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**RED DYNAMITE**

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*by* **CARROLL  
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**MURDER MOON**

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Vol. 21

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Story Illustrations by John Flemming Gould

Watch for the August Issue

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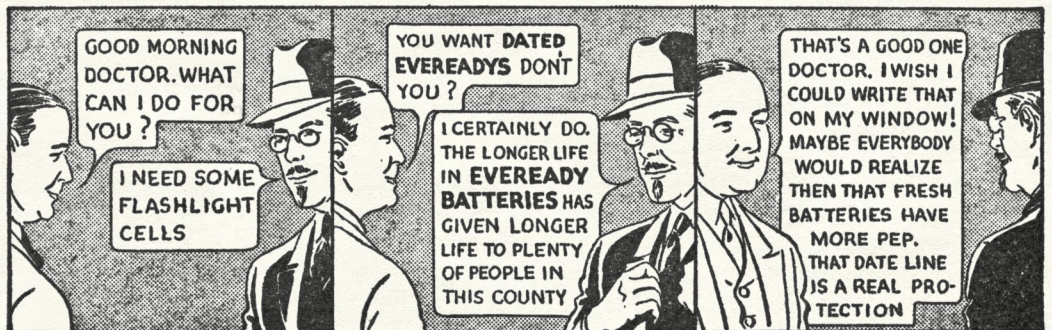
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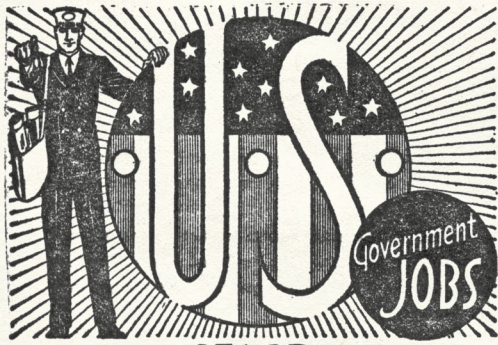


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**The Murder Polls  
 Are Open!**

**J**UST a word to remind those of you murder-mystery fans who may have missed this column last issue that the November DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE is the Fifth Anniversary number and we're—or rather you are—planning an extra-special thrill-treat for yourselves.

We decided last month that it was high time we took a rest and let you readers do a little magazine-editing on your own. Naturally, being drafted into a strange job for the first time, you may be a bit unfamiliar with your duties; a bit dubious as to just what has to be done first. Well, here's the procedure.

The story's the thing—so all you have to do is tell us what type of yarn, about what characters, laid in what atmosphere and against what backgrounds, by what authors, you want. We'll do the rest!

Of course we can't arrange to have you do the dirty work—by that we mean seeing that the copy gets edited, the proof read, and cuts and engravings off to the press in time. We'll still attend to those mechanical details. But as for actually building the magazine—that's up to you!

There are thousands of you DIME DETECTIVE fans who have been with us since that first successful issue dated November 1931 and know as much as we do about the policy of the magazine, the caliber of yarns we insist on maintaining, and the top-notch string of fictioneers we've gathered under our roof-tree to do them.

So send along your preferences and we'll guarantee to see that they are carried out. The November issue is going to be handpicked—and it's up to you not to fumble in the picking. Better get busy!



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# RED DYNAMITE

A Vee Brown Novel

by Carroll John Daly

*Author of "Just Another Stiff," etc.*

## CHAPTER ONE

Written in Blood

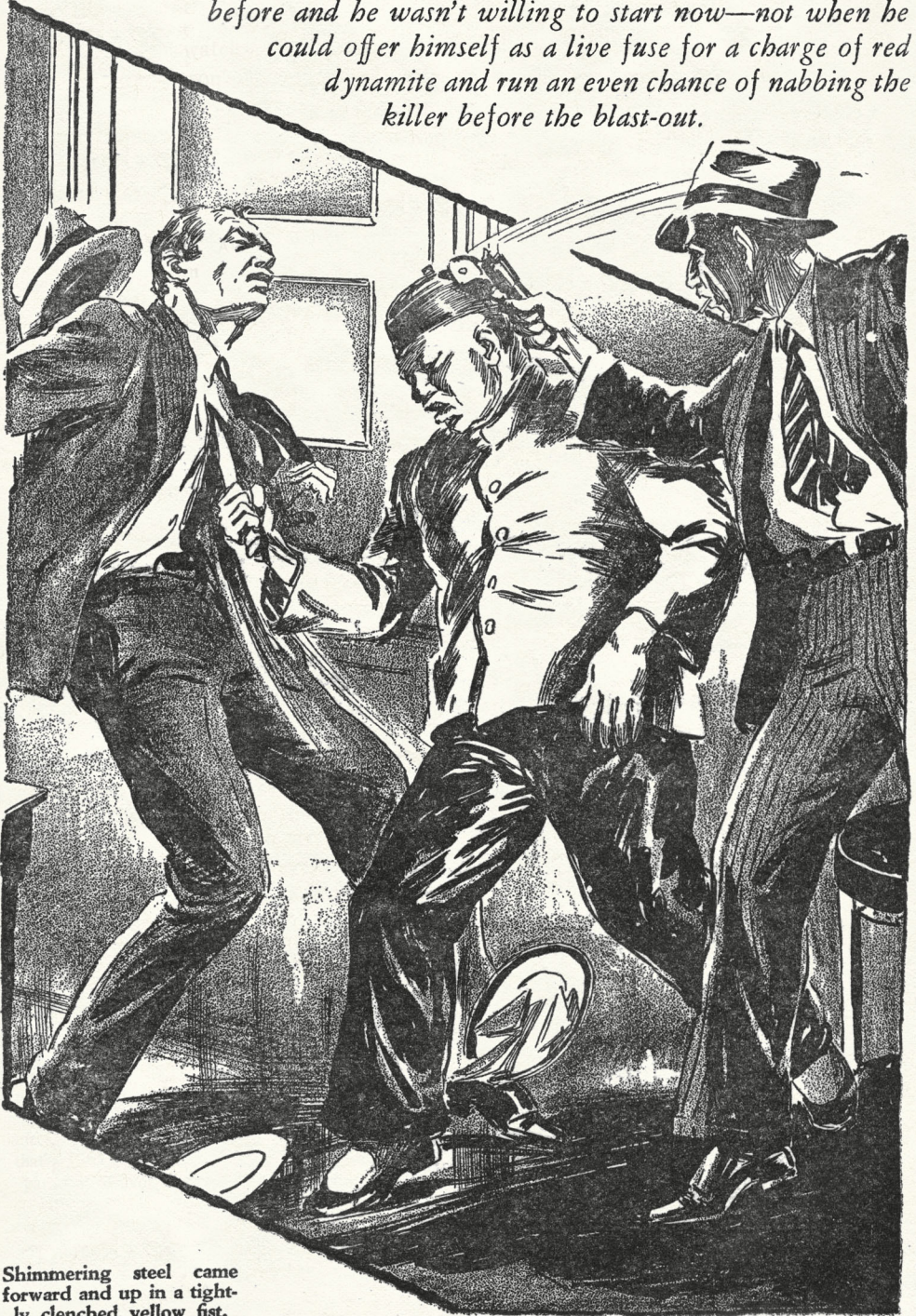
**T**HE medical examiner still bent over the body. His sleeves were rolled up, his little bag well away from the dead thing as he carefully

avoided kneeling in the clots of blood. Blood that was on the chairs, the side of the wall—upon the bed. It was a particularly brutal murder.

Inspector Ramsey, hardest, coldest-blooded copper on the force, stood beside the body, his lips set tightly, his unfeel-



*"When Brown leaves the city—I leave it. Tuesday I strike again unless he's gone." That was the message left for the police to find under that ghastly headless corpse—terse warning of future kills to come. The cops and the D.A. both thought it should be heeded, but Detective Vee Brown had other ideas. He'd never run out on a murder-series before and he wasn't willing to start now—not when he could offer himself as a live fuse for a charge of red dynamite and run an even chance of nabbing the killer before the blast-out.*



Shimmering steel came forward and up in a tightly clenched yellow fist.



ing eyes glaring down. Mortimer Doran, the district attorney, leaned against the end of the bed in that fourteenth-floor hotel room. He didn't look at the body—just stood there, white-faced, as if it were his duty.

A young police officer was there—his face drawn, pale; his eyes a blurred blue.

The M. E. spoke to Mortimer Doran as he continued his work, his voice conversational, light. "I didn't see you at the Judge Clark banquet last night." He shook his head. "Ten dollars a plate—a little money for election time. I think it's a shame, a crying shame. There's little enough money in this job of mine. You can't be telling a stiff how you'll fix it up for him." And suddenly, all business, "Dead only a few hours I'd say."

Detective Vee Brown sat on the windowsill kicking his legs back and forth. If he watched the procedure or not I don't know, but I do know that I kept my eyes from the body, and the more terrible thing beneath the bed. I won't say that Brown was heartless; I won't say that this death by violence—horrible beyond words—didn't bother him. But I will say that his face was the same as ever, and that he winked at me as the M. E. went on with his grumbling.

"I saw Joe Ferguson only this morning. They're raising a fund to fight the election of young Johnson down in his district. Now what that has to do with me I don't—" He paused, pointed impatiently and said: "Come—come. Someone give me the head there under the bed." And when no one moved, "I suppose the time is coming when a medical examiner will be expected to go about the city pronouncing death on parts of the body here and there. You can't take him out without his head."

THE M. E. leaned quickly forward, stretched a hand half beneath the bed, muttered something, then lifted his gruesome trove toward that headless body.

"Better put a sheet over it, Ryan," Inspector Ramsey said to the sergeant in a deep dull voice. "You're through are you, Doc? Everything's done you'd like to do?"

"I'd like to do! Understand, Inspector, I don't go around finding these headless bodies. You call me up and bring me to them—day after day—night after night, and then want me to cry all over the corpse. Read your papers—the editorials—and you'll see who should do the crying. The police department—not me." And as Ryan tossed a sheet over the body, "Watch the head when they move him, Inspector. At your time of life you wouldn't want to be taken for a practical joker."

We all breathed easier in that room now. Doran, the D. A., spoke while the doctor put on his coat. "Well?" was all he said.

"Well"—the doctor's little round eyes popped—"it's the same thing. His head was chopped off with a meat ax."

"A madman?"

"Perhaps." And just before he left, "At least I'd say he was a little angry."

Ramsey cursed when the doctor was gone. "The little vulture. I'd like to wring his neck. The most fiendish murder I've ever seen—and he jokes about it."

Vee Brown hopped down from the windowsill. The top of his head hardly reached to Ramsey's shoulders. "We'll put on our show now," he said. "That's just Doc's act. He'd go mad without it."

Brown leaned down, pulled back the sheet from the corpse; from the head—the face. "I tell you"—his thin lips were tightly pressed—"the murderer planted a foot heavily on the victim's face—then drove down with the meat ax. See"—he



pointed—"plainly a rubber heel— Hello! What's this?"

Brown's sharp eyes had discovered an edge of white beneath the thick red. He lifted it carefully, took a handkerchief from his pocket and rubbed it. It was a white card, still smeared with red. "We won't kid ourselves about fingerprints, gentlemen," he said. "But there's writing on this, Mr. Doran and— Why, what's the matter?"

The D. A. had reached out a hand for that card. I had turned and looked toward the ceiling.

"So that's it." Vee Brown dropped his hand to his side. "If you insist of course, Mr. Doran, but I'm sure Dean Condon here will tell me what's on the card, for evidently there have been such cards before that I wasn't around to see."

Doran shrugged his shoulders, said: "Go ahead—look at it then."

"We thought it best for you, Vee— knowing you," I said.

And Ramsey, "Guess Mr. Doran and Condon were afraid you'd run out on them. As for me, I didn't care which you did."

Brown was reading the card. I looked over his shoulder, though I knew what the message would be. It read—

Just another sacrifice on the altar of the great Detective Vee Brown. When he leaves the city—I leave it. There are others like this one here, who still have a chance to live. On Tuesday next I strike again unless Brown is gone.

THE AVENGER.

"Really." Brown wasn't smiling when he looked from the D. A. to me. "So this is why Dean tried to get me to take a trip—and you were so insistant I'd been working too hard, Mr. Doran. I am afraid your kindly attempt to spare my feelings has been rather disastrous—that it cost this man his life."

"But Brown," Doran persisted, "the murderer is mad of course. If you were away we might have had a chance of finding him—at least before any other atrocities were committed."

BROWN bristled. "Did it ever strike you that my continued presence in the city might annoy this ax-murderer into chopping my head off? I had no intention of leaving."

"But your presence caused this man's death."

"No. You can't hang a brutal murder like that on my conscience. It's your own stupidity. If you had told me about those other cards, I would have prevented this thing happening here tonight. Try thinking that one over."

"You would—have left?"

"No, I wouldn't have left! Neither would I have waited until the killer struck again."

"He's a clever murderer—leaves no trace," said Inspector Ramsey. "Comes, kills his man—and goes."

"Nonsense. He might be clever if he found it necessary to mark certain men for death. But he doesn't. The easiest victim is *his* victim. For all we know our murderer posed as a waiter, knocked on the doors of a dozen rooms, made sure of his opportunity—then killed. Murder is the simplest of crimes, and most difficult to solve—almost impossible to solve—when the murderer simply kills the first individual who presents an opportunity."

"But the man's mad. He has a real or a fancied wrong against you. And he wants you out of the city."

"Ah"—Brown's eyes widened—"and there we have a motive. He wants me out of the city."

"But a madman who signs himself *The Avenger*."

"Men," said Brown, "who wish to pretend to be drunk stagger like drunken



men. Men who wish to pretend madness act like madmen. The Avenger seems to me a very sane signature indeed. It is melodramatic. It is what a sane man would imagine a madman might write."

"But why such mad crimes—just to get you out of the city?"

Brown hesitated a long time, and then, "Because someone plans a very sane crime—a crime that may in some way attract me if I am here to be attracted."

"And just what will you do now?" Inspector Ramsey wanted to know.

"I?" Brown looked down at the white-draped figure. "First I will prevent any more such useless and violent deaths."

"How will you prevent them—this one of next Tuesday?"

Brown simply looked at Ramsey and continued where he had left off. "I will attract this murderer to me. And even you, Ramsey, would not expect me to lie down on the floor, have someone step on my neck and drive home his meat ax."

Brown and I left the hotel room, and Ramsey followed us out to the elevator. His lips curved when he spoke to Brown. "I was against not telling you from the beginning. You had a bad break in finding that card. You won't be able to crawl out of it now." And when Brown only grinned—that cat-swallowing-canary grin of his—Ramsey continued: "If you had known the truth, you'd have skipped long ago. But don't blame that yes-man of yours, Dean Condon, even if he did play at being a detective."

"That's right." Brown seemed very serious. "Dean has no more right to play at being a detective than you have Inspector Ramsey."

I PUT it straight to Brown some time later when we were back in our penthouse apartment, the lease of which was in my name, but paid for out of Vee's

enormous income from his popular song writing.

"You know I did it for the best," I told him. "Men were being brutally killed. You've been restless about your music, told me yourself your publishers want stuff and you couldn't write it. I thought the trip would do you—"

"We won't cry over spilt music and perhaps a little blood." Vee hummed softly. "Oh, I know it sounds callous, Dean, but this murder has given me an inspiration. I feel the music generating inside of me—a little sad perhaps—a little too sentimental. Odd that murder solves my music problem—and music solves my criminal one."

"It's almost ghoulish for you to feel that way! Men murdered—horribly slain because of you."

"Because of me." Brown's eyes shone. "You compliment me, Dean. Slain to force me from the city. Slain because the actual killer—or the one behind the killer fears me. My presence in New York must interfere greatly with his plans. This murderer has drawn a straight line to his goal, and some place along that straight line another line crosses—a line that he fears will prevent the final accomplishment of his purpose. I am that line. Don't ask me how or why. I don't know. But somehow I stand in his way."

"I wouldn't be so pleased about that." I shuddered. "I'd hate to be the one who stood in his way. Look what has happened to three men already."

Brown laughed. "No, no, Dean. I'm afraid the chopping off of my head was not included in this ritual of death. But I'm in it, Dean. In the long run they'll have to strike directly at me or sacrifice their plans. And they—or he—would hardly sacrifice a plan that already has called for three murders."

"But how do you know you can stop the next murder?"



"By simply letting our butchering friend know that he is wasting his time, that if he kills half the men in the city, I'll still wait around. I'll tell him frankly that if he wishes me out of the way he'll have to come straight here with his meat ax and do his own business."

"But how will you tell him?"

"Oh, I'll write him a short note," he said in that annoying, indifferent way of his. "He can't just keep on killing people you know. No, Dean, I don't believe the man is mad, but even madmen don't kill without reason. Mad reasoning perhaps, but a reason just the same." He paused a long moment, raised his hand, began to beat time in the air. "There're words there, Dean, and the tune's in my head—*Reason and Madness and Love*. Listen—"

But he didn't say any more. He looked toward the ceiling and his lips moved. Then he turned suddenly and hurried in to the music-room. Almost before he closed the door he opened it an inch and called out to me: "A forty-five—one of the big rods in the gunroom would shoot a man's head off the same as a meat ax would chop it." And after a pause, "At least it would shoot a man's head quite a distance and perhaps drag the body with it."

"What are you talking about?"

"A gun, Dean—a heavy gun. Oh, I carry one myself, though I have nothing to worry about. I was thinking of you. You've got to pay somehow for double-crossing me with Mortimer Doran—and this is my pound of flesh."

"A heavy gun—a man's head? What in Heaven's name do you mean?"

His grin was almost fiendish. "I mean that you must be careful—you've got the neck for it, Dean."

There was a single laugh; the door slammed closed, and almost at once came the beat upon the piano. No one but myself knew that Detective Vee Brown was

also the Vivian whose tunes filled the air-waves, the theaters, the hotels and night-clubs of the entire country.

I took up my pipe, passed over the evening paper for the morning one. I couldn't help it. Something made me lift it and turn to the public notices. There again was the terrifying message—

## V HASN'T GONE YET—A

That same message from the Avenger that Mortimer Doran had discussed with me that morning. That message which meant another death was to take place; a death which had now taken place. Murder—horrible, brutal, ghastly.

I paced the room. How would Brown get in touch with this mad killer?

A body without a head—a head without a body. Eyes that stared wide with terror before death struck. And inside that music-room, the soft strumming of a sentimental song.

I shivered slightly and, walking to the gunroom far down the hall, looked over that large, modern and most deadly assortment of firearms. I ran a finger beneath my collar. God! How could Vee say such things. I had—"the neck for it."

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Man at the Door

OUR penthouse was an impregnable fortress. Brown had always said that a man needed his sleep. When we retired at night great steel shutters covered the French windows that opened on the terrace. There were stone steps from that terrace leading to the locked gate below. The main entrance to the penthouse itself led to the hall—one floor above the elevators. That front door was lined with steel. The servants' entrance, which was really a private in-and-out for Brown



and myself, gave off the back of our apartments and had the same steel-lined doors.

As usual I was up before Brown. Wong, our Chinese boy, was already getting breakfast in the kitchen. I could smell the coffee as he came down the hall to tell me that Mr. Ralph T. Anderson, my lawyer, was at the front door.

"Him look respectable, but Mr. Brown say you or him always have first look-see. Mr. Anderson now wait in drafty hall—and from pained expression, I much afraid he not bring good news."

I shrugged my shoulders as I went toward the front door. Certainly Mr. Anderson could hardly bring me bad news, but the catch was why he should bring me any news at all at this time of the morning. To be sure, certain bonds, and guaranteed mortgage certificates long since dead seemed to be coming to life again. But something more important than that must be coming to life to have the fussy Mr. Anderson at my door before nine o'clock in the morning.

Of course, I thought of a fake, but that didn't bother me. I had only to lift the slot in the door, peer through those thin sections of steel and look out at my caller. Peculiarly, I did not expect to see Mr. Anderson behind that opening when I peered into the outer hall. So it was more of a shock to find him there than otherwise. He did look annoyed—in fact, downright peeved—and after all, in those really bad times, he had handled my affairs without cost. He had been lawyer for, and a friend of, my father.

I took off the chain, spun the special lock, slipped the long bar from across the door and jerked it open. "I'm sorry, Mr. Anderson." I tried to smile into that generally cordial face of his which now looked—

But I didn't smile. I didn't cry out. I simply raised both hands. Mr. Anderson was hurled to one side. Four men with

guns—one a Thompson machine gun—had pushed their way inside and closed the door behind them.

The heavily built leader said to me: "That's right. Grab a chunk of that plaster on the ceiling and button your face. This is a wipe-out. We'll be satisfied with one body—Brown—Vee Brown."

"He's in bed," I stammered—and brightening slightly—"and safe."

"Sure, sure." He nodded. "You're Condon ain't you. The lad who wrote them articles about Brown—showing what a swell guy he was, how he never raised a hand against a man except in self-defense, and got the newspapers believing that he wept like a child when he croaked a lad. Come on, stand there. We're out for business—real business. Any one of us could do it, but this is a sure job."

Anderson leaned against the wall and stared at me—without seeing me, I'm certain. How they got him there I didn't know; didn't much care at the moment. It was the four men, the machine gun, and the sure death there in our apartment that worried me then. And the fact that it was my own weakness as a guard that accounted for the situation.

**T**HE man with the machine gun gave quick orders. "You two"—he nodded at a large and a small man, the former looking far the more vicious of the two—"take Condon with you and cover the dump. Brown's bedroom is the third on the right—down the hall from the library and beyond the kitchen. If he's in it—the door closed—come back to the library. But get the Chink in the kitchen." He sniffed. "Knock him for a loop, tie and gag him and toss him under the tubs—any place out of sight of the hall." And after a pause, "All three of you better go."

The tall man said, his voice none too



steady: "If Brown is up—and happens to meet us in the—"

"Hell," said the machine-gunner, "you'll have this Dean Condon in front of you. Shoot Brown through the holes you make in Condon. But he won't be up—I got the lay-out straight. Go on—get going. I'm backing up the party with the big Tommy. Just playing safe with you guys."

He had the lay-out straight all right. I knew that Brown wouldn't be up for twenty minutes or a half hour yet. Then he'd come pounding down to the library where I always read and smoked until he joined me for breakfast, his long dressing-gown making him look even smaller. Then—

The big lanky man who held the gun against my back was nervous and unpleasant even though he had two companions with him. Three men—desperate killers, no doubt, and with me to protect them—yet they were nervous. Certainly, Brown's name struck terror.

**WE** ALL crowded into the kitchen.

Wong turned, dropped a pan from his hand and stared at us.

"Wong"—the tall man behind me spoke—"a good Chinaman wants to be buried in the land of his fathers. If you make a sound now you'll be dead, and Vee Brown won't be alive to send your body over the sea. If you keep still we'll just tie you up and let it go at that."

"You—you kill Mr. Vee."

"That's right," said the small man who had pushed close to Wong giving the broad-shouldered man a chance to slip around on the other side, his arm raised, the heavy gun in his hand ready to come down on Wong's head.

The small man said again: "That's right, Wong. We're going to kill Mr. Vee deader than hell. O. K., Charlie."

Two things happened at once—both with lightning-like speed. The stocky

man, Charlie, started to drive his gun down on Wong's head. And Wong's hand moved—back and up. It went back empty. Came forward and up with shimmering steel held tightly in a clenched yellow fist.

It was horrible—just before the gun struck Wong's head and he went to the floor. But in that second his knife had done its ghastly work. The knife cut through cloth and flesh and tore the small man's body apart straight up to his breast bone. I shuddered and reeled slightly, but I saw the picture—even as the small man slid to the floor beside Wong, his gun that hadn't even exploded still gripped in his hand.

"The dirty yellow rat!" Charlie stepped over Wong, held his gun above him. The knuckles of his right hand grew white.

"No," said the tall man as he jabbed the gun harder into my back. "These steel doors and thick walls may be sound-proof in the lease, but Brown would hear a gun and come out with a couple of his own."

"Brown—Vee Brown," Charlie sneered, "I've heard nothing else for days. That's how I'd like to see him come out—firing. Yep, I'd like to see him—just once."

"Just once is right, Charlie," said the tall man. "This knock-over has got to be clean."

"Clean! It hasn't started that way. Look at Foster—the lad who thought he could shoot rings around anyone. And now him and his guts all over the floor." Even as he talked he was taking rope from around his waist, binding Wong tightly, kicking him viciously in the face.

The tall man said: "Spare your feelings, Charlie. Porky's waiting in the library and he was Foster's friend. Porky knows a few tricks of torture that this Chink would have to go to his forefathers to even begin to learn. Porky's wise. Knows everything about explosives. Best safe-blower of his day."



"Yeah," Charlie agreed, "and careful. Imagine bringing that rattler along for a single blow-out like this. O. K. Let's get going."

WE backed from the kitchen down the hall to the library, the man still holding the gun against my back. I was tempted to hurl myself backward, crash against the tall man and swing viciously on Charlie. I'm a big man, a strong man, but physical strength was not the thing then. Brown had always said he was prepared for any emergency. Here was one. Could he be prepared for this? But of course he couldn't. And suddenly, instinctively, I thought I knew the truth. One of these men was the man with the meat chopper. Which one?

Any idea that I might turn around and be killed uselessly passed—had to pass—for I stumbled over the doorjam just then and caught my balance in the library.

The steel shutters were closed, the heavy drapes still before the windows. Why hadn't Wong opened them? Or had he opened them and Porky, the man with the machine gun, closed them? Porky spoke and settled that.

"Don't worry about the lights and the drawn curtains, boys," he said. "I didn't set this stage. It was set for me. I left it just as I found it. Take Condon over by the bookcase there on the left where Brown won't see him from the door. Leave Anderson in that chair where Brown can see him. If you make a peep, Anderson, you take the dose with . . . What the hell was that?"

Something had jarred there at my feet. All three men were staring at it and so was I. It was a heavy .45 revolver.

"God!" Porky crossed the room and stared right into my face. "Where did you get that?" And when I shook my head stupidly, "Damn it, Charlie, you searched him and let him carry a bit of

artillery like that on him! I have a good mind to fill you up like a sieve."

"Hell, I frisked him twice! He never had that on him. Got it down the hall or—"

"Yeah, yeah." Porky came over to me. I stood quietly. The sudden appearance of that gun on the floor was as strange to me as it was to him.

And so we waited.

In a blurred confused way I took in the set-up. Anderson was the only one who'd be in full view as Brown would come down the hall to the library. After he entered the room he would see me first, standing there by the bookcase near the light. Across from me with their backs against the wall were the stocky Charlie and the tall man without a name. Each held two guns.

Beyond that hall door—close to it, hard pressed against the wall with machine gun raised—knelt sure and certain death. That was Porky—the dread menace of the foursome that had now become a trio.

Porky would not be a hard man to point out in court—any court at any time. His face was something like his name. Pig-like eyes. A hanging vicious mouth, slightly undershot, and with a perpetual pout that looked like a snout. His face was big and round, but his ears were very tiny. And though he wore a slouch hat, a dull gray one that rode well back on his head, not a hair showed beneath it.

I didn't think about Porky then. I didn't think of anything. I was like a man recovering from a nightmare—trying to place himself—searching out familiar objects in the room. And the familiar objects were all there. The wastebasket beneath the desk, only it wasn't beneath the desk but slightly to one side of it. A desk drawer stood partly open, a scarf of Vee's lay on top of the desk. There was the tall lamp, too, which seemed to have been moved slightly. Those usually



orderly bookcases with an occasional book missing here and there. The curtains by the windows seemed a trifle different; they seemed to be out of alignment.

Funny, the things you notice when near death—or maybe just imagine. But the room, so familiar for years, now seemed unfamiliar. I could have sworn that the vase upon the bookcase had been moved and the huge, potted plant also. And—

I stiffened. Everyone in that room stiffened. Far down the hall a door had closed. The tall man who had held the gun against my back had to grab at one of his guns as it nearly fell from his hand.

Charlie lifted both his guns; his hands were not exactly steady. My heart stopped, something stuck in my chest—and my heart started again—pounded. Vee Brown was coming to his death. Yet these men feared him, were afraid even as he stepped into the trap they had baited.

Three men—two with guns in either hand, the third with a tommy gun. And they were afraid.

CHAPTER THREE

Death-Set

**F**EET—small feet that moved rapidly yet lightly—were coming along the hall. There was whistling, then humming and I knew that Vee Brown was going over the song of last night. Finally the words from his lips—"Reason and Madness and Love"—and Vee Brown was at the door.

His dressing-gown swished against the wall as he spoke. "Ah, Mr. Anderson. A lawyer in the morning means murder the night before and—" He thrust both hands into the air, looked me straight in the eyes and said: "So they played you for a sucker, eh Dean?"

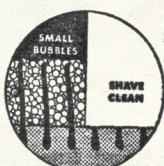


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There was a moment's pause when the machine gun was jammed into his back and Charlie tore off his dressing-gown.

"So you set the stage, Dean—set the stage for death."

"If there's any gun in them fancy pajamas now, he's welcome to it," Porky was saying. "O. K., Mr. Brown—let's see some of that gun-magic of yours."

Brown sniffed, but he didn't speak. Then Porky said: "Well, turn around—no one's going to hurt you—yet. I just want you to have a good look at me. Never mind the other boys."

Brown turned around, almost directly before the lamp. He leaned forward, said: "Take off your hat."

The man backed a bit, tore off his hat, held the machine gun ready.

"Right," said Brown. "Porky—just Porky. So you lived after your escape from Matteawan—from the mad-house—over two years ago. I always believed you were alive. Not a hair on his head. Notice it, Dean—not a single hair."

"I was never mad"—Porky held the gun in both hands now—"you know that, Brown."

"No madder than all the boys they fry for murder," Brown said. "You had a way of doing things, Porky, that were new and original. All great men are misunderstood. The meat-ax jobs were yours, of course."

"Of course." Porky was emphatic. "And this job here now. You hunted me into the mad-house. I'm one of your few victims who ever lived. So ax or machine gun—one man or ten—the worst they can ever do to me is to put me back where I was—in the mad-house. Queer law that."

"Queer law—yes." Vee Brown seemed to agree very seriously. "And an evil one if you can make a practice of slipping out every now and then and killing someone

you don't like. What's on your mind this morning?"

Porky smacked his lips. "You and him—and him"—his head nodded from me to Anderson—"after that the Chink. But you three just stand up against those curtains by the steel shutters, and we'll see how strong that steel is." He lifted his gun higher.

Brown shook his head as he backed away from that tommy gun, from the menacing light in those pig-like eyes. "So," he said, his hands raised high, "the great Porky returns to life and guns out the detective, Vee Brown. Some spread! You'll be big in the underworld, eh?"

Porky grinned—at least yellow teeth showed. "Like old times." He seemed pleased. "Picture and all across the front page."

"Sure, sure." Brown stopped, said suddenly: "But no, Porky. There'll be no one to tell it was you who did the job. Look here—why not make the thing sure? Why not let Dean Condon go—and Mr. Anderson? Then they can identify you and tell the story."

"Why both of them?" Porky took on a shrewd look and those pig eyes narrowed to thin slits.

"Well, Anderson then. You've got—"

"None of that stuff," the tall man butted in. "Charlie and me ain't got no public that needs pleasing, Porky. It's your show. Line 'em up and knock 'em over. You never change your plans, you know."

"Yeah, sure." Porky rubbed the gun against his chin. "This Brown ain't kidding me none. All right, get that Anderson lad and line them up."

**WE** were being backed against the wall now, against those curtains. I could feel the hard steel behind them, could picture jumping bodies, jerking drapes and—



Vee was talking. "Come on, Porky—why the blow-out? There's nothing personal in it." And when Porky frowned, "Hell, man, you're not even cursing me up and down."

Porky wet his lips. "I'm doing it for a guy who wants a quarter of a million dollars. Two hundred and fifty grand is a lot of jack. You stand in the way of it. Besides, I'm the lad who outsmarted you."

"Out-yellowed me, you mean. I dragged you in a squealing pig. That's where you got your name—Porky—a squealing—"

"That's a lie! I was called Porky for years." For the first time Porky showed his hate, and perhaps a touch of madness. His gun wavered back and forth at us, even toward the two men who stood watching us there to our right. They moved and Brown's eyes slipped sideways toward them, but he was shooting words through tight lips straight at Porky.

"Squealed and hollered. That's why you beat my gun. I never saw your face—only your back. Your face just once, and then you were on your knees pleading for you—"

"It's a lie! Come on—stand up straight and—" The gun moved forward, trained directly on us.

"My God, Porky! You're not going to kill your friends, too," Brown almost shouted. "Look at the way his hands shake!" Which was not true. "Better get to the other side of the room, boys and—"

The tall man said: "Just a minute, Porky. That's right, Charlie. O. K., we'll cross and then you can—"

The men—with drawn guns—passed between us and the machine gun toward the other side of the room.

They never crossed that room. The tall man was facing Brown, his gun in his right hand, hanging by his side. There was a good fifteen feet between him and

Brown. It was his face that told the story more than his stifled cry. His gun went up and his mouth opened. There was a terrific roar close to my ear.

I think I blinked, but the tall man had a hole where his left eye had been and he was falling, even as the stocky man swung, fired—and died on his feet. Or in the air, rather, for he was springing toward Vee Brown when his gun went off. I didn't know what hit him then, but I knew that it stopped him, held him there a moment. Then another single roar and he twisted in the air and crashed to the floor.

A tommy gun started and stopped—but I wasn't watching Porky. I was watching Vee Brown—standing there in those gay striped-silk pajamas, a heavy revolver in each hand. Guns that had killed two men and now—if he could make it—would—would—

Brown cursed, cried out: "The squealing bit of pork! With a machine gun—and he ran out on me." He rushed forward, grabbed my arm as I picked a gun from the floor and started for the hallway. "Are you mad altogether, Dean? He'll send a volley back so—"

The rest of his words were lost in the staccato notes of a machine gun. Holes appeared in the wall across from the door to the hall. Then silence.

"It would be folly to chase him now. Free Wong." He lifted a phone. "I'll have the place covered, then get Mortimer Doran and . . . Hello."

**W**ONG was stolid and unperturbed when I got him to his feet and told him Vee Brown was safe. When I returned to the library Brown was talking to Anderson, mixing him a drink, listening to his simple story. Someone had telephoned the lawyer, represented me, asked Anderson to visit the penthouse before "Mr. Brown" was up as I had



something very important to tell him. Nothing had happened until Anderson was right at our door. Then the men had stepped down the hall and stuck the guns in his back.

Anderson's story broke up then as Wong entered. He gave a pleased sort of smile as he saw the bodies on the floor and said, looking at Anderson: "A guest for breakfast, Mr. Vee?"

"Yes indeed. It's a little chilly, Wong, but we'll eat on the terrace. Bring me my heavy robe. And Wong—chops this morning. It's rather late and we have been extremely annoyed. And a little sunlight please. It's really a beautiful morning."

Wong went to the windows, threw back the drapes, and opening the steel shutters let in the sun. A heavy gun seemed to drop from nowhere and pound to the floor.

Wong said: "Mr. Vee, no more use for particular set-up? Wong straighten out?"

"Perhaps you'd better." Brown lit a cigarette, fed Anderson a drink of brandy, explaining: "I never drink so early in the morning myself—unless some particularly disturbing event happens." He winked at me as he led the dazed Anderson through a French window to the terrace.

But I wasn't watching Anderson. And I wasn't listening to Brown. I was watching Wong. He was lifting guns from every imaginable place. Out of the waste-paper basket, between the books, from vases on the mantel, from the end of one of the curtains.

"Good God, Vee!" I said. "What does this mean?"

"It just means that there wasn't a single part of this room—no matter where I stood, or sat, or even laid flat on the floor—that I wasn't in reach of a gun. Entirely temporary and experimental, I admit. But I'm going into it seriously, Dean.

No hooks, no nails, no misplaced books, but a permanent set-up—built as part of the room—where, apparently unarmed, I can reach at least one gun, no matter where I am."

He put on the heavy robe that Wong brought him, patted me on the back, laughed and said: "You'll be the death of me yet, Dean."

ANDERSON had been questioned and allowed to go. If it weren't for those two bodies in the living-room, and the more horrible one in the kitchen, his explanation of just what had happened would have been ludicrous. He might have been a good lawyer, but he made a confused witness.

Inspector Ramsey leaned on the table and tried to get information out of Brown. He finally said, when Vee's words were indistinguishable because of a mouthful of toast: "You wouldn't be eating like that if you had been in the kitchen and seen what's there. They're taking the bodies out now. So if you—"

"I've been in the kitchen." Brown helped himself to a tidbit of chop. "Even a cook likes a pat on the back for his work." And with a grin that made me get up from the table and walk away, "I mean the chops, of course."

Ramsey just ignored that. "You're sure it was Porky, the bomb-man, eh?" he said. "I remember him well. Worked the human-bomb racket in the Rochester Bank and again in the office of Moses, Monroe and Conelly, the brokers. Threatened to blow them all to pieces including himself. And what's more his bombs were real. Tubes of high explosives that he could break in his hands; larger affairs that he held on his knees. For a while before he was put away every bank-teller in the city had a description of him, his method of pushing a note across the counter with his bag for money, and the



threat to blow everything to hell. And tellers had orders to give him the money. Clever, this Porky. He never asked for too much—nor more than the teller had.”

“Then you didn’t think he was mad either?” Mortimer Doran asked.

“Not me.” Ramsey shook his head. “A guy with a gun is madder and often more dangerous because he simply threatens your life—not his own. He was the meat-ax murderer, of course. Came to kill Brown because he wouldn’t leave the city.”

“I wonder how he knew I wouldn’t leave.” Brown look perplexed.

“You don’t need to wonder.” Ramsey took a folded morning paper from his pocket. “The Avenger took your little message for an invitation and came.” He tossed the paper at Brown, but I caught it. It was turned to the public notices. First I read the notice I had seen in that paper twice before.

THERE’S BEEN ANOTHER ONE—  
AND V. HASN’T LEFT THE CITY  
YET—A.

The “A” stood for the Avenger all right. But it was the type under that familiar notice that made my eyes bulge.

A: Have received your card and will stay in town for the big moment. Better fold up shop before I strike—V.

“This yours?” I looked at Brown.

“That’s right.” He grinned. “I had to use my official position to get it in this morning’s edition and directly under the ‘A’ one. I know you and Ramsey have been to the advertising department of the paper, Mr. Doran—and that the notices from A. come by mail, and that you’ve told them to keep printing them. I’ll admit I didn’t expect an answer so suddenly. Maybe the time element is beginning to bother Mr. Avenger. Maybe my notice

made him act sooner than he expected to. But he was ready.” A long pause and then, “And so was I.”

“A lot of good it did you,” Ramsey growled. “Shot up a couple of punks and let the big boy get away. Matteawan wants Porky pretty bad, and if he’s doing these ax murders, why—”

Brown finished his coffee, tossed his butt into the cup—a gesture which always annoyed me—and came slowly to his feet. “Don’t forget, Ramsey, I recognized Charlie Farron. There’s a twenty-five-hundred-dollar reward on his head which will buy Dean a new rug.” He jabbed me in the ribs. “Though it wasn’t Charlie that mussed it up.” He walked over to Mortimer Doran, talked to him long and seriously. Things were going to break—the Avenger needed him out of the way—a lot of money was involved.

“Rather flattering.” Brown spoke to all three of us. “I alone, standing between someone and two hundred and fifty thousand dollars.”

“But that doesn’t make sense,” Doran objected.

“They tried to kill me didn’t they?”

“So what do we do now?” Doran wanted to know.

“We wait. The police man-hunt for Porky has been on over two years now. It’s still on. Someone wants my life very badly indeed. This morning proved that. So Dean has promised not to entertain any more visitors without opening the door a few inches before removing the chain, and then playing a game called Twenty Questions with our visitor.”

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Frightened Man

TUESDAY came and passed and Vee Brown was delighted. He strutted up and down the room like a pouter pigeon.



"What did I tell you, Dean." He laid down the phone after talking to the D. A. "Wednesday morning, the sun shining brightly, and not a lad in the entire city whose head has been separated from his body by a meat ax. Our 'maniac' has decided that his little toy is no longer useful to play with. What do we gather from that?"

"I'll bite. What do we gain?"

"We gain knowledge. And that knowledge is that the Avenger does not wish to take upon himself the task of butchering the entire population of the city. If I'm going to stay in the city anyway, and since I was in the city all day Tuesday—" He shrugged his shoulders, "The Avenger or Porky have decided either to give the whole thing up or turn directly on me."

"Since they haven't turned on you, it looks like they've given the whole thing up—and we'll never solve the mystery."

"Give up a quarter of a million dollars! You don't really think that Porky is running this racket. So what has our Avenger to lose by going after my life? Nothing but Porky—and Porky's only asset to anyone is his ability to kill. Give Porky a gun and someone to use it on, and there is no more dangerous man in the city. So—if he can't kill, he might as well be killed."

There was a long pause and his lips tightened. "Porky has many brutal murders to account for. I would certainly be glad to oblige Mr. Avenger and blow the top of Porky's head off. Ah! The idea nauseates you?" He smiled broadly. "I am quite sure," he said, "it would also nauseate Porky."

**I**T WAS early that evening when the telephone call came. The voice was low, shook slightly, but it was a man's voice just the same. Twice I looked toward the music-room door. Faintly came the strumming on the piano. I told the

voice flatly that he could not speak to Vee Brown. Then I gasped, said, "Just a second," laid down the French phone and, running across the room, threw open the music-room door.

"He's on the phone, Vee!" I fairly shouted my message. "He wants to speak to you about two hundred and fifty thousand dollars."

