

DETECTIVE

FICTION

WEEKLY

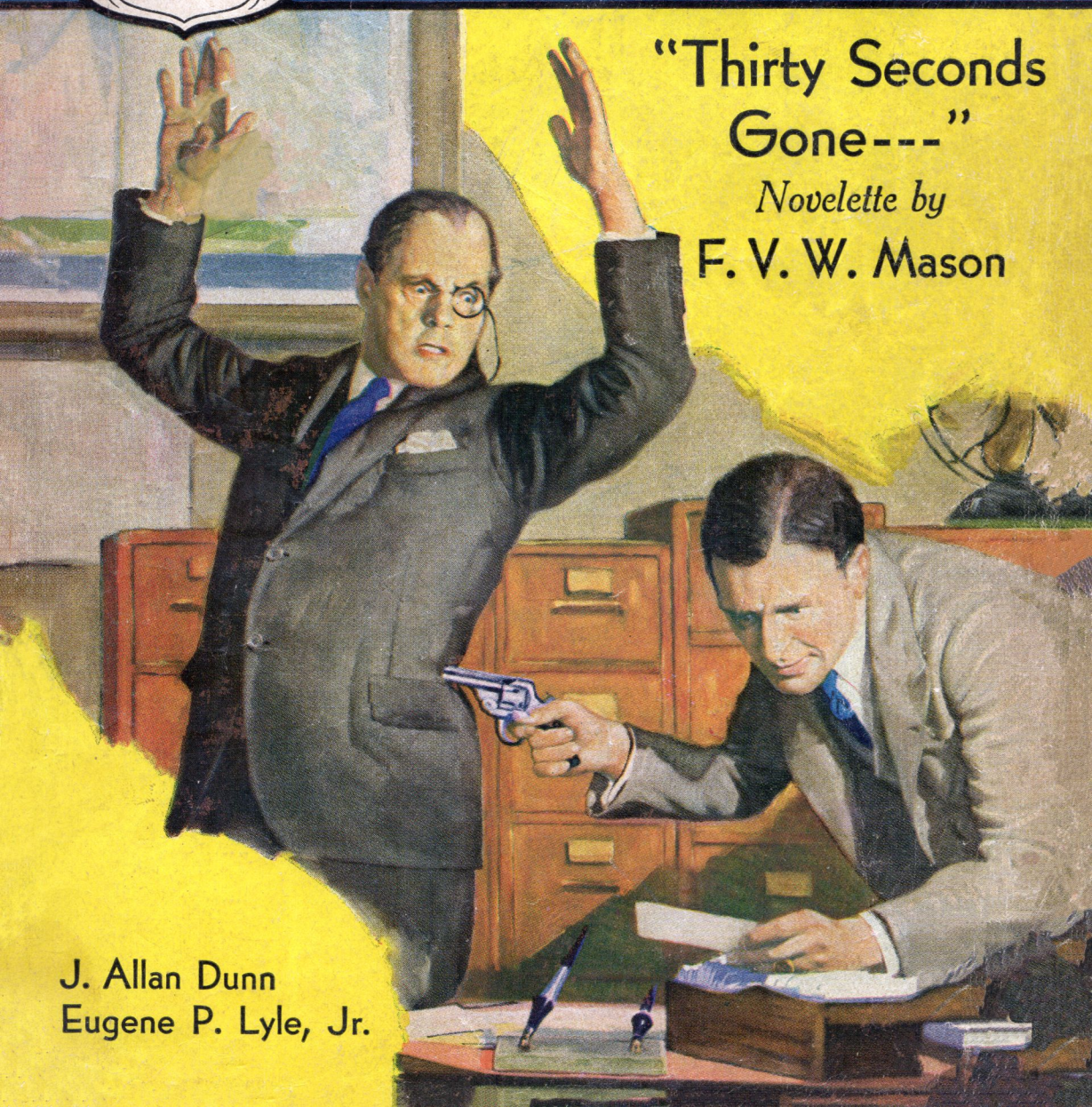
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Gone---"

Novelette by
F. V. W. Mason

J. Allan Dunn
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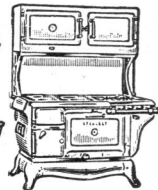
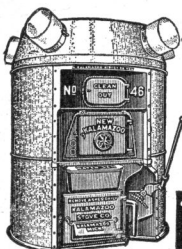
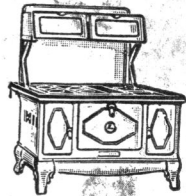
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DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY



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"The Magazine With the Detective Shield On the Cover"

VOLUME LXXI

Saturday, October 8, 1932

NUMBER 1

NOVELETTE AND SHORT STORIES

- "Thirty Seconds Gone—"** Novelette F. V. W. Mason 4
When Death Watched the Clock
- The Unknown Menace** J. Allan Dunn 41
Gordon Manning Follows a Hunch into a Pitched Battle with a Fiend
- The Late Customer** Howard Finney 57
Three Armed Thugs Storm Old Wetzel's Jewelry Store for His Lifetime's Savings
- Gun Work, Old Style** Eugene P. Lyle, Jr. 97
Death Trails the Bandits of an Oil Town's Pool Room
- Rat Bait** Maxwell Hawkins 123
Sheriff Sandey Starts a Crime Wave to End Crime

SERIAL

- Tower of Terror** Five Parts—3 Joseph Ivers Lawrence 76
War with Strange Weapons

TRUE STORIES

- The Dapper Murderer** Zeta Rothschild 68
Gallantry, Girls and the Gallows
- Illustrated Crimes** Stookie Allen 74
The Tell-Tale Burrs
- Mystery at Beverly Glen** Dugal O'Liam 108
The Vanishing of the Wealthy and Prominent Mrs. Young

FEATURES AND FACTS

- Narrative Cross-Word Puzzle** . . . Richard Hoadley Tingley 138
- Flashes From Readers** 140
- Solving Cipher Secrets** M. E. Ohaver 142

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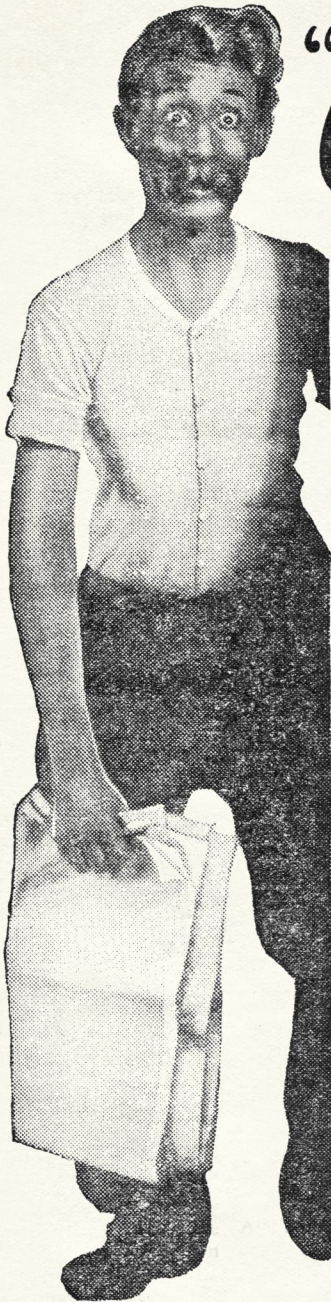
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DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY



"The Magazine With the Detective Shield On the Cover"

VOLUME LXXI

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 8, 1932

NUMBER 1

"Thirty Seconds Gone—"

A Novelette

By F. V. W. Mason

*Desperate, Roger Locke Pinned
All on One Grim Threat: "You'll
Do It by Ten O'Clock, or—"*



"There he goes! Quick,
Gus—"

CHAPTER I

The Man Behind O'Dowd

"YOU say it's all burnt through like this?" Roger Locke picked up the square of canvas and fingered one of the poisonous looking yellow-brown spots and streaks that marred the whiteness of the fabric.

"Sure—she's ate clean through in places," grunted the foreman. "Look, you can poke your thumb right through those streaks."

"Well, Keenan, how much of it's ruined?"

"Ten thousand bucks' worth—easy. The guy that dumped on that sulphuric sure made it a good job—"

Roger Locke's brows drew together. "Guess you're right, it can't have been carelessness or an accident—but who'd do such a thing? And why?"

"Wish I knew, Mr. Roger," growled Keenan, his moon of a face turning redder. "I'd like to lay my mitts on him. Oh, I ain't sayin' there ain't a few sound yards here and there, but there's nigh ten thousand dollars' worth of A weave four ply duck in your loft that'll never go to sea."

Behind the wide table desk Roger Locke slowly shook a blond head which only missed being really handsome because of a nose once broken for the greater glory of Yale.

"When dad gets back we'll try to

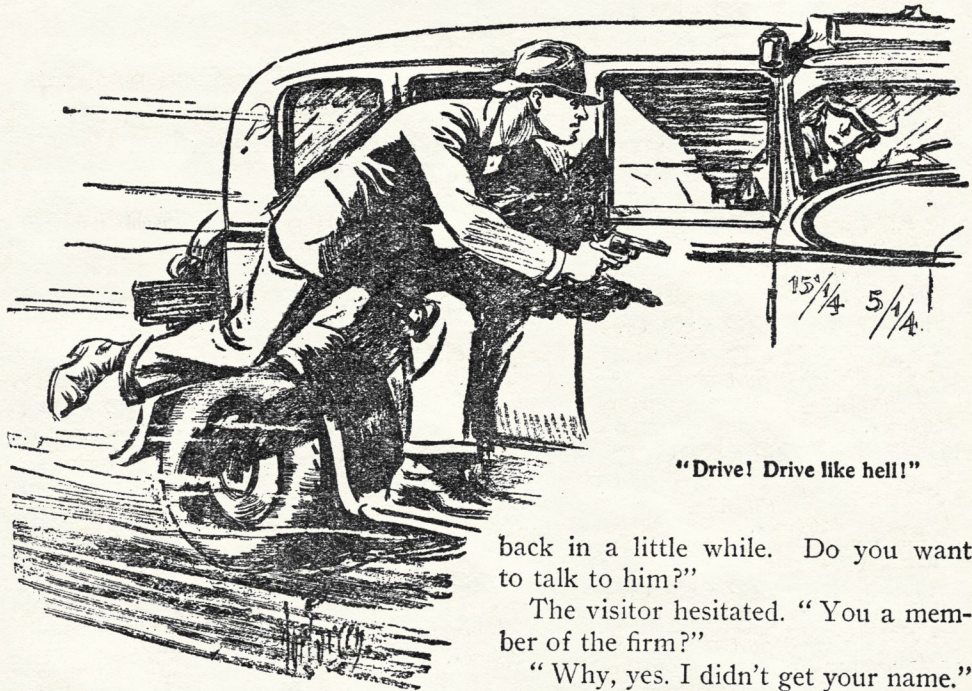
ceptibly—"a gentleman outside says he's got to see you."

"Okay, Keenan, I'll be up to the loft in a minute; and you, Miss McCoy, phone the insurance people to send over an adjuster."

As the foreman, clutching a greasy felt hat, swung out through the glass door, Locke tilted back in his chair to behold looming into sight a heavy figure unwisely dressed in a fawn colored business suit. In the doorway the caller paused to look about with blood-shot, pale brown eyes.

"You Mr. Locke?"

"I'm Roger Locke. My father is away on business." Roger got up and shoved forward a chair. "He'll be



"Drive! Drive like hell!"

get to the bottom of this; meanwhile you'll keep your eyes open . . . What is it, Miss McCoy?" He glanced up to meet the puzzled features of the firm's junior "girl."

"There's a"—she hesitated per-

back in a little while. Do you want to talk to him?"

The visitor hesitated. "You a member of the firm?"

"Why, yes. I didn't get your name."

"The name is O'Dowd—Terry O'Dowd." The stranger swaggered into the white painted office of Locke & Son's junior partner. Slowly he removed a derby, laid it on the table desk and dropped, rather than sat, in the chair Locke indicated.

"O'Dowd? Sorry but I don't remember the name. Have we done business with you?"

A tight grin curved O'Dowd's thick lips. "No, Mr. Locke, you ain't, which is your tough luck because I'm a good guy to do business with."

"That's good." Locke strove to understand the purpose of this heavy-bodied individual across the table. What was he? Tug captain, shipper's agent, labor leader or what? "What can I do for you?"

The other leaned forward, thrusting his blunt bald head well across the table. "I'll offer you fifty thousand bucks spot cash for this here pier and warehouse—as is."

Roger Locke's friendly smile faded and his wiry body straightened in its chair a little. "Are you offering it, or are you offering it for somebody else?"

The shiny, pouchy features remained expressionless. "That's my business, Mr. Locke. The fifty grand is in cash, so I guess it don't make no difference to you who it comes from. What's your answer?"

"No."

"Seventy-five thousand, then."

"No, we'll not sell. We've had other offers and turned them down."

"As big as mine?" demanded O'Dowd, settling back and stuffing a fat cigar into the corner of his mouth.

"No, but we don't intend to sell. You see," Locke was at pains to preserve his unruffled manner, "being by ourselves on a point like this, we've got the best location in Baltimore harbor."

"It's kinda far from the main road," pointed out the caller, revolving the cigar between his lips, "and kinda lonely, too, ain't it?"

"That's why we want to keep it," replied the junior partner. "We're

nearest to ships anchoring in the lower harbor by half a mile."

"Eighty grand then." Locke saw the other's red-rimmed eyes become very intent.

"No."

Into O'Dowd's heavy features there began to creep a tinge of angry color.

"A hundred grand, then." The words were almost spat out. "Ye're a good trader—you win."

"On the contrary I don't win—as you put it."

"What! You still won't sell?" The stranger made a little incredulous gesture with his shapeless beinged hands.

"No, Mr. O'Dowd. Aside from the fact that my father and I won't deal with people who conceal their identity, this warehouse and this wharf have been in the Locke family since before the Revolution."

"Yeh—but the Revolution's over and I'm offerin' cold, hard cash."

A GLEAM of menace shone in the caller's pale eyes as they stared truculently into the calm gray ones of that wiry and alert young man seated across the wide mahogany table desk.

"You could get another pier somewhere else." O'Dowd's reddish, mottled features contracted. "Yeh, I *know* you could—"

"Not as good as this. That's final," Locke added in crisp dismissal. "Good day, Mr. O'Dowd."

"Listen, you," snapped the caller. "I'm tellin' you a hundred grand ain't to be sneezed at and—" Was it by chance that the emissary's glance wandered to the square of acid stained canvas?

The junior partner of Locke & Son, Ship Chandlers, decided he could not tell as he said, "You're wasting your

breath and my time; unless you tell me just who you are and whom you represent."

Mr. O'Dowd's pouchy features grew both wary and hostile.

"Listen, mister"—he seemed to be vocally underlining each word—"I'm sayin' nothin' but, 'A hundred grand for lease or title to Pier 27, and no questions asked or answered.' We—I want this pier and I'm goin' to get it. See?"

"I see only one thing, Mr. O'Dowd," replied young Locke with deceptive gentleness, "that in about one minute I'm going to throw you out of here—"

"Okay, buddy, just try and do it—"

"Thanks—I will." Like the swing of a drawbridge Roger Locke's six feet of bone and muscle surged up from the swivel chair he occupied.

"Listen, sap—and get this." Mr. O'Dowd's thick lips writhed back from teeth that were neither regular nor clean. "Don't be in a hurry, or you and your old goat of a pa are goin' outta business inside o' three—"

The speaker moved fast for his unwieldy build, but he was not as fast as Roger Locke; in an instant he had been seized by the neck of his "Kollege Kut" coat and the seat of his trousers and propelled violently to the door.

Like a snake diving into its burrow O'Dowd's hand shot to the breast of his coat. Barely in time Locke drove a vicious right jab into the stranger's face with a force that rocked that squat individual far back on his heels and sent him just far enough off balance so that Locke's stiff left to the jaw dropped him inert on the faded green rug of the hallway.

"You slimy son of a buzzard!" panted Locke. "Pull a gun, would you?"

But Mr. O'Dowd was too dazed to answer and only half knew it when young Mr. Locke removed the blunt automatic from his shoulder holster. Then the flushed and tight-jawed junior partner made the grave mistake of not summoning the police, and instead sat down until the man sprawled on the floor recovered enough to get up.

"Now git!"

"I'll get yuh for this—see?"

Mr. O'Dowd said nothing more, but with fury bright in his pale eyes snatched up his derby and swayed through the door, out where trucks and drays clattered endlessly along the waterfront.

When, some half an hour later, Locke senior came in from Wilming-ton and tossed his brief case on his desk, Roger Locke promptly mentioned the affair.

"So he wouldn't say who he was, or what he wanted the pier for?" growled Hornaday Locke.

"No," replied Roger tilting back in his swivel chair, "he wouldn't. Tell you, dad, I don't like the look of this. Who'd send a bird like that to do their business? That bird was one tough customer."

The old man frowned as he lit a cigar. "Damned if I know what to say, Roger. Looks like someone's threatening us."

"It's a threat. That's clear enough, but who'd make it?"

The senior partner drew thoughtfully on his cigar. "That's what I can't make out. Old Kennicott's been after this wharf for years. Burns him up to see us catch the new ships on their way up the harbor. And then there's Rasch & Company. Rasch hates my nerve."

Roger Locke shook his head. "Yes,

they're both keen on the property; but they're honest, same as that fellow who wrote last month."

"Who do you mean?"

"Adrian something, I've forgotten—he's located at a place on the lower harbor."

Silence reigned in the office while the elder Locke chewed meditatively on his cigar.

"Personally," Locke senior remarked, "I can't think of anyone who'd use such tactics."

"So you think the acid and this offer are connected?"

"Sure." Hornaday Locke's powerful gray head snapped over to face his son. "It's plain as the nose on your face. Somebody is turning ugly, but whoever he is, he's bright enough to twist the usual formula around. See what he's done?"

"No."

"Most people threaten and then do damage, but this fellow's done the damage first, to prove that he can, and then has made his threat later."

"I wonder," mused Roger Locke pensively beating his desk with a long yellow pencil. "I was watching this O'Dowd roughneck pretty carefully, for I'd got the same hunch, but he only glanced once at the cloth."

Hornaday Locke drew several aimless circles on a scratch pad then remarked:

"I'm sure up a tree about this. Kennicott's supposed to be honest, if he is a little sharp; and I've heard that Rasch has run into tough luck lately and wouldn't need this property."

"How about the third outfit?"

"Clean as a hound's tooth. I remember now—met their president once. He's a nice looking young fellow—Chamber of Commerce member, ex-service man and too bright to risk

a growing business in strong-arm stuff like this."

"But it must be one of them. Who else would want the pier?"

"Sure it's one of them, but I've an idea that when this bluff doesn't work, they'll call quits."

The older man smiled as he lit a cigar. "Don't look so tragic, son, I reckon all this business is nothing but a serious bluff. People have tried to bluff me before and when the bluff didn't work—well, I never heard anything more. Baltimore isn't Chicago, thank God!" The old man turned away, thumbing a sheaf of invoices. "Don't worry. If they come again I'll throw 'em out—I've thrown more than one man out of here—and still can."

Roger smiled briefly. A splendid figure was Hornaday Locke, still the same quiet driver of himself as well as of others, and a firm believer in the doctrine that every man should scotch his own snakes.

THEY said nothing more on the subject just then, but when, early the next morning, Matt Keenan, the pier foreman, rushed purple-faced into the office saying that someone had broken into the warehouse during the night and had driven in the bungs of fifteen barrels of turpentine, linseed oil, and varnish, father and son looked grimly at each other.

"Fifteen barrels, eh?" Hornaday Locke inquired sharply.

Keenan's greasy felt hat made two complete revolutions between his calloused fingers.

"Yes, sir—the floor's a sight and a lot o' new cables is soaked. Gawd, you should see the mess; it's clean up to yer ankles and if someone was to drop a match there'd be hell to pay.

We're cleanin' it up fast as we can on account o' that, sir, and I'm watchin' every man in the stock room."

Father and son stood in silence a moment.

"I suppose you're thinking," the senior partner remarked, watching the course of a rust-streaked Danish tramp that was on her way to the docks across the northwest harbor, "we'd better call for police protection."

"I am, dad," the other admitted. "If you'd seen that gorilla I talked with—well, I think this thing is too damned big for us to handle alone—and old McDonald isn't enough of a guard."

"Just the same, we'll wait awhile," the elder Locke announced. "Our blanket policy will cover the loss of the canvas and I'd rather we settle this ourselves. We Lockes never have yelped for help till it was really needed."

"I think we do need it," cut in the younger man. "We can't afford anything that eats into our cash reserve—it's not any too big since the depression. Besides cash is—"

"Very necessary to a junior partner about to get married?"

"That's true, dad. You know I love a good fight, but—well, just now it's different, there's Lucette to think of—"

"Of course. Well, I'll leave you out of it."

Young Locke's eyes gleamed suddenly. "Don't be a fool, dad. I won't be left out of this business. Only—oh, hell! Why did it have to happen now?"

The senior partner smiled approvingly and passed a hand over his stiff iron-gray hair. "You'll find that unpleasant things seldom happen at con-

venient times. Tell you what, old McDonald and I'll stand guard up until midnight. No, no, I know you're to dine with Lucette tonight. You can relieve me at twelve. Personally, I think they'll try nothing more for a while."

Roger Locke shook his strong, blond head. "Of course you're Big Injun, dad, and have the last say, but damned if I'd not feel better with a couple of flatfoot cops on hand."

"Don't need any flat feet about," insisted the old warrior. "My old duck gun's down here and I'll send Keenan out for some buckshot cartridges."

Roger Locke heaved a silent sigh as he pulled on his coat. Too well he knew the signs. Hornaday Locke was one of those ordinarily gentle men who, when they set their jaw, are no more to be moved than the Washington column in Mount Vernon Place.

"Have your own way. I'll slip a word to Lucette and she'll let me go around eleven thirty."

"Oh, nonsense, stay and enjoy your party. I'll take a .22 along tonight and have some fun picking off rats."

RELUCTANTLY, that evening, Roger Locke left his father busy in the familiar white-painted office and stepped out onto the broad cobbled street fronting the harbor.

Perhaps his father was right, yet there had been a certain evil positiveness to the mysterious Mr. O'Dowd that left doubts so sharp that Locke paused for a few words with Inspector Dunne—that genial, moon-faced, thick-headed giant who kept his small blue eyes trained on the waterfront.

"Evenin', Mickey," Locke greeted. "We'd a little trouble down at the wharf last night. Tell you all about

it tomorrow, haven't time now. Anyhow, I'd be grateful if you'd warn your boys to keep an eye on old 27 for the next few nights. But," he grinned, "for God's sake, don't tell the old man I tipped you off. He'd skin me alive."

"Sure and I will not." Inspector Dunne gave a nod of complete understanding. "'Tis touchy old man Locke is about looking after himself. Sure yes, I'll drop around there me ownself."

"Thanks. Try to come in after twelve, too, if you can. I'll be there then."

CHAPTER II

The Invaders

IT was about quarter past eleven when Roger Locke laid down his hand and said regretfully, "Sorry, Lucette, but I've got to pull out now. Good night, Juana—see you at the club, Jerry."

Across the card table Lucette Ashforth's large gray eyes became suddenly wistful. She followed him into the hall, and when Locke ran down the front steps traces of *Ambre de Delhi* clung to the lapels of his smartly tailored dinner coat.

Eleven thirty. Damn! He wished he could take time to go home and change as he had planned, but as he sped off down University Parkway that vague sense of misgiving which had been haunting him all evening became so sharp that he decided to go direct to Pier 27.

"Dad's all right," he assured himself, "and Mickey Dunne will be looking out for trouble."

But that harrying doubt lingered. He hurried on down deserted streets towards the busy harbor.

Soon his car was jolting over the uneven cobbles of Light Street, on past long rows of docks. A little of his sharp anxiety departed when, after speeding down a dark street that smelled of roasted coffee, he glimpsed the roof of the Locké warehouse.

As he expertly whirled his car into the street leading to Pier 27 he slowed suddenly; in his ears was a subdued clamor, not unlike the distant cheering of a football crowd.

"Trouble somewhere." His blood quickened and he pressed the accelerator at the harsh clang of a patrol wagon. Louder sounded the uproar. A jangle of broken glass rose above the distant shouts.

Maybe O'Dowd's men were cornered on Pier 27. Perhaps his father was even now fighting with them. He put on a burst of speed which sent his coupé bouncing over the cobbles.

Fresh signs of trouble appeared in the shape of men slinking away from, or running excitedly towards, the scene of the uproar. Now the loading platform came in sight. It was quite deserted and he slowed down, almost limp with relief. The riot or brawl was not at Pier 27, but taking place further down the street.

"Nerves, I guess." He grinned a little shamefacedly and wiped a bit of perspiration from his forehead as he brought the coupé to a halt alongside his father's sturdy sedan.

"Night lights going all right," he told himself firmly. "Guess the old man's all right." Yet he hurriedly unlocked the office door and gazed carefully about the dim and empty offices. Nothing wrong. Locke senior and old McDonald would probably be at the wharf end, since an invader would most likely try to enter from the harbor.

Mechanically, Roger Locke's eyes checked the position of everything in his father's puritanically simple private office. Good old dad, he'd use old Abner Locke's roll top desk until doomsday.

He stepped into his own office and quickly stripped off his neat dinner coat. Dimly to his ears came the noise of the street fight. He pulled a thick gray wool sweater over his dress shirt. No use wandering about like the family ghost; that was asking for trouble. His hand sought the desk drawer in which his own .38 Smith & Wesson lay in company with the gun he'd removed from O'Dowd, but it came away empty.

"Dad's right. Buckshot's a heap less likely to miss," he reflected.

AFTER stepping from the warmth of the office into the slightly colder atmosphere of the dim and lofty warehouse itself, Locke paused, trying to locate the two watchmen by their footfalls or the sound of their voices. They'd probably be talking of the good old days when a ship came to a chandler's wharf to be fitted out for a year or two instead of for a few months. His eyes traveled quickly over the mass of goods revealed by the feeble red yellow night lights that burned at wide intervals.

Well, they weren't talking, that was sure, and they must have heard him close the office door. Queer. A first, faint thrill of uneasiness gripped him, but he resolutely shook it off as he started down a wide aisle formed by huge wooden cases.

He had taken perhaps three steps when he again halted. Was there something in the air beside the tang of the harbor? He peered in every direction, sniffed the damp musty at-

mosphere, then the muscles in his throat tightened. He had identified the odor. It was a very faint reek of burnt smokeless powder.

"Dad!" he called loudly. "Where are you?"

His voice echoed dully. There came no answer to his cry beyond the sullen lap-lapping of waves on the piles beneath. What had happened?

"McDonald! Are you there? McDonald!" Young Locke's head snapped to the left. Had he heard a noise among the bags of oakum yonder?

Legs braced apart he tensed until a thought came to check his growing sense of panic. After all, the air was pretty heavy in the warehouse and old Locke had said he might shoot rats to pass the time.

"What a scary fool I'm getting to be." He noted a small mound of limp, brown rat carcasses lying in a battered bucket. Hunting had evidently been good.

"Must be up in the loft," he decided, and forthwith started for the stairs.

"Hey, dad, you up here?"

Briefly he ran his eye over the great, bright yellow coils of manila cable hanging from pegs set into the ponderous wall beams. Queer how much the dozens of blocks and falls hanging from roof beams resembled sleeping bats. Had he heard a guarded voice speaking downstairs? He whirled about, facing the stairs.

"Father!" Low and penetrating, his voice rang to the gloomy corners of the great, silent loft, but beyond the furtive scurry of rats there was no sound. All his previous anxieties returned. Bitterly he cursed his carelessness in leaving his gun in the desk drawer.

He halted very suddenly when he

came upon a vast nest of manila hawser that had been cut into short and very useless lengths. Two axes, their edges gleaming bright, lay hastily dropped across the tangle of mangled cables. Then he leaped to the shelter of a stack of tar barrels for, not ten feet away, the silhouette of a man's head was cast, black and menacing, against the yellow side of a crate.

For an appreciable instant Locke hesitated, his mind furiously testing and rejecting a hundred courses of action. As it was, he stood no chance once he quitted the shelter of the tar barrels. The light switch was, he knew, back near the stairs. Somehow he must get to that switch, plunge the place in darkness.

He turned without making a sound, but remained frozen in his tracks, for rising like an evil moon from behind a burlap covered bale, not three feet away, was a red, evil face set with small cold eyes that were as deadly as the automatic he levelled.

"Put 'em—" The man began, but got no further for Roger Locke had decided that only speedy action could save him, and so lashed out across the bale which alone separated him from the gunman. Startled, the other twisted sidewise while his automatic barked once.

Locke felt his fist smack into the gangster's cheek with a force that must have made his teeth rattle. But nevertheless the ambusher only staggered wildly sidewise.

From the tail of his eye Locke glimpsed more sinister figures materializing from among the goods. The lights! His one and only chance was darkness. Shielded, as he had calculated, by the reeling gunman he flung himself at the light switch and instantly snapped over the hard rubber knob.

Then he dropped flat to avoid the spray of lead that was flung at him by a sub-machine gun, that smacked into the goods just above his head.

"Stop that!" snarled a voice from the darkness. "Stop it, you blasted fool!"

Panting and sweating, Locke now could hear oil and varnish dripping and splashing from punctured tin containers. He hoped his would-be murderers wouldn't think to set fire to the warehouse.

He cautiously began to crawl off to the right to avoid the widening pools of varnish, then he carefully reconnoitered each aisle and opening. There was no telling where his various assailants were crouching.

"GET him, Mike?" A voice at length inquired in a hoarse whisper.

"No, Mike didn't. The blithering idiot—waited too long—" Locke, crawling along, listened carefully to those precise, English accented words.

"Wot'll we do, boss? That you, Gus?"

"Yeh!" The third man spoke from near the light switch. "He slipped me a dirty sock. Wait till I lay hands on that punk."

Then that strangely refined voice broke in once more.

"Stop talking, you fools. He's crawling away. Gus, you turn on the lights. We've got to get him."

Feverishly Locke cursed his carelessness in entering the warehouse without a gun. Once the lights went on, they'd hunt him down and he'd pay dear for that error. He must stop those lights from going on. Covert noises told him that someone had already started for the light switch. A bluff might work.

"I'll kill anyone who touches that light switch!" he yelled from the shelter of a chain locker. A bullet from a silenced revolver shattered itself in line with his head.

But after that all the noises ceased abruptly. If a single gunman was willing to risk switching on the light, he'd die very quickly. But the warehouse remained dark, for, as Locke shrewdly reasoned, crooks are the most selfish of mankind, and not one would risk his neck for the sake of a common victory.

With the acrid reek of burnt cordite stinging in his nostrils, Locke lay quite still, listening to the soft, cautious movements of his enemies. If he could only find his father's gun he'd give them a battle they'd not forget. *But where was his father?*

He could hear a muttered discourse taking place not far away in the musty darkness, and now and then he could even catch a whole phrase or sentence.

"We've got to get him. Then we'll be sure."

Another voice protested. "To hell with that! We'd better scram outta here."

The man with the English accent cut in. "We stay, I tell you! We'll get him now and shut his mouth."

Now was his best chance to reach the office door. Damn! He'd have to cross a stretch of unsheltered flooring perhaps thirty feet wide—a lot too wide to risk crossing with a sub-machine gun ready back there among the shadows.

He peered hopefully about in the gloom and saw he was near one of the counters now. On it was screwed, as a permanent exhibit, a small brass bell such as yachtsmen use. That dully bright outline gave him the shadow of an idea, and while it grew in his brain

he silently crawled toward it. He'd have to be very careful now, the slightest sound would bring a shower of lead.

Carefully he lifted from the counter a ball of wrapping twine, and then with infinite care he knotted the cord's free end through the slot at the end of the bell clapper. Then, very quietly, he sank down behind the boxes again and commenced to slide sidewise over the dusty, splintery floor.

He was none too soon. Judging by sounds, all three, or was it four—men had begun a steady advance upon that point from which Locke had last spoken. Near the office door he crouched, breathless, watching the progress of the four shadowy shapes towards a small stack of cases of red lead.

From box to bale the attackers converged on their objective, then the machine gunner braced himself, with both hands levelling his deadly weapon. The hand of one, evidently the leader, rose in a signal.

He gave the twine a gentle tug, and the bell, now some fifty feet away and to the left of the gunmen, gave a brief, metallic *clink*. He almost grinned when the black blur of the four gunmen promptly vanished among the heaped-up goods.

Trusting that their interest was now certainly centered on the area of the bell, he drew a deep breath and gave the cord another pull, and then dashed on tiptoe across the danger zone. His hand struck the cold metal knob of the door and in an instant he was through it, ducking low.

He scrambled along the corridor on hands and knees, and when he leaped up to dash into his office he heard the invaders running in the direction of the wharf end of the warehouse.

Panting, furious at this inexplicable attempt to murder him, and sick with fear for his father, he plunged across his office.

His hand closed over the cold outline of his pistol; he also shoved O'Dowd's pistol into his hip pocket and promptly headed back to the scene of conflict.

His starched shirt clinging wetly to him, with every sense keyed to its highest pitch, he stepped once more into the gloom of the warehouse and commenced to reconnoiter. The feel of his big Smith & Wesson .38 was reassuring, and anxiety for his father rendered him savagely eager.

Had all the invaders left the warehouse? There were noises beneath the pier; the faint clink of rowlocks and a murmured sentence or two. Perhaps he could get a glimpse of the retreating invaders when they came out from under the wharf, and come out *they must*, to get away!

They had gone out at the wharf end. He could see one of the big sliding double doors open perhaps a foot, and through it caught the cold sheen of some stars as well as the riding lights of a couple of steamers.

He hurried toward the open door. By God, he had them! He could hear them talking down below. If they chose to fight, he was in the better position, being high up on the wharf and able to shoot down into their open boat.

He pulled out O'Dowd's gun and transferred it into his left hand—there were seven good shots in that automatic.

Just as he neared that bright gap marking the open door, he paused, realizing that, in passing through it, he would certainly be silhouetted. What if a single killer had stayed behind?

He shrank back barely in time for, some five yards to the right of the door, a black outline materialized with magic suddenness. Frantically, Locke whirled and fired without aiming at a streak of orange-yellow flame that stabbed at him through the darkness.

A hot iron touched his ear and he took cover behind a barrel of nails. His pistol was raised but he did not fire. He wanted to take that damned rat alive. However, let that thug's right hand rise an inch or two and he'd send a second bullet after the first.

Evidently his enemy was hard hit. Locke heard him cough with a tearing, racking cough that shook his whole body. Gradually that dark shape sagged forward.

"Well, I got one of you sons of buzzards," he was surprised to hear himself say.

Rigidly, Locke watched the other's left hand, a mere black outline, creep up and claw at a box top. There came the dull thud of the gangster's pistol falling to the floor; the man sank from sight.

He was assailed by several questions. Was his enemy as badly hit as he pretended? Was there yet another thug lurking among the shadows? The uncertainty was exasperating, and outside oars were hurriedly beating the water.

"They'll get away," he told himself silently. "Guess the only thing to do is to turn on the lights."

STILL too worried to marvel that the ordinarily efficient harbor police had not yet appeared, Locke cautiously made his way back to the main light switches and, throwing them suddenly on, flooded the great warehouse with a blinding glare.

Amid the heaps of goods there was no movement, no sound.

Halfway to the wharf door he halted. A human foot lay in plain sight between two packing cases. Judging from the position of that scuffed brown shoe, the man, whoever he was, must be lying down and staying very still. Then the wide eyes of the junior partner noted a single bright thread of blood that, stickily shiny, was creeping lazily over the scarred floor.

"Who's that?" he challenged. But whoever lay beyond that packing case remained obstinately silent.

Seized with a sharp sense of dread, Locke peered around a coil of manila and felt a cold pang pierce his heart. Poor old McDonald! His gray hair softly a-glimmer in the arc lights, he was lying crumpled on his face with that indescribable flatness of a man from whom the last spark of life has departed.

Murdered! Immeasurable rage filled Locke as he peered down at the dead man. Poor, kindly old McDonald!

A sudden sense of panic filled him. *Where was Hornaday Locke?* Dead? There was an ugly set to Roger Locke's jaw as he resumed his progress towards that spot where lay the man he had wounded.

Foot by foot he closed in, fury such as he had never known raging in his veins. Here he and his father had been minding their own business, asking for nothing better than to be left alone; and now, because some unknown coveted their possessions, they were being hunted and hounded as though they lived in medieval Europe.

Locke inched forward. He called out, "Stand up there!" but at the same time was puzzled to note certain splashes leading through the open

door, splashes that reflected the outer light. Could the gunman, only wounded, have escaped? But, no, breathing could be heard beyond the packing cases.

Locke dodged around a hogshead of turpentine and so was able to see behind the case which had heretofore hidden his antagonist from view. Lying on the floor he could distinguish the outline of a revolver, ugly as death itself, and beyond it a man's back. He stood up abruptly.

In rigid horror he gazed, blinked, passed a wavering hand before his eyes, and then looked again. The solid pier seemed to shake and sway under him when he found himself staring at the body of his father lying half slumped against a packing case.

CHAPTER III

Over Angelo's Bar

THE wound Locke found to be in his father's back just above the heart, and therewith his most paralyzing agony was dispelled. Thank God! He had not killed his father. Now the meaning of those splashes leading to the door became instantly clear.

Possessed of a chill, deadly rage he bent over his father and from the first realized that there could be no hope with so much bright, arterial blood staining the fabric of Hornaday Locke's shirt.

The enormity of it appalled and sickened him. Wantonly, efficiently, mercilessly, Hornaday Locke had been shot for no greater crime than attempting to protect property hard earned with the sweat of years.

"Steady, dad! Hang on." In spite of himself, Roger Locke's voice quavered as he made a compress of his

handkerchief. Then, with a necktie gently removed from his father's neck, he secured in place the rough compress which, in a measure, did slow the escape of the blood.

"Roger! Guess—got—me. From behind—poor Mac— We caught 'em—chopping cables—surprised 'em—they shot first, though—"

The younger Locke stiffened on seeing his father's eyelids open as slowly as though weighted with lead. How pale were those stern yet kindly features which made a whitish blur on the gray sweater he had stripped off to make into a pillow.

"Dad! For God's sake don't give up." Biting his lips, the distracted son pulled out his handkerchief and wiped away some of the brightness from that pallid forehead. "I can't get on without you."

"You will—you and Lucette—Locke & Son, don't forget... Ah-h—that's better—cold night for April—eh, boy?"

Every faltering syllable impressed itself in Locke's brain as though stamped there with a hot iron. As from a distance he heard a voice saying:

"What's wrong? What's happened?"

He raised a warning hand, for now a false strength had crept into Hornaday Locke's fine features; it was that fleeting last stand of vitality before the ultimate defeat.

"Don't quit, Roger—fight 'em—but don't be a fool, like I was—"

Locke was terrified to hear the strength in his father's voice. Wide-eyed, cold, he knelt above the lax figure.

"I'll never quit—never doubt it. Lie back—save your strength—"

The blue lips curved in a weary

smile. "I'm going to rest very soon, Roger. It will be nice—see your mother again—Catherine, dear girl—I—I—" The voice had faded to nothingness before Locke realized it.

"He's gone," choked a voice. "May the Virgin receive his soul in peace."

With glassy, unseeing eyes, the young man in the stained and torn evening clothes peered up at the disheveled figure of Inspector Dunne.

"God comfort ye, Mr. Roger," said he thickly — "'Tis so bad there's no use sayin' more."

"No, there's no use talking," the son muttered.

