Her husband was a brute to her."

I asked: "Which one?"

"What d'ya mean?"

"Which husband. She's had a lot of them, hasn't she?"

He said: "She's had a lot of trouble in her life," and sighed—and I laughed. I said:

"Now look! She's practically a professional at this getting married. She's got too much experience for you. And besides that, she's too big for you; she'd have your ears beat down around your neck. You'd better lay off."

"You shouldn't speak like that about her, Shean. She's really nice."

I said: "Oh, nuts!"

We got out of the car and I remembered Rucci had introduced me to Spanish in the first place. I took my gun out and held it under my coat and said to Kewpie:

"Keep to the side and back of me. We might be walking into a plant."

"Hunh?"

"She might be Rucci's girl. I don't know."

He handed me back what I'd given him. He said: "And you talk to me about being foolish about women. And then go ahead like this."

THE two girls were alone in the front room, and I made an excuse to follow Spanish out to the kitchen while she mixed drinks. Just to be sure nobody was hiding there. She had her back turned and I started to put my gun away, but I was clumsy about it and she turned and saw it slide in the clip. She made her eyes wide and said:

"You're carrying a gun, Shean?"

"It's an old habit," I told her.

"I knew something was wrong."

"There's nothing wrong, babe."

"I thought about it all day. That's why I went out to the Three C this afternoon. That's where I met Hazel and Mrs. Wendel."

"That right?"

"Hazel came back with me but Mrs. Wendel waited there for her lawyer. Crandall."

"That right?"

"Mrs. Wendell told me about you and her husband breaking in her house last night. She doesn't have any more use for him at all. She won't even talk to him."

"I noticed that."

"I think she's foolish. He'll just fight her alimony if she treats him like that."

"Maybe so, hon."

"I heard Rucci ask her if she'd talked to him and she said 'Of course not.'"

"What are you going to do with those drinks? Let 'em stand there on the shelf and melt until they're no good."

She said: "You're afraid of me because I met you through Rucci. Isn't that it?"

"Of course not, hon."

She went away from me and back to the shaker. She snapped: "All right. *Don't* tell me anything. I went out there just because I thought you were in trouble with Rucci and because I thought I could maybe help you by finding out something."

"I appreciate the spirit, babe."

She put the shaker and glasses on a tray and tossed her head while she headed toward the front room.

**K**EWPIE and Hazel were sitting on the davenport and Kewpie looked a little mused. I figured Hazel had probably been holding him in her lap; she was big enough to do the deed comfortably. He looked relieved when he saw us and she looked about half mad. I poured her three Martinis, as fast as she could get them down, then sat down by her and said:

"Did you hear about the little stunt Wendel and I pulled last night on his old lady? That was funny."

To prove it I laughed.

Hazel said: "Heard it. I heard nothing else all afternoon. It's a wonder you both weren't arrested."

"We were."

She looked surprised.

"She didn't tell me that. She said she didn't even know where her husband was."

"I meant to ask you something. You were with Lester, the day he was killed. What did you do?"

"Just rode around. We ended up at the Three C Club, as usual. We were talking about Mrs. Wendel and Lester happened to look up and see Rucci. He went over and talked to him a while, then he brought me home."

"And then?"

"He said he was going back to talk more with Rucci. That Rucci was going to tell him something."

It meant that Rucci had put the kid on a spot. That Rucci had told the kid something and had to shut him up. Or that the blonde wench had said something to

the kid and the kid had cracked about it to Rucci. I said:

"You don't remember what it was you said about Mrs. Wendel, do you?"

"Just that when she got drunk she used very bad language. 'She may be New York society,' I said, 'but she sounds like a bum when she's drunk.' That's all I remember. I wonder where her husband is."

I thought of the Carson City jail but didn't say anything about it. I said: "Chances are he's around some place. He may be keeping inside so she doesn't have a chance to raise hell with him."

"She's the kind that would. But she's so mad at him she won't even talk to him. He beat her up last night, too, she says."

I said: "Nuts!"

"Well, if I was him I wouldn't go out to the Three C any more. Or you either. They think a lot of her out there. She's there all the time."

I said: "Probably on account of young Rucci. Rucci's little brother."

"Well, she knows him, of course. She must have met him lately though; she's from New York and he's from Sacramento."

"That's probably it."

The shaker went dry and she looked at it, very wistfully. I said: "Toots and I'll go out and fill it up again."

She was reaching for Kewpie when Spanish and I went through the kitchen door. Spanish said: "Well, did you learn anything?"

"Sure. Of course."

"I didn't hear her say anything."

"You didn't know what to listen for, hon."

She shook her head and said: "Secrets." She was about half mad and about half worried about me and I kidded her out of both before we went back in the parlor.

Kewpie looked a lot more mused than he had the time before. And a lot more worried. He kept shooting me pleading glances and, finally, he came over and whispered:

"Let's go home, Shean! She's getting tight again."

I said: "You might as well learn to take it if you're going to marry the girl. My, won't life be a wonderful thing."

"Rub it in," he said. "Let's go."

We had the shades pulled down and I'd been watching the doors all the time. Every time Spanish or Hazel got close to one I'd sit so I could get at the gun under my coat. I said to Kewpie: "You take my car and take Hazel back to the hotel. I'll go out the back way and walk to my place."

He said: "Well, all right, but I hate to do it. I'm sort of afraid of her."

"You're all right as long as she don't fall on you," I told him.

He looked sad and I went out in the kitchen. I was just inside the door when I heard somebody call, from the front of the house:

"Connell!"

And then, before I had any notion of what he was going to do, I heard Kewpie open the front door. I heard just one single shot, ran out through the back door and around to the front in time to hear a car start, down the street.

And then I saw Kewpie lying in the door with the front of his face blown away with a shotgun.

I LEFT the place two hours after the cops had come and gone and I went out the back way quietly. That is, comparatively quietly. I'd have done better if the Spanish hadn't been hanging to me and begging me to stay where I'd be safe.

I got to the Palace without seeing a soul that looked like someone I shouldn't see and I went in the side door of the place as quietly as I could. But not quietly enough to keep Maude, the landlady, from hearing me. She came out of the kitchen, with a wrapper around her, and said:

"I told you it was trouble, mister. They're up in your room waiting for you."

"How many of them?"

"Two. One of them is Billy Montez and the other is somebody I never saw before. But a tough baby, or I'm wrong. I watched them sneak in the place."

I started up the stairs and she grabbed me by the arm and said: "Oh, no, you don't. I won't have trouble in my place. I won't have the spot hotted up because you want to start something you maybe can't finish. I tell you they're waiting for you."

"What d'ya want me to do?"

3—Detective Book Magazine—Spring

"Use your head for once. Call Mac. How can you lose? I'll get him for you."

She went to a phone she had in the kitchen and got Mac, where he stayed. I talked to him and told him what was going on and he said he'd be right over. So I sat in the kitchen and waited for him. He came in as quietly as I had, and said to her:

"Now it's all right, Maude. I'll take 'em out with no fuss or confusion and there won't be a come-back on the place." And to me: "Let's do it."

I SAID okey and up we went. We stopped outside my door and he called out softly: "Montez. This is MacIntosh. Len MacIntosh. Come out of there quietly and with your hands in sight. Or I'll come in. You hear me?"

Nobody answered. MacIntosh said again: "This is MacIntosh. Come out or I'll come in."

We could hear whispering then. Finally a voice with an accent said: "We come out. You no shoot."

"I no shoot," MacIntosh said.

He had his gun out and I had him backed with mine. The door opened and a guy with a brown, scarred face peeked out first. He saw Mac's gun staring him in the face and squealed:

"No shoot! No shoot!"

"Come on out. You and your partner."

The Mex came out, followed by a man that stood at least three inches over six feet. And who didn't weigh over a hundred and twenty pounds. Just skin and bone. Mac looked him over and said:

"Hagh! Boney Seitz, hunh?"

The thin man said: "Yes!" very sullenly.

We fanned them for guns and knives and didn't find a thing on either of them. I went in the room and looked around and found a Marble hunting knife under the mattress. Then an old .38 Smith and Wesson a way back on the top closet shelf. And a pocket knife with a blade at least five inches long between the sheets. The knife was the kind that has a spring to snap the blade out when a release button is pressed.

We got them outside and to Mac's car. He had a sedan, with a coatrail on the back of the front seat, and he cuffed them

together so the coatrail had the cuffs over it. Montez's right hand was below the rail and Seitz's left was over it. He said then, to me:

"Go on back and get some sleep. I can take 'em over alone, as well as not."

"With the two of them in the back seat? Hell, man, I'll go with you, of course."

He grinned wickedly and said: "I don't need you. Do I, boys?"

Montez said: "You no shoot. I do nothing."

Seitz said nothing. MacIntosh waited a moment, then asked: "What about you, Boney?"

"I'm not starting anything," Boney said. "I can get bailed out two hours after I'm in. Why should I start something?"

MacIntosh climbed back of the wheel and I went back in the place. Maude was waiting for me and she said:

"Both those boys know Mac and both of them are scared to death of him. He's got a reputation around this country."

"If anything happened to him we'd know who did it. That ought to keep them in line if nothing else does."

"They'll keep in line. God help 'em if they don't."

I said good night and went to bed. Between Spanish and the company waiting for me, it had been a large evening and I was tired.

THE thing had dropped into place and all I had to do was wait for somebody to break it. For somebody to get impatient and start the fireworks. But MacIntosh came in the next morning and, when I'd told him what I'd figured out, said:

"Why wait? Why not we start it?"

"Why not let them start it. They will soon."

His eyes got red and he said: "I want it to break before that youngest Rucci gets out of town. He's likely to skip, even if his big brother don't. Let's clean it up all at once."

I said: "You're the doctor, mister. But will you go out and find Joey Free and tell him Wendel's safe in the Federal can in Carson City. That he's just being held there and isn't charged. That's all; tell him Wendel will be out tomorrow."

"I don't get the idea."

"There's a reason," I said, and he left.

Then I called Amos Mard and said: "Now look, Mard. Don't miss on this. Wendel's over in the Federal jail in Carson City. He's just held; not charged. Get over there and wait for somebody to get him out. Don't you do it, understand. Just hang around, out of sight, and wait for somebody to do it for you. I'll have it all fixed for you. Get it?"

"Not exactly. What's it all about?"

"It's wheels within wheels. That sort of stuff. Now when Wendel gets loose you stick with him every second. It's important. It'll keep the damned fool from getting himself killed."

Mard said: "You're the boss." And hung up.

MARD called about three in the afternoon and said Crandall had gone to Carson City and taken Wendel out of jail. And that he'd stepped out and joined them and stuck like a leech to Wendel ever since. That Crandall had said he got Wendel out of jail because he wanted to talk settlement with him, but that he'd postponed the talk on the plea that he wanted to talk it over with Wendel first. I said: "It's working. Did Crandall let Wendel talk to his wife?"

"No. Wendel asked Crandall to let them talk it over but Crandall said she wouldn't do it. That she never wanted to speak to him again."

"That's fine! Is Joey with you?"

"He was for a while but he went out to the Three C Club to get a few drinks. I think he's crazy."

"Like a fox," I said. "Keep sticking around."

That was all for that time. The next call came at nine and I was getting worried for fear it wouldn't. It was Mard, again, and he said: "Wendel wants to talk to you. Can you meet him here?"

"Where?"

"We're still at the hotel. Joey phoned but hasn't come back."

I said to MacIntosh, who had come back by then, "The dope has made up his mind to pay off," and to Mard: "Tell him I'll be there about ten-thirty. That I can't get there before."

"I'll tell him."

"Tell him it's the finish. And for him not to take off on some screwy angle but

to wait for me. Hold tighter than ever; it won't be for long."

"I'll tell him."

MacIntosh called Kirby then, and said: "Mac speaking. Listen. Take either one or two men and go down to the Golden Eagle and look it over. Look for Rucci's men. Look for anybody that's hanging around and looking suspicious. And then away we go."

"Pick up anybody that looks bad? That it?" Kirby asked.

"That's it. I mean do a first-class job and really case the place. Crandall will have somebody down there waiting for Wendel and Mard to come out and I want them picked up. Now don't miss. Then call us back, if we're not there by the time you're through."

"What'll I do with whoever I pick up?"

"Hide 'em."

"Then what?"

"Then phone me. Get action, will you?"

Kirby said he'd get action.

WE went out ready for trouble but didn't find any. We hardly expected to, for that matter; we just weren't taking unnecessary chances. We got in MacIntosh's sedan and went to the hotel and got there just as Kirby was coming out.

He wasn't alone. He had two cops with him and three men besides the cops. There were no handcuffs but you could see the men were prisoners. Kirby said:

"I got 'em. Two of 'em were up in the hall, outside Wendel's room. The other was in the lobby and I nailed him when we came in."

"Crandall's men?" I asked.

"Rucci's. One of them used to tend bar for Rucci at the Rustic. Another used to be the bouncer at the Three C. The other just hangs around."

MacIntosh said: "We'll meet you at the station. Sink these birds deep, Kirb, we're going to want 'em."

Kirby grinned and said he would and that he'd wait for us. And then MacIntosh and I went upstairs.

I could hear Wendel before I got to his room. He was damned near shouting: "I don't understand this. This is ridiculous, I tell you, Mard. This is the twentieth century; not the days of the Old West. This is ridiculous."

I could hear Mard's soothing mumble and then I knocked on the door. Wendel threw it open, scowled all the more when he saw me, and snapped out:

"You've got a lot to explain, Connell. I've put up with these high-handed tactics of yours long enough."

MacIntosh and I went inside and I said: "I judge that Crandall gave you a line. Isn't that it?"

"He wants to talk with me about a settlement, if that's what you mean."

"Did he tell you why he got you out of jail?"

"Of course. I couldn't very well talk business while I was in jail. I understand that was your doing."

"That's right. You were safe there, weren't you?"

"Mard has been telling me of this ridiculous theory of yours. I'm perfectly safe right here. Things like that don't happen in this age, Connell."

"That's why Kirby didn't just take three guys out of the hotel that were waiting for you to stick your nose out. It just didn't happen."

Mard asked: "Is that right?"

"Right."

Mard said to Wendel: "You see? I tell you when the amount of money involved is as great as in this case, nothing is impossible."

Wendel lost a lot of bluster. "Do you mean to say that three men were waiting in the hotel to murder me?"

"That's the idea."

"Can you prove that?"

"I don't know yet. I don't think I'll have to prove it."

"What d'ya mean by that statement? Connell, I demand that you give me the facts in your possession."

I said: "Oh, nuts! You'd mess things up if I did. Let it work out; it will. Now I want you to go to the phone and get Crandall on the wire. Insist on one thing. An appointment for eleven-thirty tonight. Tell him you'll be ready to discuss terms of settlement at that time. Make it at his office. If he objects to that hour, tell him you're sick of the whole dirty mess and want to pay off and leave in the morning."

"I refuse to do any such thing. Eleven-thirty at night is no hour to talk business."

I'll see Mr. Crandall at a reasonable hour in the morning."

MacIntosh stepped ahead of me and said: "You'll do as you're told, for once in your life at least. You're fooling with murder and a man is trying to save your life and you're fighting him. Use your head, man."

I COULDN'T see his face but he must have looked very convincing. Wendel stepped back, said: "But . . . but . . . Who are you, sir?"

MacIntosh said: "The name in MacIntosh. I work for the Government, if that means anything. I'm concerned with more than a divorce case, mister . . . the Government isn't paying them attention as yet."

I said to Wendel: "For Christ's sake, man, use sense. Work it our way and it will all be over. This is serious; murder always is."

He was surly.

"I still refuse to believe I'm in any danger."

I said: "I bet that maid your wife had thought the same thing. But it didn't keep a knife out of her neck, did it? It didn't keep Kewpie Martin or my partner safe. Now will you go to the phone and make that date with Crandall? Better make it for twelve, at that."

Wendel went to the phone. He got Crandall, told him he'd like to see him at twelve, and I could hear the phone crackle when Crandall talked back at him. That made Wendel sore. He snapped back:

"Now listen. I tell you I want to talk to you at twelve tonight. I can't talk with you now; I'm busy. If you don't care to see me at twelve, say so. I can go back East and let this matter go to court, if that's what you want."

He said, in a much softer voice a minute later: "Twelve at your office then, Mr. Crandall. Yes, I'll have Mr. Mard with me. At twelve then."

He hung up the phone and turned, with his lower lip sticking out in a pout, and said: "Is that all now, gentlemen?"

MacIntosh said: "Practically all. I'll have to ask you to stay in this room with Mr. Mard until we come back for you. We'll keep that appointment with you, you know. So—long."

We got in MacIntosh's sedan and went

to the station and picked up Kirby and one other cop and then MacIntosh headed the car toward the Three C Club. From then on, it was up to us; we'd started something.

The club was jammed solid when we got there. There was a car parked just before we got to it and MacIntosh slowed, then stopped by it. He said:

"We'll go in first. The three of us. But we're liable to have trouble and need help. It's here."

This was a new one on me and I said so.

"We might as well walk in from here. One of the boys will drive my car to the front. I want to go in the back way while you and Connell go in the front."

"Who are the boys?" I asked.

I could see MacIntosh's grin in the car lights. "I'm a deputy-sheriff, ain't I? I just deputized a few of my friends. I've got that right. We're maybe going to need 'em. If we take any prisoners we'll have to have some help in getting them back."

I looked at my watch and saw it was eleven twenty. I said: "We've got forty minutes left, is all."

"That'll be plenty. Heinie, drive my car to the front for me, will you? You boys know what you're supposed to do."

A little short bald-headed man climbed from the parked car and said: "Sure, Len! We'll be watching."

MacIntosh moved toward the back of the place, hauling out an old single-action .45, and Kirby and I gave him a couple of minutes to get around to the back and then went in the front.

We must have looked like business because Gino Rucci saw us and started toward the back. Kirby gave one look at the crowd at the bar and started to call out names. He said:

"You Bates! You Wilson! Sangini! Ellis! Get back from that bar and along the wall. Jump now."

He didn't have a gun in sight but the four men moved away from the bar and against the wall. I said:

"You got it under control. I'm going back."

He nodded and said, without looking away from the four he'd picked: "Okey, go ahead."

I FOLLOWED Rucci into the back room. He was almost at the back door when I saw him, and I stepped to one side, so my back would be against the wall, and cleared the gun from under my coat. Just in case. Rucci opened the back door, looking over his shoulder at me, and started out. He ran into MacIntosh, who was standing there. MacIntosh just reached a hand out and shoved, and Rucci, who still had his head craned back over his shoulder, twisted and fell on the dance floor. MacIntosh said:

"And now?"

I just happened to turn my head toward the booth at my right, one that was facing the back door, and I saw a dark, ugly looking monkey come out with a gun. He held it just under the edge of the table, where MacIntosh couldn't possibly have seen it, but where it was in plain sight from where I was. He was with a red headed girl and I could hear him growl:

"Beat it, kid! It's a sneeze I think."

The red head got out of the booth in a hurry and went past me and out in the front and I watched the dark man until I saw he wasn't going to start anything but was just waiting.

And then I looked toward the back door again.

Rucci had twisted around until he was on his knees and one hand. He was only about ten feet from MacIntosh and he had to bend his fat neck up to see him. He was just braced there, staring up, but one hand was fumbling back of him.

MacIntosh maybe couldn't see the hand but he knew what it was doing. He just stood there waiting, one hand propped against the door casing and the other out of sight. All he wanted was for Rucci to make one move and it looked as though Rucci was going to make it.

He was in no hurry, though. He kept staring up at MacIntosh, fumbling underneath the back of his coat. I looked back at the bird at my right and saw he was half standing but that the gun was still below the table. He knew what was coming as well as I did, but he wasn't quite sure what to do about it.

I looked past him then and right into the eyes of my Spanish effect. She was sitting facing me and her mouth was open and her cheeks were so pale the rouge stood out in

patches on them. Mrs. Wendel was sitting alongside of her and I could see a hefty arm and shoulder on my side of the booth that could only belong to Hazel. Mrs. Wendel apparently hadn't noticed me but was staring at Rucci and MacIntosh. Hazel of course was facing away from me. But all Spanish could see was me and I took my left hand and waved her to be quiet.

Most of the company appeared to be in some doubt of what was going on but there was three men in one booth and two in another that were wise.

The three were the same type; flashy and city. The two were old timers; men around sixty. I figured the three for friends of Rucci's and decided I'd take the bird on my right first, then switch to them.

Rucci had been on the floor for maybe ten seconds but it seemed an hour. Maybe a bit longer, but certainly not twice that. The red-headed girl that had been in the booth at my right hadn't had time to get to the bar I don't suppose. I could see Rucci's hand clear his coat tails; could see the light flash on the gun it held; and then MacIntosh said:

"Okey! Okey! It's the pay-off!"

THE shot from the front of the place, where Kirby was holding forth, started the thing off, and from then on things went like a flash of lightning. A sound came smashing out from the front room, sounding like a big gun, and it galvanized Rucci into action. His hand flashed into MacIntosh's sight and MacIntosh shot him. All he'd been waiting for was the excuse. At the same time I saw this I jumped for the booth on my right and slammed the man there across the back of the head with my gun, just as he brought his own up over the edge of the table and in sight.

And then I twisted, so I could see what the three thugs in the booth were doing.

It was plenty. One of them was already out of the booth with a gun in his hand. The second also had a gun but he was still sitting down and trying to get a good solid aim at MacIntosh, who was standing in the door and swinging his own gun up. The third man was having trouble; he was sitting in such a way his gun was hanging in the clip and he was dragging gun and holster and all out from under his coat.

I took all the time I needed to make sure

and let go at the second man of the three. He was all I could see at the time, but during the second it took me to get him centered right and squeeze the trigger, I heard a little gun go off three times and a damned big one once. The little gun sounded like a kid's cap pistol against the noise of the cannon. My own gun's recoil threw my hand up but the second man of the three was out of the picture. I was sure of it. I'd seen his shoulders lined up against the front sight just as I shot and knew he was all through. I saw the one that had managed to get out of the booth down on the floor, saw MacIntosh still standing in the doorway, and then shouted at the third man:

"Drop it, you dope!"

He couldn't have dropped it if he'd tried. The damned thing was still hung in the clip. But he quit trying to get it out and lifted both hands above his head. If he'd lifted them up any faster I think his hands would have kept on going up through the ceiling. He'd have thrown them right off his wrists.

I called over to MacIntosh: "You all right?"

He called back: "See about Kirby."

I remembered the two old timers about then and looked at their booth and didn't see them. Then I saw a grey head poke up from below the table and figured I'd been right in thinking they knew what was coming. I turned and started for the front room and right as I did Spanish hit me from the side and started climbing all over me and screaming:

"Shean! Shean! Are you hurt? Are you hurt!"

I said I wasn't hurt and tried to tear her loose. I couldn't, without clipping her in the chin doing it, so I started out in the front room with her draped around me like a shawl. I got through the door and got my first sight of the front room just as more action broke out. Kirby was standing right in front of the bar, with his back to it, and he had his gun out and lined on five men now against the wall. Another was on the floor, rolling around as though he'd heard the call. One of Rucci's pretty boy bar men had a bottle in his hand and was just getting ready to smack Kirby over the head with it and Kirby was beautifully unaware of what was coming.

I might have called out but I still had my gun in my hand and used that instead. I got my left arm around Spanish and held her tight for the second it took me to get set, then shot the bar man right through the knee.

He went down and around in a spin. The heavy flat nosed bullet knocked one leg from under him and threw him around the other, making it the center of his whirl.

Kirby had swung, to see what was behind him, and I said: "It's okey back here."

Then MacIntosh's friends piled in through the front door. Five of them. The first one in held a sawed off shotgun as though he wanted to use it, and the rest of them all had guns in their fists and the same idea in their minds.

I said to Spanish, who was now a dead weight on me: "Will you lay off me now? I'm not playing."

She laid off. She let go all hold of me and slid down to the floor and I let her stay there, figuring she'd be out of the line of fire if anything more broke out. I went back in the back room and saw MacIntosh still standing in the door and still holding his gun in sight. Just as I got there he called out to the room at large:

"Everybody be quiet and nobody will be hurt. This is police."

**M**acINTOSH'S five friends kept order and we went through the crowd. Fast. We got two more that Mac thought might be friendly with Rucci, and that made eight good ones altogether. The one I'd smacked across the back of the head was breathing as though he had asthma and that meant a good chance of a fractured skull. The one in the front room that Kirby had shot through the shoulder didn't warrant a full count either, any more than the bar tender I'd busted through the knee. The one I'd shot in the booth had died before his head had hit the table, and MacIntosh had shot Rucci through the chin with the slug ranging out halfway down his back. Rucci had been looking up when he'd made his play but had still been crouched on hand and knees. The one that had shot three times at MacIntosh and missed all three was just as dead. Mac had shot him through the side of the neck. So I said:

"Let's call it nine and a half on the score

and not figure the three stiff. They're out of the picture."

Mac said: "That's fair. How much time have we got?"

I looked and said: "Thirty minutes."

MacIntosh said: "We've still got time," and went over to the third of the three young fellows that had been in the booth. The only one left. The kid was standing against the wall with the other prisoners, and Heinie was watching them with the riot gun and a mean look. Just wishing for one of them to make a break. Mac reached out and took a good hearty cuff at the kid's face and said:

"Where's Luigi Rucci? Quick now, punk."

The kid stammered: "He's—he's with Cran—Crandall."

Mac turned and looked at me and grinned and I said: "Be right with you. Can these boys of yours keep this crowd here for another hour."

"They can keep 'em here all night," he said, keeping the grin. I said: "Fine," and went back to see how Spanish was making out. I'd put her back in a booth, with Hazel to look after her.

She was feeling better. She had big black eyes and she stared up at me and said: "Honey, I thought they were going to kill you. I was sc-scared."

I said: "It's all over now. You stay here until the boys let you go and then go home. I'll see you tomorrow, for sure."

"Why can't I go back with you?"

"I've still got some business."

"Please, honey."

The shooting had knocked hell out of my nerves but I hadn't realized it until that minute. I snapped back at her: "Did you hear me tell you I had business? Now stay here like I tell you. Don't give me these arguments all the time."

She said, like a little girl: "Yes, honey."

I said: "I'm sorry, babe. It's just that I'm nervous. You stay here like a good girl."

She said again: "Yes, hon'. I don't mean to be a pest."

I said to Mrs. Wendel: "But you, lady, you're coming with me."

She put her nose up in the air and said: "I refuse. I will not speak to my husband under any circumstances. If you persist in annoying me I'll be forced to ask Mr.

Kirby to make you stop." Her head tossed.

"Ask him, why don't you."

Kirby was standing about ten feet away, talking to MacIntosh. She called out: "Oh Mr. Kirby. Will you come here a moment." He came over and she said: "This man insists on annoying me. He now wants me to go back to town with him."

Kirby swung back to MacIntosh and said to her over his shoulder: "Then I'd go, if I was you. I don't think he feels like fooling."

MacIntosh said: "You ready, Connell. We are."

I said to Mrs. Wendel: "You're holding up the parade. Let's get going."

She stood up, came over to me, and said: "Damn you, I'm not going."

I took her by the arm and said: "Now be nice. I don't want to get rough."

She reached out for my eyes with the hand I wasn't holding and I got my head away just in time to save the left one. As it was, I could feel her nails rip down my cheek. She panted out: "You can't talk to me like that."

Then Spanish took over. She'd managed to rip off one shoe, and she went in past me like a streak of light and started flailing away at Mrs. Wendel's face with the high heel. She got home with it three times before I could catch her and before Kirby could grab Mrs. Wendel and get her away, and I said to Kirby:

"Let's go, for God's sake."

Spanish, when I left, was sitting in a booth with her head down on the table and crying as though her heart was breaking.

Just a bundle of nerves.

WE got to the hotel at ten minutes of twelve and I got out and said: "I'll go up and get them."

MacIntosh said: "I've been thinking. It would make it better if he talked to Crandall without her being along."

He jerked his head at Mrs. Wendel.

I said: "What are we going to do with her?"

He said: "Now look! Both Kirb and I know that building. Suppose he and I go up there now. We'll stake out and be handy. We'll take her with us. Then you come up alone with Wendel and Mard. How's that?"

I said: "It'll be swell, if you don't leave me on any spot. That's liable to be tough." "We'll be there."

I said okey and went inside. I stuffed fresh shells in my gun, going up on the elevator, and the boy gave it a goofy glance and said:

"Gee, mister, that's a regular cannon, ain't it."

I said: "Why fool around and expect a boy to do a man's work," and started down the hall toward Wendel's room.

And met him right at the door. He was coming out, with his head turned back toward the room, and he was saying to Mard:

"I certainly shall keep the appointment after I made it. I tell you Connell is crazy."

I stuck my finger in his ribs and said: "BOO!" and back he went, caroming into Mard and almost knocking him down. He was shaking so he could barely stand. I said:

"That stubbornness of yours is going to get you in trouble, Mr. Wendel. Are you ready?"

He got himself together and said he was. I said: "Okey then, let's start. We'll go in my car."

"Where—where is Mr. MacIntosh?"

"He went home and went to bed. He decided the whole thing was a fake, right from the start. That I'm crazy, just like you thought."

He said he'd known I was wrong and tried to tell me but that I wouldn't listen. Then the door across the hall opened and Joey Free came out of it and saw us and said:

"Hi, Shean! What's going on?"

I said: "I'm crazy, that's all. Wendel, here, is going up and talk settlement with Crandall. After all, Crandall got him out of jail after I put him in. Maybe Crandall is really okey, after all."

Wendel said: "You have to expect him to do his best for a client. After all, he's my wife's lawyer, not mine. He's bound to look after her interests."

I said: "You bet. Even if he has to frame you with an assault charge against a minor to blackmail you into a settlement. He's a fighter, that man."

Wendel shut up and I could see Mard's grin.

Joey said: "Should I come along? After

all, you may remember, I'm Tod's friend."

I said: "Sure, why not? You and Mard can go in your heap and Wendel and I will ride in mine."

"Tod and I can ride together. We'll meet you; we'll just stop at the Rustic and have one drink."

I said: "Tod's going with me, because he's late now. You follow us."

I got Wendel by the elbow and started him out the door, which stopped the argument. He told me, all the way down in the elevator, and all the time it took for us to drive to Crandall's office, just what a fool he'd been to try and fight the divorce. That if she didn't think enough of him to even talk it over with him he was better off without her.

The talk didn't fool either of us. He knew and I knew that he was as crazy about her as ever and that the only reason he was agreeing to a settlement was because she wanted it. I felt sorry for the poor duck . . . a man in love is always a pitiful thing.

CRANDALL'S office was just as big and pretty as it had been before. Only this time, instead of the dignified looking young punk who'd done the honors in the front office, there were the two guards who'd raised hell with us when we'd crashed Crandall's house. The one called Barney opened the door for us and grinned at me and said:

"Yowsuh! He's waiting for you."

Wendel said: "I was slightly delayed."

I said: "There's a couple more coming in a minute. His lawyer and his friend."

"I'll send 'em in."

There was a water cooler over in the corner of the room and I took one of the paper cups that came along with the rig and took myself a drink. Wendel watched me with an impatient expression and I said:

"Okey. In we go. To beard the lion in his den."

"What!"

I said: "Read the classics. It goes something like 'And darest' thou then to beard the lion in his den, the Douglas in his hall? And hopest' thou hence unscathed to go. No! By St. Bride of Bothwell no! Ho, Warden, ho! Let the portcullis fall! Marmion."

He said: "Are you crazy?"

I said: "Just educated. Scott wrote it; if anybody's crazy it was him." And to the one called Barney: "Suppose you let us in, portey."

He said: "What!" also, and I shook my head and told him: "You weren't listening. You're riding for what they gave the portcullis."

"Hunh."

I said: "A fall, dope. Show us in to the old marster."

He shook his head as though I'd been talking gibberish, which I'd been. I felt that way; the show-down was coming up in the next few minutes, one way or the other, and I felt tight and tense and like babbling.

Too much nerves.

We went inside and there was Crandall, all alone. But he said to Barney: "Suppose you stay in here, Barney. The gentleman—" he nodded at me—"is inclined toward violence and I'm in no mood for it."

I said: "I can always wait until you *are* in the mood. I'm a patient man."

He grinned nastily and said: "I should think by this time, Connell, that you'd have learned your lesson. Every time there's been trouble between us your side has lost."

I looked over at the floor by the door, where he'd fallen the time I'd smacked him, and he got red in the face. He let it go, though, and said to Wendel:

"Your wife refused to attend this little meeting, though I tried to persuade her to be present. But I hold her power of attorney, of course. I'd rather Amos Mard was here however; I understand he's representing you."

"He'll be here shortly," Wendel said.

"That's fine, that's fine."

I said: "He and Joey Free are following us."

Crandall gave me a sharp look.

Wendel said: "Now understand me, Mr. Crandall. I'm willing to sign this settlement because I believe Ruth wants this divorce. Naturally, I want to be fair with her. Your threat about that assault charge hasn't influenced me in the slightest."

Crandall said: "Of course not. I'm glad I was able to stop that. You understand, Mr. Wendel, a wealthy man is a target for schemes of different kinds at all times.

Possibly this was something of that sort."

"Does that mean," I asked, "that there'll be no assault charge filed if this settlement doesn't go through?"

Crandall smiled his lawyer smile. "Now Mr. Connell. Naturally I can't hazard an opinion on that. I wouldn't know. The girl's father could press the charge anytime he saw fit."

Then Mr. Wendel is liable to take it on the chin, whether he signs this settlement or not?"

"I'd naturally use my influence to stop anything like that."

I said: "That's certainly white of you."

THE other plug-ugly brought in Amos Mard and Joey Free then. Mard nodded at Crandall and Joey beamed around at one and all and said:

"Hah! Everything friendly, I see."

Crandall said to Mard: "I have everything drawn up, Amos. If you'd care to look over it? It's just a form, of course."

Mard said nothing and reached out his hand and Crandall handed him papers. He studied them for a bit, while Joey babbled about wanting to go back to the city because Reno was too rich for his blood. He stopped for breath and I said:

"It's been pretty rich for Wendel's blood, I'd say. Or don't dough like this settlement means count as money?"

Wendel said stiffly: "I'll ask you not to comment on my personal affairs, Connell. I feel this matter could have been handled differently from the start and I don't hesitate to say so."

Joey winked at me and said: "I guess you're sat on, old boy, old boy."

Mard looked up then and nodded at me. I said: "I come up smiling, Joey," and to Crandall: "D'ya mind if I get a drink of water? I ate something salty, I guess."

I nodded toward the outside office, where the one yegg had gone and where the water cooler was, and he said:

"Certainly not, Connell. In the other room."

Joey said to Crandall: "You *ought* to buy a drink, Crandall. Not water; I don't mean water."

Just as I got to the door Crandall said: "A very good idea, Mr. Free."

I went outside.

The yegg was sitting in an over-stuffed

chair looking at the cartoons in the Literary Digest. I waved at the cooler and said:

"Drink."

He nodded and I walked to the cooler. It was at his side, maybe five feet from him, and I got one of the trick paper cups and fiddled with it and he looked down at his book again. I took my gun out from under my coat and bopped him across the jaw with it. He just dropped his head down on the magazine without a sound. I opened the door into the hall, very quietly, didn't see anything of either Kirby or MacIntosh, and whistled. They came around the bend in the hall and up to me and I saw MacIntosh had a nice start toward a black eye and more scratches on his face than I had. I whispered:

"Where's the gal?"

He jerked his thumb over his shoulder and said: "She doesn't want to talk to her husband. She says so. She fights against it, even. D'ya want her?"

I said: "Everything is okey in the outside office. Get ready to come in when I sing out. Bring her in with you."

He said: "All right," and I ducked back inside into the inner office again. Barney looked at me suspiciously and Crandall nodded at the bottle and glasses he had set out on the table and said:

"Drink, Connell?"

I said: "I just had one."

Barney said: "And it took you long enough, too."

He stood and started toward the door and Crandall said sharply: "Sit down, Barney! Everything is all right."

Barney sat down, glowering at me while he did.

Mard said, slowly and carefully: "Now again, Mr. Wendel, I'll advise you against signing any ridiculous settlement like this. I advise you to start a counter-suit and fight this."

Joey wandered over to the desk and tipped the bottle over one of the glasses. He turned with it in his hand, said to Wendel: "It's your affair, Tod. Naturally, I hate to see you and Ruth having trouble; I like you both. But God knows you've tried for a reconciliation and that's about all you can do. She won't even see you."

Wendel pulled his chair over to the desk and reached out his hands for the papers Mard still held. He said: "Let's get it over

with. Hand it over. Where do I sign?"

He sounded sick and sorry.

Crandall leaned across the desk and marked lines with a penciled cross and said: "Here, and here, and here."

I said: "I guess maybe you'd better talk it with the lady first, Wendel," and then called out:

"Bring her in, Mac!"

I was watching Joey Free's face and I didn't expect the look he put on. It had everything in it. Shock, surprise, bewilderment, and I'm damned if he didn't look as though he wanted to laugh on top of it all. He stood there holding his drink and staring at the door.

I SWUNG around and looked and I didn't blame him. It was more than I expected to see. MacIntosh was holding the door open, standing inside the room and looking mean. The girl was standing in the doorway but that wasn't the payoff. She had one handkerchief tied across her mouth and another holding her chin up so she couldn't open it. She looked like she had the mumps. She hung back in the doorway, and then I saw Kirby's face show up over her shoulder. Then he shoved her in the back and she came skating into the room.

Wendel shouted: "*RUTH!*"

I said: "Take the wraps off her puss."

Crandall stood up and bawled out: "This is an outrage. Are you trying to force this woman in here?"

Barney reached under his coat for his gun and I let him see the one I was holding was pointing at him and said:

"I wouldn't! Or do as you like!"

He took his hand away from his coat as though he'd burned it there.

Wendel stood up and I stood up at the same time. He started to run toward the gal and I got him by the shoulder and yanked him back and threw him in his chair. I said:

"Stay there, you."

Crandall said, very loudly: "You can't force this woman like this. Mrs. Wendel, I'll take care of this."

During this time MacIntosh had reached over and ripped the handkerchiefs away from her face. She spit out another one, that didn't look too clean even at that distance, and tried to kick MacIntosh in the

shins. Her eyes looked like black fire and she was bouncing up and down like a dancing doll.

Wendel shouted: "*Ruth!*" again, and I said: "Will you shut up and stay down. This gal is Madge Giovanatti. She isn't Ruth. Tell him you're not Ruth, honey."

She spoke then. She said to me: "You dirty bastard!"

Crandall said: "Mrs. Wendel! I forbid you to talk."

I said to Wendel: "Are you satisfied?"

He sat there with his mouth open. I said again: "You satisfied? Her name is Madge Giovanatti. She's a Frisco tart."

She spit out something at me in Italian and "bastard" sounded like a pet name compared to it.

MacIntosh said: "I guess this is enough. You're under arrest, Crandall. And you too, mister."

This last was to Barney.

Wendel said, in a dazed voice: "This—this isn't my wife."

I said: "That's what I'm telling you."

I'D been watching Joey Free. He was staring first at the girl, then at me, then at MacIntosh and Kirby. All around the room. He was still holding his glass of whiskey but he had it up around the level of his chin.

Crandall said: "What am I being arrested for? If this is a fraud, I'm no party to it. Naturally not."

And then drooped his eyelid in a deliberate wink at the girl.

I said: "Well, that's only one of the charges. Fraud! There's murder, too. Second degree. For Lester Hoyt and Kewpie Martin. Attempted murder with me as the victim will be another. And Mr. MacIntosh has a few little things against you.

"Little odds and ends like conspiring to defeat justice. Laugh all that off, too."

Joey Free said: "Well isn't *this* something."

I said: "The same is going against you."

He said: "*What!* You're crazy, Shean!"

I said: "I'm getting sick and tired of being told that I'm crazy. Now listen!"

Mard almost screamed: "*LOOK OUT!*" and pointed toward the door, and I started to turn my head. Joey pitched his whiskey, glass and all, into my face then. I went blind for a second and a gun crashed out,

sounding like a cannon in the confined space. I didn't now who it was meant for and didn't see any reason for sitting in my chair like a turkey at a shoot. I rolled off it to the floor and somebody, it must have been Joey, kicked me in the face.