"Great Heavens!" He jumped from the piano and raced to the phone. I won't go into his "yes's" and "no's" on that phone, but his face was alight when he put the instrument back in its cradle.

"It's the message at last—the message the Avenger feared I would finally receive. The man called himself Frederick Roberts, but frankly admitted that was not his real name. He is in fear of his life and wishes to see me concerning a quarter of a million dollars and the deaths—the meat-ax deaths. We're striking pay dirt, Dean."

"But how do you know it's not a trap—to kill you?"

"Traps are interesting. I am always ready to walk into one—armed of course. I don't think anyone will trap me exactly like that. This Mr. Roberts has a suite in the small, but expensive and conservative, Stanley Arms Hotel."

"Death is just as unpleasant in a high-class hotel as in a back alley," I quoted from Vee's past wisdom. "Look what happened on the fourteenth floor of that big hotel the other night."

"Want to come along, Dean?" And when I nodded, "Good, I need you." His words filled me with pride, but his next sentence took that pride and jumped on it. "If there's to be killing, Dean, I like to have an audience."

I frowned. "I can't understand your indifference to death, Vee. There are times when I believe you actually enjoy it."

He hesitated over that one, finally



bobbed his head slowly, patted me on the shoulder. It struck me he was thinking of Porky when he finally said: "You're right, Dean. There are times when I do enjoy a killing."

**I**N THE Stanley Arms Hotel we went directly to the manager. "It's Mr. Roberts," Vee said. "I want to know everything there is to know about him." He snapped his words out, crisp and businesslike.

The manager touched the ends of his fingers together as he leaned far back in his chair. He talked slowly but he talked well and he emphasized points here and there.

Mr. Roberts had been at the hotel for only a few days. The last two days he had not left his rooms at all. Indeed, the manager was disturbed over the fact that Mr. Roberts had not even permitted a maid in the room to clean, and had actually taken the linen himself through a half-opened door. He always had the waiter lay the tray on the floor and later took that in himself.

"That," said the manager, "started just after the man inquired about him."

"This man who called. Anything to distinguish him?"

"Heavily built—nothing in particular—yes, there was. The clerk told me that the man seemed to have no hair—at least

none showed from under his hat. The man was gone when the clerk turned from calling Mr. Roberts."

When Vee asked to be announced and directed to Mr. Roberts' room, the manager said: "Just a moment. Things are quite odd. Perhaps just a bit too odd. We have a reputation in this hotel for—"

"You'll keep it. Mr. Roberts is over-nervous. He's to be a witness in an important case. The other visitor was also a detective. Since Mr. Roberts has become so unduly alarmed, we wish him to know he is to be protected. Anything else?"

Vee had a way of settling things. He turned toward the door but this time his way didn't work. The manager, quite evidently, had been a long time in the business. "Yes," he said, "there is something else. I wish your name for one thing—I only saw your badge—and I wish to talk to someone at headquarters in authority. There, there, you saw fit to question me. I want to know exactly to whom I am talking."

"Well"—Vee cursed softly—"my name is Vee Brown. I work directly from the district attorney's office. Do you know anyone there you would care to talk to? I would suggest Mr. Adams who—"

The manager smiled. "I am well acquainted in the district attorney's office.



The illustration shows two men in a small boat on water. The man on the left is wearing a sailor's cap with 'PABST' written on it. The man on the right is holding a can of Pabst beer. To the right of the boat is a large can of Pabst Export Beer and a tall glass of beer. The text 'We have met PABST and it is ours' is written in a stylized font above the can and glass. Below the can and glass, the text 'PABST Export BEER' is written in large, bold letters, with 'TAP a Can' in smaller letters between 'Export' and 'BEER'. At the bottom, it says 'BREWERY GOODNESS SEALED RIGHT IN'. A small 'KEGLINED' logo is visible near the glass.

We have met PABST  
and it is ours

PABST *Export* BEER  
TAP a Can

BREWERY GOODNESS SEALED RIGHT IN

KEGLINED



I think, if you have no objections, I will talk directly to Mr. Doran himself."

Vee didn't like it, but he had to take it. He might have blasted into a cheap hotel and gotten away with it, but this serene, undisturbed manager knew his way around.

The manager got his call through, got Mortimer Doran, and what's more called him by name. The end of it was that Vee got on the phone. Then the manager requested that there be no publicity and at last Vee cursed his way out.

"Politics," he said as the elevator carried us to the seventh floor. "Now, we'll have Doran butting in on the thing—Ramsey, too. And a man perhaps frightened into talking to me will be terrorized out of talking at all."

A moment later we tapped on the door of 702. "Who is it?" a strained shout demanded through the heavy door.

Brown hesitated. Of course he didn't wish his name hollered all over the hotel. Finally, in a stage whisper that could have been heard the length of that hall, he let out: "I am the visitor who was just announced and the one you telephoned."

A lock turned, the door opened a few inches and a voice spoke. "I warn you, I'm armed. There's someone with you. You step in alone."

"Not me." Brown tried to make his laugh easy. "Come, come, man. You sent for me. I'm Vee Brown. Don't be a fool. I have ten times as much reason to suspect a trap as you have. Open the door."

A long moment of hesitation and the door opened. Brown stepped quickly, moved his right hand suddenly forward and with his heavy revolver knocked the gun from the man's hand.

I FOLLOWED him inside, closed the door quickly just as the man reached down for the gun and Brown sent it slith-

ering across the highly polished floor of the foyer with his foot.

Mr. Roberts straightened, looked into the face of Vee Brown. There was terror in his eyes when he saw the gun in Vee's hand. He tried to speak, but no words came. He leaned back against the wall and raised his right hand sort of helplessly.

Brown spoke. "Good God, man—you sent for me! Don't you even know me—know who I am?" He took Roberts' arm, led him along the hall into the living-room of the suite. "I'm here to help you. You understand that, don't you?" This as he steered the man gently to a chair.

I got a good look at Roberts while he tried to compose himself. He was a small man—bigger than Vee perhaps, but not quite so wiry. He had dark hair, graying over his ears, and seemed frightened, washed up.

At length he wet his lips, spoke. "I think they are going to kill me. I'm afraid."

Brown turned from the desk he had been leaning on, picked up newspaper clippings, full-paged heads, and brutally tossed them onto Mr. Roberts' knees. I say brutally, because I saw what those heads were, heard what Vee said.

"Is it these meat-ax murders that're bothering you?" And before the man could answer, "These newspaper pages have been sent to you, eh? See, Dean—on top of each one is printed in pencil—*Your time is coming. Why not talk—now?*"

Brown looked at Roberts for a long time. Then he spotted the bottle of whiskey on the table, poured a glass and put it into a trembling hand, said when the man gulped it down: "Well, why not talk? Here—try another."

"No, no"—the man pushed the glass away—"I can't do that. I mustn't do that. My head whirls enough now. I don't



want false confidence, and I don't want to go mad. Your word, gentlemen—your word that anything—no matter what I tell you—remains confidential. Not police business. Just you, Mr. Brown"—and somewhat grudgingly, I thought—"and your friend here, I suppose."

"Let me," said Brown, "be the judge of that."

"No—no"—the man stammered out the words—"I can't do that. I don't dare do that—yet. Listen." He pulled at Brown's coat. "I am to receive a great deal of money—a great deal. I will pay you what you wish."

"And the money? Where is it coming from?" Brown looked directly at him.

"I don't know. It's a quarter of a million. I didn't believe it. But now that these men want me, I do believe it. I'm not positive they want to kill me. Maybe I only think I am in danger, but someone asked about me downstairs and since then I—"

"Yes, I know." Brown turned his head away, spoke indifferently. "Did you know him—a chap called Porky?" He turned back quickly and looked at Mr. Roberts.

Roberts showed no surprise or even fear—that is, any more fear than he already had.

Brown bit his lip, looked directly at the man, and said very slowly: "This Porky who came inquiring about you is the man who committed all these ax murders. . . . Dean! The whisky!"

Mr. Roberts had leaned forward, pitched to the floor on his face.

**WE** got him back in the chair, got some of the whisky into his mouth, more down his vest. I said to Vee: "What did you want to scare him half to death for! Isn't he frightened enough?"

"He isn't frightened enough to talk. Yet he should be. Ah—Mr. Roberts, that

is better. Come—speak out. If it is necessary to take more of the police into our confidence, let me assure you it will be for your protection, not your persecution."

"Get the police then. Get a dozen of them," Roberts was pleading now. "Take me to jail—to the Tombs. Lock me up for a while—a week—until the twenty-fifth anyway."

"First you don't want the police—then you do want them. Better let me have the whole story. Then I'll be the judge."

Roberts' tongue came out and licked at his lips. He said: "Very well. A little over two years ago I received a letter from a college chum I had not seen in years. It was hurriedly written and oddly phrased. He said he might be dead when I received it. But he wrote also that if I did not hear from him, in two years I was to come directly to New York City, register at the Stanley Arms Hotel. That on the twenty-fifth of the month—this very month—I would receive a letter that a friend of his would mail me, a letter he had written those two years back. The letter would reach me at this hotel. I was to take that letter, unopened, directly to you, Mr. Brown."

He hesitated and then, "The letter further stated that my visit to the city would be worth two hundred and fifty thousand dollars. I was to communicate with you when I got the letter—on the twenty-fifth."

Brown's eyes widened. He looked at me, then spoke to Roberts. "You have not received the letter. This is only the twenty-second. Yet you called me. Why?"

"Why? Why!" Roberts pointed to the newspapers on the floor. "I feared I would be dead by the twenty-fifth. I arrived in the city a few weeks ago, but did not stop at this hotel. Yet it was known



I was in New York. Once I was nearly kidnaped; once almost run down deliberately by a car. I finally came to this hotel."

Brown stroked his chin. "It's a wild story, Mr. Roberts. What is this man's name?"

"I can't tell you that. He was my friend years back. I know little about his past life. But I feel that he must be dead. He simply wrote me that if I followed his instructions I would be a rich man, that you would see that I got this money, and that it would be honest money."

"Fantastic." Brown spoke half aloud. "Yet it fits in with someone's desire to have me leave the city. Your name and his," he finally demanded. "Come, be sensible."

The man set his jaw tightly. "I won't tell you that," he said. "I am not sure he is dead. Of course, if things happen as I was told they would, then you may have my name and his. But my life has been respectable. I would offer you money, Mr. Brown, a good percentage of this amount. But this friend stated that only justice and not money would interest you."

"You have this letter?"

"No. I was instructed in the letter to tear it up. I have heard about you—read about you. I felt that it must be—honest. Now, tell me what you know."

Brown started to laugh but didn't. "I don't know anything," he admitted. "Except, perhaps, that your story, strange as it is, fits in with events just as strange—but certainly events that have happened." And to me, "Help Mr. Roberts get his things together, Dean. Now—right now. Doran and Ramsey will be in on the show. I'll arrange for a taxi at the servants' entrance." And clapping a hand on Roberts' back, "Have no fear from now on, Mr. Roberts. You are going to be Mr. Condon's guest. Your seclusion"—

Vee looked at me—"can only be intruded upon by the weakness of your friends, not the strength of your enemies." He lifted the phone and spoke to the manager.

At the servants' entrance Brown told me: "Get a taxi yourself, Dean. Go straight to the Knickerbocker Hotel and register as Frederick Roberts. Then leave at once before someone separates your silly head from your huge body. We'll see you at the penthouse. Come, Mr. Roberts."

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Mr. Roberts Talks

I DID my job and hurried out of the hotel quickly enough, was back at our own place before ten o'clock. Frederick Roberts was not in the library. When I asked about him Vee said: "In the guest-room, Dean. I have shown him the steel doors in there and locked him in."

"Locked him in!"

"At his own request. He's entirely washed up. Maybe I made a mistake, Dean, but as he wouldn't talk to me, I talked to him. I told him of those horribly murdered men, of Porky who had called on him, and of the massacre here in our place only a few days ago. I showed him the blood on the rug and—"

"But the rug's gone. It's a new rug."

"No matter. I showed him a bit of the design and told him it was blood. I put on a third degree—a pretended, kindly one—and I overdid it, Dean. He wanted to leave, said he knew nothing about the money—didn't want it. Didn't think these men knew his real name, and that he'd go back home and forget it all. Now he's terrified."

"And what would you expect. He is the man everything centers about—two hundred and fifty thousand dollars. Why,



if they got him, if he had that letter, Porky would torture him horribly for information."

"And there's the queer part of it. I stand in the way of no one receiving money. I can imagine nothing—absolutely nothing. And another thing, Dean. If these men had found Roberts, why did they try to kill me?"

"They might not have found Roberts at that time—but later. I don't know. So you really believe in all this money, and Roberts receiving it; a letter to you first? It sounds weird, unbelievable."

VEE nodded agreement. "I don't think Roberts believes in it himself now. I think he has some wild idea that information of importance is coming through to the police, and this friend of his has delegated him to bring it. But weird and unbelievable? We mustn't forget that six men have already lost their lives. Three innocent victims of Porky's ax, one enemy of society by Wong's knife, and two that I have accounted for. So the law and the criminal run even."

"And what happens next?"

"The enemy will either be confounded with the loss of Roberts and pack up and leave, or they will strike viciously—before the twenty-fifth." Brown shook his head. "I have a feeling that whoever scores next—either myself or the enemy—wins the game. By 'scores', Dean, I mean whoever produces another corpse."

"You're not telling Ramsey, or even Doran, about what you have learned?"

"No." He got up and paced the floor. "Doran would feel it his duty to follow me around—tell Ramsey. Besides, did any of you tell me anything while men were being butchered with a meat ax? Not at all. You simply tried to coax me out of the city with a silly idea that my absence would stop these killings. Well, I'll stop them as I always have stopped

them. But not by being out of the city."

"Have you any clue?"

"Clue?" Vee Brown dropped into a chair, laughed. "My clues walk around on two feet and carry guns in their hands. But I have a clue—a real clue. Ramsey wouldn't think of it because he has nothing to think with. Mortimer Doran—Well, to be honest, they haven't had the chance to think of it. Only you saw it, Dean. Only you told me about it. Don't you see, Dean. Porky and his friends knew the lay-out of this penthouse of ours."

"Yes, they did. And knew your habits too, the time you would get up. It struck me as odd when I told you."

"But it didn't strike me as odd, Dean. It struck me as very serious and very important. The few friends we have would hardly associate with Porky, nor would they be familiar with the rear of our apartment. Oh, don't look so thoughtful and guilty. It was not you—it was Wong. He talked to the boy who delivered the groceries. I drew it out of him with mental tweezers. These silent Chinese! Like all servants Wong enjoys a bit of gossip."

"You got that—the boy told you that he—"

"Not so fast, Dean. The boy seemed quite innocent of any real harm—nothing more than the petty graft of the energetic young tradesman. But his description of the man who sought the information and paid him for it was quite clear. It was Porky. Don't look surprised. Remember how Porky wished the crime to be known as his; he wanted the boy to talk to the newspapermen perhaps. Porky would like that. But the boy remained silent. He reads his newspaper and believes a great deal of what he reads. That boy had since seen the man who first introduced him to Porky, and that boy will finally help me. He's got the heart of a



crook, Dean—and the soul of a rat. He'll do anything for money."

"I wouldn't trust him very far."

"No, no, but I told him that the ride to Sing Sing is only a little less than an hour from New York City. It sank in, too."

**T**HE next day was Wong's day off. Brown went out in the morning and I was left as nursemaid to the trembling Roberts. He said he hadn't slept, and he wanted to be sure that the chain was on the door. He even cringed so in terror that I had to close the steel shutters to the terrace. He really looked better than the night before but he jumped if I moved about the room or rose from my chair. And he did talk a little.

"I come from a small town," he said. "I have been successful in business, have a wife and two children, Mr. Condon. I didn't need the money. I came for them—for their future. Now I wish to God I had never set eyes on the city. Greed, I tell you—that's what it was. Two hundred and fifty thousand dollars. I never dreamed of having so much money." He smiled ruefully. "At least since I graduated from college."

But he wouldn't tell me his real name.

"No, no," he said to my repeated requests. "I never fully believed in this thing. I planned, if no letter had come, to return home as I came. Mr. Brown would never have heard of me. And even now, if no letter comes, I can still leave. Neither the police nor these other men"—he gripped my arm—"for there must be other men—will know who I really am. I was a fool to come."

And so it went till Vee came back. I took him aside and whispered that I had gotten little information from Roberts. "Poor devil," I said. "He talks of nothing but his wife and kids. This is the

twenty-third—only two more days. Why not leave him alone?"

"If I were Ramsey I'd beat his head until he spoke all he ever knew."

"I don't believe he knows anything—except his real name. He's scared as a rabbit."

"Well"—Brown grinned—"that may be the reason I haven't beaten his head off. If I thought he could talk sense, I would. But he'd better hurry up and talk more than he has before Ramsey discovers our trick and comes after him."

Most of that afternoon Vee just paced the room and looked at the figure which slunk in the big chair. Suddenly he turned on Roberts, spat the words through his teeth. Oh, I had seen it coming, but I was powerless to prevent it. His patience was exhausted.

"Roberts," he said, "six men have died and more may go. And all because you sit there shivering in a chair waiting for money that you think I'm going to hand you. Any moment the police will discover the hoax I played on them, though I practically swore to Ramsey that you had gone to some other hotel. But they'll find the hotel and—" He leaned close to Roberts' suddenly alert, if fearful, eyes. "Now, Roberts, there's the front door. Out you go to handle your own affairs, unless you tell me the name of the man who is sending you that letter."

I gripped Vee's arm, but he tore it free. Roberts said: "Good God, you can't do that! I'd—I'd— It would be murder."

"Murder it is, then. Did you ever think that you might be simply a plant, that the letter you received was just to attract my attention—keep me watching over you for a couple of days? You say you know nothing about this man—but I might. Come! On your feet! Six men have died—maybe more while you are watched and protected—simply a clothing-store dummy to use up my time. Now—who the hell



would want to give you two hundred and fifty thousand dollars and why?"

Roberts broke; whined: "I don't know why. I know little about him. We were at college together. I—I can't."

**B**BROWN walked to the hall, returned, and throwing Roberts' hat and coat onto his knees said: "His name or get out. If it doesn't make sense to me, then—the cops can watch over you or I'll send you home."

"You would—you would." And when Roberts saw me nod to him over Brown's shoulder, for I had a genuine liking, or maybe just a pity for the man, "His name won't mean anything to you. It is Gerald Ramsdell."

"Ramsdell!" Brown's eyes fairly popped. "The fixer—the jewel-fixer?"

"I understood," said Roberts, "that he

was a private detective. You know him then?"

"Know him—knew him you mean. He was killed two years ago. Horribly tortured and—remember, Dean? That case was one of my failures. He was the go-between in the McKeever diamond robbery."

And I did remember. Tall, lean, clever Gerald Ramsdell. I had only met him that once. It was midnight when he came to our penthouse. There was a reward out for the gem, of course, for the papers all called it the McKeever Stone. Maybe it was a little less notorious, and therefore perhaps a little less valuable than the Hope Diamond. Gerald Ramsdell was a detective, but as Brown said, he was more of a fixer. When valuable jewelry was stolen—so valuable and well known that it would be impossible for the thieves to

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dispose of it without cutting up the stones and resetting them—then Gerald Ramsdell came in. And the gems would be returned to their rightful owner for a certain price.

I think in this McKeever Stone the price was one hundred thousand dollars. Ramsdell had contacted the crooks—or as some hinted—was actually one of them. Then he had called up Vee Brown, asked to see him and exacted a promise that he might go as he came—free.

I recalled perfectly Gerald Ramsdell's huge bony frame. His long legs stretched toward the fire. His gun plainly visible in its holster beneath his open coat, and the straightforward way he put his proposition up to Vee.

He had said: "It's your case, Brown—the McKeever Stone. The diamond is safe and I can return it to its owner for one hundred thousand dollars. McKeever is willing to pay. The police don't know anything about it. And I have the diamond."

"Yes," said Vee. "So what?"

"Well"—Ramsdell had settled his chin down on his chest—"the D. A. don't like me. He thinks I spot the goods, know the fee beforehand, and get crooks to steal the stuff. That isn't so. I get in touch with them afterwards. But here's the lay. A lad called Chester Harris was in the same business that I was in. He took the money in that Smalley robbery and turned in the jewelry. Then the cops got on the job, and Harris was handed a seven-year rap. You read that in the papers."

"That's right," said Vee. "I didn't approve of it."

"Thanks, Brown—but I'm not interested in your approval. The cops and the D. A. will burn things up under McKeever's nose. The D. A. knows I'm on this job. And will they ride me?"

"They'll ride you all right. But you're in either way, Ramsdell. They'll ride you

if you don't deliver. You've gone too far already. And I'll find that stone later. Better turn in the mob. That will square you. You know I never miss a big case."

Ramsdell had come to his feet, pulled down his vest. "People are funny, Brown," he'd said. "I know a collector—an honest millionaire—who'd give two hundred grand cash on the line for that rock. And he wouldn't care how he got it or if no one ever saw it afterwards but himself. I guess I'm washed up in the city. To my way of thinking, this will be my first crooked deal—and I'm driven into it by the cops.

"Yep, you're thinking right. I have the diamond. I know my way around. McKeever's out—the mob is out. It's just myself, Ramsdell, I'll be thinking of from now on." And as he moved toward the door, "There's a letter box in the hall, isn't there? I consider it part of your word not to interfere with the United States mail. You're a square shooter, Brown. You'll never break this case, but if I crack up I'll remember you in my will."

**B**BROWN cut in on my recollections then—in fact, took them up just about where I left off.

"Two days later," he was saying, "we looked at him in the morgue, Dean. The gang must have picked him up right outside our door. He had been horribly murdered. Caught by the jewel mob and tortured to tell where that diamond was." And to Roberts, "The stone never was recovered. I never discovered who was in that mob. I always thought that, tortured, Ramsdell had told them where he had hidden the diamond. I always thought—By God! The letter he mailed that night was the one to you, Roberts. You didn't know he was dead?"

"No—no. But there was no diamond in it. I swear to—"



Brown laughed. "Don't worry about that. That diamond is plenty big and would hardly go by mail. I stood at the door and saw him slip the envelope in the box. It may have contained directions to the hiding-place of the diamond."

"No," Roberts cut in again. "It only told me that this year on the twenty-first of this month I was to come to you. I don't want the diamond. It's not mine. He couldn't have thought I'd take it."

"It's damn queer he wrote you so far ahead. But then he may have expected to leave it hidden for a long time. Someone must be holding the second letter—the one you are to bring to me when it arrives on the twenty-fifth. I'm afraid, Roberts, you've gone through a lot for a very little. He could trust you to bring that letter to me." And suddenly, patting Roberts on the back, "But cheer up, fellow. McKeever's had a reward out—fifty thousand at one time—for its return. It still stands— Yes, Ramsdell was all right. He would remember me in his will. I'd get credit for cracking the case. And you—his friend—would get the reward. I'll bet a century that's the news the letter will contain. The hiding-place of the McKeever Stone and perhaps the name of the leader of this crowd. No one even suspects who he is. Now—I wonder—did Ramsdell know him?"

I put my two cents' worth in. I said: "But these murders, Vee; the attempt to get you out of the city. It seems as if someone else knew about this letter also."

"Perhaps, perhaps." Brown was raring to go now. "You see, Ramsdell, after they captured him, might have taunted them by saying he had sent a letter to a friend, predicted that I would finally arrest the master jewel thief. Or again—the torture might have—" And straightening, "By God, Roberts or Jones or Smith or whatever the hell your name is—if I get this

lad, known even to the trade only as the Rock, why I'll—"

The phone started to ring. As he crossed to it he flung back over his shoulder: "We must be careful, for the cleverest criminal in America will disappear entirely once that letter reaches me." He grabbed up the phone. . . . "Hello."

There was "yes" and "no" and a few whispered words, and a final, "I'll come by the fire-escape of course. You say there will be two men in the living-room expecting me by the unlocked door? . . . Good. I'll come up the outside and surprise them. . . . Of course I'll come alone. Let me have the address again."

WHEN he put the phone in its cradle, his eyes were bright. "It's a bad neighborhood—cheap and all that—cheap, that is, for people who want to get their hands on a gem worth a quarter of a million dollars."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"My boy, Dean, who delivered the groceries and talked with Wong and who liked my money. They think they are using him to trap me. He'll call me again when they are with him and ask me to come and see him. He's to say that he has information for me. Two of this mob will be with him, hidden close to the door. I'm to drop in on them from behind through the fire-escape window and surprise them."

"But what good will that do you?"

"One of them will tell me where Porky is, and where I find Porky I'll find the Rock."

"How do you know they'll talk?"

"Only the live one will talk—be rather glad to talk. Hell! McKeever wants his diamond, but I want this master jewel thief and murderer, the Rock. My only real failure, Dean. Besides, the meat-ax deaths were rather horrible."



**B**BROWN was impatient for the next telephone call and when it came answered it with all the eagerness of a boy. After he'd taken it he turned to Roberts and said: "This Ramsdell that you knew so long—he had a daughter didn't he?"

"Yes, he did." Roberts nodded. "I can't remember just where she lived. Can you?"

"No. Only it struck me that he spoke of keeping his real business from his daughter."

"We must take care of her," Roberts said as he clasped a hand to his head. "I'll try to remember."

"You've remembered enough I think." Brown pounded him on the back. "Try to forget for the next couple of days. After that it will all be a dream. This sort of thing is all new to you, I know, but one gets used to it."

"I wonder—I wonder," Roberts muttered. And then, "I want to thank you for your interest in me."

"In you?" Vee laughed. "Don't kid yourself about that. When this little affair is over you'll owe me nothing." He clenched his fingers tightly at his sides. "The Rock—perhaps the cleverest—certainly the slimiest of all criminals. Others murder for him and he throws them to the wolves of the underworld that they may not betray him. Protects himself behind the shadows of doped or half-maddened criminals, and when he kills, shoots men in the back. I've wanted for years, to put a bullet in him. No, Mr. Roberts, I'll owe you a debt of gratitude."

"I hope so, Mr. Brown. I hope so." Roberts shook his head. "But this Rock knows you and you don't know him, knows your face as you don't know his. I hope—yes, I hope it will be gratitude you owe me. Certainly, it is gratitude I owe to you—and hope always to owe to you." And turning to me, "And you too, Mr. Condon, who have been so patient and so kind."

Brown was in a jubilant mood. He laughed aloud. "And you'll have to have more patience, Dean, for you'll be alone with Mr. Roberts again."

It was later—just about seven o'clock, I think—that Vee left us. He whistled softly, clapped me on the back.

"Be careful." I held his arm for I had a premonition of danger.

"Careful!" He threw open his coat and I saw that a blue snubbed-nosed .45 hung under his left armpit in its shoulder holster. "A little hard to handle, Dean. But if things go wrong tonight, they won't go wrong for me. Ramsey will be finding heads under beds—not chopped this time—but shot there dragging the bodies with them."

And when I shuddered, he gave me his final fling. "Don't open the door even if you see six cops in uniform out in the hall. That is, not until you've let the door ride the length of the chain and held a conversation that couldn't fool even you. Remember, Dean, it's not the strength of the enemy that is dangerous, but your own weakness. Good-night. I don't want to be late."

And he was gone and I was alone with Mr. Roberts, whose nerves seemed to go to pieces almost the moment Vee Brown was out that door.

## CHAPTER SIX

### *The Trap Is Sprung*

**I** WENT through the same trouble with Roberts that I had had that morning except that it was much worse because of the darkness outside, though with the steel shutters closed Roberts could not see that darkness. He kept talking about his danger, the men who wanted his life, how they would see Brown go out and take advantage of his absence. He insisted we should have someone else with us,



maybe half a dozen men that I could recommend and of whom Vee would approve. After all, men would go to any lengths for a diamond such as he was soon to know the whereabouts of, if Vee's guess were correct.

"Nonsense," I told him, for he made me feel nervous myself. "No one could get in here. Besides, I have a gun." And blowing my own horn a little, "Living with Vee Brown I've learned to do a bit of shooting of my own." I tapped my hip pocket—I never could feel comfortable with a gun under my arm as Brown carries his—and said: "If you weren't safe with me, Vee wouldn't have left you here."

Roberts poured himself a drink, hardly able to hold the heavy cut-glass decanter in trembling fingers. "But— What was that?" Roberts almost shouted the words as the phone rang. I jumped too, but it was his shouting, not the ring of the phone that bothered me.

I tried to cover my confusion as I leaned over the desk close to Roberts and lifted the French phone. "Yes," I said into the mouthpiece and when the thick voice asked for Vee Brown, "He's not in.

I don't know exactly when to expect him. I think he'll be late and—"

I don't know why I raised my head at that moment. I don't know why I stopped talking suddenly. But I did raise my head and I did look straight into the soft blue eyes of Mr. Frederick Roberts. Only those eyes weren't soft now. They were hard—a shining sort of hardness. There was a film over them as if I saw them through ice that had frozen upon a polished steel surface. There was no fear in Roberts' face now—a horribly distorted face, so evil, so— And God help me, I didn't know the truth until the decanter was actually in the air held in a hand that did not tremble.

I'm not sure but I think I reached for my gun. I do know I still held the phone. Maybe Vee Brown could have drawn and shot the man, but I doubt it. Certainly, I couldn't. Particularly when I didn't even realize the true significance of the thing.

I remember crying out: "You fool! You don't know what you're doing."

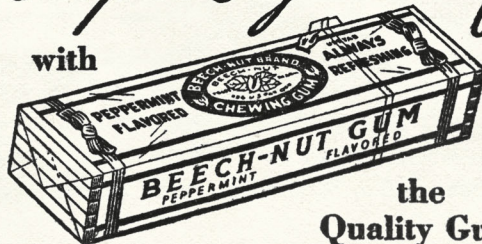
Then there was a crash, and millions of dazzling lights as the heavy decanter swept down upon my head. Pain was in my face,



When the horse runs home, and the ground is hard,  
And you wish you were safe in your own back yard,  
Don't faint, don't swear, and don't count ten—  
*Just rip off the wrapper and yield to that yen . . .*

*Compose yourself*

with



the  
Quality Gum



my chin, as my head struck the table with terrific force. Just a second—a split second then—in which I knew why the telephone call had come. It was to distract my attention and Mr. Frederick Roberts had known exactly what he was doing all the time.

Just one thought before blackness. It was the weakness of man again that had done the trick. But this time was it my weakness—or the weakness of Vee Brown?

In a way I don't think I was entirely unconscious. Someone was talking, asking questions, answering them. It was a voice I recognized and yet didn't recognize, somehow.

The voice was saying: "The thing is simple at this end. I occupy Vee Brown's apartment and my expected visitor has never seen either Brown or myself. No, no, Porky—Brown will not return. He has gone to his death. I will have to chance staying here until she comes. It's the leaving that may be dangerous. Stay there for a call, and let us hope that Brown has played the lone hand and kept his information from the police. Poor little sap. He never suspected me. Remember, you're supposed to be police headquarters when I call you."

I had started to my knees, in fact was half kneeling there on the floor, looking in a dazed way into a face—yes, the face of Mr. Roberts. Changed—certainly it was changed. He sat easily upon the desk; a cigarette dangled from his lips; his attitude was unperturbed. He was entire master of the situation.

He looked down at me; his lips parted slightly and he said into the phone: "Of course, nothing is wrong—just hold the wire a minute, Porky."

This time I saw everything plainly enough even if it was through a haze. Mr. Roberts raised his right hand. I saw my own gun plainly in it before he

snapped it down on my head again. And I heard him say, his voice almost indifferent: "Listen, Porky—"

IT took me a moment to get my bearings the next time I came to. And this time there was no chance of my coming to my feet. I found that out almost at once. I was looking out into the room—from darkness into light. For a few feet I could see only the rug, then the legs of chairs, then a whole chair—and finally at the end of the room the entire wall to the ceiling. How was that? I didn't know at first. Then suddenly I did. I was behind the couch and looking from under it. And I was bound hand and foot.

I looked upward toward the dimness of ceiling, then the lamp beside the couch went on. The light shone down on me and illuminated a face. It was Mr. Roberts, and he leaned over the couch, flicked hot ashes onto my face, and said: "The name, my dear Condon, is Rock. You know—the man who only shoots others in the back. The man who hides behind gunmen. 'Slimy,' I believe Vee Brown called it. You know if I were of a vindictive nature I would not have allowed Brown to be killed when he walked into the trap. I would have them take him alive so that I might stick a knife into his chest—much as I stuck one into that Gerald Ramsdell. But I don't take chances that way. I simply want the diamond."

"Then you are not Mr. Roberts."

"Really"—Roberts leaned over the couch—"I wouldn't lie to you or Mr. Brown—not after you treated me so kindly. I told you quite frankly from the beginning of our so profitable acquaintance that my name was not really Roberts."

"And Vee"—I got the words out through dry lips—"he's—but you couldn't have trapped him."

Roberts or Rock—or whatever his name



was, laughed. "Brown was very clever in figuring out that delivery boy and learning that he had talked with Wong. But Brown should have gone a little further. If he had taken the trouble to send to Chicago he would have discovered just who that poor frightened boy was, and the record that he had. Oh, he looks twenty or twenty-one, but he's older than that in calendar years—and far older in criminal years. Brown was told to come down the fire-escape. He'll be riddled with bullets the moment his figure appears at that window. Interested?"

"This friend—Ramsdell—he— The letter, the twenty-fifth of the month—that was all a lie?"

"Ramsdell double-crossed me." Roberts' face set hard. "He lost his nerve on the hundred-thousand-dollar deal and kept the McKeever Stone. Oh, I knew he went to visit Vee Brown that night. We picked him up in a car the moment he left your apartment. I tortured him. He was defiant, said we would never find the stone, that he had hidden it and that his daughter would have it when she was twenty-one if he died. Offered to deliver it to us if we let him go, but we couldn't trust him free, of course, and he wouldn't tell us until he got his freedom. So for a while we reached an impasse."

There was a long silence and then, viciously, through his teeth, "But I broke Ramsdell. Porky had escaped from Matteawan. I turned Ramsdell over to Porky and he talked. His daughter was to take a letter directly to Vee Brown at ten o'clock at night on her twenty-first birthday. That was Ramsdell's letter—and in that letter Ramsdell told where the diamond was hidden. If Ramsdell were not alive at that time, the daughter was to get the reward."

"That's what you told us—or almost what you told us—about yourself."

"That's right." He nodded. "Brown had

to have some kind of story. That was almost a true one. Well, today is the girl's twenty-first birthday. Tonight at ten o'clock—in fifteen minutes—she is to come here."

"But why did you wait? Why didn't you get the letter from the girl before—get the information nearly two years ago?"

"Porky," Roberts fairly snarled. "Ramsdell was willing to talk—~~anxious~~ anxious to talk under Porky's torture—but Porky showed too much enthusiasm. Ramsdell died before we knew where his daughter was. I searched the country, but never found her. There was just one thing left to do. Take Brown's place the night she came to deliver that letter to him. That's why I needed him out of the city or dead."

"And those horrible murders were to get him out of town?"

THE Rock's laugh was not pleasant. "Porky's idea—not mine. Though, once he had started, I sat back and waited. It did seem possible that if the D. A. thought a madman was at work he'd get Vee Brown out of the city for a while."

"This Porky is mad?"

Thin, cruel lips twisted. "Let us be kindly, Mr. Condon, and say that perhaps he is a little eccentric. If Brown were dead, of course, the girl would come to you, and all our troubles would be over. You would not be hard to handle; were not hard to handle tonight. Rather clever my calling the great detective, the killer of killers, and having him come to the Stanley Arms. I even had Porky call at my hotel, for I knew Brown would find that out and be sure to trust me. I am quite an actor, don't you think, Mr. Condon? Just as Ramsdell told Brown he could deliver, a couple years ago, so can I deliver that McKeever Diamond to a millionaire collector who will pay a huge sum for it. An honest, respected citizen



whose hobby, or perhaps obsession, is rare jewelry. He won't ask any questions, but he would buy that diamond if it came to him washed in the blood of a dozen men."

"You can't get away with it," I started and stopped. The phone rang.

The Rock's head disappeared but I could hear his voice on the phone—*anxious at first, then elated*. He was saying: "You'll be well paid for this, Armstrong. Shot through the back of the head, eh? Well, that was safe. Why so nervous, man? Vee Brown is dead. You have nothing to fear." He laughed lightly. "Brace up. Why you're the first man who ever killed him—and the last."

He was chuckling as he came back to the couch and leaned over it again, his gun—or rather my gun—dangling in his hand.

"Vee Brown is dead," he told me. "I was waiting for that call. He fell to his knees at the first volley—then a single shot through the back of his head."

Again a bell rang and he stopped talking. It was the front doorbell, this time. Roberts turned and looked at the clock. His gun disappeared and he said—not in the whining voice I had heard before: "This is my visitor, Mr. Condon. I have not taken the trouble to gag you." He pulled the lamp cord leaving me in darkness. "From under the couch you will be able to see us and hear us. You will also be able to cry out and warn her—and after that watch me cut her pretty throat."

He coughed lightly and added: "Why must the villain in the piece always find a woman's throat pretty? But ugly or pretty—it doesn't matter. Her life is in your hands—or rather in your mouth."

He didn't make any further threat—just walked down the room. Under the couch I saw his feet first, then his legs and finally his whole body before he

crossed the foyer, turned and disappeared on his way to the door. My mind was dull. I had no thoughts. Just one pounding nightmare. Vee—my friend—Vee Brown, was dead.

THE door opened and closed; now two pairs of feet were coming down the hall to the library. "Yes, my dear child," I heard the man saying softly. "I am that well known detective, Vee Brown, as you so graciously put it."

"You're not exactly as I pictured you," a low, feminine, and slightly timid voice said, "but much as my father described you physically."

"So he spoke about me to you then. . . . There, sit down." I could see Roberts slapping an envelope against his palm, and I saw, too, that he studied it carefully as she sat down and he asked her if she had come alone.

"Oh, yes," she said. "Quite alone. How well did you know my father, and do you know exactly what is in that letter?"

Roberts' blue eyes were soft and kindly as he looked at her big staring brown ones. I bent my head, flattened my nose against the floor and looked at her, too. A jewel thief's daughter or a fixer's daughter? It seemed impossible. Nicely, but cheaply dressed. No make-up on her face—at least, I thought that the redness of her cheeks was real, and the redness of her lips. Despite the somber steadiness of her eyes, they sparkled with youth, health. She didn't look like a city-bred girl.

Roberts didn't answer her question; he asked one in return.

"Detectives don't answer questions," he said, and his voice was kindly. "They ask them. Did you look at the letter?"

She hesitated a long moment, then said, "No," but her cheeks flushed, and I guess we both knew that she lied.

Roberts tore open the envelope and



read the letter. He read it over three or four times. His eyes were bright when he looked at the girl, but not with the sparkle of youth. God, no! I thought I knew what was in his mind—behind those bright eyes. He was deciding whether to kill the girl or not.

At last he came to his feet, said abruptly: "You know, of course, that your father is dead. This letter— Here, read it." He handed it to the girl.

She flushed again, said: "I did read it, but no else has seen it—not even the people I live with. You are a detective, Mr. Brown. My father spoke highly of you. I waited until my twenty-first birthday as he instructed me to do. But I want nothing that isn't mine." She gulped before she got the final words out. "He was not a thief. I simply brought this letter to you—not to receive any award as my father writes in it—but that you may see justice done and the diamond returned."

"You waited to bring it—as the letter said—on your twenty-first birthday." Roberts was looking at her throat now and his hand was creeping toward a jacket pocket. "But you told no one else?"

"No, no one else," she said simply.

I guess we both watched for the flush that would tell that she lied and probably cause her death. But no flush came this time. My mouth that was wide open to try a warning to the girl closed again. This girl had been brought up to believe that to lie was a sin. Anyone could tell that. She wore her own lie detector on her cheeks—her entire face for that matter. And that innocence of hers undoubtedly saved her life.

Roberts walked to the phone, spoke to her as he dialed a number. "You can see from that letter, Miss Ramsdell, that you might be in some danger. I am calling police headquarters." And as she half came to her feet, "There, don't be alarmed.

You will be taken to a first-class hotel and protected. You see, this letter not only gives the whereabouts of the gem, but the real name and actual hiding-place of this master jewel thief called the Rock. Therefore—" He turned and finished into the phone. . . . "Hello. This is Vee Brown speaking, Lieutenant. I'll want Sergeant Smith and—er—oh, tell him to pick the best man he can. It's rather private—but they must come at once. . . . Fine. Send Sergeant Smith right over."

It sounded very real indeed when he talked on that phone. I was glad I had not cried out my warning and seen the girl slaughtered there in that room. Yes, I was glad I had not cried out, but my head must have been confused—very confused indeed—not to see the truth then, the real horrible truth. For the girl knew too much, far too much to live.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### The Road to Hell

**T**HE RÖCK, alias Roberts, talked to the girl, about her home life which proved to have been on a farm in Kansas. Her mother had died and her father was busy in New York, but he came to see her—well, not often—sometimes twice a year. Her eyes brightened when she said he brought her such beautiful things.

The doorbell rang then; men came—two pairs of feet—down that floor. The huge broad-shouldered man I didn't know. But the man who kept his hat on, had no hair showing beneath that hat, was Porky.

They moved out of my line of vision. The conversation was very formal. Porky called Roberts "Mr. Brown," and Roberts addressed him as "Sergeant," impressing upon him the necessity of taking proper care of the girl.

"She's to have the best of everything, Sergeant," Roberts said. "A suite at the



Waldorf—spare no expense. . . . There, Miss Ramsdell, you are doing a great deal for me—more than you will ever suspect. Now—”

And a dead silence. The doorbell had rung again; rung while someone pressed hard and long and determinedly upon it.