The half hour which followed was for Roger Locke a nightmare. He retained of it only brief, disconnected impressions of men in blue uniform coats, of bells, of men in white uniforms, of shields, derby hats. There was, too, a vision of the coroner, still red-eyed from his interrupted sleep and ludicrous in a gray business suit pulled on over pajamas. Questions! Questions! Questions!

At the end of it all Hornaday Locke and Donald McDonald were lifted into a police ambulance and, in the democracy of death, departed forever from that house of commerce to which they had devoted their lives.

In his office Roger Locke sat with dully aching head.

Slowly he raised his eyes when Inspector Dunne's square figure loomed outside the ground glass door.

"Come in," he called. "Find anything?"

Dunne's heavy head, nearly bald now, shook. "Beyond that rat's rod, the axes they used on them cables and a thread or two of cloth caught on an iron case strap, there's never a trace—"

"Got clean away, then?"

"Clean away, but from the blood he spilt, he'll be bad hit. Mulcahey's sendin' out a doctor and hospital alarm. Maybe we'll pick him up that way."

"Now, listen, Dunne—get this. I'm posting a ten thousand dollar reward for the arrest of my father's murderers—and that's only the beginning of—" The telephone at his elbow rang drowsily.

Dunne's blunt features relaxed a little. "That'll be Mulcahey—"

A little dazedly Locke lifted the receiver off the hook.

"Hello . . . Yes, this is he . . . What!"

Over the wire came a voice speaking hurriedly in a precise, English accent.

"Will you sell out now?"

"No, damn you!"

Frantically, Locke signaled for Dunne to take a receiver in the next office.

"Don't be a damned fool any longer," that coldly menacing voice continued. "By this time you should see I intend to have Pier 27."

Dunne, hatless, with coat flying, was almost to the other phone.

"Now look here—" Locke tried to prolong the conversation. "Do you think—"

The unknown cut in. "I'm not staying to have this call traced. Is it yes or no?"

"No, you swine—"

"Then I shall have to remove you, too." And the other rang off just as Dunne snatched up the receiver.

Sweating, Dunne set down the receiver and glared a little helplessly.

"'Tis no use, of course. He called from a pay station. Damn the luck."

"All right, never mind—let's get ahead with the situation—What about clews?"

"Clews?" Dunne's bulk obliterated from sight a chair beside Locke's desk. "'Tis poor and few they are—no finger-prints on that rod and the serial numbers was burred off. In the morning we'll give the pier a more careful once-over. What with all them guys scrambling about they musta left something we can work on."

Struck by a sudden thought, Locke fixed the detective with a sombre eye. "Say, I asked you to keep an eye on this warehouse."

Dunne's heavy shoulders rose in a weary shrug as he turned a tragic face. "Sorry—but it couldn't be helped. Faith, there was an ugly scrap goin' on down in front of Angelo's, that Dago whisper acrost from Pier 30. A real mill it was, too, or I'd have been here long since."

"I see—"

"First thing I knew was wrong, some rookie said he heard shots on Pier 27."

A rattle at the door made them both jump, but there appeared only a taxi cab driver with a suitcase of clothes hastily packed by Mrs. Willocks, the elderly housekeeper who ran the otherwise womanless establishment of the Lockes.

WHEN the clocks struck noon of the following morning, not a single step had been made towards capitalizing on the very scanty clews. Locke came to the conclusion that it would have been far better if Inspector Michael Dunne had never left the uniformed force. Pathetically eager to do the right thing, the big detective was, nevertheless, hopelessly inept.

"Well," he told himself grimly, "if anything's going to be done it looks like it's up to me."

That the hand of the unknown was not stayed even a few hours was proved when Roger Locke returned to the office only to learn that not one of six trucks belonging to Locke & Son would stir from the garage.

"It was emery, sir," growled Dan Keenan. "Some son of a buzzard took out every blessed spark plug and poured a fist full of emery into each cylinder. We daren't run the poor old girls till the motors is all took down and cleaned, and even then they'll never be as good as they was to start with. What'll we do about them deliveries due at Coxton's wharf?"

"Hire some trucks," snapped Locke. "Those deliveries are damned important."

With increasing savageness, Locke strove to maintain the orderly functioning of Locke & Son. But the impossibility of the task was brought home when the foreman of the wharf gang staggered in after the lunch hour with a bloody nose and a black eye. He declared that he and the wharf gang had been just mobbed as they worked on the loading platform.

"Blackjacks was flyin' an' rocks. Some gorilla said in my ear, 'Lay offa this pier. 'Tain't healthy to work here no more, see?'"

And not a man of the wharf gang reappeared. Business halted, for, strangely enough, more labor could not be persuaded to work at Pier 27. Truck owners, too, invariably replied that their trucks were "out haulin'" and were busy for weeks to come. Locke & Son apparently would do no business that day. Locke & Son—the words lingered in Roger Locke's mind.

Queer, *he* was Locke now and there was no son. The telephone on his desk jangled. It proved to be Mr. Ashforth.

"Hello, Roger," he greeted. "Sorry to bother you, but would you please ask Lucette to step to the phone?"

"Lucette?" A dreadful qualm seized Roger Locke. "Why, Mr. Ashforth, Lucette isn't here. Is she on her way down?"

"Isn't she there?" Sharply came the voice over the receiver. "That's queer. Why, she left an hour and a half ago, just after Keenan telephoned you wanted to see her. Well, I guess she's been delayed. Anyway, I wish you'd ask her to—"

"But Keenan never phoned," Locke cried.

"What! You—you didn't tell him to?"

"No." Locke felt nauseated, weak and helpless.

After a short interval of frantic telephoning, the appalling realization came home that Lucette Ashforth had vanished without a trace. The realization left him weak with mingled fury and despair. He felt numb, utterly bewildered. It was like fighting a poisonous fog which, deady and intangible, was closing in on him.

Miss Ferguson, the gray-haired woman who had been Hornaday Locke's secretary, came in. An envelope was in her hand.

"I—I'm sorry, Mr. Roger," she commenced apologetically, "but a Western Union boy brought this and it's marked 'urgent.' Oh, I—I didn't want to disturb you, but—"

"Let me have it."

He slit open the envelope flap to disclose a single unheaded white sheet of typewriter paper. He read typewritten in the center:

"Miss Ashforth will be safe until midnight tonight. After six in the morning you can have her, but you won't want her. Don't you think you had better quit being a fool? If you change your

mind make out a legal transfer, put it in your pocket and row towards the lower harbor at ten-thirty. You will be met. An appeal to the police will result in immediate death for your fiancée and for yourself later."

There was no signature and for a long five minutes Roger Locke sat staring from unseeing gray eyes at the brutally blunt missive.

IT was three of the afternoon now; that gave him just nine hours to solve his problem. Who was back of all this persecution—Rasch, Kennicott or someone else?

How helpless he was—one man alone against an organization that had unmistakably proved its power. Strange that he had not the vaguest idea of the identity of the man who had launched this avalanche of ill fortune. Who was the leader? The Englishman? He, at least, was the dominant figure he had to date encountered, but he had not even seen his face, he had only heard a few hasty words.

"Better try another tack," he told himself, and so mentally retraced the events of the past day and night. Odd, it was just twenty-four hours ago that O'Dowd, with his brutal, pulpy face, had come into the office of Locke & Son to make his offer and threats.

The more he thought about it, the surer he became that the riot which had preceded the murder of his father was an affair staged to divert public and police attention.

He decided to find out about that riot.

Leaving Keenan, armed and alert, in charge of Pier 27, Locke made a few simple preparations. Into the waist band of his trousers he tucked his .38. He glanced at himself in the glass and noted with satisfaction the stubble of beard which covered his chin. He took

from a locker a flannel shirt and other rough garments he wore when some particularly hard work was to be done. An oil-stained and battered felt hat pulled low further altered his appearance. More intricate precautions he let alone, well aware that his skill at make-up was not enough to fool a really keen observer.

He quit the great silent pier and set off at an uncertain shamble in the direction of a certain dilapidated district which, facing the waterfront, dispensed to the sailors of the world liquor and other full-blown pleasures.

The line of his wide, and ordinarily good-humored mouth tightened and the blood commenced to surge more quickly through his arteries when he turned into a squalid street.

Where had the free-for-all started? Oh, yes, in front of Angelo's—or so Dunne had said.

"Angelo's? Sure, two blocks down—No. 35½, I think," a passing postman told him. "Better be careful in there. It ain't no kindergarten."

Before Locke had traveled half a block he became aware that a pasty, narrow-faced individual with a cigarette dangling from his loose lower lip had deserted his position at the door of a pool parlor to come sauntering along, hands in pockets.

Already? Locke's wariness increased when the stoop-shouldered individual quickened and slowed his gait to suit Locke's. He was careful to give no indications of his discovery. A small advantage was his if he could maintain his unconscious pose.

"This is a break," he told himself.

He meandered towards a little shop above whose door a sign read: "Angelo's Delicatessen."

Even a half-observant passer-by would have noted the discrepancy be-

tween the smallness of the red-fronted shop and the numbers of hard-featured and roughly dressed men who patronized it.

The shadow was loafing along not half a block behind when Locke drew a deep breath and climbed the three well-worn steps which led to the delicatessen's door in the wake of a couple of longshoremen who came swaggering up. Following humbly after them, he shuffled across the littered, sawdust covered floor of the delicatessen and, unchallenged, made his way down a narrow corridor.

In the doorway of a large back room he paused, blinking because of dazzling bright lights and the sting of the smoky air on his eyeballs.

Disjointed words and sentences came drifting out of the foul miasma through which Locke could distinguish a long, well-patronized bar and a few sturdy tables and chairs.

Almost furtively he pushed his way to the bar and there ordered a double rye; nor was it by accident that his position was at one end of the bar where his back was presented to nothing more dangerous than a strip of flyblown plaster.

The clientele was largely composed of waterfront loafers, stevedores, and sailors—big, grimy men with battered faces and tattooed, shapeless hands. However, scattered among these were a few smooth-faced, nattily dressed individuals who, disdaining the bar, hunched over the tables to talk among themselves in undertones.

While he downed a sip of his double rye, Locke looked about cautiously and met his first disappointment; if any of these individuals had been in his warehouse the night before, he did not recognize them. But then, the only man he could possibly identify was the thug

he had hit on the jaw; of the other murderers he retained only dim and imperfect impressions.

Deliberately, he took another sip or two of the liquor which, to his surprise, was not wholly vile. The rest he covertly spilled into a cuspidor at his feet before he pulled out a package of cigarettes and offered them to a burly stevedore who was patting his pockets.

"Wanta butt?"

"T'anks—don't mind if I do—"

"Some scrap last night."

"Yeh. A swell mill while she lasted. Was you in it?"

"Naw," returned Locke. "Naw, me and a frail was comin' back from the Oriental. I'd spent a lotta dough on her—"

"Sure, I know, but it's too bad, buddy," sighed the stevedore and, holding up a tattooed, ham-like hand, exhibited a set of skinned knuckles. "You oughta seen me put some coons away on ice." The speaker's small, dull blue eyes lit a little and he drew strongly on the cigarette.

"Who started it?" demanded Locke and was pleased to catch a glimpse of that rat-faced youth lounging in the doorway. Maybe he could be made useful. The shadow was peering about. He was nervous. Locke looked again and came to a definite conclusion regarding that jerky manner. "Have a pony on me?" he invited the stevedore.

"Sure," grinned the other. "A guy can't stand on one leg, an' I'm outta work."

"How come?"

"The boss is kickin' off wit' T. B. up in Saranac and the business is goin' to hell."

"What business—shipping?"

"Chandlery. I was wit' Rasch's outfit. A hard egg he was, too."

The glass in Locke's hand shook a little. Rasch dying? That narrowed his problem somewhat. Certainly a dying man would not be interested in property he did not need. So Rasch was dying.

"Tough break, buddy," he said. "Well, here's how."

By the time the shadow had artfully worked his way into earshot, Locke and the stevedore had become boon companions. Despite his close attention to his drinking, Locke had not failed to notice how the shadow paused momentarily beside one table occupied by some of those soft-faced men.

Even as he raised his pony of rye, he noted a swarthy individual in a tight fitting pearl gray suit nod very briefly. Presently the shadow edged nearer to Locke and his stevedore friend.

"How 'bout a little room, pal?" he begged while Locke's hand dropped ever so negligently into his side pocket. If a showdown was due now—

"Sure, sure," boomed Locke, "step right up, buddy. They's room for everybody."

"Sure," echoed the stevedore, launching a playful slap that nearly made the ivory-faced shadow swallow his cigarette. "Step up and burn yer guts."

Once a new round of drinks had slid over the bar, the shadow preempted the conversation, and it was not lost on Locke that the newcomer almost completely ignored the stevedore.

"Thanks, fellers. Glad to meet you, Mr. Lundstrom . . . and you, Mr. er—Bell. My name's Hart—Cully Hart." He raised a thin, dirty hand. "Nix, pal, don't make no wise cracks on my name, I heard every damn one a thousand times."

Obscene stories filled the interval before an argument over prohibition

began, and before long the amiable Mr. Hart had absorbed two double ryes and color was commencing to creep into his pasty cheeks.

"Naw," he said when Locke suggested another round. "This hooch is okay, but you oughta try some of the smooth stuff I got down to my place. I know a guy on the run to Cuba—"

"Sure," rumbled the stevedore, "atta boy. Le's go somewheres else."

Locke thought it wise to refuse the first invitation. To accept too readily was to invite suspicion. He must go slow and consider every move.

What would be likely to happen down at Cully Hart's place? Was Lucette held there?

"Suit yerself." The shadow affected injured feelings and talked to the stevedore until that worthy, realizing that no more free drinks were forthcoming, waved a semi-maudlin farewell and shuffled on down the bar to greet another ponderous human animal, as huge and as thick-skulled as himself.

"Jeeze," sighed Mr. Hart slipping into the space left by the stevedore's departure. "'At guy's a reg'lar blotter. I gotcha—passin' up the invite before—" He winked a beady black eye. "No use pourin' good booze down a human sewer like him. Come down to my joint," he invited. "We could catch a couple of quick ones—and, if it's the skirts you like—say, pal, I know a couple."

Locke, who had skillfully built up an impression of semi-drunkness, shook his head irritably. "To hell wit' the skirts," he mumbled. "Booze and skirts—skirts and booze—take a tip, Cully, don't never mix 'em up together. H'yar, Charley."

He tossed a five dollar bill on the mahogany and when the barkeep short-

changed him fifty cents he made no remonstrance.

"Hey, you," rasped Hart, outraged, "where's the other fifty cents? Yeah—I know it—come across. This guy's a friend of mine, see?"

With an artistry that would have commanded the respect of a master actor, Locke went through the business of pulling himself together, as a semi-drunken man will.

On the way to the door he noticed that the man in the pearl gray suit had slipped out, quite unostentatiously, and that the men remaining at the table regarded him with more than passing interest.

CHAPTER IV

Over the Roofs

LOCKE, arm in arm with his shadow, sauntered at last into a street which stank with the sour smell of stale garbage, where rickety carts clattered over cobbled streets and where bonfires, built of crates, glowed in the gathering dusk.

"Say, where do you live?" Locke protested as though suddenly aware of his sordid surroundings.

"Just a little ways further," Hart urged. "Just a little ways, and I'm tellin' you, kid, you ain't washed your tonsils in booze like this since the war."

By keeping careful count of streets and house numbers, Locke, for all his pretended befuddlement, knew very well it was 3341 Blenheim Street before which his guide halted to fumble for a key. What did this grimy, clapboard tenement conceal? Had he entirely deceived Cully Hart?

"Come on, buddy. I hang out on the third floor."

"Okay," grunted Locke and he felt

a cold little dart strike his heart when he recognized the man in the pearl gray suit lounging in the doorway across the street, engaged in conversation with two men who stood with their backs turned. And one of them was O'Dowd, the thug who had raised the curtain on all this interlude of tragedy and death. So the killers were already on the scene. Too late to run. There was no choice but to go into No. 3341 and trust to his wits.

Hart led the way up scuffed stairs that creaked dismally. "The sheriff trun most o' the tenants out a couple of weeks back; it's hard times, you know."

Cully Hart halted at the head of the stairs and, pulling an ordinary house key from his pocket, unlocked the brown painted door of a room on the left of the landing.

"Jeeze, we're 'way up," panted the guest, while glancing about the stuffy little bedroom. "I wouldn't ha' come up if I'd knew it was so far. Must be hotter'n hell in summer up here."

"Sure is." Hart began rummaging in the drawer of a cheap, chiffonier. "It ain't no fun bein' right under the roof. I'm gonna move before it gets hot. Sit down, buddy; here she is." From a tangle of underclothes he pulled out what seemed to be a venerable bottle of Old Crow. "You'll sure—"

He got no further, for Roger Locke had hit him a hard clip just below the right ear. It was only a short, chopping blow delivered with the hard edge of Locke's right hand, but it was as effective as a knockout punch. Hart's head jerked violently back, then his thin body went limp.

Locke snatched out his .38, half expecting a salvo of shots to crackle out. But nothing happened. The door

across the landing remained closed and silence reigned over the dim and dusty tenement.

Breathing a little quickly, Locke steadied the unconscious man then, clubbing the .38, he rapped his host on the top of his narrow, brilliantined head.

"Better make sure of you, Cully," he whispered.

With feverish speed he bent to search the unconscious shadow and discovered, as he had fully expected, a hypodermic set, a small .32 automatic, a few odds and ends, and three letters. Cramming these in a side pocket, he lifted Hart to the bed and drew the covers up over the pale, unconscious face. Apparently the executioners would not be long in coming; cautious steps were making the rickety stairs creak at the ground level. That would be O'Dowd coming to square up for that beating.

On tip-toes Locke darted to a window fronting on Blenheim Street and noted that the thug in gray had disappeared, but that his two companions still loitered there, hands in pockets. Locke stepped swiftly back as one of them peered upwards.

"Not a chance that way—"

A quick look through a flaw in the shade of the back window revealed three more individuals crouched behind ash barrels in the alley. He felt badly shaken on realizing that escape in that direction, too, was hopeless.

Contact with his enemies had certainly been established! For some reason he had felt sure the final attack would not take place in his quondam host's room. He had counted on his enemies' planning to get him thoroughly drunk in private to later lead him, all unsuspecting, to a safe and neutral scene of execution.

Irresolutely, he paused in the center of a frayed rug beside the iron bedstead, listening to the cautious steps of the advancing killers. They were nearing the first floor landing.

Silently he opened the door and glanced out into the dark little hall; almost at once he stepped back into Hart's room to look hastily about. Next he snatched up a chair and an umbrella and then slipped very quietly out into the hall once more.

After locking the door of Hart's room he placed the chair beneath a small trap door in the hall ceiling. With sweat pouring down his face, praying that the trap would work readily, he gave a gentle shove. It gave. Shoving the umbrella up onto the roof, he gripped the frame and swung himself up through the trap.

Using the crook of the umbrella handle, he leaned down and deftly hoisted the chair onto the dingy, gravel and tar roof. With that ominous shuffle of feet on the stairs loud in his ears, he swiftly replaced the trap cover and, snatching up his incongruous equipment, dodged beneath a tangle of sagging radio aërials. At a run he crossed to the next roof, and from thence to the next. Here he hid the chair and the umbrella behind a cornice.

"It'll keep 'em guessing a while," he thought as he scrambled on past smoke belching chimney pots and weather-beaten skylights.

GONE was all possibility of Hart leading him to a central hive of the gang. He had been conducted into a barren trap that had nearly cost him his life. Not that he was clear even yet. That locked door to Hart's room should delay O'Dowd and the other killers a little, but he

must get off of the roofs and away before his enemies solved the mystery of his disappearance.

A quick survey of his surroundings showed that two ancient tenements separated him from the street corner. "Better get over there," he decided.

He hastily scrambled over the low, tar-papered partitions dividing one human warren from the next, and ducked under a line of damp clothes.

Finally, he dropped onto the third and last roof, there to catch his breath in the shelter of a large, ramshackle dovecote in which dozens of large, slate gray pigeons cooed and strutted.

Now being able to see without being seen, he glanced back over his route just in time to see the skylight at 334I Blenheim Street being cautiously lifted. Then a man — O'Dowd himself — scrambled up onto the roof to stand gazing swiftly about while the last rays of the setting sun flashed on a gun in his hand.

"He'll go downstairs with the alarm," Locke realized, so, praying that the door leading from the roof was unlocked, he tried lifting a rusted latch. The door opened. He listened intently while inquisitive pigeons fluttered about his head and two or three even came teetering towards him over the roof, their pink feet showing up sharply against the tar paper.

He slipped off the safety catch of the automatic in his pocket and started downwards. He must get away. For Lucette's sake he must! Nothing short of death could stop him now; precious minutes were slipping by with maddening speed.

A grubby, half naked little girl on the landing of the top floor puckered her face to cry, but when he smiled she smiled back and went on playing

with a little bundle of rags that was doing duty as a doll.

Blacker became the rickety staircase. On the second floor he could hear two women conversing across the hall in high-pitched voices. Down, down. At last the ground floor was reached and he faced a door with light beating in through its dirty, cracked glass—No. 3376 this was.

"Better keep going," he thought when a very natural fear bade him hesitate.

Had news of his escape thrown a cordon of thugs about the block? Locke stepped to the door, opened it, and glanced quickly down the shadowy street. He distinguished the two men he had seen before; they were standing on the sidewalk and looking up at the window of Cully Hart's room. Suddenly they separated, one walking rapidly away from the watcher, and the other, keeping a sharp lookout at the house fronts, coming straight towards No. 3376!

Forcing himself to walk deliberately, Locke descended half a dozen worn stone steps, then turned sharp left around the corner and without looking to see whether the thug had recognized him or not, began to run. No shot echoed through the dingy old street, so his chief danger now appeared to be from those men who had lurked in the alley back of 334I. Would they be lying in wait to knock him off if he tried to cross the alley mouth? Drawing a deep breath he gathered himself for a sprint across. Half way over he heard a sharp outcry:

"There he goes! Quick, Gus—"

A bullet drew sparks from the cobbles under Locke's feet as he passed the alley and sprinted in desperate zig-zags for the next street. Down it he dashed, the killers in hot pursuit.

Passers-by stared stupidly or made half hearted efforts to halt him. Then a cruising cab seemed to offer a haven. Gun in hand, he leaped into the tonneau and yelled to the driver's startled face,

"Drive! Drive like hell! Get away quick!"

CHAPTER V

The Waiter at Luscar's

APPARENTLY the chauffeur, a hard-featured youth in a gray golf cap, respected Locke's gun and his grim expression. Without more urging, he stepped on the accelerator. The taxi leaped ahead and careened on two wheels around the first corner. Bracing his legs against the wild lurching of the car, Locke looked through the taxi's back window and glimpsed two or three of his pursuers piling into a car parked by the side of the street.

"Keep goin'," he shouted to the chauffeur. "A hundred bucks for you if you get me away."

He used the butt of his automatic to break the glass of the back window, and crouched on the seat, his gun ready. A dozen times death swooped on the jouncing black and white painted cab, a dozen times cursing pedestrians narrowly escaped annihilation.

Several times it appeared that automatics would yet settle the affair; but Locke had not guessed the extraordinary skill of his chauffeur. With consummate skill the stocky youth at the wheel avoided rattling trucks, children playing in the streets and presently while weaving a course through the speeding traffic, called back over his shoulder that the pursuit had been shaken off.

"How's 'at, umpire? Yuh owe extra for that window, don't forget—"

"Swell work, boy, you sure are the berries behind a cab wheel." Through the window Locke passed two fifty-dollar bills. "And here's five for the window."

"Where to, buddy?"

"Nowhere. Turn the next corner slow and I'll jump out."

When the maneuver was successfully executed, Locke, without a moment's hesitation, darted across the sidewalk and into a small restaurant. At once he hurried into the wash room and there removed most of the dirt of his adventure. Then taking possession of one of those stall-like compartments which restaurateurs install for the benefit of amorous couples, he relaxed his vigilance a little.

After ordering a cup of coffee and some scrambled eggs, he dragged out the articles snatched from Cully Hart's unconscious form. Keeping one eye on the door, he examined the first letter and was immeasurably disappointed to find it nothing more interesting than an extremely obscene love letter from some illiterate person who signed herself "Lulu."

The next envelope only contained an overdue bill from some tailor located in the cheapest part of East Baltimore.

"Oh, damn the luck," groaned Locke. The third and last document was nothing but a cheap postcard faced with a gross cartoon entitled "Mamma love Poppa?"

His dreams of shattering the blank and baffling wall which concealed his enemies appeared to be at an end.

"What a fine dick I turned out to be." Sick with disgust, he realized he was now no nearer his goal than he had been when he had stared horror-stricken into his father's dying face, than he had been when he had received that grim, unsigned letter.

"Guess there's nothing for it but to sell out," he silently decided. "I can't let them harm Lucette—"

Wearily he turned the postcard over and with unseeing eyes noted the childish scrawl of the writer. The message, evidently written as a drunken prank, read, "Dear Cully, We're sampling some of Luscar's best. Too bad you're on the wagon. Wish you was here. The Boys."

The hypodermic yielded nothing of interest, any more than did the cheap automatic.

"Getting to be a regular walking arsenal," he reflected as he dropped the gun into his side coat pocket. He laughed drearily to himself as he forced a few mouthfuls of food down his throat. How very helpless he was—a damned fool to try to fight a system single-handed. A Don Quixote in modern clothes.

Luscar's. His gaze reverted with dull interest to the card which was all soiled and crumpled around the edges. Luscar's. Quite without hope of results he got up and, selecting a telephone book from a stand, brought it back to his compartment there to thumb over the leaves to the letter L.

"Luscar, Theo.," he read, "Rstrnt, 7244 Light Street."

He glanced at the card again. Not much hope; it was postmarked in Baltimore, some ten days back. A damned slender thread of hope—but it was a hope. He bowed his aching head over the white enamel table. What was going to happen next? Thus far the attack on Locke & Son had been executed with the merciless precision of veteran shock troops, while his own offensive had proved weak, ill-conceived and unproductive.

After draining the last of his coffee he felt his mind clear a little. Some-

what refreshed, he paid his check and, after a careful study of his surroundings, stepped out into the now deep darkness. A block away he hailed a cab and gave the address of Luscar's.

A sobering thought struck him. What if Hart, on coming to, had missed the postcard and, counting on his following up the lead, had arranged for a little reception committee at Luscar's?

As the taxi sped off, Roger Locke found himself looking into the windows of one of those Neo-Hofbrau houses which dot most American cities like an attack of German measles. Outwardly, the place seemed quiet enough and apparently catered to business men from the shipping and financial districts during the lunch hour.

The instant he stepped inside, however, he realized the error of his estimate; the restaurant had a definitely sinister aspect. There were very few tables out front and these looked as if they were patronized but rarely; from the rear of the kitchen sounded many voices and the hurry and bustle of real activity.

A huge German head waiter with blond hair and sloping skull, smoothed a stained tuxedo vest, bowed respectfully, and came forward to pull out a chair at one of the tables. Locke made a contemptuous gesture.

"I ain't eatin' yet. I'm lookin' for a guy called Hart. Know him? He's a friend of mine."

"Hart?" Elaborately the German considered an ugly candelabra fashioned of wrought iron and stag horns. "Hart? Vot iss his first name?"

The two or three diners in the front room stared a little as Locke made an annoyed gesture. "Cully—I gotta find him, see? So don't keep me waitin' out here."

"He aind't here, mister. Not yet, anyways."

"Yeah? Then where c'n I find him?"

So Cully was at least known here. But he must be cautious, Locke realized. The German was peering suspiciously at him. At last the head waiter beckoned with a heavy sausage of a finger.

"Come into mein office, I'm Hoffman," he announced. "I guess maybe you really iss a friend of Cully Hart. He iss vun good feller, dot Cully, spends money when he hass it. *Ja*, a good feller—"

"Yeah," Locke spoke from the side of his mouth. "He's okay. Nice joint you got here."

"*Ja*, aind't so bad."

The office walls were lined with signed photographs of third-rate prize fighters and actors and certificates of memberships in various German-American societies.

Now, more than ever he must keep a clear head. Let him arouse a single suspicion in this bear-like German and that last thread of hope would be snapped. Lucette! How hard it was to seem leisurely. Aloud he said, "Yeah, I wanta find Cully, I got some good news for him. I just pulled in from Wilmington."

Intently, Locke studied the man opposite and decided that Hoffman was at least interested. Nebulous ideas commenced to stir. What could be the connection? Liquor? Dope? Smuggling of aliens? What?

"Yeah," he continued after accepting a cigarette from his host. "I'm from N'York and I stopped in at Wilmington to see about—er—imports." As he had half expected, the pale blue eyes of the man opposite became fixed at the word "imports." "The Big Guy said Cully was in with an Englishman."

"Vot? B r i s c o e?" Hoffman's shaggy brows lifted a little.

Locke became evasive. "Yeah, Briscoe. I don't know him yet, but Cully does."

He searched a mental file. Briscoe? He'd owned a Briscoe car, years ago. Briscoe? There was a firm in Baltimore by that name, Adrian Briscoe & Co., if he remembered right. But what the business was he could not recall.

"This Briscoe feller, is he a good friend of Cully's?"

Wariness crept into the big German's manner.

"*Ja*, I t'ink dey knows each other pretty vell. But you chust talk to Hart, he'll be in tonight maybe sometime yet. You wait or you come back?"

"I'll come back," Locke promised and caught up his hat. Briscoe. That much he'd learned. Imperceptibly he was getting ahead, or so it seemed. From the origin of the riot to Hart, From Hart to Luscar's, from Luscar's to Briscoe. Briscoe—Ah! He had it now, they were shipping agents. He recalled having once met Briscoe and having catalogued him as a quiet mannered, prosperous looking Englishman. He'd hardly fit into the picture. Must be another Briscoe. He'd look at the telephone book.

When he did so he was startled to discover but a single such name listed, that of Adrian Briscoe. So that was it! His father had recalled only the name "Adrian." A fleeting hope was born. Briscoe was an importer and was English. The man he sought at least spoke with an English accent and was undoubtedly interested in waterfront affairs. Yet his father had spoken of Adrian Briscoe as a member of the Chamber of Commerce, and the company was rated high by all credit organizations. Besides that, Briscoe

himself was socially prominent in the English colony of Baltimore.

Another consultation of the telephone book revealed that Adrian Briscoe & Co. had a wharf and warehouse on Middle Branch Harbor to the south of Baltimore itself. The more Locke thought about it, the deeper grew the frown creasing his forehead. The Middle Branch was by no means the best or most convenient of Baltimore's seven sub-harbors.

"What if someone's using his name as a blind?" Locke put the question to himself. "He might have a crooked partner."

He wondered if he were on the right track. Precious time was slipping through his fingers with the elusiveness of quicksilver.

"Since Rasch is dying and out of the picture," he reflected, "that leaves Kennicott and Briscoe. Guess I'd better go to see 'em both."

He lifted the receiver and called the old man Kennicott's office. No answer. He called the house and Kennicott himself answered.

"A business matter? Sure, come right over."

"I'll be right up," Locke promised and realized that his father's rival had sounded almost eager. Why? He pondered the question while stopping long enough at Pier 27 to change from his grimy, longshoreman's clothes and to otherwise make himself presentable.

"SURE, I want your pier," Kennicott, gray-haired, craggy-featured and still vigorous, snapped the reply a few minutes later. "I offered your Pa seventy thousand dollars for it. And say, what's eating you, young fellow?" In the shadows of the big, handsomely furnished living room, Kennicott's pale, pointed features grew

tense. "Damned if I like your manner. Guess you're kind of upset. I read about your trouble. I was sorry to hear of it, though your Pa and I have been business rivals a good many years."

"Yes; he always said you cost him more sleep than anyone else in Baltimore."

The head of Kennicott & Co. flushed a little behind his harpoon of a nose and his gimlet eyes were very hard and blue as he said:

"Well, old Hornaday's had his turn and now you expect to get yours, eh? Well, you may be a good man, Locke, but you'll have to scratch hard to do as well as your Pa."

"You don't have to tell me that." His father! God! Could this frozen-faced man opposite have been responsible for Hornaday's death? If he were, his mask-like face was under perfect control.

"Come around again, son, when you want to sell that pier. I'm always in the market for it."

"Yes, I've been learning that." Locke's voice was so edged that Kennicott's blue veined hands tightened on the arm of his chair. They were strong looking hands, Locke noticed.

"Say, listen, you'd better not get any funny ideas about me. I won't stand for it, understand? If you weren't anything but a kid—"

"Shut up!" Locke's over-tried nerves jangled. "Don't try to patronize me. And one thing, if you've had anything to do with this business—"

At the door of the living room appeared a colored girl. "They's a gemmun out in the hall, Mistuh Kenn'cott."

"What about him?" snapped the ship chandler.

"He say he got a note for you-all. He won't give it to me. He 'lows it's right impo'tant."

"Just a minute." Like a camp chair unfolding, Kennicott's long body got to his feet, and with arms loosely dangling from his thin shoulders he ambled out into the hall.

Locke watched his host's shadow travel to the left and become fixed on the apple green wall of the hallway. Quite distinctly Kennicott's thin voice came saying, "What's this?"

"A note for you, sir."

There followed the sound of a ripped envelope, and Locke's glance wandered to the hall and paused on the second shadow, then his fingers tightened on the arms of the chair until their tips dug deep into the gray velvet upholstery. Yonder was silhouetted the long, pointed nose and the conical, back-sloping skull of the head waiter at Luscar's. His throat felt suddenly dry. Hoffman at Kennicott's! What the hell? Hoffman had mentioned Briscoe, *not* Kennicott. Ah, he saw it! Hoffman, warned by Cully's defeat, had pointed him at Briscoe to shelter Kennicott, his employer or confederate.

To make sure it really was Hoffman he got up and, under pretense of examining an evening paper across the front of which was printed an account of his father's death, he peered cautiously out into the hall and saw the German in the act of turning away. There was no mistaking him. Had Hoffman followed him here? What would Kennicott do?

"Thanks. Tell him I'll do that," the old man was saying in crisp, expressionless tones. The note he stowed into a side pocket. What had it said?

He must, he realized, get outside somewhere, to try to disentangle the maze of conjectures which the German's appearance had created.

"So you're going?" Kennicott de-

manded evenly. "Too bad you're in a rush—"

"Yes, I'm in a rush and I'm going."

"Sorry about your Pa—"

Then the grim old man held out his hand, saying good-night with more than ordinary cordiality. Locke bit his lips in wonder whether it was not a sense of coming triumph that made old Kennicott so hearty?

After looking cautiously up and down the tree-shaded street he gripped his automatic and strode off, aware that he was now more confused than ever. Briscoe—Hoffman—Kennicott. There must be connection between them. But what was that connection? Only one thing seemed reasonably sure; there was no possible way of understanding the true situation until he had talked with the third member of this strangely assorted trio.

A telephone call apprised him of the fact that Mr. Briscoe was still working at his warehouse. Yes, he would be there for another half hour.

CHAPTER VI

Locke Doubts His Evidence

MANY lights shone from the offices of Adrian Briscoe & Co. and, as though to shake Roger Locke's hope, a number of trucks were backed up to the loading platform and were taking on a cargo of absolutely innocent spinning machinery. On what excuse, Locke asked himself, could he approach Adrian Briscoe at this time of night?

Odd that the head waiter should have mentioned Briscoe and then had hurried straight to Kennicott. Why? Was there a secret tie-up between the two companies? Why not? They both stood to win with the defeat of Locke & Son. Kennicott surely had

seemed pleased towards the last of their interview. The number of theories and doubts that occurred were as amazing as they were maddening. Well, he'd see what Briscoe looked like and if nothing came of his visit he'd concentrate on Kennicott.

No one challenged him when he crossed the busy loading platform and made his way into the outer offices where a sleepy looking stenographer was typing an invoice. When the door shut she looked up and forced a perfunctory smile.

"Mr. Briscoe, please?" he inquired.

"I phoned a while ago."

"Mr. Briscoe? Okay. Take a seat, please, I'll ring him. We're kinda busy tonight. That's the dickens of shipping," she added. "You're never through—and me with a date!"

As he seated himself, Locke was aware that his hopes were touching a new low. The offices, and the busy warehouse behind them, presented not the slightest hint of anything sinister or abnormal, any more than did the clean-cut young fellow who was talking into a dictaphone in the next office. Locke could see him through the glass panels.

Why didn't Briscoe hurry?

Click-clock. The stenographer spun about on her stool and plugged in a connection. "A gentleman to see you, Mr. Briscoe. Yes, sir. Have him wait? Yes, sir . . . He wants you to wait a moment," she added, quite unnecessarily.

"Thanks."

An eternal five minutes dragged by while the rumble of hand trucks and the wise-cracking of the longshoremen trickled in through shut doors. Try as he would he could not stop thinking of Lucette. Where was she? What were they doing to her?

"You wanted to see me, Mr. Locke?"

Locke got up to take the hand of a pleasant-mannered, middle-aged individual clad in neatly cut gray tweeds, and he flushed at having ever been such a fool as to have suspected this man.

"Why, yes," he began haltingly. "I—I was driving by and saw the lights on, so I thought I'd stop in now instead of tomorrow, as I've a matter I want to see you about."

"You're Roger Locke, aren't you?" The other's bony features lit with recognition.

"Yes—"

"Of course, I thought I recognized you." He waved to an open door with a gesture of infinite courtesy. "Won't you step into my office? Miss Skinner, I'm not to be disturbed. Not by anyone."

Was there a shade of over-emphasis in that command? A moment later he followed Briscoe into an office that was comfortable without being ornate.

"Well, Mr. Locke, what can I do for you?" inquired the host, at the same time shoving forward a silver cigarette box.

The Englishman's manner was brisk and businesslike and his ruddy features were alert and not unhandsome with their iron gray eyebrows and close-clipped mustache. He must be prematurely gray, Locke decided, for there were few wrinkles in that bony visage.

Before answering the visitor glanced casually about the buff painted office. There were the usual mahogany chairs, desk and filing cabinets of a typical American office, but what immediately attracted his eye was the picture of a handsome young woman which was set on the desk squarely in front of Mr. Adrian Briscoe. A nice clean

looking girl that—God help him—she had something of Lucette's look about the eyes. The picture was quite large and its glass accurately mirrored a light burning in the hallway beyond.

NONE too skilfully, Locke manufactured a proposition concerning a possible lease of the Briscoe wharf and pier, and when Briscoe returned brief but courteous answers he tried in vain to recognize some trick of speech. No use, the Englishman of the night before had uttered but a few short sentences, and only a detective of fiction could have come to an accurate decision.

His only chance now was to try to learn which of Briscoe's employees might be open to suspicion.

"No thanks," Briscoe was saying. "My little business is doing well enough, despite the tariff and the hard times. Of course, we're not in a class with Locke & Son, but I get a living from it." He smiled a little enviously. "My word, but you have a wonderful trade with the ship owners—and an even better reputation."

"Thanks," said Roger Locke and fished desperately for a further excuse to linger. Finding none, he lamely resorted to the offer of a cigarette. "These are rather special," said he, feeling very foolish at clinging so desperately to this last hope. "A cousin of mine in Cuba sends them up to me."

"How interesting," said Briscoe with a quick smile appearing under his short mustache. "Yes, I'll have one. I got to like them when I was in His Majesty's Navy; we used to touch at Havana and Santiago quite often."

Locke held out a match, conscious that someone was advancing down the hall and walking lightly. His eyes strayed not to the door itself but to

that picture, the glass of which acted as a weak mirror. Probably the stenographer was coming in to leave some papers for signature.