I kept on with the roll, trying to get away from another kick. I was holding my gun in my hand and the next kick caught me a glancing blow across the forearm, but I still kept it. I opened my eyes, saw dimly that Joey was following me up, and reached out with the gun and pulled the trigger.

He came down on top of me and it took me a second to shake him off. Not because he was trying to hold me but because he was so heavy. I got up to my knees and faced the door and saw Kirby leaning back against the wall. His shoulders were touching it but his feet were a foot and a half away and he looked as if he was trying out some acrobatic trick. MacIntosh had a gun in his hand and just as I saw it he fired. Toward Barney I thought, though I didn't turn my head enough to be sure. The bird I'd bopped on the chin in the outside office was standing in the doorway and he shot at me just as I recognized him.

He didn't miss. I felt something like a hot iron being laid across the side of my neck and then shot back.

I didn't have time for any fancy stuff and I wanted to stop him quick. Just as the front sight came up to where his dark pants and light shirt made a line I pulled the trigger. He stooped way over, put both hands to his belly, took a step, fell.

The girl was on the floor. I looked over at Barney and saw him leaning over the arm of his chair. He was still holding a gun but he didn't look as though he had any use for it. I kept swinging my head and didn't see Crandall and decided he was back of his desk. I kept on with the swing until I saw Joey Free, and Joey was flat on his back and dead to the world.

THE room was racketing with echoes from the guns and the girl was screaming through the din. Her voice wasn't so loud but it cut through because it held such fear. She was trying to crawl to the side of the room.

Kirby started to slump down to the floor then, and I got the rest of the way to my feet and started toward him. And got half-

way there when another man stood in the doorway.

I'd never seen him but I would have known who he was if I'd met him on the street instead of in Crandall's office. He had Rucci written all over him. He and I shot at the same time but I got up and he didn't. I took mine through the leg and he took his in the face. His slug didn't even touch the thigh bone and mine took the whole back of his head away with it.

Things got hazy then but I remember MacIntosh howling at me for killing that particular Rucci and not saving the guy for him and me howling back about how I wouldn't stand up and play clay pigeon for him or any other man on earth.

We were both excited.

Kirby, who Barney had got in the shoulder with the first shot, and I, went to the hospital in the same ambulance. Joey Free rode by himself in another but he was always one for attention. He even had a policeman with him all the time after they'd patched him up. My slug had caught him just below the knee and ranged up the whole length of his thigh. They dug it out up by his hip but they had to cut off his leg to find it. The leg wasn't any good to him, anyway; that flat-nosed .45 had pulverized the bone during its trip.

MacIntosh rode to the jail with Crandall and the gal.

Altogether, everybody took a trip, but it was a one way ride for Barney, Barney's pal, and the young Rucci.

**W**ENDEL came to see me about noon the next day. He sat down by the cot and said: "Joey didn't break, but Crandall did. He'll testify against Joey and save himself that way. State's evidence. The District-Attorney seems satisfied so I guess it's all right."

I said: "Let me tell it. Joey, on that trip East he made a while ago, saw your wife and realized she was a dead ringer for this Madge Giovanatti that he knew in San Francisco. He got your wife's maid in the frame then. They got your wife out of the way and the thing was started. Right?"

He said: "Right!" in a sick way.

I said: "I hate to ask; I know how it makes you feel. What did they do with her?"

"They killed her there in my house.

They—they weighted her body with wire and iron and put her in the river. My God, how can people do things like that."

He took a cry for himself, then come out of it and braced.

I said: "Joey knew he couldn't handle it by himself and he'd known one of the Ruccis in San Francisco. So he tied in with Gino, who put him in with Crandall. Crandall was the front man; that's all. Right?"

He nodded.

"That was a mistake. MacIntosh had been laying for that Rucci family for years and he was taking any angle that might help him get them. Of course Joey couldn't know that. I knew there was something wrong with Joey from the start."

"How? That's what I don't understand. How you knew Joey was back of it. Why he even introduced you to me in the first place and influenced me into hiring you."

"That was so he'd know what was going on all the time. Cinch. I'd naturally tell him how I was doing. He had Rucci and Crandall warned about me before I ever got here; Rucci gave me a job for the same reason. Just to watch me. That was self evident. And then, as soon as this Madge Giovanatti saw me with two guys that had known her in the city they got panicky and tried to kill me. Who did that shooting?"

He said mechanically: "The man you killed in the doorway. One of the two guards. Free was in town at that time and hired the man to do that. Crandall claims he didn't know anything about it until after it had happened."

"Maybe he didn't. That was the tip-off about the girl being the ringer, though I didn't realize it at the time. What put me wise was her not being willing to see you or talk to you. Any woman that leaves her husband will talk about it to anybody that will listen. Even to him. Hell, she'll talk to him about it quicker than anybody else. The minute you'd paid off they'd have rushed her out of the picture. Right quick."

**H**E grinned a little faintly and said that seemed reasonable.

"And that ringer theory fitted in with the maid's death. They had to kill her because she realized what she was mixed up in and got cold feet."

"Crandall claims he didn't know any-

thing about that, either, until it was done. The same man that shot at you did that. He killed your partner. Young Rucci killed Kewpie Martin, thinking he was you."

"Well, I guess that's all of it. I knew Joey was wrong all the time. He tagged me to the Palace, so they knew where to stake out for me when the guy killed Kewpie instead of me. Joey was the only one to logically suspect, the way the play came up."

"Why did you figure he was back of it in the first place?"

I laughed and said: "Hell! When a guy with the money he was supposed to have, puts out a rubber check for a hundred bucks and has a time making it good, it's time to figure he's not in the dough. You were. He wasn't. He'd naturally be trying to dope out a way to screw you out of it, wouldn't he?"

He said: "I should have realized you were trying to protect me and given you more co-operation. But I'll confess, frankly, there was a personal feeling back of that lack of co-operation. It's a hard thing to say; but you grated on me. I'm sorry."

"What the hell! Your life and mine have been a bit different. That's all. You did more than grate on me, mister, you damned near drove me nuts at times."

He grinned and handed me a check and said: "If it isn't satisfactory, just say so. I know you will; you're very plain spoken, I'd say."

I looked at the check and he said: "It won't come back to you, like Joey's did. I'll promise you that."

"Swell," I said. "I hope you keep your promises."

We shook hands and told each other how much we admired each other for our good qualities and the rest of that kind of talk and he left. He was catching the two o'clock plane for the East. I felt sorry for the poor duck; he was taking his wife's murder like a man, which was more than he'd done his fake wife's divorce case.

I'll always think hurt pride had something to do with that.

**H**AZEL HEBER and Spanish came up at four; the doctor was shorting me on visitors until I got back some of the blood I'd lost. The crease on my neck

had bled plenty and the slug through my leg hadn't helped that. They came in and Spanish flopped on her knees by the bed and grabbed my hand and said:

"Oh, Shean! Shean! I've been almost crazy since I heard about that terrible thing last night."

I said: "Nuts, lamb! I'm practically well right now."

I told Spanish to act like a lady and sit in a chair like one and she gave me a dirty look but minded, and then I asked:

"What's happened at the station?"

"Mr. MacIntosh and a bunch of other government men are arresting a lot of men and taking them to Carson City. He's coming to see you tonight. You and Mr. Kirby. He said to tell you something like striking an iron while it was hot. It wasn't the old saying but something that meant it, if you know what I mean. He seems very pleased."

"How's Kirby?"

"I asked the doctor. Getting along fine."

"That's swell."

"How long will it be before you're able to go back to San Francisco?"

I laughed on that one. She leaned over and took my hand and cooed: "Honey! If I go to San Francisco to live, after I get cured, will you come and see me?"

She was talking her gargly way, as usual, and I looked at her and thought how pretty she was and how I didn't like her voice one good damn's worth, and I suddenly thought of something and got curious. I doubt that I would have had nerve enough to come out with it if I hadn't been a bit light-headed from losing blood. I asked:

"Listen, doll! Do you, by any chance, happen to be wearing a dental plate?"

She looked startled as well as red in the face, and stammered: "W-w-well, yes. It's partial."

"I'll buy you one that fits as soon as we get to the city. I made dough enough out of the case to afford it."

Hazel said, in a shocked voice: "You shouldn't say things like that."

"If she isn't used to the way I talk by now, she soon will be. Won't you, lamb baby?"

She grinned at both of us and said: "I love it. I never know what's coming next."



*"Come through, you little rat!" Tanner shouted.*

# SO YOU WON'T TALK!

By BARNEY BARNETT

**The Sergeant had broken many men. "No crook ever out-foxed me!" he used to say. Then came O'Hearne—and their dogged duel in that smoke-filled third-degree cell made police-court history!**

THEY dragged Honey O'Hearne into the dark little room and slammed him down on a hard, backless chair. After the freshness of the winter afternoon the dry air was like a blanket over his head.

One of the detectives growled, "Sit there!" and emphasized his words with a rap of his knuckles on Honey's shoulder.

Then somebody turned a switch, and Honey took an involuntary breath, as a dazzling light in a narrow shade went on just above his head. The two detectives stood outside its radiance, glaring at him. After a minute of that one retired to a chair in the shadow, and the other, the sergeant, lit himself a big cigar.

"Now then, O'Hearne," said Sergeant Tanner, "come through. This is going to be a long party if you don't. Don't say I didn't warn you. I've been through a lot

of these, an' I've always come out on top. No crook ever got the better of me! If you want to be good to yourself, O'Hearne, come through right now. It's your last chance."

He was a big man, square-nosed and square-jawed, with a hard eye and a hard fist. His attitude as he stood there was one of determined righteousness.

The man in the chair was slim and blond and handsome. He had smooth hair. His tailoring and linen was perfect. He smiled up at Tanner.

"Sergeant, I told you before I can't say anything you want me to say. So the best thing for me is to keep quiet."

"You think so!" Tanner took a menacing step toward him. O'Hearne did not flinch. "That's all you got to say?"

"All except that now that you got me in

here you ought to let me call up my lawyer."

"Lawyer! When you get out of here, if you don't come through, you'll need a priest."

Again O'Hearne smiled. "Maybe I will. Probably I will. When I do, I'll pick my own."

Tanner planted himself before the low chair. He loomed over the smaller man like a mountain about to fall. "You gonna try to tell me that you're through with the old crowd?"

"I told you before." O'Hearne was as steady as his antagonist. "I told you that because it's true."

"I guess it's true that you didn't kill Biff Lafferty."

Honey nodded. "That's true, too."

"A lie!" Tanner emphasized his earnestness with a shake of Honey's arm. "You hated Lafferty's guts and you know it."

"That's true," said Honey quietly, "but he's dead now."

"And you killed him!"

"I might've at one time," said Honey, "but I didn't."

"I suppose," said Tanner with heavy sarcasm, "that you even sold your gun when you reformed."

"I threw it in the river."

"After you killed Lafferty."

"After I laid off the mob. . . . I didn't have anything to do with the Lafferty killing."

"You killed him," Tanner reiterated, shaking Honey by the arm again. "You did it, and Felton was with you."

Honey took a deep breath when Tanner let go his arm. Under the pretense of smoothing the sleeve he secretly rubbed his bruises.

He said calmly, "I wasn't in on it, and I can't tell you anything about Felton."

"Did he kill Biff?"

"Maybe he did. There were a lot of people who might've done it and deserved a medal for it."

"Never mind that, an' quit stallin'. You're only making it harder for yourself." Tanner took a long pull at his cigar. In the silence the ticking of a clock somewhere could be heard.

O'Hearne looked at the watch on his wrist. It was eight o'clock.

"I suppose it's no use asking you for a

sandwich, Sergeant?" he said, still smiling.

"Know any more jokes?" retorted Tanner. "The only sandwich around here'll be of the mince meat we make out of you."

HE began to pace around O'Hearne's chair. Honey did not cringe. He sat up as straight as was possible on such an uncomfortable seat and smoothed his hair. Tanner promptly ran his own hands over O'Hearne's head, pushed the hair into his eyes, and twisted one ear viciously.

Honey winced involuntarily. The detective took his stand in front of him again.

"I suppose you'll tell me, if I should ask you, that you don't know anything about the Riverside Trust holdup."

"That's right."

"You didn't stick up the Riverside Trust?"

"No."

"You didn't get a cut of the paper?"

"No."

"And neither did Felton?"

"That's right."

"And you and Felton didn't massacre Lafferty because he wouldn't split with you?"

"No." O'Hearne answered firmly each time.

The room was very hot. The steam heat had dried out what little moisture was in the air. O'Hearne found himself coughing a little. Tanner noted it with satisfaction. He blew a great billow of smoke directly in Honey's face. Honey coughed again, hard.

"So you gave your gang the go-by," jeered Tanner.

"Some of them are still my friends."

O'Hearne looked again at his watch.

"What are you doin' that for?" Tanner taunted him. "You got no place to go."

Honey passed his hand over his forehead, which glistened a little.

"Hot, eh? Well, you'll be a lot hotter, my lad. A hell of a lot. And if you don't come through and give us a chance to be decent to you, you'll fry in the hot seat. Did you give Lafferty the air?"

"The whole mob—except a few friends."

"Felton?"

Honey looked him straight in the eye. "He's a friend of mine."

"So you an' he got together to put the lid on Biff."

"No." The word came a little harder.

Tanner walked over to the radiator and increased the flow of heat. He strode tirelessly around O'Hearne's chair. Honey's eyes, following involuntarily, rolled dizzily in the burning light. The other detective in the shadow unobtrusively removed his coat.

"How about my lawyer, Sergeant?" Honey said after a while.

Tanner's only answer was a fresh cigar. The air was thicker. The detective in the shadow against the wall sat immobile. But the sergeant appeared fresher than when he had begun.

"You'd better play ball," he shouted. He shook Honey by both arms, hard. "Sit up, you morningglory! Or I'll give you a poke in the back that'll stiffen you like a curtain-rod."

Honey forced himself up. It was not so easy. Tanner began again the wearying questions. His voice grew louder. Occasionally he roared out with all his might. Time dragged, and the sergeant continued his torture.

"Come through, you little rat!" he shouted. The grip he sank into Honey's biceps went deeper and deeper. And Honey, in spite of himself, cringed away from those terrible fingers.

It was growing late.

Tanner would not let him alone.

"You'd like a nice, cool seidel of beer now, wouldn't you? A nice thick steak wouldn't go bad now, either. You'll whistle smoke before you get a glass of water if I don't get the truth out of you."

He pushed his knuckles into Honey's ribs. "Where were you last night when Biff was killed?"

O'Hearne only shook his head. He tried to look at his watch. Tanner slapped his hand down.

"It's ten o'clock. What do you care what time it is? Want to see how long you can hold out?" The sergeant snorted. "Better men than you have tried that, you little rat. Better men than you—ask them!"

O'Hearne heaved a long sigh. The foul air choked him. He gasped and coughed.

"Just a drink of water, Sergeant. I wouldn't treat a dog this way."

"You're a rat. Come through. Did you kill Biff?"

"No."

Tanner was at him again, blowing smoke, shouting, shaking, yelling in his ears with undiminished strength, striding around him until dust flew up from the floor.

After a while O'Hearne no longer answered. The detective against the wall faded into a blur. The light above his head, which seemed to grow brighter and hotter as he grew more exhausted, filled his eyes so that he could see nothing more.

HE was roused by a stinging pain. Tanner had slapped him violently on both cheeks.

"Come through!" roared the sergeant. "It's just twenty-four hours since you shot Biff. Where were you last night at midnight?"

Midnight! The word roused him still more. He blinked and saw Tanner standing before him with a length of rubber hose in one hand.

"I'm going to get the truth out of you!" Tanner shouted. "I'll get it out of you with this and make you like it. The crook don't live that's gonna keep mum on murder with me. Come through, or I'll bust you in a million places!"

But Honey did not see him. Clearly, as if he had been there himself, he saw the heavy simian head of Biff Lafferty, as he had seen it many times before, weaving slowly from side to side with the effort of threatening speech. He imagined Felton's timid hands clenched in a rare moment of frenzied desperation.

And he could hear Felton's cough, the cough that made Honey's healthy blood choke his saliva with terror and pity. Sure, he hadn't given all the ones he had known in the old days the go-by. How could you give a guy the go-by when you were the only man with enough—enough—something or other to give a lunger a hand?

There had been a red froth on Felton's chin the last time Honey had heard that cough—everyone else shrank from him as from red death. He could imagine Biff—infamed with liquor—weaving in his lust to punish and maim. The rest was clear: the shot, the very thud of the body. The blood on Felton's chin and on the floor.

"Did you see Felton yesterday?" Tanner demanded.

Honey nodded.

"In fact you and he were in Gus' place

all afternoon, weren't you O'Hearne?"

"Yes," admitted Honey.

He had been at Gus', all right, having a beer and an anchovy sandwich. And Felton, trembling, had found him there and gasped out that Lafferty was after him; that Lafferty, obsessed with the belief that Felton had rung a pair of loaded dice into the crap game which had wiped Lafferty clean of the Riverside Trust loot, was going to beat him to jelly.

"And the pair of you went out together, didn't you?"

"We did that," said Honey.

"And then you laid for Lafferty."

"No."

"What did you do?"

"I took Felton home and made him go to bed."

"Then what?"

"I went around to see a friend of mine."

"Who?"

"His name's Ryan. We played checkers."

"Played checkers! You damn little liar!"

Tanner's left hand caught him flush on the face. Then his right arm swung the rubber hose so that it struck Honey on the neck and the side of the head. "You come through with what you know or you'll go from here to the hospital. Do you hear me?"

"Can't you open the window for a second?" Honey gasped. His head was hanging forward on his chest now. The smooth hair lay in strings over his forehead. Little drops slid down toward his chin from the corners of his mouth. "It's terrible in here, Sergeant."

Tanner, standing over him, blew smoke in his face. "This ain't half of it," he warned him. "It's gonna be a lot worse."

But suddenly, as he looked closely at O'Hearne, the sergeant's voice assumed a gentler tone.

"Don't think I want to do this, Honey. But I gotta find out what happened. I'm a cop, and it's my job and you know it. Tell me what happened, and I'll see to it that the district attorney gives you a break.

"What's it gonna get you if you do hold out a while longer? We'll only get you anyway. And if you come through like a man you'll get the breaks like one."

"Will you let me call my lawyer?" Honey whispered.

"So help me. Did you kill Lafferty?"

"Yes." The whisper was barely audible.

TANNER stepped back and crushed out his cigar. "You killed him?"

"Yes."

Tanner nodded to the detective against the wall, who emerged from his background long enough to open the window. And Honey, raising his pale face to which a faint color was returning, gulped with wide-open mouth and nostrils.

"That feels good," he whispered.

"You'll feel better than that soon," Tanner consoled him. He turned to the other detective again. "Got any cigarettes, Kelly?"

Kelly nodded.

"Give him one. And call his lawyer for him. It's Pop Dinsmore, isn't it?" he added.

"Yes," said Honey. "Just tell him I'm in a bad jam. He'll be right over." He took a long pull at his cigarette.

Tanner chuckled. "Shrewd baby, Pop. I'd laugh if he got you an acquittal. And Kelly, as you go out, send Morris in here."

Morris was the official police stenographer. He entered in a moment, carrying his notebook. Several pencils bristled efficiently from his pocket.

"All set?" said Tanner. He pushed up a more comfortable chair for O'Hearne to sit in.

"Shoot," said Honey.

"Did you kill Biff Lafferty?" asked Tanner. His voice took on the monotone of the routine questioning necessary for stenographic information.

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because—because he was a rat."

"Never mind that reason. What other one?" O'Hearne hesitated. "Was it on account of the Riverside Trust money?"

"Well, he owed me a cut because—because of another promise he'd made me."

"What was that?"

"It didn't have anything to do with this."

"Was it about Felton?"

"No, he didn't have anything to do with it," snarled Honey.

"Where's Felton now?"

"I don't know."

"Was Felton with you when you killed him?"

"Felton didn't have a thing to do with it. The little rabbit's too yellow to put his foot on a worm. Biff promised me that money, and I had to have it. He kept stalling. I'd call up his place and he'd give me a song and dance. Then, last night, I got him. He told me he'd lost his dough shootin' crap. So I let him have it and left him the way you found him. The rat had it coming to him."

"What did you do with your gun?"

Honey smiled a wry smile. "Like I told you—I threw it in the river."

"That's plenty." Tanner laid a heavy but not unkindly hand on the grey-clad shoulder. "You got a good lawyer, Honey, and I'm not telling you what you should do. But I'd testify myself that Biff was a rat and a killer. And if you allege self-defense . . ."

"Thanks, Sergeant." Honey looked at the clock, visible from where he now sat. "I guess now that you got what you wanted everything will be fixed up all right. You're a great guy, Sergeant."

Suspicion clouded Tanner's face. "What do you mean by that crack?"

Honey ran his hand through his damp hair. "I've been in here a long time, Sergeant, chewin' the fat, and taking your stuff the way you gave it. Now that we're square I'm telling you this."

He looked up at Tanner with a full, clear smile. "I'll be playing checkers tomorrow, and it won't be in jail."

Almost as he spoke the door opened, and a short, round figure, topped with a bald, glistening head, toddled jauntily into the room.

"HELLO, Honey. Good evening, Sergeant." Roger Kendall Dinsmore, attorney and counselor-at-law, beamed at them.

"I assume," Dinsmore added genially, "that it is nothing less than murder."

Tanner nodded. "Honey, here, has just confessed to the murder of Biff Lafferty."

"Confession obtained under the usual softening influences, I suppose?" said Dinsmore, beaming again.

Tanner frowned. But Honey said, "The Sergeant treated me swell, Mr. Dinsmore. He couldn't've treated me better.

Everything's Jake." He nodded his head at the lawyer.

"Jake?" said Dinsmore.

"Jake is right."

"Then I assume," said Dinsmore urbanely, "that my services are—er—er—unnecessary?"

"Not exactly," said Honey. "You'll still have to get me out of this. You'll have to get me out, even though the confession ain't worth the shorthand it took." He turned to Tanner.

"I gave you what you wanted, Sergeant. But last night, after I took Felton home, I went to my friend's house for dinner. And like I told you in the first place I was playing checkers with him at midnight, which is when you say Biff got paid off."

"What friend?" rasped Tanner. "Who is he?"

"He's the one that made me throw my gun into the river and take up checkers. He's the one that got me to give the old mob the air. Father Ryan, his name is—of St. Francis Xavier parish. Had dinner with him at the parish house and stayed for a chin-fest and checkers. Call him up now if you want to."

Tanner's heavy face turned a deep red. His chest swelled, then he swallowed what he was about to say. But as he started for the outer office, he hesitated. "Is that the truth?" he demanded.

"True as gospel. You said I'd need a priest before you were through with me. You were right, Sergeant."

"Then why—" Tanner was asking.

But Honey O'Hearne paid him no attention. He saw that the minute hand of the clock had traveled past one by a comfortable margin.

He saw, also, as clearly as if the dim wall had been a window, his friend Felton, the little lunger with a bloody froth on his chin—Felton, who for once had fought his own fight and saved from death the little that remained to him of life.

Felton was safe aboard the wind-jammer *Matador*, swinging out on the late tide for the secret ports of the Andes—where the air is dry and fine, and a man who has killed can wait for his own death in his own good time,



Young Johns knew that perfect crimes are bunk! And in the crumbling, dark sub-cellar of the Toison d'Or he set a trap for the murder master!

# THE MURDER MASTER

By TED STORRS

"THE Flaming Death," as the newspapers called the mysterious murder of Foster Briggs, financier, caused an enormous sensation. The facts were startling. Death had taken the broker in the midst of a gathering of close friends, men of the same conservative type as himself.

Wadsworth Johns had neglected three

breakfasts to read all that the papers had to say. On the morning of the fourth day after the murder he sighed when he saw the time, gulped a cup of coffee and prepared to go to his office. He was not a professional detective. Years before, when at Yale, he had visions of becoming the greatest detective of all time. But his father, the celebrated publisher, had other

dreams. Also, the elder Johns was failing and new blood was needed. So for ten years Wadsworth had worked steadily on Fourth Avenue when he would have longed to be tracking Crime to its lair in the four quarters of the globe.

He had indulged his hobby by translating *La Sociologie Criminelle* into English and reading every case of importance that cropped up. Foster Briggs' death was the result of a variation of a very old crime. It was not the less terrible on that account.

Foster Briggs, like the elder Morgan, was passionately devoted to a large and heavy cigar. He was about to light one when an expected long distance call sent him into a booth in the room where he was lunching. After several minutes' conversation he stepped into the room and struck a match. There was an instant explosion and Briggs, terribly injured, fell to the ground and died within a few minutes.

COMPARING the statements of various witnesses as interviewed by the New York papers, Wadsworth Johns noted many discrepancies. Take the reports concerning the physical injuries. There were five men lunching with Briggs. It was his custom to invite every week men prominent in financial circles, to a private room in the celebrated *Toison d'Or* restaurant down town. Briggs and his friends belonged to a group which fiercely resented loose financial methods. One of the oldest members of the Stock Exchange, he scrutinized the lists of candidates so closely that he made many enemies among those whose election he contested.

It was curious that in none of the papers was Johns able to get an accurate account of the injuries. An explosion of sufficient violence to cause almost immediate death must, he believed, have caused great facial injuries. If so, how was he to credit the statement in the paper he had just read? It was an account of a special writer who had been admitted to the broker's home and had seen him lying calm in death, surrounded by grieving relatives and friends. It was quite inconceivable that a man with a face badly damaged could be so described or indeed that the spectacle of fearful injuries should be shown. To confirm this account Wadsworth Johns called up the head of the undertaking establishment in

whose charge the funeral plans had been.

"Do you mean to tell me," Johns said, "that Mr. Briggs' face was not damaged at all?"

"Not a mark on it," the undertaker answered. "These high explosives, Mr. Johns, sometimes act very strangely—as the war taught us. The cigar was burnt so that not a trace of it remained, and yet the poor gentleman's face wasn't even singed. The explosive drove inward."

"Drove inward?" Wadsworth Johns demanded with the impatience a nonsensical statement inspires. "What do you mean?"

"His throat was burnt. The bomb was like a loaded gun pointed at his mouth. The coroner said he had never seen such a case before."

OF the five guests who had witnessed Briggs' tragic death, Perry Thompson alone was known to Johns. The elder Johns transacted his banking through Thompson. They were old friends. It was not a difficult matter to arrange an interview with him. Thompson greeted him coldly. He was a small, thin man, active and opinionated.

"So you're the boy who wanted to beat Gaboriau, or was it Le Cocq, at unraveling crime. If you've come here to talk about poor Foster's death you've come to the wrong place. He is the victim of some of those damned labor-unions who'll get me next. Amateur investigators shouldn't be allowed. You've probably come to give elaborate theories which aren't worth a row of beans. I won't hear them."

It was not thus that Wadsworth Johns was accustomed to being met. He was a handsome man with courteous manners and was universally a favorite. This nervous, irritable man stirred up vivid antagonism.

"I have no elaborate theories, Mr. Thompson. I may start an amateur investigation although until this moment I had no serious idea of doing so. I came to ask why you made such a poor witness at the inquest. You contradicted yourself a dozen times. You said at first Mr. Briggs' eyes were destroyed by the explosion. It has been proved they were undamaged. It seems to me your testimony wasn't worth a row of beans."

Thompson flushed. "It was like this,"

he admitted more cordially. "I saw the flame and heard the noise. It seemed to be right in poor Foster's face. I remember telling myself his eyes would be burned out. I turned my head away. I can't bear these dreadful sights. I suppose I persuaded myself that I had seen his charred eyes. They covered him with a rug and I didn't see him again until after the inquest."

"Why wasn't an autopsy performed?"

"Mrs. Briggs was against it. Also, there seemed no necessity. He was dead and there wasn't a clew. The police are working on several—they have to. I never saw such an astounding thing. Foster stood just outside the booth. He didn't say a word. I could see he was excited and upset. He struck a match on the radiator and as he brought it to the cigar the thing happened. I was nearest to him, and I could feel a sudden tremendous heat."

"Wait a minute," Wadsworth Johns said quickly. "You say that as he brought the match to the cigar the explosion occurred. Do you know that you are practically telling me that it was not the cigar which killed him?"

"It must have been the cigar," Thompson returned. "What else could it have been? It was proved to be the cigar, wasn't it? I told the coroner what I'm telling you and he had the impertinence to say I was an unreliable witness."

"Too bad," the younger man murmured. "Now let me have that again. You saw him strike a match and as he brought the flame near the cigar there was a spurt of flame, a detonation and he fell to the floor?"

Perry Thompson nodded his head. "Precisely. It makes no difference to the verdict. You know if you bring a light too near gasoline it will explode. I should say the match was a foot from the end of the cigar. I told the coroner that, but he laughed at me. I happened to be so near Foster that I couldn't be mistaken. I told the coroner that, also."

"I came here for two reasons, Mr. Thompson. One is I want you to introduce me to Duran the owner of the restaurant. I understand that you and Foster Briggs owned the building so he ought not to make any bones about that. Secondly, I don't believe in the cigar bomb theory. I

came here believing that a little gun was concealed in the cigar which shot Briggs in the throat and penetrated the medulla oblongata. What you tell me alters my whole outlook. There ought to be an inquest. Do you reflect that you saw a murder committed and are content not to know how it was caused." Wadsworth clinched his argument. "Are you content to be laughed at by a coroner and have your evidence set aside as childish?"

WHILE the order was being obtained for the exhumation of the body, Wadsworth Johns gained the confidence of Hippolyte Duran, proprietor of the *Toison d'Or*. This restaurant was a very old one and was not designed to catch those customers who were attracted by glitter. Its lunch patrons—for it closed at six—were of the richer class of downtown business men.

Duran knew that Wadsworth Johns wished to clear up certain details concerning the death of the millionaire Briggs. Stout bourgeois that he was, Duran called on heaven to punish all Communists. Johns was free to go to any part of the old building and requisition anything he might desire. Fluency in French enabled him to converse with the Duran employees, all of whom were natives of France. Even the police could find no fault with these faithful old servants.

It seemed a strange thing, mused Duran, that a fine gentleman like his visitor should go grubbing about in the garbage cans which were waiting to be emptied. What was it, he wondered, that Monsieur Johns seized on so eagerly and preserved in a tin box?

It was in the cellar that Wadsworth Johns came upon the stranger, the man of whom Duran had concealed all mention. Walking softly, Johns came upon him unaware. He was a shabbily dressed man. He was stooping down and apparently filling a hole in the wall which was grimy, ancient and decaying.

"Well," said Wadsworth Johns. "Have you found the corpse?"

The man sprang to his feet. Unquestionably he was startled. But this, Johns admitted, need be no sign of guilt. Under similar circumstances he himself might have exhibited momentary fear. When the

first shock was over the speaker grinned amiably. From his accent he probably belonged to the English lower orders. There was a Cockney twang to his speech.

"You gave me a rare start, mister," he observed simply. "I was a lookin' for a corpse and 'ere it is."

From the hole in the wall he drew the body of a large, dead sewer rat.

"That's wot I'm 'ere for," he confided. "These old buildings is fair overrun." He held up his right hand which bore several inflamed bites. "Teeth like needles the devils 'ave got."

THE ratcatcher sank to a pile of sack-  
ing and began to fill a short clay pipe with a strange smelling tobacco. The presence of Wadsworth Johns seemed to interest him.

He betrayed no desire to go. Instead he talked of the crime; and it was plain he had not missed reading everything that had been written about it. Leaving him, Johns went to Duran's office.

"I've been all over your premises," Wadsworth Johns told Duran, "and while I found no clues, I compliment you on your scarcity of rats."

"There are very few, Monsieur, but I determined to have everything done to exterminate them. Mon Dieu! How I was humiliated. Two weeks ago one of my best patrons made a great scene in the main room because a rat jumped on to his table. Other customers became nervous and complained. Next morning there came this rat catcher from an English ship who had a little while to spare before he sailed. He caught many. Never would I have believed it if he had not shown them to me in the traps. I saw the rats with my own eyes and fifty people saw the rat which jumped upon the table of Monsieur Reiss."

"Reiss?" Johns demanded, "What Reiss is that?"

"There has been much in the papers about him. He was a millionaire in Frankfurt but there was scandal. Then he was a millionaire in London and there was more scandal. And then he came here to be a millionaire again but poor Monsieur Briggs he say no to that."

Wadsworth Johns did not allow Duran to perceive his growing interest.

"And why did he say no to that?"

"Monsieur Briggs was of a great correctness. He would have no fly-by-night financiers on the N. Y. Stock Exchange. With my own ears I hear him say that to Monsieur Reiss. Not once but three times. Why, I ask you, did Paul B. Reiss lunch here day after day but to try to meet Monsieur Briggs. Never once was he asked to go to the private room where Monsieur Briggs lunched with those great friends of his. He was crazy to meet them and tell them he was honorable. He offer Achille, my head waiter, five hundred francs to help him hide during the lunch in that room. At last he go back to Boston where he lives."

"When?"

"The day before the murder. It was no good. Monsieur Briggs said he would not have him on the Stock Exchange here because he was a thief. There was something in London, a crooked deal as you say it, and alone here Monsieur Briggs knew of it."

Wadsworth Johns rose hurriedly. He wanted to catch Perry Thompson before he left for his Long Island home.

Perry Thompson looked at his visitor a trifle sourly.

"You've let me in for a whole lot of trouble," he grumbled. "The District Attorney wasn't as pleasant as I expected. He seemed to think a man after suffering a terrible shock should be in complete possession of his faculties. I'm promised a public third degree that ought to please my worst enemies. I'm expecting my lawyer now, so unless you've anything pressing I'll ask you to excuse me."

"I won't take long. Tell me why there was a quarrel between Paul B. Reiss and Foster Briggs."

"There wasn't. Foster knew certain facts about the Wheal Trevena Tin Mines, Ltd., which showed Reiss was a crook. Foster was all for upholding the honor of the Exchange and hadn't any sympathy for reformed financiers of the Reiss stripe. If what he hinted about that Cornish deal was true it was no wonder he ran away from English law."

"If it was true," Johns repeated. "Don't you know?"

"No. Foster was speaking to him on the long distance just before his death. He had promised Reiss he would take

certain new facts into consideration and let Reiss know in Boston whether he would place them before us at that luncheon. You know we six exert enough influence to make us respected. If we take a stand against a candidate he will never become a member of the New York Stock Exchange."

"Let me get this straight," the younger man said slowly. "As I understand it death alone prevented you and your friends from knowing what definite information Foster Briggs had as to Reiss's shady past."

"Yes. If poor Foster had postponed that smoke he would have told us. As it is Paul B. Reiss played in luck that day."

"Will he get in now?"

"Probably. There is a lot of windy talk about him but the membership committee discounts that. There is gossip about all successful men and Reiss will be successful if he gets his opportunity. I shan't oppose him. I've talked it over with the other men and we agree that it seems like the hand of Providence intervening to save a man who may be innocent. Mark you, I think he's crooked as a pretzel but this tragedy has upset me."

"Why couldn't Reiss get on without being a member of the Exchange?"

"Because that's all he knows. He's a citizen and he's banking everything he has on getting in. He needs the protection of a big exchange if he's to stage a come back. If we accept him here the past is forgotten. It is life or death to him in a financial sense. I happen to know he's on his last legs in a monetary way. Good-bye," Thompson added, "and it makes me wonder what your father did to have a son who brings such trouble to his old friends."

"Mr. Thompson," Wadsworth Johns said earnestly, "You are going to thank me for this some day."

"Some day," said Thompson ironically, "I may. Someday there'll be a neat little mound over your body and a descriptive stone at the head. Meanwhile I've got to sweat blood because of a vindictive District Attorney who believes I've wilfully concealed facts. Once more, goodbye."

WADSWORTH JOHNS' next move filled Hippolyte Duran with surprise.

"I am going," said the investigator, "to call up Paul B. Reiss at the Copley-Plaza

and I want you to listen in. I'll call from this office, which is private, and you can take it over at the switchboard. No matter what you hear, don't utter a sound."

A few minutes later Johns was talking to someone in the suite of Reiss at the Copley-Plaza Hotel in Boston.

"This is Paul B. Reiss talking," said the voice. It was a voice wholly unknown to Wadsworth Johns. There was in it a certain thickness indicative of Teutonic origin. "What is it?"

"I am speaking for Mr. Perry Thompson. He is anxious to speak to you in private. He does not wish to talk over the wire but if it can be arranged for you to come to New York within a few days he thinks you will be repaid for the journey. I am speaking to Mr. Reiss personally, am I not?"

"Most certainly," came the answer. "Tell Mr. Perry I shall leave in a day or two."

Duran came running into his office.

"Why should two play at the same game?" he demanded, "the game of pretense? You are not Monsieur Perry and that was not Paul B. Reiss."

It was odd that Wadsworth Johns did not seem astounded at the news.

"It is fortunate that I asked you to listen in," he smiled.

Later that evening Wadsworth Johns was seeking out a friend who had, during the war, done notable work for the Department of Justice. Poole, a lawyer, lived in Gramercy Park to be near the Players Club. He was on his way to a game of billiards when Johns' car drew up. Johns was accompanied by his prize winning Airedale.

"I've got the investigation fever on me hard," he said to Poole. "I dropped in here on my way to prowling about dismal cellars in the downtown district."

"Want me to come too?"

"No. I'll rely on Gaylad's professional advice. I want you to tell me what you know definitely about Paul B. Reiss, late of Frankfort and London but now a citizen."

"What information I got during the war isn't given out casually."

"That's all right. Just listen to my reasons for wanting to know and then withhold it if you can."

"Certainly I'll tell you," Poole said, when the recital was ended. "It happens I had Reiss investigated when he first came over and got his complete history. He never admits that he was here before but I know he was a waiter or something of that sort in the old downtown Delmonico's. At twenty we find him in London where he clerked in a German firm and later went to the home office in Frankfurt. In ten years he owned the firm, ruined thousands of investors and landed in London again. There he did well for some years but history repeated himself and he landed here penniless. The Department found nothing much against him but his nationality. He likes to be taken for an Englishman and hasn't a trace of Germanic accent. Anything there that interests you?"

"Two things," Wadsworth Johns said smiling. "What's his age?"

"Fifty-five. Height five feet nine. Heavy build," Poole was by now reading from a card taken from an index, "Hazel eyes. Good dresser. Yachtsman. Social climber. I had him watched but he kept away from his countrymen and called himself a British subject. This is incorrect; he was never naturalized in England. Paul B. Reiss never bothered us at all. Say, Waddy, what about my coming with you and superseding Gaylad as a professional adviser? I think I may be at least as useful as a mere dog."

"Glad to have you but I need Gaylad as well."

UP in his room Duran did not know that his basement and sub-basement was being systematically searched by two men and a dog. At one time these cellars had contained a notable stock of rare wines. Today they were flooded with junk. But for the visit of the rat catcher they had not been visited for years.

"Some task looking for clews here," Poole commented.

"Since you are the superior intelligence," said Johns, "you shall begin first. Just nose around and tell me if there are rats here and if so how recently and lastly where they live. I need no more of you than that. You won't need a searchlight. All you require is a good strong nose. Frankly, Gaylad is a better bet than you."

Poole looked a little sheepish.

"I thought you brought him for protection. I'm not in his class."

Poole watched Gaylad's performance with much interest. To the man who owned him his story was plain. First: This was not a cellar which habitually harbored rats. Secondly, there were none in it now. The only thing that did excite the Airedale was a wire rat trap which was flung in a far corner of a wine bin. Gaylad, as an expert witness, testified that the cellar was ratless.

"I've found human traces," Poole called out presently.

Going to his side Johns saw that a clay pipe was lying on the ground. It was similar to the one the rat catcher had smoked. There was something very odd about the pipe. It was not merely broken as it might be by a fall. Its bowl had been literally ground to pieces under a heavy heel whose marks were plainly discernible. The rat catcher, directly Wadsworth Johns had taken his departure, had flung a two dollar rat trap into a corner and had savagely smashed a clay which had been colored only by incessant smoking. Johns knew that the British laboring man treasured blackened clay as the richer smoker cared for his meerschaum. What led the rat catcher to this vandalism?