“God!” Porky broke out suddenly, and Roberts stopped him. I heard whisperings. Finally Roberts said aloud: “That terrace exit—down the stone steps to the floor below. I’ll stay and close the steel shutters after you.”

More whispers, feet moving rapidly, Roberts assuring the girl that everything was all right. Steel windows opening and closing. Then silence, and the tread of feet. I saw Roberts pass out into the hall. The bell was still ringing; now someone was pounding on the door.

I struggled frantically behind that couch now, for I heard the soft voice of Roberts plus a voice I knew well. The language was coarse—loud. I never thought such a voice could be pleasant—but it was. It was Inspector Ramsey.

“You open that damn door, Roberts, or we’ll bust it down. So Brown hid you up here and had Condon register at the hotel. You fool, I’m an inspector of police and this is the district attorney. . . . By God, I don’t care what Brown told you! We’ll get a fire ax and pound the damn door in.” A mumbled sound as Roberts spoke—that frightened, nervous speech that he had sucked Vee and me in with. Then the voice of Mortimer Doran.

“There, there, Roberts. We understand you’ve been threatened—this Porky called at your hotel. And Vee Brown has given you good advice about not opening this door. Certainly. Take a good look at us and call police headquarters. We’ll wait long enough—”

“And just long enough,” Ramsey bel-  
lowed as Roberts returned to the library.

He didn’t hesitate. Simply leaned over that couch and hit me again with the gun—once—twice—maybe three times. I don’t know. But I do know I was dragged across the floor. I think that I was jerked to my feet, though I doubt that he was big enough or strong enough to carry me. Anyway, when I came to this time I was lying on the floor of my own bedroom—the one nearest to the library—down the hall about ten feet from the library door.

And this time things were different. My head was clear, and my hands—yes, my hands—were nearly free. In the excitement, Roberts must not have noticed that the ropes had loosened as he shifted me. A minute, two at the most, and my hands were entirely free. Another minute, for I had a small knife in my coat pocket, and the rope that bound my ankles was gone.

I didn’t look to the right or left as I staggered to my feet, leaned against the wall and sought the door to the hall. I found the knob, opened the door a fraction, waited. I heard the voices in the library not far down the hall. Ramsey and Mortimer Doran were there, and I could have laughed with relief, but I didn’t. I waited just as Brown—poor old Vee—might have waited for that dramatic moment.

“By God!” Ramsey was saying, “I was right, Mr. Doran. A slap with the gun did the trick. Roberts knows where this Porky is hiding—the jewel thief, Rock, too. They telephoned him to come to them.”

**R**OBERTS was whining: “Gentlemen, Mr. Brown said I was not to talk. He has gone to this place. I told him he could not find it alone. That he should take me with him. But he wouldn’t. I—I—”

“Well, we’ll take you with us,” Ramsey



thundered, "and beat hell out of you if—"

Mortimer Doran broke in and his voice was stern—and Ramsey was quiet.

"Enough of that, Inspector," Doran said. "Now, Mr. Roberts, you may be assured that you will receive every consideration at our hands that you would at the hands of Mr. Brown. That he brought you here, left you here alone, is every indication of your desire to aid justice. You say you received a letter telling exactly where the diamond was hidden—the McKever Stone?"

"Let's get going," said Ramsey. "I'm sorry, Mr. Doran, but it burns me up. This Brown wanting to work things alone and—"

Doran made clicking sounds with his lips. "We may beat him to it yet—if this house is as hard to find as Mr. Roberts tells us. But we can't blame Vee too much. Remember the cards ordering him from the city. We rather kept him out of our confidence."

Of course I knew what had happened. Mortimer Doran or Ramsey had gone to the Stanley Arms Hotel after the manager had called him. And Ramsey had discovered our little game in which I registered at the Knickerbocker Hotel as Roberts. And now—Roberts the slickest crook of them all, was planning to take the district attorney and Inspector Ramsey to where that diamond was hidden. Or was he planning to take them to their death?

"We have a couple of good cops downstairs to go along," Inspector Ramsey said. "Sergeant Murphy and a machine gun, just in case. Come on."

That was my cue. I opened the door wider, took one step toward the hall that would lead me to the library and rocked back on my feet. The thing against my neck was cold and hard—the voice was hard too—but low. It said: "Back you

come, boy, or I'll blast straight through you and into them."

The bedroom door closed softly and I was jerked back into that room. The speaker had a gun trained flat against my stomach as I was swung around. And the eyes behind that gun were the shrewd, uncertain, protruding eyes of Porky—round and small, and—I wondered—mad.

"Listen, silly. If you had hollered then I would have blasted them out. That's why I stayed behind. I was hidden in the closet in case they searched the place. The first man to open the closet door took it right through the middle. But Rock's the lad for them." He spit on his free right hand and rubbed it across his huge face and over his snout-like mouth in a peculiar fashion. Then he finished: "But they will all come to my death party."

A door slammed. Porky opened the bedroom door, looked out, said: "O. K., Condon. Everyone who has looked at Rock's face is in on this party."

"You'll never be able to knock me unconscious and carry me out of this building. Not after the other day when—"

Porky grunted, said: "Don't kid yourself. Get into your hat. We're going down in the elevator and right out the front door. I'll have a gun on you. If you can think of anything else you'd rather do at the time, why just do it. See if I care."

"You'd shoot me—right in the lobby."

"Right in the belly." Porky laughed. "Get moving. We've got to beat the boss and his friends to my workshop."

Porky was right. I rode down in the elevator with him, walked along the hall between the palms, even bowed to a couple of people I knew. I passed out the front door, walked to the corner and stepped into the car that was waiting there. I thought of a dozen things to do, but I didn't do them. I knew I was riding with death and by not doing them—well, at least I was still alive.



THE ride was a long one and a fast one. Once in the car my hands and feet were securely bound again. A lad with a cap drove and Porky sat beside me. Did I think? Yes, in a jumbled way. My lips were tightly set, but something inside me boiled. I knew well why I didn't break loose there in the elevator, or in the hall, and get myself shot to death. It wasn't fear on my part. It wasn't a desire to live. Somehow I didn't think so much about that now with Vee dead. I think I stuck along with Porky for vengeance; for the hate that was in my heart.

Vengeance! I could have laughed when I thought of my chances—tied hand and foot, and Porky with a gun in his hand.

He said: "You're not a bad dope, Condon. I can see Brown's point in dragging you around. I used to like having suckers with me, too. Makes you feel swell, but it was a sucker who slipped me the rap at Matteawan." He sniffed. "They held me for three years, then I went out flying—guns blazing. Fools, them people. I had an ax, too. Those who tried to stop me got it like them guys you and the cops found. A doctor, a couple of guards—and a woman." He chuckled. "She stood right in front of me—screaming."

He took off his hat, ran a hand over that shining, completely hairless head.

"With that bald head how did you manage to stay free so long?" I asked. "How was it—"

"It was Rock. He needed me for the McKever gem job and put up the dough that got me rolling out of the madhouse. All I ever need is a start. After that—well, he let me play around with my hobby—high explosives. He was cute about it. It was over a year before I knew he was just letting me work so I'd stay inside, but I wanted to do that job. You know what I did with my time, Condon? Well, I made a room—a whole room in the cellar—into one big blast. I tore up

the floor—re-laid it over dynamite. Understand, boy—every inch of that floor was dynamite. It took seventeen months to lay it and wire it for a quick blast—and another few months to cement it up again."

"What made you do that?"

"I had seen the death-house in Sing Sing and it proved a bust. Now this house we are going to—there's a real death-house for you! Just a single connection and I'd lay a hole that would look like a prehistoric volcano. I'll bet even an insurance investigator wouldn't be sure that a house ever stood there. Certainly wouldn't be able to find even the least part of a body."

"A body—" I gasped. "What do you mean?"

He chuckled, nudged me in the side. "Rock let me play in that room. Sometimes from six in the morning until late at night. I worked it out my way. He didn't know that some time it would be useful like now. If it wasn't for that cellar he'd have to shoot it out with Inspector Ramsey. That dodo of a D. A. won't be much good. The place'd be lousy with cops in no time. Now—he simply rides them to my party—my death party. If Ramsey picks up a dozen cops the better I'll like it."

He leaned over, tapped the driver on the back. "Put a foot on the gas before I put a meat ax in your spine." And when the driver crouched low and the car shot ahead at a dangerous speed, Porky just laughed and said to me: "It's a scream, Condon. These guys ain't sure if I'm mad or not. Look at Joe drive! He thinks I won't do it, but he don't know for sure." And after a long pause, "And sometimes I don't know either."

I KNEW where we were going for Porky made no efforts to keep the ground we covered secret from me. Once we were out of the city and on the Bronx



River Parkway he even opened the window, stuck his head out and sniffed the air.

"I like the country," he said. "I like the smell of it. Earthy. I like the smell of that cellar, too. Earthy. 'Earth to Earth'. That's what the Book says," he misquoted as if he were an authority.

"You know," he went on, "Rock had all sorts of plans to get Brown out of the city. You didn't matter none. Then one night I slipped out and telephoned Mortimer Doran, the D. A., told him to get Vee Brown out of the city and watch the public notices. Half an hour later I saw a swell-looking gent step into a hallway to light a cigarette. I had the ax under my coat and . . . What's the matter?" He chuckled metallically when I drew away from him. "You don't have to worry, brother. There ain't going to be enough of your head to chop. Not even enough to lift with tweezers."

Silence then. We turned, shot into Central Avenue, ran up it for a few miles, then swung right and climbed the hill just below the golf links at Tuckahoe.

The house was big and dreary and well back from the road. Maybe it wouldn't have looked so somber under other circumstances. We drove over a rough, unkept, private road to the rear of that house, finally stopped.

My hands remained tied, but my feet were free as I followed Porky, and was myself followed by the driver of the car, along the side of the house. I saw a coal-shute, the heavily boarded little window beyond it, after that the cellar door. Only two steps, then hard cement floor. I wondered if it would blow up beneath my feet.

A light-button clicked; a ceiling-light flooded a spotlessly clean room. And my eyes settled straight on the thing. It stood at one end of the room with a partly open door behind it. It stood on a square platform of cement—a clean job that an

expert mason might have been proud of.

It was a heavy steel box with an upright of brass leading from its center. On top of that upright was a handle that ran horizontally from the support itself. A plunger. Two grips for the hands to push the length of brass down and then—

Porky explained to me, but he didn't really need to. "Get the point, Condon? No shooting, no meat ax, nothing that even the highly strung Mr. Rock would object to." He stepped up on the platform, turned and faced me, bent forward and gripped the cross-bar above the length of brass.

"Nicely oiled." There was pleased self-admiration in his pig-like face and rough voice. "The slightest forward pressure of my body and the brass rod goes down, makes the connection, and the whole house explodes." His eyes popped. "Let us hope that Doran's common sense overcomes Inspector Ramsey's stupid wish to outshine Brown, and that they bring plenty more men with them. Policemen, of course, Condon—" And then with a viciousness that jarred me back, and forward again, as I thought he was going to lose his balance and blow us both to pieces, he said: "I hate policemen." He didn't say any more, just—"I hate policemen"—and I'll bear witness that he didn't need to say anything else.

He didn't fall on the cross-bar and I let out my breath—and heard another gasp echo my own. I spun on my heels and faced the girl. It was Miss Ramsdell. She was tied there in a chair, her eyes staring in terror—not at me, but at the man behind me—Porky.

"All right, Joe," Porky half sneered at the man who had driven the car. "Tie this guy up. You're anxious to get going." And after Joe had securely tied me in a chair, one of several, "This door, Joe—right out here."



Joe walked quickly to the little door at the end of the room and across from the flight of wooden steps that led to the floor above.

As he passed through the door Porky followed him, called softly: "Just a minute, Joe. I have something for you. Mr. Rock was a bit surprised that you actually discovered who he was, and what he sought. He wanted me to give you this."

I saw Joe pause and turn. I saw Porky pass by the black mouth of the coal-shute and through the door. He closed it behind him. I didn't see any more after that. I just heard the shots—three quick shots. Then I heard a body fall.

Porky was smiling when he came back into the room. "Nice lad, Joe," he said as he picked his teeth with a match and tucked his gun beneath his armpit. "A stupid fellow, though. Imagine him laying down the law that the money from that diamond was to be split three ways." Porky raised his eyes; his lips moved as if he counted. "One half of one third comes to me—a nice piece of change." Thick, sensuous lips parted; uneven protruding teeth showed in that snout-like mouth. "Enough to buy a wig," he added.

He walked over to the girl, tossed up her head with a flip of his knuckles against her chin. I heard her teeth click. "Nice throat, girl," he said. "So you're Ramsdell's brat—the lad who double-crossed his friends. He died horrible, your father did. I was the one who—"

He paused, listened, cursed softly. Then he turned and went swiftly to that cement platform, climbed upon it, placed both his hands on the cross-bar, leaned slightly. I could see the brass give, waver, then hold steady as Porky released his weight.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### Red Dynamite

FOOTSTEPS crossed the floor above; a base voice rumbled—Ramsey I thought. Porky whispered: "We weren't any too soon. Rock was supposed to have trouble in finding the house. Not a word, Condon, or we all blast our way to hell."

Silence, an opening door, then Mortimer Doran's voice clear and loud. "A light, Ramsey. The house is laid out exactly as Roberts told us it would be."

And the voice of Roberts with the frightened whine still in it. "Gentlemen, I'm two hours too soon. I told you I was to come here with Mr. Brown and learn the hiding-place of the gem."

"That's right you did." Ramsey didn't seem troubled. "We'll go down. No, no, Mr. Doran. I've got a couple guns and I'll go first. Lieutenant Swartz and Sergeant Murphy can follow me—you have the machine gun, Sergeant." And with a half-laugh, "If you don't find my shooting to your liking, or see anything you don't fancy—why just open up."

I'll say one thing for Ramsey. He didn't lack courage.

Feet beat upon wood, legs appeared and Porky tossed off his hat, raised his eyes toward that flight of cellar steps and leaned further forward. I could see his knuckles whiten as he clutched that cross-bar.

Ramsey came first. There was a puzzled look on his face as the others crowded him down those stairs. In the rear I saw Roberts and Mortimer Doran crouched low so that they might see between the wall and the stairs.

"Good God! Dean Condon and a dame prisoner. And Porky—unarmed." Ramsey's voice was harsh as he added: "Put them up high, Porky or I'll blow a hole in your stomach we can all walk through."



Porky didn't raise his hands. He said slowly: "If you shoot I fall forward on this cross-bar and the plunger goes down. The entire room is laid with dynamite—ask Condon." And when Ramsey still held his gun up, "I'd have a better chance in hell than you, Ramsey."

"That's true," I cried. "He—he— The girl too—"

Porky said: "Drop your guns, Ramsey, on the floor—now—or—" And when Ramsey's guns lowered slightly, "To the floor, Ramsey—to the floor."

"Drop them," Doran rasped behind Ramsey. "There's Swartz and myself with guns and Murphy with the machine gun." And when Porky ordered them to drop their guns, too, "Now, now, Porky. Let us talk first." And to me, "Is it true about the room, Dean?"

"Before God, I believe so," was the best I could say.

"Drop your guns." Porky's voice was dull; his body seemed to sway. It was as if he wished they wouldn't drop them. Then he added: "Let the thick Mick keep the machine gun for one minute, while you talk. But you others, drop your rods—now."

"Keep him covered, Murphy." Ramsey tried to make his voice a whisper. "The man's mad." Ramsey's sharp eyes covered that room to see if others lurked there, but there was no place to hide—just the door across the room which was closed, and the black hole of the coal-shute that would hardly fit a man's body, and a box in the corner by the girl.

Ramsey's guns—Mortimer Doran's gun—Lieutenant Swartz's gun fell to the floor together.

Porky said: "What about the little fellow—where's his gun?"

"He hasn't got any," Doran said quickly. "He's a Mr. Roberts. We didn't let him carry one."

"O. K." Porky's eyes never blinked

now. He said: "I'm going to tie you all up, beat it with the diamond and let you be found later. Otherwise the big blow-off and—"

My cry came too late. The warning who Roberts really was, that I didn't know if I should give or not. The man called Roberts acted quickly. He bent down, lifted Mortimer Doran's gun from the floor and shot Sergeant Murphy straight through the back of the head. It was just as simple as that. Roberts shot the man dead through the back of the head.

**W**AS that my mistake? I didn't know then; I don't know now. Death would not have been pleasant, even if Porky had taken the ride with us. I was at least partly convinced that Porky was half mad, perhaps a little anxious to try out his invention even at the cost of his own life.

Things happened after that. Roberts—or Rock—moved quickly and seemed as familiar with firearms and dangerous situations as Vee Brown ever was.

Ramsey cursed, but Roberts took him first. Twice he called to Porky to leave his lever and lift a gun and aid him, but Porky only shook his head.

The second time, Porky said: "I'm never going back to that mad-house. There's handcuffs and footchains and everything over there in that box. If there's anyone above, why I'm staying right here. I won't finish up alone—not even dead—alone."

Rock snapped: "There's no one above. I was with them every minute. They brought only the lieutenant and the dead sergeant."

But Porky wouldn't move. What's more, Rock didn't need him. The three men who represented the best in the city's protection to its citizens simply sat down in three chairs and had their hands securely cuffed behind them, snapped



through the open backs of the plain kitchen chairs.

"Ah"—Porky's breathing was audible—"just throw the keys on the floor, Mr. Rock. They won't be needing them. Now gents—"

Rock tossed the keys across the room carelessly, grinned and interrupted Porky. He said: "Only the police commissioner is missing. You see, gentlemen, I don't want anyone alive who has seen my face tonight. To be honest with you, I have other diamonds in mind." He bowed to the girl. "Thank you for the letter, Miss Ramsdell. Your father must have thought us terribly stupid. And he was right if the letter speaks the truth. The McKever Stone is hidden in this very house—beneath a stone in the fireplace upstairs." And with a laugh, "I'll make sure, Porky, while you tell them of your plans. You have done a wonderful job." And he was gone, running up the cellar steps to the floor above.

Porky still stood upon the cement platform. He spoke with pride now. "I don't want any of you boys to think I wouldn't have blown the whole place to hell. In fact, I hoped one of you would play the fool and give me the chance. I'm disappointed in you, gentlemen. I'm sorry to see you go up alone."

I said: "You are going to kill us all—and the girl, too?"

"That's right." Porky nodded and went into a long explanation of the amount of dynamite he had used, how carefully he had laid it, the time it took him. Indeed, he wandered off to bank jobs he had done, the explosives he had used, their merits, how dynamite was the simplest thing to buy in bulk.

"So don't feel bad. I wasn't bluffing," he was finishing when Rock raced back down those steps with the diamond. A great chunk of ice that was worth a quarter of a million dollars and many lives—

more lives soon. Rock held it up to the light before he slipped it indifferently into his pocket. But it was pretended indifference, for his hand trembled a little, his eyes were bright, and his face flushed.

He said shrilly: "Come on, Porky. We're leaving with the stone." He was swinging a revolver in his hand now having left the machine gun by the stairs.

"Wait"—Porky hadn't rung down the curtain on his act yet—"we want them to know just what is going to happen. It's like this, Mr. Mortimer Doran, District Attorney of the City of New York. You're not going to feel that dynamite yet. For besides this lever here"—he was still bent forward over the lever as if he hated to give up the idea of not pressing down on it—"besides this lever, there is a battery far from the house, and a time-clock connected to that battery that can start things moving when we are a mile down the road—back into the city even. To that battery a wire runs. It goes beneath the floor, up the wall, and out along the edge of the coal-chute there and—"

Porky turned and looked at the coal-chute. We all turned and looked at it. Porky stopped talking and screamed: "Drop that gun or—or—" He leaned far over the cross-bar. I thought sure it was going down this time—certainly it started down.

"Porky, eh?" said a voice from the top of the chute. "And our old friend, Rock, alias Roberts. Yes, thanks to Porky's oration I was able to reach this far without you hearing me."

**R**OCK faced Vee Brown easily, the gun dangling in his hand. If he were frightened, he didn't show it. He said calmly enough: "If you don't drop that gun, we'll all die. If you drop it, you can all escape later." And to us, "If any man talks here, I'll shoot him to death."



And suddenly to Brown, "How did you get here? I was told—on the phone—that you were dead."

"Just one of your boys talking—the one who told me of this house here. Remarkable that he could talk so well to you at my suggestion, on the phone, for you see, I nearly caved in his skull. Yes, I accepted the invitation to death. But I forgot I was to come by the fire-escape and came by the door. Dean will tell you how absent-minded I am. Too bad—it necessitated my shooting one of your men to death. You see, Mr. Rock, I was quite aware of the identity of our apparently innocent and misguided youth, the delivery boy. If it interests you, he was harmless with a gun—died playing with one, poor chap."

As he talked Vee Brown was easing himself further down that chute into the room. At last his head and shoulders—yes, and a heavy .45 revolver were in full sight.

"Careful, Brown. What are you doing?" Rock cried out as he saw the position of Porky so far over the lever. "I tell you, Brown, he'll fall right on it if you shoot him and—and—God, are you mad, too!"

"So you don't like it." Brown grinned at Porky, nodded his head. "Mr. Rock isn't like you and me, Porky—willing to take the trip to hell just for the ride."

**F**EAR, terror, both were in Rock's face, his voice as he cried out—but death was in his heart. He jerked up his gun and fired. Just one shot echoed in that room and there was blood on Vee's face. Just one shot and I looked at Rock. He was standing very straight in the center of the room. His mouth hung open, and his eyes were dead, glassy. Yet there wasn't a mark on him. Not a— And I saw the blood; it gushed from his mouth

just before he fell forward on his face. They must have fired together, then.

And Vee Brown. Yes, there was blood on his face, too, as he seemed to collapse, slip forward, and sliding clear from that black hole, land heavily at the end of the chute against the hard cold floor. He craned his neck up and looked directly into the protruding eyes of Porky.

Brown lay there close against the little cement platform, the cross-bar of death perhaps five feet above his head, and Porky leaning so far forward now that he had to make an effort not to press down. His face was less than ten feet from Vee's.

Porky wasn't frightened then, or nervous. He said: "The McKeever Stone. It's all mine. Drop that gun, Brown. By God, you fool! You'll all die if you shoot me."

"That's right," I called out. "Drop the gun, Vee, make a deal. The diamond's in—"

"Deal!" Porky shouted. "All right, Brown, we'll make a deal. I don't care if you shoot or not. . . . So you can't raise the gun?" And Vee did seem to have difficulty in lifting his weapon. Porky continued: "You think I'll fall for your fake weakness and come down and kick it from your hand. No, we'll make the deal in hell. Look—if—"

Porky leaned forward—farther forward. I guess all of us in that room cried out. It didn't seem possible that he could regain his balance now. Then someone laughed; laughed just before that roar came—just before Vee Brown thrust his gun far up in the air and closed his finger upon the trigger. And I knew that it was Vee himself who had laughed—looked at death and laughed.

I didn't close my eyes. There wasn't time to close them before death came. I stared and watched. Watched the puff of yellow-blue flame from Vee's gun and then—then—



Porky's face seemed to disappear in that sudden blast. His body followed that face. His hands were torn from their grasp upon the cross-bar of death. And Porky shot up and back through the air, missed the platform entirely, and disappeared with a dull thud on the hard floor beyond.

Brown came to his feet and rubbed the blood from his face, for the bullet had only torn a chunk out of his cheek.

"Suckers all of you!" he cried out at us. "Why even a couple of direct shots from across the room, pounding into his chest, might have done the trick. As for me—hell, I was sorry for him. Once Rock was dead, I only needed to find a position below Porky. You may know your police routine and how to shove a drunk around, Ramsey, but you don't know much about guns—the power behind them."

And with a grunt of disgust, "If Porky hadn't started to slip just then, I'd have jumped the gun closer up to him and blow him clean through the ceiling. You've been reading too much fiction, Ramsey—but so had Porky, which made it an even break." Vee grinned as he untied the girl and myself, lifted the diamond from Rock's pocket before he found the keys and set the men free.

"Always remember, Inspector"—Vee Brown directed his sarcasm at Ramsey—"that no matter what anyone tells you, a man shot from the front with a heavy-

caliber bullet, can't fall forward on his face—especially if he hasn't any face to fall on."

LATER in our apartment, dazed, bewildered—yet stimulated with a few good brandies, I said: "We know now that Porky spoke the truth. Even the walls were lined with dynamite. It was the bravest thing I ever saw, Vee—to shoot like that—with such a terrible death before us all—before you."

"Baloney." He looked at me disgustedly. "Why a child could have done it. It was necessary, of course, but it seemed like murder. A forty-five is a powerful weapon. At close range men fall as you wish them to fall. Oh, write it up as a great deed of heroism if you wish to, but the truth is that there wasn't one chance in a million of anything happening to us after I closed my finger upon the trigger."

He paced the room for a bit after that. Told me he'd get fifty grand for the girl for the return of the diamond to McKever, then said: "On the level, Dean, I feel just like a bad boy who put something over on a particularly stupid bunch of adults." He threw back his head, leaned against the table and laughed for a full minute—a boyish sort of laugh as he walked toward the music-room.

Then he said: "For once Ramsey didn't have a word to say, Dean. He's lost face, of course—but not literally as Porky did."

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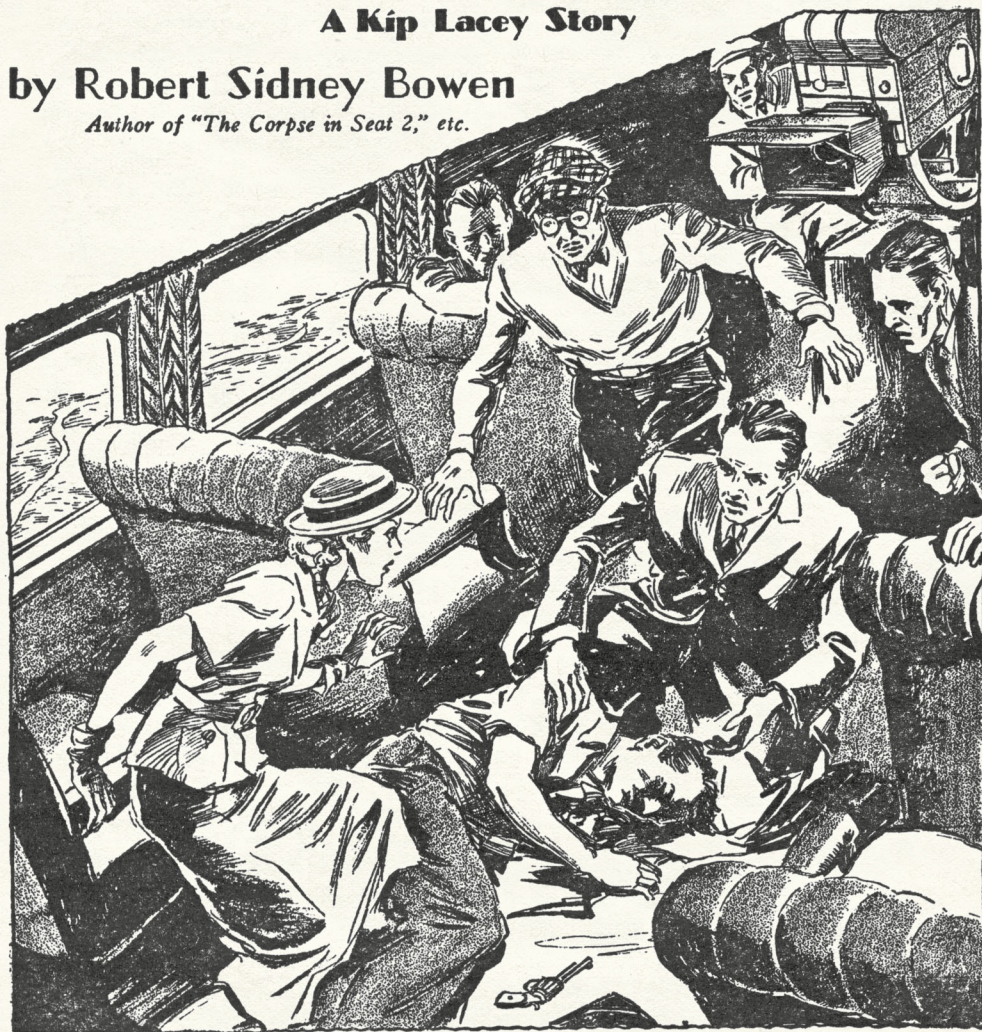


# THE OTHER BULLET

A Kip Lacey Story

by Robert Sidney Bowen

Author of "The Corpse in Seat 2," etc.



That blood wasn't any stage catsup—it was blood!

*Kip Lacey—trouble-shooter for Central Airlines—thought it was a lousy idea to film the picture, Golden Wings, in the company's prize ship, Number 21. His boss insisted it would be swell publicity, though, so they started shooting. If he'd guessed it was going to be lead the flicker-folk would shoot instead of blanks maybe he'd have listened to Kip in the first place, and not been so willing to turn 21 into a talky studio.*

**I** THOUGHT it was a screwy idea, and I told the big boss so. Not that it made any difference. When my boss gets an idea, he gets an idea, and neither rain, nor snow, nor dark of night

can stay him from the completion of said fancy. However, he'd asked for my opinion and he'd got it.

Once it was off my chest he just grinned, and said: "You're wrong, fella.



It will be good publicity for the line. Get busy. I'm leaving everything to you."

Leaving everything to me! Now wasn't that just dandy! All I had to do was to take Number 21, our twin-engined, low-wing job, out to the Coast, pick up a bunch of motion-picture bums, and ride east with them while they filmed some scenes in that air thriller, *Golden Wings*. Maybe you've seen *Golden Wings* at your local flicker-house. If you have, I'm here to say that all those air shots were the real McCoy. They weren't any stage stuff. They were all shot in Number 21 while in flight. But there was plenty more that happened in Number 21 you didn't see on the screen. And, how! Thereby hangs the reason for what's to follow—if you can hang on that long.

**J**UST to keep the record straight, I'd better admit that Kip Lacey is the general trouble-shooter for Central Airlines. He handles all mix-ups from lost teeth to lost planes. He did his trick at piloting the big babies, long ago. When he'd had enough he took the job of trouble-shooter for the company. I can personally testify that it suits him fine, the tough breaks notwithstanding. You see . . . I'm Kip Lacey.

O.K. Now we all start from scratch.

The pilot selected for Number 21 was Bill Griffith, one of the niftiest lads at the controls you ever saw. That was good news to me, because maybe we'd lose a wing on the way out to the Coast, and have to bail out. And by the time Bill and I could get back, maybe the boss would have decided to hell with having a motion-picture made in the company's property. And during the walk back home, Bill and I could enjoy things the way a couple of old timers *can* enjoy things, if you get the idea.

No soap, though. The damn wings stayed on, and we still had plenty of gas

in the tanks when Bill sat us down on the Grand Central Airport, on the fringes of L.A. And then the trouble started. A bald-headed little runt tore up to us as soon as we climbed out. He said that he was Karl Krantz, assistant production-manager of the picture, or something, and that he was in complete charge of everything. He leaned down hard on that last word.

"That's fine!" Bill clipped at him. "Better take a look at that port engine. I wouldn't know what's wrong with it. If a cylinder lets go, and kills somebody in the cabin there's apt to be plenty trouble."

You should have seen Krantz! It took him half a minute to get his breath back, and then just three seconds to tell us in five hundred words that he didn't mean the plane, or us, or anything like that. Just the actors, and cameras, and cameramen. Then he pulled the rip-cord! *We were to go to the studio for screen tests!* Yup, we'd be shot along with all the others, so Krantz wanted to know our focus, or something. I didn't get all the shop words he used.

Anyway, we took the screen tests, and the boss wasn't billed for any cameras that collapsed. And two days later the company, which included two women and nine men, not counting Bill and me, was assembled at Grand Central all set to shoot. If I'd been a crystal-gazer and had taken a squint at the glass ball I would have quit my job right then and there. But, that's life. You never know what's going to happen.

The first thing happened before we even got into the plane. A big lad named, Malden—the type with no hat, and polo shirt open at the neck showing all the hair on his chest—sailed up to the director, a thin four-eyed guy named Stromholm, and started to beef about his lines not being strong enough. He waved his script around



and raised hell in general. Stromholm let him rave, then gave it to him flat. Big Boy Malden could play the part as was, or go back to running that trolley car.

Malden didn't say a word, and I had an idea that some trolley line was going to get one of its old employees back. Then suddenly, I saw him look at a willowy blonde, and I mean willowy. She could do more revolutions than a 600 H.P. Wright Cyclone. Anyway, she opened up her eyes on Malden, and gave a quick shake of her head. So help me, our big handsome hero turned around and apologized to Stromholm! Yup, you could have scraped the honey off his lips with a hoe!

With that beginning we all piled into the ship. The two cameramen set up their machines, one up near Bill's cubbyhole, and one about halfway down the cabin. Stromholm told everybody where to park, and put me down by the door of the washnook. Wasn't that a nice way to start my motion-picture career!

Presently, Bill got his engines all warmed up and rolled us down to the head of the take-off ramp. There he blew the old power-plants, got the flag from the field-dispatcher, and we were off. All the time the cameras had been clicking over, one of them by hand crank, and the other running off a flock of batteries that had been lugged aboard.

I watched for a while, and then got into a whispered conversation with a young extra. Steve Benton, was his name. He seemed like a nice lad, but he couldn't keep his eyes off the willowy blonde. Not that I blamed him, you understand. She—her name was Telsa Technor—was something to look at!

Anyway, we chinned for awhile in whispers that the mike couldn't pick up, and then Stromholm yelled for everybody's attention.

"Now, the shooting scene!" he cried. "And for the Lord's sake make it better

than the studio rehearsals! All right, Miss Technor, and Mr. Malden, take your places. Ready sound! Ready cameras!"

**M**ALDEN plunked down in Seat 9, and went through the motions of a very bored he-man glancing through a sport magazine. The blonde parked in Seat 3, and went through the motions of making up that pretty map of hers. You see, the idea was that she wasn't supposed to know that Malden was aboard, until, raising her vanity mirror, she was to see him in Seat 9.

Well, that part was fine. She did it great, and then went into the heavy part of her act. It was to be the betrayed damsel unmasking the bold villain who had sold the farm for plenty spinach, and was running away.

Whirling from her seat she rushed back to him and tore the magazine from his hands. He registered surprise, anger, and then Park Avenue defiance. The last was because the betrayed blonde had snatched a pearl-handled revolver from her purse, and was drawing a bead on the handsome villain. There followed a lot of story dialogue, and then the blonde, registering berserk madness, and so forth, went back a step and pulled the trigger of her gun three times.

The noise the blanks made was swell stuff. Malden clutched at his chest, looked goofy, and fell into the aisle. The blonde put on the terror and remorse, dropped the gun, and threw herself sobbing on the big handsome, hairy-chested villain.

"Cut!" Stromholm shouted. "Fine! That was perfect. Now, Miss Technor, we'll . . ."

Nobody heard what else Stromholm said, and he probably didn't say it. The scream Telsa Technor let out almost tore a wing off. It was gosh-awful, and then she fainted cold.

Me, I went down the cabin aisle like a



Notre Dame fullback. I'd seen the blood on the Technor girl's face. It got there from her hands, and it got on her hands when she'd clutched the front of Malden's shirt. That blood wasn't any stage cat-sup, it was blood!

My trip down the aisle knocked a couple of actors on their ear, and I wasn't gentle either when I tossed the limp Telsa Technor to one side, and bent over Malden. One look at him and I felt pretty lousy. It was going to be *fine* publicity for Central Airlines! Sure, Malden was as dead as last year's newspaper. He had been plunked right smack through the heart! It hadn't been any acting on that lad's part, when he spilled out of the seat and hit the aisle.

One look I took, and then I dived for the gun, and stuck it in my pocket. Of course, everyboy was going nuts by then. Dryer, one of the cameramen, was bel'owing at Bill to take us back to Grand Central in a hurry. Curtiss, the other cameraman, was trying to pick up his machine that somebody had knocked haywire. Young Benton was jerking back one of the cabin windows and getting set to be sick as hell. The other dame in the ship, Lila Lancer, had pulled the first real faint in her life, probably. And poor old Stromholm was pulling his hair out by the roots!

Yeah! Anytime you want a calm, collected group of people to help you handle an emergency situation, be *sure* to pick motion-picture people! And, they say the French are a funny race!

It took me ten minutes to get some sort of order. To do it, I had to clip Dryer, to get him off Bill's neck. And I had to practically do the same to Stromholm to stop him from going to work on my hair after finishing with his own. Malden, nobody touched because I wouldn't let them. The Technor dame recovered from her faint, and was ready to scratch my eyes out because I belted her back into a seat when she tried to flop down on Malden again. I guess, by then, even our starboard engine was wise to the fact she had been plenty nuts about Malden.

Anyway, Bill took us all back to Grand Central. He had radioed to the field to have the cops there to meet us. And the young squirt at the field end must have played town crier all over Southern California. As a result, a few people met us. Well, no more than the national debt, figuring each person as a dollar.

**P**ARKING at the door I wouldn't let anybody in until the cops and field attendants had shoved the mob clear. Then I opened up to admit Inspector Jack Warner, of the local dick force. Jack and I had

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**FIT GEM AND EVER-READY RAZORS**





often tilted a few together, and we were pals. He grinned as he came aboard. Not that Jack's a hard-hearted lad. His job has just made him that way.

"Hi, Kip!" he grunted at me. "Catch all the breaks, don't you? Why don't you tip off a pal, when things are going to happen?"

"Your phone didn't answer!" I growled, not feeling good. "Take a look. I got the gun when you want it."

"Mean you're confessing, Kip?" he chuckled.

I just swore at him, and slammed the door shut. Warner went forward, and although he'd kidded with me, he didn't kid with them. When Jack Warner puts on the gloves, he puts them on! He let go a bunch of questions, and received the whole picture in no time. No more than I've been telling you, though. For the present there wasn't anything else to find out.

However, my brain hadn't been taking a nap, nor my eyes either. A big part of my job is watching people who ride our line, just in case I should spot some bird who doesn't belong. Practice has made me able to read facial expressions, and add them up. And as I looked at young Benton, while Warner was questioning Telsa Technor, I began to add him up. The lad was scared. He was scared stiff, and he was head over heels that way about the Technor dame. He wanted to take her in his arms and comfort her, just as though he was shouting the desire in my ear. But, at the same time the old legs were having a tough time holding him upright. I put all that back in the old brain file.

In due time Warner got all the answers to a question I'd been wanting to know, but hadn't gone after because, though the killing was done on a Central ship, it was not my job to take complete charge right off the reel. That's why few

cops hate my guts. I make it a point for us all to start from scratch. Anyway, the question was, who had charge of loading the gun, and giving it to Miss Technor? The answer was, Steve Benton. He was the location property man, in addition to being an extra.

His story was just what you'd expect. He had loaded the gun with blanks, and handed it to Miss Technor to stick in her purse just before we came aboard. In case of a retake he had extra blanks, which he handed over to Warner. The Technor girl had not even looked at the gun, nor shown it to anybody, and there was just one hole in Malden's chest, though she had pulled the trigger three times.

And that was that. I mean, for the time being. Everybody was taken down to Warner's local office, and questioned all over again. In the meantime I'd given Jack the gun, after taking a good look at it, myself. When I did, I said: "It won't do you any good, Jack."

"Yeah?" he blinked.

"Yeah." I blinked back at him. "Don't ask me why. I don't know. I just got a hunch."

What was my hunch? To tell the truth, maybe it wasn't a hunch. Maybe just plain common sense. Look at it straight. Benton loaded the gun, and the Technor girl pulled the trigger three times. Nobody else had even touched it. If either Telsa Technor, or young Benton, had ideas about polishing off Malden, would they have done it that way? Well, even if they were screwy enough to be movie actors, I didn't think they'd be *that* screwy! Hell, even a maniac tries to hide his guilt!

Anyway, that's what I thought, and I was just stubborn enough to let Jack Warner catch on by himself. Perhaps he did, but decided to play things his way. At any rate he held the Technor girl, and



young Benton, for further questioning, and took down the names and addresses of everybody else.

There was nothing for me to do around his office, so I collared Bill, and we went back to the field. Number 21 had been stuck in a spare hangar, and a couple of Jack Warner's guards planted in front of it. I knew one of them, and he knew me, so that made it perfectly O. K. for Bill and me to go inside for a look around. Frankly I didn't know what I expected to look for, or how I was going to find it. Let's just say that I wanted to look around.

**T**HE cabin was pretty much of a wreck. I mean, it was the same as it looked after I'd cut short the riot that started right after the shooting. Warning Bill not to touch a thing, I began at the rear end and worked slowly forward. Sure I found lots of things. But you can't shoot a man with a couple of compacts, bobby pins, gobs of make-up grease, or parts of Curtiss' camera that fell off when it was knocked to the floor. And that's about all I found.

"Say, Kip!" Bill suddenly called out. "Do you know what?"

"Sure," I said, and kept right on hunting around.

"No fooling," he said. "Look."

He pointed at the window by Seat 4. It was slid back about two or three inches. I looked at it, then looked at him, and knew that he thought just what I thought . . . that the pearl-handled gun had not been the murder weapon. I gave him a grin.

"Think it wasn't either of them, eh?" I grunted and added: "Think the killer tossed the gun out the window?"

"I'm positive about the first," he replied. "And the second is a good guess."

At that, I walked back down the aisle to where he was leaning against the par-

tion between the hostess' nook and the washnook.