"What a lovely photograph," Locke remarked.

Those footsteps were drawing nearer. Perhaps he might catch a dim reflection in the glass.

"Glad you think so," murmured Briscoe and gathered himself as a man about to rise. "I hope to marry her some day. Frightfully sorry I can't think of leasing . . ."

Here was a definite hint at dismissal and Locke had abandoned his last hope when in the picture appeared, imperfectly reflected, yet quite recognizable, the head and shoulders of *the German he had talked to at Luscar's* and who had brought the note to Kennicott! Light from a bulb just above Hoffman wrought accurate high lights on features that were tensed with excitement. He was clutching a hat in one hand and making signals with the other.

A cold tenseness dominated Locke's body and as he gazed at Adrian Briscoe's angular red features he marvelled at the fellow's flawless acting. Yes, by God, he'd very nearly been fooled, but now the appearance of the German settled things. In the glass he beheld the German still making covert gestures—evidently Hart *had* gone to Luscar's. A number of realizations shot through Locke's brain. First, that Briscoe could never afford to let him go now.

"Mighty nice office you have." It was a triumph of will power that his voice trembled not in the least; nor did his fingers quiver when he lifted his cigarette and drew a deep lungful of smoke.

"Oh, yes, it does me very well." Briscoe half turned in his chair to look

quite frankly at the door. "I'm sorry, Mr. Locke, but I see a man out in the corridor. He's waiting to see me. Do you mind—"

"Oh, not at all." Leaning forward as though to reach an ash tray, Locke suddenly blew a cloud of cigarette smoke full into Briscoe's eyes and, while his host coughed and blinked, snatched out his automatic to press it firmly against the Englishman's side.

Very slowly and in deep amazement, Briscoe's deep-set blue eyes sought Locke's.

"Are you quite mad?" he inquired. "What is this, a hoax?"

"Sit still!"

Frantically, Locke tried to think of something to say, for all at once it had come home to him that he had not one shred of real or tangible proof of Adrian Briscoe's connection with his father's death. What if Hart had tried to murder him? Hart might have been a common thug acting as decoy for a gang unconnected with the murders on Pier 27. What if Hart had patronized Luscar's and the head waiter there had mentioned Briscoe's name? Kennicott's manner had been far more suspicious, too. Did that prove anything a sane jury would admit as evidence? He knew it did not. The German had come to the Briscoe's pier. Why not? His own manner had been so queer at Luscar's that Hoffman might have come to warn a valuable patron.

He was almost amazed to find himself thrusting a pistol into the side of a man who had just received him with all courtesies.

"You'd better drop this before that man comes back with the police!"

Without turning, Locke heard a quick step and guessed that the German had departed on the run.

"Keep your hands up!" he rasped while he tried to think clearly.

"A very clever ruse," mocked the Englishman, his blue eyes calm and contemptuous. "I congratulate you. Well, let's get this thing over. My wallet is in my coat pocket and my watch—"

"Shut up!" Locke felt the skin over his cheek bones becoming uncomfortably tight. He was in for it now. He could be sent to prison for a long term for this.

But desperately, numbly, he clung to his course. "Where have you put Miss Ashforth?" he demanded and watched for the least hint of a reaction. But only a puzzled half smile curved the narrow lips beneath that short gray mustache. "You *are* mad then. Who is Miss Ashforth? I've never had the honor of—"

"You lie!" Roger Locke's suspicion was now badly shaken. What to do? It was impossible to go on threatening this man who remained perfectly motionless and only sat glaring up at his captor in pained surprise.

There descended a brief silence in which the ticking of the office clock sounded very loud, but outside excited voices and the sound of running feet could be heard. Was it to summon the police or to marshal a squad of gunmen?

"You had better put that gun away," Briscoe warned and his hands, on a level with his ears, made a little gesture of anger.

"What was that man doing here?" Locke demanded, then cursed himself for admitting a doubt.

"Who—Hoffman?"

"The man in the corridor out there?"

"He's no one to get excited over. He's a client of mine, runs a restaur-

rant. He was coming to recheck a shipment of cutlery from Hamburg."

Uncertainty tore at Locke. Just then a trample of feet running in the corridor outside interrupted the tense dialogue. Locke thought quickly.

"Stand up!" he commanded.

Hands still raised, Briscoe obeyed with all the nervous alacrity of a man in the power of a maniac.

"Turn around—face the door."

Shielding himself behind the Englishman's well tailored back Locke, with sweat trickling down his face and his neck, pressed the automatic into the base of his prisoner's spine and, over the Englishman's shoulders watched the headlong appearance of two hard-featured men. They halted outside the glass door with blue-black automatics ready in their hands.

"Stay there!" snapped Briscoe desperately, "or this crazy fool will kill me."

"RIGHT! And you, out there—don't talk or move!" Locke had seen neither of the two men. For all the world they might be, and probably were, two private detectives. Most shipping houses employed such.

"Jeeze, boss, what we goin' to do?" hoarsely demanded the foremost, a beefy individual with a bull neck and a stub nose.

"If they come a step nearer, I'll kill you, Briscoe." Silence fell, then Locke said. "Send them away."

Briscoe, standing very stiff and still, hesitated.

"Do as this idiot says," Briscoe directed. "I don't want to die—"

"But Jeeze, boss—he'll—"

"Get going!"

Slowly, reluctantly, their small, anxious eyes riveted on the rigid pale-

faced figure behind the importer, the two men in the hallway vanished from sight down the hall. Then many excited voices could be heard asking questions.

"Don't move, Briscoe—"

"I don't intend to, but if you're going to murder me, why take so long?"

Struck by a sudden thought, Locke glanced at the desk. Yes, just beyond the inkwell lay a small card index. Keeping the pistol barrel jammed into that gray tweed back, he flipped over the thumb index to the letter H.

Names and initials together with addresses and telephone numbers were listed. *Hacker Bros., Hallon & Co.* The next card simply bore the initials *P. H.*, with an address and telephone number. *Hammond & Lynch, Incorp.*

Then his hand shook a little. *C. H.* He drew a slow deliberate breath when his eyes took in a familiar address, 3341 Blenheim St!

Conviction returned and a warm flood of relief swept over him. There was no doubt now that Cully Hart and Adrian Briscoe knew each other! But where was proof of Briscoe's connection with the murders? Well, he'd get it—somehow.

"Thanks for the use of the index," said he grimly. "I've found what I wanted."

"That's luck, because, my man, very shortly you're going to find a lot that you don't want," replied Briscoe.

"Possibly, but you won't be here to enjoy it." Locke's voice quivered in spite of himself. "And now you're going to lead me to Miss Ashforth. After that you'll turn her over to me, otherwise—"

"Will you stop this nonsense?" cut in Briscoe wearily. "This unpleasant raving is—"

"Otherwise I'm going to kill you."

Locke's voice was harsh as the clash of steel plates. "Don't doubt it. You've murdered my father, you've stolen the only person in the world I love, you're trying to wreck my business. So, you see, killing you won't come hard."

He spoke in a succinct, metallic voice that was ominous as the reading of a death sentence.

"It is now one minute to ten. If, at ten o'clock, we are not on our way to Miss Ashforth, I'm going to blow your spine in two, Briscoe, and then kill as many more of your gorillas as I can before they get me."

"Dear me, what a flair for melodrama you have," the importer remarked. "Is it possible that you're in earnest?"

"Thirty seconds gone."

"What an obstinate young man you are, Locke."

"Fifteen seconds more."

Briscoe sighed and took a step forward. "I'll take you to Miss Ashforth. Such a bright chap deserves a reward before, well, before I have you put away."

"Thanks for the warning. But remember, this gun will remain at your back. At the first suspicious move you die. Even if I'm shot through the heart I'll hang on long enough to squeeze the trigger."

"Melodrama," snapped Briscoe as they passed the door of the office.

They stepped off down a gray carpeted corridor that led to the right, Locke sensed two gunmen to be following at a cautious distance.

In dead silence the queer little procession entered the warehouse itself and, after a short walk past mounds of goods, commenced to climb a flight of steps into a loft which much resembled Locke's own.

Locke felt his heart thudding. At

the head of the stairs Briscoe halted. "We'll have to have some light," he said and actually emitted a brief chuckle.

All Locke could see was a hallway that ended in abysmal darkness.

"Where's the switch?"

"At the right. Shall I turn it on?"

"No, keep your damned hands up."

When the switch snapped, two bulbs in wire protectors revealed a short corridor with blank wooden walls that terminated in a door of sheet iron. Before this Adrian Briscoe halted once more, his gray hair gleaming frostily in the glare of the lights.

"O'Dowd?" he called.

From beyond the door came the sound of a heavy tread.

"Yeah?"

"Open up."

"Oh, it's you, Mr. Briscoe."

"Yes, it's I. Open up."

Presently the metallic rattle of a chain and the soft *click* of bolts sliding back, told Locke that a new phase of the struggle had begun.

CHAPTER VII

The Prisoner in the Loft

WHEN he beheld Roger Locke's intent visage, ludicrous astonishment came over the features of O'Dowd. A large diamond glittered as slowly his pudgy, sausage-like fingers spread apart.

Then, as Briscoe entered the loft and he beheld the menacing pistol, he fell back.

"No monkey business," Locke warned, casting a lightning glance about the loft. Very evidently it had been recently refitted for special use; its wooden walls of unpainted pine were windowless and electric light wires were hastily secured with porce-

lain clamps so that they drew narrow and parallel black lines across the wooden expanses.

Alert and cautious, Locke advanced into the loft, aware that the men behind were following inexorably. Let that iron-nerved Briscoe escape then the struggle would be over very quickly. They'd slaughter him like a calf in an abattoir.

From what he could tell from the corners of his eyes, the illegal business of Adrian Briscoe & Co. was large and varied. Here were huge stacks of cases of liqueurs, of perfumes, of champagnes, and of expensive cordials. Silk, embroidery and drugs were also in evidence, to prove that Briscoe had a catholic taste in smuggled goods.

"Jeeze, boss, how'd he get here?" O'Dowd, fumbling furiously in his coat pocket, was backing down a narrow aisle between the cases towards the open door of a room at the far end.

"Quiet, Briscoe!" snapped Locke. "Don't talk! O'Dowd, get out of the way and don't forget if you make a false move, Briscoe dies."

Amid a scrape and dull trample of feet, the procession proceeded, Briscoe occasionally chuckling to himself and Locke not a little disturbed by the Englishman's strange self-assurance.

A tight corner. Enemies in front and behind, ready to kill him if he made the slightest error. Yes, during whatever lay ahead, he'd have to think sure and straight or his weighted body would presently sink beneath the polluted waters of the harbor.

"Shall we go in there?" Briscoe inquired and inclined his narrow, gray head towards the iron door. "We might find Miss Ashforth—"

"We'd better—"

Silence, death-charged, unnatural and almost tangible descended after

O'Dowd at Briscoe's command, opened wide the iron door and then at Locke's behest sullenly shut and bolted it to exclude the two gangsters down the corridor.

"Well? What next?" O'Dowd stood, uncertainly blinking like a puzzled bear, with big hands hanging straight from their wrists.

Slowly, deliberately, Locke studied his surroundings. The room, which evidently was at the far end of the pier, had a couple of windows, but these were masked with hinged, and very stout wooden shutters. Otherwise the walls were blank — only the one door could be seen. So far, so good. Next he noted the furniture. There were a couple of steel filing cabinets, a roll top desk which was open and littered with papers, a stained green carpet, and a battered brass cuspidor surrounded by a fringe of cigar butts and cigarette stumps.

Then Locke looked to the left and stiffened. Stretched on an iron cot lay Lucette Ashforth.

SHE was saying a thousand things with her wide gray eyes, but no sound passed her lips because of a gag. Her hands and ankles moreover were secured with bright nickel handcuffs.

She lay on some tumbled army blankets with only two pieces of fragile, orchid hued underwear half concealing her lithe young body. The mass of her soft, brown hair lay streaming wildly over a striped pillow which was lacking a case.

"You swine!" Locke snarled in a terrible voice and his hand tightened on the walnut pistol. "If you've harmed her, I—I—by God—"

O'Dowd made a motion towards his coat front.

"Stop it!" snapped Briscoe, shaken from his calm at last. "Stop it, you fool!"

The beefy gangster's hand checked itself, and he stood glaring at Locke from his small bloodshot eyes like a bulldog in leash.

"Answer me!" Locke jabbed the pistol muzzle further into his prisoner's back.

"She's all right," Briscoe said quickly. "Taking away her clothes was another precaution against her escape."

"O'Dowd, take off that gag! Unlock those handcuffs!"

It was only with difficulty that Locke retained his self-possession, the sight of Lucette's disarray, and the terror in her anguished eyes was maddening. To think of her pawed and gaped at by O'Dowd.

"Look out!" inner voices were shrieking in his ear when O'Dowd brought out a ring of keys. "Watch out! Briscoe is plotting something!" What was it? With victory so near at hand he *must not falter*. Perhaps he could tell if he looked into the Englishman's face.

"Turn around, Briscoe," he directed. "But keep your hands up."

Deliberately, he held his sights on Briscoe's bright blue eyes and saw that they were uneasy now and that much of the color had left the Englishman's face.

Muttering and cursing to himself, O'Dowd was unsnapping the shackles from Lucette's ankles.

"Turn 'round," O'Dowd grunted. Lucette twisted sidewise to present the handcuffs which secured her hands behind her.

The instant those bright shackles fell away, her hands flashed up, tore away the gag and then, quite forgetful of her disarray, she avoided the table in the

center of the room to dash to Locke's side.

"Oh, Roger! Oh, Roger!" she sobbed through lips swollen by the pressure of the gag. "I knew you would get here." Then: "What do you want me to do?"

"Get your clothes. Where are they, O'Dowd?"

"In the desk drawer—"

"You all right, Lucette?"

"Yes. I'll be ready in a minute."

Locke's hand becoming tired, shifted aim to Briscoe's heart as he snapped, "Order those thugs of yours away from the door outside."

"I won't—" There was a new note in Briscoe's voice now.

"You will—"

Over the automatic the two men glared at each other. Something was very wrong, and frantically Locke sought to understand.

"Do as I say or—" He stepped a little closer to the Englishman and two things happened in quick succession.

First, Locke's pistol spurted lead and flame full into that gray clad body, and second, Briscoe's fist went crashing viciously into Locke's jaw. A cascade of sparks fell before his eyes, he felt himself falling and was only dimly aware of Briscoe pinning him flat.

Snatching the pistol from Locke's nerveless hand, the Englishman hit Locke sharply over the head with it. Then the girl fainted.

"The best laid plans—" Briscoe panted over his shoulder. "He had me, O'Dowd, so long as he held that damned gun to my back and aimed at my head. I recommend a bullet-proof vest for shots at the heart."

Calmly Briscoe extinguished the threads smouldering about a ragged hole in his waistcoat and stood up.

"All right, O'Dowd, open the door

and call the others. Too bad, we'll have to kill him now. He's a clever young chap with more than his share of nerve. You could have knocked me over with a feather when he pulled that gun on me."

CHAPTER VIII

A Chance for Life

IT seemed to Roger Locke that he was swimming upwards through a billowing red sea which gradually paled until he found himself staring up into an electric light that was brighter than any he had ever beheld before. Wonderingly, he followed the course of a double black line leading from it. What were those lines? Exposed wires. Mechanically his eyes followed them across the wooden ceiling, then downwards and along a chair rail until they terminated in a knob switch.

His numbed musing ended and the present returned with merciless vividness when the two black lines were eclipsed by the ungainly bulk of O'Dowd, who was peering down at him with an evil grin twisting his flabby, florid features.

"Ah, it's about time—"

Dazedly, Locke shut his eyes. It seemed immeasurably hard to think because of a loud buzzing noise in his head.

"What about the girl?" an unfamiliar voice inquired.

"Bump her off, too," growled O'Dowd.

"Don't be dumb," interrupted the first speaker. "Slip her a shot o' dope; Benny'd give us maybe a couple o' centuries for her."

"You'll do nothing of the sort," snapped Briscoe's voice, chill with disgust.

"No?"

"No! That's one form of smuggling I draw the line at—"

Gradually the completeness of his defeat broke over Locke. Death was at hand for him, and common sense told him that, for all his scruples, Briscoe dared not let Lucette go free. His tortured soul writhed within him. Poor Lucette! What a sordid, tragic ending to their dreams of happiness.

"I say, Locke, had your nap out?"

The sound of Briscoe's voice, metallic and harsh as the rasp of steel on stone, cut short his wretched reverie. He opened his eyes again and beheld the Englishman's erect figure seated in a chair. A sardonic, mirthless grin was on his ruddy features.

"Well, my lad, you played your cards a bit too closely, didn't you? But you gave me a bad half hour—if that's any consolation."

Briskly he turned to the two thugs lounging before the closed door.

"Throw some water on him," he directed and when one of the two obeyed, Locke's head cleared rapidly.

Furiously the doomed man evolved and abandoned one wild scheme after another. No use; he knew he stood not even the ghost of a chance. His fate was written in the baleful glare of Briscoe's blue eyes.

Lucette he could see lying on the couch again. Savage revolt against his fate seized him, but when he weakly raised himself to a sitting position three automatics were instantly levelled at him. The room spun about, and his wounded scalp was throbbing with blinding surges of pain. He couldn't fight even if he decided to risk all on a wild mêlée.

"Get on with it," Briscoe commanded.

While Locke watched helplessly,

O'Dowd, grimly eager, and the two other men passed beyond the table and took up a position in front of the sheet iron door.

"The execution squad, eh?" Locke inquired weakly.

From his seat across the room Briscoe slowly inclined his head.

"Yes, I'm sorry; I hadn't intended to kill you. O'Dowd acted on his own when he rigged that fool trap for you at Hart's—incidentally, I'll attend to you later for that," he flung at that heavy-bodied killer. "It's your stupidity, O'Dowd, and this fellow's cleverness that forces me into this unpleasant business—"

The moon-faced bandit blinked and snarled, "Ain't nobody goin' to paste me on the jaw an' git away wit' it—"

"Shut up, you fool. Risk the whole business to go gunning on your own account, would you—" With an effort Briscoe controlled himself and went on. "Since I'm not altogether uncivilized, Locke, I'm going to give you a sporting chance for your life." Never was there a bleaker smile, thought Locke, than the one which crept over Briscoe's face as he said, "Get up and stand against that wall."

BECAUSE there was nothing else to do, Locke staggered to his feet and felt a slow trickle of blood go creeping down his neck and inside his collar band. How would it feel to die? To feel those bullets go crashing into his body?

He must say something to keep his senses. "Since you're going to kill me I'd like to know one thing. Just why did Hoffman go to Kennicott's? Is he with you?"

A brief smile traversed the Englishman's face. "No. Hoffman went because I sent him there with an in-

itation for Kennicott to lunch with me—"

"How did you know I was going there?"

"I figured you would when Hoffman phoned me about your inquiries concerning Cully. I thought his showing up at Kennicott's would put you off—but that German blockhead spoiled it by coming down here to report in person. And now," Briscoe continued coldly, "I said I was going to give you a chance for your life."

"A chance?" Locke demanded and, to steady his swaying body, braced himself against the plain wooden wall behind him. His fingers found support in hooking themselves over a wire clamp. Slowly he raised his head and looked across the twenty odd feet separating him from those three deadly figures waiting across the room. Bright and deadly were O'Dowd's predatory, red-rimmed eyes.

With quick, precise motions, Briscoe got up from his chair and, after crossing the room, swept a few papers from that table which separated Locke and the executioners.

"Notice this pistol," he directed and from a side pocket he produced Locke's own weapon. "It's loaded and I'm throwing off the safety catch."

Deliberately, he placed the .38 in the center of the table with its butt towards the victim.

"Now, listen to me, Locke. Presently I am going to count three. On the word 'three' my men will begin shooting. If you can reach that gun before they kill you, you are welcome to use it; if you don't—" The well-tailored gray shoulders rose in a brief shrug.

"Call that a chance?" the doomed man demanded. "You know I've not

the slightest chance. It's a sop to your rotten conscience!"

"Perhaps," Briscoe admitted shortly. "Ready, men?"

A silence fell like a curtain. Locke steadied himself against the wire clamp while his bruised and dusty body gathered itself. Could it be possible that he was going to die? That in another minute he would be choking out his life on the green carpet?

In a strange, dispassionate way he studied these three men who were about to kill him. One was small, pimply and rat-faced; next, and tallest of the three, was one of those black Irishmen whose jaws seemed to be painted blue; and the third was O'Dowd.

"Point your guns to the ceiling," Briscoe directed from his position off to the right.

A loud buzzing began in Locke's ears. In another minute now he would be dead. Dead! He straightened. Damned if he'd let those swine see his soul quake.

"One," called Briscoe in a shallow tone. The three executioners took a tighter grip on their weapons. A taut, evil smile crept over O'Dowd's bloated face, the Irishman shuffled his feet a little and the rat-faced killer began biting his lower lip. Locke's eyes riveted themselves on the walnut butt of his own automatic. Ten feet away it was. Ten feet away lay a chance for life. Gradually his muscles contracted.

"Two!"

Locke's fingers hooked themselves over the wire behind him and tightened in a terrific, spasmodic jerk.

Somewhere a splice gave way. The room was plunged suddenly into complete, blinding darkness.

Locke ducked and swept the pistol

from the table as the three automatics blazed through the darkness. He fired blindly in the direction of those flashes. A man cried once, short and sharp, like a dog whose paw is stepped on, and there followed the sound of a heavy fall.

Someone moved cautiously and, from his position on the floor, Locke fired again. Desperately he tried to control his wild breathing in the silence that followed. Pistol ready, he lay still in the dark waiting, waiting.

Someone coughed, Locke fired promptly and rolled to the left a fraction of an instant later. He was horrified to hear the cuspidor clank loudly. Abruptly someone, guided by the noise, pounded upon him and wrenched at his pistol arm as he grappled. It was Briscoe.

"Quick! I've got him. Lights! Lights, you blasted fools!"

Feet trampled madly in the dark and someone groaned.

"Hurry!" gasped Briscoe and the man beneath him felt the bullet proof vest crushing and squeezing the vitality from him.

Desperately, Locke lashed his failing strength and tried to point his automatic towards his assailant's body. Under normal conditions he would have been more than a match for the Englishman, but that scalp wound had dizzied and weakened him. Damn! His last bid would fail in a minute now, for the door handle was rattling, preluding a flood of light.

But the rat-faced gangster must have lost his head. Instead of turning on the lights, he went pounding off through the loft yelling at the top of his voice for help. Where were the other two?

Over and over, Locke and his assailant rolled in their grim and deadly

struggle. A chair went flying. Locke, as he strained and tugged, guessed that Briscoe had lost his gun, for the Englishman was centering his whole attention on controlling his enemy's right.

Suddenly Locke pushed on the automatic's safety catch, risked everything in dropping the contested pistol, and when Briscoe freed his wrists to grab for it, he dealt the Englishman a terrific blow on the jaw.

Briscoe went limp, but Locke took no chances. In the semi-darkness cast by the lights outside his fist crashed home twice more, jolting that dishevelled gray head far to the left.

Choking, fighting for breath, by sheer will power he stumbled over a limp body to the half open door, slammed it shut and pushed the bolts. Feet were pounding along the corridor.

Lucky the door was sheet iron, he thought, as he sank, spent and quivering, to his knees.

Had any of his enemies at that moment attempted an attack he could have done nothing; he was too exhausted, too weak; but the three lay in the darkness quite silent and motionless, though one of them breathed iron, he thought, as he sank, spent and quivering, to his knees.

"Open up! Open up!" yelled voices in the corridor, then feet and gun butts were futilely applied to the iron panels.

"No use," cried someone. "Get some crow bars from downstairs—that'll fix it!"

"I'll kill the first man who shows his head," called Locke.

"Jeeze, he's still kickin'. Thought you said the boss had him—"

"He did—get them crow bars, you fool—"

Locke set a match to a sheet of notebook paper and the yellow-red flame flickered uncertainly a moment then flared up to reveal an unforgettable scene. There lay O'Dowd awkwardly slumped on his face just to the right of the door, a few feet beyond him the Irishman rested with his body propped against the wall and his black head sunk forwards. It was he who was breathing noisily, and there was a widening stain on his white shirt front. As for Briscoe he lay very white and silent on his back half under the table.

A window, sound proof but latched on the inside, presented an idea. A moment later Locke had it open. He thrust his automatic far out and sent three shots crackling out into the dark.

"Help! Help!" he yelled and then fired twice more. "That ought to wake the harbor police," he told himself, and smiled when the men in the corridor abruptly abandoned their attempt to force the door.

When the police appeared hot, angry and mystified, they were more than a little annoyed that Roger Locke was far too occupied in restoring his fiancée to consciousness to answer their questions. At last her eyes opened uncertainly, closed and then opened again to encounter his anxious gray ones.

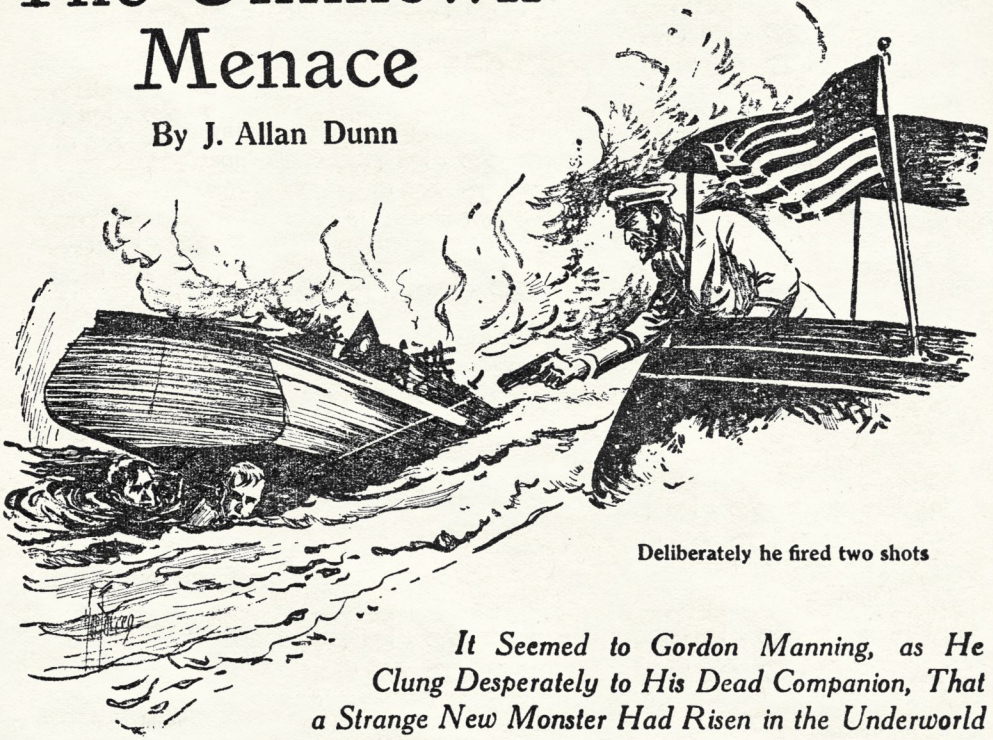
"Roger," she whispered as her arms crept upward.

"It's over, dear," he said gently "and tomorrow's not far off."



The Unknown Menace

By J. Allan Dunn



Deliberately he fired two shots

*It Seemed to Gordon Manning, as He
Clung Desperately to His Dead Companion, That
a Strange New Monster Had Risen in the Underworld*

THE old trainer of the private gymnasium that catered to those of the business men of lower Manhattan who cared about their physical condition, looked approvingly at Gordon Manning as he came naked from the needle shower, after having taken on and defeated the younger professional at handball.

Manning was fit. There was not an ounce of superfluous flesh on his body, which was as coppery as a Carib Indian's, neither was he too finely drawn. The lines that had been graven indelibly in his face by menace and suspense, by mental strain and physical stress, were barely visible. He was "in the pink" and the trainer told him so with both pride and affection in his voice.

He loved this efficient ex-major of Military Intelligence, world-wide trav-

eler and explorer, recent conqueror of the most malicious and crafty of all murderers, the evil genius of the twentieth century.

"It's the vacation," said Manning. "I managed to wangle it at last. I'm feeling great."

"I didn't like the way you looked just before you ran down that devil who called himself The Griffin," said the trainer. "I hope they keep him safe in Dannemora."

"It's not an easy place to get out of," returned Manning with a laugh that, like the chime of a bronze bell, proclaimed the perfect coalition of healthy mind and body. "If he does we'll have to put him back again, that's all."

At the moment, as he towed himself, he took the grim suggestion light-

ly. Yet the chase and capture of The Griffin, after that madman had mockingly proclaimed and executed the death of a score of the world's most brilliant and useful citizens, had almost made an old man of Manning before his time; had plunged society, science and commerce into turmoil; had terrorized New York and horrified the whole of America.

That was over now. The insane but brilliant being, whose distorted mind conceived the most diabolical exploits, was safe in Dannemora. He had suffered physically in his final encounter with the law and from that he had been reported slowly recovering. But his mind showed the effect of the moment when his supreme conceit had been broken by Gordon Manning, when his ego-maniacal belief in his supremacy had been challenged and shattered. He was said to have alternate moods of homicidal rage and deep depression when, like Giant Despair, he would sit biting his nails and glowering with eyes in which the fires of Hades seemed to flicker.

Manning dressed and started to walk the few blocks to his offices where, as proclaimed upon the outer door, he practised as Counselor at Law and Consulting Attorney. When he got restive he disappeared and club members wondered what distant, unknown trail Manning might be following; hobnobbing with South Sea kahunas or Aleutian shamans, guest of a Tibetan Lhamasery or deciphering the runes of a pro-Toltec steles and pyramids?

Many looked at his keen, hawkish face with its beaky nose, clean-cut jaw, and his eyes at once serene and questioning, without knowing who he was, but recognizing his distinction. Others were glad to nod to him, to call him

by name as he strode swiftly south and east; hatless, carrying his favorite weapon, a cane—a steel rod covered with shrunken leather rings. In the hands of Manning it was as efficient as a rapier; it could flick shin or knee or elbow with a painful precision that was disabling. It had beaten many an attempted gundraw or slungshot blow.

There was mail waiting for him. All of it save that marked "Personal" had been opened by his efficient secretary. She laid one letter, typed perfectly but curiously on an unprinted sheet of heavy bond, on the top of the sheaf of correspondence where he would see it first. She was a pretty, redheaded girl, extremely capable, and devoted to Manning. She had intuition allied with brains and he saw now that she attached some special significance to this communication. He read it through—once. There was no need to do so again. The whole page was imprinted upon his mind as if it had been photographed there.

There was no address, extremely wide margins, single spacing.

Gordon Manning, Esq.,
Consulting Attorney,
79 Wall Street,
New York City.

Dear Sir:

As you have been interested from time to time in similar happenings, it may now interest you to learn that a plan has been made to end the life of Joseph Curran. There may be others of that name, but there is only one Big Joe. The attack will take place within the next forty-eight hours. If you should decide to try and protect him you will undoubtedly run grave risk of sharing death with him.

Sincerely yours,

WELL WISHER.

WITH the typed letter in his hand, Manning stared out of the window, seeing, without registering, the towers of Manhattan, the spidering of the great bridge.

The anonymous writer was correct. There *was* only one "Big Joe."

Joseph Curran, ex-contractor, now a man whose millions seemed to have weathered even the depression, was a power in the land. He wielded more power than any one in the State, though it was a power that never appeared in public, that disclaimed all authority.

"I have nothing to do with politics," Big Joe said, time and time again, when he gave out interviews. "I am naturally interested in the welfare of the community, selfishly first, perhaps, and then, let us hope, more altruistically."

But it was significant that those in the seats of the mighty took counsel with Big Joe; that professional politicians weighed the words of one who styled himself an amateur. Whoever Big Joe championed, openly or secretly, was ninety percent sure to win. Equally those whom Big Joe did not approve went down to obscurity and oblivion.

The sort of man who has many friends—and many enemies.

Reporters wrote down what he permitted them to say with their tongues in their cheeks. If he had been the back number he professed to be editors would not have sent reporters to interview him.

He had been in politics when he was a contractor, no doubt about that. And the political leopard does not change his spots.

Not that Big Joe was essentially a leopard. He was undoubtedly fearless and aggressive, though his movements were masked, but he was faithful to his associates so long as they were staunch to principles. No one was more charitable than Big Joe Curran and, in his charities, more

often than not, his right hand did not know when his left hand gave alms. The field of charity was the only one into which politics did not enter with Curran.

A big man, physically and mentally. A man who knew men. A bigger man than the Mayor of Manhattan, than the Governor of the State, than the State representatives and senators rolled into one. His influence was felt at the White House.

Some crank, Manning was convinced; some fancied victim of slight or injury, one of the hundreds to whom Curran was forced to deny or withdraw favors, meant to kill him—and might accomplish it.

There was never a bad man of any renown, whether he came from the Badlands of Wyoming or the slums of Hell's Kitchen, New York, who does not have imitators. Crime in Manhattan, as published in the lurid columns and pictures of the tabloids, has egged on many a man whose mind was evil, but did not otherwise have the courage to emulate Billy the Kid or Gyp the Blood when he began to figure out his own private vendetta.

As for the warning, it could have come from the would-be killer himself. Then, too, the killer might have boasted of his intended plans to someone who hoped to nip them in the bud.

Cranks were strange people, their motives as eccentric as their actions. Manning had known men who confessed to murders they had never committed; men who denounced themselves as kidnappers. Some strange wish to get into the limelight might actuate most of them, but Manning believed that there was some deep motive back of this new warning. Politics breeds not only strange bedfellows, but brings in sinister creatures. Jackals

become ravening lions when denied a share of spoils they believe due them. Julius Cæsar was neither the first nor the last man to die of Politicalitis.

Manning resolved to turn the letter over to the Commissioner of Police, but he meant to do so with a comment that he himself took the matter seriously. No doubt the Commissioner would, also. Big Joe was his patron saint. If anything that the police might have prevented happened to Curran, it was going to be just too bad for the head of the Department.

Curran was not going to be too easy to protect. As all the world that read the papers knew, Big Joe lived through the summer at his residence on Long Island, known as Blue Bay Lodge. He was unmarried. Blue Bay Lodge was Bachelors' Hall for those lucky enough to be its guests.

There he grew roses for diversion, yachted, lived the life of a country squire, to all appearances. But big men with high ambitions went there and asked favors or received instructions. So did office holders. The week-end parties there often held far more significance than a political rally or convention.

It was quite likely that Big Joe had personal guards, more likely that his men servants, house, garage, stables and yacht were chosen with a dual purpose in mind. In any event he would guffaw at the idea that he would be bumped off by an unknown. In his time, Big Joe had made waste paper of thousands of anonymous letters. He might be hated—doubtless was—but he was also feared and even loved.

MANNING had met him. Big Joe belonged to two of Manning's clubs. They had met at banquets. They had discussed many things,

but not politics. Politics was outside Manning's life; but he knew the quality of Big Joe. He was a modern Warwick, a king-maker.

That Big Joe knew his own realm Manning granted, but there was more than a chance that some obscure underling, working up a minor grievance that darkened his very reason, might be the one to make an attack. Some brooding man, especially in these times, when depression stalked the land with its grim retinue of hunger, homelessness, destitution and death, was likely to be dangerous. Cranks have killed presidents, started a world war, assassinated kings. It might be a humble ditch-digger, denied a job, half mad from seeing his family suffer, determined to wipe out the man at the head of the party in control. Or it might be a discharged clerk or secretary. Somebody who knew that Big Joe's assertions of having nothing to do with politics was a myth.

Manning believed in hunches; in his subconscious mind, his trained powers of observation and his experience; in his tremendous coördination. Hunches had become part of his metabolism; the automatic chemistry of his body. Hunches seemed to ring alarms that geared him to high tension, making him supremely receptive to evil vibrations. Such hunches had saved him from the savage rush of a man-eating beast, from creeping head-hunters in the bush, from modern killers of the metropolis.

He believed that this crank, whether or not he was the actual writer of the note, was not merely blowing off steam in his threats.

He set aside the pile of work that cried for his personal attention, put in a call to Centre Street, and drove there, to be instantly closeted with the Com-

missioner, to whom he showed the letter.

The Commissioner frowned as he perused it.

"Funny it should be sent to you," he said. "Still, you have been in the public eye lately. I've got a duplicate of it myself. A crank, of course. I hadn't decided what to do about it. No sense in bothering Big Joe. He wouldn't pay any attention to it, or thank me for showing it to him. How does it strike you?"

The Commissioner knew that Manning considered it seriously or he would not have asked for the interview.

"Got a hunch, Manning?" he inquired.

Manning nodded.

"Call it a crank," he said. "It wouldn't be any member of a mob or a gangster. They wouldn't dare, any of them. This man may not be a criminal with a record, but, to my mind, Commissioner, he may be a potential criminal and a very dangerous one. The mere fact that he is an amateur is likely to give him a tremendous advantage. I have seen an unskilled fighter break through a professional's guard more than once, both that of a boxer and a sabreur. It might be some crank who would be cunning enough to show up at Blue Bay Lodge with an unimportant excuse and get through to Curran by his mere appearance of harmlessness. I suppose Curran is guarded there, but I imagine he'd be more or less careless himself in the country."

"You're right, Manning," said the Commissioner. "In the first place, I've got a deep respect for your hunches. In the second place, I can't take any chances with Big Joe. If some crank only *tried* to pull something and

it got out, it might mean my job. I'll send some men over there. He'd raise merry hell if he knew. He laughs at this sort of thing, and he's probably right. He's been threatened enough and yet, in most ways, he's the best protected man in the U. S. A."

Manning nodded.

"I've got to get back to work," he said. "The look of your desk after you get back, takes all the joy out of a vacation. If you send men down there, Commissioner, remember the three elements. The danger might come from sea or land or the crank may be some chap who can fly and wants Big Joe to have a certain type of plane used by the City, the Army and the Navy.

"There's no bigger crank than an inventor," said the Commissioner. "Thank you, Manning. Now you go along and do your homework. I'll attend to this. Curran may scrap anonymous letters, but I don't scrap your hunches."

MANNING took work home with him that night after he had stayed late at the office. It was early morning before he got to bed and then sleep evaded him. His hunch annoyed him like a conscience, like an ulcerated tooth. He could not rid himself of the idea that Big Joe Curran was in deadly danger; that the Commissioner's precautions might not prove sufficient. If the matter had been left entirely up to Manning's private soul, he might have dismissed the matter. But he could not evade this inner suggestion that murder was forward, that this crank was one of those creatures who, like the rabbit, once in a thousand years, bites a dog.

The world might get along without Big Joe and be the better for it, but his

killing in this fashion would be murder. Moreover, the anonymous writer had been correct. The possible peril, the mystery *were* incentives that challenged Manning.

Nine o'clock found him in his roadster, crossing Queensboro Bridge on his way to the northeastern shore of Long Island, on the road to Blue Bay Lodge. And the hunch rode with him. Its warming tingle spread through his veins, promising adventure; the old thrill that yet was ever new, and welcome. He drove faster and faster. If he was checked he had means of dismissing this trouble. His special commissions, issued by the Commissioner and also by the Governor, were still in effect. They had never been revoked.

He had promised himself that he would get them cancelled, that for a while, at least, he would devote himself to his legal business, but the fascination of baffling crime had gripped him once again.