The first moment of exhilaration came to Johns when, on examining the hole by which the rat catcher was kneeling when he pulled the dead rat from it, he discovered the remains of an inch pipe running up in the masonry of the wall.

"Wait here," he said excitedly to Poole, "and put your ear to this hole."

A minute later Poole heard his friend talking. "Can you hear me?" came the voice distinctly. "If so, tell me what you hear. Listen distinctly; I'll be down in a minute."

"I heard a door slam," Poole said, when Wadsworth Johns reappeared. "After that I couldn't hear a sound. Where were you?"

"I was in the same telephone booth that Foster Briggs was a few seconds before his murder. This tube is evidently a dis-used speaking tube dating from a time when the office on the second floor told the cellarman what vintages to take out of the bins. Once this place was the most famous restaurant in New York."

"How does it get into the telephone booth?" Poole demanded.

"I don't know yet. I couldn't see a trace of it. The booth is plumb against the wall and I couldn't budge it."

"I don't see how that's going to help you."

"My dear Poole," Wadsworth said seriously, "I'm so hot on the trail I feel like bursting into flames myself. Perhaps I'm crazy; but if not I'm just engaged in sending a man to the chair. I have everything. I have discovered since coming here the essentials. As a crime it was wonderful. He thought of everything, nearly everything."

"I should vote that you are crazy," Poole said. "You haven't found anything of importance." Poole took out a cigarette and lighted it. He sat on a long metal cylinder which the removal of a lot of old sacking had revealed. It was fairly clean and his efforts had tired him. He was inclined to be argumentative. "As a lawyer," he went on, "your evidence is worthless. The trouble with men like you is they rely too much on intuition. You jump from peak to peak instead of ascending the weary steps that the reasoning being must."

"I know," said Wadsworth Johns, "and that's why we often see the light when you step climbers stay in the fog. Come on home. There's still time for me to trim you at billiards. We'll see if my intuition can overcome your undoubted powers of intellect, my dear Poole."

THE autopsy on the remains of Foster Briggs revealed injuries which had been unsuspected at the inquest. Medical witnesses contradicted one another. Lawyers wrangled. Never in the history of coroners' inquiries had such injuries been shown. Briggs had not died of an external explosion caused by a loaded cigar. Some inflammable gas had penetrated his very vitals. Even his lungs showed signs of being scorched by the flaming death. The chest wall was ruptured by the force of the explosion. This second inquiry was ended with as small chance of finding the method of the murder as the first. Experts on high explosives denied the possibility that the injuries could be caused by TNT or any nitro-glycerine derivatives or by any preparations of picric acid.

PAUL B. REISS, correctly attired, stopped for a moment as he stood in the doorway of Perry Thompson's big private office.

"Come in," Thompson called out cordially, "we are just having a little conference about poor Briggs' death."

"While I regret Mr. Briggs' death," said Reiss gravely, "I can only remember that he was bitterly prejudiced against me."

Poole, who had been asked especially to observe the emotions of Reiss under certain conditions, watched him eagerly as Wadsworth Johns took from his pocket a short clay pipe, blackened by smoking, and stuffed into it the finely cut tobacco the English know as "shag."

"I hope you don't find the smell offensive," Johns said cheerily.

"It has a strange odor," Reiss said politely. He was now perfectly calm. "What is it?"

"The tobacco of the British proletariat. I learned to like it in London."

"Mr. Wadsworth Johns," Thompson announced, "is about to describe the extraordinary and unusual method of my poor friend's death. It may interest you."

"Immensely," said Paul B. Reiss. To prove that he was as collected as the others he took out a cigarette case of gold and lighted a cigarette. The hand that held the match was firm. But the hand was also gloved while the left hand was not. "A poison ivy infection," he explained. "It is most unsightly."

"When I realized that Briggs' death was out of the ordinary I began to ask what could cause such a flame to issue from a man's lungs without its absorption into the tissues injuring him. Do you know, gentlemen, that if I pumped into this room a proper mixture of oxygen and hydrogen you would not detect the difference for a time. You would live independent of the nitrogen which makes up four-fifths of the air we breathe. When the incoming oxygen-hydrogen mixture had forced out the ordinary air, we should be inhaling, without detecting it by taste or smell, an atmosphere so highly explosive that a spark would set it off to annihilate us.

"Gentlemen, Foster Briggs had a crafty enemy. Thirty years ago, when the *Toison d'Or* was called by another name, there was a cellar boy whose work gave him plenty

of time to read. He was an industrious and ambitious Prussian immigrant and his favorite study was chemistry. Chance brought this boy back to New York. He came to the *Toison d'Or* because the little group of the most powerful financiers in America lunched there and he wanted to be on good terms with them. He was no longer a cellar boy. None knew he had ever been in the *Toison d'Or*. But he had not forgotten the speaking tube down which the manager used to call when wines were needed."

"This becomes very interesting," said Paul B. Reiss. "We in Boston have been placing the blame of this murder on agitators. You perhaps saw this ex-cellar-boy?"

"I observed him at work. He was in disguise. I was enabled to trace the whole diabolical scheme by which he introduced oxygen and hydrogen into the speaking tube whose other end was in the telephone booth. At a certain moment he knew Briggs would be called to the telephone.

"Briggs disappointed him. He took an unlighted cigar into the booth. Can you imagine the murderer's disappointment when he heard the booth door slammed behind Briggs and assumed he had failed? Gentlemen, he would have failed had Fleming Briggs but spoken a few words before lighting the match. But he stood silent by the table. The air that came from his lungs was not diluted enough to make it safe. The explosion ruptured the chest walls and singed his very lungs with deadly flame. I am in a position to verify every statement I have made. Mr. Poole found the gas cylinders hidden under old sacking. I think few details are missing."

"Except," sneered Reiss, "the vitally important one of the murderer's name."

"That mustn't be overlooked," Wadsworth Johns agreed. "The details may be interesting. The perfect crime has yet to be committed. Briggs' murderer was a clever man but he slipped up on some minor points. When I met him he was disguised as a rat catcher and smoked a clay pipe with shag in it. Shag, Mr. Reiss," said Johns, "is unknown to you. I wonder at that since you lived in England for many years. Perhaps it was because you did not associate with the shag-smok-

ing set. In my investigations it was necessary to find out where healthy live rats could be found. This rat catcher actually bought rats in order to pretend he caught them in the disused wine cellars. I found a little basement store on East Fifty-ninth street. I entered smoking a clay filled with shag. I was roughly dressed and the owner recognized the tobacco and asked if I were a friend of the *Toison d'Or* rat catcher. I said I was. He told me a lot.

"To the cellar, when Briggs was long dead, this man came back. That has puzzled me very much. Why, I asked myself, should a successful murderer return to the scene of his crime where he has nothing to gain and much to risk? I found it out. It was the disposal of those cylinders. He paid a deposit on them and waited there until the van should call for them. He had given as his address, the *Toison d'Or* and knew that the company would surely make inquiries. But I frightened him. He ran away and left me in charge. Luckily I was there when the emptied tanks were called for. I gained more particulars at the works. My rat catcher made a bad error by stamping what was supposed to be a dearly loved and smoke-blackened clay into the dirt of the floor. Also it is not in accordance with the best practices of rat catchers to throw perfectly good traps away."

"But who was it?" cried Thompson eagerly. "You've apparently done everything but produce the criminal."

He shrunk back when, at his words, Johns and Poole flung themselves upon the debonair Paul B. Reiss. Their sole object seemed to be to rob him of his glove. Reiss proved a man of amazing strength and fierceness but he was soon beaten.

"Look," said Wadsworth Johns, forcing the hand to Thompson's notice. "You will see that poison ivy in Boston takes the form of rat bites. This man murdered Fleming Briggs because Briggs told him over the long distance that he would put before the Stock Exchange committee the details of a crooked deal. Such an exposure meant ruin. The Boston confederate who took his place at the telephone is now in custody." There were sounds of heavy footsteps outside the door. "Here are our friends, the police."



*It came swooping down  
toward the house. . . .  
Richard screamed. . . .*

# THE CRIMSON VAMPIRE

By JOEL ROGERS

Foul with human gore, that scythe-clawed Murder-Monster slashed at that once-peaceful countryside—and even skeptical Capt. Sparrow's blood ran cold.

*A Complete Horror Novelet*

**"F**IVE hundred acres of woodlot and meadow old man Hamilcar owns," said William Hicks—"but I'd not trade places with him for all the money in the world."

He turned his round, freckled face to

look curiously at Captain Sparrow, resting his forearms on the shuddering wheel of the little car as he swung it around a stone in the road. A stony, hard-rutted road it was, rising steadily between dim, graying upland meadows and somber

groves of pine. The storm had long since passed, and the light of morning was in the eastern sky.

William Hicks was a confiding youth, yet there was something in the air of Captain Sparrow which was not altogether friendly.

The captain's face, as well as it could be seen by the pale dashboard light and the sky still gray with darkness, was pleasant enough. His thin, smallish nose was straight-edged as a knife. His cheekbones were sharp, his jawbone grim. His skin was tanned the color of leather.

Now Captain Sparrow turned his glance directly on William Hicks. It was those pale eyes, gleaming from beneath eyebrows straight and black, which gave the freckled youth a strange feeling of uneasiness.

"Are you a detective, mister?" asked Hicks with a sudden surmise.

After a thoughtful pause Captain Sparrow shook his head.

"No," he said. "But why wouldn't you like to trade places with Mr. Hamilcar? What do you mean?"

"I mean," said William Hicks—and his voice sank low, so it was hard to make him out above the rumbling and squeaking of the rusty little car. "—I mean that to the best of my knowledge and belief, something terrible was done to poor Dick Hingham—old man Hamilcar's grand-son-in-law—last Sunday night, up there in Hamilcar's fine home on Bald Knob mountain. There's plenty of us suspect foul play of some kind or other. Maybe murder."

Captain Sparrow sat silent a little while.

"Murder is a black word," he said at last. "What makes you speak of it?"

The pale-faced driver coughed and hesitated, his worried eyes fastened on the road ahead.

Captain Sparrow waited patiently.

"Old Hamilcar never got used to the idea of Miss Irene's being married to a poor man," said William Hicks quietly. "He had another multiplied millionaire as rich as hisself picked out for her. He always hated Dick. And many a devilish thing he's done to him, Dick has told me in confidence. And if Hamilcar wanted to get ride of Dick Hingham, I'd not put it beyond him to do it."

"What do Hamilcar and Mrs. Hingham

say has happened to Dick Hingham?" asked Captain Sparrow.

"They tell a cock-and-bull story that nobody would believe," said Hicks with a snort. "They say that last Sunday night Dick Hingham was out walking on the lawn. And all o' a sudden a great big giant bat came screeching and yelling down out of the sky—"

"A what?" said Captain Sparrow.

"A flying bat, a vampire," said William Hicks, his voice growing hoarse. "A flying bat as big as all get-out, with great red eyes and claws as long as your arm, holering and flapping its wings. And before Dick Hingham could do anything, or turn and run, it had grabbed him up and torn the life out of him. Away it flew, dangling him in its claws like a dead rat. They found his blood all over the lawn."

Captain Sparrow sat tight-lipped, nodding silently.

"That's the story they tell," said William Hicks. "I ask you, mister, does it sound reasonable?"

"No," said Captain Sparrow, "it doesn't sound reasonable."

"I could think of a million stories to tell, myself, better than that, if I wanted to hide some foul and dirty work," said William Hicks.

"That's what makes *this* story reasonable," said Captain Sparrow, "however far-fetched it may sound."

THE gray pre-dawn was clammy chill, though the stars were fading in the east behind them and the dawn would come soon.

Across the road ahead stretched a high, white picket double gate set in a low, thick wall of fieldstone, and with a mail box on a post beside it. This was the boundary of old man Hamilcar's domain, on the summit of Bald Knob mountain.

"Here we are at the top of things," said William Hicks, "and we couldn't get no higher unless we flew."

Captain Sparrow stepped out to open the gates and stood beside them waiting for Hicks to drive through. But the country youth had begun to back and circle, and was plainly of no mind to go farther.

"Well, mister, much obliged to you," said William Hicks, pocketing the bills which the captain had offered him.

He put his little car in gear and, with a farewell nod, went down the rutty road much more speedily than he had come up. In a moment he was out of sight beyond the somber pine woods; in two he was out of sound.

Captain Sparrow closed the gate behind him and walked sturdily along the well-laid, graveled road between the poplar rows, over the rolling lawns to Hamilcar's house—a slight and silent little man, with an unafraid look in those shrewd eyes which were as pale as the dawn sky above him.

Down in the valley a cock crowed. A dog began to yap furiously. But up here about this silent house, no giddy cock or foolish, cheerful dog welcomed up the sun. Captain Sparrow lifted his fist and knocked, well aware that from the dark interior someone was watching him.

## II

AN old negress with a weazened countenance admitted him, shuffling to the door in carpet slippers. Her little eyes were red with sleeplessness. She peered at him like a watchful rat.

"Mrs. Hingham telephoned," said Captain Sparrow.

But the withered black woman only made strange sounds in her throat, shaking her head—a deaf mute. . . .

Captain Sparrow scrawled a message on a card. She led him upstairs to a book room on the second floor, and knelt at the hearth to apply a match to the wood piled there in readiness. Softly she went out, her big checked gingham gown billowing about her.

Left to himself, Captain Sparrow pondered the object of this strange visit. What had it been—that inhuman and unbelievable giant beast which, if the story was to be believed—had come flying over these hills on the night before the last, to seize poor Richard Hingham in its claws, as an owl seizes a running rat? Had it been a reality—or the imagined image of a crazed mind? Or was it all some malignant, lying game, with death as the stakes and prize of it? Now beneath the sun no thing flew. The wind itself was motionless.

Irene Hingham was a woman who moved with quiet footsteps. She had come into the room before Captain Sparrow was

aware of her. Turning from the window suddenly, he saw her—a large woman, clad in black, with great dark eyes staring from her pale face.

"I expected someone yesterday," she said. "It was two days ago—what day is today?"

"Tuesday."

"Then it was only yesterday I telephoned," she said quietly. "It seems longer."

"Today is Tuesday," said Captain Sparrow again.

"I haven't slept," she said. "We are here alone, you know. The village people, I suppose, think we are lunatics. They've given us no help. Yet we need help."

Captain Sparrow bowed. Standing with his back to the fire, he could examine Richard Hingham's wife (or widow, he had better say) at leisure. She had sunk down in a divan facing the hearth, with the fire-light and the clear sunlight on her face.

"We are in trouble, Mr. Sparrow—have I the name right?" she said. "How shall I begin? What do you want me to tell you?"

"The truth," said Captain Sparrow.

"I'll try," she said.

"It's the hardest thing in the world to tell," said Captain Sparrow. "Not that I'm impugning your veracity, ma'am."

"You will have to believe what I tell you," said the woman quietly, "though it sounds like an impossible nightmare."

"I will believe whatever is possible, ma'am," said Captain Sparrow. "It is only the impossible I will not believe."

"Before another night is done, if you stay in this house," she said with a deepening of her quiet voice, "you will see with your own eyes what is not possible, Mr. Sparrow."

CAPTAIN SPARROW narrowed his pale glance a moment. His teeth shone as though he might be laughing.

"I have seen many strange things," he said, "but I have never seen the impossible."

He was studying her. Pretty, he thought, but like a languid chrysanthemum, without perfume or fire. About thirty years old, Captain Sparrow guessed. Her brown eyes were wide and frank.

Yet appearances may lie, knew Sparrow.

What dismal images gathered behind that smooth mask of face? If mad, what was her madness? But she had begun her story now, and the Captain listened.

"We first saw it—this Thing that we have learned to call the Crimson Bat—on the night of—the night of Thursday last," said Irene Hingham. "Or rather my grandfather saw it. I was down in the city that night with Richard. I remember I called up home about midnight—I had gone to the show with some college friends, and Richard, who had been in conference with our lawyers, joined us afterward for supper. At midnight I called up grandfather, as I always do when I'm in the city, to see how he was getting along. Is all this boring you?"

"On the contrary," said Sparrow.

"It was that night the Crimson Bat first came," said Irene Hingham, lowering her voice. "Grandfather had been dozing on the sun porch after dinner. He was awakened by a scream and it came flashing down over the house. He said . . ."

"What you saw, please," suggested Captain Sparrow politely. "What you did."

"I telephoned grandfather," she said weakly. "He told me about it. He had been startled, naturally. The connection was weak, or else he wasn't speaking clearly, so I had a hard time understanding him. Richard talked with him then. Richard thought it had been only a nightmare. I remember he laughed. He got me and the other girls laughing, too."

"I wonder if he'd be laughing now," thought Captain Sparrow. But he said nothing.

"That was Thursday night. Friday evenings Richard drives up for the week-ends. I came home Friday morning. That night about nine o'clock I saw it. Brian Boru, our Airedale, began to groan and whine. He came and crept under my chair. His hair was up, and he shivered steadily. Then I heard it—a sudden wild scream, growing into a horrid yell as it came swooping down with wings outstretched and eyes blazing. It passed over the house as though looking for some prey, and turned and came back again, so close this time that I think it must have clung a moment to the roof ridge."

"Describe it, please," said Captain Sparrow.

"Why, it had crimson eyes—dull red like coals—the kind of eyes an animal has in the dark. Its wings must have been as wide as this room from tip to tip when they were outstretched, and they were indented along the edges like a bat's wings. There wasn't time to see . . ."

"It's head?"

"It had pointed ears, claws outstretched. . . ."

"What kind of claws?"

"As a matter of fact, I didn't see them that time," said Irene Hingham. "That was later. It must have curved up its claws ready to strike as it came swooping down."

Captain Sparrow paced back and forth in front of the fire. His hands were clasped behind his back, his head bent. He frowned.

"Did the others see what you saw?" he asked. "What did they think of it?"

"What others?"

"Your grandfather and your husband, and this person you call Minna, whoever she is," explained Captain Sparrow impatiently. "I take it there was no one else in the house?"

"No one else," said Mrs. Hingham. "Richard had a blow-out on the way up from the city, and didn't get home till later. It frightened grandfather. Yet I suppose he felt a sense of victory in proving it was more than a hallucination—he is sometimes afraid that his mind may be failing him. Minna, I think, was sleeping."

"That was Friday night," said Captain Sparrow.

He watched her dark eyes. The red firelight played on them. Her pale countenance was smooth and expressionless, but her fine hands had begun to tremble. She picked at a pillow beside her, and turned the ring on her finger.

"The next night it came again," she said, in deepening tones. "Richard hadn't yet seen it, and I think that he didn't half believe in it. That night after dinner he went out. He was going to walk down the mountainside to the village, to play cards with some of his friends. He went out shortly after dark."

"Alone?" asked Captain Sparrow.

"Alone," said the woman. "No, the Airedale was with him. Brian Boru was frightened, that was plain. Animals have

a sixth sense, people say. I don't know. But the dog must have had some premonition, for he hung back and yelped, and once he broke away from the leash in Richard's hand to come whining and crawling over the ground to me. His eyes were bloodshot, his hair was bristling up. But there was nothing to be seen except clouds in all the sky. Grandfather and I watched Richard going down the road, head up and whistling, dragging the dog behind him."

"Men don't seem to have the premonitions of animals," remarked Captain Sparrow.

Irene Hingham twisted a handkerchief with tense fingers. She made a ball of it and touched her dry lips. Captain Sparrow watched her intently, his head cocked on one side.

"Richard was down beyond the pine woods when it dove on him," she said. "He had just stopped to light his pipe. Perhaps it caught the flash of fire in the mist. The first Richard was aware of it was when he heard its wild scream above him, and looked up to see it crashing through the trees. Its wings were folded overhead, its head was stretched out and swaying, and its long hooked claws reached down to seize him where he stood—"

Captain Sparrow nodded soberly.

"He dropped—Richard dropped—no time for anything else. He rolled into a narrow gully beside the road. Screaming again, it swept over him, not two feet above his face. It was so close he could see the reddish fur which covered all its body."

IRENE HINGHAM leaned back on the pillows of her couch. She closed her eyes. Her bosom stirred heavily. Again she put the ball of handkerchief to her lips. In a moment she had herself under better control.

"He must have been a brave man," said Captain Sparrow with soft respectfulness. "I'd not like to have been where he was."

"He was afraid of nothing," the woman whispered. "Yet I think even he was afraid of it."

Captain Sparrow examined his fingers. His eyes were as pallid as the mist which had lain on Bald Knob mountain during that dismal night.

"He fought it off?" he said. "He saw

it could be wounded—was flesh and blood like any living thing?"

"He fought it off that night—but, wounded and furious, it remembered him."

With an intensity resembling hypnosis she was staring at the fiery coals. Captain Sparrow did not alter his position to look at her, but watched her movements out of the corner of his eye.

"What more is there to tell you?" she whispered. "It may have been a madness, but it had gripped us all. The next night—Sunday night—the night before last—Richard determined to go out and face the creature once and for all. I pleaded with him. I would have gone out with him gladly, to face any death with him. But he would not have me. He was fierce and savage—he was going to slay the monster. In the twilight he went out alone to meet it."

Again Captain Sparrow examined his blunt fingernails, giving her time to compose herself.

"We went out at twilight," said Irene Hingham wearily. "We were all of us mad, perhaps. He carried a rifle with him—a big-game gun that would have blown the heart out of an elephant. We watched him going down between the poplars, hurrying to find a safe hiding place before darkness fell. We never saw Richard again."

NOW Captain Sparrow turned on his neat heel, and gazed at the woman searchingly. She shook her head, shuddering, and lifted her eyes from the fire. Slowly she swung about, and like a blind person felt her way to a seat on the divan again.

"We waited hours," she said. "The night had come, without a moon. There was nothing to be seen, no sound. Richard had found concealment and was waiting, too. The thing was late in coming that night. It was sly and wise. It must have flitted through the darkness silently, knowing in its monstrous cunning brain that some danger beset it. Where it was flying, or hiding, or stalking its prey with eternal patience, we had no means of knowing. But we waited.

"What happened? We do not know for sure. Richard may have made a movement in his concealment, tired of watch-

ing and not knowing it was near. But suddenly we heard the bang! bang! of his rifle—heard him screaming: 'It's got me! It's got me!' Between the poplars we saw it rise up like a swift shadow, as though it had snatched up something from the ground, and it gave a prolonged yell of jubilation—"

"The first sound you had heard?"

"Except the rifle shots, and Richard's cry."

"Now, what sort of a sound did it make, ma'am, that you call a yell?" asked Captain Sparrow.

"It was a loud, piercing, crazy shriek of laughter," said the woman, "like no other sound I've ever heard."

Captain Sparrow nodded briefly. But it was plain he was puzzled.

"It poised a moment there between the poplars, with its wings outspread, then came swooping toward the house and shot down the slope beyond skimming low over the grass as it went by. And Richard screamed again from the air as it passed—oh, a terrible and frantic cry that froze our blood! It had him then in its claws, and was tearing him apart with beak and talons."

"But you could see, as he was carried off, that he was still alive?" said Sparrow.

"He was screaming, and was still alive."

"What next?" asked Captain Sparrow.

"I don't remember—the night passed somehow. I have not closed my eyes since then."

THE moon was not yet risen at nine o'clock that night. And the sky was black—a night for hobgoblins and flutter-mice and flying things that like to remain not too clearly seen. Nimbus clouds in long billows drifted a mile above the earth, so thick that a man standing on the summit of Bald Knob mountain would have had difficulty in seeing the brighter stars.

In a fire-lit room of the Hamilcar home Captain Sparrow was speaking guardedly into the mouthpiece of a telephone:

"All right, Hicks— Yes— In about an hour— See that the plane's tanks are filled and that she's ready to take off." A brief silence filled with the distorted mumbling of the voice of William Hicks at the other end of the wire, then Captain Sparrow spoke again and his calm, quiet voice was warm with appreciation:

"You've done well, Hicks. Send Peter's men on up to the house; we may need them."

Captain Sparrow hung up and moved quietly across the shadowed room—out upon the night-shadowed porch where old man Hamilcar was waiting. He sank down into a chair beside the haggard-cheeked grandfather of Irene Hingham. A tall old man was Hamilcar, with staring black eyes and body as lean as a spider. A white point of beard quivered now like the chin whiskers of a goat as he stared curiously at the little captain.

"You've heard our story. Captain Sparrow," he said, "what do you think of us—are we both crazy?"

His voice sounded singularly loud and harsh for so old a man. He bent forward now to stare once more at the younger man, and there was the look of plain terror in the old fellow's eyes.

"I don't know that I've formed a final opinion yet," replied Captain Sparrow calmly.

"But—but you've come up to see if we're nuts?" demanded old man Hamilcar tremulously.

"No," said Sparrow. "I'm not a detective, nor a psychiatrist, either. I'm only an aviator—a man supposed to know something about the various kinds of birds and beasts—and devils that inhabit the upper air. I heard about your case from the Peters Agency—the detective firm Mrs. Hingham called up. Frankly, sir, they thought her story sounded hysterical. Since they weren't ready to send a man out on a wild-geese chase, I volunteered to come on up—partly curiosity, I'll admit."

"What do you think of it now?" asked Hamilcar.

"I haven't seen it yet," replied Captain Sparrow cautiously.

"You will tonight," old Hamilcar said with conviction. "When you do, I'll not trust your sanity any more than my own!"

"I'm always quite sane," said the captain. "We'll find an explanation somewhere."

"Eh? What do you mean?" snapped old Hamilcar.

"I MEAN," said Captain Sparrow, "that I don't believe you've dreamed this thing—that your mind has failed you."

as you seem to fear. The thing—whatever it is—is real and dangerous. Already it has harmed you. It has given you the name of being a lunatic. If you or your granddaughter were killed tonight, whether by some diabolic thing from out the night sky or by a creeping human assassin, there is no man would bother to hound your killer down."

"Give a dog a bad name before you hang him, eh?" said old Hamilcar grimly. "You have a keen idea, young man, what this devilish thing may be— Tell me."

He eyed Sparrow keenly.

"If I told you," said Sparrow, "you'd think me crazy, myself." He threw back his head and laughed silently. "I've telephoned for a guard of men from the Peters agency who don't believe in devils," he said. "They will be here before another hour."

"And you, sir—what do you propose doing?" asked Hamilcar.

Captain Sparrow clasped his hands behind him and stood very erect. "I intend, sir," he said, "to meet the . . ."

But old man Hamilcar never heard the finish of that brave speech, for the captain cut short his words on a suddenly gasped breath. Rising shrill and terrible on the silent winds of night, there came a long-drawn, awesome shriek as of a soul in agony.

Captain Sparrow, though he was a brave man, felt the cold fingers of fear crawling against the skin of his back before that terribly weird and hopeless cry died suddenly away in the midst of its own grim echoes.

Then, disregarding the trembling old man, he had leaped the low rail of the veranda and was racing out across the smooth-rolled lawn—reckless of the horrible death that might there await him. High above him, as he reached the gates and passed through them, he caught the dim shadow of outspread wings, saw for a brief instant two searching eyes of burning crimson. Then he was in the hard-rutted road, speeding downward through the darkness, on his way to William Hicks and the plane that was held in readiness against his coming. In a very few minutes now he'd learn which was the greater flying devil—himself or the Crimson Bat!

### III

HIGH in the empty night above Bald Knob mountain, Captain Sparrow glided silently. Far below him, the clustered lights of the valley village twinkled faintly, but up there in the quiet darkness of the overcast sky his sharp eyes could catch no slightest shadow of stealthy movement. Above Bald Knob he hung, poised like some swift, unseen midge, waiting patiently to hop upon whatever flying fiend might drop from the rolling blanket of smoky cloud above him.

A mile above the earth the night was sharp, and a stiff west wind rushed swiftly through the night. Down at the three thousand-foot level Sparrow knew that only a small breeze was stirring, but up at his own level the wind was so strong and steady that his stub-winged little Vought, heading into it at half throttle, hung directly above Bald Knob without visible motion, caught on a sky hook. There he remained, watchful and unseen in the dark night, and the turning world was motionless below him.

Gone from the sky was the creature with shadow wings and crimson eyes. To Sparrow it seemed that he held the night alone, yet less than an hour before his own eyes had visioned the grotesque shape of the Crimson Bat; his own ears had rung with the shrill wail of the diving monster. Alone now in all the sky, the little captain clung grimly to his vigil.

But a strange feeling of uneasiness was coming over him. The night was *too* quiet, too calm and peaceful. Out of its very silence his straining ears conjured the stealthy beat of feathered wings. He could understand now, alone in the night sky, the panic that had been Irene Hingham's. He could sympathize with old man Hamilcar's fear.

Ten minutes passed, and Captain Sparrow felt a touch of ice on the back of his neck, as a vaporous shadow cut across the faint stars to the east. He swallowed hard, banked uneasily to gain further altitude. The shadow was gone—a heavier cloud that had drifted by into the night. That was all. The little man sighed his relief and once more cut the motor to half speed. But the wind, sweeping through his uncovered hair, tingled his scalp with needles of cold.

Dimly he felt the near presence of another creature of the air. Somewhere above him, he was now sure, some other living thing was poised behind the cloud murk, watching the mountain top with eager eyes.

Once more, impatient of his vigil, the little captain zoomed upward, cutting the lower layer of cloud. Would the creature ever return? Would his night flight, after all, prove in vain? But he could not hold such doubts for long. He had seen it with his own eyes. He knew, so he believed, the explanation of its being. He knew its purpose, knew the scheming of its cunning and malignant brain. It had set out to harry the old man and the woman to insanity. That failing, it would kill them fiendishly.

THE lowering cloud wrapped about him.

He snapped his engine switch, feeling his way down toward the clear air below. Now he could see nothing. So suddenly dark was it, that he could not see the lights of the tiny towns below him, nor the faint flare of stars above him—nor even the engine head before him. But in that brief moment when the ship still lingered within the cloud, Captain Sparrow heard a sound that bristled the hair on his head.

A scream it was, a shriek like a wild and rumbling laugh—and it echoed from the darkness close above him. A vast shadow plunged downward through the clearing air, diving from out the empty wastes above the world, its horrid cry shattering the night.

Then silence, as the creature passed not twenty feet before his ship, a shadowy, bat-winged monster, streaking vertically down the caverns of the night. Its bottom side, or belly, was turned toward him, and Captain Sparrow breathed a sigh of relief that it could not see him. Swift as a falling rocket, it passed by, with the form of its stiff wings like a shadow on the mist.

Sparrow's fist was frozen to the control stick. His legs were pressed like rods against the rudder bar. The unexpectedness of the creature's coming, the unearthly fierceness in that wild shriek, had left him for the moment utterly incapable of movement. As stiff as an ice statue he sat, while his ship dropped off in a slow glide through the foggy billows of the lower clouds. Presently he shuddered, filling his lungs

with a great draft of the cool night air. "Like a bat," he whispered. It had passed him by, but for long moments his flesh would still feel cold, his scalp would still crawl.

Then, quite suddenly, the little captain was laughing. A hard sound it was—and angry. Pale eyes slitted, he shoved the stick far forward, dived headlong down through the whistling night. His heart was roaring.

The taut guy wires sang in the racing wind. His body was flattened against the back of the seat. Once more the air was sucked from his lungs. Blood swept to his head, and blind spots danced before his eyes. Yet he still rushed down through the darkness.

Then, when it seemed that a sudden check must tear the wings from the racing body of the little ship, Captain Sparrow hauled up its nose like the tail of a figure J. Wings groaning, the little Vought twisted up out of that breathless dive, and the captain kicked right rudder and sent her tumbling over into a spin. It was rough treatment for the ship he loved, but down there below him the Crimson Bat was diving upon Bald Knob mountain. He must follow him down, must close with him, must drive him for all time from the air.

At a thousand feet he leveled off, and at the same instant caught sight of the howling thing just below him. It was soaring on long and rigid wings but a little way above the lighted house. For the moment it made no sound.

Instinctively Captain Sparrow cut his engine and glided with the wind. Now he was but eight hundred feet above the mountain top. Now he was down to five—now three. He leveled his ship. Powerless, it fell off on one wing. He righted it, but it slipped away on the other. Right and left, swaying like a pendulum, it drifted like a falling leaf, dropping down toward the shadowed fields.

He was near enough now to see the glowing, crimson eyes of the thing that flitted about the house. Handling his ship with sensitive hand, he watched its every sweep and dive. He started, as once more that weird shriek swept through the night. Stiff-winged, the howler swooped low across the house roof. It seemed almost to touch. Above the poplar trees it turned,

wafted upward, lifted by the warm currents of air which flowed up the mountain slope.

Recovering now from his first terror at the thing's horrible voice, Captain Sparrow watched it through narrowed, speculative eyes. He banked above it, staring down from his swaying cockpit. And presently his brow cleared, and a hard little smile twisted his thin lips. The mystery of the Crimson Bat was satisfactorily explained—for the dim shade that glided beneath him, motor dead as his own, was a monoplane! Jaw set at a fighting angle, Captain Sparrow nosed his ship down out of the night.

#### IV

**D**RIFTING down on that unsuspecting monoplane, Captain Sparrow laughed silently—bitterly and without mercy. He was above it, had the upper hand of it. And he wasn't afraid of it now. It was, after all, only a thing of wood and metal, captained by a pilot as human as he. He could even understand that howling voice—a mechanical whistle probably, so rigged that the wind, shrieking through it, would produce that wild tone and huge volume, and so adjusted that it could be turned on and off at will. A simple mechanical trick it was, nothing more.

The other devices of horror, the glowing eyes, the bat-shaped wings, the pointed ears, he had already reasoned out. These shining eyes would be two crimson searchlights on either side of the propeller hub, the bat wings a rim of scalloped material on the edges of the monoplane's true wings.

But Captain Sparrow realized, as he swept downward, that were he on the earth below, he would not look so contemptuously at the "Crimson Bat." For it was, in truth, a devilish thing, of evil devising. Once more it howled its empty cry, and fled over the roof-tree of the house.

Its pilot had not yet seen the biplane dropping so quietly down from above. Now was the time to strike! Without further hesitation, Captain Sparrow pushed the nose of his ship over and dove like a bullet on the tail of the Crimson Bat.

Wings whistling, he shot above the monoplane, missing its wings by a scant ten feet. Head craned far out from his cockpit, he glimpsed for a moment the white, upturned face of the other pilot.

Lips tight-pressed, the little captain motioned the monoplane toward the ground. The surprised terror in that upturned face below him was plain to the angry Sparrow.

**A**BRUPTLY he switched on his engine and gave the ship full throttle. With a roar that splintered the silence, the engine caught. He zoomed upward, saw the earth drop away below him. The biplane's nose was pointed toward the clouded stars. With a jerk he snapped the ship over on its back.

At the crest of the loop he cut his engine. He heard the silence, the ringing, screaming silence. He slipped on one wing, knifing downward through the air. Once more he was behind the helpless monoplane—and above it. Down he hurtled, like a thunderbolt from the blue.

"Make a landing, or I'll rip your tail off!" he roared above the whistling wind.

But the terrified pilot of the Crimson Bat had opened up his engine, was trying desperately to climb away from the Vought. Straight up he rose, almost stalling in the steepness of his flight. But the monoplane had no such speed, no such maneuverability as that swift, two-winged ship that rolled and streaked above it. The frightened pilot was climbing it too steeply. It wavered in mid flight, and again Captain Sparrow caught a brief glimpse of that white, terror-stricken face.

The night prowler was flying recklessly, taking desperate chances to elude his pursuer. He Immelmanned, but the captain spun about with him, once more swept upward like a rocket, to come sweeping back across the tail of the Crimson Bat. Engine silenced, he nosed up slightly, flattened across the other's tail—dragged his ship to a stall. His speed slackened. He pancaked down on the monoplane that drifted below. He was mercilessly determined to knock it down from the air.

His wheel had struck the monoplane a glancing, downward blow on the left wing. There had been no force to it, for that would have sent his own ship crashing down with the other. But it had been enough to knock the Crimson Bat out of the air. It would fly no more with its howling voice, its horrid eyes, its wide, hobgoblin wings.

It fell into a flat spin. Twice its wings

went around. Then upon the somber earth it crashed with a thundering roar—in the meadows down by the apple orchards, at the far end of the mountain crest. From the first impact it bounced, and crashed down again. Its wings crumpled like paper in a man's hand. Its tail snapped off. The scalloped sheets which had given its wings their bat appearance fell off like rain-gutters from a toppling house.

Like a falcon to the strike Captain Sparrow came down. The meadows swept up to meet him, indiscernible and black. He opened the engine throttle part way, stalling down to a landing by feel, with bow high and tail dragging. Then he knew he had met the ground. The tail skid was bumping over grassy hummocks and the wheels had begun to roll. Swiftly he taxied over close-clipped meadows toward the wreck.

OUT of the great lighted mansion a quarter mile behind him he heard the shouting of men. Peters' men were on the job. Their circling flashlights came like fireflies across the meadows.

Out of the crumpled wreckage a dark form arose.

The fugitive had taken stand on the open meadow. His legs were straddled wide, he shook his head warningly and shouted some indistinguishable word. Then his right arm swept upward, and he emptied a revolver point blank at Captain Sparrow.

Echoes yelled. Sparrow saw that pointed arm not twenty paces in front of him, jerking with the recoil and leveling again. Lead pinged on the propeller cap, and caromed off. A hot streak seared Sparrow's face, and there was a blow against his thigh. He felt no pain of it, but when he pressed his hand on it, it grew sticky and wet.

Shouting again, the man on the ground hurled his empty weapon from him, and turned to run.

Springing to his feet, Captain Sparrow tried to leap to the ground in pursuit. But his wounded leg crumpled beneath him and he slumped back in the cockpit, suddenly dizzy with pain. Teeth clamped, he opened up his engine. The heavy propeller swept like a sickle at her nose. Swaying at the controls, he drove across the ground after that running figure, which sprawled and

stumbled in desperate haste, making toward the stone wall and the deep woods beyond.

"Stop!" shouted Captain Sparrow, striving to lift his voice above the engine clamor. "Stand where you are!" he gasped, feeling sick and faint. "Stop—or I'll run you down and carve you to mince-meat."

The runner stumbled. Flinging his arms overhead, he sprawled forward on his face. Frantically he scrambled to his knees, but Captain Sparrow was behind him. On his knees the fugitive stayed, as though in prayer to Captain Sparrow or whatever were his patron fiends. The bright half moon was coming up. It flooded the crest of the mountain with wan light. The pallid face, the writhing lips, the popping black eyes of the man who had driven the Crimson Bat were lustrous beneath the moon.

"What do you want?" he croaked. "What do you want of me, you flying fool?"

Captain Sparrow poked his sagging head overside. The blindness was coming over him, and his loins were drenched with his own warm blood. But still he kept his hand on the throttle of the ship he knew and loved so well.

"I want you," he gasped, "for clubbing a poor Airedale dog to death last Saturday night. I want you for spreading lies about old Hamilcar and Irene Hingham, till the whole world believed they were crazy. I want you," he said, "for trying to terrify them into the madhouse or their graves, so you could get your claws on Hamilcar's money. I want you for the black determination in your heart to kill them in their beds if they did not succumb to your madness. But most of all I want you," he said with a deep, triumphant breath, "for thinking you were a greater flying devil than Captain Sparrow!"

He labored heavily. The blindness was creeping over him. The darkness rose and roared about him like the darkness of a great salt sea.

"Stay on your knees!" he said. "I've done my work. But here come the men to get you, Richard Hingham!"

THAT night Captain Sparrow lay in bed in the best guest suite on Bald Knob. The doctor in attendance on Irene

Hingham had bound up the wound in his thigh. The shot had missed the great artery and the thigh bone, yet it would be many days before he would again streak through the air in his swift craft.

Old man Hamilcar sat grimly beside the man who had brought an end to the weird flights of the Crimson Bat. His fierce old face was knotted up with wrinkles. His glittering black eyes stared, unblinkingly, at Sparrow. The fear was no longer in them, for he had proved to himself that he was sane—and, with that knowledge, a man need be afraid of nothing.

"How did you know?" he asked.