"What do you mean, positive?" I demanded.

"There were no slugs in the Technor kid's gun," he said. "Nothing but blanks. Just before the take-off I saw her looking at the gun. She broke it and looked at the shells. They were all blanks."

"You bum!" I snarled. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"You didn't ask, Kip," he grinned.

If I hadn't liked him so well, I would have smacked him one. Not that telling me would have made any difference. But I don't like people to hold out on me, particularly my friends.

"Keep your shirt on, pal," he added. "She's a sweet-looking kid. It was best for her to lie. She didn't kill him, so why should she make it tough for herself by admitting that she had broken the gun?"

I didn't answer. Matter of fact I had only been half listening to him. For the umpteenth time since the thing had happened I was trying to remember just where everybody was. And right then I was trying to picture who, and how many, had been close enough to that partly opened window to toss a gun out. The answer was, three people. Krantz in Seat 6. Stromholm, who was standing just to the left of the head camera. And Dryer, who had been operating the camera. But—and the realization didn't help much—only Krantz could possibly have tossed a gun out the window without anybody seeing him. Either Dryer or Stromholm would have been seen by each other, or Krantz.

And just to make it even more tough for myself, I had to realize that a shot from Seat 6 at Malden in Seat 9 would not have nailed him in the chest. The shot had come from somewhere in front. That meant either the Technor girl, Stromholm, the Lancer girl, Dryer, an



extra by the name of Parker, or—Bill Griffith!

Yeah, I'll agree with you, it was a sweet little mess to figure out. And, not being stupid, I didn't try to figure it out right then and there. As a matter of fact, I didn't have the chance, for, just about then, two members of our flying party came sailing up to the guard at the door. They would have walked right on in, if the guard hadn't stopped them. One lad, was Krantz, and the other, Dryer, the cameraman. Dryer was all for saying, "The hell with it." But, Krantz was steamed up.

In a voice you couldn't have heard any farther away than San Francisco he stated that he wanted, "the take." To you who don't know, that meant he wanted all the film that had been shot. However the guard had received his orders. And one of them was to let everything lay until Warner gave the word that it could be moved. Being an assistant-producer, Krantz figured that his orders even superseded God's.

To save him from getting a broken head, or something, I hopped down out of Number 21 and went over. Krantz saw me and almost blew up.

"Lacey!" he snapped. "Tell this dumb slob to let me pass. I want the take."

"Sorry, Mr. Krantz," I told him. "You'll have to get Inspector Warner's O. K. first."

"To hell with Warner!" he shouted back at me. "Just because a ham actor got himself murdered, do you think we can hold up a half-million-dollar picture? Stromholm wants to look at those takes tonight."

"He will, if Warner says yes," I grunted. "But not until."

OF course he didn't like that. I got the idea that he was figuring to bust past me. And somehow I hoped he'd try

it. He had the kind of skin you love to touch, if you get what I mean. But, he didn't try it. Truth is, Dryer stuck in his oar about then. He took hold of Krantz's arm.

"What does it matter, Mr. Krantz?" he grunted. "They'll have to be retakes anyway. Let 'em keep the damn cameras for souvenirs!"

Krantz hesitated a moment, slew me with a typical Hollywood look, then growled something under his breath, and walked away with Dryer. I watched them out of sight. And for your information, the old brain was clicking over at top speed. You bet! I had lots and lots to think about.

After a few minutes I went back into the plane and began to look around some more. Bill got tired of watching me and went over to the administration building to chew the fat with some friends. But I stayed right where I was. Why? Well, to tell the truth, I couldn't down the feeling that the answer to the whole damn mess was right there in the cabin of Number 21, only I was too blind to see it. But a solid hour of standing up, parking on my fanny, and crawling around on my hands and knees, didn't get me a thing.

And then Jack Warner hove up over the horizon and climbed aboard. As luck would have it, he caught me on my belly with my head stuck under one of the seats. In nothing flat the bum leaped on me, and stuck his forefinger against the back of my neck.

"Gotcha, rat!" he snarled. "Come up slow like, or this trusty old six-shooter will let you have it!"

What I told him I can't tell you, but it was plenty. Take my word for it.

He had his laugh, then patted my arm. "What are you looking for, sweetheart?" he asked.

"The weapon that killed Malden, smart



guy!" I rasped. "If you can understand English!"

He looked real sorry, and shook his head. "Poor fellow!" he sighed. "Must have been hit on the head. His memory seems to fail him, just when—"

"Nuts!" I cut him down. "The gun I gave you didn't kill him. Ten to one, the real gun was tossed out that window, right there—the one that's open. Will your face be red when you get the ballistics report!"

"I got it, fifteen minutes ago," he came right back. "And do you see me blushing, old pal, old pal?"

I took it between the eyes, but stayed on my feet. "You mean—" I began.

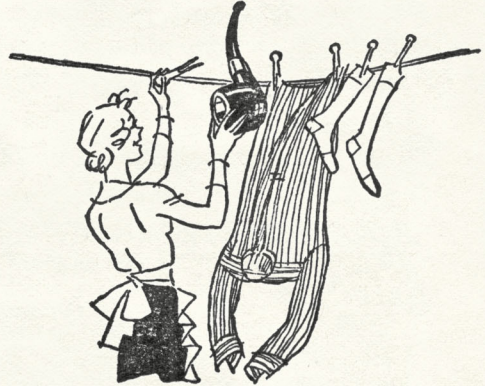
Warner nodded. "The boys tell me that the bore-marks check, Kip. Funny, though, the slug must have hit a breast bone or something. There are some queer marks that the boys can't figure. But, that doesn't matter. I've cleaned up the whole thing. It's the same old story, out here. Half a dozen lads go ga-ga about a nifty number. One lad gets the inside track. And some other lad gets crazy enough to cut him down."

"Yeah?" I mumbled, staring at my dirty hands. "Go on."

"It's complicated," the big tramp grinned. "But I'll try and give it to you in words of one syllable. Technor used to be married to Dryer, but she took the Reno trail about six months ago. That's common history, of course. What isn't, is that young Steve Benton's real name is Anthony Wallace. Yeah, heir to the Wallace dough. He went big for Technor, and she—well, she ain't getting any younger. And her box office is slipping. Anyway, she took all of young Benton's attentions, and gave him lots of hope. They were to be secretly married about a month ago. And, then, *whango!*"

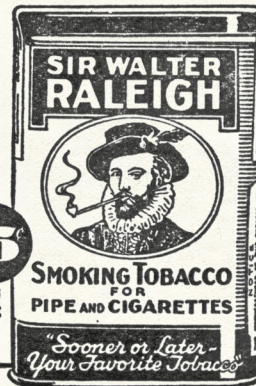
"Don't tell me!" I snarled. "Let me guess. She turned him down, and he said

## HINT TO WIVES WITH TENDER NOSES

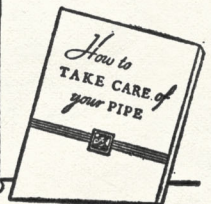


**I**F he won't clean his pipe and give up that coal-gas tobacco, clip this ad and lay it beside his easy chair along with a pack of pipe cleaners and a tin of Sir Walter Raleigh. 'Tis thus many a loving wife has freed her home from tobacco far too strong and odorous for this sensitive world. Sir Walter Raleigh is a fascinating blend of extra-mild and extra-fragrant Kentucky Burleys. Smoked regularly in a well-kept briar, it makes the air clearer and sweeter, and your curtains stay fresher. Sir Walter is a sure cure for nose-bite and tongue-bite. And how men are buying it at only 15¢ a tin! Now it's your move!

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to himself, 'Curse you, me fine woman, you'll taste death for that!' Nuts!"

"Something like that," Warner laughed. "Anyway, Benton's, or Wallace's family, put thumbs down on him. They told him to quit, or he'd be cut off without a dime. Being a sap in love, he spilled to Technor, figuring, of course, that their love together would defeat the whole world, and so forth. But Technor didn't see things that way. She kept the stuff he'd showered on her, and told him how the front door worked and suggested he close it from the outside. Then, figuratively speaking, she washed her pretty hands, and bent the old come-on eye on Malden. He is, or was, getting to the top of the ladder fast. The rest, even *you* can figure, Kip, old numbskull."

**I** didn't say anything. I didn't believe it, but I still felt lousy. It certainly *looked* that way. It was a perfect set-up for a jealous lad. Benton being property man, could stick in a real slug, and have Malden wiped out, and the girl, who'd given him the gate, stuck in a tough spot. But it still didn't add up in my head.

"Are you telling me that Benton confessed?" I asked.

"No," Jack said seriously. "Not to the killing. He swears he didn't have anything to do with it. He admitted the love affair, the turn-down, and all the rest of it. But, not the killing. It all came out when the Technor dame sailed into him. I mean, she accused him. Boy, what a nice little hell-cat *she is*, to have around the house!"

I grinned at Warner, then gave him the broadside.

"Benton didn't stick a real slug in that gun, and hand it to Technor," I said. "They were all blanks."

"Yeah?" Warner echoed with a laugh. "Says who? You, just because you're sorry for the lad?"

"Says me," I nodded. "Technor lied to you. Bill Griffith, my pilot, saw her break

the gun just before the scene. He swears it had nothing but blanks. He saw her check them! How's them for apples, funny-face?"

He clouded up, all set to rain. "Why the hell didn't he—?"

"Cool off, Jack!" I stopped him. "He should have, but he didn't. Besides, neither you, nor I, asked him what he thought. However, that's his story, and I believe him."

"Why so?"

I shrugged, and flanged my hands, palms upward. "Because it's obvious that neither Benton, nor the girl, would be dumb enough to think they could get away with a killing that way!" I told him straight.

I could almost see his high spirits ooze out of him. Bill's testimony at the trial would knock the case against young Benton so high it would set a stratosphere record.

"So she lied!" he rumbled in his throat. "Then she must have plugged him. Sure! She slipped in a real slug. Our pilot didn't see her do it, and—"

"And hoped that nobody would think of that!" I sneered. "Be yourself, Jack! Or has this California climate got too much for you?"

"All right, plug-ugly!" he rasped. "You read detective stories! What's your world-stunning solution?"

He had me, there. I mean I had only a few bright thoughts that had been chasing each other around in my head. And I hadn't been able to pin them down for a good look.

"Yah, I thought so!" he growled when I didn't answer. And then thumping his bony finger against my manly chest, "Your pilot's story doesn't jam up a thing! That slug was fired from that gun. Catch on? So that means your pal, Griffith and I are going to have a little



heart-to-heart talk. Maybe he knows other things!"

Bill hooked up in the thing? Bill, who had married the sweetest Central Airlines hostess, no more than two weeks ago? I gave Warner the Bronx cheer.

"Don't be a sap all the time! Bill's not in this. And if you get silly with him, he's liable to spread you out thin. You dope, he hasn't been on the West Coast run for months! And he got married about two weeks ago!"

But Warner was mad. "So what? What do I care? Where is he?"

"Just took off for New York!" I snapped. Then as Jack started to boil, "Listen, want me to sweep up this mess for you?"

He opened his mouth to tell me plenty but snapped it shut and gave me a long searching look. We'd worked on cases before and he knew I didn't shoot off my trap on all seven of the days in a week.

"It would help," he said grudgingly, after a pause. "What have you got in mind?"

"Just a few ideas," I said. "And I'm keeping them. But you can help me. Go back to your dog-house and spread it around that you're going to continue to hold Benton and Technor until the coroner's inquest. Also that you're keeping this ship under guard as Exhibit A, or something."

**H**E straightened up at that, and snapped his steely eyes about the cabin of Number 21. They were narrowed when they came back to my handsome map.

"You found something, Kip?" he rapped out. "Come on, be a pal! What?"

I crossed my heart with a finger. "Not a thing, Jack," I told him. "Nothing but a few ideas. And I'm keeping those. A deal, huh?"

He swore at me, which was his way of saying O. K. Then he climbed out and

did the old fade-out. Me, I stuck in the ship for another hour. Then I left. It was late afternoon by then and I was hungry. Bill and I ate in the field restaurant. If you want to be let in on a little secret, I'll admit that I was grinning all through the meal. Yup, and it sure burned Bill up when I wouldn't tell him, why. The same to you, and many of them!

After the meal I killed a few cigarettes with Bill, and then sent him into L. A. to get us back our rooms at the hotel. That wasn't important. I just wanted to get him out of the way. Then I went for a walk around the field. After a while, like it does even in Southern California, it began to get dark. So I made my way over to where Number 21 was housed. The guard knew me, of course, and we chinned about this and that for a while. Then I went to the hangar phone and called Warner.

"I was wrong, Jack," I said. "No soap at my end. Shall I tell the guard to drift?"

Jack gave me the horse-laugh, and said, "Yes." I passed it on to the guard. The "yes," I mean. And we drifted over toward the administration building together. I left him there, and headed toward the taxi stand. But I didn't go all the way. Once I was out of sight of the guard, I cut down the dark side of the field, let myself into the hangar through the rear door, and climbed into good old Number 21.

Picking my way forward in the darkness, I went clear up into Bill Griffith's pit and sat down on the floor, made myself comfortable. In case you want to know, I was still grinning.

Practice has made me pretty good at this playing-possum business, so I didn't mind waiting for three solid hours. In fact, I rather enjoyed it. Thoughts of how Jack Warner's face was going to



look after a while made me feel pretty good.

O. K., I won't stall any longer.

It was shortly after eleven when I heard the faint scuff of footsteps on the cement floor of the hangar. A minute or so later I heard the cabin door ease open; then felt the weight of somebody climbing into the plane. That somebody came all the way forward to within a couple of feet of where I was parked. There was a grunt, and then came a sort of metallic click.

Right then I made a clicking sound myself. I reached out my hand and snapped on the cabin lights. There in front of me with both hands grabbing hold of his camera was Dryer. He blinked a couple of times, not being able to see who I was.

"Want a lift, Dryer?" I asked, and stood up.

"Sure," he said. "I—"

He stopped, as he saw the gun in my hand.

"Say, what's the idea? Stromholm wants—"

"Sure, I know," I stopped him. "Stick out your hands, Dryer. I've got a nice pair of metal bracelets for you."

He had himself a couple of more blinks at that. Then he shrugged, let go of the camera, stepped around it and held out both wrists. I unhooked my cuffs from my belt.

When a bird's in a tight corner he sure will try the screwiest things. Dryer was no exception to the rule. He brought his foot up like a streak of greased lightning. I saw it coming and dodged to the side. But as I went to the side he flung out his left arm, caught the camera and sent it slamming into me. I stopped it with my shoulder, and it hurt like hell. It made me mad, too.

The dope had whirled, and was trying

to tear down the cabin aisle straight for the door.

"Don't!" I yelled after him.

But he was still full of screwy ideas. He kept right on going. What would you have done? So did I. I just squeezed the trigger and plowed a neat little slug through his right thigh. Yeah, the spot I aimed at, too. I like to bring 'em back alive, myself.

WELL, Dryer spun around twice, bounced up against Seat 12, slid off and did some more bouncing on the aisle, and finally finished up yelling blue murder from the pain. Boy, how these movie folks can take it, I don't think! I went down the aisle and completed the job of snapping on the cuffs.

By that time the whole airport was on its ear. A crowd of lads came tearing in through the hangar doors. My old pal, Jack Warner, was in the lead. So help me, he had guns in both hands. Into the cabin he came, all huffing and puffing. It was my big moment, and maybe the actor in me rose to the surface. I grinned and pointed to Dreyer who was moaning on the floor.

"There's your murderer, Inspector!" I said. "He killed Malden, believe it, or not."

Jack glared at Dryer, then up at me. "I came out looking for you," he growled. "And I find this! What do you mean, Malden's killer?"

It was too good to pass over.

"In this country ten years, and still can't understand the language!" I sighed. Then, "Look, sonny, pay attention and daddy will show you something interesting."

Leaving him there with his bare face hanging out, I went back and collected Dryer's camera. Then I showed him the small air-gun that had been neatly fitted



into the camera just under the big sighting lens.

"See, sweetheart?" I said softly. "Dryer was mad at the little girl too. He was to take all the front shots of that shooting scene. It was perfect. He just lined up the camera so that the bullet would wing past the Technor girl and smack Malden, as she was slapping out blanks. It finished Malden. It made it bad for young Benton, who probably was the reason for Dryer's divorce. And it also made it tough for the Technor dame. Catch onto it all?"

Warner gulped, and did a lot of scowling.

"But the slug in Malden—" he began.

"Sure!" I nodded. "Use your head. Dryer got hold of that gun and shot one of the bullets into some sand probably. Then he used the same slug in this trick air-gun. That explains the marks that your ballistics boys haven't figured out yet."

It didn't take Warner more than five minutes to get Dryer to O. K. everything I had said. What else could he do? I'd slapped the nail on the head, and Dryer

knew it. Eventually Warner took him away, and Benton paid the bar-bill for me and Bill that night. The Technor dame just said, "Thank you," and let it go at that.

Huh? How did I come to suspect Dryer? Well, when he told Krantz that the film didn't matter, and that I could keep the cameras for souvenirs. Sure! A cameraman, whether he be a motion-picture bird, or on a newspaper, doesn't care any more about the pictures he takes than he does for his right eye. And when Dryer acted as though he didn't care about getting the film of an *actual murder*, well—who wouldn't get thinking about that camera?

The next day Bill and I were set to go back East, and forget the whole thing. But, the boss still clung to that idea. So all we could do was see the thing through. Yeah, they filmed the picture in good old Number 21. And here's something that wasn't mentioned in the publicity releases. The shooting scene went as is! Yeah! When you see the villain killed in Golden Wings, you really see him killed! That's one time when the flicker boys didn't fake.

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# The Case of the Corpse's Bride

Compiled from the Case Book  
of Carter Cole, M. D.

by Frederick C. Davis

Author of "The Case of the Queen's Headman," etc.

*"Let me out—for God's sake let me out!" was the eery plea which issued faintly from that arctic hut of the dead. What grisly impulse had prompted Professor Knowles to pick the corpse-refrigerator of his dissection laboratory for murder and suicide? Or was some ghoul with a mania-warped mind responsible for the grisly sequence of horrors that set those iced cadavers swaying in their death-dance?*

A dangling corpse  
jerked with the impact  
of the bullet.



## CHAPTER ONE

### Two in the Tomb

ERASMUS HUMPHREY, President of Dartmoor College, one of the most venerable institutions of learning in New England, concluded his

introductory remarks with a dignified flourish.

"I consider it an honor, members of the faculty, to present this distinguished psychopathologist, whose famous sanitarium on Long Island, New York, is a laboratory in which he has achieved amazing advances into the profound secrets of the





human mind. It is our privilege tonight to hear him outline his investigations into that strange mental phenomenon, called phobia. Ladies and gentlemen, Doctor Carter Cole."

Cole bowed his head in response to surging applause. He was surprisingly young for one whose psychiatric researches al-

ready comprised a shelf of authoritative volumes. Now he advanced to the speaker's rostrum, leveled his humorously piercing eyes at his erudite audience, and began to speak into respectfully attentive silence.

"Phobia. . . . Let us consider, ladies and gentlemen, the graphic fears from which none of us is free. Those haunting dreads



which beset us one and all, which make life for some of us an inescapable hall of horrors.

"Of phobias there are many, but we shall treat of only a few which are commonest and therefore most important. We will discuss, for instance, necrophobia, which is fear of the dead. We will consider claustrophobia, that strange dread of enclosed spaces which weights the lungs and constricts the throat with the horror of suffocation. . . ."

THE girl stood trembling in the center of the room, her small hands clenched into fists, her fearful eyes wide as they gazed at the walls. She felt them relentlessly closing around her, creeping nearer inch by inch. It seemed to her that they were merciless, ponderous masses, somehow alive; moving planes intent upon enveloping her in a heavy, asphyxiating embrace—an embrace from which there was only one escape—death.

Lynda Knowles closed her eyes tightly. She told herself sensibly that the walls were not moving, could not move. It was merely her overwrought imagination which made them seem to press in upon her. She was perfectly safe here, in her bedroom. If she wished to leave it, she had only to step out the unlocked door. She fought her anxiety with all her will yet, strive her utmost, she could not completely free herself from its binding tentacles.

The very silence of the empty house seemed ominous. The girl's step-father, Professor Christopher Knowles of the medical-school faculty had gone to his office with her step-brother, Hugh, soon after dinner. An important experiment they had under way had prevented them from attending Doctor Carter Cole's lecture. Their absence was not unusual, but tonight there was some strange, threatening quality in the quiet that Lynda Knowles had never felt before.

Her lids lifted at the slow, almost inaudible sound of footfalls outside. Then a stealthy, rustling noise followed. She stepped curiously to the window to see a shadowy figure stealing through the gate. She stood motionless, her persistent fear sharpening, watching a man moving cautiously along the stone wall enclosing the lawn.

He crouched away from the light shafting from the lower windows; darkness masked his face. He looked around furtively. As he paused, the girl stepped back so he could not catch sight of her. For a moment there was no sound. When the sneaking footfalls resumed, Lynda Knowles ventured another glance. She glimpsed the ghostly form huddling over the housing of the old well.

Rusty hinges creaked as the man raised the trapdoor. The girl could picture the cold, mossy depths revealed by the lifted leaf. Now another noise came out of the hush—a single, hollow splash. The prowler had dropped something into the black water. He quickly closed the trap, scurried away and melted into the thick gloom. The girl followed the sound of his wary movements until, at last, the brooding silence effaced them.

Lynda Knowles assured herself that this was merely a student prank—some freshman had been commanded to do this senseless thing as part of the hazing of a fraternity initiation. Having lived all her life in a college town, she was no longer surprised by any stunts of the undergraduates. Despite a certain desperate urgency in the prowler's movements the thing had some obviously simple, unsinister explanation. Whatever had been thrown into the water, it could do no harm, for the well had not been used for many years. The girl told herself this, while the chill of her fear continued to pierce deeper.

Suddenly she turned from the window, ran down the stairs to the telephone in



the vestibule. She called a number, heard a sleepy voice answer.

"Is Neil there?" she asked anxiously. "This is Lynda, George." George Gregory, instructor in English, was the roommate of Neil Romeyn, of the medical-school faculty. "I've been waiting for him almost two hours," she added.

"Not here, Lynda," the drowsy voice answered. "Two hours? He left here about that long ago. Said something about intending to be away over the week-end. Sorry I can't—"

The brass knocker on the front door clacked. With eager expectancy the girl said good-by, broke the connection. She went to the door quickly, opened it—and her smile faded. The spare young man with penetrating gray eyes who stood on the stoop was not Neil Romeyn but Joel Shepard, assistant professor of mathematics.

**K**EEN disappointment made the girl's greeting a mere murmur. She turned from Shepard to hide the tears that glimmered into her eyes against her will. Abruptly, feeling her self-control about to break, she ran up the stairs.

"Lynda! What's wrong?" Shepard called in alarm.

Because she could not answer, he bounded after her. She tried blindly to shut him out of her room, but he shouldered in. She faced him with fists clenched.

"Please go, Joel! I'm all right," she told him huskily.

"That's far from true. I've never seen you so upset." He stepped closer. "Look here, Lynda, I know I don't stand a chance any more. I haven't finished asking you to marry me, not by a long shot, but if there's anything wrong between you and Neil, and if I can help—"

"Anything wrong!" The girl blurted it bitterly. "It isn't quite what you think. You know how awful it's been—between Neil and Father. Tonight Neil and I de-

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cided, in spite of everything—" She broke off, her teeth pressing her lower lip. "I'm afraid—afraid something horrible has happened!"

Joel Shepard was looking past her at two suitcases standing beside the dresser. Both were bulging, tightly packed. The girl, gazing at Shepard steadfastly, saw his mouth harden.

"Neil and I planned to run away tonight—to be married," she confessed in a whisper. "He phoned me two hours ago to say he'd be right over, but he hasn't come. Why? When we've waited for it so long! Joel, I'll go mad if he doesn't come!"

"You're risking heartbreak," Shepard answered grimly. "Neil's that kind. Lynda, listen! You've been working much too hard, day and night. I know you're exhausted, that you want to get away—but don't do it like this. I love you too much to let you waste yourself on—"

"I've got to find Neil," she broke in tersely. Her eyes flashed. "I've got to find Neil!" Her voice rose, threatening to break. "Where is he? What's happened to him? I'm going crazy, waiting for him—waiting!" Her hands closed hotly on Shepard's arms. "I can't stand it any longer, Joel. Please help me—"

"All right," he broke in tightly. "I'll look for him. And when I find him, I'll do my damndest to keep you from running away with him. It would wreck everything—your father's work—your whole life." Joel Shepard's lips drew thin. "Unpack your bags, Lynda. You're not going to need them."

He strode from the room, his face graven with pained lines, his eyes glinting with determination. The girl stood breathless a moment. Suddenly she ran after him, reached his side when he jerked the front door open. There she paused, widened eyes upon a young man who was just entering the gate.

"Hugh! Have you seen Neil?"

Lynda Knowles' step-brother looked up quickly at her ringing call. He answered absently, walking toward her: "Haven't seen anybody." He brushed at a lock of hair which fell stubbornly over one lens of his thick-rimmed glasses. "Just dropped over to hear Doctor Carter Cole a few minutes. Anything wrong?"

Joel Shepard had not stopped. The girl hurried anxiously after him as he strode out the gate, not stopping to answer her step-brother. She ran, took Shepard's arm. Her breath caught as he turned on her suddenly, fiercely.

"I meant that!" The blaze of his eyes held her silent as he spoke. "I know the real Neil Romeyn, and you don't. He's an unscrupulous schemer, underhanded, treacherous—and a sensualist. Even if it makes you hate me, I'm going to keep you from going away with him." His voice was vibrant with suppressed fury. "If necessary, Lynda—I'll kill him."

He jerked his arm from her fingers. Swift strides took him along a path that wound down the green hillside on which a number of outlying college buildings stood. The campus lay beyond, gloomy except for the lighted front of Dartmoor Hall, where Doctor Cole was lecturing. Racing after him the distressed girl saw Shepard turn directly toward a nearer structure—the medical school.

She reached his side as he thrust at the door. Just inside they paused abruptly. A cry—a strained, far-away scream—had broken the hush.

**T**HE historic building, to which one addition after another had been built as the college expanded, was a labyrinthine nest of classrooms, lecture-halls and laboratories—a weird place in the dead of night. For a moment there was no further sound—then suddenly the cry came again. Though it was so faint it was scarcely



audible, it was unmistakably a shout of terror.

Shepard bounded up the worn wooden stairs. "Who is it? Where are you?" he called. "What's the matter?"

Hurrying after him, the girl heard doors bang. She reached the topmost floor to find him pushing into a huge, cavernous room. With a shudder she paused on the sill.

This was the dissection laboratory. The air was laden with a nauseating pungency. Half a score of ghastly specimens were visible, immersed in preservative fluids, in glass tanks set against the walls—severed arms, legs, heads. Here, by day, upon the brown-crustrated tables, medical students plied their keen-edged knives upon human cadavers.

Shepard had paused at one of the tables. He was glancing around alertly. "Listen!" he urged.

It came again—that strained, muffled, terrified cry. "Let me out! Let me out!"

Lynda Knowles stared, chilled, at the heavy-walled section built into a rear corner of the malodorous room. A single huge door opened into it, now latched with a stout iron bar. This was the corpse-refrigerator—an arctic tomb dedicated to the preservation of the miserably unknown dead whose bodies served to further medical knowledge. In it were kept cadavers awaiting dissection. And the stifled cry had issued from its grisly depths.

The massive door, heavily padded at the cracks, jarred slightly, as though whoever were trapped inside was frantically beating it with his fists. The iron bar clattered gently in its latch.

Once more the wailing screech shrilled faintly through the hush. "Let—me—out!" And the girl stood with breath caught while Shepard bounded forward.

The cry faded into a strangling wail. The girl's hand rose trembling to her lips as she watched Shepard snap the bar free,

tug the weighty door open wide. Dead eyes stared out. Shepard and Lynda Knowles stood transfixed as a nauseating reek clouded over them, and a penetrating chill struck from that black hut of the dead.

"Father!" she blurted.

Professor Christopher Knowles was standing slumped against the refrigerator wall, both blue-veined hands clenched over his heart. His eyes were glinting wildly. His gaping jaw disclosed a swollen, bitten tongue; his tooth-marked lips were seeping red. Insane fear twisted his face into a revolting mask but slowly, as the girl and Shepard stared spellbound, his expression faded.

His hands dropped limply from the handle of the gleaming surgical implement that protruded from his chest. Crimson flowed from the wound as his eyes fluttered shut. His knees melted; a long breath soughed from his lungs, ending in a ghastly rattle, and the professor dropped limply into Shepard's arms.

Lynda Knowles stared past them, horror-frozen, at the cadavers hanging in a row, suspended from a rail by steel skewers piercing their ears. They were nude—all except the foremost. This was a man, fully clothed, his shirt streaked with scarlet. A name burst from the girl's lips as she gazed at the horribly peaceful, waxen face of the dangling corpse.

"Neil!"

THE voice of Doctor Carter Cole carried sonorously from the platform of Dartmoor Hall.

"These, gentlemen, are my conclusions concerning the genesis of phobia. I hope they are the true explanation of the fears, some trivial, some abysmally tragic, which plague us all. Fears which sometimes determine the course of our whole lives, sometimes map the paths to our deaths. I will be deeply gratified if this data some-



how helps to lead us out of the black, primitive maze of mysteries within our minds which is phobia."

He smiled acknowledgment of the applauding ovation that followed and, gathering his notes, stepped from the rostrum. As he turned he was aware that someone was rapidly crossing the platform behind him. He glimpsed an agitated, scholarly-looking man bending over to whisper something in the ear of his host, President Humphrey. He saw the president's eyes widen with shocked amazement, caught a distressed whisper.

"Mr. Humphrey! We've just heard, sir—a terrible thing! Professor Knowles—he must have gone stark mad, sir—only a few moments ago he murdered Mr. Romeyn—then committed suicide—"

## CHAPTER TWO

### Murder by Suicide

**I**N HIS room in the Dartmoor Inn, with his bags packed, his twin nurse-secretaries waiting at the open door, his strap-watch warning him that his train would leave in less than five minutes, Carter Cole listened regretfully to an anguished voice on the telephone.

"Everyone believes it, Doctor Cole—everyone—but I know in my heart it's not true. There's no one else I can turn to but you—no one else who can understand it so well. Don't you see, a living man could plead for himself, but my father"—the girl's tone dropped to a whisper—"has no defense."

Cole said gently: "Miss Knowles, please believe I'm sincerely sorry. President Humphrey and Dean Martin have already asked me to investigate the case, but solving mysteries must always be a secondary consideration to me. There are more than a thousand patients under my care at my sanitarium, and my first duty is to them. I must get back as soon as possible. If

you feel the local police are unsympathetic, I'll gladly recommend a private detective—"

A soft moan of despair came over the line, followed by the click of the severed connection. Cole sighed compassionately and regarded the two Misses Day. As tirelessly efficient as they were lusciously attractive, the twins were constantly at Cole's side, coolly ready to meet any demand, any emergency. Though they had just completed a night-long session of dictation of case histories, they appeared fresh as the morning sunshine.

"Miss Knowles stopped on her way to police headquarters," he told them, "to call me from the lobby. She's probably waiting for me downstairs now. Much as I would have it otherwise, time, tide and trains wait for no man. We're on our way."

"Yes, Doctor," said June Day.

"Yes, Doctor," echoed her sister, Jane.

They followed him down the broad stairs which curved into the foyer of the comfortable old inn. A bell-boy hurried ahead with their suitcases. Cole saw no anxious young woman in his path and felt relieved—until he reached the entrance. There a quick banging sound stopped him. Startled, he turned to the telephone booth in the corner. Through the panes of its closed door he saw terrified eyes gazing out, small white fists pounding.

The girl in the cubicle was striving desperately to get out. She pulled frantically on the handle, then pushed, then slapped her palms against the panes. Her pallid face pictured fright mounting to frenzy. She pressed trembling hands to her face, uttered a shuddering moan.

Cole gripped the outer knob and his thrust forced the folding door to yield stubbornly. He surmised it had stuck because of a faulty mechanism, but realized the explanation would bring small comfort to the overwrought girl inside. She



pushed herself from the booth, past Cole, to a chair and fell into it, breathing spasmodically, sagging with relief.

"Obviously," Cole murmured to his twin secretaries, "a case of claustrophobia."

"Yes, Doctor," June Day answered. "The taxi's waiting."

"Yes, Doctor," her twin pointed out. "We have three minutes to catch our train."

Cole stepped to the trembling girl in the chair. "Are you," he asked, "Miss Lynda Knowles?" A tight nod answered him. "Was your father, may I ask, a claustrophobe?"

"Yes." It was a tremulous whisper. The girl's fingers played across her tensioned throat as though she had been choked. "Our whole family suffers from it." She brought herself up unsteadily. "Whoever shut Father in the refrigerator last night must have known how—how horrible it would be for him."

Cole reassured her. "You're quite all right now. Perhaps if we step outside?" He took her arm, escorted her to the broad porch overlooking the verdant campus, noted that the open air brought her quick recovery. "If my duties at the sanitarium were not so pressing, Miss Knowles—"

"I'm afraid—it's hopeless," the girl answered despondently. "Everyone will remember Father not for the marvelous work he's done in endocrinology\* but—as a murderer. It's so wrong, Doctor Cole! No one will ever know the truth."

COLE saw Lynda Knowles wince from the curious, lingering gazes of two students strolling past. The tragedy had shaken the little college town. The investigation, Cole had learned, was in the

hands of two veteran natives whose only police duties heretofore had been to chide obstreperous undergraduates. He had learned from President Humphrey the details of how this obviously admirable young woman's plan to elope had been shattered by a shocking double death. Murder, then suicide by the murderer, was the prevalent belief. Yet Lynda Knowles, gazing at Cole pleadingly, asserted the contrary with the utmost conviction.

"Father didn't kill Neil, Doctor Cole. I'm sure of it—sure with all my soul—but if you can't help me—"

"Look here," Cole said gently. "I know of Professor Knowles' researches. It would be shameful if his scientific achievements were overshadowed by a scandal. Perhaps, if the police don't take too long to question you—"

"Oh, please!" the girl implored. "It means everything in the world to me. If only you would—"

"I will," Cole said decisively. He turned quickly to instruct his twin secretaries. "June, Jane—" but his words faded on his lips. The Misses Day had coolly anticipated his change of mind and under their directions, the bell-boy was marching the luggage back into the inn while they followed briskly.

Lynda Knowles hopefully led Cole to a ramshackle building around the corner, on the quiet main street of Hanbridge. A sign over its door proclaimed it to be police headquarters. A door labeled *Chief's Office* was standing open and they went in. The musty room beyond was occupied by four men to whom the girl introduced Cole nervously.

Chief Irby, a lean-faced giant whose sharp red nose looked like the beak of a

\*The study of the system of ductless glands of the body which, pouring hormones and chalone into the blood and lymph, determine vital metabolic changes. The delicate balance or unbalance of these glands may determine whether a human being is normal, a monster, or a genius—indeed, most physical and mental characteristics depend upon the endocrines. This is one of the most fascinating phases of medical science, and its newest frontier of research.—F. C. D.



turkey, folded an immense hand around Cole's. "Heard of you, Doctor," he said with an air of finality, "but I guess this case won't interest you much. Looks like it's all over before it begins. I'm just sort of askin' a few questions to pave the way for a detective the attorney-general is sendin' around to investigate the matter."

While the genial little Deputy Chief Messer placed chairs facing the old roll-top desk, Cole acknowledged introductions to Joel Shepard and Hugh Knowles. Their faces were drawn, their eyes haggard, their manner stiff with mutual hostility.

The dead professor's son, frankly uneasy, turned at once to Chief Irby to suggest: "Couldn't we go into another room? This office is so small and crowded it makes me choke. I'll scarcely be able to think unless—"

"Now, don't you be nervous," the chief interrupted. "It'll only take a few minutes. Just you sit down, Miss Knowles. Make yourselves comfortable, gentlemen. Now—that's better!"

Cole noted that both the girl and her step-brother steeled themselves to endure the cramped confinement of the room. He saw, too, as the others seated themselves, that one drawer of the desk was standing open. Inside it lay a blood-crusted Liston knife\*—the keen blade, Cole surmised, which had cut the life from Professor Knowles' heart.

"This is mighty sad," Chief Irby mused, wagging his rusty head. "I'm sorry to have to ask you some questions, Miss Knowles and gentlemen, but you've nothin' to fear from a peaceable old man like me." Despite his mild words, it was obvious to Cole that the chief was a canny man who slyly masked a penetrating intellect behind a befuddled manner. Irby

smiled disarmingly, but the glinting lights lying deep in his eyes signaled suspicion as he scrutinized Joel Shepard.

"Now, let's see," the chief drawled. "I guess there's no doubt Professor Knowles killed Mr. Romeyn and then took his own life. Question is, why? Well now, everybody knows there was bad blood between the professor and Romeyn. To come right down to it, they hated each other."

**H**UGH KNOWLES asserted indignantly: "My father had every reason to hate Romeyn. I worked at his side constantly. His researches were his whole life, exactly as they are mine. Romeyn was tackling endocrinology with a different theory. He was scornful, contemptuous of my father, and didn't hesitate to show it."

"Bad," Chief Irby opined. "A girl's father and her sweetheart bein' enemies."

Lynda Knowles broke in huskily: "But it's no reason why Father would do such a horrible, such a frightful thing!"

"I'm only takin' it the way it looks," Irby put in mildly. "The way Mr. Romeyn showed it, now. What did he do or say?"

"Only a few days ago," Hugh Knowles answered bitterly, "Romeyn said our work was a frightful waste of Lynda's money—and if he could, he'd stop it."

"I sort of heard," the chief observed quietly, while Cole listened intently, "that you were backin' the professor, Miss Knowles—workin' long, hard hours bein' his secretary, too. I never got it quite straight."

The girl's ready explanation sharpened Cole's interest. "My mother married Professor Knowles when I was a small child. During her lifetime she supplied him with all the funds he needed. When she died her estate was divided equally between my step-father and me. He soon ex-

\*Liston knives are surgical implements used for amputations, named after the famed Scottish surgeon who designed them, Robert Liston of London.—F. C. D.



hausted the money Mother left him. I kept helping him because otherwise he would have had to abandon his life's work. I was glad to do everything I possibly could."

"And did Romeyn try to make you stop wastin' your money, as he called it?" Irby asked shrewdly.

"Yes. I admit he did, but—"

"Maybe you sort of forgot," the chief said, blinking thoughtfully while Cole scrutinized him, "when you were plannin' to run away with Romeyn. Under the law of this state a woman's prop'ty passes to her husband when she marries. Romeyn could've stopped the professor's work dead by refusin' to help him any more. Your father must've found out somehow you were goin' to run away last night—"

"Nobody knew!" the girl protested.

"Maybe he did." Chief Irby's jaw set emphatically. "Seein' the way he hated Romeyn, and thinkin' his money would be cut off, he must've tried to stop it. It must've led to a fight, and before the professor knew what he was doin'—"

The girl's head jerked up. "I don't believe it! I'll never believe it!"

"Now, take it easy," the chief cautioned. "Seems clear as day that Professor Knowles killed Romeyn, then committed suicide, unless—"

Cole observed Irby's sharp, reddish eyes turn to Joel Shepard as Shepard tensely leaned forward to assert: "You're mistaken, Chief. Remember, I found the professor shut inside the big refrigerator. He couldn't have fastened the latch himself, because it doesn't operate from the inside. Someone must have shut him in deliberately."

Cole saw Lynda Knowles grow pale, her step-brother wince, at the mere mention of imprisonment. He stepped forward. "A question, Chief, if you don't mind. Was it generally known that Professor Knowles was a claustrophobe?"

The dead man's son answered. "Many people knew it. It's considered a sort of family peculiarity. But what possible bearing—"

"A highly important one, I suspect," Cole answered. "Perhaps your father would be alive today if he had not suffered from that phobia. To go on, Mr. Shepard?"

"Someone deliberately locked the professor in the refrigerator," Shepard continued earnestly. "Romeyn must have been dead already. Probably he was killed in the open. The murderer had to hide the body, and thought of the refrigerator where the cadavers are kept. Professor Knowles may have caught the murderer putting Romeyn's body in the box. In order to give himself time to make a getaway, the guilty man must have forced the professor inside and latched the door."

THE girl was shuddering, Cole noted, and Hugh Knowles was gazing fearfully at the walls of the stuffy little office.

"That's pretty slick figurin', Mr. Shepard," Irby opined, "except that nobody's missin'—nobody's made a getaway. Now, anyway, we ain't decided yet why Mr. Romeyn was killed in the first place if what you say is true. Maybe you've got an idea why that happened, too." And the chief's rusty eyes narrowed keenly.

Cole saw color fade from Shepard's face. In the hush Irby's horny fingers drummed on the desk.

"Speakin' frank, Mr. Shepard, everybody knows you're in love with Lynda Knowles. It must've been a bad shock to you, if you learned ahead of time they were runnin' away to get married. Seems to me you'd try mighty hard to stop 'em. Just to clear up the point, Mr. Shepard, suppose you account for yourself last evenin' at about the time when—"

Cole intently studied the young man as Shepard jerked erect. "You suspect me of killing Neil Romeyn? You have ex-



cellent reasons for it, Chief Irby. I hated Romeyn. I'd have stopped at nothing to keep Lynda from throwing herself away on him. If necessary, I would have killed him." Amazement filled Cole during the moment of silence that followed until Shepard, tight-fisted, fierce-eyed, added grimly: "But I didn't!"