As Manning came to a gap among the trees that crowned the hill and lined the highway, he saw below him the outspread estate of Joseph Curran, lying in a saucer of land with its northern border tilting to the cobalt waters of the bay that had given the place its name, Blue Bay. There were other houses nearby, and a yacht club.

The harbor was shaped generally like a horseshoe, notched irregularly here and there. It was a good anchorage and had ample room for protected cruising, if the Sound proved too boisterous. Manning had secured a description of Curran's house and had no trouble in recognizing it, built of brick in Colonial style, stately, with its pillared portico and finely placed windows—one of them a beautiful Palladian above the portal. Garage and stables were subordinated, vine-covered and almost

hidden by trees, of which many fine specimens were set about the spacious grounds—terraced lawns and walks, shrubberies and Curran's famous rose gardens, whose blooms had often captured prizes and disproved a popular fallacy that roses, except for the coarser varieties, could not be successfully grown on Long Island soil.

Manning knew that Big Joe had been an athlete in his younger days, he was still a sportsman in his sixth decade, playing a consistent eighty-four at golf, skipper of his own yacht, driving his own car and riding spirited horses. With his fixed determinations, his enormous prestige, he would be impatient of any idea that he had to be protected.

But Manning trusted that he would be able to get in personal touch with him. By appealing to Curran's hospitality, he could be assured of being close to him for several hours with an opportunity for deciding whether this threat was or was not the act of a crank. He could also prepare special precautions for protecting him without the latter's knowledge. This would be in addition to the cordon of plainclothes men that he knew the Commissioner had supplied.

He saw a smart looking launch beside the private wharf. It was small, but it had a cabin and its lines were built for speed. Off the wharf was Curran's auxiliary ketch. Her sails were reefed and under cover. It did not look as if she were going out that morning. It was now close to noon. But two men in whites stood on the wharf above the launch which they had evidently just lowered from davits.

There was no lodge or keeper as Manning drove into the grounds. Curran might be going out in the launch. It was possible and the first

strategic move would be to head him off from the water.

He swung his car into a curving path that led to the garage, braked and jumped out as a man in chauffeur's livery presented himself and civilly but firmly asked what he wanted. A polite man, but one who could be hard upon occasion. More like a gangster's bodyguard than an ordinary driver. Manning put his question as to Curran's whereabouts.

"He don't see visitors without appointment," said the man who was clearly suspicious, inclined to be belligerent. "Were you expected?"

Manning saw the well-known figure of Curran emerge from the boathouse. If he was going out in that tender, Manning was going with him. The man opposed him for a moment and then subsided, as Manning, having no time for arguments, dropped him with a right to the jaw, leaped a low hedge and raced across a stretch of lawn to the head of the stone steps leading to the wharf. There he waved his cap and *halloo'd* to Curran, calling him by name. He ran down the steps so that Curran might recognize him, which he did. It was a performance out of character for Manning, but he had no time to waste, if his hunch was right.

CURRAN'S greeting was cordial. He showed no surprise, beyond a transient gleam in his keen eyes.

"I happened to be near here," Manning explained, a little breathlessly, "and I remembered your invitation to see your roses. But I see you are going out in the launch. Don't let me detain you."

"Good man!" said Curran heartily. "Fine! It is not just the best time of the year to see the roses, but we have a few late blooms." Manning fancied

that Curran's shrewd gaze regarded him for a moment, speculatively, as if he wondered whether Manning did not know enough about roses to make an inspection trip at such a time of year. But he went on, reacting as Manning had felt sure he would. "In a hurry?"

"Not especially, for once."

"Then you'll come out in the tender for a trial run with me. It just arrived yesterday, specially built, fast, good enough for dirty weather, and the engine is powerful enough to tow the ketch if its own engine should break down; which, as a matter of fact, it has, or I would be cruising in her this minute. Glad I'm not, since you came. We'll be out about an hour, then you must lunch with me, and then we'll look at the roses."

They stepped into the well-appointed tender and Curran made ready to start the engine before casting off. Manning stopped him.

"Mind if I do that?" he asked. "I'm interested in engines."

"Of course not, my boy," the other answered and sat in the awninged cockpit, staring quizzically while Manning went over the enclosed engine with scrupulous care. He inspected the self-starter, all connections, for some hidden gadget that would explode as soon as any one attempted to function the machinery. There was nothing and he got his spark, fed gas while the judge cast off and then surrendered the wheel to the owner as they sped from the wharf towards the harbor.

For its type, the launch was unusually fast. It was warranted to make better than thirty knots after its engine had become adjusted and got to know itself.

Manning noted that some of the fishing craft had taken up anchor and were making towards the harbor mouth, fall-

ing in behind the speedier launch. Also, two other launches had gone ahead. They had plenty of speed, too. While it seemed that only one or two people were aboard either of them, Manning did not doubt that there were more, cabined, armed with rifles, with machine-guns or quick-firers.

Overhead, an amphibian plane was air cruising. It was a common enough sight.

"Then it was *not* just the roses," said Curran quietly when he had sped up his engine to the limit he wanted.

"No," said Manning. "Not just the roses. You may think me unwarranted, judge, but this is the copy of a letter I received yesterday. I don't like it."

Big Joe read the warning—or the threat—calmly, refolded the crisp, bond paper and handed it back to Manning.

"You seem to have taken this seriously enough to give me your personal protection, for which I am grateful," he said. "I imagine," he added a shade less cordially, "that the police is also taking it seriously. Some of these boats—all of which are strangers to the port—are acting curiously. It would seem," he added with a humorous quirk of his mobile mouth, "that the average detective methods are lacking in subtlety on water as well as on land. Both my men on the wharf, for example, have been wondering about them. On this tide none but a profound optimist would try fishing."

"It would not be wise *not* to take it seriously, sir," said Manning. "The country cannot afford to run any risks concerning your welfare."

"I am sixty-three, Manning," said Curran. "At least the last twenty-three years of my life have been punctuated with threats. I have yet to take any of them seriously. We'll take our police

convoy along for a short cruise, then you and I will enjoy—I hope—our luncheon; and then we will consider roses. If you still attach importance to the limit set by this nameless correspondent, who may, or may not, be a 'well wisher,' I shall be only too delighted to have you as my guest."

"I shall be very glad to stay," Manning replied.

THEY were passing through the entrance to the harbor. On one side gulls were wheeling and dipping about the white lighthouse on Kidd's Neck. The blue water was ruffled by a freshening breeze. The blue sky was set with snowy, mare-stail cloud. Green shores smiled. Yachts showed their slanting canvas, launches clipped the water. Overhead an amphibian plane made a great circle and was coming back against the wind. The varying rhythm of her engines came down strongly, but she looked as if suspended in the air, rather than beating her way into the breeze.

Manning saw the boats he believed to be manned by the metropolitan police, form an obtrusive and irregular, but powerful escort to their own launch. The Commissioner had been wise. The boats, at least, were *not* ostensibly those used by authorities. They had been borrowed, or perhaps impounded from captured rum-running craft. He did not know enough about the scanty air fleet attached to the Force, and hardly yet a distinctive branch, to be sure if there were any amphibians attached to it. He rather fancied not. He kept his eye on the plane. If it was hostile it would be hard to deal with. They would be as helpless as a crippled teal opposed to a hungry tern, if it attacked. Yet he could not believe that the Commis-

sioner had neglected the air as a source of danger.

From behind Kidd's Neck a long, low-hulled, low-cabined launch shot into the deeper waters of the Sound like a projectile. The hull was polished mahogany that gave off camouflaged flashes; the cabin was tan. There was a glitter of brass and glass. Two figures showed astern, one steering, the other reclining aft, shaded by fluttering awnings.

A small flag waved at the taffrail—red, white and blue. There was a short mast with radio aerial spreaders. Here, also, a pennant showed membership in the Power Squadron. Both men were in whites with white caps, visored, braided, set with yachting emblems of ownership and authority.

Manning's gaze was swiftly on the craft. He used the powerful binoculars that hung in the cabin. Curran surveyed him with the same quizzical, half amused regard. A look that had made Manning wonder whether Big Joe was not, personally, a good deal of a fatalist.

The man astern wore colored glasses and a black beard. It was trimmed in the fashion of Commodore Vanderbilt, a mode not unusual, especially among yachtsmen. The dark glasses were quite an ordinary precaution with many men. But Manning did not like beard nor glasses. They were devices that might be used for disguise. He was suspicious of anything not open and aboveboard on this occasion. He glanced about the cabin. The launch was equipped, as required by law, with various paraphernalia, including life preservers and fire extinguishers.

There was no sign of any weapon. There *was* no weapon aboard, but his own shoulder-holstered gun. He might never have a chance to use that. In the

jungle a repeating pistol or rifle is scant use against a horde of savages attacking unseen, unheard, unexpectedly. There might be the same conditions here, with a stranger, more ravening beast than even the jungle bred, stalking them.

He came into the cockpit and casually asked to take the wheel.

"You might like to watch the engine," he suggested. "It's smooth, but it has a tendency to heat up while running."

Curran made no spoken comment as he obeyed, but Manning again caught his humorous glance, the slightest shrug of Curran's shoulders.

The mahogany-hulled launch had developed trouble of its own. Its bow wave lowered, its speed faltered and it dropped back. The convoy of four boats had not overlooked it. They now held a diamond formation, one ahead of the Curran launch, one astern, and one each to starboard and port, practically abeam.

Manning glanced upwards. The amphibian was too close, it seemed, to evince too much interest. It might be police, of course. Police planes were generally confined to going after offenders who flew below the civic sky limits or were otherwise nuisances, and to prevent escapes of "wanted" men over the State Line.

The Commissioner might have hired or borrowed an amphibian as he had got the launches. Still . . .

Manning did not like it. His hunch made protest. Something in him, seated perhaps in his pineal gland, that least known of seemingly useless relics of evolution, acted like a coherer. A message thrilled in it.

Danger!

It came. Instantly, like bolts from a summer sky. A daring maneuver, per-

fectly conceived, and had unerringly been executed. Nothing could balk its swift, concerted attack.

The plane came hurtling down in an abrupt dive, twisting, as if it were going into a tailspin. It looked as if the pilot had suddenly lost control, but the moment and place of his disability was too pat to be coincidental.

THE flier was skilful. Manning saw his helmeted head peering and wished he had a rifle. His inner voice told him to shoot this man, to kill to prevent murder. His pistol was useless at that range. His voice could not carry above the roar of the plane, which barely straightened out before it lunged into the water, sending up spray, lurching with a seeming clumsiness that Manning believed an excellently timed and deliberate movement.

It sideswiped the police boat to port with its starboard, metal pontoon and capsized it, left it sinking, while its crew struggled in the water.

With prop revving furiously, the amphibian appeared to blunder between Curran's tender and the police launch directly ahead. It screened the latter from view. Those on it could not see what might be happening to Big Joe's craft. They were anxious to help their comrades, thinking the amphibian's acts accidental. A crash had seemed inevitable, and fatal. Water is as hard to smash on as land, scarcely more elastic.

Manning had reflexly drawn his gun.

He saw the mahogany-hulled launch suddenly abandon all signs of trouble. It came tearing up astern at tremendous speed. It was making sixty, seventy, miles an hour. Its bow lifted to the pace and showed its racing "step" as it caught up with the police boat as if the latter were a scow.

Manning saw several men swarming in its cockpit.

It was abeam of the police launch for only a second or so, but it left it a sinking shambles. Manning saw pale flame vomit from the cockpit. Shrapnel, sprayed by trained gunners, perfectly calculating speed and range, belched from a quick-firer. It splattered the cabin glass and shattered the upperworks of the official craft. The trajectory shifted and tore through the hull at waterline. The police who had swarmed out of their hiding place were mowed down, and the murder-boat rushed on.

The police boat to starboard started to swerve in to the rescue. A lame leveret might as well have tried to outrun a whippet. The swift cruiser let out another link of speed and seemed to leap clear of the water like a thrasher whale. Its quickfirer was now silent.

Manning watched it come as a man in a kayak might watch a charging narwhal. This attack was not the affair of some lone, insignificant crank. Its conception came from a subtle brain; one backed by resources.

He had no time to follow up that thought. He poised his gun and fired—once—as the cruiser surged alongside, and was gone.

He saw one man fall back. He dimly glimpsed another hurl two objects, as a pitcher with perfect control might pitch two balls in swift succession.

They crashed aboard the tender. There was a tremendous, deafening explosion that sent Manning staggering from its impact, his arm across his face. The launch seemed to fairly split apart and dissolve into flying fragments in a cloud of black, suffocating vapor that came from the second bomb.

Manning was flung to the disintegrating floor of the cockpit and, with-

out trying to stand, he shuffled through into the cabin which was filled with ignited gas and rushing flame. He dimly saw the huddled figure of Curran by the broken engine and clutched for him, his own flesh seared, his hair and clothes singed. He held his breath against the fiery blast that would annihilate his existence if it reached his lungs and dragged Curran outside, if the wrecked hull could be said to have exterior or interior left. Half blind, Manning managed to topple overboard with the man he had tried to save.

He slumped into the water, near the stern, striking out, grasping the stilled propeller, supporting the helpless body of Big Joe.

The police boats would come to the rescue. Manning's blurred gaze, looking upwards, saw a second plane coming from the land, saw the amphibian in flight, its decoy trick of being damaged successfully played.

The mahogany-hulled cruiser was coming back again, literally running rings about the police craft. The mahogany hull was veneered steel, so were the tan sides of the cabin. The glass was bullet-proof. It swept once more close to the remnants of the launch, now burning like a pitchpine torch. From it leaned the bearded man.

He had taken off his glasses. His eyes gleamed above his prow-like nose. They seemed to radiate a devilish satisfaction. He poised an automatic as his boat passed the stern where Manning clung with his limp burden.

Deliberately he fired two shots. His eyes centered with deadly aim. The first sent a slug fairly between the brows of Big Joe Curran, already almost drowned, if not burned, to death.

The second shot flung its missile as Manning sank under water, still holding the propeller—still cling-

ing to the body of Big Joe. If the bearded man had fired at him first he would have been killed instantly. As it was, the bullet struck the water at an acute angle and ricocheted harmlessly as the cruiser rushed on, thinking its mission complete.

A police boat came up. Manning and the dead man were hauled aboard. Far north, twin specks in the sky, soared the planes. East, throwing spray, javelining for the open sea, where it might turn north or south and dodge into a thousand hiding places, rushed the cruiser with the mahogany hull.

Manning's face was set and grim as they landed him on the private wharf that had belonged to Big Joe Curran who now lay shrouded under a spare sail from the boathouse. One more "imperial Cæsar turned to clay."

MANNING looked like a scarecrow, with the clothes half burned off him, his face and hands blistered or raw, eyebrows, eyelashes and hair singed. He paid no attention to his hurts. They could wait.

He cursed eloquently in Malay as he saw the police plane following the amphibian, once more acting as decoy. The mahogany-hulled cruiser was speeding like a ball-carrier in a broken field. Even if any other boats, now heading for the scene, tried to intercept her, she could dodge them or riddle them. The men aboard would stop at nothing.

Who were they?

Like lightning on a dark night there flashed a solution into Manning's brain.

The Griffin might be in this! He was a prisoner, barely out of hospital, reported broken in mind and body, not liable to live long. The last word from a visiting committee, including promi-

nent alienists and psychiatrists, was that his fits of depressive dementia were becoming chronic, his cerebral cortices breaking down. They thought there was an abscess in his brilliant, but always abnormal, brain and a lesion might occur at any moment. He showed no interest in anything and was a victim of profound melancholia.

But—there might have been a final flash that linked up his once superb, though warped, mentality. And he might well have had a grudge against Big Joe Curran. It was quite conceivable that he might have made a plea, through his attorneys, for re-examination, hoping that if he could be proven sane, the law would find that his madness at the time he committed his hideous crimes palliated them, and would set him free.

That was a fallacy, of course. His attorneys would know that The Griffin would never be turned loose again. The whole press of the nation would denounce such a move. He was a monster.

But, in his increasing madness, he might have held that insane idea. His reaction to failure would be revenge. Even if he was a life captive his cunning might have devised some means of discovering, of making a leak, even through the stern rule of Dannemora. His eyrie had been destroyed with his organization, but he might still have resources hidden away.

The idea hammered on Manning's brain like a striker on a gong. His hunch held that hammer. It was not to be overlooked. Clues to the crime just accomplished might be unearthed at the penitentiary.

He climbed into his car and raced to the nearest village. He got through Long Distance to the Commissioner and told him what had happened;

breaking through the Commissioner's shocked comment.

"I'm meeting you at Dannemora," he said. "Phone the warden!"

He added his hunch, his supreme belief, that The Griffin, for all his weakness, had contrived outside communication with agents who were still faithful to him—faithful, at least, to The Griffin's hidden gold.

"I'll take a plane," said the Commissioner. "How will you get there? Shall I pick you up?"

"I'm driving," said Manning. "I'll be halfway there by the time you step into your plane."

Manning's commissions given him by the New York Police Department and the Governor were still in effect. He was one of a very chosen few given the privilege of a police siren, a special license plate and permit.

He changed plates, switched from his usual Klaxon horn and went screaming along the highways—from Long Island to the mainland of New York State, speeding north to Dannemora.

The Commissioner, barely ahead of him, was waiting, with the warden, both their faces grave. The Commissioner had been warned, he had taken what he deemed adequate precautions, and still the death of the most prominent man in the State, so far as politics and police were concerned, would be laid at his door. He had lost two members of his force, killed outright. Five more were desperately wounded. For once he trusted that Manning's hunch was not entirely true.

The warden held the same desire, though he was confident The Griffin could not have contrived to escape. He was almost moribund; he had been well guarded.

"I suppose you want to see him,"

said the Commissioner. "I did, just now. I think you're wrong, Manning. He couldn't have managed this."

Manning was inclined to agree with him when he looked through the grating of the door of The Griffin's cell. He saw a huddled figure that looked like a bundle of rags, inert. But he knew that supreme madman. He had seen a shark's heart beat twelve hours after it had been taken from its body and laid on a ship's rail. There might have been a flash of satanic intelligence, now vanished, that had devised this supreme and final crime, even though there was no longer cerebration to realize he had triumphed once again.

"I'll go in," said Manning. "Alone."

The warden demurred.

"He might be dangerous," he said. "He attacked the last man who talked with him. An alienist from Vienna. The Griffin resented his examination—scratched him up before the guard overpowered him."

"I handled The Griffin once," said Manning. "Unlock the door. I'm armed, if it's necessary."

It did not seem so. The huddled figure did not move. It hunkered in a corner of the cell, arms limp, head on its knees. The once burning eyes looked like grapes from which the bloom is rubbed. The ravages of physical illness, added to the disease rampant in the brain, showed the effects of his downfall and incarceration.

HE looked without recognition at the man who had run him down, defeated him. The flaming spirit had dissolved. Only once, as Manning ordered him to stand up, he seemed to snarl, as a stricken tiger might, showing tusks that could no longer rend. He got slowly to his feet and stood in the corner.

His shoulders were bowed, his mouth sagged. These were the features of The Griffin, the monster who had boastfully destroyed almost a dozen prominent and outstandingly useful citizens out of a mad wantonness that seemed bred of the very heat of hell. It seemed to Manning as if that face, proud as Lucifer's was now like a mask of wax that was in dissolution, blurred, hardly animate.

Surely this derelict could not have . . .

A terrible thought smote him as he gazed. Smote like the chiming of a brazen gong.

He gripped The Griffin by his shoulders. The other struggled with unexpected strength and Manning shifted his hold. He surged forward, pinning his man in the angle of the cell's steel walls, his forearm across the captive's throat, compressing his windpipe. He called to the others to come in; a summons not needed.

Manning lifted the prisoner's long hair as the guard and the warden pinioned him.

"This is not The Griffin!" cried Manning. "Look at his ears! I have seen The Griffin's ears when we fought together. Pointed, feral, like a satyr's ears. Tufted with hair. This man is an impostor, a substitute. The Griffin has escaped!"

They stood as if stunned. Only Manning ruled.

"You. Who are you?" he challenged.

The pseudo Griffin was suddenly docile. Intelligence came into his eyes. They showed cunning.

"Okay," he said. "You win. You're Manning, I suppose? I figured this might happen, but I took the chance of being discovered."

"For money?"

"Sure. For *big* money. I needed it. For my wife and kids. I was broke. It looked like a dive out of a top floor for me. The Griffin said he'd see I got out, same way he did. With money. Now I'll take the rap, but my folks are fixed, anyway."

"What's your name?" demanded the warden. The man jeered.

"Wouldn't you like to know, so you could hound down my family, take away the jack that I've earned. Try and find out, if you can. I'll stand the gaff."

"He's an actor, of course," said Manning as he and the Commissioner sat with the warden in the latter's private quarters. "Selected because he looked like The Griffin. Some character actor out of work. Plenty of them released these days by the stage and the film companies. Now, let's find out how he got in—and The Griffin got out."

The warden looked uncomfortable, but he was resigned. This man Gordon Manning was a genius.

"It's beyond me," he feebly parried. "Go ahead."

"Did The Griffin have any visitors, aside from the regulation visit of the Penology Board?" asked Manning. "How about that alienist he attacked? The doctor from Vienna?"

"He was the only one," answered the warden. "We do not even allow The Griffin yard exercise, though he asked for it. He seemed in pretty bad shape, although he may have faked it. But we took no chances. He claimed that the shock of his arrest, in which he suffered great physical injury, caused by you, Mr. Manning, I believe, had cleared his brain. He demanded a re-examination."

"For the first time?" asked Manning.

"So far as I know."

Manning said nothing. He knew that The Griffin must have smuggled out a letter to Curran. When that failed he evolved another scheme that included revenge on Curran. They could dig that up. Right now he was interested in the alienist from Vienna.

"He named a Dr. Genthe, of Vienna," the warden went on. "Claimed Genthe would be glad to visit him. A man who had written treatises and books on mental cases, delivered lectures, a master authority on criminal mania. He wanted us to write him."

"Didn't try to pass a letter out?" suggested Manning.

"He knew that was impossible."

Again Manning said nothing, but he held his own opinion in the matter. If The Griffin had asked for the letter to pass through prison channels, he had his reason for it.

"I sent it," said the warden, "because I did not believe there was any such person. I wanted to prove that to The Griffin. To get his reaction to it. But we got an answer."

"Have you got that answer handy?" asked Manning.

"Of course. In the files. We got a letter, and a book, in German, by Dr. Genthe, treating of criminal psychiatrics. I don't read German, but I gave it to a physician, who said it was sound, but did not advance any new ideas. Dr. Genthe said in his letter that he had read about the case and was interested in it, but not to the extent of making a special trip to the United States. He added frankly that, if a big enough fee was forthcoming, he might be tempted. Also that there was a slight possibility of his making a visit here, to the Psychiatric Congress, in which case he would like to see The Griffin, though

he was sure there had not been, and could not be any recovery.

MANNING grunted. His burns were beginning to sting badly, but he hardly heeded them. His mind was in action.

"So, when he did arrive, this Dr. Genthe, you gave him an interview with The Griffin and The Griffin flew into a rage? Was there a guard present?" he demanded.

"Certainly." The warden seemed slightly nettled. "The doctor was given professional privileges, but we did not let him see The Griffin alone."

"Sure of that?"

"I've just told you there was a guard."

"The interview was in his cell?"

"No. In one of the hospital rooms. Dr. Genthe wanted to observe certain eye and nerve reactions. It was that that threw The Griffin into his tantrum. He was convinced nothing was wrong with him."

"So Genthe got scratched up? Get treated for his hurts?"

"No. The guard separated them. They had to put a jacket on The Griffin. Dr. Genthe made light of it. Said The Griffin was incurably mad, but was still an interesting case."

"May I talk with that guard?" asked Manning.

"Not now, at any rate."

"Quit?" asked Manning grimly.

"Yes. He went out West to take up an inheritance."

"He would," said Manning, mentally resolving to have the man found. It must have been he who had mailed a letter to Curran.

"There is no Dr. Genthe of Vienna, never was, unless I myself have gone crazy," Manning went on. "There also has been no recent Psychiatric

Congress. It was nicely done. Someone planted in Vienna at the given address to answer the letter of inquiry in a manner calculated to nicely erase any suggestion of sympathy. The book was sound, but held nothing new. Not hard to have a work on that subject translated into German, printed—in a limited edition—sent over here, with a portrait of Dr. Genthe, as he appeared to the warden, for a frontispiece. Neither hard, nor remarkable, for a man of The Griffin's peculiar genius. And very disarming.

"The rest was easy. The Griffin has acted a part here, ever since he began to recover. He had two accomplices. The pseudo Dr. Genthe and the guard. A Dr. Genthe came in, and a Dr. Genthe went out, with a scratched face, half concealing it with a handkerchief, no doubt; though he was still disguised with wig and flowing beard, with the clothes that suggested the eminent Viennese psychiatrist. Worn by the man, chosen by the agent with whom the bribed guard had already communicated, picking a man from the thousands of unemployed actors who was a fair double for The Griffin. With miming ability, with the right background, he had only to be moody and maintain the deception while The Griffin walked out free in the clothes, the makeup, and the manner of Dr. Genthe of Vienna—and parts unknown."

The Commissioner and the warden were silent, holding no doubt that Manning had spoken the truth.

The Griffin was free! The inhuman monster had been loosed again upon the society it hated, its murderous fury inflamed with a desire to be revenged.

The news could not be kept secret. The Griffin himself would see to that. He would surely again use the press to

publish his taunting messages. He would strike again—and soon.

"You coped with him before, Manning," said the Commissioner. "I pray God you can do it again!"

There was real reverence in his apostrophe to the Deity. For both himself and the warden, the handwriting was already shining on the wall. They

needed no Daniel to translate its message of their downfall.

Manning said nothing. He was consumed with a fire that ate at his very vitals, the flame of a spirit pledged to battle with evil. Evil personified in The Griffin who, it seemed, had hoarded resources and was once more free to use them for his hellish purposes.



Losing to Win

ONE of the most unique excuses for a crime yet recorded in Alameda County (California) criminal annals was offered recently in the superior court of Judge Fred V. Wood.

A suspect named Brunning had been duly arraigned, tried and found guilty of first degree robbery. It was brought out at the trial that he had, alone and unaided except for the assistance of a very businesslike appearing revolver, held up and robbed a taxi driver of five dollars.

As is the custom, prior to passing sentence, Judge Wood asked Brunning if he desired to say anything.

"Yes, sir," answered the prisoner. "I ain't really guilty of no robbery, judge. What I done was just for—uh—moral effect. You see, it was like this: Me an' two other guys was in a pool room talkin' about 'does crime pay.' One guy says the bulls is too dumb ta rank any rod what's got a ounce uh brains. I tells him he's all wet. 'You can't pull no jobs an' git away with it,' says I—an' I oughter know! He gives me tha razzberry—you know—the Bronx cheer; an' that burns me all up. I bets him ten bucks on it, and his buddy holds the bet.

"See, judge? I wasn't on tha prod when I sticks up that cab-puncher; it was just for, now, to show this wise egg he was all wrong."

"Have you collected your bet?" asked the judge.

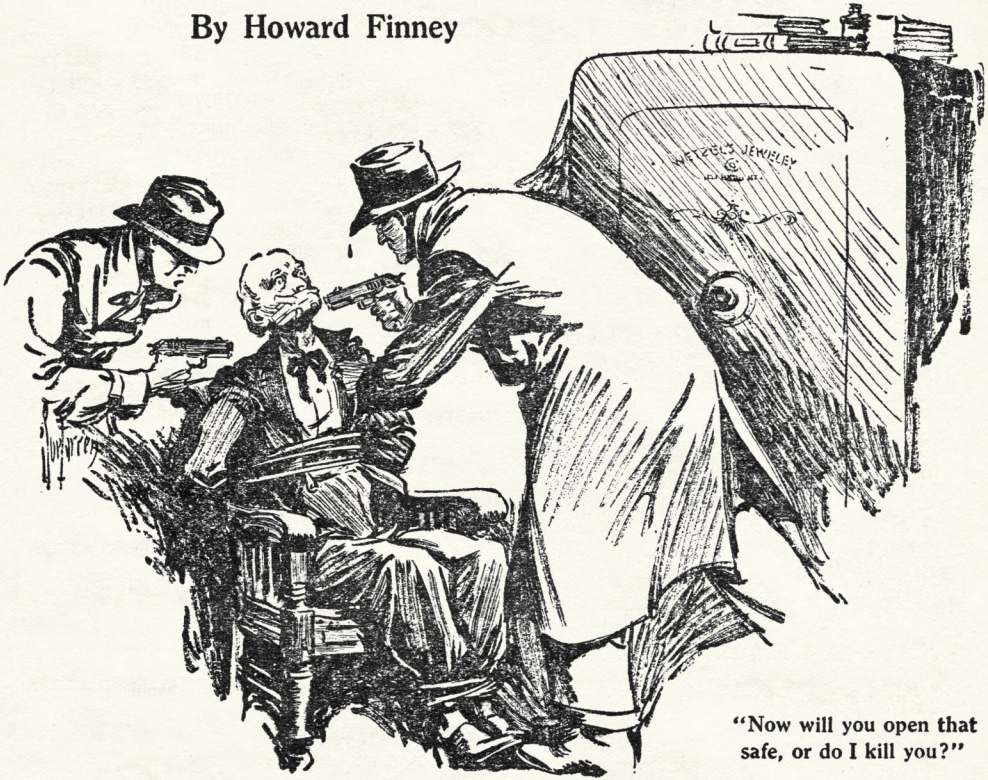
Brunning snorted. "Naw," he said disgustedly. "That guy's doin' six months for bootleggin' an' his buddy flew the coop."

Judge Wood then passed sentence. Being a two-time loser, Brunning was sentenced to an indeterminate residence of from seven years to life in Folsom penitentiary.

"It would appear that you won, only to lose all around," was the cryptic comment from the bench.

The Late Customer

By Howard Finney



"Now will you open that safe, or do I kill you?"

With the Hungry Muzzle of a Pistol Pressed Against His Temple, Old Wetzel Watched the Bandit Scoop His Lifetime's Savings into a Bag

A STEADY drizzle beat against the panes of Wetzel's jewelry store. Shrouded figures hunched under umbrellas slouched past outside the moist window.

The only brilliance in the gray morning light came from the trays of diamonds and precious stones that flamed beneath the glass show cases—a fortune in jewelry.

A man pushed in out of the rain. As he threw the slicker back on his heavy shoulders, his shrewd black eyes darted over the store for one slight instant and then he turned

casually to one of the two clerks idling behind the front cases.

"I want to look at rings, an engagement ring; something very choice—three or four carats."

White haired old Wetzel, thin and slightly stooped from the years of hard, painstaking work, stood in the doorway to the back room and gave him a keen, wary scrutiny. As he watched, his fingers caressed the cold barrel of the automatic in his pocket. He had no insurance on his jewelry. Too expensive. The loaded gun was his only insurance.

He was always studying the customers when they came in, watching them, alert, waiting. Some day "they" might try it. On that "some day" someone would die. Because it was his whole fortune and he would be pressing the trigger until himself or the other ones were lying dead on the floor of the store.

Today his glance was a little less penetrating than usual. He had other troubles. He was short handed. He surveyed the man bent over the show case, apparently absorbed in the rings Lemp was showing him, and turned to Maier, the other clerk.

"Where's Francisco?" he growled. "Hasn't showed up this morning, eh? The fifth time this month."

He watched the heavy set customer move slowly along the show cases toward the rear of the store. Lemp didn't have Francisco's Park Avenue manners and appearance, but he was a good salesman; recognized people's tastes when they first came in.

The customer held up one of the rings toward the window. For a moment his eyes glinted toward the rain streaked pane, took in a figure ducking in from the avenue and standing outside the door, shaking the little rivulets from an umbrella. As the second man pushed in their eyes met for an instant. Wetzel didn't see it.

All his narrowed, curious eyes saw was that the second customer was well dressed, jaunty, with a hand sunk nonchalantly in his coat pocket. Maier was waiting on him. Good business for a rainy day.

The old jeweler's eyes gleamed thoughtfully. Only a little while longer and he'd sell out, retire, stop worrying about his jewelry. He'd have a nice little sock full then. He'd always ploughed his earnings back into the

business. He'd spend some of the fortune he'd scrimped and worked a lifetime to save.

Another figure swirled in out of the rain, a short, stocky man. Wetzel walked down to wait on him. With Francisco out he'd have to fill in. Funny all this business on a rotten day. The third man approached him, walked right into him. The old jeweler staggered back into Lemp's customer, and saw the dull blue gleam of the snub-nosed pistols in both their hands.

"Walk into the back room and keep your trap shut," the third one snarled.

Wetzel froze with surprise for an instant. Then like a flash he reached for the automatic in his pocket. The heavy set man at his side grasped his wrist in a vice like grip, twisted his arm, swung him toward the back room. With his other hand he lifted the gun from Wetzel's pocket and slipped it in his own.

"Another move like that, you old punk, and we'll give you a belly full out of this," he hissed.

He pushed the .45 through the opening in Wetzel's shirt, deep into the pit of his stomach. It felt cold, hard, deadly. Wetzel saw the menace in his black eyes, the smouldering, murderous intensity in his scowl. He saw Lemp and Maier, gray faced, being herded into the back room by the other two. Through the rain streaked windows he glimpsed indistinct figures hurrying by. They couldn't see in, couldn't hear him if he shouted; probably wouldn't hear a shot.

"Hurry."

In the back room they tied up Lemp and Maier and gagged them with some cloth and adhesive tape.

"Lie down on the floor," snapped the heavy set one, whom the other two called "Butch." He rolled the two

clerks against the wall, and kicked Lemp viciously. "And don't try to roll around and make any noise or—" His lips curled in a sinister smile and he laid the barrel of his .45 against Lemp's cheek.

THEY grabbed Wetzel, pushed him into the chair near the safe, roped him to it. The old jeweler's grim lips tightened as they wound him in. He flexed his muscles, stiffened, worked for some slack. Shorty, the last one who came in, cracked him on the head with the butt of his gun.

"None of that, you old weasel," he menaced. "Or I'll blow your head off."

Wetzel stared into his pinched, sallow face.

"For God's sake, have a heart, you guys," he cried with lips that had grown suddenly parched. "I got no insurance on the stuff."

"Can the sob stuff!" Shorty rasped.

The jaunty one, called Joe, bound Wetzel's mouth with strips of cloth.

"Go out and grab the stuff," Butch ordered coolly. "If any one comes in, make out like you was a clerk and wait on 'em. Easiest way to get rid of the punks and they won't suspect nothin'. If they don't look right though, give 'em the rod."

Joe nodded impatiently as though it were an old story to him.

Wetzel heard him moving around out in the store, sliding back the doors of the cases, raking in all the stuff that was worth anything.

His old blue eyes were fixed on Butch and Shorty, guarding him, waiting for Joe to finish—wipe him out. It was everything he owned. Forty years he'd worked like a slave, saved, put it back in the business, sweated, eked out a bare existence. All

for this. Wiped out in a few minutes by these rats.

And he'd been waiting for them to try it, always on his guard, studying every customer that came into the store. Today he'd been off his guard, sore at being left short handed. If Francisco had shown up for work they'd never have gotten away with it. He wouldn't have had to wait on that last fellow—walk right into the trap. They got him right. On his guard for years and they'd taken him like a baby.

Sixty years old and wiped out. Only a little bit left over in that safe—a few choice stones, stuff that might bring enough to just get along on—if he didn't live very long.

Butch's hard, bleak eyes followed his quick glance; seemed to read his thoughts. His lids narrowed and he muttered to Shorty. He knelt and seized Wetzel roughly.

"Open the safe," he hissed.

Wetzel stared at him and went white. The sudden, telltale shock in his faded eyes changed slowly to hate and defiance. Butch read his answer in them. His big hand closed on Wetzel's throat, squeezed it a little.

"This is no foolin', mister," he rasped in low tones. "Open it up now or you ain't never gonna need to open it again."

Wetzel read the murderous greed in his smouldering orbs, felt the hand on his throat, and knew what he meant. They'd kill him if he didn't open the safe. But if he did, he might as well be dead. The stolid grimness in his eyes, deepened, froze there, and he shook his head.

Butch's hand closed on his throat, tightened slowly. The coarse, dirty fingernails cut into his skin, drew blood, shut off his wind. The room and Butch's vicious face began to dis-

solve in choking, tortured flashes of blackness. He felt the life slowly gasping out of him.

Suddenly Butch released him and he fought back to consciousness with great, heaving sobs.

"Now will you open that safe, or do I kill you?" Butch snarled.

Wetzel stared at him grimly, shook his head.

Shorty grabbed Butch's hand, stopped him.

"Leave him to me," he grinned with a sinister gleam. "There's a way to make him open that safe. We'll toast him."

He drew a box of matches from his pocket.

"Take off his shoes and socks, Butch."

Butch stared at him for a moment and then nodded in comprehension. His hard, black eyes bored into Wetzel's, watched the sudden start of horror in the old jeweler's misty eyes. His tight lips turned down grimly as he tore off the old man's scuffed shoes.

Shorty knelt down beside him, pulled up Wetzel's bare foot.

"See if that gag is tight," he paused. "Can't take no chances of someone hearin' him scream."

Butch examined it, pulled it tighter.

They both froze at the sound of the street door opening.

"Hold it," Butch whispered hoarsely. "Wait'll Joe gets rid of this customer. And hold the old punk's legs. Don't let him kick nor make no noise."

THE customer outside shook the rain off his slicker and readjusted a carnation in his lapel. Joe slipped the bag in his hand to the floor behind the counter and sauntered over to him.

"Can I help you?" he smiled politely, and winked back over his shoulder in the direction of the back room. Joe was smooth, suave, efficient. It gave him a big kick impersonating one of the salesmen. It was a slick trick. It would please his vanity to make a sale. But his hand was sunk in his pocket, clasping his gun, ready for any slip-up.

"Well," the customer hesitated.

"Something in an engagement ring or wedding ring, perhaps?" Joe murmured. He steered the customer over to the show cases.

"Well, that's it—an engagement ring," the man with the carnation said slowly with a slight flush. "I was just looking, getting an idea."

Joe went on talking glibly to him. He picked up the green bag, pulled out some of Wetzel's finest "ice," and held them up toward the gray light of the window, turning them slowly, watching the facets sparkling with an admiring and practiced eye.

Butch grinned in the back room.

"A slick break if he sold this sap a ring. Get about three times as much as a fence would give us."

Wetzel watched Butch and Shorty with smouldering, desperate eyes. If he could only give an alarm. The gag was tight in his mouth, almost choking him. The wire around his wrists held his arms against his back tightly. He strained them and the wire drew tighter, cut his skin. He tried to move his feet and Shorty snarled at him menacingly.

Joe's voice came to him low and indistinct from the shop, and he realized if he did give an alarm they'd stick up the customer; herd him in the back room too. They had it all worked out with the efficiency of a machine. All he could do was lie there, helpless, while they wiped him out.

The customer went out.

"You're a hot salesman," Butch growled.

Joe picked up the green bag, raked the stuff back into it.

"He's comin' back tomorrow," he laughed raucously as he went through the remaining cases.

Shorty looked at Wetzel, a sinister threat in his small, bleak pupils.

"Changed your mind about opening that safe?" he hissed. "We only got a little time left."

Wetzel stared at him, his face gray and clammy. He drew his lips thin and hard and shook his head.

"You old fool," Shorty breathed. "Rather be tortured out, eh?"

Wetzel turned away, looked at the wall.

Butch came over and held him.

Shorty lit a match. His hand moved down toward the sole of the old jeweler's foot. He licked his lips as he watched him. But Wetzel kept his head turned away, as though trying to hide the agony in his eyes.