"Richard Hingham was the only person who might have derived benefit from your insanity or death," said Sparrow quietly. "At the very first I suspected him—last night, even, when I talked with William Hicks. Hicks is a talkative youth, and Hingham had filled him with fantastic lies.

"My suspicions became almost a certainty in my own mind when I learned that he had been patiently and cunningly isolating you from all human contacts. Then, too, he was a chauffeur; it's not a far jump from piloting an automobile to piloting an airplane.

"These facts aroused my suspicions. Then when I learned that neither you nor Mrs. Hingham had seen the Bat and Richard at the same time—though neither of you seemed to realize this—then I had no more suspicions. I *knew*!

"On that first Thursday night Mrs. Hingham was at the theater several hours. She *thought* her husband was at his lawyer's. She'd probably have sworn to it as a fact. But during those hours it would have been easy enough for him to fly up to Bald Knob, pay you a little visit of horror, and return for supper with Mrs. Hingham. On the next night—Friday—when she saw the Bat for the first time, Richard Hingham was not in view; he'd broken down on the road, he said. And on Saturday night it was Hingham, alone, who claimed to have seen the Bat. He had a broken walking stick and a dead dog to show for his encounter—and a description of the creature's appearance much more detailed, and impossible, than any you had given as your own observation.

"When Richard Hingham stepped out

the door on Sunday night with a gun, you never doubted the reality of the terror he was going out to meet. Hours passed—hours to increase your frenzy and your fear. And they gave Hingham time to get his quick little monoplane and come flying back over the trees."

Captain Sparrow smiled at the intent old man, lighted a cigarette.

"What did you hear?" he asked. "You heard a gun go off. But he could have shot it from the air. You heard him shrieking. But he could have shrieked from the air. What did you see? You saw the plane come sweeping over the poplars, rising on the warm air currents from the valley, and drifting toward you. You may have thought you saw Hingham—for you were listening to his yells from the air.

"The next day you found a broken gun; he'd thrown it from the ship. You found his torn shirt where he'd dropped it in the poplar branches, soaked with the blood of the dog he'd clubbed to death the night before."

Sparrow paused and laughed. Old Hamilcar stared at him with glittering eyes. Slowly the old man nodded. Like a man just awakening, he nodded his scraggly head.

"His plan," said Captain Sparrow quietly, "was to continue his night visits until you'd both become screaming maniacs. . . . If that plan failed, there's no question but that he'd have murdered you in your beds. He would have been safe enough; you had told an impossible story of his disappearance; you were thought to be lunatics."

Sparrow closed his eyes, still grinning. Old Hamilcar muttered deep in his throat. He pulled at his sliver of beard.

"How did you know the Bat was not a creature of the air—no matter what suspicions you might have had of Richard?" the old man asked.

Sparrow smiled patiently. "I've flown up and down the air, sir—east and west and crossways," he said. "I've flown through mountains and over the big blue pond. I've flown half a million miles, I guess, and I've seen everything that flies—But I've never yet seen a flying thing—bigger than a buzzard—that *wasn't a man-made ship!*"



*Winifred whispered, "I'm not happy with Lawrence, Harry."*

# DEAD MAN'S BLACKMAIL

By JOHN STARR

The grim gallows were rigged. At dawn young Harry Trent, innocent as a new-born babe, was scheduled to walk the Last Mile. One thing alone could save him—a Confession from the Dead.

**H**ARRY TRENT lifted dull, uninterested eyes toward the steel door of his cell in the death row as footsteps sounded in the prison corridor. A man doesn't welcome visitors with much enthusiasm when he has only a few hours to live.

Trent's face, haggard though it was, took on a certain hardness when he recognized the two men who stopped in front of his cell. Warden Meade was all right—a kindly, sympathetic man, who believed firmly in Trent's innocence. But Detective Jock Withers was to blame for his being here.

The detective's tireless, aggressive energy had been chiefly responsible for

Trent's conviction—was sending him to the gallows. Even now, with Trent's execution set for dawn that morning, Withers was present because he looked upon the doomed man's death as a final triumph for himself.

The officer's hard, pink-red jaws were firmly clamped about a big cigar. He had left his hat and overcoat in the warden's office and now lifted a fat hand to smooth down his vest. Tilting his cigar upward, he squinted his sharp eyes as he spoke through the bars:

"Well, how goes it, Trent? Are you ready to kick through yet on why you killed Lawrence Nalo?"

In spite of the anger that smoldered in

his gray eyes at the question, Trent's voice was calm as he answered:

"I've told you a hundred times I'm innocent, Withers. I know no more about Nalo's death than you do."

"Yeah," the detective sneered, mouth-  
ing his cigar. "Well, you see where your  
innocence has got you. And don't forget  
the records in the case. That statement  
Nalo left—the fact that you and Winifred  
Nalo were the only persons present when  
her husband died; and that you two ad-  
mitted being in love with each other."

Trent's eyes, slightly bloodshot from loss  
of sleep, hardened still more. He gripped  
the cold bars before his face. But interrup-  
tion came from another quarter.

"Here! None of that, Withers!" the  
warden ordered sharply. "You had my per-  
mission merely to ask Trent if he had any-  
thing to say; not to try and rag a confes-  
sion out of him."

Under the strong pressure of the war-  
den's arm, the detective turned from the  
door. And Trent, listening to their de-  
parting footsteps in the hallway, dropped  
back onto his cot as his mind reverted to  
the thoughts that had occupied it for  
months.

Until that night, he had refused to give  
up hope. Steadfastly he had clung to the  
thought that justice must be just; that be-  
ing innocent, he couldn't hang. But he  
was to hang, at dawn that morning. To  
have understood why, he would have  
needed to turn back the calendar six  
months; to have known Lawrence Nalo a  
little better.

TO his friends in social and profes-  
sional circles, Lawrence Nalo seemed  
to have everything one could want. He  
had wealth, plenty of it. And as a law-  
yer, he stood without a peer in the city.  
Big-boned, muscular and robust-looking, he  
appeared to have health also. But in that  
respect, appearances were deceiving.

For months, Nalo had suffered from  
an intermittent pain in his left side. Two  
weeks before, it had driven him to see  
Doctor Lawson, his family physician. But  
the old practitioner, after a cursory exam-  
ination, had slapped him on the back as  
he said:

"Nothing wrong, Lawrence, except too  
many cigars. Lay off smoking for a week

or two, and see if that pain doesn't dis-  
appear."

Nalo had quit smoking, but the pain  
hadn't disappeared. In fact, it had got  
worse. Victim of a sudden, sharp attack  
after lunch that day, he was now in the  
luxurious reception room of Dr. Alfred  
Parley, one of the most famous specialists  
in the city.

The long wait proved irksome to Nalo.  
And so did the specialist's methods when  
Nalo finally got into the private office. Dr.  
Parley believed in system. With a printed  
form card before him, he insisted on know-  
ing all about Nalo's health, business and  
home life.

"Have to have a complete history of a  
case to understand it thoroughly," he ex-  
plained, finally shoving the card forward  
on his desk and reaching for a stethoscope.  
"Now we'll see if we can locate the cause  
of that pain."

The specialist's reactions to Nalo's symp-  
toms weren't at all like Dr. Lawson's had  
been. A frown settled over his keen, sen-  
sitive face as he listened through the instru-  
ment. After a tedious, careful examina-  
tion, he remarked:

"You were quite right in thinking your  
case required attention, Mr. Nalo. But  
I'm afraid you have waited entirely too  
long. Unless I'm mistaken, you have a  
serious heart-leak. I'll know positively  
after we use the cardiograph."

Out of that room and into another, and  
Nalo sat down before the delicate heart-  
registering apparatus. His examination  
finally completed, Dr. Parley led the way  
back into the other office. He picked up  
the history card of Nalo's case again be-  
fore he spoke.

"You're a strong man in most respects,  
Mr. Nalo. So I might as well tell you  
the truth at once. The pain you are suf-  
fering comes from a valvular heart-leak,  
an extremely bad case. I doubt if you can  
hope to live longer than six months."

"My God!" Nalo whispered tersely, his  
face now deathly pale. "But isn't there  
something you can do to save me?"

Slowly, thoughtfully, the physician shook  
his head.

"Not a thing, Mr. Nalo, because medi-  
cal science can do nothing in a case as  
far advanced as yours. All you can do  
is to prepare yourself for the worst.

That's why I considered it best to tell you the truth at once."

Nalo had aged ten years in as many minutes. He waited an instant, had to moisten his lips before he asked:

"What about this pain? Will it keep on?"

Dr. Parley had resumed his seat at his desk. He nodded quietly as he answered:

"Not only will it keep on, but it will probably get worse as your system becomes more weakened."

While speaking, the specialist had written a line across the open space on the bottom of the history-card. Nalo, sitting beside the desk, could make out the words—

*Six months to live.*

Shocked at the realization of impending death—that he must continue to suffer until death—the lawyer impulsively remarked:

"If there's no hope of curing me and no relief from this pain, why wait six months?"

The doctor gave Nalo a searching look before he said:

"Don't think of that, Mr. Nalo. Suicide always leaves a stigma of weakness, and you're a strong man morally. We can't stop that pain, but we may be able to check it."

Abruptly, he arose from his desk; stepped to a medicine cabinet in one corner. From a bottle of dark brown fluid, he filled a one-ounce vial, wrote out a direction label, pasted it on, and handed the vial to Nalo.

"That's tincture of digitalis, to slow the heart," he stated. "Carry it with you, and whenever the pain becomes severe, take five drops in a tumbler of water. Not more than that, mind you, and not too often. In its undiluted state, digitalis is poisonous. An overdose means death."

NALO was like a man in a trance as he left the specialist's office. Few men can face death unflinchingly, and the doctor's statement had unnerved him. Dazed at the news, he telephoned his office that he wouldn't return that day, got his car and started home.

Driving toward the exclusive section in which he lived, his thoughts went to Winifred, his wife.

Luckily, he would leave no children. But Winifred was young and happily married. How would she receive the news that she was to become a widow within six months?

Reaching his home, Nalo put the car in the garage and entered the house from the rear. Passing through the kitchen, he heard voices in the library; voices he knew belonged to Winifred and Harry Trent, one of his closest friends.

Trent, a young bond salesman, had been an old suitor for Winifred's hand. He visited the Nalo home frequently; was always welcome there. But something about the way Trent was speaking caused Nalo to stop suddenly in the dining-room.

"You know why I've got to leave, Winifred," Trent was saying with unusual warmth. "I've tried to get over caring for you ever since you married Lawrence. But I can't."

"But why go away because of it?" Nalo heard his wife say in reply. "Lawrence knows we were once engaged; that we still think quite a bit of each other. But he also knows we'd never do anything to betray his confidence."

"No, of course not," Trent answered. "It's fine of him to open his home to a beaten rival. But I'm wondering if he isn't making a mistake. He doesn't realize how it hurts me to see you; to know you are happy with another man."

There followed a brief pause, and Nalo turned to steal out of the room. He hadn't overheard an unfair word in that conversation, but he hadn't expected to. Then his wife's next statement jerked him to an abrupt stop.

"But I'm *not* happy with Lawrence, Harry. That's why I don't want you to leave."

"What?" Trent exclaimed sharply, and Nalo barely checked an exclamation himself. The statement of Dr. Parley that he must die within six months had shocked him no more than had Winifred's announcement that she wasn't happy.

"It's true, Harry," Winifred continued. "Though I have never mentioned it before. I wouldn't have now, if you hadn't spoken of going away. In choosing between you and Lawrence, I married the wrong man. But of course, I'm going to carry on."

"Of course you are," Trent exclaimed rather forcibly. "And that's all the more reason why I should leave at once; to make it easier for you too. I hope you won't ever let Lawrence know what you've just told me."

But Nalo — knowing — was slipping quietly from the house, his strong face paler than when Dr. Parley had announced his verdict. The knowledge that Winifred wasn't happy with him—that in marrying him she had chosen the wrong man—was a much harder blow than knowing he had to die.

CLOSING the kitchen door quietly, he returned to the garage; sat down on the running-board of the car while he tried to collect his thoughts. Neither Trent nor Winifred had hinted of doing any wrong. But that leaky heart meant his death would leave them to happiness together.

A few minutes later Nalo arose and walked around to the front of the house. Winifred, a pretty, nervous, little woman, met him at the door, Trent just behind her. Noting her husband's paleness, she exclaimed:

"Lawrence! You're home early! And you seem ill!"

"I am ill," Nalo answered. Still dazed by the two blows fate had dealt him that day—the certainty of impending death and the loss of his wife's love—he suddenly decided to say nothing about his visit to the specialist's office. He paused in the library, then went upstairs to his room.

Lying down across the bed, he gave himself over to thoughts that weren't pleasant. Reason told him Trent hadn't been unfair; that only his announcement of leaving had caused Winifred to make that impulsive statement. Yet Nalo was conscious of a sudden, unreasonable hatred for the man.

Perhaps Dr. Parley's verdict had paved the way for that hatred. It had warped Nalo's judgment, made it impossible for him to see things clearly. Knowing he faced death, he suddenly resolved that Trent shouldn't have Winifred when he died.

Nalo lay awake most of the night, just thinking. Yet he told Winifred nothing of what was in his mind. And at breakfast, the morning newspaper brought a

shocking piece of information that seemed to fit in with his thoughts.

The front page carried a story that Dr. Parley, on his way to the hospital in response to an emergency call, had been killed in an automobile collision. The specialist had been the only person who knew of Nalo's condition; suspected that he wasn't in the best of health. The physician's death suggested a fiendish plan to Nalo's jealous mind.

TRENT was packing in his apartment the next afternoon when he received a telephone call from Nalo; an invitation to dinner that evening. When Nalo seemed rather insistent, Trent promised to come, although he had resolved not to see Winifred again.

Nalo, who seemed in good spirits when Trent arrived, met him with a hearty welcome. And Winifred, as she greeted the visitor with a bright smile in her brown eyes, showed that her interest in his coming was more than friendly.

Nalo was older than Trent, and considerably less handsome. His heavy face bore an expression almost stolid, unless one looked closely into his blue eyes. The three were in the dining-room, ready to be seated, when Nalo left them to go to the basement. He returned a few minutes later with a bottle of wine.

"Here's something rather choice, Harry," he explained, displaying the bottle. "A bit of rare old port I've been keeping for a special occasion."

Stepping to the buffet, Nalo took down three glasses and filled them from the bottle. He handed one glass to Winifred, another to Trent. But just as he started to lift his own drink, he checked the movement, set down his glass as he said:

"Excuse me again for a moment. I want to take a headache tablet before I eat."

Trent, chatting idly with Winifred, noticed a small, empty bottle on the buffet as Nalo left the room. But Trent's mind, on the matter of Winifred's unhappy marriage and the fact that she still loved him, was unobservant of other things.

Had it been, he might have noticed a queer, hard light in Nalo's eyes when his host returned to the room. Or the odd tone of Nalo's voice when he again picked up his glass and offered a toast to his wife

and guest before he drained it of its contents.

Trent, drinking slowly, saw a queer expression cross Nalo's face as the lawyer set down his empty glass and caught the back of a chair. For an instant, Nalo stood there, smiling strangely. Then he bent forward, gasping, and fell to the floor.

MRS. NALO, dropping her partially filled glass, was beside her husband in an instant. Kneeling, she called him by name, shook his shoulder. Fright made her voice quiver as she turned to Trent.

"Call the doctor quickly, Harry! Doctor Lawson." And she gave him the telephone number. "I'm afraid something terrible has happened to Lawrence."

Trent, obeying quickly, got the physician at once. Dr. Lawson lived only two blocks away, and it seemed that he was at the door by the time Trent had finished explaining. A quick, anxious examination and the doctor said:

"Too late, Mrs. Nalo, but I doubt if I could have helped him had I been here. He must have died instantly, from heart failure, apparently. But I always thought Lawrence was in excellent health."

Standing near the buffet, Trent's eyes again rested on the small, empty bottle he had noticed. Attracted by the word "poison" in red letters on the label, he picked it up.

Across the label was the abbreviation "Tr. Dig.," and penned instructions for taking the medicine. But the bottom of the paper, containing the name of the prescribing physician or druggist, had been scratched off.

It was afternoon the next day before he had an opportunity to get any rest. With Winifred in the care of her mother, he went to one of the guest rooms and threw himself across the bed. He was awakened a short time later by a harsh knock on the door.

Drowsy from his short nap, worn out from loss of sleep, Trent mumbled an inarticulate "come in." But he sat up abruptly when a heavy set, hard-faced man, with a half-smoked cigar in his mouth, pushed into the room.

"You Mister Trent?" the visitor asked sharply, displaying a shield under the lapel of his coat. "I'm Detective Withers, from

headquarters. What do you know about Lawrence Nalo's death?"

"Why, all there is to know, I suppose," Trent replied, a bit taken back by the detective's brusque manner. "I was present as a dinner guest, when Mr. Nalo died."

"Just you and Mrs. Nalo, eh?" the detective suggested. His sharp eyes were watching Trent closely. When Trent nodded, the officer rolled the cigar in his mouth, then said:

"All right. Go on. What was your connection with the Nalos?"

"Why, just a friend. I had known Nalo for years."

"How long have you known his wife—and how well?"

THE question surprised Trent, shocked him for an instant. But he managed to keep his voice calm as he answered:

"I've known Mrs. Nalo even longer than I had known her husband. And about equally well."

Withers nodded quietly, waited while Trent told how Nalo had died. He snapped to attention when Trent mentioned the bottle of wine.

"Notice anything unusual about that?" he interrupted.

"Not a thing," Trent stated. "I had drunk about half a glass of it when Mr. Nalo fell to the floor."

"You say Nalo poured the drinks himself, and left his glass on the table while he left the room. Who touched that glass during his absence?"

"No one. Not a soul," Trent said quickly. "Both Mrs. Nalo and I were across the table from it."

"Neither of you left the room while he was gone?"

"No."

The detective paused, scratched a match across a sole of a shoe to relight his cigar. There was something insistent—something that hinted of a definite purpose in his manner as he returned to the questioning. "You didn't notice Nalo put anything except the wine into his glass?"

Again Trent's reply was negative. The detective leaned forward, his tone a bit sharper, as he asked:

"You saw nothing unusual in the room?"

"No," Trent answered, then started to change his reply as he remembered the

empty bottle he had seen. But Withers, reaching into his pocket, extended a hand as he said:

"Got any idea where *this* came from, Mr. Trent?"

Trent saw that the officer held a small cork between his fingers; a cork that was stained brown at its smaller end. Thoughtfully, Trent took it, studied it for a moment before he spoke.

"Yes, I think that came from a small bottle, an empty bottle labeled 'poison' that I saw on the buffet just before Mr. Nalo collapsed. That's what I was going to tell you about."

"But you didn't tell anyone else about seeing the bottle?" The detective's sharp eyes were bright now; his manner that of a dog on a hot scent. It disconcerted Trent.

"Why no, I didn't," Trent answered, after an instant. "I intended to call it to Dr. Lawson's attention. But Mrs. Nalo was almost hysterical at the time. Since then, I forgot all about it."

Withers smiled meaningly, pocketed the cork.

"Did you handle the bottle, Mr. Trent?"

"Yes, I examined it. But see here, do you mean there's anything wrong about Mr. Nalo's death?"

"Oh, no, nothing except that he was poisoned," the detective said sarcastically. "And that bottle bears your fingerprints. I suppose you've thought that maybe Nalo committed suicide?"

The question was leading; purposely put. But Trent didn't notice that. Thoughtfully, he answered:

"I hadn't thought of it before, though it's odd about that bottle being there. But what motive could Nalo have had for taking his own life?"

"Motive enough, according to a letter he left," Withers said in answer. "But I guess I'll let the district attorney tell you about that. We'll see him at once."

"Does this mean I'm under arrest?" Trent asked sharply, getting to his feet.

"It does, Mr. Trent," the detective snapped, rising and producing a pair of handcuffs. "Nalo was poisoned, had a stomach full of digitalis. The poison bottle shows your fingerprints, and you told no one about it. And Nalo knew his wife was in love with you."

WITHERS snapped the cuffs on Trent's wrists, pushed him out of the room ahead of him. On a chair in the hallway sat another man, apparently another detective, because he nodded to Withers. The second man seemed to be watching the door of Mrs. Nalo's room.

Trent and his captor were at the top of the stairs when a door opened and Winifred looked out. Her face was pale, her eyelids red from crying. Noticing the steel links on Trent's wrists, she hurried through the door, eluded the watching detective and ran to Trent.

"Oh, Harry! Where are they taking you!" she screamed, and fell to the floor.

Trent was taken before the prosecutor at once, forced to recount all he had told Withers. Since proof that Nalo had died from poison had been established, Trent's only conclusion was that the lawyer had committed suicide. When he voiced that opinion, the district attorney said:

"I'll show you something, Mr. Trent; something that indicates it *wasn't* suicide."

From his desk he picked up an envelope, drew out a folded sheet of letter-size paper. Unfolding it slowly, he explained:

"Yesterday, the day before his death, Nalo gave his banker this envelope, with definite instructions that it be opened immediately should he die. When the morning newspapers told of Nalo's death, the banker thought of the letter. Here's a copy of what it contained."

Trent took the paper, dropped his eyes to the typed lines. Across the middle of the single sheet he slowly read:

*Should I die suddenly, please have the authorities make a thorough investigation. What might appear to be suicide or natural death will probably be murder. I know my wife is in love with another man.*

LAWRENCE NALO.

Staring down at the letter, Trent was too amazed to speak for an instant. So Nalo knew Winifred wasn't happy with him; knew she loved another man. But if Nalo had been murdered, who had killed him?

TRENT spent that night in a cell, or rather that part of the night when he wasn't being questioned by Withers and other detectives. Over and over again he told what he knew of Nalo's death, until his mind was dead tired. But all the third-

degree methods used by Withers didn't change his story.

The coroner's inquest was held the next afternoon. Trent was taken there to testify. The jury, told there was a reasonable chance that Nalo had committed suicide provided a motive could be shown, returned a verdict of "death at the hand of a person or persons unknown." But in spite of that verdict, Trent was held in jail.

At first, Trent had denied any feeling except friendship for Winifred. Then he was shown a newspaper article in which she admitted her love for him and she hadn't been happy with Nalo. After that, he relied on truth.

The prominence of the Nalos, the triangle element and the mystery of the case made good "copy" for the newspapers. It aroused public interest, brought the pressure of public sentiment to bear on the district attorney. A direct information was filed and Trent went on trial for murder.

Winifred was a witness, of course, and she was determined to help Trent if she could. But the prosecution skilfully played upon her excitability, made it seem that in trying to shield Trent she was hiding the truth. Her testimony did more harm than good.

Withers was a dominant factor in the prosecution. Throughout the trial, he sat beside the district attorney, suggesting questions and picking flaws in the defense testimony. And on the stand, he told his story in a way that couldn't fail to impress a jury.

At first, Trent couldn't believe his ears when he heard the jury's verdict; couldn't believe those twelve men believed him guilty. He was slumped down in his chair when Winifred, risking a court reprimand, rushed to his side and whispered hurriedly:

"Courage, Harry! I know you're innocent, and justice can't be blind. We'll find a way to save you yet."

A week later, Trent was back in the courtroom; heard the judge sentence him to hang. After that, he was taken to the penitentiary, to wait month after month while his attorney exhausted every means to save him. To wait until dawn the next morning, when he must pay for an error of the law—for a detective's persistence—with his life!

TRENT was stretched out on his cot after the visit of Withers and the warden, trying to steel his nerves for the ordeal ahead, when he heard an iron door clang. He sat up abruptly, wondering if that meant the end for him. Then he saw Warden Meade hurrying down the corridor.

"You're relieved, Trent! You'll be pardoned later! The governor just telephoned. And the people who saved you are waiting in my office."

Inside the warden's office, Trent's blinking eyes took in Winifred Nalo and his attorney. Winifred rushed to meet him, but seemed unable to speak. The attorney explained:

"It was Mrs. Nalo who saved you, Trent. You remember that Doctor Parley, a famous specialist, was killed in an automobile accident the day before Nalo died? Well, yesterday Mrs. Nalo received a statement from the administrator of Dr. Parley's estate—a bill for a physical examination of her husband.

"She couldn't understand that, didn't know Nalo had ever consulted the specialist. She went to the office, demanded to see the books. They showed her that Nalo had been examined by Doctor Parley the day before the specialist was killed; had been told that he had only six months to live."

The attorney paused, reached into his pocket, but Trent didn't interrupt. Bringing out a small card, the lawyer hurried on.

"You remember we based our defense on suicide, Trent, and the prosecution admitted its possibility if we could show a motive for it. When Mrs. Nalo found this, she called me, and we finally saw the governor tonight."

Dazed at the sudden turn of events, Trent took the card; stood looking down at it. It was a patient's history card from Dr. Parley's office, and on the bottom were written two lines. One said Nalo had only six months to live, and the other read:

Threatens immediate suicide.

Glancing from the card to Winifred, Trent knew that he had been first convicted—then saved—by the records in the case!



*A Novelet of  
Crime-Czar  
Politics*

## D. A.'S DIE TOO!

By RICHARD VANCE

**A five-grand reward for an envelope—and a gang bullet for the holder. Marty O'Day followed the taxi girl into a maze of criss-cross murder.**

MARTIN O'DAY bent his thin, flexible cane almost to a loop, let it snap out straight again, and placed it carefully against the park bench beside him. He did not want it in his hand. The feel of it reminded him of other days—and right now such thoughts were unpleasant. He shrugged his coat-collar higher on his neck and jammed his hands deeper in his pockets. It was cold and dark here, and the bench was hard. But it was a good place for his purpose. In this secluded spot he was invisible to

others, while he himself could see through the bush, and by stretching back his head stare at a moon which could not find him.

He had come to the Park to think—think seriously. Should he let his car go or should he tell Knight that he could no longer afford a servant? He shrugged his shoulders. His apartment in the modernistic Jefferson, the low-hung Duesenberg in the garage, and his other numerous expenses would soon send him to Bankruptcy Row if something didn't happen.

Martin O'Day thought of pleasanter

things. Gay nights in Paris. Then in quick flashes, like the news screen, came Berlin, Vienna, Algiers. He stopped the moving picture at Algiers and made a "still" of it. Give him Algiers for adventure, romance. . .

He straightened suddenly in the darkness.

The man was there again; just seemed to step out of the bush, his shadow more than his figure visible on the edge of the moonlight. A quick look up and down the deserted path, perhaps, and back he'd go into the bush. If he would only take one step farther—maybe two, he'd be directly in the moonlight. Certainly he was waiting for someone; watching for someone. Adventure? Romance? And Marty O'Day glanced down at the illuminated dial of his wrist watch. Ten minutes after one. Romance, maybe. But of the back stairs variety. The maid in some apartment, he thought, as he looked above the trees and the towering buildings of a great city.

Then footsteps on the path. Even, steady feet—flat feet. Marty nodded. He thought that he understood feet. This would be a policeman. And it wasn't. For the man who passed under the distant light was in civilian clothes, plain clothes. Plain clothes! That was it. Marty nodded. That would account for those feet. A cop who had jumped the hurdles and become a detective.

Flat-Foot passed the bush where the figure had been lurking. Marty O'Day shrugged his shoulders. This was not the awaited visitor then. This was not . . . But it was. Clearly Marty saw the hidden figure leave the bush again—this time from the other side. He could see him moving across the grass, quickly, stealthily, close to the path. Close to the stretch of moonlight.

And that meant—?

Marty bent forward, lifted his cane from the bench and silently parted the heavy foliage.

Broad shoulders entered the moonlight. A gray slouch hat stretched forward, a snubbed-nosed object shot out breast-high—and the man's whole body sprang ahead.

Marty O'Day tried to cry out his warning to the man on the path. In fact he thought that he did, but he could never be sure of that. The roar of a gun shattered

the silence; the tiniest flash of fire, like a Japanese fire-cracker, cut the blackness—hardly distinct, just like the dull flicker of a dying match. And Marty knew, with a little feeling of nausea, why that flash from the gun was not clear, penetrating, biting through the blackness. It was because the muzzle of the gun had been held close against the back of the man on the path.

Again the gun roared as the figure that had lurked in the bush once more squeezed lead, even as his victim sagged at the knees and sank to the ground.

THINGS happened quickly after that. The man, with the gun still dangling in his hand, dropped to one knee beside his victim. Placing his gun close to the body, he began hurriedly to search his clothing. A practiced hand ran quickly beneath the jacket and came as quickly out again, stained with red. But the hand that had been empty now clutched something long and white. The sigh of satisfaction died upon the killer's lips. He dropped his prize, grabbed his gun and sprang to his feet. Swinging his body suddenly, he jerked up his gun as he heard the soft feet that, beating across the grass, had stepped upon a dry twig.

For a single moment Marty O'Day saw colorless, narrow eyes, a flat nose and thick, snarling lips. And in that moment he saw, too, the white hand come up; the thickness of taut knuckles that held the gun—and he struck. He whipped that cane through the air as he had whipped it through the air many times before. With the unseen speed of a mongoose striking, that whistling stick struck the gun almost on the split-second that that finger tightened upon the trigger.

But the finger did not tighten exactly on that split-second. The gun blazed, a heavy caliber bullet plowed harmlessly into the gravel of the path, and an automatic pistol bounced once and lay shining upon the grass.

The gunman drew back involuntarily, with a curse of rage and pain, and clutched at his hand. It was then that Marty made a dive for the gun upon the grass—a quick, running, bending dive that would prevent the man from jumping him from behind.

But the gunman had no such intention. He turned almost as Marty recovered the

weapon, and dashing into the thick foliage was lost in the night.

Marty, the gun held tightly in his right hand, took a few steps in pursuit—then stopped.

"Two years ago—even eighteen months—and I would have had the gun and the man too," he muttered to himself as he turned again and gave his attention to the figure who lay so still in the moonlight.

The man was dead. No one had to tell Marty O'Day that. He had lived close to death in other days and he knew. And then he saw upon the man's chest the thing that the gunman had sought—and the thing that the gunman had dropped when he swung so suddenly. It was a long white envelope, stained now with red. And in the center of that red was a tiny hole—a tiny hole with blackened, burnt edges. The man must have turned, and the second bullet gone through his jacket pocket before burying itself in his defenseless body.

**B**UT Marty saw something else. In the moonlight and through a smudge of red, Marty O'Day spelled out the name of the man to whom that envelope was addressed. It was Thomas Burke, and Marty knew—as well as any man in the city knew—that Thomas Burke was the famous criminal lawyer who was defending Roscoe Hunt in his sensational trial for the murder of Police Captain Charles Ahern. It was a trial that even the most conservative papers gave the front page; a trial that each day packed the courtroom and even the steps leading to the entrance.

All the newspaper details of that trial flashed before Marty:

Roscoe Hunt, son of a millionaire, arrested by Captain Ahern in a hotel with an actress. His offer of a huge sum of money to Ahern to hush up the thing—Ahern's refusal. Hunt's wife leaving him and suing for divorce; Roscoe Hunt's threat to kill the captain. And the final episode in the private room above a speakeasy, with Captain Ahern dead on the floor—Roscoe Hunt, unconscious, beside him; dazed from liquor and a blow on the head from Ahern's blackjack. The gun beside Hunt—the remembered threat to kill—and now, Roscoe's father hiring Thomas Burke. And the wife, too—who had left Roscoe—was sticking to him in his time of trouble.

And trouble was right! The gun that killed the captain was found beside Roscoe Hunt. There seemed no hope for him—except for the statement of Thomas Burke in that evening's papers that he would spring a surprise in the morning that would free his client and rock the police department to its foundation.

Marty O'Day's flash of things past was jarred back to the present. Uncertainly Marty held that envelope in his hand. Should he leave it there, where he had found it? Should he cry out that a man had been murdered? Should he . . . ?

Marty raised his head and listened.

Someone called from far down the path. Another deeper voice answered. A moment of silence—then the shrill blast of a police whistle. And Marty stood so, the letter still clutched in his hand. He had come back home, hoping to find adventure and romance in his own big city. And now, after two years, he had found—just sordid crime.

He could do the dead detective no good by waiting there. As for the letter, he could do no better by his duty and his conscience than deliver it to Thomas Burke. Decidedly, he didn't want to be mixed up in this sort of thing. Besides, the document he held in his hand might be of great value and he might even be accused of—

No. He'd leave it where he found it.

And he thought no more. Another whistle cut the night. The sound of running feet came from far down the path. Marty O'Day turned, and taking his cue from the fleeing gunman, ran quickly into the foliage and toward the east entrance of the Park.

## II

**D**ID someone else jump from the foliage as Marty entered it? Was the gunman coming back to make sure his victim was dead, or simply to recover the document for which he had taken a life? But Marty O'Day didn't stop to consider that. He made his decision and stuck to it, and that decision was—flight.

Things were different than they used to be. Not that Marty felt winded as he dashed across a stretch of open field, entered the thickness of a tiny forest, dodged in and out among the trees. But he felt other things; things that he put down as

nerves. Nerves, that he thought he never possessed. But distinctly he had the feeling that someone followed him—that light, running feet beat in with his.

He turned twice and saw nothing, dashed into the heaviness of dense bush, spied a tiny hedge, leaped it quickly and easily and came to a sudden halt on the edge of the drive. Now he saw the east entrance to the park and the small stone wall. He walked slowly toward the avenue, the lights, and the heavy-set man who leaned against the pillar of stone to the left of the entrance.

Marty, thoroughly conscious of the penetrating eyes that regarded him from beneath the dark gray felt hat, slowed to a pace that helped his labored breathing. He was turning into the avenue when the man stepped out and spoke.

"Good evening."

The huge form completely blocked Marty's path. But the eyes of the man were not on Marty, but on the envelope that Marty for the first time realized he still clutched in his left hand. He was glad, though, that he had slipped the gun into his pocket. He thought of the dead man in the park, tucked his right hand into his jacket pocket and about the murderer's gun and glanced down himself at the white envelope in his hand. The red stains were away from the man who barred his way, and the tiny hole through the envelope was hidden by his fingers. With as little concern as possible, Marty folded the envelope with a single deft movement and tucked it away.

"Good evening." Marty looked straight into the stranger's face now, or what he could see of it, and wondered if the man had heard the shots—and if he were a police officer.

"Been in the park?" the man asked, his eyes seeming to narrow as he ran them down Marty's immaculate attire.

Marty smiled and jerked his cane the tighter under his arm.

"I don't know who told you," he said lightly, and with some sarcasm, "but it is quite true that I have been in the park."

"Yeah—" The man stuck the end of a match between his teeth, moved a couple of feet to the left as Marty would have passed and said, "Where are you going now?"

Marty O'Day stiffened. There was really nothing threatening in the man's attitude save for the right hand that was sunk in his jacket pocket.

"I don't know as it is any of your business." Marty had seen two men on the other side of the street and a uniformed policeman walking along the sidewalk close to the stone wall. With such company and his own hand on a gun, Marty saw little to fear from this man—unless! He cursed himself for a fool. There was the letter stained with blood, and the murderer's gun in his pocket. But he tried to carry that dignity of bearing that had so often helped him.

"Police officer." The man jerked his coat open and back quickly, but Marty had caught the flash of the badge and, he thought, the letters that spelled out *Inspector* upon the shield. "Been a few hold-ups in the park. Live hereabouts?"

Marty nodded.

"The Eldorado Apartments," Marty lied quickly. "I often walk in the park late, and—" Marty stopped and gave thanks for the idiosyncrasies of those who live in a big city. A prepossessing figure with white spats, a heavy cane, a gardenia in his buttonhole—and a tiny dog on the end of a leash was coming from the park.

The man at the gate looked shrewdly at Marty again, shrugged his shoulders, and stepping aside gave his attention to the overdressed man who was leaving the park.

MARTY O'DAY turned, went casually down the avenue, crossed at the corner and was thankful for the taxi that drew up alongside and the driver who called out his offer.

As for the murderer's gun, Marty had simply wiped the butt clean with his handkerchief and dropped it over the park wall.

"To the Eldorado Apartments," Marty said easily. He jerked open the door of the taxi and stepped inside. It would be easy for him to leave the cab there, double back a few blocks and enter his own apartment, the Jefferson.

He closed the taxi door softly, dropped back with a sigh, and running a hand over a moist forehead, laughed uneasily. It wasn't so simple to go back two years then. Easy living had made him soft. Not physically. Mentally soft, was what he thought.

And there were nerves in his body, too. Nerves that he had never suspected.

The cab started—and the door Marty had closed jerked open. A small body fairly shot into the car, a white face for a moment shone in the darkness, and instinctively both Marty's hands shot out. There was the soft fragrance of hair brushing his cheek, the slightest touch of perfume that was pleasant in his nostrils, and the next instant Marty held a woman—a girl, he thought—tightly in his arms.

She gave a startled little cry that didn't reach the driver. Then she laughed, a little uncertainly, a little fearfully.

"I didn't know the taxi was engaged. I—you're hurting my wrists."

Marty let the girl sink to the seat beside him. Not much to fear from her. She was such a slip of a thing. But then—things had happened tonight, and while it was foolish, perhaps, to connect the girl up with that brutal event in the park, it would be just as foolish not to be careful.

"Are you in the habit of jumping into a taxi like—like you did?" He finished rather lamely. He couldn't see her face—that is, her features—there in the darkness, but he could see, or at least feel, that eyes were watching him. Big, wondering eyes. And the girl spoke.

"I was frightened. I was in the park—and I ran away."

"In the park?" Marty was startled. "What did you see there?" he added, almost harshly.

"Why—nothing." The girl seemed surprised. "I—went out with a man—and I had to run away. There—I'm sorry. You can let me out any place. I'll be all right—I'll find another cab."

She started to cry softly.

"Now what?" Marty tried to see her face, but beneath an occasional street light he saw only two hands and the little white handkerchief that was pressed against her eyes.

"I haven't any money. I lost my bag." And after a sob, and very suddenly as she clutched his arm, "Let me out any place. Give me five cents. I'll pay you back."

Marty O'Day laughed. He couldn't help it. It was just that little bit of comedy that broke the tension. And he had thought for a moment that she might be connected

with the bloody, tragic events of the night!

"Don't worry," Marty assured her easily. "I won't put you under any such staggering financial obligation. I'll take you home." He patted her shoulder as if she were a child. Patted! Then he ran a hand quickly down her arm and held it at the wrist. He jerked that wrist slightly forward, held it so a moment, and plainly in the flicker of light from a street lamp saw the flutter of an envelope which fell to the floor of the taxi.

*The envelope.*

MARTY O'DAY knew now why she had leaned against him. Why she had clutched at his arm. But the girl was the first to speak.

"Why do you want that envelope?" she demanded more than asked. And Marty noted the change in her voice. Not the timid, weeping child of a moment before. Her voice was alert, quick, and her eyes snapped even in the darkness.

"I might ask the same question of you," Marty countered. He picked up the envelope and put it back in his pocket.

"And I'll answer it." She fairly shot the words at him. "I want it to save a man's life—and perhaps to take the life of another man. Two now—since the murder in the park."

"Yes?" Marty was trying to tie things up together. "You saw the murder then?"

"No. Or I would have prevented it. But I was there just as you struck the gun from his hand. The envelope was for me. I was waiting farther down the path, by the summer house."

"It was addressed to you then?"

She shook her head. "It would be addressed to Thomas Burke. Come! You're an honest man. It doesn't belong to you. It will save a man's life. You may have guessed its value. I'll pay you well for it. A thousand dollars *now*. What good can the envelope do you? Everyone can use money."

"Can they?" Then, after a pause, "The letter is going to the man it's addressed to."

"I wish I could believe you," she said. "But even if I could, what good would it do? You'd be just a child in their hands. They'd simply take it from you. No—you've got to give it to me."

Her other hand reached out.

"And just how," said Marty O'Day, his vanity slightly stung, "would they take it from me?" He smiled to himself at the girl's lack of understanding. If she knew exactly who he was; what he had seen; the things he had faced and—

He jarred erect.

With a single quick twist the girl had jerked her wrist free, and even as Marty reached out for it her right hand slipped toward him. Nickel flashed in the darkness, and a small revolver was jabbed against his side.

"Just like that." The soft voice was now hard. "Give me the envelope!" was all that she said.