"Please!" Lynda Knowles jerked erect, her face deathly white, her hand pressed to her mouth to stifle a cry.

"Please—I can't stand any more!"

SHE hurried past Irby, out of the close room. Cole followed her. She paused on the sidewalk, breathing deeply of the clean air. Cole took her arm and steadied her as her step-brother and Shepard came to her side. Hugh Knowles' drawn mouth, Cole saw, eased relievedly, too, in the openness of the village street.

"Look here," Cole said gravely. "It's an extraordinary situation to find an entire family suffering from the same phobia. Obviously you and your step-brother acquired it from Professor Knowles—an unconscious process of learning.\* I strongly suspect it caused his death—suspect too, that that fear of his was used as a weapon against him. If that's true, there's a great deal more behind his death than we think. I feel obliged to warn you both that you—"

"Warn us!" the girl exclaimed.

"Warn you," Cole repeated levelly. "If someone used Professor Knowles' fear to destroy him, remember that you suffer from the same dread of enclosed spaces. I feel confident that in time I can free you of it, but for the present—be careful.

Until we learn the truth, Miss Knowles—"

Joel Shepard interrupted urgently: "I think you're right, Doctor Cole. This might be the work of a madman—a homicidal maniac—someone possessed with a lust to kill. It might be a member of the faculty, or even a student, whose brain has cracked under some strain. Lynda, you've got to watch yourself—"

"I suggest that you go home—you need rest, Miss Knowles," Cole interrupted. "Please believe I'll do everything possible to clear your father's name. The first step I'll take is one you would not care to follow."

Cole felt the girl gazing after him hopefully as he strode back to Chief Irby's office. There he found the turkey-beaked man blinking puzzledly. At Cole's request, the chief brought out the weapon of murder. Cole intently studied the deadly blade.

When he returned it, Irby shrewdly commented: "Either the professor killed Romeyn, or Shepard did, Doctor Cole, that's sure. But there ain't any choice about the professor's killin' hisself. That happened just before Shepard got the big door open. He told me he saw Knowles' hands still on the handle of the knife."

"Yet, perhaps," Cole answered, "Professor Knowles was murdered nevertheless. He evidently lost all control of himself when he was shut inside the refrigerator. The confinement brought him keener suffering than all the agonies of hell. He was trapped, choking, fighting frantically for air, for freedom. In his desperation he may have taken the only certain means of escape—death. If that's true, Chief,

\*Fear is the emotional coloring of our instinctive efforts to protect ourselves. Though an adult human being may be a complex charge of mixed dreads, new-born infants display only a few fear reactions. A very young child will react fearfully to a loud noise, which may be a racial inheritance from the jungle where predatory animals roared; it feels a fear of falling when in an insecure position, which may trace back to an arboreal existence; it reacts strongly to restricted movements, though this may be less fear than rage. Most of our fears are learned either through experience or example. Children are not naturally afraid of the dark but easily learn to fear it through unconscious teaching by their elders. Thus a child, seeing an older person react fearfully to a given situation, is taught that it is dangerous and likewise dreads it. In this way an entire family may share a common phobia. Doctor Cole's files contain several examples of family fears.—F. C. D.



then we have a murder committed by suicide—with the weapon in the victim's own hand."

"What!"

"If my theory is correct," Cole replied, "Professor Knowles was murdered as surely as though someone other than himself had driven the knife into his heart—someone who was nowhere near the scene when the professor died, someone who can advance a perfect alibi. A difficult problem to prove, Chief, but—with your permission, I'll view the bodies."

### CHAPTER THREE

#### The Second Knife

COLE'S brisk stride carried him rapidly across a quadrangle misted by deepening twilight. He had spent the entire day in Hanbridge and in the executive offices of the college, asking innumerable questions, making voluminous notes, all the time conscious that one train after another was arriving and departing. His time-table told him the last of the day would leave in two hours. And Carter Cole knew he must, without fail, be one of its passengers.

Rounding the corner of a faculty dormitory, on his way to the Knowles home, he stopped short. He saw a figure outlined in the light radiating from one of the first-floor windows. The white, drawn face was Lynda Knowles'. One hand was raised as if to tap on the pane, but she was motionless. So intent was she upon the scene inside that she was unaware of Cole's quiet move as he drifted to a spot behind her.

Through thin curtains Cole saw a small room tastefully decorated as a man's study. Joel Shepard was standing at a desk in the corner, his right side turned to the window. He had opened a drawer, was lifting something from it. It twinkled metallicly under his speculative gaze. It was a revolver, Cole saw.

Abruptly Shepard turned. At his move, Lynda Knowles jerked back. Her shoulder brushed Cole and she gasped, twisted, stared mutely. The wanness of her cheeks, the concern shining in her eyes, were dimmed suddenly by the drawing of the blind. Shepard had quickly pulled it down to the sill. Now the girl stood trembling beside Cole while footfalls beat back and forth across the room. They ceased with the slam of a door.

Cole retreated quickly to the corner of the building, his hand on the girl's arm tugging her along with him. In a moment Joel Shepard stepped out into the darkness, strode away. He left the walk, climbed the slope with heels digging doggedly in the grass, and had almost blended from sight in the gathering gloom before the girl spoke.

"I can't forget it—the horrible thing Chief Irby intimated, and what Joel said. He meant it—he'd have stopped at nothing to keep me from going away with Neil. But he was one of Father's closest friends—I can't believe—"

"We'd best," Cole suggested, "follow Mr. Shepard."

They mounted the slope cautiously. Cole saw that its crest formed the rim of a deep, fragrant pine vale which stretched behind Dartmoor Hall and the homes beyond.

"Hugh doesn't believe Joel's theory about a homicidal maniac," the girl went on wretchedly. "He says it sounds like a clever attempt to cover up the truth. He thinks it means Joel is hiding something. I deliberately interrupted Joel, in the chief's office, before he could account for himself at the time it happened last night—I was too afraid of what he might say. Doctor Cole, it's too horribly possible—"

Cole cautioned silence with a gesture and they paused on the path, listening. Joel Shepard had disappeared among the shadows and his footfalls no longer



floated back to them. Cole, eyes narrowed thoughtfully, turned the girl back toward the dormitory.

"I absolutely must," he said quietly, "catch the last train tonight. If I board it without having found the secret of this situation, it will be the first case I ever abandoned unsolved. If it's humanly possible, I want to remove the stain from Professor Knowles' name, prevent your whole life from being overshadowed by this tragedy. Therefore let's speak of known facts."

They were approaching the entrance of the building where Joel Shepard lived.

"It's a fact that Shepard knew of your father's phobia. It's a fact someone deliberately imprisoned the professor in the corpse-refrigerator. It's a still more eloquent fact that he was locked in with a knife. I'm convinced your father's death was murder committed by forcing him to commit suicide through fear."

"I can't believe Joel could—"

"Someone," Cole pointed out firmly, "did. It was not fear of the cadavers in the box, because Professor Knowles was case-hardened to that long ago. It was the much deeper, much more powerful terror of his phobia. In his frenzy to escape he used the knife on himself—the knife that had been, apparently, deliberately placed there for that very purpose. It was suicide, yet it was murder."

COLE opened the dormitory entrance, then the inner door to which Joel Shepard's card was thumb-tacked. Lynda Knowles stood anxiously on the sill as Cole crossed to the desk. He drew open the drawer from which they had seen Shepard lift the gun. No revolver lay inside it now. Rapidly Cole searched the other drawers, then the bureau. He paused and his eyes narrowed at the girl.

"It's another definite fact," he said quietly, "that Joel Shepard's revolver is

no longer here. Miss Knowles, where is your brother?"

"At home."

Cole took the girl's arm and together they left the building. They followed the winding path up the slope toward an attractive house which radiated light across a lawn bordered by a stone wall. As they came to the gate, Cole heard the girl's breath catch. She paused, eyes widened.

"I left the door closed, but it's open now," she murmured. "Did—did you hear—"

It came through the wide-standing entrance as she broke off—a stifled shout. "Let me out! Let me out!"

"Hugh!"

The girl blurted the name in terror as Cole started for the entrance. On the porch he brought up short. A rhythmic sound was coming from outside the house—the fast, padding footfalls of someone running across the lawn. A figure appeared in the glow—Joel Shepard.

"I was just passing—I heard a shout," he told Cole breathlessly.

At that moment the frantic, muffled cry strained through the entrance again. "Oh, God, let me out! Let—me—out!"

Shepard stepped quickly toward the door. Cole passed through it first, stopped in the vestibule, listened. Lynda Knowles anxiously followed him as the shout rang again from somewhere below. "Open the door! For God's sake, open—the—door!" Cole crossed to a door opening beneath the stairs, jerked it open. A light shone across a cobwebbed flight of wooden stairs.

"Open—the—door!"

"The wine-cellar!" the girl gasped.

Cole sped down and Lynda Knowles and Shepard hurried after him. They came to a stout oaken panel set in the cement wall. It was shaking in its frame under the impact of beating fists. Shepard shouted, "All right! We're here,



Hugh!" as Cole pulled at the rusty latch, flung the heavy slab wide. It revealed a stone-walled room filled with racks of dust-covered bottles—and a scene which wrung a whimper of horror from the girl's lips.

Hugh Knowles was standing tight-muscled beside a table, his right hand stiffly closing upon something which lay on it—a revolver. Its fascination seemed to hold him so powerfully that he was unaware that the door was open. He didn't even hear Cole's warning exclamation as he snatched up the weapon, eyes closed. He swung it to his temple, finger curling on the trigger. . . .

"Hugh!"

Lynda Knowles choked out the name in the instant Cole snatched at the weapon. He gripped cold metal, forced the revolver down, twisted it away. Breath beating, Hugh Knowles stared at him, then at the door. Suddenly the young man flung himself past Cole, out of the dank room. Stepping out, Cole watched him scramble up the stairs, heard him rush from the house as though chased by all the torturing devils of hell.

The girl did not follow but stood gazing, transfixed, at the revolver in Cole's hand. It drew her nearer magnetically. She stared at it more closely, then turned appalled eyes upon Joel Shepard, who stood tight-lipped, silent.

Cole, extending the revolver toward him, asked quietly: "Yours, I believe?"

"It—it's mine! But—God!—I don't know how it came to be—"

**L**YNDA KNOWLES turned away with a sob, ran up the stairs, vanished. Cole grimly pocketed the weapon and followed Shepard, who was hurrying after the girl. They paused on the front porch. Hugh Knowles was braced against the house, his forehead beaded with perspiration, his eyes shining with a wild light.

"You're quite safe now," Cole assured him. "Exactly what happened? Who locked you up in the wine-cellar?"

"I—I'm not sure what happened!" Knowles blurted. "I was lying in the library, dozing. I woke up with a start—because something was thrown over my head. It might have been a coat—a blanket—I don't know. I was desperate to get it off but could not free myself. Somebody dragged me down the cellar stairs—threw me in there. God! I was going crazy! I know how Dad felt—locked up in that horrible—" His head lifted suddenly. "There was a gun! How did it get there on the table? Why was it there?" His voice rose to a screech. "Where is that gun?"

Lynda Knowles was gazing stunned at Joel Shepard. Cole, noting Shepard's whiteness of face, brought the revolver into the light. He said quietly: "I have it, you see. It was deliberately left on the table in the wine-cellar, of course. Apparently you were expected to kill yourself with it—precisely as your father killed himself with the knife left in the refrigerator."

Shepard began in a strained tone: "You were right to warn them, Doctor Cole. There is some murderous maniac at work trying—"

"No maniac," Cole interrupted, "evolved this plan. It's a product of cool, rational reasoning. I think, Mr. Shepard—"

Hugh Knowles had been staring at the gun in Cole's hand. Now he turned an accusing glare upon Shepard and broke into Cole's words with a quavering outburst.

"That's your gun—yours—Joel! I know because I've used it myself—for target practice with you down at the river." His eyes flashed through his heavy-rimmed glasses. "You did that to me, Joel! You knew I didn't believe your theory about a homicidal maniac. I told



Lynda at dinner I think you're guilty. You were eavesdropping! You threw me into the cellar to get rid of me because I'm too near the truth! You damned—"

"Steady!" Cole's hand pressed the agitated young man back against the wall. "You're too upset—"

"You don't seriously think," Joel Shepard broke in grimly, "—you can't think I'd do a thing like that!"

"And why not?" Hugh Knowles challenged breathlessly. "I don't trust you any more than I trusted Neil Romeyn. You want to marry Lynda for her money the same as he did—and wreck my father's whole life's work! Damned if I'll let you do it even now! It means as much to me as—"

"Please, Hugh!" Lynda Knowles implored. "You're saying things you don't mean. Please go inside—lie down and get some rest. Doctor Cole will talk with Joel."

Hugh Knowles passed a trembling hand across his white face, turned, shuffled into the house. Through the windows of the library Cole saw him sprawl out on a divan, eyes closed. Joel Shepard was gazing imploringly at the girl.

Cole pocketed the gun again, said levelly: "Vital evidence. Miss Knowles and I saw you with this gun in your room a short while ago, Shepard. You could have circled through the woods to the rear of this house and taken Hugh by surprise. You slipped out and waited to hear the shot, but when you saw Miss Knowles and me coming, you pretended—"

"That's not true!" Shepard blurted. "I can't deny it's my gun, but I didn't take it from the room. I considered carrying it because you'd warned Lynda she might be in danger, Doctor Cole. Then I remembered I was under suspicion and left it behind. Lynda, you—you've got to trust me!"

Cole said briskly: "I suggest, Mr.

Shepard, you return to your room and stay there. Doubtless Chief Irby will want to question you about this incident. I'm obliged to accept it for what it appears to be, because time presses. I'm determined to catch that last train. Miss Knowles, please come with me."

Cole left Shepard standing in an agony of consternation, led the girl out the gate. As they approached the medical building he was conscious that Shepard was following. The young man turned off the path, trudged toward his room.

ALL the windows of the medical school were dark and the entrance was locked. By means of the key which the girl passed him, Cole opened the way. He stepped in, snapped a switch that filled the lower hall with a yellow glow. They climbed the stairs and at the first landing looked down a corridor past a row of doors, one of which bore the name of Professor Knowles.

Cole said quietly: "Your step-father must have been working in his office late last night. If Romeyn was killed outside, the man who murdered him had to pass this door at least twice, possibly four times. One trip to get the knife, another to carry the body in. It's a certainty Professor Knowles heard him and saw him. The killer must have been surprised in the refrigerator—"

Cole's hand on the girl's arm steadied her, urged her farther up the stairs. On the top floor he opened the door of the dissection-room. The click of a switch filled it with white light. Cole felt Lynda Knowles shudder as she entered at his side. The ghoulish place was hushed, filled with the nauseating odor of preservative.

Cole gave the ghastly specimen tanks only a glance. His long experience had inured him to physical and mental horrors—even the ghastly sight revealed



when he opened the door of the corpse-refrigerator. He stepped back, inspected a series of cabinets, opened a score of drawers, nodded his satisfaction and returned to the girl.

"This is difficult for you, Miss Knowles," he said sympathetically, "but I must reconstruct the circumstances with your help. The knives are kept there. The guilty man took the murder weapon from one of those drawers. This morning, examining the bodies, I discovered a vitally important fact. Two different knives were used."

"How do you know?"

"Romeyn's wound," Cole answered, "is slightly smaller than the professor's, but the knife used by Professor Knowles fits his own wound perfectly. He couldn't have used that same knife on Romeyn, nor could anyone else. If he had killed Romeyn in the refrigerator, then immediately committed suicide, he wouldn't have switched knives. No second knife has turned up. It's logical proof that Professor Knowles did not murder Romeyn."

"But—can you prove what actually happened, Doctor Cole?"

"Not yet," he admitted, "yet to achieve our purpose, I must. The fact of the two different knives may help. The murderer used a small Liston knife to kill Romeyn, possibly outside this building. Perhaps he dropped the weapon. In any event he must have been empty-handed when Professor Knowles surprised him in here with the body.

"Because—"

"Because he obviously snatched up another knife, slightly larger. He left it in the refrigerator when shutting the professor inside. That's the knife Chief Irby has now. But that first one, which was used to kill Romeyn, is missing—unaccounted for."

The girl's eyes widened.

"Either the murderer cleaned it and re-

placed it," Cole went on, "or he got rid of it. In his place, I shouldn't have taken the risk of waiting to clean it. I'd have carried it away and hidden it somewhere. It would never be missed from the drawer. I think he must have done exactly—"

"Doctor Cole!" The girl's hand closed on his arm. "Last night—I remember now—while I was in my room, waiting for Neil to come for me, I saw someone sneak into the yard. He opened the well and dropped something into it. Could it have been—"

"The knife!" Cole exclaimed softly. "Very possibly. An excellent hiding-place, and not far." His eyes shone with decision. "Miss Knowles, wherever it is, that second knife is important evidence. There may be fingerprints left on it. Draining the well is a job that can't possibly be completed before I must catch my train, but—"

The girl's face suddenly went white. "Listen!" she whispered. "I thought I heard—"

A step? Cole was not sure. It might have been the faintest creaking of a loose board in the hall, a noise made by the old building settling—or was it someone lurking, listening, just beyond the door? Cole turned slowly. He heard the girl behind him say almost inaudibly, protestingly, "Joel!" And suddenly her whisper became a stifled scream.

A hand was reaching into the dissection-room—reaching for the light-switch.

**D**ARKNESS snapped down as swiftly as Cole's hand slid to his shoulder-holstered Luger. The dissection-room became blindingly black except for the dim moonglow filtering through the windows. Cole pointed his automatic into the thick, suffocating gloom.

A furtive rustling movement—and a ghostly figure glided through the door. His face obscured in the faint silver shine,



a hunch-shouldered man melted into the darkness. Now Cole could not see him, but he sensed a phantom stealing nearer with ominous deliberation.

Cole said quietly: "I should regret having to shoot you, but you're making it necess—"

Fists driving with mad power struck him from an unexpected angle. He tottered against the edge of a table, felt his Luger gripped. He clenched its butt, pistoned his right, and felt teeth grit under his knuckles. Suddenly a staggering blow caught him squarely on the side of the head. The crushing impact of something heavy caught up from the table jarred Cole's brain like a blast of dynamite.

He poised a moment, feeling the other man heave away. He sensed the girl recoiling as the prowler flung himself on her. Her cry of terror was a far-away wail in Cole's pounding ears—a cry that stopped like a snapped-off radio, as if a hand had clamped over her mouth. Dimly aware of a frantic struggle in the gloom, Cole plunged headlong into the abyss of unconsciousness. . . .

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Behind Death's Door

WHEN Cole regained consciousness he was lying on a floor. Utter blackness blanketed him. Beyond the drumming inside his skull he heard quick breathing. He felt that Lynda Knowles was near, but when he tried to call to her his constricted throat muted the sound. Stirring painfully, he found his ankles bound together, his wrists fastened behind him. The air pouring into his lungs carried a penetrating reek—a stench stronger even than the odor of the dissection-room.

Cole forced himself to a sitting position and something brushed across his face. He dodged it, feeling a prickling coldness spread over his body. The contact had

been cold, clammy, slimy. Cole knew that he had touched dead flesh—knew then that he was inside the corpse-refrigerator.

A rustle of movement came out of the darkness. Cole heard a faint sliding sound, as of a hand slipping across the wall. It was followed by a thud, a click, a horrified gasp. Immediately a quick series of blows disturbed the chill hush—fists frantically beating. Then an almost inarticulate plea, muffled by the pressing darkness. "Let me out—let me out!"

"Miss Knowles!" Cole snapped.

The sounds stopped. A whisper responded: "Doctor Cole! Where—where are you? I can't get out. The door's fastened. I can't open it!"

Cole could not see the girl. "Don't go to pieces," he warned. "There's nothing here that will hurt you except your own fear. Keep hold of yourself—listen. There must be a light. Do you know where the switch is?"

The girl did not answer and immediately the thudding tattoo beat again. She had turned back to the door, was pounding it with all her strength. Cole realized she was obsessed with a mad impulse to escape the oppressive blackness, the suffocating confinement. Sobs broke from her throat as she thrust again and again at the door.

"Stop that!" The imperative ring of Cole's voice demanded obedience of Lynda Knowles. "You can't possibly break out alone. Realize that—accept it. You'll be free more quickly if you do as I say. I'm tied—I can't help you until you release me. Do you remember—is there a light?"

"Yes—a light," she said quaveringly. And as if thinking aloud to reassure herself, "I've seen students come in here—turn it on just inside. It must be—over my head. I'm afraid—afraid to touch—"

"Find it," Cole directed firmly. "Turn it on."

He heard her moving slowly, fearfully. He braced against the wall, murmuring re-



assurances to the girl. Suddenly a gleam came on in the chilly little cubicle.

Through a painful blar he saw Lynda Knowles recoil. She backed to the door, horrified eyes widened, a cry of terror breaking past her drawn lips even as she bit her knuckles.

"Steady—steady!" Cole commanded, then looked up at the dangling corpses.

Their scrawny, nude bodies gleamed moistly. Distorted faces leered at the girl and Cole. They seemed to be poised in a grotesque dance of death, their glazed eyes popping between their skewer-pierced ears, their stomachs horribly distended, their slavering tongues protruding—mocking with silent laughter the living trapped in their miserable tomb.

Lynda Knowles flung herself wildly against the door, hammered it frantically with her fists, hurled herself against it again and again. Her abject terror was so overwhelming that at first she didn't even hear Cole's sharp commands to stop.

"Let me out! *Let me out!*" she screamed. Then suddenly the girl stiffened. Cole knew she was stunned by the realization that she had repeated her step-brother's shout from the wine-cellar, perhaps the plea her step-father had cried out when imprisoned by this very door. She was feeling the awful power of the same hysteria which had forced him to destroy his own life. Her hands rose to her tightening throat.

"Listen to me!" Cole ordered. "You can't possibly get out until you release me—do you understand? Unfasten my hands. Do as I say!"

SHE stared at him over her shoulder for a moment, still pressed against the immovable door, striving to obey Cole, to conquer her fearful impulse to escape. He twisted on his side, showed her his bound wrists. She forced herself forward, lowered herself to her knees. Reaching

toward his hands, she paused. Cole saw her gaze drop to something lying beside him on the floor.

His Luger gleamed there in the light, its safety catch open.

"Don't touch it!"

The girl snatched it up. Her hands closed white upon it as she straightened, stepped back. Cole's urgent "Drop it!" brought no response from her. She gazed at it hypnotically, eyes haunted, face white as those of the cadavers staring at her.

"Drop it!" he repeated, but her finger curled slowly, as if by a volition stronger than her own, upon the trigger.

"We can't get out!" she blurted. "We'll never get out! It's better—better than this torture—"

Cole strove to pull his wrists from their bonds. He saw that the girl had lost all consciousness of his presence. She was possessed by only one all-powerful urge—to escape. The glittering gun in her hand promised her swift release from unbearable agony. Cole ceased calling to her as her colorless lips moved.

"It—it won't hurt," she whispered. "Only a second—only once—" She raised the gun to her temple, eyes closed, finger squeezing the trigger.

Cole pulled himself from the wall and straightened his legs with a powerful thrust that slapped his soles against the girl's thigh. She stumbled back, her raised hand jerking. The gun spat flame. The pounding, muffled report reverberated in the closed space with the force of a physical blow. Cole saw one of the dangling corpses jerk with the impact of the bullet.

He kicked out again, deliberately toppling the stunned girl off balance. As she sagged down he rolled, straining his bound hands out behind him for the gun. He caught it, pulled it from her stiff fingers. She desperately tried to recover



it as he dropped it to the floor, fell face downward upon it.

"Please—please!"

"It's what he wants you to do—the man who shut us in here—don't you understand that?" Cole snapped. "Listen to me! Untie my hands! Do you hear? Untie me!"

The girl was kneeling at his side, looking dazedly into his drawn face. She made a grueling effort to control herself, lifted trembling fingers toward his bound wrists. He realized the revolver in his hip pocket—the weapon he had taken from Hugh Knowles—might attract her attention, and quickly covered the bulge it made. The girl tugged at the bonds, shuddering, blinded by tears. Cole felt them loosening.

Immediately his hands came free, he gripped the Luger, rolled over. The girl sprang up, pushed madly at the door. Cole quickly untied his ankles, came dizzily to his feet. He took the girl's arm, eased her aside. "We'll be on the other side of this door," he promised, "very soon."

He pointed the Luger at the protruding head of the bolt which held the iron latch in place on the outer side. The pull of the trigger drove a slug into splintering wood. Rapidly Cole drilled lead around the bolt. Nine deafening concussions shook the refrigerator, caused dead arms to swing slightly, dead feet to dance. The gun empty, he holstered it.

Now he hurled himself against the panel, supple muscles bunching, but it would not yield. He drew back, flung himself at it again. The impact was a torturous shock, but the bolt remained in the pierced wood; the door held. Grimly Cole reached into his hip pocket, brought out Shepard's revolver to complete the job.

He leveled it, pulled the trigger. A me-

tallic snap resulted. The hammer had fallen, but the cartridge had not fired. Cole spun the cylinder, assured himself it was fully loaded, aimed again. His second jerk of the trigger brought a second empty click.

**T**HREE more times Cole tried. Three more futile snaps echoed among the dangling corpses. This time Cole swung the cylinder out. He made sure that every chamber contained an unexploded bullet. Raising the hammer, he examined the point. "I'm damned!" he said softly. With decisive finality he returned the gun to his pocket.

"Miss Knowles," he remarked firmly, "I'm not a magician who can make you unafraid with a simple wave of a wand, but please believe you're perfectly safe. I'm determined to get out of here as soon as possible, because we're very close to the truth—and I still have a train to catch." He smiled wryly. "By now," he added, "someone's probably draining your well to recover the knife which was used to kill Romeyn. Unless we get at him before he hides it in another place—"

Cole grimly flung himself against the door. His trained, supple muscles expended a telling force. Three times he repeated the attack, then inspected the results. The door had yielded a fraction of an inch. Cole renewed his efforts doggedly.

The girl watched with hope shining feverishly in her eyes. Cole's strength was bending the hook that held the iron bar. The crack at the edge of the padded slab was widening. After each attack, Cole pulled the door shut, then slammed himself against it anew so that its own momentum added to the force of his blows. The girl aided him.

"Once more!" Cole said tightly, and the bar snapped. The door flew wide. Cole



dove out, the girl stumbling at his side. He straightened, caught her in his arms, and she clung to him, trembling, drawing a deep breath of relief. Cole looked around the empty dissection-room. Then he glanced urgently at his strap-watch, firmly took the girl's arm and hurried her out and down the stairs.

Stepping into the clean night air—it seemed delightfully balmy after the biting chill of the corpse-refrigerator—Cole gazed at the nearby dormitory in which Joel Shepard lived. The window beside the entrance was dark.

"Not there," Cole said grimly.

He hurried the girl along the path to her home. Pushing through the gate, he turned to ask, "The well?" Lynda Knowles led him past a garden, paused at a square hole, profoundly dark, in a weather-seasoned well-housing.

The trap was open and a bucket lay on the ground, a long rope knotted to its handle. The sod was softened by the water which had been drawn up from the dank depths. A bewildering, overlapping pattern of foot-tracks was trampled into the grass. Cole, noting that they were inhumanly large, looked with eyes glittering.

"He was here only a moment ago. Evidently wore boots. He abandoned the job when he heard us coming—the man who killed Neil Romeyn. Trying to get the knife back, of course, but it must still be in the water. He couldn't have done all this without making some noise. With me, Miss Knowles!"

Cole led the girl to the front entrance of the house. They strode into the library, paused. Cole's eyes narrowed at Hugh Knowles. The girl's step-brother was sprawled on the divan where Cole had last seen him. He was breathing slowly, eyes closed. Cole noted that his small shoes were completely dry. His sudden shake of

Hugh Knowles' shoulder snapped the young man's eyes open.

"What—what's the matter?"

"Is it possible?" Cole asked tartly, "that you didn't hear someone drawing water from the well? Am I to believe you slept through it all?"

Knowles came to his feet. "I don't know what you're talking about. I didn't have any sleep last night—I was so exhausted—I didn't hear—"

Cole's shoulders squared. "You're concealing something," he said incisively. "I'm in no humor to waste time. I should have been back at my sanitarium by now. I have every intention of catching the train which leaves within thirty minutes. Unless you tell the truth at once, you'll oblige me to take drastic measures."

Young Knowles scowled. "Why should I conceal anything? Of what importance is it if someone was drawing water from the well? Instead of questioning me, why don't you get the truth from Joel Shepard?"

COLE'S eyes fastened on his strap-watch. "With your permission," he said. He stepped into the vestibule, took up the telephone. He asked for, "The inn, please," then, "Miss Days' room." As soon as a competently level voice answered he added: "June, Jane, whichever you are, engage a taxi immediately. Take my bags with you to the railroad station. You're leaving on the next train, and I'm going with you."

"Yes, Doctor," the efficient voice said. "I'm June."

Cole left the telephone, returned to Hugh Knowles, confronted him grimly. "It seems unlikely," he observed, "that you'd shield Joel Shepard. It's possible enough that you're protecting someone else. I want the facts, young man, right now."

"You can't browbeat me!" Knowles challenged.



"When circumstances warrant it," Cole retorted, "I'm capable of being exceedingly high-handed. I find myself in precisely such a situation at the moment."

He gripped Hugh Knowles' shoulders, spun the angrily protesting young man and forced him into the vestibule, out the entrance. Lynda Knowles followed, dismayed, as Cole thrust her step-brother through the gate. Hugh Knowles shouting wrathful indignation, could not escape Cole's firm grip. Cole noticed, marching Knowles along the path, that they were creating a disturbance. Dormitory windows were lighting, heads were poking out—but all Knowles' snarling struggles did not deter Cole. He stumbled the young man to the entrance of the medical building.

"Doctor Cole!" the girl exclaimed. "What—what are you going to do?"

"I am," Cole told her grimly, "taking a lesson from a murderer—using a phobia as a weapon."

He forced Hugh Knowles up the steps. The young man's efforts to escape became even more desperate as they wrestled into the dissection-laboratory. Cole twisted Knowles toward the big refrigerator. Its door, still standing open, disclosed the hideous skewered cadavers. Then Cole gave Knowles a push that sent him tottering among them.

"You may come out," he said inflexibly, "when you decide to tell the truth."

He slammed the heavy door shut, braced against it and planted his heels firmly against the jolt of Knowles as he tried to push it open. Standing grimly erect, Cole glanced again at his strap-watch, saw the girl gazing at him white-faced. They heard a muffled wail from the hut of the dead.

"Let me out! Open the door!"

The slab shook with Knowles' mad efforts to escape. Cole, inexorable, kept his position. He saw Lynda Knowles sink

into a chair, cover her eyes with her hands. The plea shrieked through the heavy door again—"Let me out—let me out!"

Cole ignored it, spoke to the girl quietly. "I'm sorry, but there's no other way. He made necessary the mental third degree he's suffering now. I hope, for all our sakes, he chooses not to endure it long."

"Oh, God, open the door!"

"A most appropriate chamber of horrors for a claustrophobe," Cole observed wryly. "Grasp the reason for his fear, Miss Knowles, and it will help you to understand your own. At the bottom of most phobias is a yearning for rest—eternal rest—death. The claustrophobe craves to return to blissful, prenatal unconsciousness, but at the same time he fights down the desire. He cannot take what he wants, nor can he cease to want it. Your step-brother unconsciously craves the release those horrible cadavers have already found, yet the unknownness of death terrifies him."

"Let—me—out!"

"You must realize the absurdity," Cole went on levelly, "of your own inner conflict. You have a rich, youthful life full of the promise of glorious happiness. Your phobia will be destroyed when you realize that happiness in the fulfillment of love. I'm a psychiatrist, not a match-maker, Miss Knowles, but it's apparent to me, from what I've learned, that your attraction to Neil Romeyn was purely physical and therefore only half what it should be. On the other hand—"

"Open—the—door!"

QUICK footfalls sounded in the lower hallway. Someone came bounding up the stairs and in a moment a young man hurried into the dissection-room—Joel Shepard. When he paused, the sound of beating heels continued behind him. He



strode to the girl. Though she recoiled from him, he seized her hand, held it tightly. Cole watched her as her head lowered exhaustedly to Shepard's arm.

"On the other hand—"

Three men strode in. The red-headed giant, Chief Irby, led the way. Deputy Chief Messer puffed to a stop behind him. The third was a stranger to Cole. He frowned officiously as Irby gave a puzzled glance around.

"I got a call sayin' there was trouble in here again. What the devil are you up to, Doctor Cole? This gentleman here, he's the detective sent from the attorney-general's office, and he agrees with me there's no doubt the professor killed Romeyn and—"

"Name's Blake," the stern-faced man put in.

"Delighted," Cole bowed, "I'm sure. Not only to meet you, but to have the proof that will clear a worthy man's name of the crime of murder. I think, Mr. Blake, an arrest is in order. Since I must leave very shortly to catch a train, Mr. Shepard will tell you—"

From the corpse-refrigerator the wail came again. "Let me out! Oh, God, open the door!"

Irby stiffened. "What's that! Somebody in there! You're keepin' him in, Doctor Cole. Look here, that ain't right. You can't do that! Manhandlin' people that way—I won't allow it. You get away from that door!"

"Sorry!" Cole said.

"Then you're under arrest for disturbin' the peace!" Irby declared wrathfully. "Hear that? You're goin' to open—"

COLE'S hand moved as rapidly as the irate chief. It slid out of his hip pocket. Steel glittered in his lifted fist and he leveled the revolver belonging to Shepard. Under the stare of its black muzzle, Irby stopped short, eyes widened.

Cole backed up the gun with a crackling command: "Stay where you are, gentlemen. I can't tolerate any interference now. If you had your way, you'd either damn a dead man with murder, or condemn an innocent one, and in any case ruin Miss Knowles' life. In a moment, I believe—"

"Open—the—door!"

The chief growled: "Resistin' an officer—usin' a gun—that's mighty serious, Doctor Cole. You can't trifle with the law. I won't stand for any high-handed—"

"Listen!" Cole ordered.

"Oh, God, let me out! Open the door—open it!" Then a last, frantic screech. "I'll tell you the truth! I'll tell everything—only let—me—out!"

Cole stepped from the door and Hugh Knowles spilled through. He whirled, poised to break into a frantic run. Cole gripped his arms, held him against the table. He glanced at his strap-watch as Knowles' wild eyes rolled.

"Let's have it!" Cole snapped. "You knew your step-sister was about to run away with Romeyn, didn't you? You knew it would place her funds beyond your reach. It meant an end to your precious researches. You went to Romeyn's office in this building last night, stopped him, tried to argue him out of it and it led to a fight—is that it?"

Knowles slumped against the table. "I didn't intend to kill him! There was a Liston knife on his desk. I didn't realize what I was doing. After he fell I—I wanted to get away. That's why I brought him up here. When Dad saw him—threatened to tell the police—I had to stop him at least until I could get out of town."

Lynda Knowles and Shepard were staring. The turkey-beaked chief blinked.

Hugh Knowles went on breathlessly: "I was crazy, I guess. I found myself—with a knife in my hand—on the point of killing my own father. I'd have done it in another minute. I didn't realize I'd



dropped the knife in the refrigerator. I shut Dad in only so I could have time to get away. God, if I could only undo it! You've got to believe me—I didn't intend to kill him!"

COLE straightened. "Mr. Drake," he said quietly, "your man." He turned to express his regrets to the girl and found her clinging to Shepard, arms tight around the young man's shoulders, eyes closed, silently sobbing. He smiled wryly, turned back to answer the chief's bewildered question—"How the devil did you figure *he'd* done that, Doctor?"

Cole placed Shepard's revolver in Irby's lean hands. "That gave him away. He locked himself in the cellar of his home in an effort to turn any possible suspicion from himself, not only by making himself appear to be a victim, but by incriminating Shepard—Shepard, whose love for his step-sister was a further threat. He must have stolen the gun from Shepard's room to fill out the picture—but his own phobia tripped him up."

Irby merely blinked.

"He was afraid that after he locked himself in the cellar his phobia might overwhelm him in spite of himself—afraid he might fall into his own trap and actually commit suicide. That's why, you see, Chief, he filed down the hammer-pin of the revolver—so it couldn't be fired. His confession, I think, completely clears the case. There are other details, but I'm afraid you'll have to learn them from someone else. I must catch a train!"

Cole glanced at Hugh Knowles, cowering against the table; at Lynda Knowles, still clinging to Joel Shepard; at the befuddled officers—at his strap-watch. Swiftly he left the dissection-room.

As that last train puffed out of the Hanbridge station, Carter Cole caught a hand-grip, swung onto the steps just before the platform was closed. The wheels were clicking with rapid rhythm over the rails when he settled into a seat opposite the imperturbable Misses Day. Neither spoke, but both promptly produced booklets and freshly sharpened pencils as soon as he said: "June, Jane—either or both—take some notes on a multiple case of claustrophobia."

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# DIME SPORTS MAGAZINE

Out June 19th



# Death on the Double-0

A Blue Barrell Story



He had the gun-barrel in his mouth when the croupier's rake hooked into the trigger-guard.

by William E. Barrett

*Author of the "Needle Mike" Stories.*

*Which just goes to prove that when two men commit another man's suicide for him it's still murder.*

THE roulette-wheel whirred and the little ball raced around to the music of it. Behind the wheel with the green eye-shade pulled low over his eyes, sat Dean Culver. He was the croupier, the dealer, the man who sat in one of the most conspicuous spots in town and who prided himself that in spite of that, he was practically unnoticed.

That is, he had so prided himself until tonight.

Nothing in Culver's expression betrayed the fact that tonight was different from any other. He moved like an automaton as he raked the chips in, distributed them, or whirled the little ball into its race. Hundreds of people saw him thus every evening at the Twin Moons, and there were regulars who played his wheel nightly. Scarcely one of them would have recognized him on the street. He was scenery, a sort of genie of the wheel,



as mechanical as the wheel itself. He preferred it that way. But tonight—

The lantern-jawed man had been watching him steadily ever since copies of the *Star's* bull-dog edition had reached the Twin Moons. Sitting in one of the big easy chairs just clear of the field of play, he made no pretense of interest in any of the various games of chance. He was going through the motions of studying a racing form-sheet but his eyes measured Culver over the top of it. He had occupied the same spot last night but he had been watching Mark Creed then.

His name was Walter Lippen and he was a small-time highway contractor who had worked in, somehow, on a big deal. Though Culver did not know why he was in the Twin Moons, he suspected why he might be interested in Mark Creed. And he definitely didn't like to think of why the man might be interested in himself. Anybody's interest spelled danger for Dean Culver; particularly if that interest picked up on the arrival of the *Morning Star*.

**M**ARK CREED hadn't even noticed the arrival of the newspaper—and he was the one who should have been interested. He was still engrossed in his task of placing dollars in thousand lots upon the wrong numbers of Culver's wheel. He had passed over many of those thousands and his eyes were sharp with panic, with the fear of losing so much, and of his inability to stop plunging. He was a bald-headed, pot-bellied little man with a red face and a gray-white neck. His hands trembled as he shoved in his chips, but he kept shoving them in.

"Hey, let's get a look at the *Barrel!* Maybe we'll be in it."

A dapper man was spreading the *Star* to bring Page Two to the top. He stood right behind Mark Creed and several others joined him at mention of the *Bar-*

*rel.* The *Blue Barrel* with its automatic-pistol mast-head was the *Star's* exclusive feature; a slang column that had done for the world of crime what Winchell had done for Broadway. The chiselers and the double-crossers and the petty cheats feared it and when it leveled on a man, it rarely missed. It was read eagerly from the hamburger palaces to the exclusive clubs by people who liked to get a peek at tomorrow's crime headlines today, and who prided themselves that they could pick the story out of the anonymous *Blue Barrel's* cryptic hints.

The man who was spreading the paper passed right over the screaming front-page headlines—*SEEK GOVERNOR FOR STATE HIGHWAY GRAFT QUIZ*—and ran hastily through the first few items in the *Barrel*. Then, with the confidence of a column-addict who can spot the significant items, he read one aloud.

"The biggest slice of satchel money ever paid in this state is slipping through the lily-whites of the wrong man. The blow-off will be terrific."

"Oh-oh." The man who read the item had been drinking and his voice had carry to it. "That means the governor didn't get the pay-off. Somebody glommed onto it." He struck a mock-dramatic pose and glanced sternly at his two companions. "Which of you guys has been shooting craps with the pee-pul's money?"

"Twenty-seven on the red."

Culver's hand was steady as he paid off two bets and raked in the rest of the chips. He was a smooth, efficient, well-oiled machine that nobody noticed except the lantern-jawed Walt Lippen who was still watching his every movement. Yet less than six feet away from Culver, the *Star's* crack column was being read and discussed. Across the table from him sat the man at which the deadliest slug of tonight's column was aimed.



And Dean Culver was the mysterious unknown, the hated, feared and sought-after *Blue Barrel*.

He seemed to be watching nobody, but Culver hadn't missed a shade of expression on the face of Mark Creed since the item was read. The man had jerked erect with the first sentence, then dropped his head like an ostrich that seeks to conceal its whole body by getting its eyes out of sight. His hands, trembling more violently than ever, pushed in triple the usual bet. The slate color that was natural enough on his neck was spreading over his entire face.

"Nine on the red."

Mark Creed foolishly had had a thousand dollars on 0-0 but he seemed scarcely aware of it as Culver scooped in the chips. He stared for a moment with eyes that were a trifle glazed and then his hand dropped the bulging lapel of his dinner jacket. It came up flashing.