"It's an old Chinese trick," Butch laughed brutally.

For one searing, excruciating instant Wetzel felt the flame lick against the tender skin of his sole—flaming, indescribable torture.

He writhed out of Shorty's grasp and the match went out. Shorty tore off another, started to strike it. Wetzel shook his head dumbly, instinctively.

"Will you open it up now?" Butch growled.

The old jeweler tried to talk, but couldn't.

Butch loosened the gag.

"It's all I got left—only a little—in the safe," Wetzel gasped. "Let me keep that. I've worked hard—forty years. Have a heart."

Butch's eyes glinted murderously and he yanked the gag tight.

"Stalling, eh?" he snarled. "Give it to him, Shorty. Thaw him out a little, then he'll talk."

The match sputtered and Wetzel closed his eyes. The flame seared him, broke him down. Butch saw him shake his head, saw the look in his eyes. He pulled him up in the chair and undid his hands.

"He's licked, all washed up," he said to Shorty.

Wetzel stumbled over to the safe and knelt down. For a moment he hesitated and glanced around wildly. It was no use. He was through. He spun the tumblers with trembling fingers and swung the heavy door open. Shorty grinned at him, lighting matches idly.

Butch ransacked the safe, and slipped the jewelry and currency into his pocket carelessly. His eyes flamed in triumph.

"O. K., Joe? Got everything?" he called.

"O. K.," Joe grunted from outside.

Butch turned to the old jeweler, sneered down at him.

"A hundred per cent haul and not a slip up," he laughed, harshly.

WETZEL stared at him and his thin lips drew down in a half smile of bitterness. He heard someone come in from the street, but he scarcely noticed it. He was thinking as he saw them standing there in triumph, thinking of forty years—"honesty is the best policy"—and Butch's words ran like a bitter refrain through his head, "a hundred per cent haul and not a slip up."

Suddenly he heard a shot outside and pounding feet coming down toward the rear of the store. Butch and

Shorty froze for an instant, and went for their guns backing up toward the rear window to the alley.

A man in plainclothes burst in the door, his gun still smoking.

"Reach high, you mugs!" he bellowed.

Shorty screwed up his face viciously, pulled down on him.

His automatic flamed and the man in the door spun around as though struck by a gust of wind and fell on one knee. As he dropped, his gun came up spurting. Shorty lurched and went down like a dead weight.

A cop in uniform came up behind the man on his knees. Butch threw his automatic on the floor and pushed up his hands.

"O. K. You got us," he whispered hoarsely.

More feet pounded in from outside. It seemed to Wetzel that the room was filled with cops. Someone cut him loose, and he fell into a chair, weak and dizzy. He saw Joe, handcuffed,

between two dicks. One of the cops rolled Shorty over.

"He's a goner," he said casually.

Butch stood backed up against the wall, hard faced, sullen. He and Joe started when a sergeant entered, pushing ahead of him a man in a slicker with a carnation in his buttonhole.

The man with the carnation grinned at Joe.

"I thought I'd better not wait until tomorrow if I wanted that ring."

The sergeant glanced at him curiously.

"What wised you up that this was a hold up?"

The man with the carnation grinned at Joe.

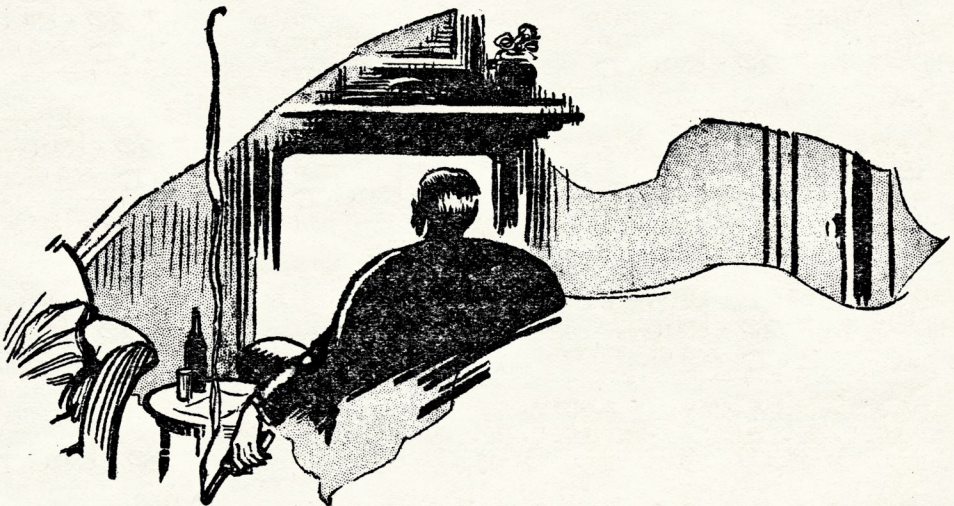
"Well, this guy tried to wait on me," he said slowly.

"Yeah, what of it?"

"Well, I happen to work here, that's all."

Wetzel was staring at him.

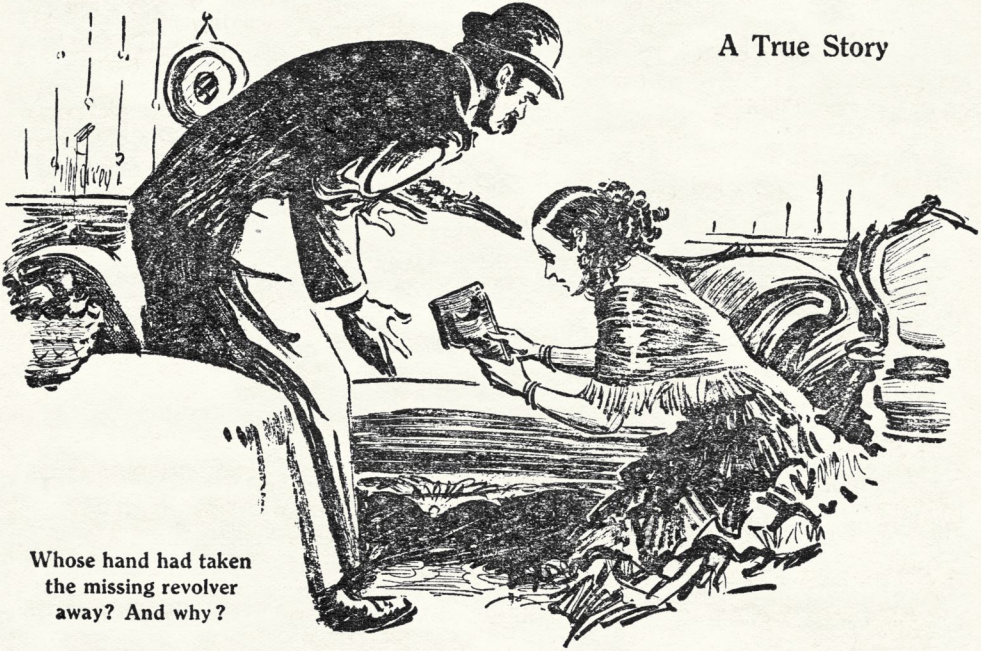
"Late again, Francisco," he murmured. "Thank God."



The Dapper Murderer

By Zeta Rothschild

A True Story



Whose hand had taken
the missing revolver
away? And why?

*The Body of a Girl Lying Face Downward in a Hedge-screened Ditch
Brings to Light the Lurid Career of the Don Juan Who Killed Her*

ON a Monday afternoon in June between five and six o'clock, a youth was hurrying along a short cut from Southend to the village of Prittlewell, half a mile north of the bathing resort.

The route led by way of a foot-path, banked on either side by fields of growing corn and wheat. On his right was a high hedge which hid from the view of the passer-by a ditch six feet deep and equally wide which ran parallel with it.

As the lad came along, his foot kicked a lady's glove which lay on the path close to the hedge. Stooping to pick it up, he saw a gap in the green

border and automatically glanced through the opening.

Amazed at the glimpse he got through the hedge, he stopped short and pulled the hedge apart to scrutinize the horrifying spectacle on the other side.

Before him lay the body of a young woman, crouched on her face in the ditch. One arm was sticking up at right angles to the body as if the outstretched hand, already stiff, were pointing to the glove.

The youth, frightened and shocked, gazed fascinated at the awkward figure in its death rigors. He leaned close, crawling halfway through the hedge to

get a better look at the exposed side of the face.

It wasn't the face of a Southend girl, he decided; maybe one of the Sunday trippers down for the holiday.

Letting the hedge relax into place, the boy turned and ran back the way he had come; back to Southend and to the police station to tell of his gruesome find.

Within an hour the body of the dead girl had been identified.

That very morning, shortly after eleven o'clock, an agitated woman had arrived at the Southend station house and reported her sister, Florence Dennis, was missing.

The sister, according to Mrs. Ayriss, had come to visit her the week before, but having no spare room, she had lodged her with a neighbor.

Shortly before midnight the night before, this neighbor had come pounding at Mrs. Ayriss' door to report Florence had not come home.

In the morning, Florence not having yet returned, Mrs. Ayriss had come to the police station and reported her sister missing.

Then came to light a story of interlocking triangles, of the machinations of a Don Juan who had entered the lives of two sisters.

It was a tale of lust and adultery, which had now already brought death to one and was yet to decide which of the two remaining should pay in kind.

Who was guilty? Was a question debated in England for several weeks. The discarded mistress, or the sated lover, already entangled with a third and new love?

Fortunately, Scotland Yard was called in. And due to its excellent work there was finally no doubt as to who the guilty person was, despite the

efforts of the murderer to shift the blame to an innocent party.

The triangle began when Mrs. Ayriss, a rather giddy young married woman, met a dapper stranger when on a holiday trip in the summer of '89.

Easily won, she spent the following night with her handsome companion and continued to meet him for similar celebrations during the next three years.

Mrs. Ayriss, at the time, had a perfectly good husband, but no children, while the man, James Canham Read, frankly admitted to having a wife in Stepney and being the father of eight. But this little detail did not hamper his desire for amorous adventures.

Read claimed in court that the two children born to Mrs. Ayriss after their meeting were fathered by him. It was during her confinement with the second child that Mrs. Ayriss' younger sister Florence came to stay with her. When Read paid a surreptitious visit to the older woman, he met the girl for the first time.

Then began the romance between Read and Florence Dennis. While his regard for the older sister grew less, his affection for the younger increased, though he continued to correspond with both.

It is a merrie custom in England for small shops to advertise their willingness to receive mail for those who do not want their letters to arrive at their own homes.

A placard "Letters Received Here" in the window is all that is necessary to carry on this furtive business. No questions asked is an unwritten law, and no questions answered the privilege of the customers in these "accommodation" shops.

Both Mrs. Ayriss and Florence Dennis corresponded by way of these

private mail boxes with Read up to the time of Florence's death. Letters for the married woman were received at Southend and other places under the names of Neville, Dennis and Harris, while Florence got hers addressed to Latimer and Talbott.

The strangest slant to this triangle is that the older sister for two years knew nothing of the attachment between Read and Florence.

During this period, Florence and her sister were the best of friends. The younger one often spent several weeks at a time with the older at Southend. She talked freely to her sister of her affairs and her beaux, with the exception of James Read.

THEN in June, '94, Mrs. Dennis, mother of Florence, noticed something wrong with her daughter. On questioning her she learned that not only was the girl pregnant, but also that her baby was due within the month.

The mother decided that Florence must immediately leave the house because of the younger children at home, and sent her willy-nilly to Mrs. Ayriss at Southend.

There, in a general confession of how her predicament had come about, Florence told Mrs. Ayriss of her affair with James Read and admitted that he was the father of her child.

It was a day of shocks for both women. What were the older sister's reactions to the news that her lover was not only faithless to her, but had seduced her little sister!

Was her resentment against Read stronger than her love for her sister? Did Mrs. Ayriss hate him more for quitting her for the younger woman or did she hate the younger woman for taking him away?

At first, it is possible, she resented her sister as her successor in the affections of Read. But soon this feeling left and her one thought was to protect the younger woman from the man.

When Mrs. Ayriss had somewhat recovered from the news her sister brought she turned and announced she too had something to tell that would likely be news to Florence.

From her conversation, Mrs. Ayriss had deduced that Florence still thought James Read a single man and that he would eventually marry her.

But now for the first time the girl learned that Read already had a wife and family and there was no prospect whatever of a marriage with him.

At the end of this heart-to-heart talk, Florence asked but one thing of her sister—not to let Read know she had told her of their affair. She had promised never to tell her and she didn't want the man to know she had broken her word.

Mrs. Ayriss reluctantly promised with a mental reservation.

When Florence was settled in Southend, she had written a timid, formal note to Read telling him of her change of address. It read:

Dear Sir:

I have left Sheerness and am staying at Southend. Please write me what arrangements you have made. Address Miss Dennis, at the Post Office, Southend.

Read was in a quandary. Florence, who did not work, was dependent on her family for all the money she had. She had told him he would have to pay the expenses of her confinement and he was afraid if he did not do so voluntarily, she would tell her family who her lover was.

So far, he took for granted, their secret was safe. But when he learned

that Florence was in Southend he was afraid if he did not help her she might confide in his ex-mistress.

Anyway, in reply to her letter, Florence Dennis received a telegram, unsigned, which read that the sender would meet her at nine o'clock, on Sunday.

Contrary to previous instructions not to mention this appointment to anyone, Florence Dennis fortunately did tell her sister.

If she had not, James Read might have come and gone, with no one the wiser.

On Sunday evening, Florence left the house shortly after eight o'clock. The following afternoon she was found dead in a ditch, her misshapen body doubled up in its death agony.

James Read never admitted meeting Florence Dennis the night of the 24th of June in Southend.

Florence Dennis did not tell him that evening that both her mother and sister knew he was the father of her child. Nor did she tell him that Mrs. Ayriss also was aware that she was meeting him that Sunday night.

Otherwise Read could not have been so cocksure that his plot had succeeded. Nor would he have so openly returned to his place of business on Monday as if nothing had happened.

But his peace was permanently upset when a telegram was delivered to him at his office on Monday morning shortly after eleven o'clock.

Mrs. Ayriss when her sister had not returned to the lodging house by then had sent the following wire to James Read.

Where is Florrie. Telegraph reply to
43 Wesley Road, Southend.

This message may have made him doubtful that his relations with Flor-

ence Dennis were still a secret, but he decided at first to take for granted that they were.

In answer to the above telegram, Read sat down and wrote the following note.

What is the meaning of your extraordinary wire? Please write fully. Have not seen young person for quite eighteen months. Faithfully yours,

J. C. READ.

The center of interest now switches to Read, a cashier at the Royal Albert Docks in London.

The day, Monday, the 25th, passed quietly, though it was later remembered by his associates that Read seemed rather nervous. To his work-mates it was a rather mild June day, but Read had insisted he felt chilly and had had a fire made.

Shortly after three o'clock, Read had a change of heart. Brooding over the telegram from Mrs. Ayriss had broken down his self-confidence. (So claimed the prosecution.) The body of the murdered girl would rest, he had hoped, in her grave in the ditch undisturbed so long as to be unrecognizable when eventually found.

BUT on the receipt of the telegram he knew Mrs. Ayriss would start a search for her missing sister.

By four o'clock James Canham Read had decided the way to safety was in flight.

As cashier of the docks, Read had access to large sums of money. His weekly payroll came to over one thousand pounds and up to date there had never been any shortage in his accounts.

But this day when he left his office, Read carried with him in a black bag one hundred and sixty pounds of his employers' money.

One hour later, at five o'clock, the boy stumbled over the glove and the body of Florence Dennis was found in the ditch between the stiff green hedge and the gently waving corn.

That Read had fled on Monday afternoon was held later by both defense and prosecution to back up their respective cases. The defense argued that Read, because he had decided to steal, hurried off earlier than usual on that account. He had fled before the finding of the body, therefore his flight could have had nothing to do with that event.

The prosecution held that he stole, the only time in fifteen years of opportunity, in order to get away before the body was discovered; after receipt of the telegram, he felt he had to hide.

For several weeks there was no sign of James Canham Read. He had succeeded in disappearing completely. Neither his wife in Stepney nor his fellow employees at the docks could make any suggestions as to his whereabouts. He had vanished.

In the meantime, on Monday evening, an autopsy was performed on the body of Florence Dennis which had been laid out in the office of the Spread Eagle Inn.

A bullet, a 7-Eley, had pierced the side of the head a little in front of the left ear and death had been instantaneous. It had occurred from sixteen to twenty hours before the body was found and the girl, announced the police surgeon, had been "eight months gone with child."

A description of Read, supplied by Mrs. Ayriss, was now broadcast throughout all England. The circular sent by Scotland Yard to every station house in the United Kingdom described him as slim, dark hair with sideburns and long mustache.

In appearance, Read was very much the dandy. His clothing was always immaculate and if he wore a dark suit, he topped it with a dark hat. Invariably, he wore gloves, a rather unusual piece of grandeur for a clerk making a hundred and forty pounds a year.

He paid a great deal of attention to his person, too. The very morning of his disappearance, he had taken time off to stop at a hairdresser's near the dock to have his hair clipped and his mustache and side burns trimmed.

"Clean and smart," was the complimentary description given of him by one of his female admirers.

Strange as it seems, Read had also been popular with men. His fellow employees had sincerely liked him and as a token of their esteem had within a year of his flight presented him with a gold watch.

His employers were equally pleased with him, that is, until he had fled with one hundred and sixty pounds.

Wherever the detectives sought information of the habits and customs of James Canham Read, they heard little that was not complimentary, and met few who were not friendly to him.

Despite the nation-wide lookout kept for Read, he could not be found. The trail stopped at the docks; where he had gone when he left Southend.

However, while waiting for the trail to be picked up, the police were not idle. In their hunt for Read, they got into touch with the various members of his family. There was a brother, Harry, with whom Read seemed to have been on exceptionally good terms. To Harry, Read had confided some of his affairs, for it was found that the telegram which had summoned Florence Dennis to her last interview with James Read, had been mailed by Harry at an office in the Strand.

When Harry denied that he knew anything of James' whereabouts, the police apparently accepted his answer. But taking for granted that Harry would protect his brother, they decided not to put too much trust in his denial. And a watch was kept on Harry's mail in case James decided to get in touch with him.

For the cleverest of criminals have a way of forgetting that the letters to a suspect's friends and family often provide the detectives with a clew.

Finally came a letter to Harry in a handwriting the detectives recognized. The postmark covered too wide an area to be of much help, but the letter itself, intercepted by Scotland Yard, at least assured them they were on the right track.

It read:

My dear B., Secure my desk and contents and report everything to me at M. Will explain all when I see you. Allay all fears.

J.

At first the detectives were inclined to raid the desk at the Read home, but on second thought they decided it would be more profitable to pretend they knew nothing of the contents of this letter and to wait.

While waiting for Harry to make up his mind to visit James at "M," the detectives paid several visits to poor Mrs. Read at Stepney. She knew nothing at all of her husband's side interests, but in talking with the children one of the Scotland Yard men found a link that was to weld James Read with the murder of Florence Dennis.

ONE of James' older daughters spoke of a revolver left at the house by or taken from her Uncle Harry by her father. Early in

the Spring, Uncle Harry, fired from his firm after a misunderstanding, and very much depressed, had purchased a revolver and brought it with him to the house in Stepney to show it to his brother James.

The latter, evidently fearing Harry might do away with himself, had insisted on his leaving it behind when he left.

The revolver, in its holster, with a box of cartridges, had been stowed away under the sofa in the dining room with many warnings and admonitions from Mrs. Read to the children not to touch them.

Of course the children had never forgotten the presence of the revolver and had secretly fingered the heavy holster and peeped at the revolver within.

The older girl was certain the revolver had been in the house the second week in June; she had had to push it aside when cleaning under the sofa with a brush and had noticed its weight.

But now when she reached down to hand the detective the holster from its hiding place, she was startled to find how light the case was. Opened, the reason was clear. The holster was empty.

Whose hand had taken the missing revolver away? And why?

Judging, however, from the box of cartridges still beneath the sofa, these 7-Eley bullets, conical in shape, were doubles identical, except for the markings made as it was ejected from the revolver, to the one which had killed Florence Dennis.

Then, too, according to the children, the revolver had never been used.

But, printed on the box of cartridges were words to the effect that the box contained fifty cartridges. Yet, mused

the detective as he quickly counted them, there were now only forty-four.

The revolver and six cartridges were missing.

Tenderly the detective tucked the box in an inside pocket and with the empty holster under his arm, hied himself to Scotland Yard with his find.

About two weeks later, Harry Read sent off a telegram which came into the hands of the police. It read:

My dear Jem, I reached M. J. at 10:45 and did not see you, so caught the 11:22 for Clapham Junction. I shall be waiting at M. J. at 11 on Saturday morning. If I do not see you, shall go to Rose Cot. quite incog. Yours,

EDWARDS.

(This name was an alias often used by Harry Read when meeting James' lady friends.)

This telegram was all the detectives needed. With the help of a time table, they had little difficulty in identifying "M. J." as Mitcham Junction, and one of their number hurried down to Mitcham to locate Rose Cottage.

Finding the cottage was not such a simple task. The local post office had no record of anyone by the name of Read in the neighborhood and Rose Cottage, the detective was informed, had been inhabited for a year or more by a fine young couple with a baby. Their name was Benson; the man was a traveller, his wife, a pleasant enough woman.

This report was discouraging, but the Scotland Yard man decided nevertheless, that since he was at Mitcham he would take time to call on the Bensons and see the young couple for himself.

When the detective knocked at the door of Rose Cottage, a fair haired young woman, blue-eyed and slender, opened the door. He was hard put to

open the conversation, but decided to ask casually for Mr. Read and get her reaction to the name.

The woman shook her head; no one of that name lived there.

The detective insisted; the young woman laughed at him. She ought to know, she told him. The Bensons lived there and she was Mrs. Benson.

As a proof of her argument, the young wife brought back from an adjoining room a long roll of paper and opening it, proudly held it so the detective might read. It was the marriage lines of one Edgar Benson and Beatrice Kempton, performed in London, in March of the previous year.

This marriage certificate had a quite different effect on the detective from what the so-called Mrs. Benson expected. For at the first glimpse of the writing on it, the detective knew immediately that he was on the right track.

In checking up the past of James Canham Read and making himself familiar with the man's idiosyncrasies, the detective on the case had had plenty of opportunity to study his writing. He was capable of recognizing it at a glance.

And the marriage lines shown so proudly and confidently to the detective were written by the hand of Read himself.

Evidently some sort of marriage ceremony had been performed and the young woman had been satisfied with this certificate. But real marriage there had been none, of course, and the fake certificate, instead of being written and certified by the proper authorities, had been the creation solely, including the signatures of everyone concerned, witnesses and minister, of the versatile Mr. Read, alias Benson.

As the detective took the certificate in his hand, the front door of the cottage opened and a man strode into the room. He stopped abruptly when he saw the other and waited for him to speak.

It was difficult to recognize the dapper, smart James Read in the slovenly creature before him. No man had ever worked out a better disguise than by simply changing the outstanding characteristics which his friends first thought of in connection with him.

THE curling mustachios, always so well cared for, were gone, clipped short to a mere bristly stubble. The side burns, the elegant trade mark of the gentleman of the late Victorian era, were missing. And a rough growth of beard now covered the erstwhile smooth skin.

Alas, no one would have referred to Read now as "clean and smart." He wore an old suit, stained and unpressed. His shoes were cracked, his collar soiled. The contrast was so different to what he had been led to expect that the detective realized the man was acting a part.

Mrs. Benson was the first to speak.

"This man came here," she said turning to the newcomer, "looking for that awful Read person who murdered the girl at Southend. He thought for some reason he might be here. Isn't that funny? But I told him we weren't the Reads and to prove it showed him our marriage certificate."

Now there was a tense silence. The two men staring at each other, the woman, first in amusement, then in horror, turning from one face to the other.

For while the detective's face had become stern, the other man's had turned gray, his features sagged and

a despairing look shadowed his eyes. The woman screamed and the tension snapped. Read sighed and the detective spoke:

"You will come with me without any trouble?"

And Read nodded yes.

The story of James Read's relations with Beatrice Kempton was just one more of his amorous adventures.

Miss Kempton, a confectioner's assistant, had met Read in London rather casually without the benefit of an introduction about the same time his affair with Florence Dennis started, in 1892.

The acquaintance had continued along perfectly proper lines and in May, 1893, Beatrice Kempton had taken Read to her home in Cambridge and introduced him to her parents and friends as her fiancé.

A month later she had accompanied him to Wimbledon for a Saturday and Sunday visit and there he had seduced her. In July, at his request, she had given up her job in order to spend several week-ends with him.

In October, Miss Kempton found herself pregnant and Read then had promised to marry her shortly. When the time came for her confinement, she left London for a small town in the north of England, telling her parents, at Read's suggestion, that she had been engaged as a companion by a lady. Read took care of her mail, redirecting it so that no one would find out her whereabouts.

Her baby had been born in December, 1893. When the girl kept on insisting that Read keep his promise to marry her, to pacify her he had written the home-made marriage certificate she had shown the detective. It was dated March 19th, 1893.

Shortly afterwards Read, known

through all this adventure to Beatrice Kempton as Edgar Benson, moved her and the baby to Rose Cottage at Mitcham. From then on he had spent every week-end with her there, explaining his absence during the week as due to his job as a travelling salesman.

Rarely ever did Read fail to appear at the cottage on Saturday afternoon. Only three times had he disappointed her, said Beatrice Kempton, the last time, admitted the young woman reluctantly, the week-end of the 23rd of June. Instead of coming on Saturday, he had not arrived until Monday evening.

To her surprise, he had not left the next day. He explained this break in the usual routine by a story of trouble with his boss and his decision to lay off for a while.

Since then he had stayed at the cottage continuously, going out rarely except at night.

Read took his arrest calmly after the first shock, and made but one comment.

"I guess I have the dairy maid to thank for this," he said to the detective.

"The dairy maid?" queried the latter, surprised at this mention of an apparently strange person in the case.

"Yes," explained Read, "Mrs. Ayriss. We always called her the dairy maid because her husband is in the dairy business."

To this comment the detective made no reply.

"Have you asked her what she did with the revolver?" asked Read. "The dairy maid, she can tell you."

But the detective was not to be sidetracked so easily.

Read, back in London, was charged forthwith with the murder of Florence

Dennis at Southend on the evening of June 24th.

At the trial, the prosecution presented its case concisely. It gave a simple account of Read's intrigue with Mrs. Ayriss and his switching to Florence when he met the younger and prettier sister.

The prosecution had no trouble in proving that while Florence Dennis had corresponded with a number of men via the "accommodation" shops of Sheerness and other places, only Read had reached such terms of intimacy with her.

SEVERAL compromising telegrams were read out in court, received by the Dennis girl and which the prosecution held had been sent by Read.

This Read denied. But the Solicitor-general (England's district attorney) was prepared for this move.

It is permissible in England to mail telegrams to the nearest telegraph office with the stamps equivalent to the amount needed for the sending.

They go through the mail and arriving at the telegraph office are then forwarded according to the usual routine.

In this way the sender cannot be identified by the attendants at the telegraph office and many criminals find this protection a great convenience.

Undoubtedly Read had thought of this safeguard. And not only had he mailed his telegrams in, but instead of writing them in longhand, he had carefully put his message in printing, totally unaware that printing can be as distinctive as writing or typewriting.

Since the only way of proving these telegrams, all unsigned, had been forwarded by Read, the prosecution had gone to some pains to have the print-

ing of the original drafts identified as his.

Experts in handwriting were brought into court and with them came certain memorandum books kept by Read in his office and in which he had fallen into the habit of printing his notes!

This printing was compared with that of the telegrams and were held identical, thereby breaking down the stand of the defense that another man had been more involved with Florence Dennis and had been the sender of the incriminating telegrams.

Though Read continued to deny having been at Southend on the 24th of June, several witnesses came forward to testify they had seen him either there or in the vicinity.

One witness saw him Sunday afternoon a short distance from Southend and picked Read out from a group of men his own age.

Another, an umbrella maker, said he had met both Read and Florence Dennis in a lane near the place where the girl's body was found. He had identified the dead body as that of the girl and later recognized Read.

What is most astounding is the identification of a police sergeant at Benfleet, a small village eight miles from Southend on the way to London.

The sergeant testified that at about a quarter to one on Monday morning the prisoner had come toward him on the road from Southend. When he got near enough to hear his voice, the sergeant had said pleasantly enough:

"You are up and dressed early this morning."

To which the prisoner had answered by asking if he were on the right road to London.

"Where do you come from?" the policeman had asked.

"From Southend," the man had answered.

The last train had left Southend for London, he had gone on to explain, and he had decided to walk, at least part of the way.

It was not difficult to show the motive back of the murder of Florence Dennis, which always goes a long way towards convincing a jury of the guilt of the accused.

James Read, claimed the prosecution, had actually fallen in love with Beatrice Kempton. Then when he was finding it increasingly difficult to provide for his family at Stepney and for the love cottage in Mitcham, along comes Florence Dennis with her baby.

Even though he refused to marry her, she insisted that he take over the expenses of her confinement and provide for the baby afterwards. He knew that she could compel him to do this and willingly or unwillingly he must accept this additional expense.

The only and quickest way to rid himself of this responsibility was to kill Florence Dennis.

And thinking the girl had kept her word to tell no one who was responsible for her condition, nor of his appointment with her that fatal Sunday night, James Read had shot Florence Dennis.

Though the revolver had not been found, the bullet taken from the dead girl's head matched others found in the Read home.

This was the case for the prosecution.

The defense announced, to the surprise and disappointment of the crowds that jammed the court room, that it would bring forth no witnesses.

And since the accused was forbidden by law to take the stand in his own defense (this was the law in England

in the nineties), the speech of his counsel would be the only word spoken in behalf of James Read.

The evidence presented was not convincing, argued Read's counsel.

The witnesses who claimed to have seen the accused near Southend had not come forward to give their evidence until two or three weeks after the murder.

ONE witness said she recognized him by his piercing eye alone; another claimed he recognized Read by his walk which he had seen but for a few minutes on a dark night!

The testimony of the police sergeant, instead of convicting Read, should go far in freeing him.

Would a man, just come from murdering a woman, calmly tell a police officer where he had come from and where he was going?

It was most unlikely.

Therefore there must be something wrong in the identification of the prisoner by the police sergeant.

Furthermore, there was no reason to think that Read was the only man in Florence Dennis' life. She had corresponded with several others and it was one of these men, a sailor, who, Mrs. Ayriss had told the prisoner in the preceding March, was responsible for her sister's condition.

"Has the jury considered," continued the defense, "what part Mrs. Ayriss has played in this triangle? She had been Read's mistress for several years.

"He is the father of her two children, the prisoner says."

Was it not likely, continued the defense, that Florence had been the go-between for her sister and Read?

This would account for the many letters that had been sent to Florence

Dennis, and the various telegrams. And, implied his counsel, would clear Read of any personal connection with the younger girl.

Then, too, could one take Mrs. Ayriss' word since she admitted that she had lied in her first statement to the police about Read.

So went on the counsel, trying to throw doubts on Mrs. Ayriss and her testimony.

"It is necessary for the jury to bear in mind," admonished Read's counsel, "the relations between Mrs. Ayriss and the prisoner, and how far their relations had been altered, and how far her feelings toward the prisoner had been affected."

But the jury saw in Mrs. Ayriss not the vengeful cast-off mistress pictured by the defense, but only the grief-stricken sister.

With less than a half hour's deliberation, the jury brought in a verdict of Guilty for James Canham Read.

Read, dapper and well groomed once more, showed no dismay or regret during those last weeks in prison.

Even on the gallows, his thoughts centered on himself, on his personal appearance. As his arms were being pinioned and the executioner stood ready with the noose, Read noticed the flapping of his open coat and turned to the man at his side with a last request.

"Button my coat," he said curtly.

The executioner obligingly complied while Read looked on.

Then only did Read raise his chin for the circle of rope that hovered over his head.

A minute later, in his snug-fitting, buttoned coat and neatly pressed bell trousers, his mustache and side-burns glossy as of yore, James Canham Read swung off into eternity.

ILLUSTRATED CRIMES

BY STOOKIE ALLEN

THE TELL-TALE BURRS.

ABOUT 15 YEARS AGO A MIDDLE AGED LADY NAMED EMSLEY WAS FOUND MURDERED IN HER HOME AT STEPNEY, ENGLAND. SHE WAS A MISERLY PERSON WHO OWNED MUCH PROPERTY AND COLLECTED HER RENTS IN PERSON. SHE LIVED ALONE AND WAS AT TIMES ASSISTED IN HER RENT COLLECTING BY A NEIGHBOR NAMED EMMS, A COBBLER. SHE ALSO HAD IN HER EMPLOY A CARPENTER NAMED MULLINS.



DETECTIVE
TANNER OF SCOTLAND YARD WAS PUT ON THE CASE. HE FOUND A HEAVY BRUISE ON THE SIDE OF HER HEAD AS IF SHE HAD BEEN HIT WITH A HAMMER. HE ALSO FOUND THAT SHE HAD RETURNED FROM HER COLLECTING CARRYING A HEAVY BLACK BAG OF COINS. THIS BAG WAS GONE. LOOKING FOR CLUES TANNER NOTICED NEAR THE BODY SEVERAL SMALL BURRS AND UNDER ONE OF THE WINDOWS HE FOUND A BUSH FROM WHICH THEY HAD EVIDENTLY COME.



THE WINDOW WAS OPEN. IN THE BUSHES TANNER FOUND A MAN'S FOOTPRINT. THE ONLY MEN MRS. EMSLEY WAS KNOWN TO HAVE ANY ASSOCIATION WITH WERE EMMS AND MULLINS. MULLINS HAD FORMERLY BEEN A CONSTABLE IN A PROVINCIAL POLICE FORCE AND CAME FORWARD TO OFFER HIS AID IN CAPTURING THE CRIMINAL. THE CASE LOOKED PRETTY HOPELESS, AND TANNER WAS GLAD TO HAVE HIS HELP.



DETECTIVE

TANNER




MULLINS
WHO OFFERED TO AID
DETECTIVE TANNER.


A REGULAR PICTORIAL FEATURE



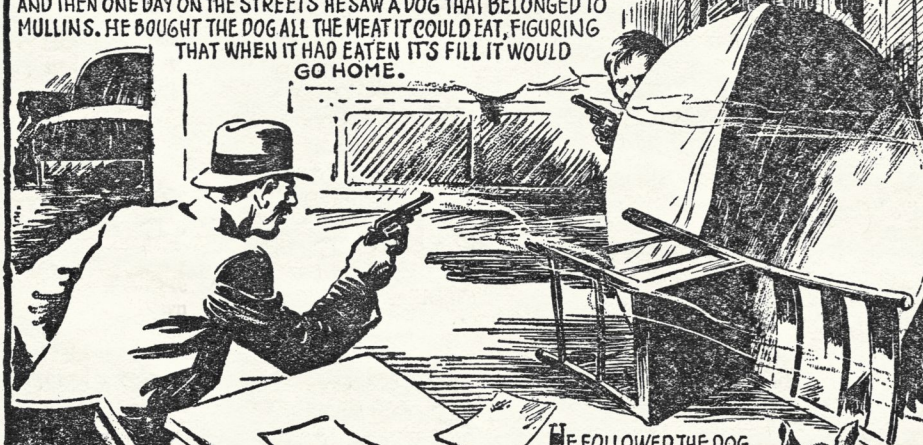
ONE DAY MULLINS CAME TO TANNER AND SAID, 'I KNOW OUR MAN.' HE THEN EXPLAINED THAT SINCE THE MURDER HE HAD KEPT A CLOSE EYE ON EMMS.



THAT VERY DAY, HE SAID, HE HAD SEEN EMMS TAKE A PARCEL INTO AN OLD BUILDING NEARBY. TANNER DECIDED TO SEARCH THE PLACE THAT NIGHT. MULLINS WAS VERY ANXIOUS TO GO WITH HIM. THEY MADE A SEARCH WITHOUT REVEALING ANYTHING, BUT TANNER FOR REASONS OF HIS OWN DID NOT LOOK VERY HARD. MULLINS BECAME EXASPERATED AND TOLD HIM TO LOOK BEHIND A CERTAIN SLAB. TANNER LOOKED AND FOUND A PARCEL CONTAINING A SMALL PART OF THE STOLEN PROPERTY.



EMMS PROTESTED HIS INNOCENCE AND TANNER RELEASED HIM BECAUSE HE SUSPECTED MULLINS. BUT MULLINS HAD VANISHED. IN HIS ROOM TANNER FOUND A BLOODSTAINED HAMMER AND A COAT ON WHICH WERE 2 BURRS! FOR DAYS HE HUNTED FOR THE MISSING MAN AND THEN ONE DAY ON THE STREETS HE SAW A DOG THAT BELONGED TO MULLINS. HE BOUGHT THE DOG ALL THE MEAT IT COULD EAT, FIGURING THAT WHEN IT HAD EATEN ITS FILL IT WOULD GO HOME.



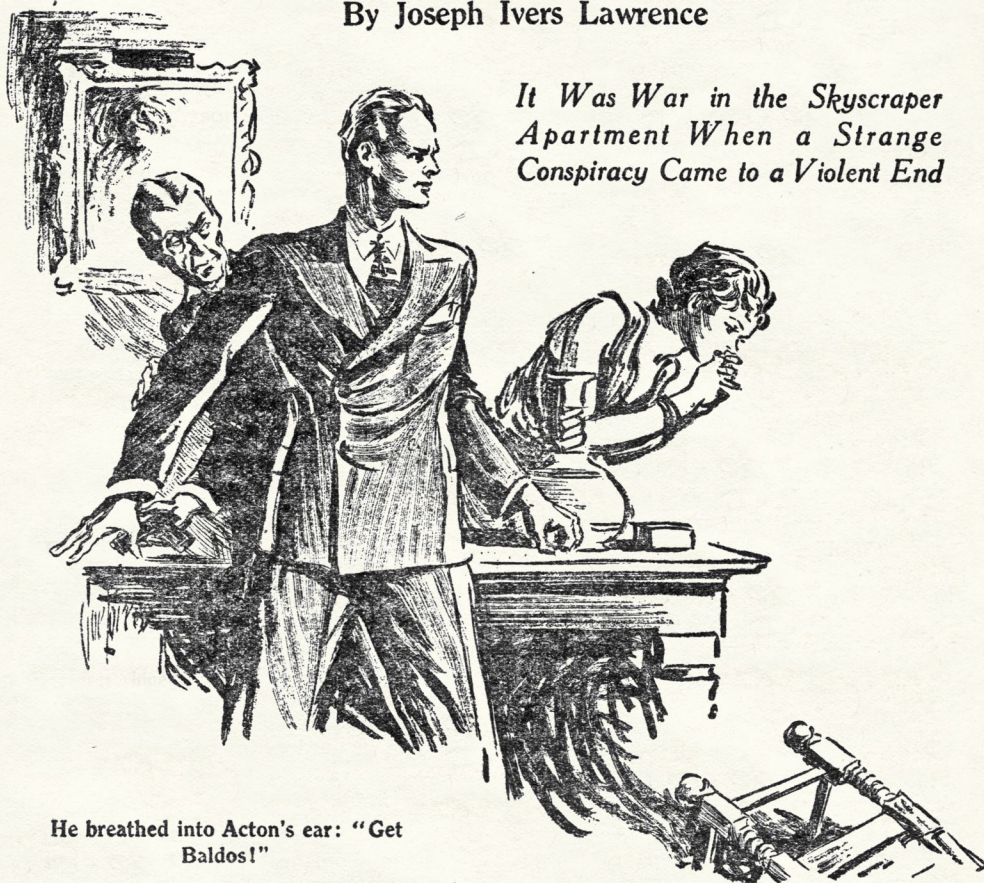
HE FOLLOWED THE DOG TO AN OLD HOUSE. MULLINS SAW HIM COMING AND PUT UP A FIGHT. HE WAS WOUNDED AND THINKING HE WAS GOING TO DIE CONFESSED. HE RECOVERED AND WAS HANGED.