And that was all she needed to say, Marty thought. There was a coldness, a determination, almost a sinister warning—that took the smile from Marty's lips and forced his hand into his pocket again; his fingers onto the crispness of that envelope. He had a feeling that he was facing death. And—he was going to give her that envelope.

The taxi stopped with a jar, the chauffeur jumped from behind the wheel and was jerking at the door. They were at the Eldorado Apartments. Marty could see the girl's eyes flashing over his shoulder and he half turned his head. A policeman was standing close to the apartment entrance. He was talking to a sleepy doorman who was eyeing the cab.

The feeling of death went. Marty O'Day's lips curled pleasantly. The door of the cab opened and he spoke to the driver.

"You will take the young lady to—to where she wants to go," he finished lamely, as he saw the gun disappear. And to the girl he half whispered, "Don't worry about that envelope. It will go to Thomas Burke." But he kept his eyes on her hands as he backed to the sidewalk, half jerked his head back at the cop by the door, and added, "I'm giving you a break tonight, little lady. A real break."

And as he tucked his cane under his arm and fished for money in his pocket she slid over to his side of the car, crouched back in the darkness and beckoned him close.

"I'm sorry about the gun," she whispered slowly. "It seemed the only way. But thanks for the break. Here's one in re-

turn. If that envelope reaches Thomas Burke an innocent man's life is saved. But a guilty man will die. Look out, Mr. Meddlesome Stranger, for that guilty man. For it looks as if you can't be reasoned with alive." And as Marty started a question, "Give the driver an extra dollar and tell him to turn at the next corner and go across town. I'll be leaving him in the middle of the block but he won't know it. Look out for that guilty man."

"And who," said Marty O'Day, "will I look out for?"

"Look out," said the girl slowly, "for a protector of citizens." A moment of hesitation, and then, leaning close to his ear, "Look out for a police officer. Inspector John H. Twait."

### III

THE street before the Jefferson apartment house was deserted when Marty entered. He turned, nodded a cheerful good night to the sleepy night man, hesitated a moment, then crossed the modernistic lobby. But in that quick turn he had seen a man cross the street, look hurriedly up at the name above the door and pass from view.

Crossing the hall to the elevators, Marty, in sudden impulse, swept up one of the long envelopes on the writing desk. Entering one of the smaller automatic lifts, he pressed a button and ascended to the fourteenth floor. Two minutes later his only servant, Knight, had let him into his apartment.

"You were longer than usual, Mr. Marty." Knight made no effort to hide his anxiety as he took O'Day's hat and watched him, with some trepidation, retain his cane. "Not the cane, sir?" he said. "Surely . . ."

"Twenty feet, Knight," Marty said sharply, though his lips and eyes smiled. "So—like a soldier on parade. Eyes closed, now. Arm extended. No peeking!" And when Knight obeyed, "There! As good as ever."

Marty had rested his cane upon the floor, placed the index finger of his right hand upon the curved handle, lifted that finger suddenly—and the cane sprang like a living thing across that twenty feet of space, slipped almost gently against Knight's chest, the curved handle tucking itself

most snugly around his outstretched arm.

"It's all an illusion—done with mirrors," Marty said lightly as Knight opened round, shocked eyes. "Bred from the best steel in Sheffield, but made and educated in Sicily, Knight. I have always claimed that it's the flexibility of the thin, outside steel, though Martinia, who made it, is equally as emphatic that it's the coils of heavy steel inside that does the trick. But the heavy coils, that seem to act as a spring, Knight, I had him place there mostly for the weight. It makes a very serviceable weapon, you know, and— Come—come! Knight, you're not disappointed that I still retain the knack."

"No, sir. Not exactly, sir." And with almost a tremor in his voice, "But it don't mean you're going back—we're going to have those old, wild days again?"

Marty crossed the room and laid a hand affectionately on the man's shoulder.

"We may have to go back, Knight. You should be retiring on a pension, and you haven't been paid in months. I suspect, sometimes, it is not my credit, but your pocket-book, which supplies the larder. But it won't be here in the city. It's not the place for us. A bit sordid for our way of thinking. Forgive my little show of enthusiasm. I had a touch of the past tonight; just a touch, Knight. Put away the stick, and—"

Marty stopped. The door bell of the apartment rang suddenly, sharply, and no one had been announced from below. Indeed, no one would be calling at . . . Marty stretched out a hand and took Knight's arm as he started toward the door.

"Answer it, of course, Knight," he said. "But—but I think I'll just keep the stick."

Knight's expressive blue eyes opened even wider, but he didn't speak as Marty lifted the dark brown length of steel that looked like a plain ebony cane.

"I won't see anyone, Knight—unless, of course, it is very important business."

"I WANT to see Mr. O'Day," said a deep, gruff voice as the big figure behind it thrust itself into the hall, "and I don't need announcing." He fairly threw his huge form down the hall and turned into the living-room.

Marty's hand was reaching for the phone as the man entered.

"If you're thinking of calling the police you don't have to." The man fairly belowered the words. "I'm the police."

"So you are." Marty sat down on the couch, then peering in pretended intentness at the man, repeated, "So you are. You're the man who wished me such a pleasant good night at the park gate."

"Yeah—that's me. And, Mr. Martin O'Day, I want that envelope—the one you carried in your hand."

"Ah! yes." Marty ran a hand along the cane. "The one I carried in my hand."

The big man stood by the table now. His breath was slightly labored as he leaned both hands upon it.

"If you can't talk sense here, we can talk it somewhere else. I don't mind telling you that I'm Inspector John Twait, from Headquarters. And I don't mind telling you that a man was murdered in the park tonight—just before you left it." Inspector John Twait raised a hand and caressed one of his twin chins.

"Are you by any chance accusing me of murder?" There was just the slightest lift to Marty O'Day's thin eyebrows. "If so, Inspector, I am willing to go along with you. Knight"—Marty called sharply to Knight, who waited in the hall, "you will call my lawyer and explain that I have gone along with Inspector Tw—Ta—. But no matter—simply say 'an Inspector.' A big man with two chins, rather small eyes, a not over-clean shirt, and—"

"You stay where you are." Inspector Twait turned suddenly on Knight, and then to Marty in a slightly modified tone, "It may not come to that. If you'll send your servant to—to his room, I'd like to talk with you."

"You may go to bed, Knight." Marty smiled and turned languidly to the inspector, who did not speak until a door closed far back in the apartment.

The inspector stepped to the living-room door, closed it and turned the key in the lock.

"Just a precaution, sir," he said, "if you're reasonable." And the 'sir' made Marty sit up a bit straighter and finger his cane.

"Unpleasant business." It was with an effort the inspector tried to be amiable. "Very unpleasant. I made a few inquiries downstairs. Not much, but enough to con-

vince me that you would hardly be mixed up in such a thing. But you were in the park—you had an envelope in your hand. Not a word yet! I don't mind telling you I know for a fact that you took that envelope from the body of the murdered man. I want that envelope." A moment's pause, while the officer leaned across the flat table, both his huge hands upon it. "I want to deliver it to its rightful owner. We won't have any trouble, eh?"

Marty tried to fall in with this new attitude. He didn't want to be mixed up in the thing. He didn't want to be dragged down to Headquarters. And remembering what the girl had said concerning Inspector John Twait, he didn't want to be dragged anywhere—and wouldn't be.

"I know nothing about the events of tonight," Marty said slowly. And then with emphasis, when he saw the eyes of the officer knit; the mouth set grimly and cruelly, "And I don't want to be mixed up in any such—such 'unpleasantness.' Let me assure you that the envelope—if there was an envelope—will be delivered to its proper owner."

"Yeah—" said the inspector. "You wouldn't do anything to hamper the course of justice? The man who was killed in the park was Detective Shay, one of my men. He had picked up private information—information that is most important in a murder trial. Just turn that envelope over to me—and I'll leave you out of it."

Marty O'Day shrugged his shoulders.

"Have no worry, Inspector. The envelope will be . . ."

THE inspector's face changed suddenly. Eyes narrowed and leered evilly—thick lips quivered. With a single movement his right hand shot beneath his jacket and flashed out again. A heavy automatic was pointed straight at Marty. Marty looked down the dark hole in the end of the gun, and his fingers slid along the cane so that one hand was at each end of it. His right hand, holding the curved handle, twisted slightly—nothing more; the left hand, far down close to the ferrule, tightened. He was looking at the inspector's chin, measuring the distance and wondering if the policeman would become melodramatic and ask him to raise his hands.

"I want that letter." If the inspector's

lips trembled slightly his voice didn't. "We don't always work according to the police regulations, Mr. O'Day. Now—where is it?"

Marty smiled.

"The letter," he said, "will be delivered to its proper owner."

Inspector John Twait did not speak. He simply raised his right hand slightly, stretched his arm a bit, then brought the nose of his gun straight down across Marty O'Day's forehead. The blow didn't knock Marty unconscious. Inspector Twait didn't intend that it should. But it stunned Marty for a second or two. Then he felt the warm trickle that ran down his forehead, across the bridge of his nose—and he tasted blood in his mouth. The inspector was speaking again. Slowly, calmly—but with a hard, sinister determination in his words.

"I'm all for business instead of talk," Inspector Twait was saying. "I haven't the time nor the inclination to search your place. The next swipe down your forehead will cut into the bone. Where's that envelope?"

"There." Marty nodded sulkily toward the half dozen books upon the table. "Under them."

The inspector half grinned, moved his left hand to the books, pushed a couple aside, felt of the envelope, jerked it into his hand with a little exclamation of satisfaction, and for the fraction of a second glanced down at it. Then Marty jerked back the curved handle of his cane and released it from his right hand.

There was a sudden whirring, though it is doubtful if Inspector Twait heard it. There was a dull thud and a humming sound as the steel cane, released from the right hand of Marty O'Day, caught the officer flush on the end of the jaw. The glint of satisfaction died in the inspector's eyes, leaving them dull and with a fixed stare. Then, without a word he fell forward across the table.

MARTY O'DAY came to his feet, whistling softly. He picked up the automatic. He extracted the envelope from the limp fingers of Inspector Twait. Then carefully copying the address upon the envelope he had taken from the desk below he placed the blood-stained envelope in-

side of it, carefully sealed and stamped it and called Knight.

"Drop this in the mail chute in the hall," he instructed his man. "Then visit that friend of yours on the seventeenth floor. Be gone an hour anyway. And, Knight, if you are questioned later you may say that you took a letter across town and mailed it in the box outside a branch post office. Quick!" he ordered sharply, as a book fell to the floor in the living-room behind him and a man gasped and half cursed.

When Marty returned to the living-room Inspector Twait was still bent across the table, but his hands were on it now and he was forcing himself to his feet.

"Feel better?" Marty patted him on the back.

"What happened?" Inspector John Twait straightened, clutched spasmodically at his head, ran a hand across his eyes and sank into the chair Marty pulled out for him.

"You had a spell," Marty told him. He walked to a closet below a cigarette stand, extracted a bottle of whiskey and poured the inspector a stiff drink. "I'll have to wait on you myself," he apologized. "I sent my servant across town to mail a letter—a rather important letter. You were alarmed about it. Don't you remember?"

The inspector half jerked to his feet, flopped back in the chair again as he saw his own gun hanging in Marty's hand. Then he tossed off the drink of whiskey and smiled. No one would leave that building and mail a letter. Two men waiting outside would see to that. He felt almost good-natured despite the blow.

"Well, well." He looked at Marty. "If that's true we'll have no more to say about the letter. But I might hold you for assault. I was struck from behind, wasn't I?" And he looked at Marty with a new interest.

"I tell you," said the inspector at the door in parting, "it riles a cop like me to have one of his men murdered, and then have a stranger like you try to regulate police business. I'm not saying I wasn't a bit quick tempered and didn't over-step my authority. Maybe you'll look at it as over-enthusiasm. But I could make more trouble for you than you could for me. I might, you know, hold you for murder.

You were there, you see, and you fled the scene of a crime. Shall we call it quits—since you sent the letter?"

"The thing is already forgotten." Marty smiled. "If you don't put me to further inconvenience I won't put you to any. And be assured, Inspector, that that little alligator bag of Thomas Burke's, which the afternoon sheets so elegantly describe, will in the morning contain the blood-stained envelope."

As he half-closed the door he handed Inspector Twait his gun. "I'd load it, Inspector," he smiled as he saw the indecision on the officer's face, "before I threatened anyone else tonight. And in case you're looking for Knight, to make sure he mailed the letter—don't bother. He has a way of leaving by the rear entrance. Good night."

The door closed. Inspector Twait stood in the hallway, his empty gun in his hand. His thoughts were not pleasant. Despite the cry of the more sensational newspapers to the contrary, there were too many honest police officers on the Force. Frank Shay was one, and he was dead. Inspector John Twait had been on the Force for twenty-five years and was a rich man. Now his past was creeping up on him. From a free glass of beer at the private entrance to a saloon back in the days before prohibition, his path of glory had led to murder.

His jaws clenched.

He wasn't sorry now. Not about the dead Detective Shay. But that envelope contained Shay's full statement on the death of Captain Ahern, and Shay—dead—was now more of a menace than Shay, living. Shay had information and he had died to protect it. And he had protected it.

Inspector John Twait grunted gruffly.

#### IV

IT was exactly nine o'clock on Wednesday morning when Inspector John Twait pulled a cigar from his mouth and laid it carefully on the edge of the table in the little curtained booth of the speakeasy and looked at Sam Boardman.

Sam had a flat nose, thick lips, colorless eyes, and wore a hundred and fifty dollar suit.

"Nothing doing, eh?" Inspector Twait

repeated Sam's last words. "That's what you think?"

"That," Sam Boardman said slowly, "is what I think."

Inspector Twait half came to his feet and leaned heavily upon the table.

"Okay, boy." He put those pig-like eyes on Sam. "You understand fully. If that brief case goes into court with that blood-stained envelope, I—" He paused a moment. "They'll burn me, Sam."

"That," said Sam easily, "is your business. I done my part in rubbing out Shay."

"You were paid for it. Well paid for sticking a gun in a lad's back on a lonely road and squeezing the trigger. You ain't got the guts for this job, Sam."

"Guts!" Sam threw up expressive eyebrows. "I ain't a fool, if that's what you mean. Burke's guarded. Never travels the same way to court twice. You said, yourself, there's only one place. On the courthouse steps, as he goes in. You've said, too, the bulls damn near have to rope the steps off to keep the crowd back."

"I know crowds; have studied them and handled them for years. They'll be stunned—then a panic. I'll see to that. Why, you'll be safer than if you and Burke were alone at midnight in the park."

Sam Boardman parted his lips and showed his teeth in what might have been meant for a smile. Then he bit off the end of a match, chewed it a moment, spat it across the table and said:

"You've had my last word. Those what know Sam Boardman know—"

"How old are you, Sam?" cut in Inspector Twait.

"What the hell?" But noting the serious look on Twait's face, Sam added, "Twenty-eight. Why?"

"Nothing." Twait shrugged his shoulders. "I've got twenty years on you. It ain't so hard on me, but it's human nature. I don't want to fry, neither."

"What do you mean—'neither'?"

"I don't know. I'm a sociable fellow, Sam. They can't burn a guy more than once, you know. I like company." And then, almost viciously, as he leaned across the table, "Before I burn I'll talk."

Sam Boardman half came to his feet, stuck a hand beneath an armpit, looked through the tiny crack in the curtains be-

fore the room beyond, and back to Inspector Twait.

"There's a couple of boys waiting for me outside, Sam," said the inspector easily. "Big, rough fellows. You and me ain't going to quarrel over a thing like this, are we, Sam?"

"No," said Sam, "we ain't. There ain't a guy I could get to do it." He looked toward the low, slanting ceiling of the booth. "Not a guy."

"No—" Inspector Twait nodded. "You're the only one I'd trust. You're quick. You're sure. You've got the nerve—and you've got an interest. It wouldn't be good for you if things went wrong—neither."

"Neither!" Sam chewed the word on the end of his tongue and didn't like the taste of it. It was some time before he spoke. His views on the killing had changed considerably. His thoughts, now, were all on the commercial end. He talked price. His voice was friendly.

INSPECTOR TWAIT put a hand in his pocket and produced a roll of bills.

"Three grand," he told Sam, then seeing his face, "Just to go on with. It's hard to raise jack quick. There'll be two more in it for you by tonight."

"There's a lot of people interested?" Sam Boardman was a business man.

"Yeah. Good boys, Sam. Big boys, who won't be averse to doing you a turn if—when you're in trouble."

"Yeah." Sam nodded emphatically. "I'll see to that. But what about the envelope after the bump?"

"I'll take care of that. I don't want anything else on your mind."

"No." Sam shook his head. "It ain't like Burke didn't read it, though he won't do anything or say nothing till he throws the bomb in court. But they're apt to accuse you and search you. Eddie Smith can get it in the excitement, if you stir things up enough. I'll give it to you tonight, when you bring the other two grand."

Inspector John Twait bit his lip. But Sam was right. He simply nodded his head and said:

"Okay. You'll handle the get-away car and all that."

"Sure." Sam nodded. "I'll fix that."

Cripes! Twenty minutes after nine. Not much time for the job."

Inspector Twait patted him on the back and smiled encouragement.

"Plenty of time for you, Sam. It don't take but a second to close a finger on a trigger. I can count on you?"

"Sure." He nodded again. "I'll give Burke the works at ten sharp—if he's on time. See you some more." And to himself Sam added, "I'll knock that big stiff, Twait, over some day."

"Some more," said Inspector Twait, and to himself he muttered, "Sam's getting too smart—too wise. I wonder what Benny would rub him out for?"

But as soon as he left the booth and departed from the "speak," Inspector Twait's smile of easy confidence vanished and deep lines played about the heavy, loose skin of his face. Sometimes it was tough, trying to make a bit of jack out of the racket. But he tried to cheer himself with the thought that they couldn't electrocute a man more than once, and if Burke walked into that court with that brief case he was doomed. So—there were no two ways about it. It was his life or Burke's.

No other way out of it.

## V

HUNDREDS of people who had failed to gain admittance to the court lined the steps to watch the little white-haired attorney, Thomas Burke, arrive. Most of the crowd jamming both sides of the courthouse steps were there for a thrill; a thrill they could not name; an uncertain curiosity that they did not understand.

Yet rumor held that, this Wednesday morning, big things were in the wind. Detective Shay had been murdered in the park. Detective Frank Shay was to have been called as a witness for the defense and Detective Frank Shay had been expected to say some harsh things about a certain member of his department. Now he was dead. Murdered! And the question was—Was he a better witness dead than living? Rumors fly quickly. And while the morning papers had flashed great headlines that because of the murder of Frank Shay, Roscoe Hunt was doomed, a rumor that sprang from nowhere and was seemingly without foundation spread quickly and was ac-

cepted by the crowd. That rumor was—that Frank Shay, dead, was twice as valuable to the defense as Frank Shay, living.

An extra was already on the street. An extra which cried out: "*Dead Men Do Tell.*"

Marty O'Day stood well down at the foot of those steps, close against the rope that the police had felt was necessary to keep the crowd in line this particular morning. It wasn't simply an idle curiosity that brought him there. He fingered the gash on his forehead and set his lips grimly. He had sent that letter and he wondered if Inspector John Twait would be there to face the music. And he wondered, too, what that music would be. A funeral march, as the girl had more than hinted. But his vindictiveness against Inspector Twait was no more than his curiosity, perhaps, to see the girl again. He thought it likely that she . . .

And he saw Inspector Twait. He was coming through the open door of the court building. He was good-naturedly helping the uniformed police in their efforts to keep the crowd back against the ropes. He smiled, too, and more than once straightened out the crowd with the force of his huge body. Marty drew his head back, so as to hide his scarred face behind the woman who held a crying baby in her arms.

Then a murmur broke out in the crowd. A couple of policemen went to the door of the big black limousine that drew up to the curb. The door of the limousine opened; two men from the Intercity Detective Agency alighted and waited, standing one on either side of the car door. They looked the crowd over and straightened. They were important and they knew it and liked it.

Thomas Burke stepped from the car. His head didn't reach to the shoulders of either of his guards. His shoulders were slightly bent; his body seemingly frail, but his step was light—boyish. His head, however, was massive, his eyes keen, bright and sharp—and his face the set mask of the veteran poker player. The crowd did not bother him. He liked playing to the gallery. It was part of his stock in trade.

There was a confidence in his manner, an assurance in the set of his chin, a glint in his eyes. The worn alligator bag, that had been with him through many cam-

paings, was grasped tightly in his right hand. He started up the steps between his two companions.

And it happened. Marty heard the shot and heard the scream of the woman beside him. Then another shot—and a third following quickly. Marty turned just as Thomas Burke dropped his alligator bag, clutched at his chest, muttered something unintelligible and sank slowly to the steps.

AS Thomas Burke collapsed Marty looked at the crowd behind Burke. For a moment he saw again, as he had seen in the park the night before, colorless eyes, a flat nose and thick, snarling lips. Then the face was gone. The police for a moment closed in around the silent form. Two excited private detectives frantically waved revolvers. Someone shouted an order and the police were back at the lines again, but too late to straighten out the pushing, mauling, panic-stricken men and women.

Burke's law partner, Leonard Adams, was shouting something from the courthouse entrance. It concerned the alligator bag and the envelope that bag contained. But no one heard him at the moment, and though he fought desperately he could not reach his fallen senior partner.

Marty thought quickly; thought what the murderer would do once the crime was committed. He would seek the street of course; a car that was waiting, and put as great a distance as possible between himself and the murder he had so brutally committed.

So Marty fought his way through the crowd to the sidewalk; to the street itself and across it, watching for colorless eyes, a flat nose and thick lips. But he was watching also for a heavily curtained car, with the motor running.

And Marty saw neither, for Marty had guessed wrong. Sam Boardman had fought his way up the steps, squeezed through the door to the courthouse, lighted a cigarette with trembling fingers and let himself be waved back and forth by the new crowd that were coming from the courtroom.

Sam's head nodded, but his fingers shook as he shoved a hand inside his pocket and felt of the envelope that had been passed to him. Then he slid toward a side door,

managed to get it open and, hurrying down a long, deserted corridor, crossed to the block behind, and descending a flight of steps passed out on a deserted street.

The get-away car was waiting, the engine running. Excited faces looked out at Sam as he walked slowly across the sidewalk, fighting the impulse to run the last few steps, and finally reached the car.

"Fool!" Sam cried irritably as he knocked down the nose of a Tommy-gun one of the men in the car held half-raised—and to the driver, "On your way."

"What happened, Sam—what's the racket?" a ferret-faced man asked.

"Nothing much." For the first time Sam's muscles relaxed, and then in pride at what he thought his own heroism, "Nothing—'cept an old goat got kicked over on the courthouse steps."

Sam had done his work well—done it easily. Twait had been right about crowds. Even the woman whose eardrums he had almost shattered with the exploding gun had not looked at him. Yes, he was a keen workman; none better than Sam Boardman. He stroked his chin thoughtfully looked at the boys in the car with him. All willing to go any length for Sam Boardman, none who would squeal if he was caught. Guys who would face the chair with silent mouths, not rats who would threaten to squawk—like dirty, yellow cops. That was it. Twait was a cop. All cops were rats.

Sam looked at the boys again—and Sam's thoughts, if they would not exactly have surprised Inspector John H. Twait, certainly would have warned him.

## VI

MARTY O'DAY missed the get-away car, but he did see the powerful coupé that came down the side street from the back of the Court and he did recognize the occupant of that coupé. Though the car was gathering speed, Marty stepped out onto the street, and as the coupé passed swung easily onto the running board.

"That," said Marty as he jerked open the door and sat down beside the girl, "is what I call an even break. You hop into my car and I hop into yours. I haven't any envelope, so I presume you haven't any gun."

The girl eyed him from the sides of slightly closed brown eyes. He nodded his approval. In the clear light of day she was all he had hoped she'd be. He liked the definite cut of her features, the curve at the corners of her straight, firm mouth when she smiled. He liked, too, the direct appraisal of himself he felt in those steady eyes and the undisturbed way she had taken his sudden appearance.

"You're wrong about the gun." She nodded, and the smile went. "As for the envelope! A car just went down the block behind; the envelope was in it. But I've been finding out a few things about you. You can use money, can't you?" She spoke casually.

"Maybe." Marty didn't like the indifference with which she mentioned looking into his affairs. "Where are you going now?"

"Driving you home. The Jefferson. That wasn't a very hard guess," she forestalled the question on his lips. "The envelope bore the return address of The Jefferson. The landlord was freely vindictive about your financial instability when a supposed brokerage house inquired. It's after the first of the month again and he'll want his money this time."

Marty laughed.

"We'll forgive him for that. If it wasn't for him I wouldn't be with you now. He's partly the reason I rose early—and I like to sleep late. There was another reason, too," Marty did not try to hide his admiration now, as he looked at the girl. "Do you want to hear it?"

The girl turned and regarded him coldly for a moment, then gave her attention to the road again.

"That envelope," she said abruptly, "contained the signed statement of Detective Frank Shay. It can save the life of Roscoe Hunt. Now—I know who has it. Sam Boardman, who killed Shay and shot Thomas Burke. No—" she shook her head as Marty would have interrupted—"Inspector Twait wouldn't dare have it in that crowd. Things are getting too close to him."

"And you think to—to get that letter?"

"I have to," she said. "I have to!"

"It's like the pictures." Marty lit a cigarette. He was beginning to enjoy himself. "You're Roscoe Hunt's sister, or his

—his—" and he didn't feel quite so contented.

"Not his wife," a moment's pause, "nor his sister. I'm afraid you'll find little of romance in it, if that's what you're looking for. If you must know the truth, Inspector Twait killed Captain Ahern. He had to, because Ahern was honest. Roscoe Hunt was found drunk beside the body, you know—but Twait killed Ahern."

"If you know that, why—?"

"That's knowledge, not evidence. You can't convict a man before a jury with knowledge; you have to have evidence. Roscoe Hunt is not bad. His wife loves him—she's stuck to him since the trial. And he loves her. It takes trouble to bring people together, but if I don't get that envelope the chair will part them again. Roscoe's father is worth a million. He'll spend anything to get the boy clear. Thomas Burke is a lawyer—the best in the city. He knows where to dig up hidden facts—shady people."

"And," Marty asked, "just where do you fit in the picture?"

"Me?" She shrugged her shoulders. "I'm one of the shady people."

"BUT just what chance will you have with this murderer—this gangster, Boardman?"

"Oh!" she said. "He won't know what I'm after. He won't suspect me."

"But you—a girl like you! Why, you'll never get within a—"

"Oh, yes, I will. Tonight."

"But it's crazy. Impossible. You— If you should meet him you wouldn't be safe a moment. But you couldn't possibly meet him and—"

"But I could," she said. "Don't have any illusions about me, Mr. Marty O'Day. You see, Sam Boardman is a friend of mine."

Marty just gasped at her. The thing was preposterous—impossible. He didn't speak.

"That got you a bit, didn't it?" the girl said. "You're looking for romance and you're finding reality. Well—I've looked for romance too—and it isn't there. Now—" there was a peculiar twist to her lips as she jerked the car to a stop before the Jefferson. "Now—do you want to help me?"

"Yes." Marty's black eyes looked

straight into her brown steady ones. "I want to help you."

"Well—" she looked him up and down as he stood on the curb beside the car, "you're class; you're a new face; you've got a front." She hesitated a moment, then placed a hand upon his arm and the coldness went out of her voice, and she smiled a sad little smile, Marty thought. "I saw you in the park. You've got the stomach for it and you can't be bought over. I think I can use you tonight. Wait by the phone after dinner. It will pay you well."

She jerked the car suddenly into second gear and was gone.

But neither Marty nor the girl saw the man who tossed a cigarette into the gutter, eyed them a moment, then going to the drug store on the corner entered a telephone booth.

## VII

IT was ten o'clock and Marty had given up hope of hearing from the girl—when the phone rang. Her voice was excited. She fairly snapped the words over the wire.

"You can help me tonight," she said. "I can't play it alone. I can't trust anyone—anyone else. Will you help me?"

Marty thought of the gun Inspector John Twait had dragged along his forehead; he thought of the two shots Sam Boardman had squeezed into a helpless man's back, but most of all he thought of the girl:

"Yes—I will."

"Of course. I seemed to know you would." Her voice was very soft, Marty thought—but before he could be sure it changed, became cold. "Eleven o'clock then," and she gave him a downtown corner to meet her on. "Come alone—and don't bring a car," she finished.

Marty O'Day came alone. . . .

"Please don't ask questions." The girl took him by the arm the minute he reached the corner, and led him down the block. "It's late now. I've got a date with Sam Boardman. I want you to help me. I want you to deliver the envelope at the Lincoln Hospital. Burke is going to live."

"But where is the envelope?" Marty questioned.

"I haven't got it yet. Come!"

She led Marty to the middle of the block, down a narrow alley between two houses and into a disordered backyard. There was a high wooden fence. She grasped the top of it with both hands and swung onto it before Marty could help her. In the darkness he saw her put a finger to her lips, then beckon him to follow as she dropped from sight beyond the fence.

Marty reached up his cane and hung it across the fence, then he swung lightly to the top, dropped softly to the stone court on the other side and retrieving his cane tucked it beneath his arm. The rear of an unlighted house loomed up before them.

"Now what?" he asked the girl.

She took him by the hand, led him across the darkness to a tiny shed and pointed to the unlighted window above it.

"You're to wait here, in the shadow of the shed, and watch that window. The one with the miniature stone balcony outside it. I'll drop the envelope from there. Simply pick it up, go carefully back to the street and straight to the Lincoln Hospital. Ask for Mr. Adams—that's Burke's partner. He'll be expecting—at least, he'll be hoping the envelope will come."

"But what about you?" Marty still held that cold, damp little hand.

"Me?" The girl laughed, at least she made a queer little sound in her throat. "I'll be all right. You—just obey orders. There will be money in it for you."

There was again that sudden twist of her hand that Marty remembered in the taxi the previous night. He saw her run toward the side fence but didn't hear the fall of her feet. Her little body just seemed to merge with the darkness.

Money! So she thought he was doing it for money. And he didn't like that. But what else could she think? Why would a man come out of a comfortable home and mix himself up in a business that might very easily put him in a position of being accused of murder?

He wondered how long he would have to wait there, and what chance the girl was taking.

Did a light go on in that dark room above Marty? He wasn't sure. It was as if the shade by the window had moved a bit and let the tiny stream of light through.

But, no. It wasn't bright enough for that. And Marty knew, or thought he knew. A light had gone on in the room beyond—toward the front of the house, and shone through into the room above him.

TEN minutes passed and Marty still watched that window. Was it closed before? He thought so. But now it seemed to be open a little at the bottom. A very little, certainly—but distinctly, as his eyes became accustomed to the darkness, he could see that inch-high stretch of blackness above the whiteness of the sill and below the lower frame of the window.

Five minutes more—ten, perhaps—and he saw it. A long white something creeping slowly through that slit of blackness. Very slowly it came, at first—then it shot out suddenly, turned over a couple of times in the darkness, like a plane out of control, then being caught by a slight breeze it straightened out and shot right down into Marty O'Day's outstretched hands.

Now what? He looked toward the window. Just the same dim, distant sort of light. The same stretch of blackness between the white. Not a flutter to the shade—no shadows. Not a sound. And Marty listened. Did he hear feet cross in the room above? Hardly. That must have been imagination.

Now, with the envelope in his hand—the prize that a man had died to preserve and others had killed to destroy—he hesitated. What of the girl? What would happen when the envelope was missed? There wasn't a sound there in the darkness of the yard. Marty looked around. The house directly behind was deserted. The one to the right! Well—it was built almost into its neighbor, and Marty could see no lights. The house on the left! He had seen the reflection of a rear light go out fully fifteen minutes before.

No danger to him there. No danger to the envelope. The place was deserted—at least, in the rear. As for the street in front! He shrugged his shoulders. He couldn't tell about that, but dangers shouldn't . . .

He jerked erect. A door had slammed. There was no doubt of that, though it was dull and distant. He thought it was in

that room above—beyond that slightly open window.

It took some time for the truth, or what Marty thought was the truth, to dawn on him. The girl had left. That was the slamming of the door. Maybe even a signal to him that things were all right. He'd only be endangering the safety of that envelope by waiting longer. Certainly if anything was going to happen it would have happened by now. It was a good ten minutes since that envelope had fluttered into his hand. And Marty O'Day hesitated no longer. He ran lightly across the yard, reached the fence, took a grip upon it, half swung up and dropped back again.

A scream had come from the house he was leaving, from the room he had been watching. Even as he turned he saw the shade snap up in that window. And for the moment he saw the whiteness of a face—the girl's face—and heard the scream again. This time a scream that died almost before it started. Marty thought, too, that he saw another face behind the girl's, but he wasn't sure of that. But he was sure of the hand—the huge, knotted hand that was clamped over the girl's mouth.

Without a sound she was jerked from the window. The shade went down. Then silence. Silence but for the soft pat of Marty O'Day's feet returning to that house.

## VIII

MARTY O'DAY wasn't soft now. The past swept over him and he acted as he would have acted a few years before. He didn't stop and try the back door. He didn't run around to the front. He didn't know if others might be in that house—and he didn't care. The girl needed him. He reached the shed, tossed his cane up on the slightly slanting roof, jumped, caught at the rain gutter, felt it give and groan beneath his grasp—then as it held he climbed from his knees and looked at the stone balcony above. He couldn't reach it—it was well above his head.

Now for it, Marty thought as he stretched up his cane, balancing on his toes, and set the end of the curved handle hard against the stone base of that balustrade. Nothing to grip there, nothing but his own weight to steady the cane upon it. Tricky

work that. But he had done it before and he could do it again.

And Marty swung free. His left hand gripped the steel cane above his right, then his right above the left as he tried to keep his body stiff and avoid the swing that would cause the cane to slip from its all too uncertain position.

One more lift of the left hand, then the right—and he would clutch the tiny balcony with his fingers. Let him once get his fingers there and . . . The cane slipped; a quick, sudden movement—just the fraction of an inch, as Marty jerked himself a bit higher. Then, as his right hand came up slowly and steadily for that final grip at the stone itself, the curved handle of the cane slid through the rough bit of stone that held it, and reaching a smooth surface glided quickly toward the edge of the balcony.

Marty felt the cane and his body curving beneath the balcony, and put his whole strength into that single effort. A quick jerk upward of his body, a sudden frantic clutch at worn stone, a moment of doubt as the cane slipped off the edge—and he was hanging on that cold surface of smooth stone, his fingers fighting not to slip as the cane had slipped.

Marty's left hand still gripped the cane. He swung that length of fine steel up, found at the first thrust a place for the curved handle in the fancy network of the stone balustrade and steadied his right hand with the new support. He tested the strength of the balustrade against his weight on the cane and nodded his satisfaction. That stone work had been done when men took pride in their job. Then he pulled himself slowly and carefully, but seemingly with little effort, onto that balcony.

Things must be done more carefully now, Marty thought, as he regained his breath there by the window and tried to peer under the inch-high opening at the bottom.

He was right. The light came from between two curtains that divided the back room from the one beyond. There were people there, too. Marty could see a figure pass the slit in the thick curtains that led through the light.

Marty set his teeth grimly as he slowly raised that window. The girl had gone to meet Sam Boardman. There was no

doubt of that. Sam Boardman was a killer. A man who carried a gun and used it. A man who would shoot him down without a moment's hesitation. And Marty O'Day had nothing but his cane. Nothing but—And as the window reached a height for Marty to slip under, he clutched his cane tightly. After all, it had seen him through many dangerous situations. More than facing just one man—one man; who didn't know of his presence. One man who—

And there were two men in that room. Distinctly Marty heard the other's voice. Even as he silently crossed the room and reached those curtains he recognized the voice.

**"YOU'RE** a fool, Sam," Inspector Twait said. "I was tipped on the girl this morning, just after you made your get-away. She drove that punk, Marty O'Day, to his apartment; the lad who knocked the gun from your hand in the park. The lad who mailed that envelope to Thomas Burke."

"Did you bring the money—the seven grand?" Sam Boardman's voice was sulky.

"Two Gs," said Twait. "That was our agreement. Yeah, I've got the money. But the envelope first."

"I been thinking it over." Sam spoke slowly and thoughtfully. "It was a big job—a smooth job. That envelope is worth seven grand more."

"Don't lie," said Inspector Twait hotly. "You haven't got the envelope. You told me the envelope was behind the picture, and it wasn't. You told me the date with the girl was for twelve and she got mixed up and came early. Well—she didn't get mixed up. She knew you had the envelope. You probably looked at the picture enough to let her guess where it was. Then you went in the other room to get a drink—that bottle of whiskey, there, you've been swilling into you. She got the envelope. She's got it on her. Tear some of the things off her and—"

"You two-timing, lousy bum," Marty heard Sam Boardman say as feet crossed the room. "You took it, eh? Well—take that."

There was the smack of a blow against the girl's face. And Marty peered through the crack in the curtains.

He saw the girl first. She was half lying, half sitting, on a long couch. Her arms were bound behind her back, her feet held tightly together with strong rope. Above her stood Sam Boardman. Clearly, on her left cheek, were the red marks of Boardman's fingers. Across the room and by a small table on which was a half bottle of whiskey, the girl's light coat and a couple of glasses, stood Inspector John Twait. He was looking at Boardman. His eyes were two round points in narrow slits; his left hand hung in his jacket pocket.

"You know what that envelope means, Sam. If you don't get it, I burn. And if I burn, well—there was Frank Shay in the park; Thomas Burke on the courthouse steps. I'm the only one who knows the truth."

"Yeah." Sam turned quickly and faced Twait. The right hand that had started up beneath an armpit dropped quickly to his side as he saw Twait's hand in his jacket pocket. "Yeah!" he said again, moistening his lips with his tongue. "I do a good job, Inspector—a clean job. That's the second time you've threatened me. Look out for . . ."

And suddenly, "But *there*. I ain't such a fool as you think. I didn't trust the dame none. Not me—not Sam Boardman. The envelope she got ain't the right one. I wanted to try her out"—he looked at her viciously—"and then cut her squealing, stool-pigeon's throat. But I'll get the real envelope. It's in the cabinet there."

"Yeah?" Inspector Twait stuck a match into his mouth and chewed on it.

Marty saw Sam Boardman walk across the room close to the curtains and bend over a cheap lacquer cabinet with a drawer below the two swinging doors. His back was to the inspector, but Marty plainly saw that deft, slow twist of his right wrist, which left the elbow motionless to the eyes of Inspector Twait. And Marty saw, too, the huge automatic that slid into Sam Boardman's right hand.

Sam Boardman's thick lips set tightly, then curved at the ends. He grinned evilly before he spoke, his back still to Twait.

"You see, Twait, I've got it." He raised his gun slightly, close against his body. Then he turned quickly, speaking between closed teeth as he swung. "Now—you get—"

But the words died on his lips. The finger on the gun trigger never closed. Inspector Twait waited until the gunman almost faced him. Then he shot Sam Boardman twice, through the stomach.

## IX

MARTY O'DAY stood stunned, his eyes glued to the long slit in the curtains. A man had been shot down suddenly and violently, and he had been unable to move.

For a moment Inspector John Twait stood above the inert body. He half leaned toward it—then straightened, listening. Finally he turned, walked straight to the girl, and taking her by the throat shook her violently.

"You've got it," he cried. "It's on you or you've hidden it in the room." He threw her back on the couch, tore at her waist, then stopped suddenly. "You saw it, eh? You saw Boardman get the lead. But you won't live to tell it. You first, and the envelope second."

He raised his gun—

Marty realized that he couldn't cross that room and strike before the inspector closed a finger on that gun trigger. He realized also that, if he could, the inspector's finger might automatically tighten even as his blow struck. The gun was tight against the girl's head. There was one thing to do, and he did it. He parted those curtains and stepped into the room. But he spoke slowly, and although his words were calm and his voice steady, his heart was pounding.

"Drop the gun, Inspector," he said, "if you want to live, of course."

Now—though Marty hoped that the inspector would obey his command—he didn't stand in the center of that room. Even as his words were uttered he had sprung forward, whipping that steel stick through the air.