Culver sensed what was coming even before the gleaming gun-barrel caught the light. The smooth, effortless rhythm of his work behind the wheel went into the fencer's thrust with which he sent the rake across the table.

Mark Creed had the gun-barrel in his mouth when the croupier's rake hooked into the trigger-guard.

Dean Culver flinched at the sharpness of the report. It slashed through the tense silence of the play at a dozen tables and boomed its echoes back from the four walls. Mark Creed swayed with his eyes staring whitely. A crystal tear from the big central chandelier fell to the floor and a woman screamed when it hit. Culver flipped the tiny gun from the end of the rake, caught it in his left hand, dropped it into his side pocket. His face was very white.

He was realizing suddenly that in saving the life of a would-be suicide, he had placed everyone else in the room in

jeopardy. The slug that had torn a pendant from the chandelier might as well have torn life from a human heart.

"Play suspended."

He closed the wheel and walked around it. The man who had read the item from the *Blue Barrel* and one of his companions had grabbed the dazed Creed who did not quite realize yet that he was still alive. The floor-manager and his assistant were crossing the room fast and Culver left Mark Creed to them. He saw Larry Dane, his relief man at the wheel, in the doorway and nodded to him.

"Take over for a while, Larry. I'm taking a walk."

Behind him, he was conscious that Walter Lippen had risen from his easy chair. Another man rose from a similar chair near the check-stand. Culver swore under his breath.

Somebody had something on him. The second man was Lippen's partner in the highway business; a bull-necked, heavy-chested lad named Bert Orker.

IT took Culver less than three minutes to shake off the clumsy shadowing of Bert Orker and he didn't have to take a cab to do it. He was thinking rather grimly about the hopeless, pot-bellied little fool who had tried to commit suicide. It wasn't often that the *Blue Barrel* blasted at such inoffensive small game as that but the man had put himself on the spot.

Culver had known for a week that Mark Creed was the stooge into whose account the state-highway graft money had been paid and that the man was gambling with it. But Culver had created his *Blue Barrel* column to ferret out and destroy the human leeches who lived off the sweat of better men without taking risks; the framers and double-crossers and chiselers of the breed that had destroyed his own career, and those of many others as in-



nocent as he had been when he served three years in an Illinois penitentiary.

Mere fools like Mark Creed didn't count, but when he had seen Lippen and Orker watching the man, he had known that the jig was up for Creed and that he might just as well beat the front page to the news.

Now Lippen and Orker were on him, too.

He made sure that he'd lost Orker and slipped into the lobby phone-booth of a quiet hotel. No one, not even the editors of the *Star*, knew the *Blue Barrel's* identity, but many anonymous tips came in to the paper addressed to the column. Some of them were good. There was one tonight.

The voice of Randall, the *Star's* city editor, came crisply over the wire. "Glad you called up, B. B. That tip of yours on the state-highway thing is kicking up dust. Lots of telephone since the rag hit the street. Mostly question-askers. One of them claims he has a tip on more dirt. Call Northern Nine-seven-nine-eight. Ask for Mr. Graystone."

"O. K. Thanks, Randall. I'll let you know if it's level."

Culver hung up and sat staring for a moment at the phone. Northern 9798 was the number of the Twin Moons—but he didn't know any Mr. Graystone.

"Fancy that now," he said quietly. "We'll have a look."

He dialed the number, disguised his voice for the benefit of the girl at the Twin Moons' board and waited while his man was called. He didn't recognize the husky voice that identified itself as "Graystone." He hadn't expected to.

"This is the *Blue Barrel*," Culver said. "Talk fast if you've got anything. I've got a one-minute limit on calls."

He wasn't kidding about that, either. People had planted stooges on the phone with him before while they traced the call

and tried to race him to the hang-up. He expected them to do that and none of them had even come close. Graystone seemed disconcerted.

"All right," he said hesitantly, "but this is serious. I've got dope on the state-highway racket."

"Spill it."

"It's this, see. An item you can run like this. 'What behind-the-scenes figure in the state-highway investigation has abandoned his hot-spot haunts to join the governor in seclusion?'"

Culver raised his eye-brows. Somebody has spent time and thought on that item. They had it in pretty much the tone he used in the column. But he growled into the mouthpiece: "I'll bite, guy. What figure has?"

"Isn't that enough. You don't run any more than that."

"I know more when I don't. Speak up or hang up."

"All right. You're a hard guy. Well, the lad that's pulling out is the guy you ran the item about, Mark Creed. He bought his tickets this afternoon. That gambling-loss stuff was a stall you fell for. He's taking the dough to the governor. . . . If you don't believe me, wait till it's news."

There was a click at the other end of the line. Culver got up and moved swiftly out of the booth. He was a block away and around two corners before he stopped to light a cigarette. "The lug gave me a tip at that," he said grimly.

HE wasn't thinking about the stuff that the man had told him but it was interesting to discover that somebody had a reason for planting such an idea. Mark Creed wasn't joining the governor and hadn't planned on joining them. Culver was willing to bet heavily on that. He didn't believe that Creed knew any more about where the governor had gone than



anyone else did. The state executive was merely lying low till he saw how the cat jumped on the investigation that the rival party had stirred up. He didn't need people like Mark Creed for company and the last thing he'd want at the moment was the money that would tie him up to the bribe charges.

But somebody was going to a lot of trouble planting a disappearance for Mark Creed.

The regular newsboy was selling his papers on the corner and Culver flipped him a half-dollar. "Son," he said, "do you think you could call Northern Nine-seven-nine-eight in five minutes and ask for Mr. Graystone?"

The youngster pocketed the coin with a deft movement. "Sure. What do I do when he answers?"

Culver shrugged. "Just hang up."

He went on to the Twin Moons and killed a moment with the girl who handled telephone calls. Bert Orker had not come back and Culver imagined that the man was still trying to pick up a lost trail. The phone rang while Culver was checking his hat and coat with the girl at the check-stand.

"Mr. Graystone!"

The telephone-girl's voice was raised as she sent the page-boy off. Culver lighted a cigarette. In about twenty seconds, the page-boy was back with the lantern-jawed Walt Lippen in tow. Lippen was one of those men who manage to look slovenly and not quite clean even in evening clothes. There was a yellow stain in one corner of his mouth like the drool-stain of a tobacco-chewer. Culver heard him say "Graystone!" into the phone. He looked a little puzzled and a little expectant when he said it. Then he looked mad. He turned savagely on the telephone girl.

"They hung up," he growled.

She smiled back at him. "I'm sorry, Mr. Graystone."

"Well, don't call me again unless you have somebody on the line."

HE SWUNG his shoulders and went muttering back to the big room; a lean, powerful, rangy man who walked with his head held forward. Culver watched him thoughtfully. For a man who had come up off a truck, Walt Lippen was carrying a lot of nerves tonight. If he had been as smart as he was tough, he'd have figured that second call as a stall and looked around for someone watching him who might be the *Blue Barrel*. It was on little business like that that the tough monkeys lost out.

"Hanlon's office, Mr. Culver, before you go back on the trick." The page-boy was at his elbow and Culver nodded.

"Right."

Dollar Hanlon was the front office and biggest share-holder of the Twin Moons, Culver's boss and a square shooter. He didn't know that Culver was the *Blue Barrel* but he suspected his past and he didn't ask questions when the answers didn't make much difference to him.

Tonight Dollar Hanlon was indulging a mild blow-up of his own. He had the *Morning Star* in his hand and Mark Creed seated in the most comfortable chair in his office. Creed was still a sickly shade of white and there were marks of tears on his face. He was a very sick, paunchy, half-hysterical man and he was no longer young. Dollar Hanlon was no longer young himself, but he was built as solidly as a battleship and he wore his gray hair as he would have worn any other scars that he acquired in the battle with life. He slapped the *Blue Barrel* column with the back of his hand.

"Have you seen this yet, Culver?"

Actually Culver hadn't; he'd merely written it via phone dictation. He shook his head. "I heard some of it read down-



stairs just before our friend here tried to dutch it."

"Umph! That's it. You heard this crack?"

He pointed with one thick forefinger to the leaded-type paragraph that the bystander had read aloud downstairs.

Culver nodded. "So what?"

"So Mr. Creed here is the wrong man that's been spending the dough. This graft dough was paid into his account and he was being paid to play dummy and keep it warm. He's been shooting it across our tables. Culver, I ask you. How in hell could we know?"

"We couldn't." Culver's voice was crisp.

Hanlon banged the desk-top with the paper.

"The public won't stop to figure, Culver. Nobody loses big cash in this place without being checked up. A bank clerk couldn't lose the bank's sugar here. I wouldn't let him. Mr. Creed here was losing money out of his own account. I checked that up, damn it!"

**HANLON** was walking up and down. Huddled miserably in his chair, Mark Creed watched him. Mark Creed had probably been a pretty good man once but something had died in him when he pulled the trigger tonight, even if his body lived on.

"Let me go," he said. "I won't do you any harm. I'll get away from here—"

Dollar Hanlon spread his hands. "You hear the guy, Culver? He's still going to slaughter himself. And just get a mental picture of what the wash-up will do to us. We're the motive."

"Sure." Culver was looking narrowly at Mark Creed.

Dollar Hanlon misinterpreted the look. "It isn't a stall to poker us into dishing the seventy grand back, Culver. Mr.

Creed ain't that kind of a customer. It's level but it's still lousy."

Mark Creed inhaled with a noisy, sucking sound and came to his feet. There was a wild look in his eyes. "A man's life is his own business if anything is," he said. "I don't want any money back. I want the liberty that any citizen is entitled to. I want to get out of here—get far away from here and—"

Dollar Hanlon spread his hands again and looked helplessly at Culver, then grimly at Creed. "It ain't that I care whether you dutch it or not. That's your business, Mr. Creed. Sure it is. But we can't let you do it. It's going to come out that you lost heavy sugar here if you dutch. I just naturally ain't going to see my place spread over page-one newsprint with this dirty highway mess. Not any. By the time that some papers got through, I'd practically be the guy that took the graft; complete with cartoons. Nix!"

Creed's lips were trembling but he was still on his feet and waving his hands. There was a glazed film over his eyes and he was beyond the power of argument. "You can't hold me," he shouted. "You can't keep me from doing what I want to do. I won't live! I won't face it all. I've thrown away my reputation. I've betrayed a trust . . ."

He made a dive for the desk and a swooping grab for Dollar's paper knife. Hanlon beat him to the grab and knocked the knife to the floor with his right hand. With his left, he shoved Creed back on his heels.

"Take him away, Culver," he said. "He's your job. Get him home and sit with him till he comes out of it. Order in a couple of bright blondes or a case of liquor. Anything reasonable. Only kind of keep him alive till he snaps out of it."

Mark Creed was swaying on his feet, staring hopelessly at Hanlon. Like a man with too much liquor, he was numb to



all but a single idea. He was emotionally jagged. He groped behind him suddenly for the chair and sat down.

Culver looked at him thoughtfully. "We'll get along," he said.

He was not thinking so much about the problem of keeping the man from being snatched. There had been a quarter of a million in the highway-graft satchel and the seventy grand that Creed had lost was not a very big hole in a chunk like that. That phony tip to the *Blue Barrel* had been paving the way for a disappearance that Mark Creed had not planned voluntarily. Somebody was laying the groundwork for snatching this poor little sap and bleeding him for the rest of that dough. When Walt Lippen fell for the fake phone call to "Graystone," he'd tipped off the identity of the potential snatchers; but Culver, as Culver, couldn't use information that he possessed only as the *Blue Barrel*. To do so would be to risk exposure. He extended his hand to Mark Creed.

"Mr. Creed," he said, "we're going to have a talk."

LIPPEN and Orker were slow on the draw. Dean Culver had his man out of the Twin Moons and into a cab before either of them knew that he had left Hanlon's office. Mark Creed was suddenly like so much putty. He was passing through the limp, indifferent stage that follows an emotional debauch. He sat in the cab with his head pulled into the collar of his topcoat and his chin on his chest. Culver was satisfied to have him like that. He addressed himself to the driver.

"Just cruise around for a while."

He was trying to find thinking-time. Lippen and Orker were not to be underestimated. They'd been hurried by circumstances tonight and they'd fumbled a bit, but they were hard men. They had to be tough to batter their way up from

the hard-boiled ranks that had graduated them. And they would know where Creed lived.

"I'll have enough to do with this crackpot on my hands . . ."

Culver looked sidewise at Mark Creed. The idea of Creed's place as a spot to spend the night did not sound attractive. There'd be less chance of interference from Lippen and Orker in Culver's own quarters or in a neutral spot like a quiet hotel. But either of those spots would be pretty tough if Creed escaped the Culver vigilance and succeeded in killing himself. Suicides were often pretty resourceful and it could happen. If it did, the police might not accept the fact that it was suicide and Culver would be in a poisonous spot. Hanlon, of course, would back him up; but Dollar Hanlon was hardly a grade-A, certified police witness and a jury wouldn't like his profession.

Culver sighed. "The Burlington Arms!" he said.

He was going to have to chance Creed's apartment; even if he had to stand siege as well as stand watch.

It was a small apartment and one in which the regularly provided hotel service made servants unnecessary. It was on the twelfth floor and there was an entry-hall, a large living-room with only partially filled built-in bookcases, a small bedroom, a breakfast-nook and a green-and-white kitchen. The only luxury touch was provided by the balcony-porch that ran past the two living-room windows and provided width enough for several porch chairs and two potted palms.

Culver didn't like the porch. It provided too neat a diving platform for a man who wanted to end it all. He didn't like the fact, either, that the adjoining balconies were close enough for an agile man to change porches with a minimum of risk. The set-up made it look like a busy night.



"I'm a ruined man. Why don't you leave me?"

Mark Creed had thrown himself down in one of the living-room chairs. His voice was almost a wail.

Culver halted in the middle of the room. "Why spread destruction? You'd just about ruin the Twin Moons if you datched out. I work for it."

"I've ruined everything else." Creed locked his fingers together, his arms between his knees. "I had a very successful bank once, Mr. Culver. I contributed a lot of money to campaign funds for Governor Porter's party. The depression ruined my bank . . ."

His voice caught. "I was pretty desperate but I still had my reputation. I had to offer that for sale when I had nothing else left to sell. They bought it, Governor Porter's party. You seem to know the story. It wasn't strange for me to have large sums in the bank. I'd dealt in finance all my life. The governor didn't want any large sums in his account until he saw how matters stood. He—they—used mine. I got a salary. I wasn't supposed to touch the principal."

He choked up and waved his hands. "I did. I had a good salary, but I betrayed the men who gave it to me. I had a gambling streak. Most bankers have and won't admit it. I couldn't trade in securities. I wasn't used to games. I—"

He left the chair so fast that Culver was taken by surprise. Off-balance, Culver dived for him and stopped a vicious straight left that rocked him. Creed was past him like a shot and headed straight through the bedroom for the bathroom beyond. Culver cursed and pushed himself up from the floor. He hit the bathroom door with his shoulder just as Creed closed it, and landed on the man as he fastened his fingers on the case of an old-fashioned razor.

THE glaze was back on Creed's eyes and he had the strength of a maniac. Culver slapped the razor out of his hand but the little pot-bellied banker found two punches in his system that shook Culver to the base of his spine. Then they were locked in a fierce embrace on the floor and Mark Creed was an awkward package to hold. He twisted his body out of a series of grips and got his fingers on the razor-case once more. Culver's fingers slipped down his arm and fastened hard upon his wrist.

There was a thumping sound in the living-room that Culver heard without having time to register. Fighting the hold on his wrist, Creed was shaking the ugly straight blade from the case. His eyes held a mad glitter and there was drool running from the corner of his mouth. His right hand was free and he hit Culver again and again with it as Culver concentrated on holding the razor-hand down. A foot hit the bedroom floor, then a startled voice broke above the struggling men.

"Hey there! What's this all about?"

Creed seemed unconscious of the interruption and Culver took a chance. He had a flash of Bert Orker's broad face and he gambled that Mark Creed would not be given a chance to use the razor. He released his grip on the man's wrist suddenly and smashed his right fist home to the flabby jaw. If he had missed, he would have had the razor to contend with—but he didn't miss.

He came up twisting as he felt Creed's body go limp and Walter Lippen stepped past the poised Orker. Culver saw the gun in his hand and he caught the flash of its arc; but he was in no position to avoid it. The gun-barrel caught him on the side of the head as he turned with the blow and he felt himself pitching forward.

Lippen's voice had a snarl in it. "You



can always talk to these tough guys better," he said, "after you've softened them up."

He stepped across Culver's body and bent above Mark Creed. The little ex-banker seemed to have forgotten the razor and the strength that was in him a few minutes earlier was spent. He was moaning softly and saying something in a mumbling undertone that did not quite make sense. Culver's head was spinning and his stomach was threatening to revolt on him from sock-shock, but he did not lose his consciousness nor his sense of what was going on. He merely lay where he had fallen and took advantage of his old rôle of being unnoticed.

Lippen was shaking the dazed Mark Creed savagely. "Come out of it!" he said hoarsely. "You're going to take a little trip."

Creed shook himself in revolt against the manhandling. "I won't," he said. "I won't go with anybody."

"Maybe you better tap him, too. We'll take him out like he was drunk." Bert Orker's voice had a rasp to it.

"No, we won't! This cookie isn't the type that goes out drunk. He's going out of this apartment with a packed bag and he's going down the elevator without either one of us showing. And he ain't talking a word to elevator men neither. He's going to get the idea if we have to sit with him all night."

Walter Lippen had savage command in his voice. He had evidently rehearsed all of the eventualities in this play, and he was hard enough to ram through on a single track once he had laid his plan. Bert Orker was just as hard, perhaps, but he had the kind of mind that is easily confused—and this job evidently had him scared. He wanted to slam into it the quickest way and get it over.

"What about the guy you conked?" he said.

"He fits in. This bird, Creed, will be glad to bail out when . . ." Lippen let the sentence dangle in the air while he resumed his shaking of the mumbling banker. Culver felt, grimly, that he could finish that sentence. He had made his deductions about Lippen when he found out that the contractor was the man who had tried to peddle him the phony tip on Mark Creed's leaving town.

Lippen had known, when he talked to Culver on the phone, that Creed had just attempted suicide and that the man was not going to jump town. Lippen had been watching Creed spend money before the *Blue Barrel* cracked the tip. And Lippen's attempt to palm off that story about Creed jumping out to join the governor on the most widely read—and believed—column in town explained the shift of attention to Culver.

LIPPEN had figured that the *Blue Barrel* item would scare Creed—as it did scare him—and he figured that Creed would ask for protection on his trip home. Culver was usually the man assigned to protection jobs. It all added up neatly.

"Creed! You listen to me. You've got one chance of getting out of the mess you're in. But you've got to play ball with us. We won't play rough unless you make us."

The lanky, lantern-jawed Lippen was a shadow outlined monstrously on the floor. Culver could watch his movements in silhouette without raising his head. He was shaking Creed again to emphasize his words. Culver moved one hand under his body, balanced on it and came up suddenly with a twist that put him sitting with his back to the wall. His right hand moved in and out of his armpit as he rolled, and his gun was level when his back touched the wall.

"Hold it, everybody!" he said grimly.



"Listen to me, Creed, if you want to do any listening."

Culver's hand felt light but he could see the three men pretty clearly through the slight haze before his eyes. Orker had his gun in his hand but he had let it drop halfway to his knee and he had had sense enough not to raise it in the face of the draw. Culver gave him a curt nod.

"Drop it!"

Orker's fingers went lax and the gun hit the floor. Lippen had put his own gun away but the expression on his gaunt, heavy-lipped face was primarily that of disgust for Orker. Culver had an idea that Lippen wouldn't have dropped a gun that he had in his hand. Mark Creed was shaking his head stupidly. The banker had died once tonight within his own imagination and his experiences since then had been a series of mental and physical shocks through which he had moved half-insane.

Yet upon such a weak reed must Culver lean. He was not in a position to do anything about Walt Lippen and Bert Orker and they, eventually, would figure that out for themselves. The law was out of the question. It would not only put the Twin Moons on the front pages in a big way, but it would put Culver there where he couldn't afford to be. It would be pretty nearly as bad as if Mark Creed were snatched. Any search for him would bring a noisy back-trail to the Twin Moons with the resultant squawk that gambling-houses bred graft and dishonesty.

Culver drew further upon the deductions that he had made from the phony tip and hurled those deductions at the dazed banker. "Creed," he said, "these two muggs had a contracting business that was just big enough to get onto the fringe of those state-highway contracts, but they were the first to unload when the investigation started. They've been supplying the governor's enemies with

their dope on the contracts for a promise that they'll be let out in the clear."

"Why, you—"

Walt Lippen's eyes were lidded almost shut and there was a snarling twist to his long lips. Culver moved the gun as the man stepped forward.

"One more step, Lippen!"

There was ice in his voice. He was coming slowly to his feet, sliding his shoulder blades up along the wall. He had the gun steady. Orker was in a crouch and his eyes swerved regretfully to the gun on the floor. Mark Creed was passing his hand across his forehead dazedly as though he were striving to comprehend what Culver had been telling him and finding the effort a strain. Culver lashed at him relentlessly. He had only one plan and it depended upon Mark Creed.

"They want to kidnap you, Creed," he said. "They know you've got the governor's account. They'd bleed it out of you, make you sign checks to them. They want to double-cross every other contractor that plays with highways and ruin them in the legislature, and they want to grab the graft that they are so virtuous about, to make their own business big. They're filthy rats, Creed, and—"

A righteously indignant Creed who got that picture could seize this moment, call in the police, confess his own shame and denounce the two men who had pulled down a dozen careers with their greed. It would still be disgrace for Creed but he'd be a hero in disgrace.

But the man was too far gone.

Culver had been concentrating on him and watching Lippen too closely. His guard had been a bit too relaxed as far as Orker was concerned, and he realized it too late. Bert Orker dived in with the word "rats."

CULVER fired and the shot snapped over the diving man's head. Orker was close-coupled and under-slung and he



packed his weight between his shoulders and his chest. Culver felt a ramming impact that was like the slap of a locomotive's front end. He went catapulting back against the wall and as Orker followed his dive with a slugging fist, Culver clubbed twice with the gun-muzzle. He went to the floor with Orker, and Orker rolled desperately away from him to escape the gun-barrel. As he did, he kicked out with his right foot.

Culver felt a numbing sensation that ran along his entire arm as the kick landed on the point of his elbow. The gun leaped from his fingers and Orker scrambled for it.

"Look out, you! Drop it—"

Walt Lippen's voice was so sharp with command that even Orker and Culver hesitated. Mark Creed had come out of

his lethargy once more with that same uncanny speed of the obsessed that he had demonstrated twice before. One leap gave him the gun that Orker had dropped earlier at Culver's command, and he came up with it just as Lippen was leaping to his partner's assistance. There was only one thought in Lippen's mind as that gun came up—but there was an entirely different thought in Creed's.

Lippen didn't know.

He was directly in the muzzle of that gun for a split second and he didn't gamble on the next fraction. He fired from the hip.

**M**ARK CREED vented one strangling cry, pivoted on his toes and pressed the trigger as he spun. Bert Orker took the bullet squarely between the eyes.

# Adventure

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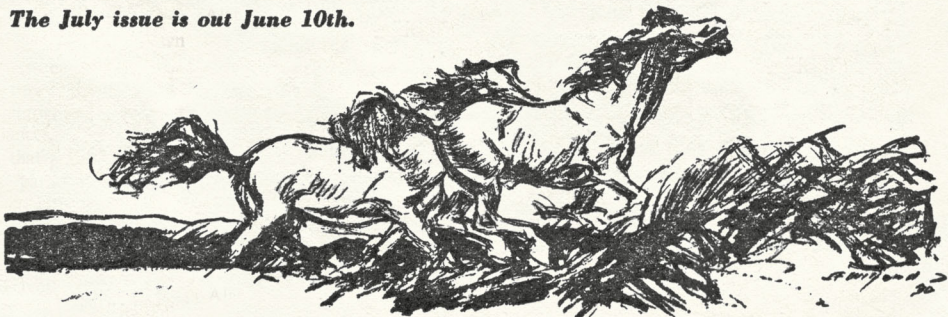
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Culver saw him die and he had the gun that had lain between them in the moment that Orker's soul blinked out. His fingers closed on it but he knew that he would not have time to fire it if Lippen followed through on his turn and pumped another shot his way. With the same swooping motion that gave him the gun, he plunged on into Lippen's legs and took the man to the floor.

Lippen cursed obscenely and missed the one thrust that he had time to make. Culver hit him squarely on the temple with the gun-barrel and wiggled away from him as he went limp.

"That makes us square—and plus," he whispered.

He was sick and dizzy and aching but it was no time to let down. The shots had tenants of the apartment house up and out in the hall in a trice. Someone was banging on the door. It would be only a very few minutes before a cop would be kicking that door down. Culver looked down at the shambles in the room.

Mark Creed was quite dead and his face, for the first time in a wild night, was peaceful and relaxed. Walt Lippen lay on his back with the gun that had shot Creed still clutched in his fist.

There was a poetic justice in that which satisfied something in Culver's soul. When the cops rolled in on that scene, Lippen could tell any story that he liked but he'd never argue past that gun. He was signed, sealed and delivered and Culver could see no scandal for the Twin Moons in a murder that occurred in a

man's own apartment. He moved swiftly toward the living-room. He remembered that the balcony abutted on the balcony of the next apartment and it was easy to figure his play.

The two men would not have slipped in so easily if they had not been smart enough to grab that next-door apartment when they planned their act. Culver could go back the way they had come and mingle out in the hall with the aroused tenants. He took a last look at Lippen.

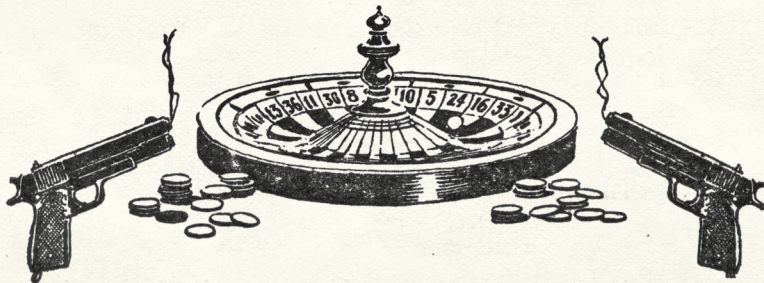
"Fancy you making an appeal to this governor," he said, "when you face the chair. Fancy it. And he has two years yet to run."

He was framing the wording of an item for his column as he scaled the balcony, and he completed it when he was drifting out through the packed mass of tenants that the cops were shooing off the floor.

The inside on the latest slaughter sensation is that the timing was bad. A jury will still insist that when two men commit another man's suicide for him, the name is murder. . . .

He phoned it in and headed for the Twin Moons. It would be easy to fix an air-tight alibi there that would stand against any story that Lippen might tell. He might even slip back into his place behind the wheel and a dozen reputable people would swear that he had been there all evening.

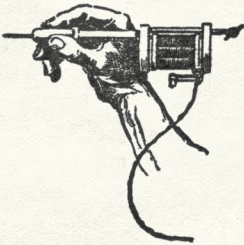
After all, nobody ever noticed the croupier. It was one of the delightful features of the job.





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**OUT  
ON  
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# MURDER MOON

by T. T. Flynn

*Author of "Bride of the Beast," etc.*

## CHAPTER ONE

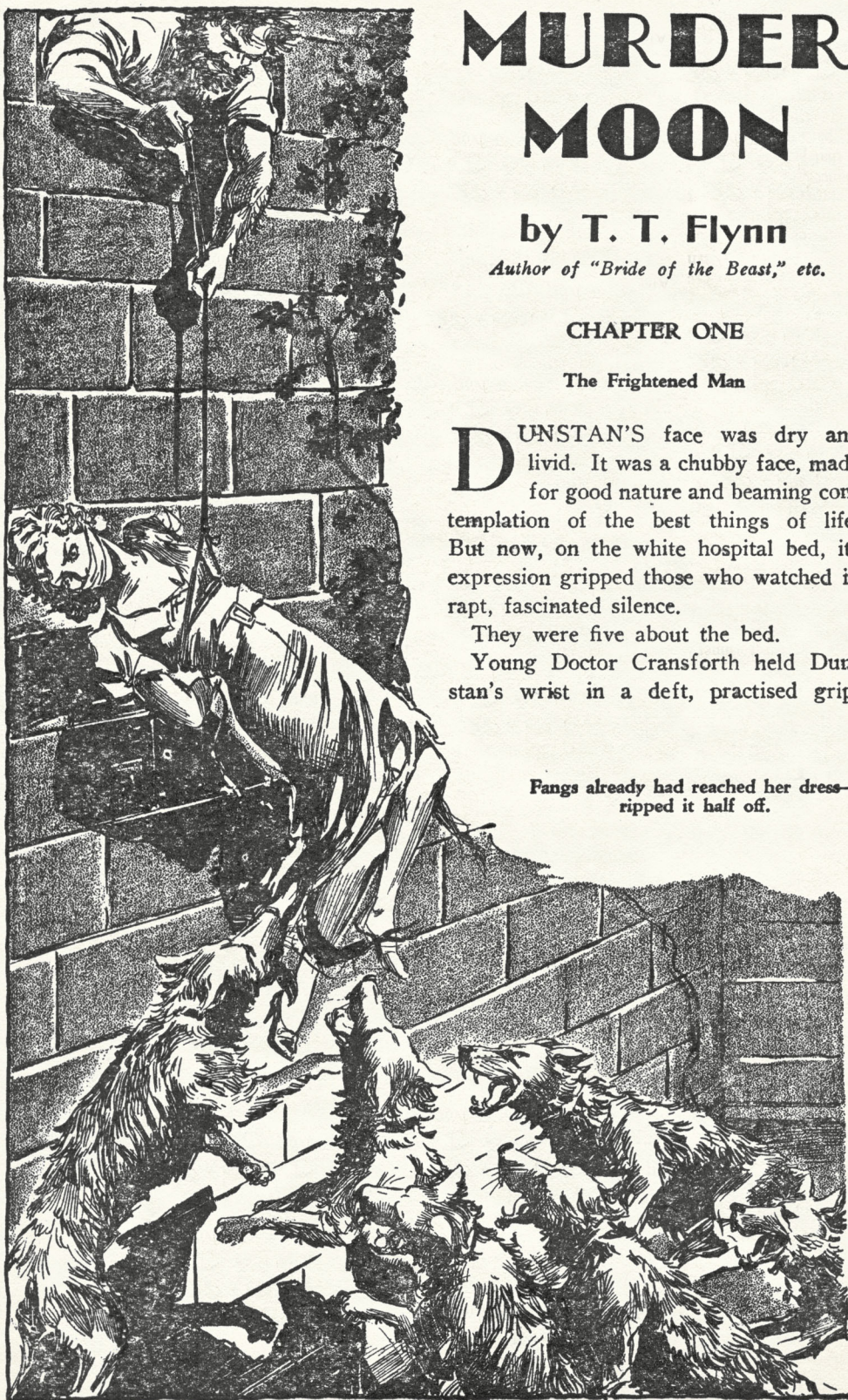
### The Frightened Man

DUNSTAN'S face was dry and livid. It was a chubby face, made for good nature and beaming contemplation of the best things of life. But now, on the white hospital bed, its expression gripped those who watched in rapt, fascinated silence.

They were five about the bed.

Young Doctor Cransforth held Dunstan's wrist in a deft, practised grip,

Fangs already had reached her dress—  
ripped it half off.



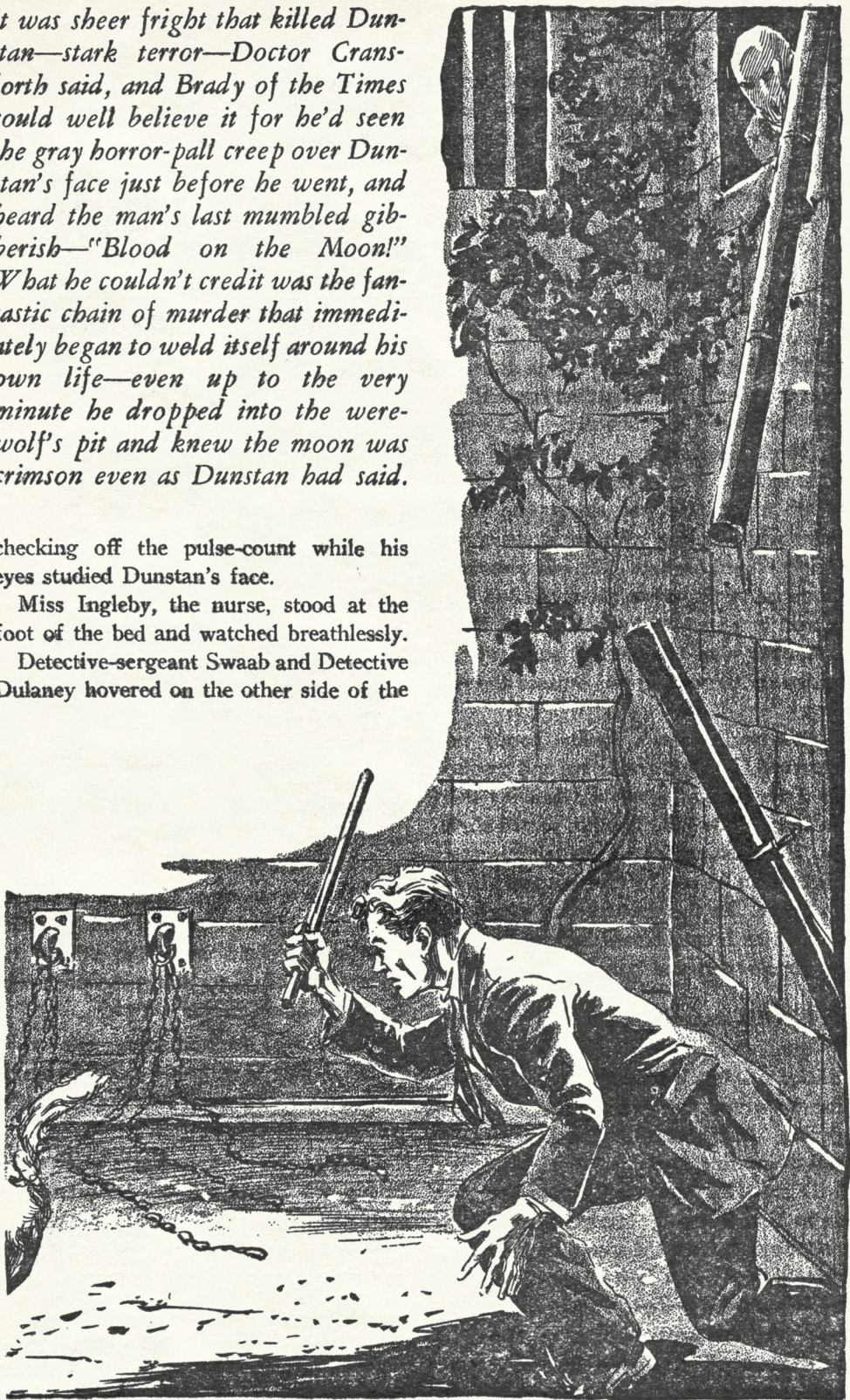


*It was sheer fright that killed Dunstan—stark terror—Doctor Cransforth said, and Brady of the Times could well believe it for he'd seen the gray horror-pall creep over Dunstan's face just before he went, and heard the man's last mumbled gibberish—"Blood on the Moon!" What he couldn't credit was the fantastic chain of murder that immediately began to weld itself around his own life—even up to the very minute he dropped into the werewolf's pit and knew the moon was crimson even as Dunstan had said.*

checking off the pulse-count while his eyes studied Dunstan's face.

Miss Ingleby, the nurse, stood at the foot of the bed and watched breathlessly.

Detective-sergeant Swaab and Detective Dulaney hovered on the other side of the





bed. Swaab was staring without expression on his meaty face, but he was intent. Dulaney bent forward, eyes narrowed; slowly he sucked in his long lower lip and clamped teeth hard on it.

Ross Brady, standing at Cransforth's right hand, looked at their faces, looked at the patient—and found time to eye with appreciation Miss Ingleby's flushed features.

Miss Ingleby caught the look and grew rosier; then, as the patient moved and the bed creaked slightly, her glance jumped there again.

Dunstan's round features were like a death mask. He was staring up at the bare white ceiling with an intensity that fairly bulged his eyes. He was completely unaware of the group about the bed. Like a man in a state of hypnosis, Ross Brady thought, who was seeing some ghastly vision on the ceiling—or beyond the ceiling.

Slowly Dunstan's pudgy hands now clenched. His left arm lifted and crooked, as if warding off a menace hanging there in space above him. His lips parted slightly. His chest, under the plain white cotton nightgown issued by the hospital, began to heave. In the dead silence which had fallen, his breath hissed between his teeth as he cowered and panted with fear.

SWAAB cleared his throat with an uncomfortable, growling sound and his thick shoulders hunched. His glance, lifting for a moment, was puzzled and wondering. And that, Ross Brady reflected, was something new for the big detective.

Doctor Cransforth held on to the wrist as he bent forward. His voice struck low and sharp against the sound of Dunstan's breathing. "What is it?" he asked. The question had no effect. Again the doctor's voice cracked with authority: "Look at me, Dunstan!"

A tremor ran through the tense body

under the sheet. Slowly Dunstan's stare came away from the ceiling. Despite a skepticism that often annoyed even himself, Ross Brady marveled a little as he watched the sheer impact of young Doctor Cransforth's will drawing Dunstan's attention from that invisible menace beyond the ceiling.

But Cransforth had not banished the threat. The livid fear was still on Dunstan's face. His eyes, sliding over Ross Brady to Cransforth's thin, blond features, made Brady's skin prickle with a sudden damp chill. And that was something new, too. Brady knew why his skin prickled—and the knowledge made him shiver inside, against his will.

Dunstan's bulging eyes had the glassy vacantness of a dead man's eyes. If there was a soul behind those eyes, it was lost in some unseen miasma of black shadowy horror. Here was a man, Brady realized in that moment, gripped by a terror he would not have thought any man could possibly experience.

For moments that seemed endless, patient and doctor stared at each other. If Dunstan saw the face bending over the bed, he gave no sign. Cransforth seemed calm—yet Brady noticed the tendons standing up rigid under the skin of his wrist; and the doctor's fingers were pressing hard into Dunstan's flesh.

Cransforth spoke again. His voice crackled with a surge of electric energy. "Describe it, Dunstan! What is it? You've got to tell, Dunstan!"

Cransforth's high forehead grew moist as his will fought the veil between Dunstan and himself. The struggle was no less real, no less terrific because it lacked noise and movement.

Cransforth won.

Dunstan seemed to deflate, relax; he sagged back against the pillows. His reply came in a low, agonized moan. "Keep



them away! Not me! No, not me! Blood on the moon! Oh, God—*blood on the moon . . . .*”

The last moaning word died away. The man's eyes rolled up—up in their sockets—and stayed there. And Dunstan lay inertly under the sheet.

“A hypo of adrenaline, Miss Inglesby!” Cransforth snapped.

The spell was broken as the nurse whisked to a glass-topped table against the wall, snatched up a gleaming hypodermic. She filled it from a bottle, returned to the bed, brushing against Brady's arm without noticing him.

Cloth ripped sharply as Cransforth bared the patient's chest by tearing the nightgown down from the neck. Taking the hypo from the nurse, he plunged the long needle in over the heart, jabbing deep before he depressed the plunger.

“Stethoscope, please.”

Adjusting the earpieces, Cransforth listened for some moments, finally straightened and handed the instrument to the nurse.

“He's gone,” he said to no one in particular. His hand wandered into the pocket of his white jacket, came out with a cigarette and a clip of matches. He lighted the cigarette and inhaled, frowning down at the bed.

SWAAB cleared his throat again. His voice sounded rusty, strained as he said: “He popped off like that, Doc? Talkin' one minute an' gone the next?”

Cransforth nodded, still frowning at the bed. “His pulse had been getting weaker. A hypo sooner might have helped—but I doubt it.”

Dulaney exhaled a gusty breath. “I don't get it. What was the matter? You gave him a clean bill down in the emergency-room. No dope, poison, or anything like that. Sound as a button all over, wasn't he?”

Cransforth turned from the bed. He looked tired, yet oddly alert. “An autopsy may show a heart or brain condition. I'm not prepared to say. At the moment I think I'm safe in saying he died from natural causes.”

Ross Brady had lighted a cigarette also. He was a slender young man wearing a wrinkled suit that looked as if he might have slept in it at some time during the day. But he wore the suit with such flair and swagger that one hardly thought to notice the wrinkles. His thin face was humorous and shrewd. His manner was restless—everything in sight seemed to claim his attention—and yet his movements had the smooth, effortless ease of water sliding over glass.

Now Brady looked at the lengthening tip of gray ash on his cigarette, seemed to study it for a moment. But from under black brows his eyes were on Doctor Cransforth's lanky, blond figure, brooding by the bed.

Casually, Brady asked a question, as if the idea had occurred to him in passing. “Isn't there a chance he died from an unnatural cause?”

Cransforth looked at him quickly—hesitated while he weighed the question—then, surprisingly, nodded. “Quite a chance,” Cransforth agreed. “My own private opinion, which has nothing to do with the record, is that he died from fear. Sheer, unnatural fear, gentlemen; and if you can make anything of that, go ahead. I'm damn curious myself.”

“Blood on the moon!” Swaab said that explosively. He looked at Dulaney, then at the others. “Does that make sense?” he challenged. “I ask you—does it?”

Brady chuckled. “I've heard the moon is made of green cheese, Swaab. If someone wants to add a little blood, why get excited?”