Next Week: THE TORN COAT!

Tower of Terror

By Joseph Ivers Lawrence

It Was War in the Skyscraper Apartment When a Strange Conspiracy Came to a Violent End



He breathed into Acton's ear: "Get Baldos!"

DON'T MISS THIS STORY—BEGIN HERE

GROVER MOSTYN, power in Wall Street, conspired with Kit Baldos, chief of the gangster world, to fake his own kidnaping in order to draw a ransom from his friends and save his wavering finances. Mostyn hid in his own skyscraper apartment, while his beautiful show-girl wife faced all inquiries.

Behind the scenes always lurked the sinister Baldos, ready with his henchmen and his guns to dispose of whoever got suspicious. One of those was

young Dr. Peter Acton, whom they had had to summon when Mostyn got a heart attack.

He was held prisoner, finding no sympathetic person in the incongruous group but Delia Sharland, Mostyn's secretary.

When two friends, Truscott Glynes and Judge Briggs, called on Mrs. Mostyn and told her they were holding out against an immediate payment of the ransom demand, Baldos sent one of his henchmen after old Glynes to

This story began in DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY for September 24

kidnap him and further impress the banker associates of Mostyn.

Inspector Coulthard, of Headquarters, acting on a hunch, visited the Mostyn apartment. But he betrayed his suspicions, and Baldos captured him too, after a struggle in which the Inspector was shot through the hand and leg.

CHAPTER X

Another Day

MORNING came to the Mostyn apartment with all the routine matters of city households: milk was delivered there, by the electric service lift, as milk is delivered to the Harlem walk-up flat; and staple provisions, the mail, the newspapers, came in at the proper time.

The sober, silent Virgil Spino did the necessary ordering of supplies, but under the watchful supervision of Matty Hart, who took care that no messages should pass in or out.

The power of Grover Mostyn's name had effectively guarded the penthouse apartment from any inquisitiveness or suspicion on the part of the management of the great building. Mostyn was their most illustrious tenant, who cheerfully paid the most exorbitant rental in an apartment palace conducted exclusively for millionaires—millionaires who tacitly regarded an income of a single million as something uncomfortably close to penury.

It was enough that Mrs. Mostyn, familiar to the administrative and service staff as a dazzling goddess who walked majestically in the grandeur of ermine, sables, silks, and laces, was in possession. A person endowed with such beauty, so much wealth, and such prestige, could not conceivably do wrong.

That the spacious lobby of the house was thronged with annoying newspaper persons at all hours, together with morbidly curious nuisances that had to be ejected, was merely a trying and unavoidable detail of the tragic misfortune which had come upon that distinguished household.

The mail for the penthouse came in bushels, a prodigious litter of crank letters, fan letters, and more or less serious communications offering suggestions and advice.

Serena pawed over the mass with casual curiosity at first, but tired of it quickly. Baldos gave strict orders that every letter should be opened, and poor Delia Sharland was assigned to the labor, but some of the more serious documents startled and disturbed the gangster, and Grover Mostyn, with his lofty disdain for comparative trifles, directed that the rubbish should be burned in the big fireplace . . .

On this morning, following an eventful night, the newspapers were distributed to eager readers. At first glance, Baldos turned loose a torrent of curses, Serena chattered hysterically, and Grover Mostyn set his jaws and proceeded grimly to read the news.

Practically the whole front page of every paper seemed to be dedicated to affairs more or less traceable to the disappearance of Mostyn.

The Eastern States Bank was not to open its doors that morning. Headlines to that effect greeted the readers of every morning paper, and it was that intelligence which moved Baldos to such sulphurous raving.

The conservative papers declared their belief that the affairs of the bank were in good order, and that the directors had used admirable judgment in forestalling a run of depositors which might be precipitated by the news of

the kidnaping of the president, Truscott Glynes.

Other papers reviewed the details of the so recent Mostyn mystery, and pondered the significance of the second daring outrage in its relations to it. There had been rumors, they said, of minor irregularities in the bank's affairs, which persisted in spite of denials, and there were pessimistic critics who suggested that such things as kidnapings and romantic mysteries served to divert the public's attention from cold facts of business during seasons of storm and stress.

The bank, it was reported, would remain closed indefinitely, and action and report of the State Superintendent of Banks and his examiners would be awaited with some suspense by depositors and the interests allied with the institution.

"You must be tickled to death with yourself," Serena remarked, with a withering glance at Baldos. "I suppose it was all my fault, like you said last night. My God, if you pull a few more of your strokes of genius, we'll all be sent to the incinerator together. You've got Coulthard on your hands now; and he wouldn't have come, but you had to shoot up Westchester County and kill three men—not to mention all this hell about old Glynes. You're a big shot, you are—like a blank cartridge!"

The gangster's rejoinders crackled like a machine gun. He made further devastating allusions to Serena's ancestry, far back of the generations resident in the Bronx, displaying some acquaintance with the theories of Darwin.

"Stop!" commanded Mostyn, with frigid authority. "We've got crime enough here in all conscience, but spare me the vulgarity and the cheapness.

When there's anything to say, I'll say something with a purpose. I haven't discovered any intellect here superior to my own; I shall make my own decisions."

"All right, you make 'em then!" retorted Baldos. "And tell your missus to keep her big trap shut when I'm round here; then we won't have no trouble."

Sullenly the three returned to the reading of the papers, but found nothing therein to lighten their leaden spirits.

There were reviews of the careers of Grover Mostyn and Truscott Glynes, with sketches of their respective philanthropic and beneficent activities. There were editorials seething with indignation at the wave of criminality which could imperil the security of American homes and the lives of such useful citizens. There were statements by prominent business men and office holders demanding swift action and a vigorous crusade to stem the tide of outlawry and restore public confidence in the institutions of government.

What served as Otto Slamah's obituary was without eulogy. His criminal record furnished the needed horrible example. He was known to have been associated with the sleek and facile Christopher Baldos, one of the papers stated; Baldos, who not only eluded and mocked the police, but had impudently offered them his services as an expert criminologist in the Mostyn case.

In pathetic contrast to the malignant Otto were presented the ill-fated chauffeur of Truscott Glynes' car and the young policeman who died in defending the man he had been ordered to protect.

The chauffeur had been a loyal servant to his employer fifteen years, and

the patrolman's service record of four years was without a demerit. The chauffeur left an invalid widow, without children to comfort her; the policeman had been married three years, and there were two babies in the little Harlem flat where the young widow mourned.

"Boloney and applesauce!" Baldos muttered aloud, as he read that item.

Harry Morse, long known as a star reporter in New York, was on the front page probably for the last time. According to the kindly eulogies he had soared close to the pinnacles of journalistic success in his time, and in his untimely taking-off the Fourth Estate suffered a distinct loss. He had been in failing health for some time, all the papers said, and there was little doubt that the tragic end came in a moment of acute mental disturbance.

Obviously there was no significant connection between the tragedy and the reporter's visit to the Mostyn home, and Mrs. Mostyn, herself suffering severely from nerve strain, had not been asked to make a statement.

Dr. Peter Acton, a university man known among his colleagues as a physician and surgeon of brilliant promise, was disposed of in just about a printer's stick of type—on the front page, as it happened, but down at the bottom.

The housekeeper at Dr. Boyd Jarvis's residence reported that the young man in charge of Dr. Jarvis's patients during his absence had left the house in response to an emergency call, and had not returned, though he was known to have important professional engagements for that evening.

The police flashed the notice of his disappearance throughout the metropolitan area, but expressed the belief that the doctor was detained by pro-

fessional duties, and the housekeeper was unduly alarmed.

AT ten o'clock, while Mostyn and Baldos still pored over the news, Clyde Antrobus arrived. Normally lean and angular, he seemed to have lost flesh over night, and was drawn and haggard.

"What in Heaven's name has been going on here?" he inquired, appealing to Mostyn.

"You'd better invoke Hell while you're about it," corrected Mostyn. "The devil himself inspires most of our operations, by the looks of things."

"I can't understand this awful mess about Glynès. What happened here after I left? Do you know all about it, Grover? Do you know where Glynès is, Baldos?"

"It's another development of Baldos' gigantic plan," Mostyn said evenly, not taking the trouble to sneer. "I gather that he is perfectly satisfied with conditions. His Napoleonic genius is still functioning twenty-four hours a day, it appears."

The racketeer glanced from one to the other of the two millionaires, and decided to keep cool.

"Yeah, you're damn' right I'm satisfied!" he returned crisply. "I can't get every break I want, but who can? I know what I'm doing, and that's what counts, I guess. We got to work fast now, if we don't want to flop, gen'lemen. I got to throw a scare into them Wall Street stiffes that'll make 'em produce."

"But what happened?" persisted Antrobus.

"It's a—well, it's not a short story," Mostyn sighed.

"It's a dirty, rotten comedy—that's what I'd call it, Clyde!" spoke up Serena.

"Never mind all that now," said Mostyn. "I'll tell you all I know, presently. I'm anxious to know what you've heard outside, old man. How do things look to you?"

Antrobus heaved a heavy sigh.

"It isn't so much how they look, Grover. It's how they are. I talked with a number of men, last night and this morning. I haven't heard much that's encouraging. We've got to work fast if we're going to save ourselves. Your friends are loyal; I can say that. But they're all worried—damnably worried, Grover. I found out that there's a pretty general suspicion that you've committed suicide, and it's beginning to make trouble for us."

"Mm—yes—it would!" Mostyn agreed. "I must work that out. I suppose a kidnaped man might reasonably send a personal communication to his friends. I'll do that. It's about time for a frantic appeal. I shall have to warn my loyal friends that the kidnapers will show me no mercy unless their demands are satisfied at once. My handwriting ought to reassure the anxious ones, don't you think? My signature ought to have some weight; it has been an unfailing talisman in the past."

"Talismans aren't working so well these days," Antrobus remarked despondently. "I suppose you could have managed things if you'd been on deck, Grover, but—well, it wasn't just on account of Glynes that the bank decided not to open this morning. They needed you pretty badly, and Glynes was a worried man when he left his office last night. You see, in order to save its own face, the bank has got to ask for a receiver for the holding company of your Great Eastern Utilities Corporation."

Mostyn did not display any emotion

—except to the discerning eye of Antrobus, who knew him so well. He seemed merely to ponder what he had heard with casual interest, and nonchalantly lighted a cigarette with a steady hand.

"Very interesting!" he remarked at last. "My Kilkenny cats are preparing to eat themselves up, are they? The corporation created the bank, and the bank created the holding company; and now they would make a sort of commercial suicide pact, hey?"

Antrobus nodded, with tragic gravity.

"If you're looking for metaphors," he said, "it's a raging prairie fire, sweeping everything before it. And—I'm afraid it's too late for a backfire to do much good. You might have done something, if you'd been there."

"I can always do something!" Mostyn asserted doggedly. "It needs a little assurance and authority. I suppose some of my most devoted friends are tumbling over themselves to unload their stock in the Great Eastern. That will add a little more fuel to your prairie fire. I shall have to get back, that's all. If my disappearance is a failure, I must accept it as such. I shall have to stage an escape from the kidnapers and make a discreetly impressive return."

"But that cannot be done, gentlemen," said Kit Baldos calmly, with an amiable grin. "Expert and efficient kidnapers take care to make such escapes impossible."

"What do you mean, Baldos?" Mostyn demanded sharply.

"When I say it cannot be done," the gangster replied, "I mean that it cannot be done except in a strictly business way. You engaged me to act as your kidnaper, Mostyn, and I have done the work in a big way, I believe

—for the sake of our mutual advantage and profit, yes?”

Mostyn laughed unpleasantly, with an ugly leer.

“Is this conceit or bluff?” he demanded belligerently. “You’ve made the most infernal mess of things that a lunatic or a devil could possibly make. Mutual advantage and profit be damned! Our respective objectives are vastly altered, Baldos. You have to escape from this trap you’ve made for yourself—to escape trial for murder and outrageous brutality. I have to escape from this hell, and from you. I can do it! The testimony of you and all the scoundrels of your gang would not shake my reputation. My word would damn you. I have an unblemished name for veracity and integrity, and my record will stand.”

“Don’t exhaust yourself,” said Baldos mildly. “You are my prisoner. You cannot escape without first paying me my fee—which is now three hundred thousand dollars. You cannot communicate with anyone outside this place.”

“I have communicated with someone,” said Mostyn unguardedly, with a defiant toss of the head. “Now you’re warned, Baldos. Look out for yourself.”

“Grover!” cried Antrobus in consternation, fully realizing that his own fate was sealed.

“With a man in my profession,” said Baldos calmly, “life is matched against death every day. What of it? I never surrender, Mostyn. If I lose this game, you are my partner in the smash, my friend. Believe me, the police will never make an arrest in this place.

“Now,” he continued, his face hardening, “you can make your plans. Three hundred grand, for your life and

liberty, Mostyn. You can show me, now, the power of your influence. I will guarantee to deliver any messages that you care to send to your friends.”

CHAPTER XI

The Ruler of Business

THE moods and manners of Kit Baldos were changed at will, in the twinkling of an eye, to suit each passing minute. He was suave and composed in matching wits with Mostyn, and could use the language of a business man, even to the exclusion at times of all trace of the mob vernacular.

On the sudden arrival of a visitor he swiftly assumed another character, the garments of the formal man of affairs falling from him by magic.

The visitor was Johnny Rudge, of the gang, and he was announced by telephone with a commonplace name which served as a password. He came in timidly, his scared eyes shifting apprehensively from face to face, and he looked like anything but a gunman. An observer might have placed him as a store clerk, polite and ingratiating, without much spirit or ambition.

Baldos pounced upon him, jerked him forward by the lapels of his jacket, and held him there, as it were, for minute inspection.

“What’re y’ doin’ here, you rotten little rat?” he roared. “You’re a white rat—a washed-out white rat with pink eyes, you are! Call yerselves a gang, do yer? I’ve got a hell of a gang, ain’t I? Turn you out to pick up an old geezer dyin’ with the pip, on a country road in the night time—an’ you shoot off fireworks all over Westchester—an’ kill a cop!”

“Honest to God, chief! we done the best any guys could ‘a’ done!” chat-

tered the boy, his face like chalk. "It was the dick that started it."

"It was about time Otto got a slab in the morgue!" remarked the boss. "He was all done, Otto was! Useter be good. Got to thinkin' he was good. That's what was wrong with 'im. Well, why don't yer talk, y' poor guinea pig? Lost yer voice? Where's the old guy? What yer done with 'im?"

"He's all right, chief. We done what yer said. He's up to Lou's place. Ain't nothing wrong with 'im. He's awful mad, though."

"Mad? Who's mad?"

"The old guy—old Glynas. He ain't so scared, seems like, but he's terrible mad. Kep' on sayin' over an' over we couldn't keep 'im there—bawlin' us out like he was the boss—tellin' us how nobody couldn't grab a bank president an' lock 'im up. Says 'tain't never been done, an' can't be done. We got to laffin' at 'im, an' then he cussed us out so the big Swede got plumb scared."

Baldos dignified to smile slightly.

"All right!" he growled, letting go his hold on the man, "I'm goin' to take a quick run up to Lou's. I'll put the fear o' God into that old stiff! You stick around here, Johnny. Take your orders from Matty Hart. Bat's here, too. Keep them eyes o' yours open, an' do what they tell yer."

He left the apartment with his customary bold assurance, although he first spent some time in altering his appearance. A pair of horn-rim spectacles veiled his eyes, and he exchanged his hat and coat for some sport togs of Mostyn's.

Peter Acton was resting in his room, under the eye of his guard, when he was called to treat and dress the wounds and burns of Inspector Coulthard, who was shackled and put to bed in one of the chambers, suffering

acutely from physical and mental shock. Peter's jaw was swollen and discolored where it had stopped Matty Hart's fist, and he was low in spirits, beginning to entertain a more desperate view of his predicament.

Bat was in a blue morning mood, too, and would not go into the small room. He remarked that he could not stand the smell of medicine and surgical dressings, and said he would wait outside. He had made it evident that he cherished no more friendly regard for Inspector Coulthard than he did for any person connected with the organized police, but Peter readily surmised that he had no desire to face the detective after that torture-chamber scene of the early morning hours.

Coulthard stirred uneasily and groaned as the doctor entered the room and closed the door.

"Oh, you're the doctor!" he muttered thickly, and put his manacled hands up toward his neck as if to relieve the pain in his bruised throat. "Yes, you're the doctor of this—this hellish establishment! What you been doing—or what has been done to you? Do you have a battle every few minutes in this dive? You look sort o' bunged up."

"If you want to know," said Peter, with a mirthless grin, "I got this decoration on your account, Inspector. I might have spared myself the effort and the penalty, if I had used more sense; but when they were throttling you and burning you, I lost my head and butted in. Matty Hart brushed me off with one hand, and I was a good deal like a fly hit with a swatter. I took the count."

"Hmm! Well, that's a good story as they go, anyhow," grumbled the sick man. "It *might* be true, I suppose."

"Take it or leave it," Peter retorted.

"I've had as little to do with policemen as I have with crooks and gangsters, and I hope this will be my one and only experience. It may be your business to be skeptical and suspicious, but if I'm willing to give you medical service when you need it so badly, you can well afford to be moderately decent. I'm going to change those dressings and fix you up generally, and it may save you from blood poisoning or gangrene."

"Go ahead; I can't stop you," said the ungracious patient. "How do I know who you are, or what you are? You may have come from Dr. Jarvis's office, but it's likely enough that he'd call in some young squirt from the hospital to look after things while he was away."

"I happen to be a regularly practicing physician. I've had my training in hospitals, in New York, and in Vienna and London; I've passed the 'young-squirt' stage. Grover Mostyn is one of Dr. Jarvis's patients, and that's why I was called in here when Grover Mostyn was seized with one of his heart attacks."

"Hey, what's that?" gasped the detective, and opened his eyes wider. "Is Grover Mostyn here? Is that the game? Well, it happens I didn't guess it, but—I'm not surprised, at that!"

HIS questions came faster after that, and as Peter examined and treated his wounds the story of the emergency call came out, little by little, and was followed by a brief review of subsequent events.

"So they croaked the poor newspaper feller!" exclaimed Coulthard. "Well, I ought to feel pretty lucky that I got off with the garrote and the hot iron. I'm still alive, with a fighting chance to square things up with Kit

Baldos. I'm surprised that a big shot like Mostyn would let a rat like Baldos get the upper hand like this, though."

"A lot of big shots have been reduced to small calibre lately," observed Peter, "under the tests of the present emergency. I've talked with Mostyn here, and I haven't seen any remarkable signs of genius or a personality that might dominate the financial world. Tell me, Inspector, if you can, why a man should gain any advantage by kidnaping himself—by doing what Mostyn has done."

"You might better get that information from the man himself," said Coulthard, "if he cared to give it to you. But I suppose I can make a guess that will be as good as anyone's. Why do these big fellers commit suicide, or run away, or do a lot of other crazy things? Well, they lose their nerve; they've got to escape from the messes they've got themselves into."

"There's nothing so very strange in what Mostyn is doing, as far as I can see. He had to do something right away, I reckon, and he thought he'd do something clever. We get a good deal of information, in the police department that doesn't get into the papers. Three weeks ago the papers reported Mostyn's disappearance, and said that his affairs were in first class shape, didn't they? Well, we knew better. As a matter of fact, no man's affairs are in first class shape at the present time."

"Even then, we were keeping an eye on Mostyn's bank, the Eastern States, expecting any minute to hear there was a run on it, or that it was folding up. His big utilities corporation has passed three dividends, and it's about ready for a crash. The man on the rocks, without any doubt."

"I still fail to see what good he ex-

pected to get out of a farce comedy like this," said Peter.

"When a feller needs a friend," drawled the Inspector, "he can get one sometimes by working on somebody's sympathy. When an actress can't get any publicity any other way, she usually stages a jewel robbery—or even gets herself kidnaped. Mostyn got himself kidnaped, you see, and the whole world is talking about it. He's the hero of the moment, and if he could stage a big rescue act and make a dramatic return, he'd be a hero for another month or two.

"It has worked pretty much as he figured it, so far, hasn't it? The papers are full of sob stuff about him. The big corporation hasn't folded up yet, and the Eastern States Bank has kept going three weeks. It closes today, incidentally, but that's because Baldos was inspired to kidnap the president, Truscott Glynes. Mostyn's friends rallied to his defence just as he figured they would, and you'll notice that they stopped all the talk about bad business, bankruptcy, and all that."

"What possible good would a ransom do him?" Peter asked. "A couple of hundred thousand doesn't mean much to a man who is losing a couple of hundred millions."

"No? Well, I don't know about that! If you're busted, a five-dollar note looks pretty swell, young man. If Mostyn can't save his banks and corporations, the next best thing for a crook like him is a clean get-away, and any little bunch of ready cash would come in pretty handy, I reckon.

"Fix me up as fast as you can, Doctor," he added earnestly. "I've got to get out o' this before Mostyn makes that get-away. That's his next move, because he's wise enough to know by this time that the clever little

game is shot to pieces. He'll have to get away from Kit Baldos first, and then dodge the police, and dodge his friends."

Bat Jones knocked on the door and called Peter.

"Yer wanted by another patient, Doc. Mostyn's in his room, feelin' rotten. The Sharland dame is lookin' after 'im, but he wants you."

Peter left the room reluctantly, but promised to be back again for another discussion of the situation.

He found Mostyn sitting in a deep-cushioned lounge chair, wrapped in a silk dressing robe, sipping water from a glass.

"I'm feeling rather groggy, Doctor," he said hoarsely. "Come in and sit down, here by me. I want to have a talk with you. Shut the door, Delia, and lock it. Tell that fellow Jones to go and get some breakfast. We'll call him when Dr. Acton is ready to go."

Delia looked at Peter as he passed her, and her eyes were eloquent in the brief glance. She was plainly ill from unrelieved fatigue, constant fear, and horror, and her eyes frantically begged for help and pity.

"You come over here, too, Delia," said Mostyn, when she had locked the door, and nodded toward another chair.

"You want something for—for your heart?" Peter inquired coldly.

The genius of finance and industry smiled whimsically and stared at the doctor intently, with a gleam of sardonic humor in his eye.

"For my heart, yes," he replied, "and for my soul, Doctor. We must have a talk while Baldos is away. The doors are practically soundproof, and my friend Antrobus is outside; he'll keep watch."

His thin lips twitched again as he noted the resentful surprise and curiosity in Peter's eyes.

"We are eight to four," he announced in a low tone, his face turning to solemn gravity. "The odds are two to one."

HE paused to observe the effect of the declaration, but Peter continued to stare at him, and remained stonily silent.

"There's my wife," he went on quietly, touching the little finger of his left hand with the forefinger of his right. "She's a mere child, but a good deal of a Spartan—abundant courage in a crisis, every time. Then there's Delia—Miss Sharland—one of the bravest and most loyal friends I've ever known, Dr. Acton. Antrobus is three, and he's like a brother; a little timorous by nature, but reliable. Inspector Coulthard might refuse at first, but I shall count him as fourth.

"My Chinese cook, Jimmy Shan, is like a faithful dog. He obeys my orders; he's number five. My butler is a queer fellow, a human enigma, but very loyal in his way. He despises Baldos, so I count him sixth. I'll assign myself the mystic numeral seven, and take the responsibility of command. Lastly, for number eight, I hope, sir—Well, you're a man of spirit and a gentleman, Doctor; I'm counting on you."

Peter's gaze was unwavering, his silence steadfast.

The faintest shade of irritation touched the great man's brow.

"Hardly a man of impulse or of quick decision," he remarked. "I fancy you have gathered much of my plan, Doctor, but you are curious about the details."

"A little curious, perhaps, but not in-

terested," said Peter, and his voice was hard and hostile.

A glint of steel flashed in the other's eyes.

"I've always been a patient man; it's one of my assets. Pardon me if I say that, interested or not, you will have to listen to my plan. If you are human, self-preservation must be one of your instincts. I am putting it up to you, sir, whether you choose to live or to die. The unique feature of my proposition is this: that I am prepared to make your life worth while to you—though you are free to choose the rather tragic alternative."

"There are things much worse than death," said Peter. "If I were to make a bargain with you, it would involve some service to be rendered. I'm a physician, and instinctively I give medical aid where it's needed, but beyond that I will not go. I tell you, if I were to raise my hand to help you attain any of your objects, that hand ought to be cut off."

Mostyn's lips curled in a sneer.

"Must we be so heroic?" he asked. "Is it for the lady—all this dramatic effort?"

Delia Sharland sprang to her feet.

"I must speak!" she gasped. "Dr. Acton, I had talked with Mr. Mostyn; rather, he has talked to me. My answers were much like yours. His plight—the plight of every one in this place—is desperate to the last degree. I think—I have told, in fact, that his mind is unbalanced. He is absolutely at the mercy of Baldos, the monster that he brought here himself. We're all at the mercy of that creature, and—"

"At his mercy unless we save ourselves," interrupted Mostyn with kindly tolerance. "As for unbalanced minds, there's fair evidence that I'm

the only one here who is thinking logically. If that's insanity, make the most of it!"

"No one," said Peter, "has pronounced your condition lunatic; I doubt that a commission would commit you to an asylum, but I know you to be a megalomaniac, and the highest authorities would endorse my opinion. People, nations, the world, all through history, have been at times in the power of so-called supermen, and the end has always been disaster and tragedy. You have limitations, Mostyn. You've magnified your genius beyond your power, and the end is coming swiftly. No one would want to join hands with you in the final scene."

"I find it hard to believe that you choose death so calmly," Mostyn persisted. "You haven't heard my proposal, and there'd be no harm in listening unless you fear temptation."

"I tell you, we have to escape from that devil Baldos, and there is not a minute to lose. With me, Doctor, everything is at stake—my life, my future, my all! By returning to my business I can aid a thousand persons who will lose their fortunes if I do not return. I can save a great bank, a great corporation, a thousand business men, I say, by going back to my post of duty. My name, my presence, will do it!"

"I am a captive here—it has come to that! Well, I have to escape. Isn't that the natural thing to do? Is that an insane idea? My plan is the simplest one. I have weapons, enough for all of us. I am held prisoner by a vicious, inhuman criminal and three of his accomplices. I must fight for life. I shall shoot my way out, with the aid and support of my friends. Frankly, I have to kill Baldos and his three men. Then I'll publish

it to the world that I've escaped, and that will be the truth—and good news, I think, don't you?"

"There are other members of the gang," said Peter, "and they know what you are, and what you've done."

"Not eye witnesses. Their stories would be too absurd. The statements of low criminals against the word of a prominent and highly respected citizen. We should all tell the same story—Antrobus, my wife, and—"

"Not I," Peter broke in.

"Will you hear me out? I have paid you the compliment of including you in my scheme. More than that, I am offering you not only life, but fortune and happiness."

"In arrogating to yourself such godlike power, you are verifying my diagnosis," Peter remarked.

"My godlike power in this case is nothing more supernatural than a check book. You're a poor man, I believe; a young doctor with a practice to build up and a living to make. For your good will and aid I shall give you one hundred thousand dollars."

"Now, look at this girl. She is beautiful, cultured, highly connected. Delia is a woman in a million. I shall give *her* a hundred thousand dollars as a wedding present, and marry her to you, doctor."

"Don't—oh, don't say such things!" Delia cried angrily, and covered her face with her hands.

"But that's not madness," argued the man. "Listen to me, doctor: I have practical reasons for marrying Delia to you. I don't know that you are infallible; I don't know how far I could trust you; but I could trust Delia with my secrets until death, and I'm sure her husband would never betray me. Do you see how practical I am? Come, then, two hundred thousand

will set a young couple very handily on the road to happiness and contentment."

DELIA, her nerves unstrung, burst into choking sobs.

"Come, come, child! You mustn't let yourself go like that!" said Mostyn. "I can't very well marry you now, you know. I'm not the Bashaw of Tunis."

"That's enough, Mostyn!" Peter cried sharply. "Let Miss Sharland out of this room before she collapses. This is too outrageous, too idiotic! You're in no position to direct any one's destiny, even with a check book."

"You don't want the girl? You're hard to please!"

"The question is an insult to both of us. And I don't put it down to mere madness, Mostyn. It's your monstrous conceit, your insufferable superman idea, your passion to dictate and rule!"

Mostyn smiled archly and became tolerant, but consciously superior.

"Scientific men—assuming that doctors are scientific—are known to be strangely narrow minded, often ignorant, with regard to things outside their professions. Yet you must know, Dr. Acton, that this nation and all the rest of the world are ruled by expediency. The nations always have been ruled by invisible dictators, with brains and money.

"Rulers are forced to put sentiment and soft impulses behind them. Would a great ranchman with thousands of cattle on his range sit down in a barn to nurse a sick calf? Well, what's the difference between our millions of stupid people and just so many cattle and sheep? They want to eat, and breed, and play in the pasture; that's all they know.

"I suppose you had to read some history in your general education, doctor? Do you think that Alexander and Cæsar and Hannibal and Napoleon were merciful, tender-hearted men? They were successful in managing vast ranches. A wave of the hand, and ten thousand human cattle were slaughtered. Business was business, and the manager's appetite was just as good as ever, and his sleep untroubled. If a few thousand women and children perished in a burning city, what of it? The world had to go on, if the business was to be a success. If they colored a map with blood, it was to simplify a geographical problem, wasn't it?"

His eyes sparkled and his whole form became animated and vibrant.

"Do you comprehend all that, doctor?" he challenged.

"Perfectly," answered Peter. "I think the average intelligent schoolboy comprehends it, too—but for some good reason he doesn't grow up to be a monster. Luckily, those shining examples of yours aren't as convincing as they might be. Your conquerors haven't left much to the world, except a few principles in the art of killing people. And the maps are still changing, and the people are still just as hungry and unhappy. I've been thinking, Mostyn, that you must be a badly disappointed man."

"Why? What do you mean?"

"You've taken your heroes as models; you've adopted their philosophy, and it hasn't worked out very well for you, has it? You haven't conquered any nations or changed any maps. You've played some games for high stakes, and lost, and the lawyers are busy with your problems in the bankruptcy courts. At the end, you are in a little cage on a Park Avenue roof,

matching wits with an ignorant, clumsy thug from the slums—and not making out very well.”

Mostyn's face was darkening.

He started up with a gasp of rage which brought Delia out of her chair in terror. He was stung to white fury and ready to fight, but in a moment he controlled himself and stood staring at the young man.

“I have created great industries and corporations, and bought and sold them. I've handled millions as other men handle dimes and nickels. I have reached the top, but that is not high enough. Watch me, and see how a man can mount to new levels.”

“The sky, then, would be your only limit,” Peter said with ironic humor; “that is, if the police or Baldos did not hold you on the ground.”

“I can fight and I can think. That's a rare combination of faculties, if you but knew it. An unconquerable spirit does not fail; I have no fear.”

“Other unconquerable spirits have come to New York to begin the conquest of the world,” said Peter, “and they've left New York by the train that runs to Sing Sing.”

“Go back to your room!” Mostyn ordered sharply. “I won't quarrel with you. I've been a fool to waste my time with such a mind as yours. No imagination, no insight! Go to your room, but think over what I have said. You still have your chance. It matters little or nothing to me whether you take it or not.”

CHAPTER XII

In a Garden

THE high tension that held all nerves at the snapping point after the assault on Inspector Coulthard relaxed little by little dur-

ing the day, but everybody sensed a new static disturbance in the atmosphere.

Baldos' men were ill at ease and sullenly vigilant in his absence, and it was evident that he left some drastic instructions with them, after his conference with Mostyn and Antrobus.

Matty Hart was less amiable, less crudely tactful, than little Bat Jones, and he made unexplained excursions from his post in the servants' quarters, passing through all the rooms, and was discovered stealthily peering around corners.

Johnny Rudge, the newcomer, though peculiarly shy and awkward for a bold gunman, scarcely left the entrance foyer, and obviously had been assigned to the late Otto Slamah's duty as a sentinel at the picket line. He was overawed by the magnificence of the place, and ludicrously ill at ease, but his eyes and ears missed nothing.

Peter and Delia left Mostyn's room together, and the girl was so unstrung and ill from the ordeal that she staggered. Peter took her arm and begged her to forget what had been said.

The impartial sun was beating on the open terrace, and he urged her to go there and rest. She was fearful and undecided, but he led her to the door, and the movement brought Johnny Rudge down upon them like a corporal of the guard.

“Back up!” ordered the shift-eyed young man, bold and stern in the service of his boss. “What do yer think this is, a health resort?—or do yer aim to shoot a little golf right over Park Avenue?”

“This is all O. K. by me, Johnny!” called Bat Jones, bearing down on the party. “Let 'em go out. Th' doc's my job, and he's an all-right guy. Got his head welded right on to the neck,

th' doc has; no screws to come loose. He ain't the kind to do a Brodie from the twenty-ninth level, nor let 'imself down by his necktie."

Johnny withdrew doubtfully, and Bat pushed past him and escorted his charges to the forbidden ground.

"Give the little girl friend the air, doc," he whispered, and grinned like a monkey over the rare opportunity to repeat his warning in a shrewdly turned pun.

Peter resented the impudence, but was too grateful to the little thug to show it.

They walked out through the pergola to the open garden, and the girl made for the tea table under the striped umbrella and sank into one of the chairs.

Bat withdrew to the stone settle under the iron balcony and rolled himself a cigarette.

"First time I've seen this by daylight," said Peter, sitting down at the table.

"There's not much to see—to help us," Delia faltered. "Towers and temples of progress—the world's greatest city. Millions of people and dollars all around us, yet we might have more hope on a raft in mid-ocean."

Peter could scarcely disagree, without resorting to some fatuous platitude, yet his own depression was not dark enough to obscure the magnificent shining arrogance of the cloud-piercing shafts of Chrysler and Empire State, shimmering in gold and opal mists. Nearer were the boldly aspiring towers of the titanic hotels.

A million eyes might be turned toward him as he looked out from his own pinnacle, a million hearts were beating close about him.

The terrace was an aerial garden, as

spacious as many a country garden, and as lavishly furnished. Wide panels of green turf were laid on the flooring of slate tiles; flowers were blooming thriftily; a close-cropped hedge of vivid green followed the lines of the balustrade. From a great bowl of Italian pottery rose emerald ivy, to climb and weave itself about the railing of the balcony, and along the house walls, trees and shrubs enriched the presentment of sylvan beauty.

Delia's troubled eyes presently followed his wandering glance and caught it.

She exclaimed bitterly, "I never knew it before—that nothing can be more hideous than beauty, where beauty doesn't belong. It shrieks at you. These flowers are just so much horrible irony!"

Peter nodded.

"You're right. Nothing can be more cruel than beauty. The gardens at Versailles were the most beautiful in the world. I wonder how they looked to Paris when there was more blood in the streets than water in the fountains?"

"I come here," she explained, "only to escape from the house, to breathe clearer air."

"I'm looking about," he explained to her, "not to admire the spectacle, but to find some shred of hope in it. I've wanted to know what one might do, if something had to be done."

She shook her head hopelessly.

"I told you the raft on the ocean would be better for us."

HE went on with his survey of the place, and got up to look over the balustrade.

On the long side of the terrace, fronting the south, there was a sheer drop of twenty-nine stories, a straight

fall of no less than 350 feet to the street. To east and west, however, the building presented broken façades, successive setbacks ascending in pyramid form, so there were other terraces below the broad one at the top, furnishing gardens for some more modest dwellers on the floors below.

The nearest at either end was five floors below the Mostyn garden, and so narrow by comparison that it appeared a mere ledge to break the face of the precipice.

Peter recalled with a shudder how the assassins had spoken of an upper roof from which the unfortunate Harry Morse might be supposed to leap, and he saw that it was the roof of the upper section of the Mostyns' duplex, extending along the north side of the building. To it the only means of access was a door in a square tower that rose twenty feet above it, obviously a housing for the gear and tackle of the elevators.

No one lived, then, above the level chosen by Grover Mostyn; wherever that superman might dwell he would claim the topmost eyrie for himself—the vulture scanning the reaches of earth and sky for his prey.

Shafts of masonry stood at various points around the roof, chimneys and ventilators, and the like; and most of them served to form foundations for added embellishments, conceived by the artful landscape architects.

Thus a row of ventilators was absorbed by the classic columns at one side of the Roman pergola, and a Della Robbia wall fountain miraculously spouted clear water from the side of a masquerading chimney, the roots of which were sunk in a sub-cellar far below the grade of Park Avenue.

"I've studied every stone and brick myself," said Delia, following his ex-

ploring gaze. "I suppose convicts do that, the first few days in prison. You can't go down the chimneys, like Santa Claus. A note dropped into a ventilator would never get to any one. It's an island in the clouds, but if you jump off it won't do you any good to swim."

"There are ships that can touch at such islands," Peter said thoughtfully.

"Yes, I know. I've wondered if an autogyro could really land in this space. But what's the use? Gyros aren't cruising around Manhattan to rescue captives from towers, and aviators aren't bullet proof any more than chauffeurs."

"The unexpected certainly happened to me here," said Peter. "I should have said such an experience was impossible, but now I'm living in it. The unexpected will happen again and again. Don't give up hope whatever you do!"

"You must know," she sighed bitterly, "how guilty I feel, that I was the direct agent for the unexpected, in your case. If I had stopped to think—"

"It will do more good for you to forget that now. I don't for a moment associate you with any of these people. You're impulsive and sympathetic, and emotional. You didn't want to see the man die, and you did what almost any one would have done in your position. You got a doctor."

"And that was only yesterday!—but today I wouldn't do it. I hope you know that."

"We've had a good deal of tragedy in these few hours."

"I'm not naturally morbid, Dr. Acton; my sympathies aren't morbid, nor mawkish. If that man were dying now, today, and I could save him, I wouldn't do it.

"Please believe me, I don't say that because he insulted me and humiliated

me just now. I'm not in the position of the woman scorned. I can't believe he thinks that I would ever marry him if that were possible. I've been a loyal employee, I've worked for him faithfully, but he's intelligent enough to know that I'm not a sentimental fool. Does he fancy that all women are enamored of him?"

"Yes, that's quite possible. He has convinced himself, I think, that he is a superior being, with unusual power and influence over others. Women flatter such personalities especially when there's money to be considered, too. He's extraordinarily clever, of course, but clever persons can be inordinately vain."

"Well, I've no one to blame but myself. You may doubt it, doctor, but I've always been a proper sort of a person. The trouble is, I act too quickly on my impulses before I've studied the possible consequences."

"I'm not merely curious," he said, "but I've wondered if there's anyone else to be worried about this situation you are in. You have relatives?"

"I'm an orphan," she answered. "I'm a lone and independent business woman. I have an aunt up-State, but I hope she hasn't read enough in the New York papers to make her worry about me. I've been interviewed here with Mrs. Mostyn, but I'm not important enough in the case to get much publicity."

Peter checked her with a look.

"Shh! The gentleman conspirator is coming."

THE dapper Clyde Antrobus, always a picture of elegance in his morning coat, striped trousers, and spats, came through the pergola and toward the tea table, but paused near Bat Jones.

"I shall be out here with these people a few minutes, Jones," he said. "You may go in."