Marty saw the stab of flame. He heard the roar of the gun, and struck. The heavy steel handle caught Inspector Twait on the side of the head. There was a surprised, childish look in his eyes; his right hand dropped to his side, the gun still dangling in it.

Marty raised the cane again.

But he didn't strike again. Even as his

hand was in the air Twait staggered to one side, gripped at the couch, missed it and fell to the floor, his back against the couch, his chin sunk down on his chest, his breath coming in great gasps.

"His gun!" The girl spoke in a muffled voice.

Marty's hand shook as he lifted the gun from those lifeless fingers and placed it on the long table. Certainly he was getting soft. It wasn't fear; he had never felt that. At least, not fear for himself. And now his trembling fingers were opening his pocket-knife, cutting at the ropes, freeing the girl's hands and feet, pouring whiskey from the bottle on the table, forcing it between her lips as she shook her head.

And she was on her feet, leaning against him.

"YOU have the envelope?" were her first words.

"Yes." Marty put an arm about her to steady her, saw her try to draw the torn waist over her shoulder, and spoke the words that were on his mind.

"What is your name? How do you happen to be in this—know Sam Boardman? Why did you come?"

The girl jerked out words.

"I knew Sam would be here—and alone. I had a date to meet him here at twelve." And before Marty could put the question, "Sam liked me and wanted me, and I let him think . . . But I came at eleven instead of twelve. And I watched his eyes and knew where the envelope was, and got it and tossed it out to you. But Twait came early too—just as I was leaving. He knew me. But that's all. Come! Those shots must have been heard by someone." She pulled the coat from the table—held it over her arm.

"But who are you?" Marty had to catch up to her and steady her as she grabbed at the curtains to the room beyond.

"That doesn't matter—not since Twait lives. He knows me—has marked me. And—and he only has to talk. You won't ever see me again."

Marty stopped and looked back at the room they were leaving; at the sunken chin of Twait, which was beginning to rise; the eyes that were beginning to lose their vacancy; the fingers on the floor, that were twisting spasmodically.

He touched her arm.

"He knows something about you—something that would hurt you?"

"Something that would—" she laughed mirthlessly. "Yes, something that would hurt me."

He released the girl in time to hear the single shot. He swung in time to see Sam Boardman's gun belch flame, and to see Inspector Twait leaning against the couch again, a tiny hole in the center of his forehead, a tiny hole that was ever widening and turning from a dull purple to a dark red.

A dark and evil red . . .

Marty was in the room and above Sam Boardman when Sam sank back to the floor again. And this time, thought Marty, Sam would stay there. For Sam was dead. He had lived long enough to raise himself on one elbow and finish the job he had failed to do a few minutes before.

## X

MARTY O'DAY knew that someone pounded heavily on the front door below. He knew, too, that someone shouted something, far distant. He heard distinctly the shrill blast of a police whistle. But Marty never knew just exactly how he got the girl from that house. In a dazed way he remembered hanging over the miniature balcony, dropping her onto the slanting roof of the shed below. He remembered, too, that he had followed and caught her and lowered her to the yard below as she was slipping off.

There was the dart across that yard, the girl's gasping breath as he almost threw her over the fence. Things cleared somewhat then. Clearly he heard the pounding feet on the stone behind—the cry to halt—the single shot and the splitting wood as a bullet hit the fence just before he dropped from it.

And then the sudden stopping of his heart; the siren of a police car; the screeching of brakes—and the hoarse shouts of voices.

The girl ran, stumbling, at his side as they reached the street behind. But what could they do now? Surely in a few minutes, maybe less—maybe even now that block was being hemmed in by the police. There should have been a car.

And there was. A car moved to the curb, a voice called hoarsely, the door swung open and Marty and the girl were inside. Then the door slammed closed and the car was away—up the street and around the corner.

A police siren screeched distantly, to fade out entirely. The girl leaned against him.

"Give me the envelope," she finally said. Without a word, Marty put it in her hand.

They drove in silence to the Lincoln Hospital.

"You'd better let me come with you." Marty looked at the deserted street as the girl pulled her light coat tightly about her.

"No. Please don't come with me. You're very brave—and very foolish."

"I like to be foolish." He held her arm. "You're not offended at me for . . . Not offended?"

"No—not that. It isn't that. Good-bye!"

"But I'll see you again—now that Inspector Twait won't—can't talk?"

"That," said the girl, "will be entirely up to you. Let me go, please."

"But you'll— Promise to ring me up—that you're all right—as soon as I reach home."

She hesitated, but when he still held her wrist she nodded and he thought that her lips formed the word, "Yes."

MARTY didn't particularly notice the man who passed out of the Jefferson just as he entered, but a few seconds later he wished that he had.

The boy at the desk handed him a thick envelope.

"Man left it—just went out," the boy told him. "Said to give you this at once."

Marty nodded, tipped the boy and carelessly tore open the envelope, then closed the flap quickly. There were five crisp bills in that envelope, and each was of a thousand-dollar denomination. Up in his own apartment Marty counted them over again. Five thousand was right. Then he saw the typewritten note:

*She has told me what you did and what you risked. I can use a man like you.*

There was no signature. Marty grinned. He wouldn't— And the phone rang. It was the girl.

"Keeping my promise," she said simply. "Hold on—don't hang up!" Marty snapped eagerly. "I'm going to see you again soon? And the money! I really don't. . . ."

"That's right," she cut in. "Don't use it. It will tie you up as I am tied up. We'll be in it together, and—" she bit off the sentence.

"Wait a minute," said Marty. "If I don't use that money will I see you again anyway?"

"No," she said, very low, "you won't."

"And if I do use it?"

"It will be inevitable, of course—then—that we meet. But don't use it."

She had hung up—hung up as the doorbell rang and Marty heard Knight arguing with the landlord.

"Don't tell me he isn't in," the landlord was saying. "I've been watching for him. Ah! Now, then, Mr. O'Day."

"Surely," Marty shook the man playfully by the shoulders. His eyes sparkled, his grin was boyish, "you're not hinting that I'm behind in my rent. No, don't tell me the amount. I abhor figures, and I like the Jefferson."

He thrust two of the one-thousand-dollar bills into the landlord's hand.

The landlord stared at them.

"There, there—figure it out yourself," he backed the gaping man through the door, "and return me the difference."

The door closed in Mr. Levy's astonished face, leaving the landlord more sure of his early impression that Marty O'Day was a very rich but a very eccentric man.

Marty, humming softly to himself, returned to the living-room, packed his pipe, lit it carefully and looked at Knight. With the three remaining bills in his hand, he hesitated. Then he shrugged his shoulders.

"Breakfast—grocer bills—and back pay, Knight. No, no—you're to take all of it."

He turned and looked at his cane, lifted it, and called:

"Twenty feet, Knight! So—like a soldier on parade. Eyes closed—arm extended. There!"

He threw himself onto the couch as the stick nestled against Knight's chest, the handle curving about his arm.

Marty had used the money and he was going to see the girl again.



# THE FLATFOOT-FRAME

By DABNEY HORTON

**They framed Big Bill. Railroaded him on a fancy charge.  
Busted him from the Force—but even that wasn't enough  
for that hungry Murder Mob.**

**B**LOWING his whistle imperiously, the traffic cop waved the black sedan over to the curb.

The driver was obviously drunk, and the officer had seen him weaving back and forth down High Street for three blocks as he approached the traffic light.

The surprised cop recognized him. It was Lieutenant Larrigan of the homicide squad, driving blind drunk. Larrigan, who'd never been seen drunk in his life.

As the befuddled driver managed to make the curb, one wheel on the sidewalk, and his fender scraping a fireplug, a red runabout drew up beside him, and a somewhat overdecorated and angry woman jumped out. Evidently she had been endangered by the wild driving of the black

sedan, and was ready to tear out the driver's hair.

The angry traffic cop and the angrier woman reached the sedan at the same time.

"My Gawd, there's a dead man in there."

The woman's piercing shriek stopped every pedestrian within a block.

"He's carrying a dead man in the back seat down High Street. He's killed him. He's a murderer." The woman screamed again, and a crowd gathered.

Big Bill Larrigan, detective lieutenant, was asleep at the steering wheel, snoring peacefully, ignorant of the disaster that had overtaken him.

At the phone box the traffic cop was calling for the patrol wagon and for the ambulance.

"The driver's Lieutenant Larrigan," said the cop over the phone. "This'll be a crack in the teeth for him. Looks like he's got stopped and done a killin'. Hurry up with that wagon."

At the city hospital the dead man in the back of Larrigan's car was identified as one of the Grove City race-track bookies.

The gun that shot him, presumably, was found in the death car, a German automatic. It showed signs of having been freshly fired, and one shell had already been ejected from the clip. The shell itself was on the floor of the car.

"Big Bill's own Luger," muttered Perry Gordon, the big dick's harness-mate. "Oh, hell! He's finished this time.

**B**IG BILL LARRIGAN sat motionless on the edge of his cot in the city jail, holding his aching head in his hands.

His only recollections of the whole affair were that the bookie had been mildly drunk at the track and that the man's pals had asked Big Bill to take him safely home. Then the chap had offered Bill a drink from his flask, and Bill had accepted.

But a hundred witnesses on High Street had seen the dead man later in the back seat, and the gun on the floor.

Big Bill's face was twisted in agony as he tried to put the events together in order.

Why the devil couldn't he have had the sense to leave that rotgut alone? It must've been full of smoke, that flask, the stuff that steals away the brain and leaves the drinker crazy. Murder juice, they called it down on Front Street.

Those Front Street rats, Whitey John's gang, would think that this was a swell break for them. Couldn't have been better if they'd planned it themselves, a blow aimed at putting him out of the way. But they didn't have the brains to pull anything like that, damn 'em.

The police surgeon stepped to the barred door of Big Bill's cell and motioned to him. He whispered a message that added to his pain.

"Just got a phone call from the hospital, Bill. They got the bullet out. Smack in the center of that bookie's heart. A Luger bullet, too."

Then he noticed the agony in Larrigan's face, and added, "Tell you what I'll

do for you, Bill. I'll just slip you three grains of morphine, and then there won't be any trial. You'll just pass out of the picture. Shall I do that for you, Bill?"

Larrigan waved him away.

"No one who knows me would believe that I ever killed myself, Doc. No. I'll have to go through with it. At any rate they can't prove any motive. I didn't know that bookie's name. Just picked him up at the track. And how did that Luger get in the car? It should have been in my desk drawer at home. I never carried the thing—too heavy.

"No jury in the world would convict me of murder on the evidence. They can't dig up any motive, and no one saw me shoot him."

But Big Bill knew that he was through. He would be finished on the force after this.

**B**IG BILL'S trial was mercilessly short. As he had foreseen, no motive for the killing could be shown. No one could be produced who could testify that Big Bill and the murdered bookie had ever been seen together before. And there was no witness to the shooting.

At the race track exit no one had heard a shot, nor on the road from Grove City to High Street. But then, tire blowouts, and dirty mufflers sound much like pistol shots to the unwary.

So the jury disagreed on the murder charge, and Bill got off with a stiff jail sentence on the drunken driving. And the Commissioner asked him to turn in his badge.

**I**F Whitey John's knowledge of human nature had been greater, or if he could have credited a detective with a single decent motive, he might not have filled himself full of hop and gone uptown to bump off Larrigan as soon as his jail term was served.

Afetr all, it was a useless business. Big Bill was through. He was off the force, and trying to get started again peddling real estate. And peddling real estate, when you haven't any friends, is a tough break.

But Whitey wanted to see Big Bill dead. Whitey's kid brother had left town the year before and the gang said Larri-

gan had been responsible for the kid's disappearance. The big dick and the kid had been pretty good pals.

So Whitey oiled up his gun, fitted a silencer on it, donned a silk glove and went uptown to interview Big Bill Larrigan at Larrigan's own home, just about when Big Bill generally drove up to his garage, according to Fish-Face's special observations.

Fish-Face—Whitey's second in command—had been very helpful to Whitey lately, keeping him informed of Larrigan's movements, and everything that Fish-Face told Whitey merely irritated him the more. Which was exactly what Fish-Face intended. Whether Whitey killed Larrigan, or Larrigan killed Whitey, it was bound to benefit Fish-Face in the end.

Inside the ex-detective's own garage, Whitey waited for Big Bill to come home. Unfortunately, Big Bill was suspicious as usual, and even quicker with a gun. He got Whitey full in the right lung, just missing the heart. And Whitey went down coughing. Bill couldn't get out of the habit of carrying a gun.

**B**IG BILL LARRIGAN stared down at him curiously.

"Not so good, Whitey," he told him. "You crazy fools have got an idea that a double shot of hop makes you bullet-proof and gives you a cast-iron shooting wrist. There's nothing in it."

The big ex-detective reloaded his revolver and thrust it back in his pocket, letting the flap of his coat drop over it carefully.

"I'd do it again, you cursed flatfoot," cried Whitey. "What've you done with the kid? Sent him up to Elmira, or holdin' him out for a stool? Fish-Face and Dingo said you're usin' him to get somethin' on the bunch." He coughed painfully.

"So that's it?" Big Bill began to see light. "Looks to me, Whitey, like your rats have been working you up to a killing. Maybe they don't like you any more. Anyway, the kid's an auto mechanic down in Circleville. He ain't in Elmira, and he ain't a stool. He's going straight.

"I wouldn't have told you where he was, but you're going out, Whitey. Here's a letter I got yesterday from the kid. You

can see it's in his own handwriting."

Larrigan thrust the letter under the dying crook's eyes. The letter was short, but unmistakable as to meaning:

*Dear Mr. Larrigan:*

*Repairing busted cars is a lot better than taking stolen cars apart for the gang and wondering when the lousy dicks, excuse me, Mister Larrigan, is going to hop on your neck. I like this place fine and some day I'll have a shop of my own. Tell Whitey I'm all right but don't tell him where I am. So long and thanks.*

*Kid John.*

"I meant to tell you about it before," said Big Bill. "But this murder trial made me feel so lousy that I hardly know what I'm doing half the time."

Whitey's eyes still studied the letter. And his breast heaved as he fought for a few last lungfuls of air. He had something on his mind he had to tell Larrigan. But he had to get enough air first.

Finally he spoke, his words breaking through the crimson froth painfully and almost inarticulately. Dying, he saw more clearly than ever before.

"That looks—on the level—Larrigan. It's all right—then—your shootin' me. I —had it—comin'—all right. I gotta make it—square with you—for helpin'—th' kid." His wheezy voice was much lower now. "Fish-Face said—I oughta—bump you off.

"I got news—about that bookie—in your car. Get closer."

Startled, Big Bill placed his ear almost against the dying man's lips. The feeble murmur continued.

"You—was framed. Better'n killin' you —Bronson told us."

Big Bill's face was an agony of fear as he strove to catch the last words. If he should miss them. . . .

He turned his head so that he could read Whitey's lips, instead of trying to catch the almost inaudible whispers.

He saw Whitey's lips saying, "Framed —by my gang—Doc Bronson—said—it would—break you. Doc Bronson—head of gang. That bookie welshed—so we killed him—in your car. Get rid—of you. . . ."

The rest of the movement of the lips was unintelligible. Whitey had changed his territory for smoother going, where the bulls never make a pinch, and bullets never miss.

BIG BILL LARRIGAN slammed into the door of the Detectives Room where a few weeks before he had hung his dusty old hat. There was only one man in the room.

"Gosh!" A gasp escaped Perry Gordon. "It's Larrigan! Bill, Bill, what do you want in here?"

"Fella," Larrigan said slowly to his ex-harness mate. "Have you guts enough to go through Doc Bronson's house with me tonight? Unofficially, illegally, like a couple of housebreakers? Whitey John said Doc Bronson was the head of the Front Street gang."

"I'll go, Bill," the plainclothesman said quickly. "Fact is, Bill, ever since you've been outa here, this job's kinda sickened on me. If this means a chance of your reinstatement, I'm with you."

"The answer must be in Bronson's house. He planned it," said Big Bill. "I've wondered about that guy a long time."

DARKNESS in the house of Dr. Bronson, eminent surgeon, except for faint flickers of light from two electric torches, dimmed by handkerchiefs. Whispered phrases in the shadows as two men searched the doctor's office.

"Nothing in the desk," murmured Big Bill, almost inaudibly.

"That goes for the bookcases and the safe," replied the plainclothesman.

"Now for the cabinet," said Big Bill.

The doctor's cabinet was filled with shiny instruments, and these Big Bill pushed aside impatiently, searching for something resembling a gun, a gun that could fire a conical bullet without making rifling marks on it.

Every metal tube he tested for bullet caliber, as if he expected to find the gun masquerading as a surgeon's probe or a stomach pump. The last object, at the bottom of the cabinet drawer was a knife. He was about to lay the knife down as being uninteresting, when he suddenly gave a low exclamation of surprise, thrust his hand into his pocket, and pulled out the bullet again.

The blade of the knife was curiously hollow. There was nothing resembling a trigger, or a hammer or firing pin. Yet the tiny bullet fitted its interior channel perfectly. There was no smell or trace of

burnt powder on it, yet the wicked looking instrument seemed to whisper imperiously to Big Bill, "I am the secret, and the answer to this mystery."

Big Bill motioned to Perry Gordon to come closer, then putting his mouth close to his ear, he murmured:

"Stand by for trouble. I'm bringing Bronson down here."

The ex-detective lieutenant slammed a cabinet door shut loudly, and stumbled over a chair.

Silently the two waited in the darkness.

Big Bill laid his flash on a table on the opposite side of the room, the switch on, illuminating the curtains before the door.

Then the curtains were pulled back silently, and a revolver cracked, shattering the flashlight decoy.

Four strong arms gripped Doctor Bronson, but not before he had sunk his savage teeth in Perry Gordon's ear, nearly tearing off the lobe.

"Good evening, Doc," said Big Bill deliberately, switching on the light. "Sorry you tore our friend's ear in your excitement. That's a bad mark for him, in his business. His job doesn't want any unnecessary identification marks. Might do him a great deal of harm some day.

"Sew it up for him, and make a neat job of it. No monkey business, either. I have a little knowledge of the cruder forms of surgery, myself. If you make a break, I'll let you have this," and he waved the gun at the doctor's head.

They forced the doctor into his office. There he produced his catgut and awls and set to work, swabbing out the wound with weak carbolic.

"You two infernal fools!" he mocked them. "You're working in Whitey John's territory. You pull off a robbery up here, and you'll end in the Scioto River, with a piece of railroad iron wired to your dirty necks. You lousy mugs are not Whitey's boys, I know that, and you'll get the works."

"Pardon me, Doc, but this isn't a robbery. We want information," said Big Bill, while he still pressed his gun into the doctor's stomach. "We merely wish to make inquiries about a race track bookie, the one who was shot—the killing for which Larrigan was broken."

His finger tightened on the trigger as

he spoke, and Bronson could see the hammer of the double-action slowly lifting. Bronson paled.

"When Whitey John hears of this—" threatened Bronson.

Big Bill cut in, "Whitey John is in Hell. I sent him there."

He waited for this to take effect. Evidently the heavy jowled doctor had courage of the animal kind, and was used to facing death. Big Bill elaborated his brief statement.

"Whitey had news of this affair, but unfortunately he died before we extracted the whole story from him. It was a serious error of judgment on our part. We believed him to be of much stronger constitution. He failed to survive the first stage of our questioning.

"It must have been the dope that weakened him so. You don't use the stuff, do you, Doctor? So many medical men do. Well, we'll do our best not to let any accident happen to you. By the way, have you a pulmotor machine handy?"

**H**ANDS fastened behind his back with his own surgical tape, Doctor Bronson sat tied to a heavy office chair facing his two inquisitors.

"Question Number One," said Big Bill, "who killed the bookie?"

No answer from the doctor except a malevolent glare.

"Question Number One," the big detective went on patiently, "Who killed the bookie? The killing that nearly electrocuted Larrigan?"

Still silence from the man bound to the chair.

"Does he get another chance?" Big Bill asked Perry. "We're not in any hurry are we?"

The other nodded, signifying a third chance.

"Who killed the bookie, in Larrigan's car?" Bill asked for the third time.

He waited a long ten seconds for the answer that did not come.

"Lights out," said Big Bill.

The lights were switched out. Thus a simple thing became horrible.

Bill arose, and fumbled in his pocket with something that rustled softly. Then a quickly muffled groan came from the direction of the doctor's chair, and silence.

"Lights on."

Over the doctor's face was spread a light clinging substance that masked nose, eyes and mouth. As the man's chest rose and fell in a desperate fight for air, the thing swelled like a balloon, and then collapsed at each intake of the stale air inside it.

It was merely a thin rubber bathing cap which Big Bill had slipped over the doctor's face. But the strongest man in the world would have suffocated in three minutes unless his limbs were free to dislodge that almost gossamer instrument of death.

"Question Number One," said Big Bill in a monotone, "Who killed the bookie? Nod your head if willing to answer."

A minute passed. The head did not nod.

The mask no longer heaved and collapsed. The doctor was holding his precious breath, and his brain cells were growing dizzy as they starved for fresh oxygen.

A minute and a half. Long for the average man, but short for a deep-sea pearl fisher. The doctor must have had extraordinary lung power, and courage.

Then, very slowly, they saw his head drooping as if nodding. Pent up foul air in his lungs burst furiously into the mask, and then was sucked back.

Then the head dropped submissively. Big Bill ripped off the mask triumphantly, but stood suddenly aghast.

"Damn him, he's fooled us," he cried. "Quick, start the pulmotor."

A switch turned, loud humming filled the little office, and Larrigan held the mouthpiece to the unconscious man's teeth. Air was forced into the nearly collapsed lungs and pumped back swiftly.

The body stirred feebly, and the lungs began to breathe naturally. The pulmotor stopped.

As if asleep, or very drowsy, or even drunk, the doctor muttered half-consciously, "The fools, they'll never find out. And I'll never tell 'em."

"Does that count for an answer?" asked Big Bill of his colleague.

"I think not," said Perry Gordon. "Make him answer it again when he's entirely conscious."

**B**RONSON was fully conscious again, still glaring triumphantly at his inquisitors.

"Well, Doctor, you may have the satis-

faction of knowing that you've just lived through what killed Whitey John," said Big Bill. "Of course, we didn't have a pulmotor for him. But that was just a lucky break for you.

"Now we're ready to continue. Question Number One—but wait a bit." He pulled out his knife and severed the electric cable of the pulmotor.

"There you are, Doctor," he announced. "Of course you know we couldn't possibly make the necessary splice on that cable in time to bring you around again, don't you? All right, Question Number One, who killed the bookie?"

Doctor Bronson seemed to cringe, then a malicious grin flashed over his face.

"Big Bill Larrigan killed the bookie. Didn't the prosecuting attorney tell the jury he killed him. What do you care who killed the welsher?"

Something let go in Big Bill's ordinarily adequate system of self-control. He leaped from his chair in a red, blazing fury, his fist swinging for Bronson's jaw.

"You cursed liar," he yelled.

Tied down as he was, and with his hands taped behind him, the doctor was still able to lurch sidewise and avoid the blow, but his chair tipped to the floor.

The man went down screaming, "Don't hit me. Don't hit me. Fish-Face killed the bookie, I tell you. I showed the Whitey John's how to frame Larrigan. It's none of your business anyway."

"Hell!" exclaimed Big Bill. "You can never tell what a man's most afraid of. This fellow, now, isn't afraid of death, but he can't stand physical pain. We've been driving tacks with a sledge hammer. This is a simple matter of rubber hose and the water-cure stuff. Say, Doc, have you got a short piece of rubber hose and a bucket and a funnel somewhere around here?"

But the man was conquered. The implements of tongue-loosening were not needed. His answers came out glibly. They asked him eight questions. At the ninth question he balked again.

The ninth question was. "How was the bookie shot?"

So far, the inquisition had brought to light the fact that Whitey John himself had given the bookie the doped flask, that

both the bookie and Big Bill had drunk from it, that the bookie with the gang's help had clambered into the back seat of Bill's car, and that on the way down High Street one of the Whitey John's had killed the bookie from the running board, unseen and unheard by the drugged detective. But how?

"I can't answer that one," declared the doctor, as if baffled. "Dingo knows, but he's not telling anybody. Says he might want to use it again."

Big Bill opened a glass cabinet and produced six feet of rubber hose, and a small funnel. He looked about reflectively, seeking the most convenient water faucet for the water-cure.

"Don't do that," screamed Bronson. "Don't do it. I couldn't stand it. I saw them do it to a dog in medical school once."

Larrigan pushed the hose over the small end of the funnel.

"Open his ugly mouth for him," he told Gordon.

Doctor Bronson screamed shrilly. "In the bottom drawer of the cabinet. It's in the bottom drawer of the cabinet. For God's sake drop that hose!"

Gordon jerked open the cabinet drawer. Under the pile of surgical instruments was the curiously formed piognard.

Big Bill examined it carefully. The blade was hollow three-quarters of the way down, and fitted with a plunger.

"How does this damn' thing work?" He held it close to Bronson's nose, the rubber hose and funnel in his other hand.

Bronson saw the funnel and shivered.

"It's not a gun. Fish-Face stole Larrigan's Luger. He put a bullet in the blade of the knife, stuck the bookie through the heart, and the plunger left the bullet in the place where the blade had been pulled out. I invented it.

"What are you muggs going to do about it? You better lay off this. If the monkey with the Whitey Johns, they'll leave you in the river. Say, who are you guys? Friends of Larrigan's?"

For answer, Gordon slipped an official-looking pair of handcuffs on him, and they dragged him out, his eyes budging with amazement and terror.

"I'm Larrigan!" said Big Bill.

# G-MAN GRAB

By BENGE ATLEE

## Western Union

Dan Gaunt, Hotel New Yorker, New York, N. Y.

Proceed at once to Count Paul Kalinof Ambassador Apartment Stop Instructions unchanged Stop Don't let Kalinof out of sight until jewels are disposed of

(Signed) J. EDGAR HOOVER.

THE Ambassador Apartments was one of those hostleries that has a striped awning and a commissionaire out in front. The latter held the door of the taxi open and condescendingly as the two friends stepped out.

"Give us a ring sometime, Bugs," said Dan, as they shook hands at parting. "You'll be able to get me here, I expect." He jerked a thumb toward the huge brick building in front of which they stood.

"O. K., Dan," said the little plainclothesman, and stepped jauntily off, his gray fedora at an angle such as can be worn only by a cocky Irishman in a city like New York.

Grinning affectionately after the little Irishman to whose courage and quick-wit he had more than once owed a lot, Dan stepped into the foyer of the big apartment house and walked over to the desk.

"Is Count Kalinof in?" he asked the clerk.

"Yes, sir."

"Give him a ring and tell him Dan Gaunt is here. I think he's expecting me."

The girl at the switchboard put the message through—she was a couple of minutes at it—seemed to have to do quite a lot of explaining. In the end, however, she turned and said:

"You can go up, Mr. Gaunt."

Her decidedly attractive gray eyes followed his tall figure with interest as it moved toward the elevator, and as the door clanged behind it she sighed. It was what women did when Dan Gaunt passed out of their lives.

Number 82 was on the fifteenth floor (the higher the dearer) and when Dan rang the bell the door was opened by a tall, gaunt man whose slanting, cat-like eyes seemed to open with a start as they rested

on the big figure of the Department of Justice man.

"I'm Dan Gaunt," the latter said.

"Thees way, sare," said the fellow, who was obviously of the valet type. He ushered Dan into a wide hall and then along it into a large, luxuriously furnished drawing-room. The Count, Dan thought as he gazed about at the expensive trappings, did himself well.

"I weel tell to my master that you are 'ere," said the servant, and withdrew.

Presently Dan turned at the sound of a footstep behind him. A man as tall as himself, but with a lean, rapier-like figure and dark, piercing eyes, was entering from the doorway.

"You wish to speak with me?" he said in English that held but the slightest foreign accent.

"Are you the Count Paul Kalinof?"

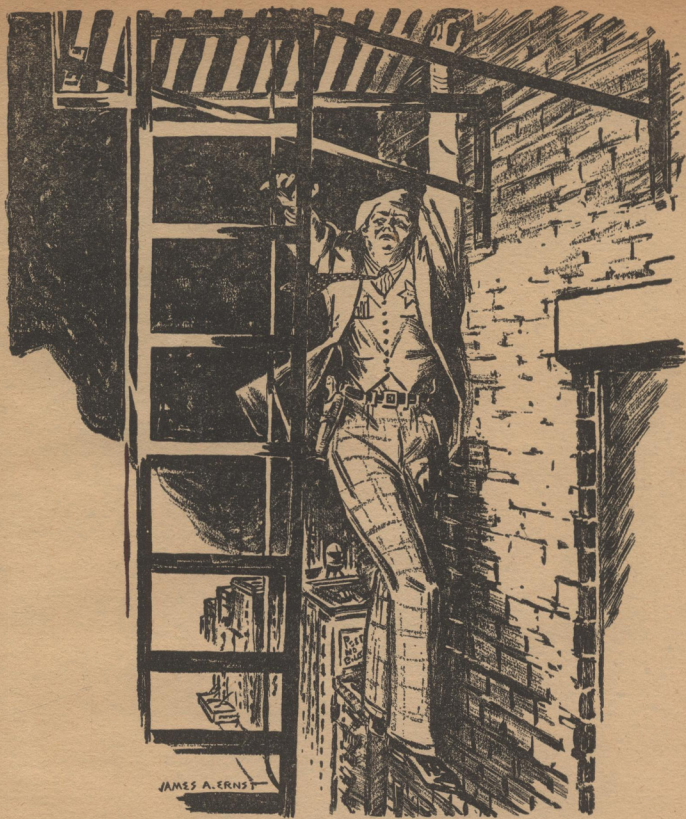
"I am."

Dan's face did not for a moment betray his surprise, nor did his quiet gray eyes so much as flicker. But it did flash through his mind that Bugs Brophy had described the Count as "One of those soulful, bearded Russians." This fellow was neither bearded nor soulful. Perhaps he had shaved off the beard for purposes of his own—and perhaps the loss of it had robbed him of "soulfulness."

"I'm Dan Gaunt of the Department of Justice, Count," he said. "I was ordered by my Chief to give you what protection you require against your—enemies."

"So?" exclaimed the Count—and it seemed to Dan, who was scrutinizing him closely, that a slightly puzzled look came into his eyes.

"My orders are not to let you out of my sight until you have disposed of your jewels."



*Dan could feel the tendons of his forearms growing numb. . . . He reached out blindly with his free hand . . . snatched at the iron rail of the escape.*

A glimmer of something that might have been annoyance shot into the Russian's eyes—disappeared again. He spoke cordially enough.

"You will have coffee or a cocktail, Mr. Gaunt?"

"Coffee," Dan replied.

The Count smiled. "It is good. My protector keeps a clear head."

They seated themselves at a low Indian brass table. The coffee came and was poured by the servant at a nearby table.

"You know, of course," said the Count, "where I keep my jewels?"

"No," Dan replied, taking the cup from the tray the servant held toward him.

"In that case," the Russian began to sip his drink, "perhaps it will be a weight off your mind if I do not tell you." He smiled oddly—and then asked with a nervous abruptness:

"The coffee is not to your taste? You do not drink!"

"Just letting it cool, Count," Dan re-

plied, stirring his drink and watching the bubbles on its black surface.

They had a queer opalescent hue, those bubbles—a hue that interested him intensely. Once before he had been served coffee like that—while he was guarding the American legation at Geneva during the League conference there in 1936. It had almost been the end of him then—strychnine!

Realizing that the Count's piercing eyes were fixed intently on him, he put the cup to his lips and sipped. Mighty bitter coffee!

Did the Count suspect him of being one of his enemies? And then suddenly Dan remembered again Bugs Brophy's words—"a bearded, soulful Russian."

Most abruptly he determined to put the whole situation to the test. Turning to the Count he said, pointing suddenly:

"I suppose that table is Russian work?"

As the Count glanced around at the intricately carved ebony and ormolu table, Dan tilted his right hand quickly—allowing the coffee to empty down inside the front of his vest. He was sipping the last drop from it when the Russian faced him again.

"I'm interested in Russian designs," said the G-man, placing his empty cup on the small brass table beside him.

"Indeed! You will have more coffee, Mr. Gaunt?"

"No, thanks! That'll be enough."

Dan took a cigarette from the little table and lit it with steady fingers. He puffed at it—leaned back on the chesterfield—leaned forward again and said in a thickish voice:

"I feel queer—damned queer!"

He staggered to his feet. The Count rose also. For a moment the two men stared tensely at one another. Then, suddenly, the G-man's body went into a convulsion. He fell to the floor—began to writhe and jerk.

The Count barked a low order in Russian. From behind the *portieres* sprang the servant, gun in hand. The two of them took hold of the still convulsing man and began to drag him from the room. The twitchings grew weaker as they proceeded along the hall, but had not yet died away when they opened a door some distance down. They flung the body in—

the Count removed Dan's automatic, and closed the door again, and locked it.

**H**ARDLY had the lock clicked when Dan was on his feet. He looked over the room. On a bed against the far wall of the room lay two figures.

"Good God," he breathed. "Here it is. . . ."

Blood lay on the coverlet. Blood soaked through in a dark red stain on their breasts. They had been stabbed, and one of them—the nearest—wore a beard! That one's eyes stared from deep sockets tragically even in death. . . ."

"Bearded, soulful Russian," grunted Dan. So the Soviet agents had got here before him. They had murdered the real Count and his servant—these two pitiable figures on the bed, and—thank God, another of those hunches that sometimes came to him in moments of danger had asserted itself in time!

But why had they lingered in the flat after murdering the real Count and his servant? Why had they admitted him?

The jewels!

That was it—they hadn't been able to find the jewels in the flat. They thought perhaps he had come about them and could give them some information! The bogus Count had asked him if he knew where they were! That would explain the whole thing perfectly.

He must get out of here at once. The door was locked. He tip-toed hurriedly to the window, shoved it noiselessly up. Fifteen dizzy stories below lay a courtyard. Two windows along to the right hung the iron balcony of the fire-escape. There were other windows across the court. He leaned out and searched them eagerly for someone whose attention he might draw. But not a face appeared in any of those windows.

He glanced along again at the fire-escape—twenty feet away with only bare perpendicular brick wall between. No—there was more than that! From the base of the windows on this floor a line of sandstone blocks ran around the building, standing out about two inches from the face of the wall. His eyes glittered grimly. Two inches was finger-grip. A man might hold up his weight by those two inches—even at this dizzy height.

And then Dan Gaunt proceeded to demonstrate just why he had gotten his reputation for reckless daring. Without further hesitation he let himself out through the window and down over the outside until he was dangling by the arms fifteen stories above certain death. Then he edged himself toward that narrow ledge of out-jutting sandstone. It took him a couple of minutes to navigate the change of grip from window to tiny ledge.

Then he hung suspended by the fingers of his hands from that two inches of purchase, his long body dangling free.

**S**WINGING himself like a pendulum he moved his grip slowly along, hanging by one handful of fingers while he made a new purchase with the other. The sweat began to stand out on his forehead. Before he was halfway to the fire-escape he could feel the tendons of his forearms growing numb. He got his lower lip between his teeth and bit on it—went desperately on.

Across the court a woman's scream rang out. It went higher and higher—until the sound was a thin thread in Gaunt's mind. He cursed her bitterly—without words. It gave him strength. Nearer and nearer to the goal he swung his long body. Only another five feet—then three. He gave himself an extra swing—reached out blindly with the free hand—caught the iron rail of the escape.

A moment later he was standing on it, grinning twistedly at the half-fainting woman in the window opposite.

He started down the escape. It was just possible he might be able to spring the trap on the Soviet agents and catch them red-handed in the dead Russian's apartment.

But five minutes later, with the goggled desk clerk in tow, he found the apartment empty. The place was in confusion. Drawers had been removed from tables and desks and their contents were littered over the floor. In the last few minutes of their stay the Soviet agents had evidently done some frenzied searching. Had they found what they wanted?

Suddenly he remembered Cyrus Blackwell, the dead Count's father-in-law. Picking up the table phone, he got the switchboard girl to put him through to the finan-

cier's downtown office on lower Broadway.

A half hour later he had the grim task of showing him the remains.

"Poor Paul," said old Blackwell, shaking his shaggy mane. "He's had a hell of a life since the war. My girl was killed in the war, did you know? Paul returned to Russia last year and brought the family jewels out of the country. Soviet agents have been on his track ever since. . . ."

They were interrupted by the arrival of three plainclothesmen who greeted Dan jovially and began to search the apartment.

Suddenly Cyrus Blackwell turned to the G-man.

"By the way, I persuaded Paul to leave his jewels in the safe at my office. I'd better ring up my office manager and tell him about this."

A minute later he was cursing into the phone, purple-faced. When he banged down the receiver and turned to Dan he was almost speechless.

"Stupid fools! Let a man have the jewels—ten minutes ago. Said he had an order signed by Paul—countersigned by me. Forgery! Absolute forgery! They've got away with it! By God, I'm going to police headquarters! Going to talk to Valentine about this! Make him comb the city for those devils as it was never combed before!"

He hurried from the apartment.

**D**AN swore softly. In their frantic last-minute search of the apartment the Soviet agents must have discovered some paper denoting the whereabouts of the jewels. He found himself admitting grudgingly their cleverness. They had certainly let no grass grow under their feet.

The telephone bell rang. One of the detectives answered it.

"For you, Dan."

It was Bugs Brophy.

"That you, Dan?"

"Yes."

"Everything O. K. with you?"

"No—but what makes you think otherwise?"

"Listen, Dan. After I left you this afternoon I hadn't gone a block before something struck me. One of those hunches, Dan. I took a stroll back past the Ambassador. Seemed to me that if there were any big shot Soviets around

New York the force ought to know about it. I hung around for perhaps a couple minutes when I saw a guy across the avenue loitering a bit too casual—I can spot 'em with my eyes shut, Danny. A few minutes later a couple of birds came out of the Ambassador in a hurry and bawled to the commissioner to grab 'em a taxi. Then the guy I'd been watching across the street came over and joined 'em, and they began to talk fast. Russian, they talked, Danny!

"They went downtown to the Standard Oil Building. One of 'em entered the building while the others waited. Then they hooked another taxi and came to a house on East 12th Street. Here's a funny thing, Dan—the house is deserted, with a 'To Let' sign in the window. I'm phoning from a drugstore across the street. Anything in it?"

"Is there anything in it?" shouted Dan. "Be right down to join you! Hang onto 'em!"

He turned to the detective who had handed him the phone.

"That was one of your crowd—Bugs Brophy. He's found something. I'm going to join him!"

He grabbed up his hat and hurried out of the apartment.

IT was six o'clock, and dusk had already settled when he joined the little Irishman on East 12th Street.

"That's it—with the sign in the window," said Brophy.

They entered a dirty yard at the back and climbed a fence, into another equally dirty. They were now in the area behind the deserted house. Not a light showed in its windows. Keeping close to the wall, they crept to the back door. It was locked. So were the two ground floor windows and the two basement windows.

But Dan knew a trick. Dropping beside one of the windows, he pressed gently but firmly with the palm of his hand against the glass. It gave with a faint crack. A moment later he had his hand through the gaping hole and unfastened the latch. The little Irishman followed him in, and they found themselves in the darkness of a basement room.

"Watch your step!" Dan spoke in Bugs' ear and led the way toward a dark shadow

in the farther wall which proved to be a door.

They passed through the door to a passage which was pitch-black. Suddenly Dan halted. A faint rumble of voices seemed to come from straight ahead and as though through a thick wall. Was there a cellar other man and started cautiously forward below this basement? Dan nudged the again. They had gone about a half dozen feet when, with startling abruptness, the passage way was flooded with light.

"Put up the hands!" barked a guttural voice.

They found themselves staring at two men who stood in front of a door a couple of yards from them—one of whom Dan recognized as the fellow who had let him into the Count's flat. Both were armed.

BUGS' hand was in his right coat pocket—on his gun—but he dared not fire, since Dan was in front of him and would certainly catch it from both the other guns. He raised his arms above his head as Dan had done. Then the door ahead swung open and the bogus Count and another man appeared. At the sight of Dan, the former's eyes opened wide. He stepped forward.