Swaab seemed to see him for the first



time. "Who let you in?" he questioned sourly.

"I walked in."

"Walk out then."

"Why start an argument?" Brady retorted amiably.

Swaab jabbed a blunt forefinger at him and addressed Cransforth accusingly. "This guy is a newspaper man! He don't belong in here!"

"I thought he came in with you gentlemen," Cransforth said, lifting his eyebrows. "But I see no reason for putting him out now. Do you have any questions? I've an appointment I must keep."

"Questions?" said Swaab in irritation. "We're lousy with questions, Doc. This thing is funny."

"Are we supposed to laugh?" Brady murmured.

SWAAB flared at him: "Tie that long lip! What I mean, Doc, this don't make sense. Here's a guy whose billfold says his name is Arthur Dunstan, from New York. No other identification on him. No local address. No nothing Yet he's found hiding under a bush in Riverside Park, moaning to himself; and when the park cop touches his shoulder, he squeals and passes out right there Not a peep out of him after that, until his eyes open here in bed. Then he gives us 'blood on the moon,' and dies under our noses. An' you say he was frightened to death."

"My own opinion, merely," Cransforth corrected.

"It's good enough for me. I seen how he looked. But Dulaney an' me were ordered to look into this—an' what the hell have we got to look into? It's screwy!" Swaab finished almost plaintively.

"A bird in the hand beats birdies in the bushes," Ross Brady murmured to himself.

"What's that?" Swaab asked balefully.

"You were speaking about bushes, weren't you?"

"Keep outta this! You're screwy too!"

"Who wouldn't be, with blood on the green cheese—sorry—on the moon, and a man hiding under a park bush. I was tipped off there was a story here," Brady said accusingly. "And I find a riddle. How good are you at riddles, Swaab?"

Swaab growled impolitely under his breath and looked at Cransforth. The blond young doctor shrugged. "I can't tell you any more than you know," he said. "The man's a stranger. He's dead. That seems to be the story."

Miss Ingleby flashed a look at him. Cransforth caught it and the barest shadow of a frown flitted over his face. She looked away, noticed Brady watching her speculatively, and looked guilty before she could help it. Brady was grinning faintly as he lifted the cigarette to his lips.

Swaab rubbed a palm over his chin and spoke with exasperation. "Frightened to death, huh? An' blood on the green—damn you, Brady!—on the moon! That's a hell of a thing—excuse me, Nurse—for a man to make anything out of!"

Cransforth plainly had no further interest in the matter. "I'm not a detective," he disclaimed. "Doubtless you'll get the answer and find it very simple." He pushed up the sleeve of his white coat, glanced at a wrist-watch. "If that's all, I'll get along."

Swaab looked at his partner, got no encouragement, agreed heavily: "O. K. We'll see what we can dig up."

From the chair where he had tossed it, Brady picked up an old green hat which had weathered and faded to an indeterminate, bilious hue. "I'll write it up with all the trimmings," he informed them cheerfully. "Don't have nightmares about the moon tonight, Swaab."

"Bah!"



Doctor Cransforth was moving toward the door. He stopped with an abruptness which suggested perturbation. "Is it necessary to publish everything you heard in this room?" he questioned, a shade more sharply than he had been speaking.

"Why not?"

Cransforth's hesitation was barely noticeable. "You might hamper the investigation these officers are going to make."

"That's right," Swaab promptly agreed. "Listen, Brady—you crashed in here and got by with it. But lay off printing anything about this blood-on-the-moon business until we get a chance to look into it. You might tip somebody off we're on the right track."

"Are you?"

"Well, I've got an idea."

Brady's grin left no doubt about his opinion of that. "I'll make it cheese," he promised, starting for the door also. "That'll be closer to you, Swaab, won't it? I'll bet some day I open two slices of rye and find you inside. Good luck anyway."

## CHAPTER TWO

### Doctor Cransforth Explains

**B**RADY'S wrist-watch showed a little after eleven when he walked out of the hospital. He stopped on the sidewalk, studied the sky. A cold-white full moon hung overhead. Automobiles were passing. Houses across the street showed lighted windows. The night was pleasantly cool and peaceful.

Looking at the silver moon-disk, one might smile at anything so preposterous as the dying stranger's last words.

But, thinking back to that scene—back to Dunstan's perspiring, bulging-eyed terror—back to Dunstan's moaning words—one could believe.

For an instant Brady relived those moments in the hospital room—and once

more a chill crawled up his back. He had wisecracked a little with Swaab directly after. But that had been reaction from the strain; anything to lighten the cold, clammy sense of horror which had oozed into the room and affected them all.

It had been so unexpected, so vivid, so real. Brady had stopped at the hospital with no idea there would be much worth printing about the man who had been found in Riverside Park. He had walked into the room unsuspecting—and found tense, gruesome drama.

Now what?

Swaab was always fair game for a bit of airy baiting. But Swaab had a canny head in spite of his looks. Here was a story that might be worth going after.

There had been something queer, about young Doctor Cransforth and that look which had passed between him and the nurse. There had been no reason for that look. It had suggested some secret shared by the two. But what secret? Cransforth had been speaking to Swaab at the moment; he had just said: "I can't tell you any more than you know. The man's a stranger. He's dead. That seems to be the story." And the nurse had flashed him that look.

You weren't a newspaperman long before you learned to look behind the little things for something bigger. What was behind Miss Ingleby's look, behind Cransforth's statement? And, for that matter, what was behind Cransforth's quick suggestion that Dunstan's dying words not be published?

Brady rubbed an ear, cocked his eye at the moon again. He got into his small coupé at the curb, lighted a cigarette and made himself comfortable.

Wellton Hospital sat back from the street, behind a generous sweep of green lawn. A half-circle of paved driveway spread out from the front entrance to the street. The coupé was parked beside half



a dozen other machines which stood between it and the street. It was easy, therefore, to watch the hospital entrance.

A man and a woman came out, passed in front of the coupé talking in low tones, and drove away in one of the cars. A side driveway led around to the back of the hospital, but Brady could see that also as he waited. He was on his second cigarette when the hospital doors opened and the lanky figure of Doctor Cransforth was visible for a moment against the light.

CRANSFORTH hurried down the steps, passed the coupé, striding fast, and got into the automobile standing nearest the street. It was a big sedan. Cransforth backed it out with a rush, swung into the street gathering speed. He seemed to be in a hurry.

Whistling softly between his teeth, Brady followed, leaving his headlights dark until he reached the next corner.

He had to drive fast to keep Cransforth in sight. The doctor led him downtown, to the business section, and parked on Oak Street, where most of the theaters were located.

Brady swore aloud when he saw that the next open parking-space was some distance ahead. This seemed to be where he was going to lose Cransforth. He parked snug against the curb, put out his lights and started to open the door, when Cransforth strode past, walking fast, paying no attention to anything around him. It was a break. After that it was easy.

Cransforth turned the corner, walked to the middle of the block and entered the Monmouth Hotel. Brady got into the lobby just in time to catch sight of his man entering an elevator. From across the lobby, the doctor appeared to be the only passenger. Brady watched the hand of the elevator dial. It stopped at 6 . . . started back again. Yes, Cransforth had

been the only passenger, and he had gotten off at the sixth floor.

Brady whistled softly between his teeth for a moment, and walked over to the desk. "Is Doctor Cransforth registered here?" he asked.

The clerk consulted his room-list, shook his head. "Doctor Cransforth isn't with us."

"How about Dunstan? Arthur Dunstan?"

"We have a Mr. Dunstan—from New York."

"What room?"

The clerk consulted his list again. "Six Fourteen," he said, and looked at the key rack. "Mr. Dunstan seems to be out right now."

"Thanks."

Bell-hops, baggage, two men to register, claimed the clerk's attention. Brady crossed to the cigar-stand, bought a package of cigarettes, and walked to the elevators.

He went up with two couples, was the first out, and a few moments later stood before the door of Room 614. The transom was closed and light glinted through the keyhole. Brady tried the doorknob. The door was locked.

He knocked.

Nothing happened—but the startled silence in that room could almost be sensed. Grinning slightly, Brady knocked again. A gruff voice spoke beyond the door.

"What is it?"

"Open up, Doc. It's Brady."

After a perceptible hesitation the night bolt clicked back. Cransforth opened the door, closed it quickly when Brady entered.

The doctor's face was red. He was embarrassed, angry and uncertain. He took refuge in words, heated and challenging. "What the devil are you doing here?"

Brady allowed himself a chuckle. He enjoyed moments like this. Cransforth's



dignity was knocked askew and he looked most unprofessional.

"Imagine my surprise, Doctor. Do you usually dash for the dead man's luggage?"

Cransforth swallowed. For all his big, blond lankiness, he was still young—about Brady's own age. In the hospital room he had moved with a deftness, master of himself and any situation that arose. But his profession had not fitted him to cope with a denouement like this. He continued to struggle between anger and embarrassment while Brady eyed him with amusement.

"Damn you!" he finally blurted, "are you insinuating I make a practise of robbing—the—the dead?"

Brady's restless glance had been roving around the room. He nodded at a brown leather kit-bag standing open on the luggage-rack. Several shirts had been taken from it and laid on the dresser beside the rack.

"I suppose," Brady said dryly, "you wanted to see what size shirts he wore?"

**C**RANSFORTH'S face was fiery red by now. He clenched a fist. It was, Brady noted, a large and capable-looking fist. And Cransforth's flare of anger was ominous. "Take that sneer off your face before I knock it off!" Cransforth warned hotly.

Obediently Brady stopped smiling. The fellow was badly rattled, capable of some foolish move if he was goaded much more.

"You'd better explain this, Doctor."

"I've nothing to explain!" Cransforth retorted stiffly.

"Sure of that? I come here and find you in Dunstan's room, rifling his luggage. That'll take plenty of explaining."

"You knew I was in here."

"Now we're getting somewhere. Sure I did—I followed you. What's the idea of rushing here to Dunstan's room? You

knew while you were talking to us in the hospital that you were coming here as soon as you could get away."

That was a chance shot. It struck home. Cransforth hesitated, swallowed again, moistened his lips. "Suppose I did? You had no right to follow me."

"I see you never worked on a newspaper," Brady chuckled. "Listen, Doctor, the minute I knew you were up to something, I was a burr on your tail. What's the answer?"

Cransforth lighted a cigarette. The tobacco seemed to steady him. "How did you know I was—er—up to something?" he asked, frowning as his mind cast back to the hospital room in an effort to find out what he had done to give himself away.

Brady let him wonder. "That's my job," he said. "But I spotted you right, it seems. If it'll make you feel any better, I know you aren't after Dunstan's shirt or a loose twenty-dollar bill. But just what are you after?"

Cransforth looked relieved. His anger faded, but he was still not inclined to complete frankness. "I was looking for information. That's all I care to say."

"Looking for blood on the moon, by any chance?"

"What do you mean?" The question had startled Cransforth.

Brady had walked over to the kit-bag while they were talking. He looked in it now, eyed a briefcase lying beside the shirts. The case had been opened. Some papers had been taken out and thrust back so hurriedly they were not all the way in.

As he removed the papers and started to leaf through them, Brady said: "I don't think you knew anything about Dunstan before he was brought to the hospital. But after he got there you learned something. You're following it up now. So am I. . . . Right?"

Confident, Brady grinned shrewdly as



he noted the indecision on the other's face. He gave his attention to the papers again while he waited for a reply. The top sheets seemed to be specifications for street-paving, with half a dozen pages of figures under them. There were several business letters addressed to Arthur Dunstan, Vice-president Dunstan Brothers, Inc., New York.

Cransforth spoke—unwillingly. "Very well; you're right. Dunstan's death brought me here. I had access to his clothes before the detectives did. His room-key from this hotel was in a coat-pocket. Since he had no information other than his name on his person, I came here to see what I could find."

"Just curious, eh?"

"In a way. It fits in with certain other facts which I think are significant."

"For instance?"

Cransforth hesitated. "I'd like to have some assurance my name won't be dragged through the headlines. I can't afford that."

"You picked a sweet way to keep out of the headlines—breaking into a dead man's room. . . . Never mind about getting sore again, Doctor. You're in the soup and you might as well like it. Let's hear your story."

CRANSFORTH came to the dresser, taking an envelope from his inside coat pocket. He removed several newspaper clippings and spread them out, arranging them so they were in sequence.

"These are from papers running back for the last month," he explained curtly. "This is the first one."

Brady read it.

Police have been requested by the family of Alderman Hermann Lausch to conduct a search for Alderman Lausch, who is believed to have suffered an attack of amnesia. Lausch was last seen by a friend two days ago on a B. Y. & P. train, on which he was

returning from a business trip. He did not appear at home, however, and nothing has been heard from him since, the family reported to police today.

Picking up the next clipping, Brady commented: "They're still looking for Lausch. He had an attack of amnesia about twelve years ago and they're pretty sure that's what's happened this time."

"Possibly," Cransforth said. He made the one word sound ominous.

Police cars converged last night on a block in the Highland Drive section in answer to half a dozen emergency calls which poured into headquarters from alarmed residents. The disturbance was at the home of the Misses Agatha and Jobyna Morrison, who were in hysterics when the police arrived. Their screams had aroused the neighborhood. The sisters stated that a monstrous animal of some kind had entered their bedroom. Search by the police disclosed no signs of an intruder about the premises. The windows of the second-story bedroom, in which the sisters had been asleep, were screened and the bedroom door had been locked. The Misses Morrison gave police a description of a beast-like figure, larger than a man, which both claimed to have seen plainly in the moonlight shining through the bedroom windows. It vanished, they alleged, when they screamed. A supporting circumstance was discovered when a dog belonging to the household was discovered in a state of coma inside its kennel in the back yard. The dog recovered shortly and seemed terrified. City Sealer Samuel Wilkinson, who occupies the adjoining residence, reported he heard a dog howling shortly before the screams of the Misses Morrison reached him. Chief of Police Daggert promised this morning that a watch would be kept in the Highland Drive section in an effort to solve the mystery.

"I remember that too," Brady said, picking up a third clipping. "The cops said privately it was two old maids who shouldn't have eaten Welsh rarebit before they went to bed. Nothing ever came of it."

"I suppose their dog ate Welsh rare-



bit, too," Cransforth snapped impatiently. "I drove out there and looked around. City Sealer Wilkinson, who lives next door, has a house almost exactly like the Morrison home."

"So what?"

"Read the others," Cransforth requested.

The next one was short.

The body of a man found hanging by his belt from a tree limb on the river bank just south of Long Bridge, this morning, was identified as Leroy Hollister, a bookkeeper in the City Hall. A coroner's jury convened by Coroner Lathrop returned a verdict of suicide.

The fourth clipping was still shorter.

Serious discrepancies were reported today in the books of Leroy Hollister who hanged himself five days ago on the river bank south of Long Bridge.

Brady was frowning, whistling tunelessly between his teeth as he picked up the fifth clipping.

Guests who gathered yesterday afternoon for the nuptials of Miss Barbara Roberts and Assistant Corporation Counsel James Schaeffer, were disappointed at the last moment when the mother of Miss Roberts announced the wedding was postponed. Mr. Schaeffer refused to make a statement.

And the sixth clipping—

Assistant Corporation Counsel James Schaeffer left last night for the West on an extended vacation trip.

The seventh one also was short.

Wendell Timberman, president of the City Council, received a minor flesh wound in the leg last night when a revolver exploded accidentally in his coat-pocket. The wound was treated at Wellton Hospital.

The eighth clipping was the last one.

Residents to the north of Riverside Park have registered complaints with the police of dogs howling in the night when the moon is full. The nuisance has been continuing

for at least six months, it is claimed, and relief is requested. A pack of dogs which have run wild for several years in the open country beyond Riverside Park are thought to be responsible. Complaints have been made that tame dogs, cats, and other live stock have been slain by the wild dogs. Poundmaster Simms states that all unlicensed dogs in that area will be brought to the pound and destroyed. Dogs, and especially dogs which may have gone wild, Poundmaster Simms stated to a reporter of the *Times*, are apt to howl at the full moon.

SLOWLY Brady put that last clipping down on top of the others. A dead silence gripped the hotel room. He turned his head. Cransforth was staring at him intently.

"Wild dogs—the full moon—blood on the moon. Which one of us is crazy, Cransforth?"

"Is that the way it strikes you, Brady?"

Brady indicated the clippings. "That's the damndest collection of incidents I ever saw gathered together. An alderman apparently has an attack of amnesia—two old maids go into hysterics over a monster in their locked bedroom—a man hangs himself on the river bank, and his books turn out to be crooked—a young woman runs out on her wedding at the last moment—a fat politician shoots himself in the leg—and wild dogs howl when the moon is full. What's the connection? What sense does it make?"

Cransforth's eyes were blazing feverishly. "What sense did the death of that fellow Dunstan make tonight?"

"I'll be damned if I know," Brady confessed. "He was a business man evidently in town on a business trip. And—and something happened to him."

"What business brought him here?"

"Street paving, it seems. City business." Brady whistled softly. "Every one of those clippings, at some point, touches a member of the city administration."

"Exactly."



"What do you make of it? Why did you collect those clippings?"

Brady moved back instinctively as Cransforth jabbed a finger hard against his chest. The young doctor was growing excited.

"I remembered them after I had read them. They began to form a logical sequence. I got the back issues of the papers and clipped them. There's a mystery there—a horrible mystery, I think—that has got to be explained. I was at the hospital when Timberman's leg was dressed. The man was completely unnerved. He'd been under a strain before the gun went off in his pocket. He gave some lame excuse as a reason for carrying the gun. It was obvious to all of us who talked with him, that he was terribly afraid of something and had been carrying a gun for protection. But he wouldn't admit it."

Brady flipped through the letters, copied something in a small notebook.

"You win, Doctor. I'm hooked. I think we're both screwy—but if there's any kind of a hook-up between all this, it'll make a hell of a story. There's nothing else here in the room for us. Let's get out of here. I want to telephone my city editor and ask if he'll stand the charge on a long-distance call to New York."

"I'll pay the cost if you think it will do any good."

"You're a sport, Doc. I'll call from downstairs."

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Wolf-Song

WITH a handful of silver money he had gotten at the cashier's window, Brady entered one of the lobby telephone booths. Some minutes later he emerged, wiping perspiration from a sober face.

"God, I hated to do that," he said with

a deep breath. "I talked to Dunstan's wife. She sensed something was wrong. I let her have the news as easy as I could—and she screamed and fainted. I heard other people in the room. They'll take care of her."

"Did you learn anything from her?"

"Dunstan came here to confer with Buck Riordan, who put the mayor where he is and holds the city machine in the hollow of his hand, as everybody knows. I got that out of her before I broke the bad news."

"Boss Riordan?" Cransforth said. "I wonder what he'll have to say?"

"Let's go see. There's a lot of the evening left yet." Brady sidestepped quickly so that Cransforth's tall, lanky frame screened him. "Don't turn around, Doctor. Swaab and Dulaney just went to the desk. Swaab's a bloodhound when he gets on a trail."

The telephone in the booth behind them rang sharply.

Cransforth guessed the obvious answer. "New York is calling back for you. They want to know more."

"Let's get out of here while we've got a chance. This way—to the side entrance."

The telephone was ringing again, and Swaab and Dulaney were heading for the elevators with a bell-hop as Brady led his companion behind a pillar, and around a corner into the corridor which led to the side entrance.

"Phew—that was close!" Brady exclaimed with relief as they gained the sidewalk. "If Swaab had spotted us in there, he'd have had us cold—and no telling what hell he'd have raised. I know where Riordan lives. Going with me?"

"Certainly."

"Leave your car where it is then and come in mine."

As Brady drove they talked some of Buck Riordan, political boss.

Riordan was a successful business man



—coal, lumber, construction; but politics was his main interest. Deny it though he always did, big Buck Riordan was a political boss, canny, shrewd, successful. The Riordan machine was a steam-roller at the polls, the marvel and envy of other politicians in a dozen adjoining states.

"Riordan always wins," Brady said shrewdly, "because he keeps his head down and lets others take the brickbats. He gives the boys plenty of rope so long as they vote right. Everybody's happy—and Buck holds the strings."

"And in return the people are bled by a greedy political ring," Cransforth said with some bitterness.

"It could be worse. Buck Riordan isn't a bad fellow when you know him."

"And if you don't know him? If you cross him?"

"Not many people cross Buck Riordan any more."

Cransforth was silent a moment. "It takes a strong man to stay on top. I wonder—" His voice was strange.

"You wonder what?" Brady said.

"I wonder just how strong Riordan is?"

They were on Hempstead Avenue, which was lined with wealthy homes of brick and stone, built close to the sidewalks and close together. Brady stopped before a three-story house of weathered white stone. The lower windows were barred. A gate of ornamental steel grillwork closed the entry to the front door.

"At least," said Brady dryly as they went to the gate, "Riordan isn't taking any chances."

The house windows were lighted and an overhead light glowed just beyond the gate. Brady located a bell-button. His ring was answered with unusual promptness, as if it might have been expected.

A WISP of a young woman opened the front door. She was no servant, Brady saw. She came out eagerly, was

unable to hide her disappointment when she saw them.

"What do you want?" she asked, in a manner that suggested she didn't care what they wanted, if they'd only leave at once.

"We've some important business with Mr. Riordan."

"He isn't here."

Her small oval face was pale, so that her lips and the rouge on her cheeks looked abnormally bright, as if she were feverish.

"Where can we find Riordan?" he asked her.

"Who are you?"

Brady told her the truth, since newspapermen were no strangers in the life of Buck Riordan. "I'm Brady, of the *Times*. This is Doctor Cransforth, of Wellton Hospital."

The overhead light revealed clearly her sudden fear. She had to swallow before she could speak; and one small hand with tinted nails went out to a steel gate bar for support.

"What—is it?" she asked. Her lips were stiff; her voice low, strained.

"Expecting trouble?" Brady demanded quickly.

With a sudden fierce entreaty she burst out: "If you've bad news, let me have it! I'm Anne Riordan. Don't dig at me like—like a ghou! Oh, how I hate you newspapermen sometimes! I've had about all I can s-stand this . . ."

Her voice trailed off into a whimper as her knees buckled. She went down in a kneeling heap against the grillwork before Brady could reach through and catch her.

"Damn!" he blurted, trying the gate. "Why'd she do that?"

The gate was unlocked and Cransforth was kneeling beside her a moment later. "It's only a faint," he said briefly. "We'd better get her inside."

Brady called through the open door,



but no one answered him. "I saw someone in there a minute ago," he said with irritation, and stepped through the doorway, called again, with no better result. He tried a third time, and when no reply was forthcoming swore under his breath and turned into a lighted drawing-room on the left.

Cransforth, cool and competent, followed with Anne Riordan's limp figure in his arms. He put her on a divan, looked about, said with satisfaction: "Ice-water. Good."

A tray held gin, soda, limes, a pitcher of ice-water and several glasses. Cransforth fished several small lumps of ice out of the pitcher and went to work.

Brady returned to the doorway and raised his voice to a shout; when he got no reply he turned back disgustedly into the drawing-room. "Damnedest thing I ever ran up against!" he snorted. "I saw someone listening back there in the hall, and now I can't get an answer."

"Man or woman?" Cransforth questioned without turning his head.

"The light was dim. I couldn't tell."

Brady inspected the tray. One of the glasses had been used for gin drinks. Another for water. The third had not been used. Apparently Anne Riordan had been drinking alone.

An ashtray on the same table was heaped with cigarette ends. Ashes had been dropped all over the rug. They lay most thickly beside a chair at the telephone. Evidently she had moved restlessly about the room, been often at the telephone.

"It hit her pretty hard," Cransforth said, frowning over his shoulder. "Better see if anyone's in the house. Whoever it was might have thought we'd harmed her and run for help. That might mean some nasty publicity. Sure you saw someone?"

Brady wasn't sure by now. "I'll look

around," he said. He left Cransforth working over the girl, and went back into the hall.

THE rear hall door was not quite closed. Opening it, he found a dark, silent passage. There he became conscious of a faint, peculiar odor which reminded him vaguely of a dog-kennel or—the wolf den at the zoo. Imagination, of course, unless Riordan kept a dog, which didn't seem likely from the silence.

If there was a light switch, Brady couldn't locate it. He advanced into the passage where the dim hall-light struck only feebly. Suddenly he realized his hands were clammy, his heart pounding, muscles tense. He was straining hard to hear any sound. No valid reason for it, but he had to admit to himself he was on edge, gripped by a childish fear of the dark and what might be lurking ahead.

That canine—no, that wolf-like—odor must be responsible. Coupled, of course with the apparition he thought he'd seen.

The house was damnably quiet save for the soft creaking of his shoes. . . . Then something else scraped softly in the darkness ahead. Brady stopped short. The sound was not repeated. Probably it had been some part of the house settling, contracting in the night coolness. He went on—and the strange odor seemed to increase.

Brady knew he wasn't a coward. He'd been in a dozen spots where danger was real and apparent and never felt like this. But now every nerve protested against advancing into the soundless dark.

His right hand, lightly touching the wall, pushed into the black gap of a yawning doorway. He felt inside for a light-switch. That queer odor was even stronger here. Brady stiffened as the blackness before him seemed to stir. . . . A catapulting body drove him back and his head struck the sharp edge of the door-frame.



Stunned, reeling, weak, Brady yelled as he went down under the savage, clawing attack. An animal reek filled his nostrils. Teeth closed on the arm he threw up. Heavy nails raked across his cheek.

Revulsion replaced the fear. This thing on him was straight out of a nightmare. A panting mouth pushed close to his face. Brady thought sickeningly—"It's after my throat!"

His fingers plunged into long, matted hair; weak, dizzy though he was, he yanked the head to one side. From a distance—far, far away—he heard Cransforth shout: "What is it, Brady? What are you doing?"

And the thing gibbered and whined as its hairy head jerked back from Brady's weak grip. Big hands seized his head, pulled it up, slammed it down against the hard floor in a burst of savage fury which Cransforth's call seemed to have provoked. This creature had amazing strength. Brady's head was jerked up again, slammed down—and he slid off into a painless void in which he dreamed he heard the distant, eery howl of a wolf.

**S**TRANGE hands touching his face was the next thing Brady knew. He struck them away and sat up fighting empty space. Bright light glared in his eyes and Cransforth's reassuring voice met him. "All right now, old man. I was only trying to bring you to."

The light from a floor-lamp had been focused on his face. He was on the drawing-room divan and Cransforth, pale and still excited, held a bottle and a wad of damp cotton. Anne Riordan was there, looking like a small ghost.

Brady swung his feet to the floor, winced as his head throbbed, and memory rolled back. "What happened?" he asked huskily.

"Don't you know?"

"Somebody jumped me." Brady shivered slightly at the memory. That rank, animal odor still seemed to fill his nostrils.

"You must have bumped into a prowler," Cransforth said. "He ran before I got to you. I stumbled over you in the dark and stayed to see what I could do for you. The fellow was already going out the back of the house. You were unconscious and bleeding from the scratches on your face. He must have handled you rather roughly."

"Roughly?" Brady laughed shortly. "I suppose you could call it that. Did you see what he looked like?"

"No. Did you?"

Brady shook his head, looked at Anne Riordan.

"Miss Riordan had just recovered when I carried you in here," Cransforth explained. "She was sporting enough to listen to my explanations and get me this antiseptic and some cotton."

"How long ago was it?"

"Only a few minutes. You came out of it quicker than I thought you would."

Gingerly Brady felt the back of his head. The scalp had been cut by the sharp edge of the door; the whole back of his head was sore, throbbing. But strength had returned and he stood up easily enough.

Anne Riordan said: "Doctor Cransforth tells me you saw someone at the back of the hall while we were talking. I—I didn't know anyone was in the house. I'm frightened even now when I think the man was in here with me and I didn't know. There's something strange about it all. Just as I opened my eyes—he couldn't have been out of the house more than a minute or so—I heard a dog out back give the most ghastly howl."

"A dog?"

"Why—I think so."



Cransforth nodded. His boyish face was grave. "I heard it."

"A wild dog, possibly?" said Brady.

Their eyes locked. Cransforth nodded slowly. He was pale. Brady knew they were both thinking of Cransforth's newspaper clipping about the wild dogs in the open country north of Riverside Park; the wild dogs which howled under the full moon and savagely slew tame animals. Brady felt again those teeth clamp down on his arm. Only his coat sleeve had saved the flesh. The spots were sore now. And the teeth had been seeking his throat when Cransforth shouted.

"Have you got a gun in the house?" Brady asked.

"I got one out at once." Anne gestured toward the tray. An automatic lay there on the table.

"I don't suppose he'll be back," Cransforth said slowly.

**B**RADY poured himself some gin and drank it; its stinging warmth helped. He let Cransforth's remark pass while he grappled with a welter of thoughts. The hairy thing which had attacked him had been no wild dog but a man. But what kind of man—with a matted beard, long sharp nails and a mouth that gibbered and snapped?

The creature had left Anne Riordan alone. Why, then, had he waited and attacked Brady, while a second man was close? And why that unclean, wolf-like reek—that howl outside under the moon?

"Did you call the police?" Brady asked.

"Miss Riordan thought it best not to," Cransforth said.

She met Brady's questioning look with a steady glance. "I didn't want the publicity. Doctor Cransforth assures me you know nothing about my father. I'm sorry. I thought a doctor and a newspaperman could only be bringing bad news."

She was about twenty, as pretty as she was young. The strain and growing misery on her face touched a streak of sentiment Brady usually kept bottled up. Sentiment was an emotion a newspaperman could seldom afford.

"Where is your father, Miss Riordan?"

"I don't know. . . . I'm afraid. . . ." Her voice trailed off miserably.

Cransforth was watching her with narrow-eyed intentness. The lanky, blond young doctor looked, Brady thought, as if he were examining a specimen on a glass slide in the laboratory. For some reason Brady resented the man's impersonal intentness. Couldn't Cransforth see she was only a girl trying to keep her chin up under an avalanche of trouble?

"What are you afraid of, Miss Riordan?"

She shook her head in mute answer.

"Bad news. . . ." Brady mused. "Did Cransforth tell you a chap named Dunstan died in Wellton Hospital tonight?"

"Dunstan? Not Dunstan!" Eyes wide and dark with sudden fear stared at him. "Who was with him? What happened to him?"

"He was found in Riverside Park. Your father wasn't there," Brady said dryly. "They were together this evening, weren't they?"

She nodded.

"Where did they go?"

Silence fell on the room. She had locked her hands together. Her wrists were straining, trembling, Brady saw. She was shaking as if a sudden chill had struck her.

Cransforth's professional advice broke the silence. "Better take a drink, Miss Riordan."

She shook her head without taking her eyes from Brady. Just then a buzzer burred sharply. All three jumped.

"Will you answer it please?" Anne



Riordan requested Brady unsteadily. "I—I'm afraid."

#### CHAPTER FOUR

##### Dead Men Come in Pairs

**B**RADY had a hunch as he opened the front door—and he was right. Swaab and Dulaney confronted him. Both detectives remained speechless for a moment till Dulaney exclaimed: "I'll be damned!"

Brady regarded them with simulated disgust. "Are you two tailing me around?"

"Tailing you?" Swaab choked. "Now I know who the mugg is who telephoned Dunstan's wife from the Monmouth. What's the idea, Brady? Where'd you get those scratches on your face?"

"I walked into a dark doorway—"

"And scratched your face on the door. Never mind lying any more about it. You found Dunstan was in town to see Mr. Riordan, so you beat it around here to see what you could pump out of him. Tell Mr. Riordan we want to see him."

"He's not here."

"Who is? How come you're answering the door?"

"Miss Riordan asked me to; and you're not down in the basement at headquarters giving me a work-over, Swaab. Take off your hat and watch your manners around Riordan's house or you'll be back on a beat before you know what's happened to you."

It was all painfully true. With murder in his look, Swaab swallowed mightily, spoke mildly through his teeth. "Tell Miss Riordan we'd like to see her, you—you—"

"I hope it gags you," Brady grinned, and closed the door in their faces.

Anne Riordan had come to the doorway of the drawing-room.

"A couple of headquarters detectives

who are investigating Dunstan's death," Brady told her.

She was calm again, but still pale. "I heard them. Let them in."

Swaab's face was beet red when he stalked in. "Sorry to bother you this way, Miss Riordan," he apologized hoarsely. "I'm Detective-sergeant Swaab. We came to see your father an'—an'—" Swaab nodded his meaty head at Brady. "Did you know this man was a reporter on the *Times*, ma'am?"

"Yes, he told me," she said composedly. "What of it?"

"Why—why—uh—well, he's a *reporter*," Swaab followed up uncertainly.

"So you said, Sergeant. I'm sorry my father's not here. Do you want to leave a message for him?"

"Message? Uh—why, no. Where can we find him, Miss Riordan?"

"I'm sure I don't know, Sergeant."

Dulaney had sucked in his lower lip and clamped his teeth over it. He broke his silence almost absently. "Did your father see a man named Dunstan tonight, Miss Riordan?"

"Dunstan?" Her forehead furrowed. "Is there any reason why he should have been with the man this evening?" she asked.

Swaab cleared his throat. "It's this way, Miss. This Dunstan came to town to see your father. An'—an' Dunstan had a kind of an accident this evening, and we thought maybe Mr. Riordan could give us some ideas about it if he'd seen Dunstan before it happened."

Brady was silently marveling at her ability as an actress when she said without a quiver in her voice: "I'll tell Father to get in touch with you. Is that all?"

Cransforth had stayed in the drawing-room and the detective saw only Brady. Sergeant Swaab appeared to be on the verge of apoplexy as he faced an exit



with the reporter remaining. He opened his mouth as if to speak, closed it, and then opened it again to say hoarsely: "I guess that's all, Miss." A blunt forefinger stabbed out and indicated Brady. "Don't tell this fellow anything your father wouldn't want printed," he said viciously. "Good-night."

She turned back to the drawing-room as Brady closed the door after them. When he followed, she was lighting a cigarette.

"Why did you do that?" Brady inquired curiously.

"I don't know," she confessed in a low voice. "I think I'm beginning to trust you. I don't know why I should." Wonderment was in her voice as she continued frankly and rather pathetically: "I need help. A doctor can keep secrets. And I've always heard newspapermen will, if they promise."

"I promise," Brady said without hesitation.

There was a story here—a big story, he knew now. But there was also something more—this girl who needed help. Doctor Cransforth seemed to feel the same way, for he smiled faintly and said: "Anything you feel like telling us."

ANNE RIORDAN drew a deep breath. "My father has been expecting trouble. I've never known him to be so nervous. Tonight, just before this man Dunstan stopped by for him, Father said with a queer laugh, 'If I don't come back, Anne, my affairs are in order and I've left papers covering everything in my safety-deposit box.'"

"So he was expecting it?" Cransforth murmured.

"He's been carrying a gun lately," Anne Riordan said in a strained voice. "He only laughed when I asked him why. Tonight he laughed when I tried to find out why he had spoken as he did. He insisted the idea had merely occurred to him and

he'd meant nothing by it; he told me positively not to think about it, and not to be alarmed or do anything so foolish as notifying the police if he were out late.

"And then," Anne Riordan said wretchedly, "he telephoned me a little before nine o'clock and asked if I were all right. He seemed worried. He asked me to make sure all the doors and windows were locked, and told me he was starting home in a few minutes. And—and that's the last I've heard of him. That was"—she looked at her wrist-watch—"almost three hours and a half ago. In an hour I knew something must have happened. I couldn't call the police; I didn't dare leave the house. I telephoned places he might have stopped, and he was at none of them. Then you two came—a doctor and a newspaperman. . . ." She shivered at the memory.

"Poor kid," Brady said impulsively. "Did you make sure the doors and windows were locked?"

"I inspected them all as soon as Father telephoned. I—I can't see how that man got in."

"Just like the Morrison sisters," Brady said to Cransforth.

"Do you think it's the same—"

"Yes—he felt like the thing they said they saw,"

Cransforth's gesture indicated the house they were in. "Close to the city administration again," he muttered.

Anne Riordan had knit her brows as she listened to them. "I don't understand," she said.

"We were speaking of something else," Brady said briskly. "Much as I like a good story, this thing is getting to the point where the police should be notified. Those two detectives aren't fools. I've a hunch they're waiting outside for your father now. If he doesn't come back, they'll put out an alarm."



"We promised Miss Riordan secrecy," Cransforth reminded sharply.

"We're keeping it until she releases the promise. Miss Riordan—where did your father and Dunstan go?"

"Dunstan came in a taxi. It was a business conference, I gathered. I don't know any more."

Brady was thinking. He snapped his fingers suddenly, grinned with satisfaction. "I was an idiot not to think of it sooner. What time did Dunstan get here?"

"About twenty minutes to eight. It had just gotten dark. He telephoned from his hotel before he started."

"That's good enough," Brady said. "He undoubtedly took a taxi from in front of the Monmouth between seven and seven-thirty. Swastika Cabs have the concession at the Monmouth. They've a lot of cabs. We'll save time by going to the Swastika Garage at Fourteenth and Lee-land."

"I'll go with you," Anne Riordan said.

"You'd better not stay here any more tonight," Brady agreed. "Go to a hotel or a friend's house."

"I'll go to this garage with you first. I'll get my hat and coat."

SHE sat between them as Brady drove off. He watched the rear-view mirror. "Swaab and Dulaney are following us," he said presently. "I thought they would."

"Can you lose them?" Cransforth asked nervously.

"Hard to say. Swaab looks dumb but he isn't. I'll get out a street over from the garage, Doctor. You drive Miss Riordan to the side entrance of the Monmouth, take her in, and walk out the front and come back for me in your car. I think that'll catch 'em off base. I'll meet you in the same place."

The plan worked without a hitch. Brady

was out of the coupé and Doctor Cransforth was driving on along the street before a touring car with two passengers turned the corner and followed after the coupé. If the men in the second car saw Brady's figure on the sidewalk, they thought nothing of it. Grinning to himself Brady turned back toward the big taxi garage.

It took him twenty minutes, some bulldozing, and a few lies to get the information from the report sheets which had been turned in during the evening. It was really Buck Riordan's name that finally got him what he wanted.

Brady was sober and thoughtful as he walked back to the spot where he was to meet Cransforth. The doctor's big sedan was waiting.

"Did you find out?" Cransforth asked as Brady got in.

"Yes. The cab which went from the Monmouth to Riordan's house went on to Ninety-eight Thirteen Lancaster Road. That's evidently where Riordan and Dunstan went."

"Lancaster Road—" Cransforth left the sentence hanging in mid-air.

"To the north of Riverside Park," Brady finished the thought grimly for him. "God knows what we'll find out there. Doctor, what do you think this all means? Alderman Lausch—that clerk who hanged himself—the thing which got into those women's bedroom? And this last at Riordan's?"

"It's all too much for me," Cransforth said as he shifted gears and gathered speed. "But we'll know more soon." He peered in the rear-view mirror. "I think those detectives followed me after all," he said. "I'm sure a car has been trailing me. I tried to shake it off, but couldn't."

Brady looked back. "I guess you're right," he agreed. "I told you Swaab was smart. Let 'em come. We've done our



duty by Miss Riordan and cops are going to be needed very soon. Swaab and Dulaney are about as good as we can hope for. They'll put up an awful squawk when they find out how we've cut in ahead of them. Did Miss Riordan stay at the Monmouth?"

"I left her in the lobby. She wanted to come."

"Good thing you didn't let her. This is no business for a woman." Brady lighted a cigarette, flipped the match out the window. "Every blasted one connected with the city administration in some way," he mused. "I'm holding my breath and saying prayers. It doesn't make sense but—" His voice trailed off.

"But what?" Cransforth asked after a moment.

"But," said Brady, "I've seen enough tonight to make me believe anything is possible—even blood on the moon."

Cransforth was turning corners recklessly in an effort to shake off the trailing headlights.

"Let 'em follow us," Brady said again.

"We'll learn more without the blundering idiots underfoot." Cransforth was sharply emphatic. He persisted in his movements and finally the headlights behind vanished. Now they sped swiftly and alone through the winding, wooded drives of Riverside Park.

**T**HE river bounded the park on the east; three quarters of a mile to the left were the streets of Riverside Heights; ahead, beyond the park, Lancaster Road struck off at a tangent toward the northwest, through the sparsely settled outskirts of the city, into the rolling open country beyond.

A lone street light at 98th Street showed a graveled cross-road. Their destination proved to be the only house in that lonely neighborhood. Some eight or ten acres were bounded by a low fence

grown over with rose vines. The lighted house-windows were some distance back from the road, under tall trees.

As the car headlights swung into the driveway Brady commented: "They certainly picked an isolated spot for a business meeting."

"Riordan does seem to like to keep out of sight," Cransforth remarked. He stopped with a jolt before the portico. "Well, let's see what they know about him here." The car door slammed loudly on the quiet.

Lighted windows studded the big colonial house but the arrival apparently had been unnoticed. Faint strains of music came from the house. Cransforth had turned off the headlights. Now their shoes crunched on gravel as they walked to the steps.

"Listen to that!" It was Brady who stopped short, swearing under his breath. Not far back of the house a blood-chilling eery howl had quavered on the still night.

Involuntarily Brady looked up. Overhead the full moon hung white and cold like a fixed, Cyclopean eye dominating the night. The young reporter was beginning to dislike the moon thoroughly.

Doctor Cransforth laughed with grim humor. "Skittish over a dog's howl, Brady?"

"Dog?"

"What else?"

"I never heard a dog sound quite like that."

"Perhaps it's one of those wild dogs. You need a drink."

"Much more of this and I'll need a keeper," Brady said through his teeth. He was listening, every nerve tense.