"Oh, yeah?" Bat grunted, with unexpected impudence. "You'd be a hot guard for 'em all right, but the jane might slap you on the wrist and knock yer cold."

Antrobus was thunderstruck, and indignant.

"What do you mean—such insolence!" he cried. "Have you been drinking? I shall tell Baldos about this."

"Yeah, you tell 'im. Give 'im a big laugh. I know what I'm doing. I take my orders from the boss."

Angry, but helplessly flustered, Antrobus came to the table and sat down.

"You heard that!" he murmured in a low tone. "A very grave situation is developing here. Those fellows in the house were quite rude to me for the first time. Something has happened. I don't know what to make of it."

"Nothing would be surprising here," Peter returned. "I should say that much has been happening, all along."

"Yes, I know—I know! We should all be prepared for trouble, Dr. Ac-ton."

"Trouble!" Peter exclaimed, with a bitter smile.

"I came out here to speak with you privately—with you and Miss Sharland. You were very unwise, doctor, to speak to Mostyn as you did. You got him all excited and considerably upset, and that's bad! You'd have done well to listen to him and consider his proposition carefully."

"Mostyn is not alone in being excited and upset," said Peter. "I can't see why he should have a monopoly on emotion."

"You are an educated man, a gentleman, doctor, just as Miss Sharland is a lady. We, of the superior class, have got to stand together, and I believe the time for very definite action has arrived. I'm beginning to think we have made some disastrous mistakes. Mostyn managed these fellows at the start very well—had perfect control over them, but— Oh, you know, they're nothing but brutes. We've got to get ourselves out of a bad mess, and there's not a bit of time to lose."

"You speak as if I came into the bad mess voluntarily," said Peter disgustedly. "I shall get myself out of it as best I can, with Miss Sharland, if we can find a way. But I'm not entering into a war with gangsters for the pleasure of defending Mostyn and you. And if I live to get out of this, I shall do all I can to deliver you and Mostyn to the law, and see that you get what is coming to you."

"Are you an idiot or a lunatic," Peter went on, "to sit here and talk to me about gentlemen and a superior class? You're guilty of criminal conspiracy, murder, and extortion! You're as much a party to this hippodrome of crime as Mostyn or Baldos, and all their hired cutthroats. I haven't been infected with the general insanity here."

Antrobus showed no anger. He turned red, then white, and his thin hands involuntarily played a tattoo on the metal table top.

"For God's sake, doctor!" he breathed, not daring to speak aloud. "You can't be as inhuman as all that! You don't understand. Great Heaven! Think of my family—my position in New York! We're victims of these beastly gunmen, Mostyn and I. Poor Grover planned everything for the

best, for the general good, don't you see? You don't comprehend his philosophy. Don't you know that wars are declared by nations for the general good, as a matter of practical necessity? If men are killed, why, it's necessary to the cause."

"Yes, I see that perfectly," said Peter. "If you live to get to a law court, Antrobus, you'll have to explain that all over again to a commission in lunacy. Make your pleas for mercy to the alienists, but not to me."

"Dear Miss Sharland, will you speak to this man?" groaned Antrobus. "Tell him—make him understand! Grover Mostyn is a great man. Make him see that!"

"I agree entirely with Dr. Acton," said Delia coldly. "I was Mr. Mostyn's secretary when he *was* a citizen, but I'm not in the service of a felon. My duty now is to the State."

The man's breath whistled in his throat, and his eyes rolled grotesquely. He inhaled deeply, to speak again, but was interrupted by a heavy footfall on the flagged walk.

All three looked up, startled, and saw big Matty Hart approaching with his habitually jovial countenance set in hard lines.

"Come along into the house, all of yer!" he commanded harshly. "Make it snappy! Th' boss is back and he's got something to say to yer."

CHAPTER XIII

First Blood

THERE was something positively ominous in the gangster's solemn announcement, and those whom he summoned rose and followed him without question, apprehensively eager, in fact, to hear what the dreaded robber baron had to say.

They heard the robust, throaty voice raised to a pitch of anger and command as they entered the door to the drawing-room, and saw that he was talking to Mostyn, who faced him across a table, pale with suppressed emotion and as frigid as ice.

"Yes, you will take orders from me!" thundered the gangster. "You'll take 'em and like 'em, see? No more partnership business about this show. I'm running it from now on. It's my show, Mostyn. If there's any little thing left for you at the end, I'll let yer know."

Peter's anxious eyes flashed about the room in a hurried survey of the scene. Every person dwelling in the apartment was there, save the wounded and sick Inspector Coulthard. And there were new faces, three of them.

A young woman stood close to Baldos, and she was fashionably dressed and notably attractive in a bold, somewhat flashy way. The two other strangers were young men, and no label was needed for their identification as members of the captain's official staff.

The golden Serena was standing back of the table beside her husband, tense with rage or fear, her eyes like great lamps of blue flame; and in an awful pause, while Baldos waited for his pronouncement to sink in, the lovely hostess was suddenly addressed by the strange girl with the sable tresses, dark eyes, and carmine lips and cheeks.

"Don't you be one bit afraid, deary!" piped the unknown cheerily. "I'm going to be your friend. We're going to get on like little old pals together, and I'm right here to see that Kit don't pull any rough stuff with ladies present. Leave it to me, girly!"

Even the doughty Baldos was amazed. He turned and stared at his

companion, and twisted his mouth into a crooked grin.

At first Serena looked incredulous, uncomprehending. Then—

"Who *are* you?" she demanded, in a dry, husky voice. "What are you doing here?"

Baldos declared a recess, as it were, to dispose of the defection with dignity.

"Meet the girl friend," he said. "Shake hands with Maida Norman, Mrs. Mostyn."

The hands did not meet across the table.

"I want to know why she's here!" persisted Serena, with growing determination.

"Say! Ain't she got a right to know?" challenged the brunette. "You ain't afraid to tell 'er, are yer, Kit?"

"You know what I think o' molls chiseling into a man's business," said Kit. "But hell! I'll tell 'er! I'm doing you a kindness, Mrs. Mostyn. I'm running this show now, as I was telling your man, and I ain't going to be bothered with janes. You ain't at home to callers any more, see? You and Miss Sharland, the both of yer will stay in your room together, an' Maida will make it three. She's going to look after you ladies for me, and she can do it!"

"You go straight to hell, you and your moll!" cried Serena, her clear soprano soaring an octave on the scale. "Don't stand grinning at me, you old ape! You dirty little gutter rat!"

"Jeez! She's a real high class lady, ain't she?" murmured the brunette. "Cripes! How they do high hat yer up here on Park Avenue. I ain't got any come-back for a dame like her."

Baldos, deliberate as a stalking tiger, was advancing to the table which fortified the Mostyns.

"Let out another crack like that, you foul-mouthed slut," he said slowly, with a sort of savage dignity, "an' I'll plaster that doll-baby mug o' yours on th' back of your head. Old Charlie Kuch wouldn't know his brat from a scarecrow!"

GROVER MOSTYN, a head taller than the gangster, and well set up, caught his wife and swung her behind him.

"You'll never touch her, Baldos!" he said.

The color had drained from his face, but his voice was without a quaver and he stood firm.

Peter Acton, standing behind Baldos, was warmed suddenly by the first thrill of admiration for the arrogant superman.

Baldos, short and runty by comparison, was all knotted muscle and sinew, with the arms and shoulders of a gorilla, and it took more than casual courage to challenge him.

The table was a massive Florentine antique, brought over at the price of a poor man's house. The frame was of richly carved cypress, and the top was an inch thick slab of rose-hued porphyry—a fair load for two strapping porters when it had to be moved.

Baldos reached for the table, clamped his thick fingers upon the edges, heaved the slab of stone breast high without great effort, and hurled it from him fully twenty feet.

The crash was shocking. A Chippendale chair was crushed, the faïence tiles in the floor shattered, and the slab itself cracked in two.

All the women shrieked in terror. No one was hurt, but the act, and the prodigious smash, were demoralizing, deadly to nerves already taut.

Baldos took another step, and with

one hand sent the cypress frame hurtling after its top.

"Anything else in my way?" he muttered, and the vainglory of the bully was in his swagger. "Get that frail out o' here! I don't want to mess up the place with your woman, Mostyn—but I'm goin' to show yer what I can do with you—you poor white-livered cockroach—talkin' up to me like a he-man!"

Mostyn stood fast.

"You're running amuck, Baldos," he said. "Get your wits together, or you'll be behind bars within a week, and you know it."

"My wits are workin' overtime right now, Mostyn. I just woke up. This here's a real kidnaping now, and it might get to be a real murder case. There's some talk outside that the city may offer a big reward to get you back, and there's been so much suicide talk that they'll make it read, 'dead or alive.' I don't ask nothing better than that!"

He paused, grinning fiendishly, and awaited some reaction to the announcement; but there was nothing but deathly silence.

"Well, you know yerself what I'm up against, to deliver you alive. I'll allow a liberal discount to make it dead meat, and no questions asked."

There was a soft thud. Serena Mostyn had slipped from her husband's supporting arm, and she lay in a dead faint at his feet.

"I say, this is intolerable!" spoke up Clyde Antrobus, with creditable spirit. "Come to yourself, Baldos. You're talking like a wild man; your own crowd will tell you so."

"I'm talking straight business, Antrobus. I've got a line on things today. We may work the proposition to pull the cold storage idea for all

three of yer—Mostyn an' old man Glynes, and you."

"You can't figure me in on anything!" Antrobus protested, staggered and hardly comprehending.

"No? Well, the figgerin' is all done. You disappeared from New York this morning. When you came here today, you used the private entrance. Nobody downstairs saw you come; I've made sure o' that. Well, then, I phoned your house, and said Mrs. Mostyn wanted to see you right off about something important. They said you had come here hours ago. Speakin' as Mrs. Mostyn's butler, I said it seemed terrible how all the gen'lemen were gettin' kidnaped—that it looked like they'd got you, too."

"Great God! This is too frightful!" shrilled Antrobus. "You've over-reached yourself! The thing is becoming too exaggerated—too absolutely fantastic! The police will be here next. You'll be done for, you know."

"You ain't seen me in action, feller! I'm just beginnin' to be good; I'm gettin' warmed up. I've planted a new clew for the dicks; it'll go big in tonight's papers. The kidnapers are now believed to be operating from a hide-out in the Adirondacks, somewhere west of Schroon Lake. Get that? You're right in with the big shots, Antrobus—an' you three gen'lemen are now lost in the big woods, waitin' for some one to find yer—*dead or alive!*"

MOSTYN was still at bay, stiffly erect in the middle of the room, but a nervous reaction had set in. His face was ashen, and the eyes had lost their fire.

"Another twenty-four hours will tell the story," he said a little abstract-

edly. "I don't think you'll be here, then, Baldos."

"I'll be here, but maybe pretty much alone, Mostyn."

To Peter Acton's consternation, Delia Sharland suddenly stepped forward and addressed the gangster.

"Would it be too much," she began with irony, "to ask you to tell us what's to happen to us all? I can't believe that you and all your gang are maniacs, but you've got to do something with us—these servants, and everybody. What is going to happen?"

He was surprised, but he grinned more broadly, pleased with her daring.

"Don't go worrying about yerself, sister. I ain't the kind of a palooka to hurt a swell little jane like you. Leave it all to me, an' consider me as your friend."

She was standing close to him, and he reached for her hand.

She recoiled, with a startled gasp, and he caught her wrist and jerked her forward roughly.

A clenched fist landed on the roll of flesh under his right ear with stunning impact, and he went down with a crash. Peter Acton stood over him, purple with fury, ready to carry on.

The ensuing action was swift and violent.

Clyde Antrobus thrust an automatic into Peter's hand, and breathed into his ear: "Get Baldos!"

Riot and panic swept the big room, and Peter saw Matty Hart's broad face loom before him and caught the dull gleam of a pistol barrel.

Quicker than thought he fired the little automatic and heard a deep-throated bellow of pain and rage.

He jammed the small pistol into his coat pocket as he ducked a chair that was flung at his head, then caught up a heavy fragment of the shattered por-

phyry slab, swinging it before him like a shield.

The two strangers who had come with Baldos were making for him, and he let them have the slab, hurling it at them with all his strength, then leaped back and dashed for a door.

Bat Jones and a gun appeared between him and the door, and in that kaleidoscope of darting, swirling figures, he caught a picture of Delia Sharland in the act of flinging a light coffee table at the little gunman's head.

The narrow stairway to the balcony was before him, and he leaped for it, clearing three steps at a jump.

Pistols barked, and a slug grazed his neck, burning like a hot iron.

He sprang through the door of the small sun parlor, banged the door shut, and locked it. Then he overturned a heavy couch and braced it against the door. The pocket automatic was his only weapon, and he took time to examine it. The magazine was full, except for the cartridge in the chamber and the one expended on Matty Hart.

Heavy feet clattered on the stairs and the balcony, and he seized a bulky table and added it to his barrier.

Bat Jones' shrill voice came through the door.

"Hey, doc! Made a damn fool o' yerself that time! You'll be sorry you didn't listen to me, boy! Too good a guy to chuck yerself away on a frail."

Peter made no response.

"Come on out, doc!" Bat proposed in a friendly tone. "If you think I'm just a rat, you're dead right, but I'm givin' yer my word you'll be safe now.

You're goin' to catch holy hell pretty soon for what you done, but you can come out now and nobody's goin' to touch yer.

"You're wanted out here right off, doc. You got to dig your slug out o' Matty's ribs, where you put it yerself, and you got to take a look at Big Shot Mostyn. He's pulled another flop an' passed out. The show got too fast for 'im.

"Beau Brummel Antrobus, he's bad off, too. Got nervous prostration or something, an' he's cryin' all over the dinin' room. Better come down an' give 'im a pill. When he gets done cryin', Kit's going to burn his middle out for slippin' you the rod."

"I'll come out when I'm ready to," Peter replied at last.

"More likely you'll come when Kit's ready. Be wise, doc."

Peter tried to be wise, taking such precautions as were possible in his dubious situation.

He had locked the outer door to the small iron balcony over the terrace, and he assembled all the furniture in the little room and arranged it to form a substantial brace between the two doors.

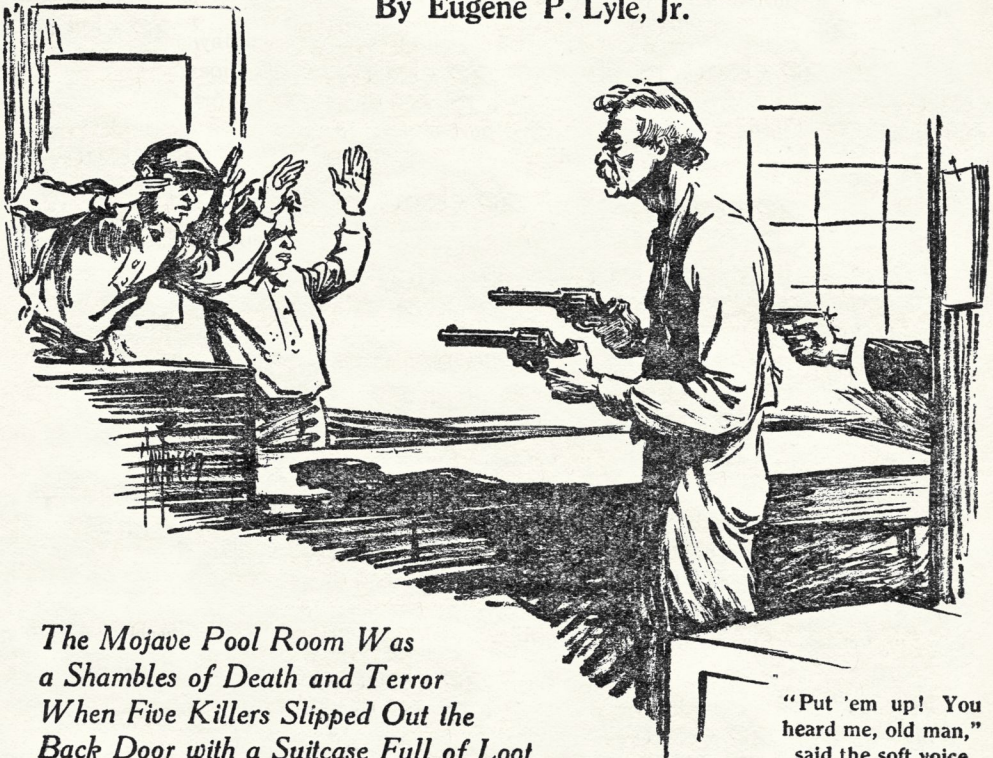
With every piece jammed firmly into place he had an immovable backing for both doors, and it was virtually impossible for the enemy to force an entrance without the use of axes and crowbars. The resourceful Baldos might presently produce a wrecking crew and a machine-gun squad, but the temporary barricade was satisfactory.

CONTINUE THIS STORY NEXT WEEK



Gun Work, Old Style

By Eugene P. Lyle, Jr.



*The Mojave Pool Room Was
a Shambles of Death and Terror
When Five Killers Slipped Out the
Back Door with a Suitcase Full of Loot*

"Put 'em up! You
heard me, old man,"
said the soft voice

THIS was in Bakersfield. Workers from the oil fields had been paid off and it was their night in town. They had cashed their pay checks. The cash bulged on them. They were fat for the kill.

Four young men pushed open the slatted swinging doors of the Mojave Pool Room. The doors flapped closed behind them and for a moment they stood in sneering contemplation of the begrimed toilers at play. Under snapped-down brims of crisp, expensive hats, their restless eyes had the deadly quality of unsheathed blades.

No one remarked their entrance. They did not as yet compete in interest

with the clicking of ivory balls on green felt under cones of smoke-thickened light. Such total unconcern regarding their presence amused them. Their lips curled. They could afford to be amused. If these dumb saps who worked for their dough knew what was about to happen!

The four young men were in no hurry. They stood in jaunty, slouching ease, looking the scene over. One of them idly swung a smart traveling bag of walrus hide. Each wore his coat buttoned by the lowest button in the latest affectation of tailored correctness over silken shirts. Each had his right hand thrust in the pocket of

his coat. Now and again three of them glanced inquiringly sideways at the fourth man. He was some years older than the others. Nearly thirty, perhaps. And he was colder, deadlier. That showed in his eyes—cunning, merciless eyes with the luster of black lacquer. Shadowed under the brim of an immaculate Panama encircled by a blue ribbon with folds like a sash, they peered out, swift and darting as a weasel's. From wall to wall and down the length of the fairly crowded pool hall they missed no important detail. Round head on short thick neck slightly canted over one fleshy shoulder, the man was a picture of contemptuous insolence.

"S's't!" he hissed gently.

Instantly the three tensed, and the right hands of all four flipped from coat pockets, each gripping a large, blue steel automatic pistol. In unison, queerly like a clockwork bit of vaudeville, they executed the movement. With the leader the gesture had the same horrid graceful undulation of a snake slipping over a rock. His full lips drew back from his teeth, and he addressed the oblivious patrons of the Mojave.

"Now, you mugs, paw air!"

The soft lush voice filled the room like a poisonous miasma. It touched with paralysis the hum and buzz of the evening's leisure. Care-free relaxation froze into a rigid stillness. Men turned questioning faces to the front of the hall whence the voice had come.

Players in the act of making a shot let fall their cues and slowly lifted their hands above their heads.

"O. K. Now line up against that wall!" A gesture with the weapon in the soft puffy hand indicated which wall.

A hurried, shuffling movement began. A benumbed instinct of exact obedience moved them. Only the proprietor balked. He was a heavy, plump man in his shirt sleeves, and when the order came he had his back to the robbers. Behind the little stand up front where soft drinks were served, he stood before his cash register, counting the bills in the drawer. He put up his hands at once, even before he turned round, but as he stepped out from behind the counter sudden unreasoning anger seemed to possess him. The veins stood out on his temples and he clenched his fists above his head.

"If you bums think—"

As if it were part of a mechanism of coiled springs, the chief gangster's trigger finger jerked. At the single staccato roar the Mojave's proprietor clutched at his throat. He slumped over the pool table in front of him and stayed there. He was like a stuffed sack, a bolster that had been thrown over the corner of the table.

The lush voice blanketed the stir, the start of horror.

"That's just in case any more you punks think we don't mean business."

The scuffing of boots on the floor became a panicky rush.

"O. K. Pans to the wall. And keep them hands up!"

They kept them up. They flattened stomachs against the wall. They resembled captives awaiting the cat-o-nine-tails. Their despoilers worked with method and dispatch, varied by conversational abuse and cruel little raps of gun barrels on defenseless skulls. Two did the "frisking." The leader himself and one whom he called Slats, a slim fellow with long, sharp face and coarse yellow hair oiled and brushed straight back from his nar-

row forehead, worked down the line. They turned pockets inside out and tossed whatever was of value into the walrus traveling bag, which a third member of the gang held open for them.

This third young man was the ghastly product of a beauty shop. The stifling odor of perfumery traveled with him. He had the whitest, softest hands of the four, and the finger nails were tinted a delicate red. Rouge heightened the pallor of his flat, chalk-white cheeks.

"Let me fry this one. Aw, Leo, let me fry this one," he begged in a thin, petulant treble.

"Nix, Flooze, nix," the sleek Leo warned him.

A grinning manicured ape, who was the fourth man of the quartette, had the job of look-out. After looting the cash register, he took his station just within the entrance. Once, when the doors slammed open to admit two new customers, he grinned a welcome. Motioning them to the wall with his gun, he robbed them personally.

Meantime the other three worked steadily towards the rear door of the pool room. This door was open. It framed a rectangle of black night. The trio came to the last man. They finished with him, and the elegant Flooze snapped shut the walrus bag. Leo sped an appraising glance at the open back door.

"As you are, you saps," he spoke softly to the men facing the wall. "Start counting. Out loud, together. Count slow. Count to one hundred . . . Sandro," he called to the look-out.

SANDRO grinned and started down the aisle-like space between the wall and the ends of the pool tables. Passing the first table, he

brushed against the inert form of the proprietor, which fell to the floor. A choked, gasping sound came from it. A man in oil-stained khaki and laced boots whirled out of the line against the wall.

"You dirty—" he began.

"Eh, you want it, do you?" Fat, sleek Leo let him have it.

At the roar and spurt of flame the man slowly folded over upon himself and so to the floor. Flooze raged at the killer in a fury of whimpering indignation.

"Hog, hog!" he cried. "Always hogging the thrill! Now I'm going to fry one."

With the petulance of a spoiled child he lifted his gun, but Leo cracked him across the wrist with the butt of his own gun. Flooze's weapon clattered to the floor.

"Nix, nix! Screw outo' here."

But the slatted doors up front banged wide and a uniformed policeman burst in. He was pulling his gun clear when three streams of flame focused on him. Flooze was trying to recover his own weapon, but Leo shoved him face round to the rear door. The policeman had lurched out of sight and sought safety behind pool tables. The mob scurried into the alley.

A closed car, lights out, engine running, awaited them there. The driver let in the clutch as the skylarking young assassins crowded aboard. The sedan slid along the dark passage between black walls. The gangsters chattered as if it had been a Halloween prank.

"Didja see the funny look on that bull's face when we give him the works?"

"Yeah, and didja—"

But Flooze on the back seat was

grappling with Slat for possession of his gun.

"I lost mine and you got two—"

"Can it!" Leo snarled softly.

"But, Leo—" Flooze sobbed. He snatched at the gun in Slat's hand. Slat jerked back his hand. Glass crashed to the pavement as the gun struck it. The gun fell into the black void outside the swiftly moving car. Slat took Flooze by the throat.

"You punks want me to rub out the both of you?"

"Leo, take that gat out o' my ribs!"

"Sit pretty. We're turning into the street."

They did. Leo would have pulled the trigger. Their car blended with the traffic of the lighted street. No one looked at it twice. It glided smoothly along, betraying no evidences of flight. News of the stick-up in the Mojave had not yet spread.

"Angle round to the north, Joe," Leo said to the driver.

They inhaled cigarette smoke. They drank from silver flasks. They were well satisfied with themselves. Slat kicked the traveling bag with the toe of his sports shoe.

"We cut a juicy slice out o' that burg."

Leo reached for the bag. "I'll count the sugar."

They left the business district behind them. They bowled along a street of homes. The street became a paved highway in open country.

"We're hot babies on the lam too," Flooze remarked in his high delicate voice.

"Up to now," said Leo. "Nobody spotted this car on us, but we got to look different."

He bade them get up and pull out bundles of nondescript clothing stowed away under the back seat. Flooze

made peevish complaint against changing his tailored niceness for a working man's clothes. It was one thing about this racket that crossed him up.

"Flossy doll!" muttered Sandro on the front seat beside Joe.

Leo made them smear faces and hands with oil dusty rags.

"If anybody asks us, we're looking for them guys ourselves," he said. "But maybe we oughta split up at that. Coupla you gorillas borrow another car in the next town. You can use the Nevada license plates we took off o' this crate."

"I gotta get another rod, too."

"Yeah?" said Slat. "How 'bout me?"

Joe roused from his sullen attention to his driving. "Why don't you yeggs stick up a police station and get you some gats?" he growled. "You're good enough, ain't you?"

"Plenty good," Flooze retorted, "but I don't like rods with wood handles. They rough up my hand when I fry a guy."

"Cheese it," Leo ordered. With the traveling bag open on his knees he was smoothing out the crumpled bills it contained. These he made up into rolls, and around each roll he snapped a rubber band. "Sandro," he said, "look on your road map and tell me what's the next burg in big print we come to."

Sandro spread out a folder under the dash light. They were new to this region and he spelled out the name.

"F-r-e-s-n-o."

"How far?"

Sandro made a calculation. "On this map it's about four inches."

"Oh, hell," said Leo, "we'll get there before morning. Take it easy, Joe."

"And if there's a gun merchant in

that town," said Flooze, "can't you see us? There the guy is, all surrounded with gats, but me and Slat's we take our pick and make him like it. Maybe I'll poop him too, just to see how surprised he'll be as he checks out."

"You thrill hound!" Slat's grumbled. "But it oughta rate a giggle at that."

BACK of his little gun shop in Fresno leathery old Pat McCann was exercising his ancient six-guns. No day could be quite complete for the veteran gun fighter if he did not begin it in this way. Nobody objected. Nobody felt uneasy regarding stray bullets. Pat McCann's bullets weren't the straying kind. They did not go wild. If by chance they missed the target entirely, there was the back-stop of four-inch boards to hold them.

Besides, there was plenty of room. Pat's combination shop and cottage, the one built on the front of the other, stood in the vacancy of an otherwise empty city block out on the southerly edge of town. He had all the pistol range he needed, and official permission to use it. Morning after morning he blazed away in blissful content.

He could never be wholly content, however, until he achieved a certain particular self-imposed feat of marksmanship. To place a mortal shot at thirty yards through the life-size silhouette of an olden-time bad man was only elementary. There was also the matter of timing. The bad man had to be shaded on the draw or Mr. McCann scored himself as ticketed for Boot Hill. Then there was the second shot. That had to be mortal too, and delivered within the same fixed desperate fragment of eternity.

But how could a bad man painted on a wooden silhouette draw and fire? As a matter of fact he had his gun

already at arm's length. Gun and arm were one piece, sawed out of the same plank. There was a peg for shoulder joint. When Pat McCann jerked a cord that released the catch holding the arm practically erect, the bad man pulled down on Pat. The weighted arm dropped to the horizontal as swift as an actual bad man could draw. It pounded down upon an explosive cap set in the niche of the shoulder joint. The cap gave off a puff of white smoke. When that happened, it meant technical demise for Pat McCann. Pat knew that he had not been quick enough.

So far this morning the cut-out bad man had scored a fatality every time. A furrow creased Pat's lean visage between his lively blue eyes. Often in the days and livid nights of the old cow towns he had staked his life on just such quick accuracy of gun work. He could not endure the thought that he was giving back any. That would be to concede too much to an enemy, to the unfair enemy who had streaked his bristling sandy mustache with gray, who had etched a fine criss-crossing of wrinkles in his sun-baked old face, but who, by God, had not yet clouded his eyes or stiffened the tendons in his wrists. He would try again.

He reloaded his guns. They were single-action, six-chambered forty-fives with the long barrels favored by the town marshals of Dodge City, Kansas, a half century ago. Except for the barrels, which had been replaced, these were the same eighteen-inch Colts that had been issued to him in the early Eighties by Pat Shugrue, then town marshal of Dodge City. Use had polished their walnut stocks but no notches marred their smooth contour. Pat Shugrue's young deputy had dis-

dained to keep tally on his various official and personal transactions.

Shoving the guns into the scuffed leather holsters on either thigh, Mr. McCann walked up to the life-sized bad man. With honorable courtesy he put the bad man into a state of offense and defense. He restored the right arm to its erect position and placed another explosive cap in the niche of the shoulder joint. Not so courteously he took a brush from a bucket of whitewash and whitewashed the bad man's face. But the face was a steel target, spotted by former hits. And there was another target centered over the bad man's heart. It swung free, a circular hole cut in the plank silhouette. That, too, had to be whitewashed. That done, Pat returned to his firing position on short legs slightly bowed from much working of a horse when the legs were young.

The cord which released the catch and started the bad man's arm in its descent lay on the ground. Turning his back on the bad man, Pat thrust one foot through a loop at the end of the cord. In an absent-minded way he limbered up his long, bony fingers. He became elaborately unconcerned. He had not the slightest inkling of an armed desperado behind him, sworn to shoot him on sight. He was speaking to some one.

"Please, Mr. Shugrue, you let me make that arrest."

The youngest and wildest of Shugrue's deputies was pleading for action.

"You leave it to me, sir." In his earnestness young Pat spoke with a touch of the brogue.

But at that moment old Pat gave his foot a sharp forward kick. It stretched the cord. Something behind him clicked. It sounded like the cock-

ing of a hostile weapon. Pat whirled. He filled his hands. The old dependables were speaking. Not together, never that. Right, left, each blazed once. At the bad man drawing down on him, Pat's two guns roared almost as one.

Another expert in the fine art of self preservation would have rejoiced at the finished masterpiece. An especial delight was one small detail concerning technique. It was this. The old gun fighter had no use for a trigger. Fifty years ago Shugrue had shown him how to file off the dogs so that the triggers were dead. With his thumbs he pulled the hammers back. Yet there were delicate shadings of technique even here. He did not use the ball of the thumb. The soft flesh might not hold against the hard metal. He crooked the thumb and held the hammer in the bend of the second joint. Like twin vipers striking, his thumbs performed.

A SMILE of soulful satisfaction spread itself upon the weathered countenance. This time there had been no puff of white smoke. The descending arm had been checked short of coming to aim. That bad man was plugged, not once but twice, before he could draw and fire. Pat's first shot had registered on the head, the second over the heart. They usually did, for that matter, but this time the second shot had arrived within the time lapse measured by the descending arm. The bullet's impact had started a series of small events. It had pushed the loosely hung body target violently backward. The upper end of a rod welded to the back of the target had struck the end of a small board or spindle that revolved on a pin like a turnstile. The spindle had spun round until its other

end slid into the niche of the shoulder joint. It had brushed off the explosive cap and it had partly filled the niche, acting as a chock or wedge under the descending arm. And that had stopped the mechanical bad man as certainly as Pat McCann's marksmanship would have stopped a flesh-and-blood killer.

Pat felt better now. There was still sap in the old bones. He reckoned that he could still hold his own in the old cow towns, only there weren't any of those old cow towns any more.

He reloaded his guns. Habit of years, that was. He thrust them into their holsters and unbuckled his belt and removed it with its weight of armament. He turned towards the house, and now, curiously, his expression became wry and furtive. Romantic illusion was over for the day. He passed the shed where he stabled the last of a long line of cow ponies. He passed through the back-yard garden and entered the kitchen. The breakfast dishes had been cleared away and there was no one there. He went on into the living room. Still no one. He stepped from the living room into his shop. She was here, but with the guileless casualness of a small boy who has been in mischief he pretended not to see her.

In Pat McCann's gunsmith shop old Pat could still have guns about him, though the time was past when he could habitually tote them. They were everywhere. In various stages of dismemberment, they littered the work bench against the back wall. In the show window up front, the latest models and quaint old ones caught the eye of the occasional passer-by. Shot-guns and rifles were displayed on racks on the wall opposite the counter. Revolvers and automatic pistols filled the show case at the end of the counter.

Pat McCann, who had ever stood to his guns like a man, now carried them with a careful lack of ostentation. He slipped behind the counter and deposited them on a shelf under the counter. He swung himself upon the counter and dangled his legs over into the shop. From his pocket he fished out tobacco and papers and began the making of a cigarette. That done, he looked up.

Blue eyes, bright and quick as his own, were quietly contemplating him over a pair of gold-rimmed specs. They were the eyes of a little old woman—a very, very old woman—seated in a rocking chair where the sunlight from the window flooded over her. A half knitted sock with its needles lay in her lap. A crooked stick lay against her chair. She was small and slight, and the crow's feet radiating from her eyes were deep furrowed in yellow parchment, but Pat McCann's mother had brought a mother's austere responsibility with her down through the years. The seventy-year-old lad looked uncomfortable.

"But mum—"

"Mum indeed!" She wagged her head at him. "Indade," she pronounced it, for she had never shucked the brogue and delightfully it flavored the vigor of her speech. "And how often must I be tellin' you that you're too young—"

"Young, mother?" Pat asked.

"Old, then." She seized on the correction to make her indictment stronger. "Too old ye are to be playing with firearms. Whatever'll become of you, I don't know, when I'm no longer by to spare the rod that ye should be having."

"But, mum—" he tried to protest, and though he was in hot water and knew it, his own crow-footing lines

became crinkles of mischief. With only the change of a word, from "young" to "old," that indictment had stood against him for more than sixty years. Sixty years of being a scolded boy, old gun fighter that he was!

"But, mum," he tried once more, but seriously, wistfully, "it's the one thing I do good—this foolishness with firearms, I mean. It's the one thing I do better than most, and seems like—seems like I can't give it up."

"But where's the use?" she demanded, almost darting at him. "Tell me that! Where's the use?"

"I know," he said. "It's nary a bit of use, not any more. But there was a time—"

She interrupted. A car had driven up before the shop, and two men were getting out.

"Customers, Pat, customers!"

THE car was a battered, dusty roadster. The two men paused a moment to glance at the display of arms in the show window. They sauntered into the shop. They were young fellows and from their work-worn clothes evidently mechanics. Pat slipped down from the counter and stood before them.

"Well, gents, what'll it be?"

"Want to look at some automatics," one of the two answered in a high petulant voice. "What you got?"

"But you left your engine running—"

"Don't let our engine bother you, grandpa. You show me that ivory-handle one in the window."

It was a beautiful specimen of the gun maker's art with gold mounting and a gold plate for engraving the name of the owner. Pat had bought it mostly as an exhibition piece, and

certainly he had no hope of selling it to either of these young fellows in oil-daubed overalls and cotton shirts. Still, if it gave them pleasure to admire it, he was willing to oblige.

"Some rod, Flooze," said the taller one, the one with the long, sharp face and yellow hair. "I'll take it."

"Like hell you will!" Flooze cried out like a spoilt child. He snatched it from Pat's hand. "You pick out another one, Slat's."

Pat thought it was as well to mention the price. "It's seventy-five dollars," he said. But price seemed to be no object to the young men.

"Got another like it?" asked Slat's.

"One with a bone handle for sixty dollars," said Pat.

This one was in the show case. He went behind the counter and got it out.

"I'll take it," said Slat's, "but we'll want some clips."

"Yes, and some shells."

From the shelf behind him, Pat pulled down a box of cartridges, and from the box loaded a clip for each of the automatics. The young men slipped the clips into the guns. They threw a shell into the barrel of each gun. They did it, Pat noticed with a dexterity that betokened practice. And when Pat noticed also that they left the safety off so that the weapons were ready for instant use, his eyes narrowed. The little gunsmith shop bore no resemblance to the saloons and gambling houses of the old cow towns, but the symptoms were the same as when a word, a movement, meant the filling of hands, and there'd be the smoke of guns and a man's body lurching to the sawdust. But Pat's voice when he spoke was prosaic and commonplace.

"Just a minute, gents, before you go. You can't take them with you now. It's the law. You leave me your

names and addresses, and if it's all right with the police, you can come back tomorrow and get the guns."

"Yeah?" said Slats.

"What was it you said you wanted?" said Flooze.

But the inoffensive shopkeeper did not seem to catch the significance in the inquiry. His tone was quieter, milder, than before.

"Now that I know you for the rats ye are, I'll sell you no guns of mine. Give 'em back."

He vanished before their eyes behind the counter.

"Why, the old mug!" Flooze gasped.

Slats fired through the panel of the counter. "Rats, are we?"

In her rocking chair behind them Pat McCann's mother sat rigid. As if graven in stone she watched without movement or sound. But her blue eyes gleamed.

"'S right, Slats, we'll smoke him out."

THEIR shots ripped through the panel, but Pat McCann, crouching low, had moved on. On the shelf under the counter his old single action guns reposed in their holsters. He reached for them. He got a hand on each of them and pulled them out. He would not fire through a panel. He wanted sight of a mark. A split second would do. These smart-aleck youngsters would not know what to do with a split second. He'd show them. He bobbed up from behind the counter. They tried to shift their aim. Right thumb, left thumb. Twin vipers.

Flooze grabbed for his cap, whisked from his head. Slats clapped a hand over one ear. A bullet had notched it. The automatics fell to the floor. Dazedly the two young men lifted their

hands over their heads. Old Mrs. McCann's eyes danced brightly.

"Show-actor stuff," Pat remarked, "but I didn't want to spill you boys right here in the shop. Now push those guns along the floor until they touch the counter. Don't stoop. Use your feet."

They began to do as he said.

"Customers, Pat," Mrs. McCann chirruped.

A sedan had drawn up behind the roadster. Three more young men who seemed to be mechanics were in it, two on the front seat and a round headed, fleshy man with thick, short neck in back.

"Leo!" Flooze bawled out. "Leo, we're jammed up! We—"

"Cheese it!" Slats growled under his breath.

But the old gun fighter would have suspected the coincidence of the newcomers in any case. More mob-boys. The newcomers hesitated. Then the one in the back seat opened the door on the off side and sprang out. He pulled open the front door of the sedan and spoke out of a twisted mouth to the two on the front seat. These two made way for him. They got out on the sidewalk, and he got in, wedging his fattish body behind the steering wheel. At once he let in the clutch and drove off at high speed.

"Look it! He's leaving us flat."

"You rotten cry baby!" said Slats in a whisper. "Get set. Be ready."

Pat McCann stood behind the counter. He stood at ease. He held his long, black-barreled guns at ease, but with the hammers cocked under his thumbs. Still as stone his old mother watched him from her rocking chair. Her eyes watched him with the liveliest expectancy. The two men who had gotten out of the sedan loitered on

the sidewalk near the curb. They were either undecided as to what to do next or they were timing their next movement. Pat could see them through the open door. One was looking at his wrist watch. He had an ape-like grin on his face. Pat spoke to Flooze and Slats.

"You two get over to that wall across from me. That's right. And stay there like good boys. I might not have time *not* to kill you if things get too active round here."

Out on the sidewalk the one with the grin stopped looking at his watch. He nodded to his companion, and both leisurely crossed the sidewalk towards the door of the shop. Their arms hung at their sides. So long as they came empty-handed, Pat let them come. From out there they could not see clearly into the shop, and Pat wanted them to see. He wanted them to understand the need of putting them up when he told them to put them up. When they reached the doorway and saw him with his guns they would understand. He would not have them make any fatal mistake about this. They reached the doorway.