"So! You are clever, my friend!" he said with a grin. "But you are too clever. Once, you may fool Karl Radek—but not twice! Against your kind I take precautions!"

He turned to the man beside him, a heavy, lethargic-looking individual with indolent, slanting eyes.

"Behold, Comrade Muller, one of the famous G-men! He came while I was at the dog, Kalinof's place. It was not until I had disposed of him that Andriev and I found the papers telling us where the jewels were kept."

He turned to the other two men: "Bring them inside! Search them for weapons!"

The room into which the two friends were led had been built into the basement and contained, beside a table and chairs, two cot beds. The servant, Andriev, relieved the cursing little Irishman of his revolver and thrust it into his own pocket.

Radek turned to the man he had addressed as Muller.

"It will be necessary that we silence

these two—G-men. They know too much.”

But Muller protested gutturally: “No! There must no murders be in this house! It is trouble enough we haf had to find so goot a hiding place to carry on our propaganda in New York. There must no murders be traced to it!”

“But these men are secret agents! What good is this house to you when they know it!”

“They shall not die here,” the other said determinedly. Suddenly a sly grin lit his heavy, slanting eyes.

“Why not can you take them with you tonight on the *Amtorg* when she sails? In Russia you can turn them into goot Communists!”

The other two laughed. It was a good joke.

THE car stopped finally in front of an East Side dock shed. Comrade Muller had undoubtedly made the way smooth for the escaping Soviet agents, for immediately the driver blew his horn the door of the shed rolled up. The car purred on for two hundred feet into the dimly lit interior, and stopped near an open port from which a gangway ran to the deck of a tramp steamer lying alongside.

A burly bearded man in a dirty blue uniform met them at the other end of the gangway. Radek spoke to him in Russian. He was evidently the tramp's captain, for he bawled some order along the littered deck, and two sailors came running aft. The prisoners were taken inside, along a corridor, and thrust into a cabin. The door was bolted behind them.

“Heigh-ho for the life of a sailor,” said the little Irishman, seating himself on the edge of one of the two bunks. “She’s a dirty old tub. Beaucoup de bedbugs or I’m a tomato.”

“You know, that looks like a razor,” said the G-man, nodding his head toward a leather case that stuck out from the shelf above the dirty washstand. “It is a razor!”

“Thinkin’ of taking a shave? Or are you hankering to cut your throat with it?”

“Razors can cut more than hair and throats.”

“Sure! You can trim a hedge with ’em. And they make great toothpicks—if you got hands.”

“We’ve got teeth.”

“Spill it! I’ll listen.”

“Let’s wait a while, and see if friend Radek comes for another look at us.”

Friend Radek arrived ten minutes later, gave them another once over and disappeared.

“Now,” said Dan, stepping toward the other man, “take hold of the lapel of my coat with your teeth and pull.”

Bugs’ eyes danced with understanding.

“Aren’t you the bright guy!”

He grabbed at Dan’s coat, got the lapel between his teeth and yanked. The top button unbuttoned. He took another grip, and then another. At last Dan shook the coat from his shoulders, kicked it along the floor out of the way, and turned to the shelf above the wash-basin. A little maneuvering, and he had the razor case in his teeth. He held it out to Bugs, who fastened onto the other end. A moment later he spat the case cover out.

“I’m going to try to open the razor, Bugs, then I’ll drop it on the floor. Get it between your feet by the handle, with the blade up. Hold it there and see what happens.”

IT wasn’t so easy. Bugs chased the razor in tantalizing zigzags across the cabin floor.

“Dammit,” snapped Dan. “You’d think-it was human.”

“Patience does it, fella,” said the little Irishman. “You’ll get to be a nasty old man if you don’t watch out.”

“I’ll die young if you don’t hurry!”

Five minutes slipped by before Bugs got the razor upright between his toes. As Dan was lowering himself over it, he realized that the vibrations of the engine had ceased. The tramp had stopped to let the pilot off. He exerted the utmost caution as he brought the nearest strand of rope against the sharp blade.

“Hold it!” he gasped—and pressed.

There was a sharp snap as the strand gave way. Leaping to his feet, he began to twist and strain with his arms. A moment later he stood free. Tearing off Bug’s coat, he ran the razor along the latter’s bonds and cut them clean.

“Get into your coat again,” he hissed, gathering up the ropes and storing them into a drawer in the dresser.

“But, listen, Dan. . . .”

"Do as I tell you. You've got to sit there when Radek comes back and act as the decoy. I'll crouch behind the door. If he sees you free, he'll back out and raise a yell for help. We don't want the whole bunch of them on us."

"O. K.," grunted the little man. "But just the same," he added, as Dan was buttoning him up, "I don't feel so good like this."

"Leave it to me," said Dan, grabbing the water carafe from the stand above the basin and emptying it.

The vibrations of the old tramp's engines began once more to rattle her hulk.

THEY needn't have been in such a hurry—a fact which Bugs took occasion to point out gently—for it was a full half-hour before they heard footsteps along the corridor. In the meantime they had sat—Dan crouched in the corner near the door, the little Irishman draped over the edge of the bunk—with a growing sense of tension. Both men showed signs of strain, realizing that their one chance of escape lay in a swift lucky break after Radek's next entrance.

The bolt of the door was shot back. It was not Radek, but the man, Andriev, who stepped into the cabin, revolver, in hand. Seeing only Bugs, he shot a question sharply at the little Irishman.

"Where is the othair. . . ."

And then the thick glass carafe crashed against the back of his head, and he plunged forward to the floor with a thud. Dan tore Bugs' coat off and dropped beside the prostrate man. Gathering up the gun he hissed:

"Get those ropes out of the drawer!"

A few minutes later they flung the thoroughly bound, gagged, and still unconscious man onto one of the bunks.

"I'd feel better with a gun," said the little man.

"Take the carafe!"

They stepped out into the corridor. At its far end was the open door of the dining saloon, from which came the faint rumble of voices. Dan started toward it on tip-toe. He had hoped that it would have been Radek who came for them. With the obvious ringleader of the Russian gang laid low, the rest of his task would have been easier.

But if he could surprise the Soviet agent now—disarm him and his other accomplice, the fellow called Letszky—and lock them up in the cabin with Comrade Andriev, it mightn't be so hard to handle the crew of the tramp.

They were within a couple of yards of the door ahead when suddenly a yell arose behind them. As they swung, a shot crashed out, the bullet spattering against the paneling close by. Down the corridor stood one of the ship's officers, a smoking gun in his hand. As they ducked to avoid his second shot, the lights went out.

"MAKE the deck!" Dan hissed in the little Irishman's ear.

They shot toward the nearby companion and slipped through it, followed by a couple of shots and a volley of Russian curses. Somewhere off in the night a distant light flickered through the murky November air. Ahead loomed the narrow ladder leading up to the bridge deck. As Bugs banged the companion door shut, Dan hissed at him, "This way!" and shot forward rapidly.

As they reached the narrow deck above, he thrust the gun into Bugs' hand.

"Keep 'em down! I'm going to see who's inside the cabin!"

His long figure moved silently toward the bridge-house door. As he stepped inside, the man at the wheel—a junior officer—swung about and let out a grunt in Russian.

Taking no chances, Dan went straight at him, caught him on the angle of the jaw and sent him down in a heap.

He glanced quickly around. Suspended by two hooks to the rear wall of the cabin hung a rifle. He grabbed it down, shot the bolt on the starboard companion and hurried back to Bugs through the one on the other side by which he had entered. To get at them now it would be necessary for the Russians to mount by the port ladder since the bridge house covered the entire depth of this deck.

There was a clatter of feet below. The ship's captain, Radek, and Letszky came dashing toward the foot of the ladder. Forward someone was bellowing an order down the fo'castle hatch—an S.O.S. to the crew. The burly skipper started roaring up the steps, but Bugs' gun barked,

and he staggered back with a yell of rage and pain into Radek's arms. Another bullet, crashing into the deck beside them, sent them back toward the companionway.

Bugs grinned up at the G-man. "Reminds me of that night you and me held that machine-gun pit against the Heinies at Fismes, Dan!"

"I hope we—look out! Here they come!"

Dan took aim with the rifle at the foremost of the gang of sailors who came rushing toward the foot of the ladder, an officer roaring at them from the rear. But the only response to the falling hammer was a faint click.

"Hell!" he grunted. "The damned thing's not loaded!"

Bugs' shot caught the leading sailor in the thigh and crumpled him at the foot of the steps. While the rest hesitated, he sent a couple of shots into the deck at their feet, crowding them back. When they came on again, under the combined bellowing of the first officer and the wounded skipper, the little Irishman sent another shot into them without effect. Then he cursed blankly when pressing the trigger again, he realized he was now also holding an empty weapon.

The crew, five strong—with Radek at their rear—came surging up the ladder.

THE foremost crumpled under the impact of Dan's clubbed rifle on his skull, but the others pressed up, and immediately the narrow deck became a confused *mêlée* of struggling figures.

The stout-hearted little Irishman, his back against the deckhouse, fought desperately with his fists the two burly sailors who edged in on him. Dan's clubbed rifle fell again with a thud, and a heavy form sagged to the deck. As he was turning to leap to Bugs' aid, a souging knife-thrust ripped his coat from shoulder to elbow. He raised his knee, drove it into the stomach of the knife-artist and sent him groaning back.

Then a shot rang out—something seared past his cheek. He swung sharply. Radek, who had circled the crowd, stood six feet away by the rail, taking aim at him again. Out of the corner of his eye he saw another head—the first officer's—appearing up the ladder.

As the Soviet agent fired again, Dan leaped aside, and from the rail sent his rifle flying, butt first, at the fellow, who had swung to take another pot at him. Too late Radek jerked his head back. The butt caught him on the check-bone and he went plunging over backward, his gun clattering to the deck.

Leaping at the weapon Dan caught it up. As he did so, the first officer, who stood now at the top of the ladder, fired at him—and missed. Dan let his gun speak. The officer staggered backward clutching at his arm.

Bugs was down on his back, a big sailor astride him, pummeling his face.

Dan shot forward, brought the butt of the revolver down over the fellow's head, and when he went rolling over, yanked the little Irishman to his feet.

"You're all right, Bugs!"

"Yes—where's that buzzard that was . . ."

As the little fellow swung around, fists clenched, Dan turned. Radek was staggering dazedly to his feet, mouthing curses through his bleeding lips. Dan shoved the gun into his stomach.

"Put 'em up!" he growled. As Radek's hands went skyward, he added grimly: "Get below! And watch your step, Comrade!"

He followed the Russian down the ladder, his gun in the middle of the man's back.

It was a cowed bunch he faced in the tramp's saloon a few minutes later—the tramp's skipper hanging on to a bleeding shoulder in the corner, Radek swaying dazedly beside a green and trembling Comrade Letzky—the first officer—mopping his bloody wrist with a none too clean handkerchief.

It was to the latter the G-man spoke first. "Go above and take charge, you! Put about for New York!"

Then he turned to Radek. "You just underestimated American intelligence a bit too much, Comrade," he said. "And you're a damned poor prophet. You said I'd swim, didn't you? Well, I said you'd burn. You're going to!"

"And how!" added the little Irishman, through the corner of a somewhat bloody mouth.



# ANGEL-FACE ALIBI

By TED TINSLEY

Major John Lacy, gentlemen! Ex-commander of the 697th Machine-Gun Battalion in France. Decorated twice. Wounded twice. Now fighting the rat armies of the racket. His orders read—"Bring 'em in on a stretcher."

## A NOVELET OF THE RACKET BUSTERS

**M**AJOR JOHN TATTERSALL LACY removed his hat and gloves, slipped off his beautifully tailored topcoat and glanced about the hotel suite with a slight smile on his lips.

His eyes were alert and stamped with authority. He was clean-shaven except for a trim, sandy mustache that imperfectly concealed a scar that curved like a small white crescent from his upper lip past his nostril. The scar was no disfigurement; on the contrary, it gave a curiously arresting and vital quality to his smile. Women found that smile of his disturbing and rather thrilling, but Jack Lacy was completely unaware of women. From head to foot he was a man's man.

He stood by the window, staring far

down at the street while Dillon checked over the luggage and tipped the bellhops.

Dillon was as masculine as his employer, but a man of different mould. He was older, heavier, bulkier than the lean major. "Regular Army sergeant" was written all over him. He had been with Jack Lacy twelve years in peace and two years in war. He loved the major's guts, and, if truth be told, the major loved his. But no word of this would ever pass either man's lips—not if you were to cut out their two hearts. There is only one sin that military men will never play with—the sin of slopping over.

The major turned and smiled.

"Well, Sergeant? Tired of traveling?"

"A little, sir."

The major stopped smiling. He looked suddenly tired.

"Sergeant, I'm fed up! I'm bored. Been bored as hell for six ghastly months."

The sergeant said nothing. His eyes flicked toward the piled luggage.

"All right. Unpack—unpack!" said Lacy sharply.

He walked back to the window again and stared out. New York had changed a lot since he had last seen it. Midtown Manhattan seemed to sprout a new tower every week. He saw two unfamiliar buildings toward the west. South and east was the dizzy, sun-splashed pinnacle of the Cloud Building rising like the Matterhorn from Fifth Avenue. The last time he had seen it, it was a gaunt finger of uncovered steel.

THE telephone rang suddenly. Dillon left the luggage he was unpacking and answered the call.

"Yes? What's that? What's the name, please? Oh . . . Well, er, just a minute . . ."

He cupped his hand on the instrument and looked dubious.

"Call for the Major, sir. Man. Won't give his name. Says it is quite important. But he won't say who he is."

"Give it here, Sergeant. Thanks . . . Major Lacy talking . . . Who is it and what do you want?"

"I must make sure of something before I tell you," said the voice on the wire. "Forgive my seeming impertinence, but it is a precaution really quite necessary. Will you please repeat the number and designation of the unit you commanded in the War? I give you my word, sir, that I'm neither a lunatic nor a jokester."

Lacy hesitated. Finally an impish pucker curved his mouth. He spoke dryly.

"Major John T. Lacy. T for Tattersall. Commanding the 697th Machine-Gun Battalion in France, if it's any of your damned business."

"It is, I assure you," said the voice earnestly. "A mutual friend suggested I call you, Major. Mr. David Barlow. You recall him, of course."

"Of course. I sent the damn fool a telegram in an evil moment. He knew I was coming here . . . Well, sir, I'm waiting . . ."

"Major Lacy," said the voice; "I'm calling you in this abrupt fashion because David Barlow told me that you were the one man in the United States who measured up to our peculiar requirements."

"You're not, by any chance, offering me a job?" asked Jack Lacy in dry amusement.

"Better than that, sir. I'm offering you a sporting proposition that has already licked two real men. I'm offering you danger and death to play with by day and night. I know that you are comfortably wealthy but I want to assure you that the combined resources I and my associates are prepared to place at your disposal are literally unlimited. Please forget the word 'job' and consider the word 'adventure.' If you decide to try it, the chances are more than even that you will be killed. Are you interested?"

"Sir, I'm damned interested."

"Good. Barlow said you'd be. The directions are simple. Please come as soon as you conveniently can to the Cloud Building. When you enter the lobby go straight to the information desk and give your name. My associates and I will be expecting you impatiently. When can you get here?"

"Approximately twenty minutes."

"Thank you, Major."

The line clicked.

Jack Lacy closed his big fist and reopened it with a taut, lingering joy. He looked down at his stretched fingers.

"Sergeant!"

"Yes, sir."

"What damn fools we were to go all the way to Harbin to find excitement! Get my hat and coat. Put a clean handkerchief in my pocket. I'm going out on a binge."

"Yes, sir. Any orders?"

"All leaves canceled. Stand by until I get back. I'll phone if I need you."

He slid into his topcoat, adjusted the faultless hat and walked toward the door. The phone rang again and he turned.

"Never mind, Sergeant. I'll answer it. Hello?"

A voice came thinly.

"This is the secretary of the gentleman who called you a few moments ago. In his flurry he forgot one important item. You are first to visit the Lincoln Building. Go to the starter for the bank of elevators

in the main corridor. Give your name to the starter. That's all, Major. Sorry to bother you a second time. Good-bye."

Lacy blinked at the instrument. He replaced it with a chuckle. The chuckle grew to a roar of delighted laughter . . .

TEN minutes later he walked into the busy maw of the Lincoln Building and turned into the main corridor. The vault-like place was thronged. He paused and a crowd jostled past him and spilled into an empty elevator. The doors clanged and the car whisked upward. Lacy touched the starter's shoulder.

"My name is Lacy—Major John T. Lacy."

"What do I care?" the man growled.

"Why, you damned—" He mastered his burst of rage with a click of his strong teeth. The thing was obviously a joke—an elaborate practical joke. The starter appeared puzzled and a trifle scared, like a man confronted by a dangerous lunatic. He tried to edge away.

"No one told you about me?" Lacy asked him in a quiet fury.

"Never heard of you, Mister. Beat it, or I'll call a cop." He quailed under the frosty glitter of Jack Lacy's eye. "Better go home and go to bed, sir," he finished weakly.

"Thanks. Maybe I will."

He turned on his heel and walked to the side corridor that leads to the street. An undersized man with round baby cheeks and blue eyes who had stopped to watch, caught the eye of the elevator starter, grinned and made a derisive gesture of wheels turning with his forefinger in the air. The starter laughed and went back to work.

The little man followed Lacy around the marble corner.

To the left was a broad flight of steps that led below to the subway; on the right was the plate-glass window of a branch bank; straight ahead was the street door. Lacy had just reached a point opposite the subway staircase when the man who had followed him stepped closer.

Then it happened.

A woman screamed suddenly, piercingly. Lacy whirled, saw the glittering snout of the gun, and dropped. Two shots echoed like an explosion in the confined space. A

sliver of glass from the shattered window of the bank fell downward past Lacy's head. Pandemonium followed.

Lacy sprang to close with the baby-faced killer. He found himself caught helplessly in a mad swirl of jostling, panic-stricken men and women. The thug leaped down the subway steps, battering his way to freedom.

A policeman's whistle shrilled. A special cop came tearing out of the bank's side door with a drawn weapon in his hand. People were pouring into the narrow side lobby from the street entrance. A wild, swirling mob. Those inside were fighting to get out.

Lacy lost himself in the confusion, pushing his way to the exit with fist, elbow and knee. On the sidewalk, his sharp eye noted the passing of a slow-rolling cab. He hailed it, climbed in and slammed the door.

"Cloud Building," he said curtly.

The driver glanced backward as he let in his clutch.

"What happened, Bud? What was the fuss?"

"Suicide. Some poor devil just blew out his brains in the bank."

The hackman said, "That's tough."

He stepped on his brake as a red light glowed. Lacy, staring out the window, stiffened suddenly. He had caught sight of a squat, undersized man with hands jammed deep in his pockets, moving swiftly along the crowded sidewalk. The fellow's face was as sweet and guileless as any babe's. Angel-face! It was the murderous rat who had tried to kill Lacy a few moments earlier. He had quite evidently popped into one subway entrance and out another.

The major's hand dropped on the door handle and twisted it; but before he could throw open the door, the traffic light glowed green and the taxi jerked forward and accelerated. Jack Lacy relaxed on the cushioned seat.

"Blue eyes, fish hands, and angel-face," he murmured to himself. "Angel-Face! That's one face I intend to remember."

He paid off his driver and walked into the huge, black, modernistic lobby of the Cloud Building. He noticed, with a glance at the enormous clock, that he was ten minutes late for his appointment. He felt

wary and a bit uncomfortable at the thought that the only weapon of offense he carried was his big fists. His hesitation was brief.

It might be a second murder lure, planned in case the first went wrong; but murder or no murder, Jack Lacy intended to see this damnable thing through to its climax. At all events, it wasn't a practical joke!

He walked up to the polished desk with a studied and insolent leisure, drawing off his gloves and staring at the three uniformed information men as one who stares at three rather unusual types of rare earthworm. He spoke impartially to all three.

"My name, in case the information is instructive, happens to be Lacy. Major John T. Lacy."

The effect was instant.

HE received obsequious attention. The clerk in the center throne snapped his finger with a quick, summoning sound. A portly man in a wing collar, cutaway and striped gray trousers stepped forward and bowed.

"This way, sir, if you please."

He led the way toward the monstrous bronze doors of an express elevator. As they approached, the door slid open with a clang. Lacy's impressive-looking guide leaned close for an instant and his lips stirred briefly.

"Room 70169, sir."

Jack Lacy stepped into the car. A stenographer and a handful of clerks pushed after him but the portly man's arm barred them. The door clicked shut. The car rose. Except for Lacy and the operator it was empty.

The major had been in China when the Cloud Building was finished and thrown open to the public. He discovered, with a thrill of interest, that there was absolutely no perception of motion in the rapidly ascending car. Red lights in a bronze frame clicked on and off. 62 . . . 63 . . . 64. As a red 70 bloomed the door opened with a soft click.

Lacy stepped out. He walked down a stone and metal corridor and found he had taken the wrong turn. He retraced his steps and in another wing found the room he was looking for. 70169. A plain ground-

glass door. In the lower right corner, two brief lines in tiny capital letters:

J. J. Oliver  
Attorney-at-Law

He turned the knob and stood on the threshold, holding the door half opened like a glass shield. It was a small room. The major's gray eyes probed it with a quick stab. Three chairs and a desk. At the desk a man.

A quiet, full-bodied man, with pleasant eyes, graying hair and rimless glasses. He looked like a fullback, twenty years out of college, successful, physically fit. He gave Lacy a quick scrutiny and his eyes were bright with approval.

"Your name, please, if you'll pardon?"

Lacy told him.

"Thank you. Just a moment."

He spoke into a shielded transmitter. Then he rose with a brief chuckle that sounded slightly embarrassed.

"I'm afraid all this seems slightly insane. It isn't. Will you please come this way, Major?"

He opened a door. Lacy had expected to enter a private office. It wasn't.

It was a beautiful, modernistic, tiled washroom. At one end was a tall plate mirror, beautifully beveled and carved. Mr. Oliver touched something and the mirror became a door and swung silently open. Behind it was a grilled gate and a small private elevator. Light from an antique bronze fixture flooded the car with a soft, rose glow. There were two onyx buttons in a bronze plaque.

"Press the upper button," said Mr. Oliver. "You'll find the rest to be automatic."

Lacy pressed. The gate closed. The mirror swung back. The car ascended . . . For a few moments nothing happened. Then, magically, the gate reopened. A panel slid back and Lacy stepped out—not as he half expected into another washroom—but into a magnificent foyer, domed like a cathedral, soft with priceless rugs, lovely as a jewel.

A man-servant in black livery bowed and accepted the visitor's hat, gloves and topcoat. He led the way through a gorgeous sitting-room and opened a magnificent twenty-foot door of dull, crusted metal.

"Major Lacy," said the servant and shut himself out.

The room was a paneled library. A place of dull, polished furniture, deep leather chairs, a wide stone fireplace. Triangular-shaped windows showed hints of a landscaped terrace and the gray-blue of the afternoon sky. No shafts of towering buildings pierced that desert-like sweep of empty sky. The Cloud Building enjoyed the same upper air loneliness that belongs to the poised eagle.

There were six men in the room, seated, comfortably in a rough semi-circle. The library was full of a blue smoke haze. They were smoking and chatting as Lacy entered. The talk ceased. One of the men rose and came forward with outstretched hand and a pleasant smile. He was tall, with a thick mane of black hair; a broad, intelligent face and a wide, interesting mouth. He looked like a public speaker.

"My name is Richard Abbott," he said. "I'm the gentleman who arranged this meeting. I'm sorry I was forced to be so mysterious over the telephone. I am eternally grateful to you, Major, for your courtesy and promptness. May I introduce my associates to you?"

He presented them with courteous words. In spite of his imperturbable demeanor, Jack Lacy found himself gulping a bit. Every one of these six men was nationally famous. His host, Richard Abbott, was a corporation lawyer, millionaire many times over, an ex-Secretary of Commerce under a Republican president. Mortimer Marx, small, dark, fop-pish, was a famous banker and the patron of countless Jewish charities. Lewis C. Fletcher was the automobile industry in person; a spare, gray-haired man with a long, horse face and melancholy eyes. Julian Weber rationed the nation with pork and beef. Matthew Kane was the Irish brain that had conceived the daring miracle of the Cloud Building. And the last man, Hiram Vandaman Cutler, was a noted sportsman, a polo player of international rating, a director in thirty key industries.

Jack Lacy surveyed each of the six men for a silent second. Then he bowed punctiliously and sat down.

"I take it that we are met here for more than polite formality," he said to Abbott. "You seem to think that I am pecu-

liarily fitted for some business—or shall I say excitement? Suppose you explain."

Abbott presented a handsome humidor-case filled with cigars.

"Quite true. Briefly then, these are the reasons for our pledged association and our summoning of you today."

He began to talk. Long before he had finished, the impish devil that had slept so dully in Lacy's brain since the war, awoke, shook its tail and horns and began a mad and gleeful clog-dance in the depths of the major's quiet, gray eyes.

## II

"WE call ourselves the Emergency Council," said Richard Abbott. "We came into secret existence to fight something that is vaster and more dangerous than the reading of newspapers might lead you to believe. I mean the organized and successful piracy of industrial racketeers. Don't misunderstand me—we're not concerned with petty thugs and holdup men. For two years we've fought this thing with wealth and power.

"And, Major, we've failed.

"We helped to lay Al Capone by the heels, but Capone was a straw man for newspaper headlines. I'm telling you all this confidentially. Legitimate industry is almost in a state of siege. We have our report and charts from every key industry. The police and municipal authorities are useless. The graft that goes to them is enormous. If the newspapers printed tomorrow the actual tax paid by every man, woman and child in the United States to organized rackets, there would be a revolution that would rip the nation wide open. We don't dare let the newspapers print the truth! The uprising would probably swamp us along with the racketeers.

"This damnable depression has already brought black unrest—a vast powder keg and one ripe for a spark."

Richard Abbott clenched his fist and shook his black, lion-like mane.

"Hitherto, we've worked with the law. We've worked for the promotion of justice. From now on our program will be different. We will not be against the law—we will be independent of the law! Our aim no longer concerns itself with justice. What we seek now is the knowl-

edge, detection and extermination of the racketeer. As fast as we run the leaders of this expensive vermin to earth, we intend to kill them with the swift speed and shrewd publicity of their own gunmen. For this job we need a head who will create his own organization. We offer our field leader unlimited wealth, unlimited cooperation.

"Let me be concrete! Mortimer Marx of this Emergency Council will hand our field leader a token that will be good for cash on demand—a million dollars, if necessary—in any Federal Reserve bank in the United States. We guarantee this arrangement by a deposit of gold bullion in the rock vaults under Maiden Lane and Liberty Street. Mr. Hiram Vandaman Cutler has an ocean-going yacht, available at any time. He can be relied upon for sporting or arms equipment. Mr. Fletcher guarantees transportation—a tank, if necessary . . .

"You smile, Major, but I assure you I speak in simple sincerity. I mean everything I say. Is that correct, gentlemen?"

The five men nodded in a serious silence.

"I smiled," said Major Lacy gently, "through no feeling of humor. I smiled because I'm damnably, joyfully, interested in your proposition. If you want to know what I think . . ."

Abbott raised his hand in interruption.

"Please! Just a moment. If you agree to come in with us, you face more than an even chance of death, as I told you over the telephone. I'm playing fair and telling you things frankly. You are the third man we have selected to lead our attack. The first man was an ex-police inspector of the New York Department. He was killed last year. The second was an ex-marine officer who resigned and joined us because he considered it a high, patriotic duty. He is at this very moment in the Marine Hospital at Washington, fighting for his life. In short—"

"In short, I accept!" said Jack Lacy curtly.

There was a sharp murmur of approval from the six men. They crowded about him. He smiled at them and the pale scar on his lips jerked crookedly.

"I have no illusions, I assure you, concerning the permanency of my general health. Gentlemen, it may interest you to

know that I was very nearly assassinated on my way down here this afternoon."

He faced a circle of amazed faces and detailed how he had been lured to the Lincoln Building.

"The amusing thing about it," Lacy said, "is the speed with which your enemies work. That fake call came through to me only a few moments after Mr. Abbott had hung up. By the way, Abbott, where did you telephone from?"

"My office," said the lawyer slowly.

Mr. Marx made a harsh, guttural noise. "Ach! We find one leak already. Your office, eh?"

"But not my secretary," said Abbott grimly. "Somebody impersonated Preston. However, it's a leak! My office wire is tapped somewhere and, by Heaven I intend to find out where!"

"There's probably more than one leak, I'm afraid," the major murmured. He looked rather happy at the thought. "We'll have to be a bit cautious. No more proper names discussed on wires. We need identification, however . . . Wait! Abbott, your code name is Mr. Monday. Marx your name is Tuesday. Fletcher, Wednesday. Weber, Thursday. Kane is Mr. Friday. Cutler, Saturday. You will always refer to me on the phone as Mr. Sunday."

Abbott remained grave.

"Are there any questions that occur to you at the moment, Major? Anything pertinent to our organization that we can make clear?"

"Are you," Lacy asked, "locking horns at the present moment with any definite and known racket leader? Is there anything, so to speak, on the fire?"

"Not right now. But please understand how things will be. Most of the time you will have to operate on extremely short notice. You will have to be prepared to strike almost before we send you clearing-house information. I suggest you make this penthouse your headquarters. It is private, inaccessible. Mr. Oliver, in the office below, is efficient and incorruptible. The personnel of the Cloud Building carry out any wish of yours, however strange. I shall assure that by a brief talk with our Custodian Chief of Personnel. . . .

"There is a bus terminal garage in the basement of the building. I have a private garage there. The keys will be turned

over to you. You'll want a car, of course. The make and type is your own choice. Fletcher will handle that. Please let us know now if you need anything."

LACY rubbed his chin and considered.

"First, the frivolous," he smiled. "For the good of my soul and a tonic to my system, I want Mr. Oliver's name and occupation erased from that door on the 70th floor. In its place—purely a whimsical thought of my own, gentlemen—I want a small, chaste stencil substituted: AMUSEMENT, INC."

He glanced quizzically at the Emergency Council. If he had intended this whimsey as a test of his position and standing, it was a satisfactory test. No one smiled. Abbott looked at him without curiosity and said courteously: "I'll instruct Mr. Oliver to attend to it. What else occurs to you, Major?"

"I want a fast car immediately. The make is not important. I'll leave the selection to Mr. Fletcher. It must be fast, it must not be conspicuous nor too ornate. It must be in the private garage of the Cloud Building at the earliest possible moment, filled with gas and oil, ready to start. I want an appropriate driver's license and chauffeur's license for my man Dillon and myself."

He considered a moment.

"Next I want a Tommie Gun and ammunition. Better have it placed in the traveling trunk on the back of the car . . . Oh, yes! A Federal badge of some sort. We won't get much help from local police, I fear. See that I have Federal credentials . . . What about the bank token you mentioned?"

Mortimer Marx grunted and held out his hand. Jack Lacy took the small leather case from him and pressed it open. Within, set in an oval of plush was a small flat oval of gold. The major lifted the token out and examined it with interest. There was an engraved number on one side; on the reverse side was a tiny design that looked oddly like characters of Arabic—and yet, wasn't, as the major noted. The edge of the gold trinket was milled. It looked like a coin that had been flattened on a cartrack. Lacy put it back into the case and Marx bowed with a grunt.

"One more question," said Jack Lacy, "and then I think we'll be finished—except for some telephoning. I must confess that, at the present moment, I'm almost as innocent as a babe in the woods concerning rackets. Query: Are racketeers organized? Wait—I don't mean that. Let me reframe the question. I presume each racket has its own working organization. Do the rackets interlock? In a word, are we opposing a gang consolidation with a single supreme head?"

"I say no," replied Abbott swiftly. "But I think yes."

"What do you mean?"

"Just this. In gangland there are probably a dozen well-advertised scoundrels of the Elbows McCoy, Pete Zaggi, Bugs Pearl type, each controlling a certain definite territory, and levying tribute from every racket in the district.

"In New York the ostensible big shot is Mike Cuerdo. I believed that a year ago, Major. Today, I'm not so sure. I have come to think that, over Cuerdo and the rest, is one shadowy figure who has his dirty thumb in every profit wrung from vice and fear. I say there is no overlord—but, dammit, I *think* there is!"

"Who?"

"I don't know. I doubt if any of the thugs themselves know. If I'm not raving, and such a Napoleon of crime does exist, he must be tremendously wealthy, tremendously respectable and tremendously scared every waking hour of his dirty life. If he exists, no racketeer ever met him face to face. But I'll lay odds, Major, he's a yellow craven. He's a shyster at heart, and if we ever uncover him and get our fingers in the scruff of his invisible neck. . . ."

"Why say if," said the major softly. "When is a better word, I think."

Abbott's angry face cleared.

"You're right, Major. I stand corrected."

He pressed a bell on the library table and the soft-footed man in black livery appeared.

"Telephone in here, Hawkins."

"Yes, sir."

He brought the instrument, plugged it in, and retired deferentially. The Executive Council got busy. Abbott used the phone first. Then Fletcher, the automobile mag-

nate, made his curt, dry-lipped call. After him came Cutler. Major Lacy took up the instrument after consulting a small notebook.

"If I may?" he said in his precise tones.

He called a number in the John exchange—the insurance district—and asked for Mr. Charles Weaver.

"Hello? Mr. Weaver? How is your backbone, Charles?"

The voice at the other end gasped. It was a familiar query that only one man on the planet earth ever used with him. He exploded faintly in a faraway yelp of pure joy.

"Jack! By the pig's pink whistle, it's the Major! No, it can't be!"

"Yes it can, Charles. It is the Major.

... Still selling insurance, you drudge?"

"Jack," said the voice pleadingly, lovingly. "How long have you been in town? Don't tell me we're going out on a binge tonight?"

"Better than that, Charles. How would you like to stick your long, repulsive nose into something twice as repulsive and infinitely more dangerous?"

"Where are you, Jack? Listen—I'm closing the desk with my elbow right now! When did you get back? Where do I meet you?"

"Softly, my dear Charles," said Lacy in his cool voice. "I'm really serious. I'd like to get you and two others of the old inner circle into this mixture. How about Tip Ellison? He'd be just right."

"Sorry, Jack," said the voice, and it changed queerly. "You didn't hear, of course. . . . Tip's dead, old boy. He died last August. You were away and we couldn't reach you. No address."

"What?" There was a long pause. Lacy stared with unseeing eyes at the men who sat, well-bred and silent, in the penthouse library.

"True, I was away. . . . No address. . . . True enough. . . ." And in a lower voice: "I'm damned sorry I *was* away, Charles."

His face remained wooden, inscrutable; but his voice rippled out more offhand to Weaver's ear.

"All right. Let's reconsider. Tip's out. How about Ed Corning? Is he on tap? And Pat Harrigan. What's Crazy Pat apt to be doing?"

He heard Weaver laugh.

"Same irresponsible infant, Jack. He's get some kind of a flossy executive job over at Newark Airport. No hours as far as I ever could discover. Apparently when Pat gets tired of business cares he calmly puts on his derby—remember that ancient iron hat of his? He puts it on and goes for a row on the lake, or a horseback ride, or whatever the crazy galoot does with his spare time. He'll come running when I tell him you're on Manhattan Island. Shall I give him a buzz?"

"Right! You round up Corning and Harrigan and tell them the Major promises nothing—as usual."

"Where do we meet you?"

"Stay in your office. Get the boys. I'll call you later and tell you where to come. We'll have dinner together—all four of us. Good-bye."

HE hung up and nodded to the Executive Council.

"Gentlemen, I think we've done all the necessary. It's a quarter of five now. I intend to move in here with my luggage, and my man Dillon, some time before six. If you have any occasion to call me, or to relay news here, please remember I'm Mr. Sunday."

They shook hands and the Executive Council dissolved. They left by one and twos so as not to attract attention in the building. Jack Lacy was the last man to quit the penthouse. He found Mr. Oliver still at his desk in the office suite below.

"How long are you to be on duty here?"

"Usually till five, Major. I've been instructed, however, to obey whatever orders you give."

"Very well. Please remain here until I notify you that you're relieved. There will be three gentlemen coming here at about six this evening. Make a note of their names—Charles Weaver, Edward Corning, Patrick Harrigan. Admit them without question if they arrive before I do, and tell them to wait in the library for me. Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir."

"And, by the way, you might phone Hawkins and tell him to arrange for dinner. Any questions?"

"None, sir."

"Good afternoon, then."

The man smiled. "Good afternoon, Major."

As he descended swiftly in the express elevator from the 70th floor, Jack Lacy smiled his one-sided, scar-marked smile. Mr. Oliver had not once suggested that perhaps a meal might be arranged for him. He evidently took it for granted that he would be taken care of properly, if he obeyed orders and kept his mouth shut. The major liked that.

When Lacy stepped from the elevator in his own hotel and walked down the corridor toward his small suite, it was just two minutes past five.

He rapped briskly on the door. Twice he rapped. There was no answer.

The room was silent—too silent.

### III

WITHOUT hesitation Jack Lacy began whistling carelessly, in the manner of a good-natured employer who awaits the arrival of a lazy servant. His hand closed on the knob, turned it gently, pushed the door imperceptibly—the merest fraction of an inch. The door was not locked. But it should have been!

He released the knob and slipped quietly out of his topcoat. He bunched it over his left arm and hand like a shield. He plucked off his felt hat and gripped it in his right hand, crushed tightly. Only then did his cheery whistle cease. With one pantherish bound he whipped open the door and sprang into the room.

He flung his wadded hat around the door edge, straight into the tense face of an ambushed intruder. A sandbag grazed the major's head and a numbing pain wrenched his shoulder. The door of the room swung shut and clicked.

The thug dropped his sandbag and came charging out of the corner. A knife glittered in his hand. The major parried the thrust with his wrapped arm and retreated a step. A brief, whistling sigh of rage and satisfaction escaped his lips as he saw his enemy clearly for the first time. The thug was dressed in the sky-blue uniform and silver buttons of a hotel bellhop. But the face was sweet and guileless. . . .

"My old friend, Angel Face!" whispered the major, with a little hiss of pure joy.

He circled the fellow with his wrapped

arm extended before him, laughing at him, taunting him in that hard little whisper.

Angel Face sprang again. The major ducked as the knife ripped his coat and slid for his throat. He caught the bony wrist and held it. The two wrestled furiously without a sound. Lacy's body was like a beautifully tensed spring. At close quarters Angel-Face was no match for him. The topcoat unrolled and slipped from Lacy's arms to the floor. They tripped over it as they fought.

Angel-Face tore himself free and raised the knife. The major's fist drove out like a hammer, and the thug flew backwards toward the door. As Lacy sprang after him his toe hooked in the trampled coat and he staggered. The dazed thug seized the precious second of grace. The door slammed and he was gone. The noise of his pattering feet echoed from the hall. When Jack Lacy looked out, the bellhop was gone and the corridor empty.

He re-entered the room and shut the door. He had no desire for hotel assistance, or police curiosity.

A muffled bumping came to his ears from the bedroom. He strode in, turned the key in a closet door and threw it open. The gagged and trussed figure of his man Dillon was rolling and threshing on the closet floor. There was a large bump in Dillon's head and his hair was matted with dried blood. The major removed the gag and cut the bonds. Dillon struggled, swaying, to his feet.

"Well, Sergeant?" said the major. A queer inflection in the voice.

"I'm sorry, sir. He . . ."

"I know. . . . No excuse, please. Don't waste words. . . . Hurt much?"

"No, sir."

Dillon sat down on a chair and raised both hands to his head. His face had suddenly drained white. The major sprang over to him and gripped his shoulder affectionately.

"Bend over, Sergeant. Keep the head down low—way down. . . . That's better."

The shoulder he gripped so strongly heaved a little.

"He took your pistol, sir," Dillon groaned.

"Doesn't matter. Doesn't matter a damn. Forget it. Pull yourself together, son. . . . Steady. . . ."

In a few moments Dillon felt better.

The major walked to the telephone, called an outside number and waited. The voice of the hotel switchboard operator trilled lazily.

"Jist a moment. Here's your potty. . . . One moment, pul-lease."