Suddenly it came again, farther off, starting low, welling to a howling crescendo which broke off on the high note. It seemed to echo and reëcho, to quiver and throb through the cool night air for long seconds.



Brady's hand was in his pocket, gripping the automatic he had taken unnoticed from the table in Riordan's drawing-room. "Got a flashlight?" he questioned sharply.

"No."

"I've had enough of this. I'm going back and look around."

Cransforth objected. "The people here apparently aren't bothered by it."

"Coming?"

"If you insist." Cransforth shrugged.

The howl was not repeated as Brady skirted the shrubbery close to the foundation of the house at a half-trot, automatic out, safety-catch off, finger on the trigger.

A frame garage and two smaller out-buildings loomed among the trees behind the house. The moonlight struck through the foliage forming dappled patterns of ghostly light and shadow on the ground.

"You're wasting time. You can't catch a dog," Cransforth panted.

"I had a chance to catch something in Riordan's house," Brady snapped over his shoulder. "I wish I'd had this gun then. I'd have . . . *Damn!*" He sprawled over something soft and yielding on the ground.

**E**VEN as he struck the grass on hands and knees—before he bounced up and turned back to look—Brady knew what it was. There it lay in the ghostly light and shadow, pale face staring up, eyes open and glistening as the moonlight glinted into them.

"He's wearing overalls; looks like a gardener. Looks as if he might be dead!" Cransforth panted.

"Dead! Look at his throat!" Brady flung out. "His throat's torn open!"

A spectral finger of moonlight touched the man's throat. It was a grisly sight. Brady shivered and his mind flashed back to the dark hall in Riordan's house—back to crunching teeth which had sought his own throat.

"Damn those wild dogs," Cransforth muttered.

"Dogs?" Brady laughed shortly. "Why lay it on the dogs? That thing that jumped me in Riordan's house went for my throat also—and it damn well wasn't any dog!"

Brady went over the body as he spoke and struck a match. The dead man was middle-aged, thin, sandy-haired, with a weathered face. His face was scratched—as if long nails had raked it. Long nails—like those which had opened raw furrows on Brady's own face. But his overalls were ripped and torn in a dozen spots; the hands were lacerated as no human teeth would ever have done.

"Animal fangs cut him up that way," Brady pointed out. "What's that?"

Light, furtive steps were coming around the house toward them. A shadowy advancing figure came in sight and Brady lifted the automatic, calling sharply: "Who it is?"

The breathless reply dumfounded him. "It's Anne Riordan. Is that you, Mr. Brady?"

Nervous reaction put a snap in Brady's voice. "Yes, it's I! What the devil are you doing here? I thought Cransforth left you at the Monmouth. Don't come here. You don't want to see this!"

She stopped. "What is it?"

"A dead man."

Her gasp was audible. "Wh-what killed him? Is it—" Her voice broke on the unuttered question.

"It's not your father," Brady reassured her. "What brought you out here?"

He reached her side as she replied: "I followed in your car. Part of the way I drove without lights so you wouldn't know I was back there. It wasn't so hard in the moonlight."

"How," Brady demanded, "did you get the keys to my car?"

Doctor Cransforth said sheepishly: "I



was so excited I'm afraid I left them in the ignition."

"You're a blithering, blundering fool," Brady snapped. "You might have guessed it was she following us. Miss Riordan, will you kindly get back to town?"

"I can't. One of the tires is flat. I walked the last quarter of a mile after I saw your headlights turn in here. Is this where Father came?"

"It is. Did you hear that howl?"

"It frightened me. What was it?"

"God only knows," Brady said disgustedly. "Come on to the house and let's report this."

She walked by his side and Doctor Cransforth followed silently. Brady couldn't tell whether the doctor was angry or embarrassed. He didn't care.

The music was still playing in the house. It might be smothering minor outside sounds, but not those unearthly howls. Brady vigorously slammed the front door knocker. The music continued; no one appeared. He used the knocker harder. The door gave a little, swung open some inches.

Brady pushed it still wider, called: "Anyone in there?"

He received no answer and entered.

The entrance-hall was paneled in dark wood. A sweeping staircase led up to the second floor. The rooms opening off the hall were brightly lighted. One appeared to be a library, the other a drawing-room. The music was coming from a radio in the library.

An easy chair, back to the doorway, faced the radio. A bald-headed man sat in the chair, listening to the music. Light from the chandelier glinted on his smooth scalp, which was ringed by sparse, gray hair, carefully brushed.

Cransforth and Anne Riordan had entered also. Brady shot them a swift glance. Anne Riordan was pale, biting her lower lip with even white teeth.

Cransforth's thin, blond features were set and serious. He hesitated in the library doorway as Brady walked to the chair and raised his voice.

"Couldn't you hear me knock?"

The man ignored him. Short, dumpy, he slumped there in the chair eyeing the radio with bulging, glassy eyes.

The stranger's tongue was half out of his mouth—and the teeth had clamped down so hard on the tongue that a thin trickle of blood oozed from the corner of the mouth and meandered down the chin. Soft, white hands were clenched rigidly across the rotund stomach.

It was death—gruesome death!

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Blood on the Moon

THE expression on Brady's face must have warned his companions in the doorway. Anne Riordan put a hand over her mouth with a quick, frightened gesture. Cransforth started forward hurriedly. He took one look, threw his hands out in a hopeless gesture. His eyes searched Brady's face.

Turning, Brady cut off the radio. The sudden silence made Brady's voice sound strange even to himself. "I wonder how much more of this there'll be," he mused.

Cransforth moistened his lips. "Pretty bad, isn't it?"

"Bad?" Brady jerked out. "It's ghastly, if you ask me."

"Shall I look?" Anne Riordan faltered.

"No." On second thought Brady said: "I wonder if you know him. Short, fat, bald-headed."

"No, I don't think so."

"I wish Swaab and Dulaney had followed us," Brady confessed. "This is police work now. Wait—I'll call headquarters."

Brady went to a telephone which sat on the edge of an open roll-top desk,



where lay rolls of blueprints. He picked up the receiver, listened for a moment, jiggled the hook, listened again, hung up.

"Line's dead," he said ruefully. "Bet you it's been cut." He picked up some papers, looked through them. "Ever hear of Peter Clausen?" he asked as he put them down.

"He's a contractor, isn't he?" Cransforth said.

"Yes—paving, sewer."

Anne Riordan nodded. "I know that name. I've heard Father speak of Peter Clausen several times to friends."

"Political friends?"

"Why—yes; I suppose so." She added stiffly: "Most of Father's friends are political friends." Then, after a moment, "What do you think?"

"I've stopped thinking, Miss Riordan," Brady sighed. "I'm completely bewildered. I'd have taken oath all this simply couldn't happen." He included the dead man in the chair and the dead man in the back yard with a gesture.

As if mocking his words, there came from the distance once more that eery howl rising to the moon-lit sky.

Brady reddened. It was anger—sudden, reckless fury—if he would have admitted it. "That's enough!" he flared. "I'm going after that damned thing, whatever it is. Cransforth, take Miss Riordan and drive to the nearest telephone. Report all this to the police. Tell 'em what we found here. Tell 'em Swaab and Dulaney are on the case already. Then come back here and wait for them."

Cransforth nodded.

"What will you be doing?" Anne Riordan said.

"I'll be following those howls," Brady told her. "Even a ghoulish has to go home sometime. That thing, whatever it is, man or beast, is going somewhere. I'm going along."

Her eyes were wide, fearful. "Aren't you afraid?"

"Scared to death," Brady admitted with a faint grin. "But I'm going. I've got your gun. I'll use it if I have to. Let's go, Cransforth."

CRANSFORTH'S automobile rolled out of the grounds, turning back toward Riverside Park. And Brady, automatic in hand, walked rapidly around the house, past the overalled corpse, over a back fence and across a field toward a dark patch of woodland ahead.

With him Brady took one warm memory.

At Cransforth's car, as she was about to get in, Anne Riordan had stopped and put a hand on Brady's arm. Her face had been pale in the moonlight, her voice had trembled a little as she said: "I think you're a very brave man, Mr. Brady. I think you're doing this to help find my father. No matter what happens—no matter what you find—I won't forget."

There wasn't much to say to a farewell like that which would not verge on the mock heroic. But any barriers between them had been wiped away in that moment. She was a game, gallant kid, Brady knew; no matter what happened, he'd always think of her that way.

No matter what happened . . .

The dew-wet grass swished underfoot. The lonely street-arc on Lancaster Road was the last light, the last outpost of the city; beyond lay the night-shrouded countryside, heavy with mystery and the promise of more horror.

Brady had no idea where the trail would lead as he skirted the path of woodland at a half-trot, gun ready. His skin prickled as he stared at the black shadows under the trees. He wondered what lurked there, what eyes might be watching his movements.

Each patch of black shadow, each bit



of growth moving in the breeze held its threat. Time after time Brady jerked the gun up ready to fire. Now and then he climbed a fence. Twice he made out dark farmhouses in the distance. There was no reason to believe they held an answer to the mystery.

He came to a dirt road, crossed it and kept on.

A throbbing frog chorus welled out of a gloomy belt of trees ahead. Off to the left in a small clump of trees, an owl hooted mournfully. Back in the distance a railroad whistle wailed faintly.

Brady had the feeling he had walked out of civilization, and was blindly stumbling into the unknown. He stopped, lighted a cigarette, told himself he was a fool.

The tobacco helped his nerves and he went on to the trees at a fast walk. In their shadow he stopped short as water splashed just ahead. It splashed again—and Brady suddenly grinned with relief. Fish were jumping in the river just ahead.

While he stood, uncertain what to do, the blood-chilling howl once more rang out, to the north of where he stood. It was as if the thing he traced was aware of his hesitation, and was drawing him on.

"All right. If that's the way you feel about it, I'm coming," Brady told himself.

He skirted the trees and brush on the river bank, hurrying through damp pasture grass and weeds. Twice more the howls rang out ahead, each time nearer. The thing really seemed to be waiting for him.

Brady's mouth was dry; his finger was rigid on the gun trigger. He wanted to turn back—but didn't.

The river began to curve here; and beyond the curve a tree-covered slope loomed up across his path. On that hill, among those trees, the thing he sought evidently waited.

Wire twanged sharply as he walked against a fence under the first trees. He climbed it and went on cautiously. The underbrush seemed to have been cleared out and Brady guessed a house must be somewhere near.

Then the eery howl came once more—close now, off to the left. A few moments later the sound of an automobile motor grew swiftly. Headlights became visible through the trees. They would pass just ahead.

BRADY was near the road when the lights did pass. He stepped out a moment later and saw the car's lights sweeping over a big, gloomy, vine-covered stone building on level land at the top of the slope. And as the car turned before the building, Brady stiffened. A dark figure, faintly silhouetted between himself and the car, had stepped out into the driveway.

The last howl had been from the other direction. This was something else. The car-door slammed as someone got out. The headlights remained on, and the dark figure stood in the moonlight, staring at them.

Brady melted back into the shadows under the trees and went toward it. The damp grass underfoot made his movements almost noiseless. He was close when a small, dead stick snapped thinly underfoot. Gravel scraped as the figure spun around. "Lige?" a thin, high-pitched voice demanded.

Brady made an inarticulate sound of assent and kept on. A flashlight came lit, blinding him. "Stand still, damn you, or I'll shoot!" Brady snarled.

He expected to be shot himself. He couldn't tell what was behind that light and he was unprepared for the quick obedience his threat got, the thin cry of alarm, "Don't shoot! I'm s-standing still."

They were face to face in the driveway



a moment later. The stranger was about Brady's size. Moonlight glinted on a nickel-plated revolver. Not until the automatic was jammed into the other's middle and Brady had snatched the revolver, did he feel safe. He took the flashlight, put the beam on a thin, pointed, wizened face that had a long, beaked nose above a scraggly red mustache.

The stranger cowered back from the automatic, almost inarticulate with fear when Brady demanded: "What the devil are you doing out here?"

"J-just waiting, sir." The man sounded like a servant.

"Waiting for what?"

"I d-don't know."

"Think fast, damn you!"

"Yes, sir." The man was breathing hard. "I was just s-standing here, sir," he faltered.

Brady jabbed hard with the gun. The man gasped. "Don't lie to me!" Brady warned. "Did you hear that howling?"

"Y-yes, sir."

"What was it?"

"Why—why—"

That was all Brady heard. A plunging body struck him from behind, knocking him into the speaker. They both went down in a floundering heap. Brady thought of nothing else after that but the fury that had attacked from behind. For once more the wolf-like reek was in his nostrils. He felt long nails rake his throat, heard panting breaths that were almost snarls.

He whipped up the gun and fired over his shoulder. The crashing explosion deafened him. Then a powerful hand slapped on the gun and drove it away as Brady fired again.

A stunning blow struck his head. For the second time that night Brady sagged into a black daze that had a nightmarish reality. This was the end, he knew.

And he wondered if his throat would

be torn and gaping when his body was found. He wondered what Anne Riordan would say. A second blow must have struck his head for that was the last thought he had—Anne Riordan . . .

THE next thing Brady knew, big hands were gripping his shoulders. He was being shaken violently. A harsh, frenzied voice was shrilling: "Wake up, damn you! Don't pretend you're asleep! I'll make you wake up!"

Brady struck out—and hit the face.

The man released him, laughing with harsh triumph. "I knew you'd wake! Come here and see it! Tell me I'm not mad! Tell me it isn't there!"

Brady was a sick man as he sat up. His first wild glance showed he had been lying on the floor of a small, bare room.—only a wooden floor, white plastered walls and ceiling. The light overhead was so dim it made only a half-gloom. But it was sufficient for Brady to make out the big, burly figure which was dragging him up. He seemed half frantic with excitement—or fear. His broad face was working and his words were barely understandable.

Brady jerked his arm free. "You're Buck Riordan!" he exclaimed.

"That's my name," Riordan replied wildly. "I am Buck Riordan, ain't I? . . . Look at it and tell me! Do you see it?"

He dragged Brady to an open barred window. His pointing hand thrust through the bars—and the hand was shaking. "Look at it!" Riordan gulped. "Do you see it? Am I crazy? Red—like blood!"

Riordan was pointing up to the full moon.

They were at the window of a second-story room. Below them was an inclosed courtyard surrounded on all sides by the stone walls of the big house. The grim silhouette of the roof seemed to frame the



moon—and the moon was still cool and white.

*Blood on the moon.*

Evidently Buck Riordan was seeing the same vision that Arthur Dunstan had before he died. And Riordan, too, was in a frenzy of fear. His fingers dug into Brady's arm. "Do you see it?" he asked thickly.

Brady made his decision instinctively. "The moon is red tonight, isn't it?" he said calmly, and forced a chuckle. "Looks like it's been splattered with red ink, doesn't it? I understand there's been a big dust storm out West. The dust in the upper air makes it look that way."

Riordan dropped his hand and relaxed. "So that's it?" he muttered. "I—I thought I was losing my mind." He rubbed his eyes, as if to shut out the sight. "I'm thirsty," he said thickly.

Savage snarls burst out in the courtyard below. The cold moonlight illuminated a strip along one side of the courtyard. Metal chains jingled on flagstones as Brady looked down. Slinking forms showed at the edge of the moonlight and turned back out of sight. A vagrant wisp of breeze came through the bars. It was rank with that wolf-like smell, coming now, Brady knew, from those chained animals below.

He turned to Riordan. "How did you get here?"

"Where are we?" Riordan mumbled. The big man was no longer the confident, commanding—even imposing—figure the public knew. He was fumbling, uncertain, half in a daze.

"We're several miles north of Riverside Park, in a house by the river," Brady told him. "Think hard. How did you get here? You were at Peter Clausen's house, weren't you?"

Riordan nodded uncertainly. "I was at Clausen's house, wasn't I?"

"And you telephoned your daughter to

lock the doors and windows, and told her you were starting home at once."

Riordan nodded again, almost as if he were learning a lesson. "I did telephone Anne, didn't I?" he muttered. "But—but how did you know?"

"She told me. Why did you telephone her?"

**R**IOR DAN'S broad forehead furrowed deeply as he tried to think. "We were at Clausen's house," he mumbled. "We heard some sounds outside—as if someone were watching us. There'd been so much trouble lately—so many threats—I thought of Anne home alone and telephoned her. Shouldn't have left her there with the servants out for the evening. Dunstan and I started back to town with Frank Dietz, and before his car started someone fired a gas-gun through the window. I—I think it was a gas-gun. I tried to get out and—and everything went blank. Then I waked up in this room, and the moon was red, and there was a terrible commotion down there in the courtyard. I got to the window and looked down and—and—"

Riordan shivered, looked sick.

"The dogs were attacking a man!" he said hoarsely. "He was gagged. His arms were tied behind him. All he could do was kick at them. They dragged him down. It was all moonlight down there then. Red moonlight. I could see—everything."

Brady visualized it clearly—the helpless victim—the savage animals—the unspeakable end. He felt sick.

"The man," Riordan gulped, "was Bill Dietz."

"A man named Dietz is the city engineer, isn't he? William Dietz?"

"That's the one," Riordan assented dully.

Again death had taken a member of the city organization. Brady shook his head



as chains rattled once more below the window. He turned to the solid wooden door. An ax, at least he found, would be needed to get through that door.

The building seemed to be very old. Brady examined the window-bars. The ends had been cemented in slotted holes cut in the stone and the cement had weathered badly. After a little work Brady loosened the lower end of one bar. Just then a key grated in the door-lock.

Instantly Brady followed an idea which had been shaping in his mind. "I'm still unconscious! I haven't recovered! Don't give me away!" he husked. When the door opened, he was inert on the floor.

He heard a familiar, high-pitched voice say: "You're to come with us, Mr. Riordan. You'll be shot if you try to get away."

"Where are we going?" Riordan asked.

"I think you're going to be entertained." A thin laugh, just short of a giggle, accompanied that. "How about this other fellow? Hasn't he recovered yet?"

"No," Riordan denied.

"Come on, then."

## CHAPTER SIX

### Mask of the Pit-Master

**B**RADY'S first move was to turn off the light. Then he went to work on that loose bar. He was panting when he finally pushed the lower end out and wrenched the bar free. Using it as a lever he made short work of the adjoining bar, but when he straddled the window-ledge and looked out, the thing seemed hopeless after all.

From the window Brady saw just one thing which offered slight hope. Across the courtyard a drain-pipe from the roof was visible in the moonlight. It slanted in from the eaves, ran down the vine-covered stone wall to a point somewhat

below the second-story windows, and there made a slight curve out and back to the stone wall again.

Gripping the window-bars, Brady let himself cautiously down, feeling among the vines with his toes. He found a narrow, slightly sloping ledge, which apparently had been left there because the lower half of the wall was much thicker than the upper.

There was no chance that any part of the vine-mass would support a man's weight, but the vines would stand a certain pull. Brady tested them gingerly. He had rested one of the bars across the window-ledge and now he wedged the heavy thing through his belt. He drew a long breath, balanced on his toes, reached out to the right for a firm hold on the vines, and released the window-bars.

Cautiously, inch by inch, like a fly on a windowpane Brady edged along that sheer wall, holding himself flat against the mass of creeping vines.

The beasts below began to snarl and move about. They knew he was up there and were waiting for him. Brady fought off panic and kept on to the next window. It was closed.

He clung to the bars there and rested from the terrific tension. He was wet with perspiration. Presently he rapped on the window. Nothing happened; the room evidently was vacant. He edged on to the next window, found it dark also. But the window was open—and as he gripped the first bar and drew himself over, a frightened voice spoke hollowly inside.

"Wh-what's that?" A groan followed. "God, what now in this hell hole?"

"Shut up!" Brady husked. "I'm trying to escape!"

"Escape? Who are you? There isn't any escape from this damned place!" A pale ghost-like face peered through the bars.



"I'm a newspaperman," Brady jerked out in a whisper. "Who are you?"

"My name's James Schaeffer."

"Corporation Counsel Schaeffer?"

"Yes. Do I know you?"

"No. The papers said you had gone on a vacation trip."

Schaeffer's laugh was wild. "A telephone call decoyed me from my apartment to an automobile that evening. I was kidnaped and brought here. They told me later they'd telephoned the newspapers that I'd taken a trip. They—they broke up my wedding by—by sending information to my fiancée's family."

"What kind of information?"

"About certain things I hoped they'd never know." Schaeffer groaned.

"Who owns this place?"

"I don't know. It's a house of hell, if there ever was one. I've been tortured, doped and questioned incessantly. I've seen men torn to pieces by those dogs down there. I'm half mad. I've been told I'd never leave here alive, and I believe it. I don't even know where we are."

"Who's in charge?"

"I've never seen his face. He wears a rubber mask. There's a bearded giant who cares for the dogs. He gets down there among them in the moonlight and howls at the moon with them."

"How many people are around?"

"I've seen a woman. And there's a little man with a high voice. And two big blacks who act as if they're deaf and dumb. And I've heard screams and cries. Just a little while ago a woman was screaming."

**T**HE beasts below were snarling threateningly. In his wildest moments Brady never could have visualized this scene—himself clinging outside a barred cell-window while savage dogs waited for him to fall. He could not go up; he dared not go down. His only hope lay on the next

wall of the courtyard, where the windows were not barred.

"I loosened a bar at my window," Brady said. "How about yours?"

"They're loose. But what's the use? You'll only fall and be torn to pieces."

"There's a ledge down here you can stand on if you're careful. It's worth trying. I've got to go on."

Schaeffer's breath sucked in audibly. "I'll try it," he said.

As Brady edged on, he heard Schaeffer working on the window-bars. One more dark window—then the corner of the court. A vine pulled loose as Brady edged around the turn.

He caught desperately for another hold. For agonizing seconds his body swayed out the fatal extra inch. The vines seemed to be pulling loose. . . .

Brady's stomach muscles ridged hard as he drew himself in against the wall—and the vines held. He had to balance a moment, shaking, trembling before he went on. Then, with a gasp of relief he reached the drain-pipe. He was clinging to it when the low growls below intensified. A door creaked open. A tall, stoop-shouldered, padding figure shambled into the narrow band of moonlight. Brady saw that a bushy tangle of beard covered the face.

The man paused in the moonlight and looked up at the moon. Then he howled—a long, drawn-out, mournful, savage bay.

The chained beasts were silent as the last quivering echoes rose to the sky—then madness broke loose as they, too, howled to the moon.

The man moved over into the black shadows. A gray, skulking form slunk into the moonlight—then another—another—another. . . . He was unchaining them.

"He knows I'm up here," Brady thought with a cold chill. "I'm next."



The wolf-man passed back through the moonlight; the door closed behind him. The freed beasts roamed in the courtyard below. One of them leaped up at Brady and fell back growling. Others tried it.

The second window beyond Brady, on the same side of the court, went up with a bang. Buck Riordan's hoarse voice came out into the courtyard. "You wouldn't dare! Unstrap me, damn you!"

A laugh answered Riordan. A man leaned out the window and waved an arm. Brady barely made out a queer, unnatural, horrible face. It took him a moment to realize he had seen the rubber mask James Schaeffer had mentioned.

In the same moment a second-story window lifted across the courtyard. A struggling figure was pushed out and swung down at the end of a rope. Vines rustled and crackled as the figure brushed through them on a slow, macabre descent. An oath choked Brady's throat—for it was a woman. A gagged woman. Her arms were tied behind; her legs were free. The rope was fastened about her middle and a white gag hid most of her face.

The gloom-shrouded pit burst into an inferno of savagery. The beasts were snapping, snarling, running about under their helpless victim.

Nausea made Brady shake as he clung to the pipe. Long, powerful bodies were leaping up to meet the struggling figure. Powerful teeth snapped on empty air. In a few moments those teeth—

Buck Riordan's frantic voice became audible—but the words were lost in the bedlam of the milling pack.

Brady spoke aloud to himself as the woman sank lower. "You're a damn fool, Brady—but you might as well get it this way as another."

**H**E LET himself down the drain-pipe as he spoke. In a moment metal cracked, snapped as the rotten fastenings

tore out. Brady let go and dropped to the hard stone far below.

He landed with a bone-crushing impact and sprawled on the stones. Pain shot through his left ankle. He lurched up, tearing the iron bar from his belt as he ran.

Wobbling in a limping run, Brady charged the beast-pack. The woman had drawn her feet up. But fangs already had reached her dress and ripped it half off.

A warning shout came from the window where Riordan was.

Brady's answering cry was half a scream of fury. The next instant he reached the beasts and swung the heavy bar.

One great brute dropped limply. Another followed as the bar smashed irresistibly into flesh and bone. The pack, sensing prey that must be dragged down, turned on him. Moonlight glinted on snarling fangs and greenish, flaming eyes.

A huge brute with slavering jaws leaped for his throat. The bar clubbed him down with a broken neck. Another darted in and slashed with sharp fangs at Brady's leg, ripping through cloth and flesh. Brady broke that one's back with a downward swing.

The woman—she was young and slender—kicked one animal away; another leaped and tore away the rest of her dress; a third slashed her thigh. Brady saw the red blood on her white flesh as he struck furiously, dropped the big dog in a writhing heap.

Each time the bar landed it crippled an animal. Brady's leg was ripped again. He hardly knew it. He was gasping for breath—but there were not so many animals now. They lay heaped about him, dead and dying.

Suddenly the rope was released from above. The girl dropped the last few feet, and staggered up as Brady killed a dog



which rushed at her. The remaining brutes drew back, snarling, growling.

"Turn around!" Brady gasped.

The rope had been tied in a crude knot and Brady tore at it with his fingers. Every few seconds he had to stop and drive the dogs back. At last the knot slipped free.

"Over here to the door!" Brady panted.

The door was unlocked and a moment later they were in a short, dimly lighted passage, freed of the horrors outside. Brady's hands shook as he pulled the gag down from the girl's mouth. He had already recognized her.

"How did you get here?" he flung out.

Anne Riordan, still slim and lovely in the midst of tragedy, replied with a gasp: "Doctor Cransforth brought me here! What sort of a beast is he?"

Brady gripped the iron bar and stepped ahead of her, speaking huskily. "I thought he was all right or I wouldn't have let you go with him. I don't know whether we've a chance to get out of here alive or not. Stay behind me. I'll do what I can."

A corridor crossed the end of the short passage. To the right, some thirty feet, a door stood slightly ajar. Beyond it Brady heard heavy feet racing down steps. He ran for the door, ignoring the agonizing pains in his ankle.

A heavy shoulder knocked the door open and the matted beard and wild, staring eyes of a lunging, thick-shouldered giant burst through. The man had a gun.

Brady struck down with the bar. The gun crashed and Anne Riordan's overwrought nerves broke in a piercing scream. Brady felt the hot touch of a bullet along his side as the heavy bar smashed the bearded giant's shoulder.

The big man staggered into the wall, dropping the gun. His right arm swung limp, useless. The matted beard parted on long teeth as he bounced off the wall at Brady. With no time to swing the

bar, Brady launched it straight out in a short, chopping blow which carried past the outstretched arm to the bearded face.

The heavy body lunged against him—falling now. Beneath the matted beard the jaw seemed broken. The wolf-like monster had been knocked out cleanly.

ANNE RIORDAN moved forward fearfully as Brady scooped the gun from the floor and panted: "Come on. I'll save one cartridge for you if it's necessary."

She understood and nodded. They were in the doorway when a gun opened fire from the other end of the corridor. Wooden splinters from the door flicked Brady's face as he whirled, sweeping Anne Riordan behind him to the floor.

Not until she was down and he had ducked into a crouch, did Brady make out the tall, lanky figure standing at the other end of the corridor, firing wildly at them. It was Cransforth, no longer masked.

Brady had been through so much in the last hour or so that he had no nerves now. His mind was oddly detached as he opened fire.

"I've got to get him," he thought. "If he kills me, he'll have her again—and no one will ever know what's going on in this place."

Brady took time to aim, which was more than Cransforth seemed to be doing. Three times Brady fired, carefully, before Cransforth took a staggering step forward and sprawled down on the floor.

Limping forward, Brady thought: "I've killed a man. And—I'm glad."

His gun came up, then lowered, as a woman darted into the corridor and dropped down beside Cransforth. She was cradling his head in her lap when Brady reached them. She paid no attention to Brady as she wailed: "Where did he hit you, Frank? This can't be true! It can't!"



She was the pretty little nurse from Wellston Hospital—Miss Inglesby. Cransforth opened his eyes, looked up at her, then at Brady. Two spots on Cransforth's chest were bleeding. A line of bloody froth was at his mouth when he spoke.

"So it had to be you, Brady? I might have known. It looked too easy."

Kneeling beside him, Brady asked: "Are you insane, Cransforth—or what?"

"I'm dying," Cransforth gasped.

Miss Inglesby started to get up. "I'll send for an ambulance!" she gulped.

"No!" Cransforth said violently.

She stopped, wavering, with tears on her cheeks. The corridor was suddenly very quiet. Cransforth's harsh, labored voice sounded loud.

"They might pull me through," Cransforth gasped. "I don't want that. They'd only hang me later on."

He choked, swallowed, gasped out: "Another few months and I'd have been willing to go. But it looked as if I were going to pull it off without being discovered."

"Pull what off?" Brady asked.

"The crooked political gang Riordan headed—I was trying to break it up. I had proof—and they were getting panic-stricken. After Riordan—tonight—I'd have had most of the information I wanted."

"Trying to fight a political ring with torture and murder?"

"Why not?" Cransforth said. "I was justified. Look at this place. It was a prosperous private sanitarium when my father owned it. He fought dishonest politics—and they published lies about him, brought charges of malpractice. They ruined and disgraced him. I started practice under a cloud." Cransforth struggled up on one elbow. "I swore I'd ruin them, too!" he gritted. "And—I almost did." He sank back, panting.

Brady nodded thoughtfully as he visualized that fierce hate.

CRANSFORTH smiled faintly now. "Each man who talked implicated others. With each lot of new information I had a stronger hold on them. Now and then I warned one or another his turn was coming. I left a body or so to be found. They knew what had happened."

"That clerk, Hollister, who apparently hanged himself on the river bank?"

"Hollister had been keeping dishonest books for years. He had a lot to tell," Cransforth panted.

But his smile faded when Brady said: "You left Dunstan in the park, I suppose? Did you think he was dead?"

"I thought he would die before he was found," Cransforth muttered. "I went on to the hospital to get some drugs I needed; and while I was there, they brought Dunstan in. I took charge of him myself until he died. He was here to put through a dishonest paving deal. They'd done it before. I knew Dunstan was coming. I waited, got them all together. And when Dunstan saw Dietz given to the dogs and thought he was next, his mind cracked. But he talked, too."

Cransforth choked again. The bloody froth was thicker on his lips.

"The only thing I didn't expect," he whispered hoarsely, "was you, Brady. I'd intended to inspect Dunstan's hotel room before I came back here. You caught me there. I didn't think there was much chance of anyone's really suspecting me. Then things began to go wrong. I'd sent Lige to get Riordan's daughter. You frightened him out of the house. The fool stopped by Clausen's house to look at that dead body in the back yard—and you went after him. When I got here, he was back, and I sent him out again to decoy you on. But—but everything went wrong."



"Who is Lige?"

"He had charge of the dogs I used in certain experiments," Cransforth said weakly. "I discovered he was an abnormal case, approximating a werewolf. He's like one of the dogs himself each time the moon is full. The rest of the month he's normal. Usually I locked him up when the moon was full, but this month I had to use him."

"And the oaf with the red mustache?"

"One of my father's old servants. Too stupid to realize what I've been doing."

"I suppose you know what happened to Alderman Herman Lausch?"

"He's upstairs," Cransforth said.

"And the Morrison sisters got the fright of their lives when this Lige got into the wrong house, eh?"

Cransforth rolled his head in a nod. "I sent Lige to kill Wilkinson. He had skeleton keys; but he got into the wrong house."

"He got into Riordan's house the same way?"

Again the head rolled in a nod. Breathing was getting harder. Cransforth's eyes had a glazed look. The pretty little nurse had gone to her knees beside him.

"Frank often told me how he hated the graft and crookedness in politics," she sobbed. "But I never suspected anything like this. Tonight when the detectives came back to the hospital and began asking questions about him, I thought something must be wrong and drove out here

to ask him about it. But I never suspected all this. We were going to be married."

Cransforth's hand found hers, held it. His blond young face was calm now. His eyes were closed.

Brady asked one last question. "What made the blood on the moon?"

Cransforth's reply was barely audible. He did not open his eyes. "Scopolamine. So-called truth serum. It occasionally had some effect on them. It acts on the vision—makes them see objects in different colors. . . ." His voice trailed off.

Just then a familiar voice shouted nearby in the house. "Anybody home here?"

"That's Swaab, from headquarters," Brady said.

Cransforth rallied and opened his eyes. "The written proofs I collected are in the bottom desk drawer in my laboratory upstairs. Use them if you have nerve enough. They'll try to stop you."

"I will. That's a promise," Brady said.

Swaab shouted again. He was coming closer to the corridor.

Cransforth smiled. "Tell those detectives they're too late." His eyes closed quite peacefully.

Brady looked at Anne Riordan. Her face was pale; she said nothing. Sobbing, Miss Inglesby stood up, took off her light summer coat and handed it to Anne Riordan for a covering.

Brady turned his back on them and walked to meet Swaab and Dulaney.





# Ready For The Rackets

A Department

*Racketeers and swindlers of all sorts are lying in wait for you, eager to rob or cheat you of your hard-earned cash. All you need to thwart them, guard against them, is a foreknowledge of their schemes and methods of operation. Write in telling us your own personal experiences with chislers and con men of various sorts. It is our intention to publicize—withholding your names, if you wish—the information you have passed on, paying \$5.00 for every letter used. No letters will be returned unless accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope, nor can we enter into correspondence regarding same. Address all communications to The Racket Editor—DIME DETECTIVE MAGAZINE, 205 E. 42nd St., N. Y.*

**W**HEN we decided to incorporate this *Ready for the Rackets* department in DIME DETECTIVE we hadn't the shadowiest idea of the proportions to which it would grow in such a few short months. Or how completely you readers would cooperate in making it a timely service-feature, revealing—embarrassing as it must have been sometimes, as a confession of personal gullibility—the methods of the vast army of assorted chislers, swindlers, and petty racketeers that swarm the country, preying on the uninitiated and unwary.

It's becoming more and more difficult each month to sift for publication the great quantity of material you reader-reporters send along, for all of it is interesting, most of it is timely, and a surprising proportion extremely well presented. We wish we had room for a lot more. Here are a few examples of ingenious easy-money schemes going the rounds just now.

Ekron, Kentucky,  
April 14, 1936.

The Racket Editor,  
Dime Detective Magazine,  
205 East 42nd Street,  
New York City, New York.  
Dear Sir:

I am recounting herewith what I consider a very smooth racket, showing intensive foresight and study upon the part of the perpetrator.

Into the store of a small yet reputable jeweler, comes a well dressed gentleman who might be a captain of industry or banker. After considerable shopping among the jeweler's stock, he purchases an expensive gift, selling for around \$300 or \$400. He explains that the bauble is for an anniversary gift for his wife. He presents a check in payment for the exact amount of the purchase drawn upon the same bank as that with which the dealer does business.

Naturally, the merchant, not knowing his customer, seems reluctant to accept the check and make delivery. Whereupon, realizing that the proper moment has arrived, the racketeer requests that the jeweler engrave a suitable insignia upon his purchase and he will come back in about an hour. In the meantime, he urges the dealer to present the check at the bank on which it was drawn.

This the victim does, sending his messenger out to deposit the check to his credit if it is valid. The messenger returns promptly reporting that the drawer of the check has no account at the bank. The merchant congratulates himself upon his perspicacity and never expects to see his potential customer again.

Much to his surprise, the racketeer does return and requests his purchase. The jeweler relates the facts as reported to him by his bank. The racketeer requests the check and feigning surprise himself, sheepishly says that inasmuch as he is out of town and does business with a bank in his home city with the same name as the bank upon which the check was drawn, he became confused. To settle matters and show evidence of good faith, he presents currency for his purchase, takes his purchase and worthless check and departs, profusely uttering his apologies.

At this stage, the swindle arrives. He has taken the trouble to seek out another merchant in the vicinity with whom the jeweler is very friendly, such as a hardware store, drug or department store. Leaving the jeweler's establishment, he goes to this friend of the dealer and presents his check for payment stating that he is from out of the city and went to his friend, the jeweler, to see if he would cash his check. Not having that much about his store, the jeweler endorsed the check and advised him where he could get the cash. Recognizing the handwriting of his neighbor, the hardware merchant does not hesitate to exchange the cash for the check. In due time the check is returned by the bank marked "N.G.," whereupon the hardware merchant looks to the jeweler for settlement.

Of course, the racketeer is taking all sorts of chances, but as he is a keen student of human nature he realizes that not more than half of the people whom he works will take the trouble to remove or cancel their endorsement of the check.

Respectfully submitted,  
W. J. Hicks.




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28x4-75-20	2.50 .95	30x4-75-20	2.55 .95
28x5-00-19	2.85 1.05	30x5-00-19	2.85 1.05
5-25-17	2.90 1.15	5-25-18	2.90 1.15
28x5-25-18	2.95 1.15	30x5-25-18	2.95 1.15
28x5-25-19	2.95 1.15	30x5-25-19	2.95 1.15
30x5-25-20	2.95 1.15	31x5-25-21	3.15 1.15
31x5-25-21	3.15 1.15	5-50-17	3.35 1.15
28x5-50-18	3.35 1.15	28x5-50-19	3.35 1.15
28x5-50-19	3.35 1.15	6-00-17	3.40 1.15
30x5-00-18	3.40 1.15	30x5-00-19	3.40 1.15
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36x6	9.95 3.95	40x8	13.25 4.15

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## Dime Detective Magazine

And here's another one which has a dozen different variations your imagination can easily picture.

Beverly Hills, Calif.,  
 Mar. 22, 1936.

Dime Detective Magazine,  
 Racket Editor.

Dear Sir:

Here is an account of an unusually "slick" swindle which I hope will be acceptable for your Rackets corner.

A young man entered a restaurant after the rush hour had subsided and left the establishment empty of customers. He proceeded to the counter and begged something to eat. The waiter, who was also the proprietor, took compassion on the youth and finally gave him some sandwiches and coffee which were devoured with great gusto.

As the young man was ready to leave, after thanking the donor, he drew a handkerchief from his pocket and out fell a twenty dollar bill.

The proprietor was aghast and decidedly angered that a man would "bum" a meal with so much money in his pocket. He used everything in the vocabulary on the evildoer and demanded recompense for the food.

The young man gave him the bill and waited to receive nineteen dollars and seventy-five cents in change, whereupon he left the store.

The next morning when the restaurateur deposited the money in the bank he was informed that the twenty dollar bill was a counterfeit.

The man, who, because of his anger the previous night had neglected to examine the note, had fallen heir to some fake money delicately transferred by a shrewd young swindler.

Yours sincerely,  
 E. F. Gueble.

And another directed at the housewife alone in the home while her husband is away at the office. It's common in the larger cities these days. Watch out for it!

Buffalo, N.Y.

The Racket Editor,  
 Dear Sir:

Here is one that actually happened to a friend of mine:

A housewife living in one of the better class apartment houses one day accepted delivery of three suits that she thought had been ordered by her husband who had a charge account in this particular store. About an hour later a suave, dignified gentleman called and said he was from the store that had just delivered the three suits, there had been some mistake in the delivery and she had received the wrong suits.



## Ready for the Rackets

She gave him the suits on his promise that he would rectify the mistake immediately. Needless to say she never saw him again. Her husband had not ordered the suits but due to the fact that she accepted delivery was obliged to pay for them.

The racketeer had found out from the elevator boy that most of Mr. Blank's deliveries from this store were charged and surmised that he was in the habit of having purchases sent home without letting his wife know about them in advance. He then called the store, ordered the suits made to his measure and told them that he was going to be out of town but his wife would sign the delivery sheet. This was done and the poor victim was "hooked" for three suits he never saw.

V. L. Donovan.

## THE MYSTERY OF THE GOLDEN SKULL

By Donald E. Keyhoe

The car swung in toward the entrance of the Courtland estate. Suddenly, Traile put on the brakes. The huge gates were open, but there in the center and barring the way was a shining, crimson pole. In the headlights it looked the color of blood.

"Good God!" Traile whispered. He

leaped out.

"What is it?" Eric gasped as he caught up.

"It's a Chinese funeral pole!" Traile said tensely.

He raced up the drive with Eric close at his heels. No lights shone from the mansion. He ran up the steps. The door was open, and from somewhere beyond there came an eerie, will-o'-the-wisp glow. The silence all but shrieked.



Traile tiptoed to the doorway through which the flickering light showed. He took one step inside, then halted, appalled with Eric staring white-faced past his shoulder.

Two yellow chinese candles shone down from the head of an open coffin directly before them. An icy shudder went over Traile. He was looking down on the back of a man in evening clothes—but the dead man's face was staring upward!

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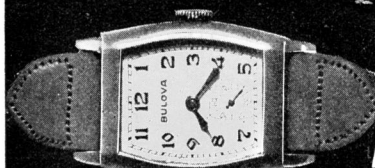
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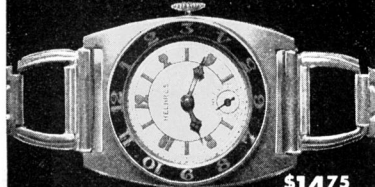
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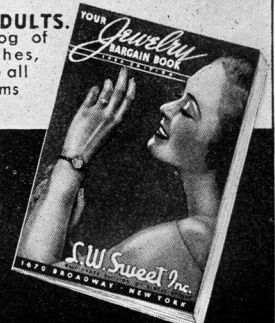
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