"Hello? Ah—how are you, Mr. Monday? Sunday talking. . . . I want the following items immediately. Two Colt Forty-five Army automatics. Two spring clip shoulder holsters and ammunition. Wait! Better let me have four extra magazines also. Yes, immediately—at my hotel. . . . No, nothing new. . . . Goodbye."

He broke the connection and called the hotel desk.

"Please prepare my bill and send it up in half an hour with a bellhop. I'm checking out."

Dillon was working quietly on the last of the bags when a knock sounded at the door. A messenger boy entered with a neat package. Dillon signed for it. The major opened the package. He picked up one of the guns and hefted it. A sweet gun. . . . Partridge sight, a new model trigger and safety grip.

He tossed the gun and a holster to Dillon. He spilled out the cartridges on a table and both men loaded swiftly, with easy familiarity. They loaded the extra clips, too. Lacy slipped his two clips in his overcoat—one extra in each pocket.

When the bellhop arrived, both men were ready to leave. They took a cab and stopped a few blocks south of the hotel while Lacy went into a cigar store and called Charlie Weaver. They dismissed the first cab and took a different one to the Cloud Building.

THE major smiled as he glanced at the ground-glass panel in the office door on the 70th floor. The lettering had been changed. In small newly black capitals was the legend:

#### AMUSEMENT, INC.

He opened the door and nodded cheerily to Oliver.

Mr. Oliver reported that none of the three gentlemen he expected had yet arrived. Dillon placed the bags in the secret elevator and the two men ascended. At the top Hawkins greeted them impassively as usual.

"This is Sergeant Dillon," Lacy told Hawkins. "Show him where to put the luggage, and see that he has something to eat immediately."

"Yes, sir."

"And when the gentlemen arrive show them into the library."

"Certainly, sir."

The major walked into the empty library, selected a dark, graceful panatella from a green jade humidor and dropped with a sigh of content into a wide, deep chair. He was staring at the crackling logs in the fireplace through a haze of blue cigar smoke when Charlie Weaver and Ed Corning came in. Lacy greeted them with an elaborately innocent smile.

"Hello, Charles. Howdy, Ed."

"Jack! You snake-in-the-grass! You look swell. Ouch! Same old grip, too!" Weaver pulled his crushed fingers apart carefully.

"Gosh, it's good to see you again, Jack!" Corning chuckled. "Hi-yuh?"

Weaver was a smallish, dark-featured man with a thin face, small hands and feet and shoulders surprisingly wide for his build. Corning was taller, full-blooded. His heavy face was painfully pink from a close shave. They crowded around their penthouse host, pumping his hand, kicking his shins, asking him what the heck was up, and why the swell dump?

Pat Harrigan arrived a few minutes later in a welter of sound. He was a big, hearty, redheaded Irishman with a million bad habits and a face like a cherub. His voice roared out in horse bellow like a wave slapping on rocks.

"Jack Lacy, you old baboon! I'm cheering! Shake hands with a black Irishman from Cork. Hello, guys!"

He stared at the major curiously.

"What's in the wind? Who's your baby-faced friend out in the hall downstairs. He gave me a regular Saturday inspection down there, on the seventieth floor near the fire-stairs."

"Eh?" said the major sharply. "Wait just a second, boys. I'll be right back. . . . No, I mean that, Pat! Stick here, like a good fella. I won't be a minute. . . ."

He found Dillon in the dining-room, smoking a good cigar and staring at the wreck of a good dinner.

"Come along, Sergeant. . . . How was

the chow? Glad it was good. . . . Come on. Maybe trouble."

In the office below, Mr. Oliver stared with interest at the big gat peeping from Dillon's paw.

"Under your coat, Sergeant?" growled Lacy angrily.

They stepped out into the corridor. No one was in sight. They walked down to the end, opened the fire-door and peered down the stairs. Nothing. They tried every office door along the hall. All were locked and dark. Whoever had been loitering was gone—probably warned off by Harrigan's belligerent glare.

Lacy left Sergeant Dillon at the desk in the office below, and took Mr. Oliver with him up to the penthouse. The dinner was being served in the library. There were quick introductions and Oliver sat down with the four friends. It was a good meal, superbly prepared, but the conversation around it soon became lame and trivial. Jack Lacy refused pointblank to talk business until the coffee and cigars appeared. Both appeared at last.

"Well?" said Corning impatiently.

"I like this joint," said Harrigan, with an appreciative puff of his black weed.

"Shoot!" Weaver growled nervously.

The major got his cigar going to his satisfaction and puffed blue fog.

"Here's the thing—complete to date. Please don't interrupt until I'm finished."

He told it with the staccato, emotionless clarity of an Army report. They listened in characteristic fashion. Weaver sipped coffee thoughtfully like an old maid. Corning rubbed his pink jowl and beamed. Harrigan's strong teeth showed a bit under the upward curl of his lip.

Lacy finished talking and drained his coffee-cup in one gulp. He set the cup exactly in the middle of the tiny saucer.

"That's all, gentlemen."

He was deluged instantly by a swift spray of questions. Everybody spoke at once.

"I've told you all I know," Lacy said. "Sorry, Pat; if I knew the answer to your question, things would be much simpler—but I don't. What's that, Ed? Yes, of course. That's correct. . . . Oliver?"

"I wanted to tell you," Oliver said, "that the car you just mentioned is now in the private garage in the basement, below the

first level. The—er—accessories are locked in the trunk box on the rear. The various keys you need are in my possession. I'd like to turn them over to you now, if I may?"

"Certainly."

There was a silence.

PAT HARRIGAN tossed his cigar butt in a silver tray.

"I'm in this thing, Jack!" he roared. "Whole hog. Up to the hilt. No questions. That's settled."

Weaver nodded instantly. "Ditto."

Ed Corning just grinned. His big head wagged good-naturedly.

"Did I ever say no?" he demanded.

A discreet knock and Hawkins appeared.

"Gentleman wishes to communicate on the telephone, sir. He says he has an important message for a gentleman named Mr. Sunday."

Lacy shot him a cold, icy glare. "I'll take the call in here, Hawkins."

He seized the instrument and clapped it to his ear. Hawkins plugged in the trailing cord and vanished.

"Hello. . . . Will you talk just a tiny bit louder. . . . Oh, yes—Mr. Tuesday. I can't quite—that's better. No. Not at all. Go right ahead. . . ."

He listened attentively. He jerked an envelope from his pocket and frowned. Corning rolled him a pencil across the table. After a long, long wait he murmured: "Certainly. Why not?" and replaced the telephone on the table.

Weaver said inquiringly: "Mr. Tuesday is Marx. That's right, isn't it?"

"Yes. That was Mortimer Marx. Listen to this report! I'm beginning to learn some more about rackets. . . . It seems that a certain well-known Italian builder named Pellegrino—Anthony Pellegrino—has been building a tremendous six-story apartment house up in the Bronx. It's been under construction for almost a year. Huge place. Covers a block. Pellegrino has been financed by the Bronx City Trust. Three days ago he went there and confided to the branch manager that he was being shaken down by a big shot. The big shot's name is Harry Lipper.

"Harry Lipper, according to Marx, is the head of a fake labor union called

The Honest Workmen's Alliance. He's well known to the police, he's been under indictment twice for murder but was never convicted. Scared witnesses got him free both times. He shook down Pellegrino—demanded a huge rake-off. Pellegrino couldn't pay such a sum. You see, his loan is due, the building is only eighty per cent finished, and no purchaser in sight. He faced bankruptcy. So he went to the Bronx City Trust. Got all that clear?"

Jack Lacy paused.

"He wanted his bank to extend a further loan so that he could pay Harry Lipper's gang and keep the big shot quiet, until the building was finished and sold. Pellegrino was honest about it. If he defies Lipper the building goes up like a torch some night. If he pays Lipper that huge graft, he goes into bankruptcy, and the bank is forced to take over the building as a speculation. The matter was discussed at a special board meeting of the Bronx City Trust. Marx is a director. The Bank refused a loan to buy off a big shot. Pellegrino sent word to the big shot to go to hell."

"And?" asked Charlie Weaver grimly.

"And—Mr. Marx received an undercover report a few minutes ago that Pellegrino's new building is to be wiped out tonight by torch bugs. . . . The bank controls the insurance company that holds the risk. They've been hit hard by this arson gang. Isn't this a sweet civilized country? No complaint, thank God, is going to be made to the police. It is strictly up to Amusement, Inc., to attend to Harry Lipper & Co. And get this!"

His voice rasped.

"I want this crystal clear. If possible, we are to save the building and protect the bank's investment—but our main purpose tonight is something else. It is to get the goods on Harry Lipper—Lipper himself, mind you—and if we do, to exterminate him on the spot! Arresting big shots is a worn-out joke. The Emergency Council wants this public enemy killed outright!"

"Where is the building?" asked Ed Corning, after a short pause.

"It's in the High Bridge section of the Bronx. The address is six fifty-four Zemblat Avenue. I'm not familiar with the neighborhood. . . ."

"Any watchmen there?" Corning wanted to know.

"Two. Pellegrino suspects that they're both crooked and in the pay of the racket."

"We ought to slug 'em and put two of our guys in their place," said Harrigan calmly. "What kinda suit does a watchman wear, anyway?" He chuckled.

"All right," said Jack Lacy crisply. "Let's organize. Oliver, you'll stay all night here in the penthouse, and act as headquarters. Sergeant Dillon will drive the automobile. I'm going into the building as platoon leader. Corning on guard at the rear. Charlie and Pat replace the two watchmen."

"Fine," nodded Pat gleefully. "I've always wondered what a night watchman thinks about. Now I'll know!"

It was past eleven o'clock when a dark, plum-colored sedan rolled out into Sixth Avenue from the basement ramp of the Cloud Building extension. In less than half an hour, Dillon parked noiselessly at the curb two blocks to the east of the dark skeleton of the Pellegrino Building in the Bronx.

Pat Harrigan alighted from the automobile and shambled off. He walked two blocks and mooched along the front of the unfinished apartment house. The sidewalk was a filthy path of hard-packed ashes. The street was partially blocked with piles of building material and refuse, a watchman's frame shanty and covered hoisting apparatus.

The watchman sat tilted on a chair inside the open door of the shanty, reading a tabloid newspaper by the light of a lantern. He was alone. His partner was evidently on the upper floors of the building. Pat ascertained that much, as he passed the shanty the first time. The second time that he passed it—he didn't pass it. He stepped in quickly, and, with almost one motion, his fist struck downward and his foot kicked the door shut.

The door reopened presently and Pat came out, dragging the ex-watchman's chair. His victim, neatly gagged and trussed, lay hidden in a rear corner of the shack under a rumpled pile of old blueprints.

Harrigan sat down calmly on his borrowed chair. He picked up the ex-watchman's pipe, wiped the dripping stem

carefully on his sleeve, and stuck it between his teeth. He puffed a filthy cloud of cheap tobacco smoke without a gag or a blink.

"The good Lord knows I should have been an actor!" mused the genial Pat.

#### IV

TWO discreet shadows mounted slowly and noiselessly, from floor to floor, through the quiet semi-darkness that shrouded the cluttered inside of the Pellegrino Building. It was a clear, cold night outside and a vague, milky light came through the gaunt window openings, unfinished as yet by frame or sash.

As the two friends crept upward toward the fourth floor, Lacy heard Charlie Weaver's teeth chatter, and a shiver twitched his own shoulders. The damp chill from mortar and new brick was like a foggy breath of ice. The two men stepped over dark, sagging planks; avoided the black outlines of upturned wheelbarrows, cement pails and piles of rubbish and broken tile.

They had made their plans swiftly. Corning was already in the rear of the building, watching the weed-covered slope that ran steeply downward to the railroad tracks and the Harlem River. Harrigan, who loved to tinker with anything from a pencil sharpener to a steam dredge, had thrown aside the stiff tarpaulin that covered the electric hoisting apparatus. He had cannily muffled the bell's loud clamor with a piece of dirty rag. Two bells, up; three bells, down; one bell, stop! A long staccato jangle was Pat's final warning. It was Pat's tip to shoot the lift fast to the street and get out of the neighborhood without delay or any further thought of his companions.

A flicker of red light met Jack Lacy's eye as he peered through the lath skeleton of a partition wall on the fourth floor. An iron brazier, filled with red, glowing coals was visible near the yawning hole of the hoist-shaft. A man stood over it, warming his hands. The upstairs watchman. The major pressed Weaver's arm. The two men separated and dissolved into the darkness.

The watchman stamped his frosted feet and began to hum mournfully:

"Is it a sin, is it a crime,  
Lovin' yuh like I do-o-o-o-oo!"

The barrel of a Colt prodded his ribs and made him stagger. Lacy's leap had been absolutely soundless.

"Stick 'em up!"

The watchman's hands rose and he turned stupidly. On the other side of him was Charlie Weaver's granite little face. The man grinned a bit uncertainly and began to whine.

"Easy, boys. Why git so tough? I'm wise, ain't I? Yuh come so early yuh scared me?"

"I thought so!" Jack Lacy snapped. "The rat's in on it. Tie him up, Charlie."

He jerked the muffled bell signal twice. The lift rose from the street level with a soft whir. Another jerk and it stopped, motionless and empty. They rolled the gagged and tied watchman aboard and Weaver stepped on the platform with him. The lift descended through the dark bowels of the empty building. Weaver and Pat would know what to do with the second captive.

Alone on the fourth floor, Lacy slipped his Colt into his overcoat pocket to be handy. He walked about in the flickering light from the brazier, examining his surroundings. There was a small supply shed on this floor. He opened the door and peered in. The shed was partly filled with plumber's materials—red lead, cans of alcohol, a square tin of gasoline. The major smiled as at some secret joke. He stood there, staring into the shack for quite a while—just smiling.

Finally he walked to a window space and looked out cautiously. The street was as quiet as a tomb. A chilly wind blew strongly in his face from the exposed west of the building. He had a wide, sweeping view of the dark river and the lights of the Speedway. The lamps on High Bridge were two long strands of golden beads hung high over the quiet river.

"Pretty!" said the major to himself, with a sharp gulp of pleasure.

He was still there, patient and relaxed, when a pebble flew inward from the street, struck the floor and bounced with a faint ping! against the metal side of a wheelbarrow. A second missile followed it. No more.

"Two," said the major thoughtfully. "A pair of damned rascals!"

He waited. From the fire-stairs came a tiny ray of light. Two figures slid into view like hulking shadows. One of them had an electric torch whose bull's-eye had been taped so that a tiny pencil of light was all that showed.

"Okay, Max. Where's that lousy wop gone?"

"Took it on the lam, I guess." A hoarse chuckle. "Maybe he figgered we might croak him anyhow, jist fer the fun of it." Another hoarse chuckle. "Remember Scarlatti. . . ."

They moved away and vanished temporarily. Still Lacy waited quietly in his ambush. He had seen many things in his life, but never a torch bug on a touch-and-go job.

The bugs worked fast and expertly. One of them carried a tin beer-growler to the center of the floor. The metal handle had been jerked out, and a handle of frayed rope substituted. The pail was full of water. The thug threw a light cord over an exposed beam and drew up the can until it swung gently a few feet above the floor. Lacy watched the maneuver in puzzled wonder. Why a swinging can of water? He waited for the answer. He saw the two shadows drag a bricklayer's metal mortar-vat directly under the suspended can. They filled the vat from big square tins until it overflowed and slopped in a puddle on the floor.

The two arson experts were now working fast and without a word to each other. One of them grabbed up everything he could find in the way of receptacles—pails, wheelbarrows, a battered old dishpan. He placed them helter-skelter near rubbish-piles, against lath partitions. His companion followed him with gasoline, spilling each tin full, running a generous wet trail from point to point, splashing it everywhere. It was a devilish network for fire to trace, leaping from pail to pail, exploding in a red snarl from each cunningly placed receptacle, to lick at lath and timber. Still, for the life of him, Jack Lacy couldn't figure out the tin suspended over the big vat.

"Okay, Max?" growled a thick voice.

"Yeah—all set. . . . Shove in the pipe and give it a suck."

"How long you figger the big blow, Max?"

"Five minutes."

"A buck it's four!" said the thick voice with a chuckle.

HE uncoiled a length of narrow rubber tubing—about the diameter of a lead-pencil—and fixed one end so that it led into the suspended tin. The flexible tube curled downward over the lip of the gasoline vat and trailed snakelike on the floor. The torch bug lifted the free end of the tube to his mouth and sucked noisily until a thin trickle of water spilled from the tube. He dropped it on the floor and straightened. As he did so, he turned and the flickering light from the brazier of hot coals touch his face with a clear, momentary distinctness.

The major saw and his muscles tensed like a spring. Round baby cheeks, blue eyes—it was Angel-Face again!

But the revelation of Angel-Face's identity was as nothing to the revelation that pricked his brain wide-awake at the instant he had seen Angel-Face's pasty lips sucking noisily at the free end of the rubber tube.

A siphon. . . . Water in the pail, slowly trickling out and spilling on the floor till the pail was empty and the contents exposed. . . . The gas-soaked rope handle, the frail cord! A burst of fire burning the cord to drop the blazing pail. . . .

"Phosphorus!" thought the major. "By the Lord Harry, lump of phosphorus! Devilishly clever!"

A board creaked faintly. Lacy leaped at the torch bugs with his big Colt taut in his fist.

"Stick 'em up, you damned rats!"

His gun held Angel-Face motionless, but the other man turned with a shrill yelp and ran. The major's gun swerved and he fired with a crashing echo in the darkness. He missed. The feet raced onward. But he had Angel-Face caught. The fellow glared malevolently at his half-invisible captor.

"Croak him, Max!" he screeched. "Croak the flatfoot and let's scam outa here!"

A roar from the darkness. A bullet from Max ripped the wall with a whack. Lacy fired at the flash. His left hand caught Angel-Face by the throat and swung him

in front like a shield. He heard a plank creak and saw the swift flitting of a shadow.

Bang! The shadow sprawled, squirmed like an ugly bug for an instant, and relaxed in the light of the brazier. Lacy shoved Angel-Face ahead of him. He stood over the fallen man with his gun poised and his eyes flint-like. One expert look. The man was dead.

At that instant Angel-Face kicked. Lacy felt an intolerable stab of pain. He doubled over and staggered back. His gun dropped from stiffened fingers. He tried hazily to close with his foe. They wrestled drunkenly into a pile of material and it came down on them like a landslide. A board-end cracked against the back of the major's head. He gritted his teeth and fought to retain his slipping consciousness. He fell helplessly, and the thug gave a yelp of joy as he straddled him with his knees and pinned him on his back.

Behind them in the dust-filled darkness, water kept trickling endlessly through a rubber siphon.

A lump on the floor beneath his body pressed remorsefully into Lacy's back. His fainting brain swam with the answer. His own gun was on the floor beneath him. But the battering fists of Angel-Face were like flails. Lacy tried to squirm. His limbs were like lead. He felt his arms thrust aside and a fleshy hand dropped on his face. Unseen finger-tips moved up his cheeks, groping toward his closed eyelids.

At that instant there came a white blinding flash. A thunderous roar shook the building. Angel-Face, still on his knees, turned his head. His jaw dropped open and he glared stupidly. He had forgotten his time torch!

Vast sheets of orange flame were swirling upward. Angel-Face saw the lakes of spurting gasoline wriggle snakily across the floor, like the blazing spokes of a wheel. The prostrate major saw the eyes of his kneeling foe gleaming dully in the lurid light like a pig's. A vast crackling filled the air with the snapping noise of whips.

The major rolled and his hand clutched at the hidden Colt beneath him. The light gleamed on an upraised barrel. Angel-Face, still kneeling dazedly, was confronted by a stark, snarling demon who snapped at him:

"Get up, you rat! Up on your feet!"

The thug swayed to his feet and cringed back, whimpering with terror.

"My Gawd, we'll boin here! Don't be dumb, flatfoot! Let's scram. I swear you'll git a big split of dough outa this. Don't be a dumb cop."

Lacy laughed aloud. Somewhere out in the dark night a policeman's whistle was shrilling. They heard the rap of a night-stick beating a tattoo on a frosty sidewalk. And Jack Lacy laughed!

"I'm no cop, you fool—I'm a death warrant! You'll talk fast to me or you'll burn in your own grease! Who's the big shot boss, and where is he?"

"I ain't talkin'."

"Is it Harry Lipper, you rat?"

"I ain't talkin'." He backed up a step, snarling sullenly.

"You'll talk, damn your soul, or you'll burn!" snapped the major in a steely voice. "Come across! No? All right, you've had your chance. Back up!"

He shoved the cursing, snarling gangster ahead of him across the burning floor toward the plumber's shack at which he had smiled so thoughtfully earlier in the evening.

"Where's Lipper? He's watching the job somewhere, isn't he?"

The thug was silent. He stood there spitting silently like a trapped puma.

A sudden sweep of the major's arm sent him sprawling into the shack. Lacy slammed and fastened the door.

The open square of the hoist-shaft was already a roaring inferno that blocked escape. Lacy ran down the stairs to the floor below and, racing across to the shaft, he bent over and jerked the bell signal twice. He waited for an instant in a queer, sickish apprehension. Were Pat and Charlie still on the job below, unmindful of everything but orders? A soft, whirling sound was the answer. The lift rose. Ding! went the bell. The lift stopped at his feet.

Lacy left it and like a flash was over again to the stairs and up them in a bound. Half the upper floor was already impassable, and the smoke blew like a greasy banner in his face.

He reached the paint shack. From inside it came a frenzied pounding. He threw open the door and the firebug fell out on

his face. Lacy dragged him to his feet. Angel-Face quailed from the doom in the major's eyes.

"Will you talk—or burn? Hurry up. I can't wait!"

"Yes . . . yes! I'll talk—I'll talk!"

His head rolled on his shoulders.

LACY took a firm grip on the torch bug's collar and hustled him down the stairs like a bouncing dummy. From the street came the noisy bells of the first arriving fire apparatus. Lacy pinned the dazed crook and tied his slack hands with a quick loop to the side timber-post of the lift. Angel-Face struggled futilely. His lips frothed and there was a horrible vacancy in his distended eyes. He was almost insane with hatred and fear.

"Who hired you—Harry Lipper? If you lie to me—damn you—up you go and burn!"

He seized the man by the hair, and bent his head back so that he could see what awaited him up the shaft.

"Lipper," frothed the racketeer. "Big shot . . . Lipper. . . ."

"Watching the job, is he?"

"Watching—yes. . . ."

"Where?"

No answer. The major's arm jerked twice. The lift began to rise toward a rippling sea of bright flame.

From the lips of Angel-Face came a horrible, inhuman shriek. Ding! The lift stopped. It whirled down again at the major's signal and paused at the floor.

"Where?" said the major simply.

"Twenty-eight hunnerd Zemblat Avenue. . . . Corner house. . . . Block down. . . . On the roof. . . ."

A rush of booted feet came pounding across the floor from the direction of the stairs. A fireman, rubber coat glistening, his big hand clutching an ax, darted like a streak toward the lift.

"Who are you, guy?" he roared at Lacy.

"None of your damned business."

"Why, you sneakin' louse! You're a torch! Caught yuh hot! I'm gonna cave in your rotten skull for you!"

The ax swung upward in a vicious arc. Lacy drove his fist under it and landed hard on the jaw. The fireman's heels lifted and he fell with a clatter. His helmet rolled to the floor of the lift.

Jack Lacy jammed the bulky thing on his own head. He could see more firemen coming from the stairs. He gave the last signal to the faithful Pat. A furious jangle like palsy. The lift dropped. As it did, Lacy's knife cut the bonds that held Angel-Face. He heaved him over his shoulder.

"Play dead, rat! Hang limp or I'll tear your belly apart!"

There was furious commotion and noise in the street. Engines were chugging, long lines of wet hose were unreeling like snakes. Policemen were working like fury to shove a disorderly crowd back, and establish a hasty fire-line.

A cop ran forward toward the building entrance. He had just caught sight of a fire helmet and a limp body. He stared at the smoke-streaked face half-hidden by the helmet, at the dirty, water-soaked coat. He touched Lacy's shoulder.

"Okay, Bud. Lemme grab his legs."

The fireman grinned wearily.

"Never mind," he snapped. "I got him. Shove in an ambulance call quick!"

"Right!"

The young cop dashed off. Lacy climbed a pile of sand and dropped Angel-Face in the shadow of the construction shanty. He threw the helmet from his head and prodded his quivering captive.

"On your feet, rat! Move!" he grated sharply.

Another cop—a fatter and older one—saw two bare-headed men walking inside the fire-lines like jay-walkers.

"Hey, youse! Hey! Where do you think you're goin'?"

"We got in here, Officer, and now we can't get out."

He grinned and gave them both an impartial, good-natured shove.

"Beat it! Who do yuh think yuh are—LaGuardia? Come on! Everybody move back!"

The packed crowd swallowed them both. They walked arm in arm down the Avenue. Jack Lacy's grip was like a steel band on his companion's arm. They reached the corner house at the end of the next block.

"If you lied, and Harry Lipper is not on the roof, I'm going to kill you in his place," said the major in a low tone.

They went into the house entrance together.

V

LACY nudged his captive with a poke of his hidden gun.

"Upstairs, rat!"

They stepped out into a queerly beautiful spectacle. The whole sky over the roof was a vast whirlpool of wind-blown sparks. The blaze sent them soaring high in the air like a spouting volcano, then the wind seized them and sent them whipping across the sky like a wide golden river. On every roof in the neighborhood the dangerous yellow rain was falling everywhere. A chunk of lath as big as a man's hand dropped with a shower of sparks and began to burn briskly like a pine knot. A woman screamed and pointed. Someone dashed a pail of water over it. Here and there people were bent over, dabbing with water-soaked rags at smaller spots of fire.

The major's eye went past these dozen or so startled householders and rested on the one motionless figure who stood in a corner of the roof, staring at the mounting flames of the Pellegrino Building.

The man's back was broad and squat. He wore a derby and a heavy overcoat and his head was sunk into his collar like a turtle's. He had a pair of small opera-glasses to his eyes and he kept staring at the blistering furnace up the street, occasionally brushing away a spark with an absent-minded gesture.

The major was deliberate. He said coolly: "Is that the big shot with the opera glasses?"

"Yeah." Just a wary monosyllable.

"Is it Harry Lipper?"

"Yeah."

He gave the gangster a swift push forward.

"Keep walking in front of me. Stop when I tell you. And keep quiet."

They crossed the roof silently. The major slid his gun out of his overcoat pocket.

"Stop," he whispered.

As he did so, a burning brand dropped eddyingly from the sky and struck the back of his hand. Stung, he jerked hand and gun involuntarily downward toward his side.

"Look out, Harry!" screamed Angel-Face, and ran.

Lacy turned instantly and fired. His bullet struck squarely in the spine. Angel-Face pitched forward and slid on his face.

The cry and the shot came almost simultaneously. Harry Lipper turned suddenly at the roof's edge, snarling, as the major rushed for him. The big shot of the arson racket had no time to draw his own gun. He swung over the edge of the roof and on to the iron rungs of a goose-neck ladder. He went down the rear of the building like a monkey.

On the top floor fire-escape landing he crouched a moment and again went for his gun. The major, halfway down the goose-neck, gave him no chance. Lacy leaped the remaining twelve rungs and landed with a thud where Lipper had stood. But the arson king was racing down the ladders below. The flat gratings of metal gave Lacy no chance for a shot. He tore after the fellow pell-mell. Round and down; round and down. . . . Windows opened, heads poked out—and jerked in promptly, with startled yelps.

Harry Lipper reached the lowest fire-escape and threw one leg anchor-like over the railing. Twenty feet below him was a stone-paved court, flanked by white-washed walls on either side; and in the rear, a wooden fence. The racket boss jerked out a thirty-eight police positive and raised his arm upward like a flash. But he was miles too late.

The major's bullet burned through coat and vest and pierced his heart.

His fat leg unhooked slowly from the railing. He fell head first to the concrete below, and lay there in a curiously huddled heap, like a man trying to stand on his head. . . .

Jack Lacy went over the platform railing, hung from his hands and dropped. He landed on the balls of his feet and cushioned the shock with bent knees.

As he raced for the board fence a man in soiled dungarees came rushing out of a low cellar entrance, with a kitchen knife in his hand. It was the superintendent of the apartment house.

The major's bullet singed his blond mustache and chipped a whitewashed stone.

"Yimminy!" gasped the Swede, and went back into the black cellar with long, intelligent strides.

The major trotted onward to the fence,

leaped, caught the top with one hand and went over like a pinwheel.

He dropped into a courtyard like the one he had just left. At the far end was a towering pile of ashcans, and a half-opened iron gate. He squeezed through, walked rapidly along a sidewalk, turned a corner, went east, turned another corner. . . . His brisk gait slackened to a slow stroll. He looked curiously innocent and inoffensive—like a mild, civilized man on his way to an all-night delicatessen for Swiss cheese and rye for an all-night poker party.

He hailed a rolling Fifteen and Five.

"Lenox Avenue and One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street," said Lacy mildly. "Okay, Major," chirped the cabby.

He wondered what made his passenger chuckle with soft laughter.

WHEN John T. Lacy, field leader and active head of Amusement, Inc., reached the penthouse in the Cloud Building, he found his co-workers in amusement waiting for him. Apprehension slid from their faces as he walked in jauntily. They rushed him with yelps and howls of relief. A rueful smile creased Pat Harrigan's cherub face.

"Jack, I never sweat so much in my life," he declared, "as I did tonight, when I walked off and left you alone in that damned fire-box."

Jack squeezed the big paw affectionately.

"But you obeyed orders like a seasoned soldier, Pat. I'm proud of you—proud of the whole gang."

"Whoopee!" squeaked Ed Corning.

He had been drinking rye highballs steadily for half an hour in an effort to lull his fears for Jack. He was well puffed. His red face glowed like a harvest moon.

Charlie Weaver was like a swarthy little jack-in-the-box, leaping nervously around and talking a blue streak.

Sergeant Dillon grinned like a winter apple and gave Lacy his little half-salute.

"Would the Major care for a drink?"

The major would!

Hawkins suddenly stood in the doorway for an instant.

"Mr. Monday and Mr. Tuesday," he announced.

Marx came in first. His olive cheeks

were flushed and he looked eager. Abbott was right behind him. The little Jewish banker stuttered in his very eagerness to talk. Abbott spoke instead.

"We received notice a short time ago. We were, naturally, worried over your delay. May I ask whether. . . ."

"The Pellegrino Building, I am sorry to say," said Lacy, "is probably gutted—a total loss. I was unable to prevent the blaze."

"But—but—" stammered Marx impatiently.

"There were two firebugs. One of them, name unknown, was caught in the act of committing arson and killed by me. I'm afraid he was cremated in his own fire. The second thug was shot in the back trying to escape and is dead on a roof up in the Bronx."

"But did you—were you able to trace. . . ."

"The chief of the arson racket was a man named Harry Lipper. He was shot through the heart as he raised his own gun to kill me. He's cold dead—gone."

"Ach!" breathed Mortimer Marx in a slow sigh.

"I—I never took a drink in my life," Abbott said slowly; "but I—I think I'll take one now."

"This is, of course, no time to talk of fees or rewards," Marx said. He hesitated. "Tonight you struck the first successful blow at the criminal enemies of legitimate business. You have performed a high patriotic service—anything that you want or desire—anything at all. . . ."

Lacy interrupted.

"I think you had better talk to Corning, Harrigan and Weaver. They came into this thing with blind loyalty. As for me—"

He smiled his crooked, scar-marked smile.

"You forget the gold token."

"Ach, yes! Use it—it is yours—yours to any limit."

"Besides which," said John Tattersall Lacy in a soft murmur, "you forget the name of my infant organization, I'm afraid. Living has always meant to me a rather primitive striving for satisfaction. And I confess I receive a good part of the satisfaction of life from—shall we say—Amusement, Inc.?"



## **NORTH•WEST ROMANCES . . .**

Real, pulse-stirring stories of that vast white land of silence, mystery and romance. True-life stories of the last great frontier where the wolf-pack howls beneath the flaming Borealis, and the man-breed fights for raw gold and fair women and the sheer love of battle.

## **AIR STORIES . . .**

Deep in the Papuan jungle, head-hunters brewed dark magic. On board a mystery yacht a white girl lay, captive of the pirate rabble—and overhead Al Dane flew on thunder wings against a sure-death set-up . . . **THUNDER BIRD**, a complete tropic-air novel by Herman Petersen. Also novelets and shorts by Joel Rogers, Linton Davies, George Bruce, Andrew A. Caffrey, Franklin P. Miller and others.

## **ALL-ADVENTURE ACTION NOVELS . . .**

For men who like their stories long, meaty, swift and colorful—All-Adventure Action Novels! The current issue features **CAPTAIN KIDD'S CARGO** by Albert Richard Wetjen, **THE MANCHU FALCON** by Curtis Mitchel, **THE SKIPPER FOULS THE DEVIL** by Thomas J. Cooke, and **JUNGLE MASTER** by Ted Tinsley.

## **FRONTIER STORIES . . .**

Massacre was scrawled along the wagon-train track. Men and women, a captive herd, dragged across the Staked Plains—and only a buckskin-man miracle could save that remnant from the knife and torture-stake! . . . **LAST-STAND STOCKADE**, by Linton Davies. Also **QUEEN OF THE BORDERERS**, by Ted Fox, and novelets and shorts by Walt Coburn, Tom Lewis, Harry F. Olmsted and others.

## **ACES . . .**

He was a flying sheik of the silver screen, mock hero of the movie-mad. But they double-crossed him with a booking to the Front—to play a killer role to the tune of bucking Vickers!—**A STAR WITH WINGS**, George Bruce's great novel of a movie hero swept up into the swirling vortex of world war. Also **NO DOGFIGHTS WANTED!** by E. W. Chess, and novelets and shorts by Andrew A. Caffrey, Tom O'Neill and others.

**On sale at all newsstands**

**Get your copy today**



GEE... I'd sure like to have real **HE-MAN** muscles!

So would I, but it takes a long while

**"Bunk!"**  
—says

**CHARLES ATLAS**

**"I'll Prove in the first 7 days YOU can have a Body like Mine!"**

No other Physical Instructor in the World has ever DARED to make the offer he makes in this announcement!

DON'T get the idea that it takes a lot of time and hard work for you to get smashing strength and powerful muscular development! And don't fool yourself into thinking that you need dumbbells, stretchers or any other such contraptions.

Both of these ideas are all bunk—and I have PROVED it. All I need is 7 days to prove what I can do for you! And I don't need any apparatus either. In fact, I have no sympathy with apparatus at all—don't believe in it. It is artificial—and it may strain your heart or other vital organs for life.

#### NATURAL Methods Are All I Need

On this page you will see an actual photo of how I look today. This picture has not been changed in any way. No muscles have been "painted on." This photograph is the camera's honest proof of what I have done for MY body. I myself am ready to prove what my secret of **Dynamic Tension** can do for yours!

To look at me now you wouldn't recognize me as the same man I used to be. Then I was a physical wreck, a 97-pound weakling, flat-chested, spindly legs, arms like pipe stems.

I was worried—and I had a right to be. I decided to study myself, to do something about my body. Then I made a discovery. I found a new way to build myself up. A way that was simple, natural, quick and sure! "**Dynamic Tension**" is what I called it. I put this secret to work. And in a short time I had the kind of body you see here—the body which has twice won the title of "**The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man.**"

## FREE BOOK

Gamble a stamp today. Mail coupon for free copy of my new book, "**Everlasting Health and Strength.**" It shows you from actual photos how I have developed my pupils to my own perfectly balanced proportions. Where shall I send your copy? Write your name and address plainly on the coupon. Mail it today to me personally.



#### THIS STERLING SILVER CUP BEING GIVEN AWAY

This valuable cup stands about 14 inches high on a black mahogany base.

I will award it to my pupil who makes the most improvement in his development within the next three months.

#### This Secret Has Helped Thousands

Thousands of other fellows now know this secret, too—and know from their own personal experience what **Dynamic Tension** has done for them. When they turned to me for advice, they were just as frail and puny as I once was. Now they are life-sized examples of what a man can and ought to be—with mighty energy, tireless endurance, and muscles that stand out like bridge-ribs all over their bodies.

I have written an interesting booklet, filled with pictures, which tells my story—and theirs. I would like to send you a copy of it entirely free.

#### Let Me Send You My FREE BOOK

I'd like you to know what **Dynamic Tension** has done for me—what it has done for others—and what it can do for you! This little coupon will bring you my free book which tells all about it. There is no cost or obligation of any kind—and no one will call upon you.

I just want to put into your hands proof that I can do for you what I have done for so many thousands of others; give you broad powerful shoulders, biceps that bulge with smashing strength, a chest which stands out solid and muscular, and an evenly-developed body that will make others look like dwarfs next to you.

Will you gamble a stamp to win a book like mine? Then mail this coupon TODAY. **CHARLES ATLAS**, Dept. 1502, 115 East 23rd Street, New York.

**CHARLES ATLAS**  
Holder of the title  
"**The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man**" won in open competition in the only national and international contests held during the past 15 years.

**CHARLES ATLAS**, Dept. 1502

115 East 23rd Street, New York, N. Y.

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

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

Address .....

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

England—40-42 Chandos Street, London, W. C. 2.



**L.W. SWEET**  
FOUNDER

# \$1 brings your choice of these **DIAMONDS and WATCHES**

**10 MONTHS TO PAY**

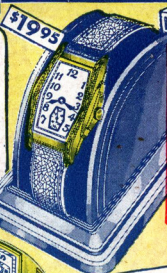
**10 DAYS FREE TRIAL**

**MONEY BACK GUARANTEE**

**10¢  
A  
DAY**

## 17 JEWEL WATCH for MEN

**K223**—Attractive 17 jewel watch with case in charm and color of natural gold. Guaranteed to give you satisfaction. Regular \$30 value.  
**\$1.70 a month**



## 14K GOLD-17 JEWELS

**P317**—Tiny new 14K solid yellow gold watch with guaranteed 17 jewel movement. Black silk cord band. Regularly \$35.  
**\$2.38 a month**

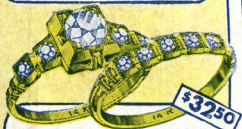


**M211**—Bulova's new feature—the Minute-Man. 17 jewel curved watch in charm and color of natural gold. Leather strap.  
**\$3.28 a month**

Think of it—as little as 10¢ a day (paid monthly) will enable you to own one of these beautiful Diamonds or Watches. I'll send your choice of these bargains for approval and 10-day trial. Simply put a dollar bill in an envelope with your name, address and number of the article wanted. Tell me your age (must be over 20), occupation, employer and a few facts about yourself. Information held confidential—no direct inquiries will be made. I'll open a 10-month Charge Account for you and send selection for approval. If you are not satisfied, send it back and I'll refund your dollar. If satisfied, pay balance in 10 small monthly payments. Send your order today.



**R126**—Bulova's newest feature—the Lady Bulova—a tiny 17 jewel watch in charm and color of natural gold.  
**\$2.88 a month**



**A7/C15**—Matched Bridal Ensemble in the newest 14K natural gold. 5 diamonds in each ring. Exceptional value at this low price.  
**\$3.15 a month**

**20¢ A DAY buys  
this 1/4 CARAT  
DIAMOND RING**



**A137**—Gorgeous new 14K white gold engagement ring. Large center diamond of high quality, 2 other diamonds.  
**\$2.90 a month**



**I185**—Massive 10K natural gold 2 Diamond initial ring for men. Initial on black onyx.  
**\$1.88 a month**



**A341**—Direct importing makes this low price possible. 1/4 carat quality diamond with 2 other diamonds in 14K natural gold engagement ring. Reg. \$75 value.  
**\$5.65 a month**

**C10**—7 diamond wedding ring in 14K white gold. Diamonds in beautiful step arrangement. A pretty ring priced low.  
**\$1.88 a month**



**L.W. Sweet Inc.**

MAIL ORDER DIVISION OF FINLAY STRAUS

Dept. 838-S 1670 BROADWAY · NEW YORK

**FREE TO ADULTS**

Complete Catalog of Diamonds, Watches, Jewelry and Silverware all on Ten Months Terms, sent FREE upon request.