"Put 'em up!"

But it was not Pat McCann speaking. A soft lush voice behind Pat gave the order. Someone had entered the shop by the back door, coming through the house from the rear. Pat did not move. He kept his two guns trained steadily on the pair of gunmen in the doorway.

"You heard me, old man," said the soft voice.

"Go on, croak him, Leo," said Flooze.

"Yeah," said the soft voice, beginning to snarl, "and what sap play you been pulling here?"

"That old mug," said Slats, "that

old mug packs a headache. You watch out for him, Leo."

"I'm watching," said Leo. "I'm going to plug him in the back."

"God, no!" cried one of the two in the doorway. "Don't do that, Leo! God, no!"

"You and Joe 'fraid of him too, Sandro?"

"**H**ES got us both lined up," said Joe. "He's got the triggers pulled back under his thumbs. You know what'll happen if you shoot him. Them triggers—"

"That would be just too bad," said Leo, "but he's going to put up his hands like a nice old grandpa. Ain't you, grandpa? Or do you want me to spatter the old twist first?"

Twist? Pat had heard that gangster word before. It meant a woman. The gangster behind him meant Pat's mother. They'd kill his mother anyhow, he knew. For spite. For amusement. These were the kind he'd read so much about.

"We want to tie you up, that's all," spoke the soft voice. "Just tie you up and be on our way out o' here."

"Oh, yeah?" old Pat thought to himself in their own argot. They wouldn't take chances shooting it out with a lone old man who had already demonstrated his workmanship on two of them. Promise him an affectionate farewell instead. Laugh at him afterwards for an easy sap. Top off the joke by drilling him through the stomach. Pat kept his hands down and he kept them filled. The long black six-guns held their unswerving line on the two gangsters in the doorway.

"Won't you come in?" Pat said to them, but he had to help them decide. He lifted a thumb. The gun roared

and a ribbon of cloth fluttered from the sleeve of Sandro's coat. Leo's gun roared too, but Pat reasoned that nervousness, not marksmanship, had pulled the trigger. The bullet whizzed past and shattered the window.

"Might as well come in," Pat repeated his invitation to the two in the doorway.

They crossed the threshold into the shop.

Leo did not fire again. At least, not yet. He only said:

"I'm going to count three," but Pat was used to that by now. And Leo did not start counting. Pat depended on his mother to cry out if Leo started to rush him from behind.

"Right on in," Pat prompted the two mob-boys under his guns.

They did as they were told, as in a hypnotic trance. They came down the center of the shop. They passed the show case. They came opposite Pat. Behind the counter Pat turned in order to keep facing them and keep his two guns on them.

"Right on back," he said.

He could have killed them both with

the same bullet, and they went on, Pat pivoting with them. By now Pat could all but see Leo out of the corner of one eye.

"So that's it, you—"

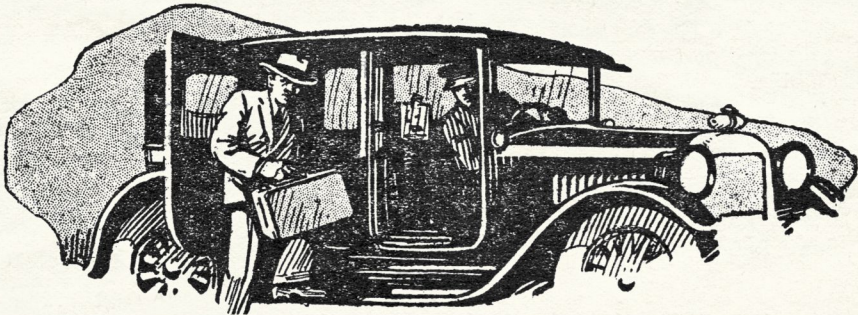
Like a crashing in of his skull Leo must have realized what the old man was doing. He'd rather Sandro and Joe get it than get it himself. Even so, Leo should have fired before he spoke. Nothing was ever so quick as Pat McCann's head jerking round, as the jerk of Pat's wrists, as Pat's two thumbs pointing upward. Leo's first shot only grazed Pat's chin. His second was never fired.

Leo oozed down with a slug through his thick neck, a slug through his black heart.

The other gangsters made no move. Pat had them covered again, Sandro and Joe, Flooze and Slats.

Lips tight and determined, Mrs. McCann gripped her cane. She got up from her rocking chair and went to the telephone. She phoned for the cops.

"And it's stopped I want it, this playin' with firearms," she told them.

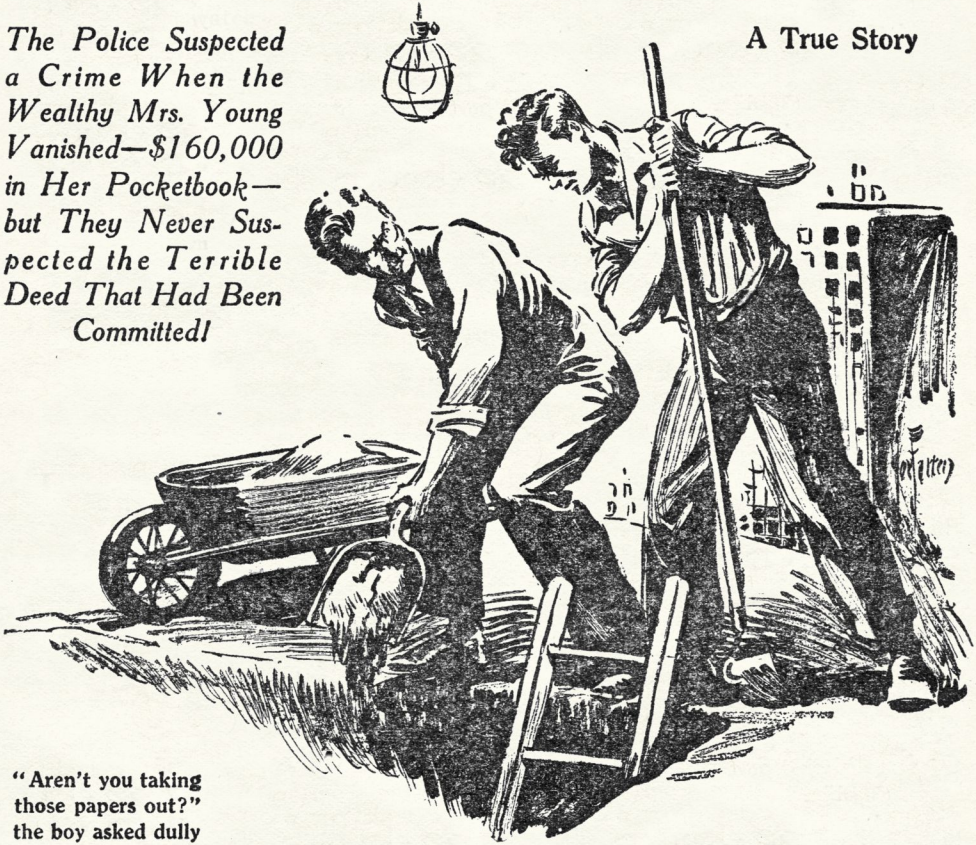


Mystery at Beverly Glen

By Dugal O'Liam

The Police Suspected a Crime When the Wealthy Mrs. Young Vanished—\$160,000 in Her Pocketbook—but They Never Suspected the Terrible Deed That Had Been Committed!

A True Story



"Aren't you taking those papers out?" the boy asked dully

THE gathering dusk cloaked the wooded silences of Beverly Glen, exclusive California summer colony, but a touch of silver from the setting sun showed through the drooping trees and daubed the lower sides of the lonely cottage and sprawling lodge.

A man and a youth, moving about the yard, were the only human beings in sight.

The man was Dr. Thomas W. Young. He was one of the wealthiest and most widely known of Los Angeles

dentists, socially prominent, active in civic, church, and political affairs, husband of the former Mrs. Patrick Grogan, one of California's wealthiest divorcees.

The youth was eighteen-year-old Charles Patrick Grogan, his stepson, child of the woman who had divorced Patrick Grogan. Grogan had been known as "The Olive King," in 1917, eight years before. She had married the wealthy and successful Dr. Young three years later, and since that time the boy had made his home with them.

The youth worked over a huge, rectangular wooden basin, mixing concrete with a long handled, perforated hoe. The man scooped concrete from the basin into a steel wheelbarrow until it was half filled, picked it up, wheeled it to a lattice door that led under the side porch of the cottage.

He opened the door, pushed the wheelbarrow inside. He stood on the lip of an empty cistern, twelve feet deep, ten feet across. A wooden ladder led to the floor, now partly covered with fresh concrete.

The man put down the wheelbarrow, took up another scoop, and began pouring the concrete into the cistern. A shadow played over his shoulder from the electric lantern he'd hung above the cistern. He started back, whirled about.

The boy stood behind him, looking gloomily into the cellar.

"Aren't you taking those papers out?" he asked, dully.

He pointed to a pile of old newspapers, sticking into the new concrete at one edge of the cistern wall. Bits of stone and clods of dirt held them down.

Dr. Young wiped his forehead with a colored handkerchief. Perspiration stood like great beads on his brow, although it was February and a cool breeze had come up with the fading of the sun into the distant Pacific.

"Yes, yes, I'll go down and get them out—get some more concrete ready. We've got to hurry or it'll be too dark."

The boy went back to his mixing. The man emptied the wheelbarrow, went for another and still another and another. Each load he emptied into the cistern, until the bottom was covered with a coating of the new cement, five inches thick.

He descended into the cistern by the wooden ladder. He took a long, thin

board, spread the concrete evenly. He left a pronounced slope at one side, over the newspapers, but in the darkness of the coming night, it was scarcely noticeable.

The doctor quit the pit. There was an uncovered spot, at the foot of the ladder, where he'd worked. The youth stood at the brim of the cistern again, looking down.

"One spot left," Dr. Young said, hastily. "Bring me another wheelbarrow of mortar, will you, Pat?"

The boy moved off with the wheelbarrow. He returned in a few minutes. Deftly, Dr. Young dropped the concrete over the barren spot. It splashed, then spread over the last tiny body of old earth and cracked cement.

"Let's get home," the boy said, spiritlessly. "Mother ought to be there now."

"Yes, she should," Dr. Young said, glumly. "She's been away long enough, now, Pat. Anyway," he added, after a pause, "she'll be glad we fixed the cistern. She'd been complaining about that."

The youth swallowed hard, looked out of anxious eyes at his stepfather.

"But what if she isn't back? What'll we do?" he whispered, hopelessly.

"If she isn't at home when we get there," Dr. Young said quickly, "I'm going to the police immediately."

DR. YOUNG went to the police on that night of February 25, 1925.

He went immediately after he and his stepson reached home and found only the maid to greet them.

"My wife," he told the desk sergeant, huskily, "she's gone."

The desk sergeant recognized him, recognized the name of Dr. Thomas W. Young, recognized that this case, a

society woman's continued and unexplained absence from home, was not one of the many ordinary husband and wife tiffs.

He summoned the captain in charge. The captain called Dr. Young to his office, and two detectives, who'd been lolling in the squad room, to hear the story.

"How long has she been missing, Doctor?" was the captain's first question.

"Since last night," Dr. Young replied. "I didn't come before because I thought it was only a woman's pique. We'd had a little quarrel. Just one of those casual, petty things. I thought she might have been trying to punish me with worry. But she'd never worry her son like that—never. She was devoted to him."

Dr. Young explained the case. He'd gone with his wife to the Plantation Club, out at Venice, for dinner, on the night before. She'd met him downtown and they'd driven directly to the shore to celebrate a business deal he'd just completed, a deal that had made him a profit of \$162,000.

"We felt like dancing and having some drinks," Dr. Young explained. "It isn't every day that a man turns a profit of \$162,000."

They'd had some wine, had danced. Mrs. Young seemed deliriously happy.

Then came the fly in the ointment. A woman bowed to Dr. Young. Dr. Young returned the bow. The woman was beautiful, elegantly dressed. There was a touch of Hollywood about her, a suggestion of Beverly Hills, of Malibu Beach. Mrs. Young didn't recognize her. She demanded to know the charmer's identity.

Dr. Young explained that she was a patient, but Mrs. Young pretended not to believe him, and in a mad fit of jeal-

ousy refused to stay in the place any longer.

They left the Plantation Club and drove to Beverly Glen. It was dark and lonely there and they started back for Los Angeles. Mrs. Young suddenly became contrite. She wept, chiding herself for spoiling Dr. Young's celebration.

"I laughed at her, kissed her, and told her we'd start all over again at the Ambassador in Los Angeles," he said.

They drove to the Ambassador, most exclusive of the Los Angeles hotels. Mrs. Young left her husband at the entrance. Dr. Young went to park the car. She told him, cheerfully, that she'd meet him in the foyer of the grill room.

"I never saw her after that," Dr. Young said.

"Did you search the hotel?" the captain asked.

"I went to the foyer and saw the head waiter. He hadn't seen her. He questioned the attendant at the women's room. She hadn't seen my wife. I asked the attendant to look through the women's rooms, giving her a description of Mrs. Young. She came back and said there was no such woman there.

"I went upstairs. The doorman hadn't seen her leave. The night house man hadn't seen her. The clerks, the floor manager, no one. She'd simply vanished into thin air."

"You tried all her friends—all your friends, where she might be hiding just to give you a scare—sort of teach you a lesson?"

"Absolutely."

"And you know no other reason why she would disappear—any enemies, any monetary consideration?"

"Why, why—yes—yes," Dr. Young stammered, his face pale.

"Well, what was it?"

"She had the money from the deal with her—the hundred and sixty-two thousand dollars."

II

THE captain gasped in astonishment. The detectives looked blankly at Dr. Young.

"Do you mean to tell me she carried a hundred and sixty-two thousand dollars with her?" the captain finally stammered.

"Yes," Dr. Young said. "It does seem stupid, now, but it didn't occur to us that way when we started with it."

"But how could she carry it?"

"In her handbag. It was in bills of large denominations and some negotiable bonds. It didn't make a large parcel."

"Did any one know she had it, besides you? Did any one see it that you know of?"

Dr. Young thought over the events of the evening, carefully.

"There's one chance," he said, meditatively. "Something that happened as we were leaving the Plantation."

The captain and detectives were attentively silent.

"As I told you, she was irritated. As I stepped out the door and turned for her, she threw her bag at me. I caught it, but the catch came loose and part of the money popped out. There were two men just going in. They looked at the bag, as if astonished, then at my wife and me. But they went on inside, talking in low tones."

"Do you know whether or not they followed you from the Plantation?"

"It seems hardly likely. If they'd wanted to make a grab for the money, they'd have done it when we stopped out at the cottage at Beverly Glen, in

the dark, instead of waiting for the light and crowd of a big hotel lobby."

That ended the questioning, but Dr. Young remained at police headquarters for hours, until the boy, and Mrs. Young's father, Earl M. Hunt, wealthy Los Angeles business man, came for him.

The police communicated at once with the county authorities. The sheriff's office sent men to Venice, to the Plantation Club. The captain got in touch with authorities in Lower California, in Tia Juana and the amusement town of Agua Caliente.

It was toward Lower California, that long, mountainous finger of land stretching into the Pacific, with the fugitive Gulf of California separating it from the central Mexican government, that the authorities turned first.

Lower California has lent itself peculiarly to kidnappings and body snatchings. It is a wild country, little known above the line. Guerrilla bands and outlaws flourish there. Guided by master minds in Tia Juana and Los Angeles they swoop down, rob a bank or snatch some wealthy citizen, and disappear into their mountain fastnesses, protected by the desert lands and the ragged hills.

The county prosecutor's office assigned Harold L. Davis, keen young assistant, to the case.

Davis was given the aid of the police and the sheriff. In addition to this, Hunt and Dr. Young hired Burns detectives, and Young, still not satisfied, engaged Samuel Grant, long a federal operative in Southern California, to take up the quest.

"Spare no expense—I will pay anything," became Young's shibboleth, and with the four branches of investigation in action, the man hunt moved toward Lower California.

The hunt went on for days, weeks. Finally a month had passed. The searchers had run into blind alley after blind alley. Their Mexican trails had ended in a blank wall. They searched as far East as Yuma, Arizona, as far north as San Francisco's waterfront and Chinatown, but all with the same result—nothing.

Dr. Young began to demand that the police accomplish something. He threatened action to remove the department heads. With his influence in the city, in politics, finance and church circles, which are powerful in Los Angeles, these were no idle threats. They carried weight and meaning. The police and the district attorney's office were aroused.

Then, when Dr. Young made a final and public demand that his wife be found, or some word of her be furnished him within a fortnight, the authorities issued a formal joint statement.

Together, the police, the sheriff's office and the district attorney's office announced that, while there were no clues to date, they were in the hunt to stay, that they would go on forever but that they would solve the crime. There would be no quitting on this most audacious of body snatchings. It was war to the finish, with no quarter given or asked.

Dr. Young seemed satisfied after that. His withering charges had had their effect. He was even a little proud, more certain of himself, more sociable. He began to be seen in public places again, to mix with people he had avoided since his wife's disappearance.

A new note of confidence marked his behavior. He began to smile once more, to take an interest in business, to be seen at the banks, at church meetings and civic clubs, and to take up his

practice, virtually abandoned for weeks after Mrs. Young dropped out of sight.

In the midst of this regeneration of Dr. Young, his stepson, Charles Patrick Grogan, suddenly became deathly ill after being treated for a tooth ulceration at his stepfather's laboratory.

He had developed a malignant infection, of a type almost universally fatal, and his life was despaired of in the first twenty-four hours of the attack.

On the heels of this, Davis, learning of the boy's illness, visited the Young family attorneys and discovered that ten days before, after his mother's disappearance, the boy had made a will leaving all his property and that coming from his mother to Dr. Young.

DAVIS sat in his office, with two detectives. They awaited Dr. Young, whom Davis had summoned.

A secretary brought Dr. Young in. He looked comfortable and content, seemed a little amused by Davis' serious mien and the stern faces of the detectives. There was a hint of tolerance in his attitude, a suggestion of trying to humor the energetic, laudable ambition of a struggling young man.

"Well, well, what's up?" Dr. Young said. "Anything new?"

Davis disregarded the gesture. He drove directly at his point.

"Did Mrs. Young leave any of her jewelry at home?" he asked the doctor. She had been known to wear expensive adornments.

"Some," Dr. Young said, "but she had on a big diamond ring, worth \$5,000, that she always wore, in addition to a diamond wrist watch and a brooch, on that last night."

"What did you say you did the day

after your wife disappeared, before you came to the police?" Davis asked, abruptly.

Dr. Young was silent for a few seconds. He seemed to be piecing his actions together.

"Why, nothing in particular," he said. "That is, nothing but wait to hear from her, I guess."

"You didn't go to Beverly Glen and fix a cistern?"

"Oh, that's right, the boy and I did that," Dr. Young agreed, hastily. "It'd slipped my mind."

"You didn't practice much after your wife left, did you, doctor? Sort of worked in your laboratory, didn't you?"

"Yes, worked on experiments."

"Infectious bacilli and the like?"

"Yes."

"How's the boy now—young Pat?"

The question came like a thunderclap. Dr. Young was palpably startled.

"Why, very low," he answered, nervously. "Very, very sick."

Davis watched Dr. Young intently. Both were silent for some time. Dr. Young gazed out the window. Finally he spoke.

"Haven't you any ideas at all on the case yet?" he ventured. "It seems it's about time something was accomplished."

"Yes, doctor, I have ideas," Davis said, absently. "But nothing definite yet."

Dr. Young left the office. The two detectives remained. One was a man named Donovan. He'd been doing much check-up work, was a genius in that direction, one of the camera eye type of operatives.

Davis assigned Donovan to watch Dr. Young's office and to make a close check of Mr. Young's personal belongings, especially in the Young home.

This done, he took his car and drove to the Plantation Club. The manager there remembered Dr. Young's visit. He remembered that he'd left suddenly. He knew nothing more than detectives had reported to Davis before.

From the Plantation, Davis drove back to Los Angeles. He went to the Ambassador Hotel. He found the doorman and the head waiter who'd been on duty the night Mrs. Young disappeared.

The doorman didn't remember seeing her, nor did the head waiter of the grill.

He asked for the girl who'd been in charge of the women's room that night. She was no longer in the employ of the hotel. The hotel records showed her address. Davis sent one of his men for her.

The aide brought her to his office. He launched at once into his questioning.

"Did you make a thorough search for Mrs. Young on the night she disappeared from the Ambassador?" he asked.

The girl had read of the Young case. The papers were full of it. But she'd never connected herself with it. She was puzzled.

"Why, I never saw Mrs. Young in my life—wouldn't know her if I did," she exploded.

"Do you know Dr. Young?"

"I never saw him either."

Davis knitted his brows.

"You mean to say Dr. Young didn't ask you to look for his wife in the women's room that night?"

"Dr. Young nor nobody else asked me to hunt for his wife," the girl snapped. "Don't you think I'd remember it, with the papers full of this case as they are?"

The girl went home. Davis went back to his investigation.

III

THE following day, when young Patrick Grogan was showing signs of fighting off the ravages of the mouth infection, in spite of the dismal prophecies of the attending physicians, Dr. Young received a telephone call at his office.

Dr. Young was out and his secretary, Miss Dorothy Leopold, answered the call.

It was Dr. Young's bank. The district attorney's office had asked for information of Dr. Young's books. They wanted to inform Dr. Young that they would have to permit the examination. Since Dr. Young wasn't in, Miss Leopold was asked to tell him that the examination was being made.

When Dr. Young arrived, Miss Leopold told him of the call. At first he was indignant because Davis hadn't spoken with him about the matter, but calmed down and telephoned Davis.

Davis admitted the examination.

"I had to do it quickly to straighten out some records, Doctor," he said. "Nothing of consequence."

"Very well," Dr. Young said. "Anything new?"

"Not a thing."

"Well," Dr. Young replied. "I've got something new for you. You can call off the hunt. The case is all settled. She's found."

Davis was amazed. He tried to question Dr. Young over the telephone.

"Never mind, I'll be down," Dr. Young said. "Right away."

Dr. Young appeared at the prosecutor's office within a few minutes. He carried with him a sheaf of letters. These he unwrapped, smilingly, laid them out, one by one, before Davis.

"These are letters from Mrs. Young," he said. "One for me, one for her son, one for her father, and two for friends. They're written from the East. She's alive and well and simply in the sort of huff I'd thought at first—with the \$162,000 to support the luxury."

Davis examined the letters. One of them asked the son to be patient with his mother until she could send for him, and told him to obey his stepfather and not to worry.

The other told Dr. Young that Mrs. Young would not return to him, ever, that she would not countenance his alleged philanderings, and threatened, if the hunt for her were not called off, to go to Europe and never return—or to do something even more desperate.

Davis studied the letters carefully. He read them and reread them through half closed eyes. He devoted a long scrutiny to the one to Dr. Young demanding that he call off the hunt.

"She doesn't mention money," he remarked.

"Why should she?" Dr. Young exploded. "Didn't she have enough—one hundred and sixty thousand ought to be enough, even for a woman."

Davis looked Dr. Young squarely in the eyes, rising from his desk as he did so.

"I've got some good news for you, too, Doctor," he said. "Mrs. Young didn't take the \$162,000."

"What?"

"Your wife didn't take the money. It was placed in your deposit box at the bank."

Dr. Young's face first flushed, then turned livid. Finally he demanded, in a rasping whisper:

"She came back and put it there?"

"Somebody did," Davis said, casually. He didn't mention that he also knew

that it had been withdrawn from the box.

The dentist was silent, for some time, as if turning the situation over in his mind. When he spoke, he seemed to be infinitely relieved, or maybe it was hopeful.

"Well, that settles it then, I guess," he ventured. "There's no use keeping up this comic opera hunt. She's safe and the money's safe. Eh, Davis?"

"It looks that way," Davis agreed, quietly. "We'll just check off a few more little details—matter of form, you know—"

He shook hands with Dr. Young as the dentist left the office, the ghost of a smile unnoticed on his keen, intelligent face.

TWO days after this incident in Davis' office, Donovan and another detective strolled into Dr. Young's office. They heard that young Pat Grogan was well on the road to recovery and mentioned that they had called to express their pleasure.

Dr. Young, busy in his laboratory, seemed unusually amiable and satisfied that his wife would return within a few weeks—after she'd tired of being away from her son.

"By the way, Doctor," Donovan asked, "did you have any letters from your wife around the place—any diary, or anything like that?"

"Nothing at all. What's the matter, now? I thought Davis was dropping this thing. She'll come back in time. Why fret about these little things any longer?"

"We've got to clean up the records, Doctor," Donovan explained. "You know how these D.A.'s are. Full of ideas about papers, files."

Dr. Young agreed that they were a little trying at times.

"But there's one thing I've got to clean up today," Donovan said. "It's about some notes your wife left."

"Notes? I don't remember any notes," Dr. Young protested.

"She had them in a strong box at the bank," Donovan explained. "We found them there when we were checking through her things yesterday."

Dr. Young denied Mrs. Young had had a strong box. He asserted that they had kept their business in a joint account and that any deposits, either in the bank or their vault, she intrusted to him.

The detective drew several papers from his pocket. He handed them to Dr. Young.

"These in your wife's handwriting?"

Dr. Young examined the papers. They were single sheets, doubled over, with a bit of writing on each, writing that looked hasty, even hysterical.

"Why, yes, it could be," Dr. Young admitted. "It looks like it'd been done under stress, but it has a general resemblance to her writing, all right."

"Better read those notes," Donovan suggested. "We'd like to see what they're about before we close the files."

Dr. Young read the note in apparent amazement.

"He told me I was crazy," the note read. "Said he would send me to Patton. (An insane asylum near Los Angeles.) He threatened to kill me. Said he would destroy my guardianship over Patrick."

Dr. Young looked up, a little flabbergasted.

"I suppose the 'he' in there means me, but I had no idea she had such streaks as that. Almost hallucinations, aren't they?"

Donovan nodded gravely.

"Women get funny ideas," he

agreed, then added, "Well, Doctor, I'll be getting along and turn in the report on these."

On his way out, he stopped to talk to Dorothy Leopold.

He was talking with her, joking about his turn to take her out and the little pleasantries men in his work exchange with girls who might be, and usually prove to be, good sources of information, when he noticed for the first time that she wore a huge diamond ring.

"Ah ha!" he exclaimed in mock dismay. "I have a rival."

The girl looked at the ring, blushed prettily.

"Oh, he's way out ahead of you," she said. "You'd never give me a ring like this."

"Lady, I couldn't buy you or any other dame a ring like that if I worked for my present salary the rest of my life," the detective gloomed. "Who is this young Midas?"

"You'd wouldn't know if I told you," the girl said.

Donovan didn't want to press the idea. He figured the girl might become skittish and stamped.

But he drove pell mell to Davis' office.

"So the office girl's got a ring," Davis said. "Well, well, well. Did it look like much money?"

"Not a dime less than \$5,000."

"Find out who that young man is—that fiancé," Davis ordered, tersely. "It looks like we're getting pretty close to the end of the trail."

AT ten o'clock the morning after Detective Donovan had visited Dr. Young's office, the dentist appeared at a downtown office building, took the elevator to the floor occupied by a brokerage house that

specialized in office building construction, and entered the waiting room, blithe and alert.

An office attendant, recognizing him, immediately took his name into an inner office. The attendant returned almost immediately and told Dr. Young he was to go in, that the president of the company would see him.

The president of the company greeted Dr. Young. Two other members of the firm came into the room to join the conference.

"Well, doctor," the president said. "Are you ready to go ahead?"

"Certainly," Dr. Young said. "I didn't want to move until I'd cleared up the matter of my wife's disappearance. I see no reason for not proceeding now. You have the \$150,000. All I want is to get the building up."

Dr. Young, in conjunction with the brokerage house, was to build a twelve-story office building in downtown Los Angeles.

He had been at the point of starting it, according to the conversation that ensued, when his wife disappeared, a circumstance which had compelled a halt.

The structure was to be built on lots owned jointly by Dr. Young and his wife. He had full power of attorney to represent her. Also, some time before, more than two weeks, to be exact, he had paid the \$150,000 of the original investment in bills of large denomination and negotiable securities.

The brokerage house would handle the accounts, the stocks, the rental and so forth, and attend to all further details of financing.

At the end of two hours, Dr. Young left the office. The papers had been drawn, signed and filed. The Young Building soon was to be a reality.

One of the doctor's great dreams was about to be fulfilled.

His step was light and brisk as he walked to his car. In spite of his wife's disappearance, the world was beginning to be very good to him again.

Dr. Young had not reached his office before Davis was in communication with the offices of the brokerage house. They had made an immediate file of intentions to build in the county records building and by the mysterious underground that forms about these things, the word had reached the prosecutor's office.

Davis asked for the complete contracts and torts. He got them, in addition to which he got copies of the filings made in the hall of records.

While Davis was doing this, Donovan was moving swiftly about another assignment. He was on his way from Dr. Young's office, where he had had another casual talk with Dorothy Leopold, and now he was on his way to see this opulent person who gave \$5,000 rings to his loves.

He found the youth, a quiet level-headed, industrious fellow by the name of Ralph Mahon, employed as a clerk in a downtown business.

He showed his credentials and abruptly asked the young man what his salary was. The youth answered without hesitation. Donovan then demanded to know how he, on a salary such as he had named, could afford to give his fiancée a \$5,000 engagement ring.

Young Mahon was stunned. He started to stammer, to explain. Donovan waved aside the explanations. Finally Mahon declared, stoutly, that he'd never given Miss Leopold an engagement ring of any kind, although admitting that he hoped to be married to her.

Donovan didn't hold the boy. Instead, he went directly to Dr. Young's office.

Dr. Young was not in. The girl was. She was working, busily, as usual, over the doctor's papers. She looked bright and happy and at peace with the world, but—she wore no ring.

The diamond had disappeared from her finger overnight.

"Girlie," Donovan began, abruptly, "what happened to the ice?"

"Ice?" The girl was puzzled.

"The ice—that diamond your boy friend gave you?"

The girl flushed, and laughed nervously.

"Oh, I left it at home," she said.

"Where did you get that ring?" Donovan's voice was cold and challenging.

She looked at him, alarmed. "What do you mean?" she snapped. "I told you—"

Donovan held up a hand, interrupting her.

"You didn't get it from Mahon—I just talked to him and he says he never saw the ring or enough money to buy such a ring. Come clean now—where did you get it and where is it?"

The sheepish smile fled from the girl's face. So did the air of bravado desert her. She trembled, clutched at the desk.

Suddenly she cried, hysterically:

"Oh, what have I done? It was Dr. Young's ring. He let me have it to tease Ralph. He took it out of his pocket that day you saw it first and dropped it on his desk. I picked it up and asked him to let me wear it to tease Ralph and he did—"

She was almost inarticulate in her distress.

"—you believe me, don't you? You won't bother Ralph any more, will

you? Oh, what have I done? What will Dr. Young say?

Donovan was moving toward the door. He turned as he stepped across the threshold.

"That's what I was wondering," he said, "what Dr. Young will have to say."

THE telephone rang in Dr. Young's office. It was the brokerage firm. The president, in fact.

"Sorry to tell you, Doctor," the broker said, "but there'll be a delay of four or five days in your project. Legal matters take more time than I figured."

"Anything wrong, anything seriously wrong?" Dr. Young asked, casually enough.

"Nothing," the broker assured him. "Just the usual procedure. Examination of titles and the like. You understand."

Dr. Young understood. He hung up the telephone and almost immediately it rang again. Davis was on the wire.

"Good afternoon, Doctor," he said, amiably. "Would it be possible for you to drop in at my office right away? Something I want to close up with you."

"Surely," Dr. Young replied. "Glad to end this thing. I'll be right over."

"Thanks," Davis said, politely. "It'll only take a minute. Business routine, you know."

Twenty minutes later, Dr. Young entered Davis' office. He was suave and sociable, but his lips were dry and he constantly moistened them with the tip of his tongue.

Davis was quick to note any signs of nervousness. He dropped his friendly

affability immediately, launched into a staccato questioning.

"Dr. Young," he said, "you told me your wife wore a large diamond ring when she disappeared, did you not?"

"That's right. She did."

"She didn't leave that ring at home, by any chance, did she?"

"Oh, no. She had it on. I'm sure of that."

"Did she have two such rings—two large, solitaire diamonds?"

"No. Just one."

"You didn't have one of your own, did you—a lady's ring?"

"Certainly not. Look here, what's it all about?"

Davis was fencing. He was sparring, like a master boxer, for an opening, feinting warily, deftly.

"You haven't had such a ring, or seen such a ring?"

"No such ring, no, sir."

Davis suddenly swung around his desk. He leaned over Dr. Young, menacingly, his face dark, his eyes piercing.

He whipped a huge, diamond solitaire from his pocket, the diamond solitaire Donovan had seen on Miss Leopold's finger.

Dr. Young drew back, bewilderment flooding his face, his eyes wide with a vague dread.

He opened his mouth, gulping, his lips the color of ashes.

"What's that? Where did you get that?" he gasped.

"Out of a chest, in your home," Davis said, calmly. "One of the boys took the liberty to examine your wife's effects and found it there. It is your wife's ring, isn't it, Doctor?"

Dr. Young swallowed hard.

"Why—oh, yes, I remember now. The night she disappeared—she left it in the side pocket of the car. I was

cleaning it out a couple of days ago and found it—forgot all about it—”

“Then it’s her ring?”

“Yes.”

Davis looked at the man a long time. Dr. Young tried to meet his gaze, then dropped his eyes to the floor, clasped his hands.

Davis spoke again.

“Dr. Young,” he said, “I’m going out of here for a little while and I’m going to leave you—”

He paused, spaced his words dramatically.

“—leave you here all alone, with yourself and your conscience—”

Again he paused, standing above the wilting dentist, playing on the keys of the man’s emotions.

“And when I come back,” he was going on, slowly, meaningly, “I want you to be ready to tell me a story—a true, complete story.”

He moved slowly to the door, without another word. Softly he stepped through it, closing it behind him, turning a key in the lock.

The light was off in the room. The gray darkness of twilight was coming on, touching the walls with ghostly hands, like imps come to taunt a sick conscience.

Dr. Young was alone.

THE shadows of night lengthened along the walls. A gray and golden gloaming bathed the buildings beyond the windows, through which Dr. Young stared with unseeing eyes.

He sat alone, unmoving for minute after minute, minute after minute. Then he arose, walked about. He sat down again. The shadows sifted through the windows. The room was a blue and ghostly dark.

He searched for the light switch,

found it. The lights did not respond. The fuse had been pulled, so that he could have no light, nothing but shadows, and the grotesque forms, searching with shimmering fingers along the ceiling, shafts from the lighted streets outside.

For two hours he remained there alone, waiting in the darkness with his conscience. He began to grow hungry. He tried a telephone. There was no response. The switchboard operator had had instructions.

Darkness is a bitter nemesis of a mind that is sick and weary; aloneness is an unreasoning foe.

The two tilted fiercely at Dr. Young’s tenacity. They assailed his stubbornness through the hours, struck viciously at his self-control.

Then, after hunger had added its thrusts to the ravages of the darkness and the aloneness, the door opened.

A figure slipped into the room.

Davis crossed the room, with slow, measured tread. He stood above Dr. Young.

Finally he spoke, slowly, heavily:

“Are you ready with your story?”

Dr. Young never moved. He looked into the cold, steel gray eyes, then shook his head with stubborn dignity.

“I have nothing to say,” he answered.

Again Davis left the room. He didn’t return for two more hours. When he did come back, he received the same reply. Dr. Young had nothing to say.

Davis summoned a jail attendant. He ordered Dr. Young placed under arrest, taken to the county jail. He ordered him held until the following day, incommunicado.

The man left with his prisoner. Davis picked up the telephone. There was an answer now.

"The county jail," he said.

There was a pause. Then a voice.

"This is Davis. Give me the turnkey," the young prosecutor snapped.

Another pause. Another voice.

"That man Young," Davis rasped.

"No light tonight, no company—and no food."

He locked his desk and locked his door and went home.

The grilling began early on the following morning. It lasted through the entire day. The questions popped one after another. The evidence, the information, every device within the scope of the state and its minions.

Dr. Young only shook his head.

"I have nothing to say," he repeated. "Nothing, except that I'm frightfully hungry. Must I be starved?"

Davis brought up the matter of the Ambassador Hotel. He hammered with that. He hammered with the bank deposits, with the filing of the papers on the Young Building, with the finding of the ring—finally, the illness of young Pat Grogan, and the boy's will.

The man held out. His face was pale and his eyes were sunken. His cheeks were more gaunt than ever, and his big hands seemed but bones, charred over with shrunken skin; yet for thirty-two more hours he alternately rested for brief intervals, ate nothing, because it was denied him, and resisted every effort to break him down.

IV

NIGHT of the second day came on. Dr. Young had been brought to Davis' office again. The shadows were creeping into the room.

He was alone once more, alone in the gathering dusk, alone in the twi-

light of a waiting city, and his own resistance.

Davis came in once more. There were others with him. Davis was bustling, businesslike, threatening. His face was set in a mask of grim determination.

"Dr. Young," he said, "this is your last chance to tell the truth. Now tell it and ease your soul."

Dr. Young looked at him. His eyes were sunken. The color of his skin had turned from the ashen gray of terror and fanatical stubbornness to a sickly yellow. He was weak and his hands hung listlessly in his lap.

"May I have some food?" he asked.

"When you tell your story. When you tell why you poisoned young Pat Grogan, when you tell why you took the ring from your dead wife's finger, when you tell why you lied about the \$162,000, when you tell why you said you were at the Ambassador Hotel when you weren't—when you tell us that you invented that monstrous fabric of lies to cover the killing of your wife."

Davis turned suddenly to one of the men with him, drew him aside, whispered to him. The man left the room hurriedly.

No one spoke. The room was silent as a tomb. Then the door opened. The man Davis had spoken to came back. He carried a huge tray, covered with two napkins. The savory aroma of food filled the room.

Dr. Young half drew himself to his feet. Davis took the tray, sat it down on the desk, just out of the suffering man's reach. He withdrew the napkins.

Dr. Young closed his eyes, seemed on the verge of collapse.

"For me?" he said, weakly, hopefully.

"When you tell your story."

Dr. Young pulled himself up. He faced his inquisitor resolutely. His face was white again, white under the yellow.

Then he broke once more, into a sobbing, cowering man.

"Yes, yes," he cried, "something terrible has happened—I'll tell you—"

Davis stopped him. A man came in with a shorthand pad and pencil.

Dr. Young was talking again, talking in a broken patter . . .

"She accused me of things I never did—she held me in contempt—she made a fool of me—then she hit me and broke my glasses when we went to the cottage. I don't know what happened then—I just remember her body dropping into the cistern—"

They fed him. He ate ravenously. When he had finished, motor cars were waiting. They drove to Beverly Glen, through the gray night, to the cottage and the fatal cistern.

The cistern was dry. Men descended into it with picks and shovels and heavy sledges. They began to batter the cement floor. They chipped out a segment in one side, where there was a sudden rise, about six feet long, against the wall.

The tiny break widened into a long slit. Newspapers crackled under the searching hands of the police and deputies.

Davis had descended into the cistern, taking Dr. Young with him. Electric lanterns illuminated the work.

Someone ripped back the newspapers, flung them almost into Dr. Young's face. He stood, silent and bent, like an old, old man, watching them.

"There it is—" One of the men exclaimed.

The body of Mrs. Young lay beneath the newspaper shroud, full and

round and perfectly preserved in the airtight crypt of concrete, mixed two months before, all unknown, by her own beloved and unsuspecting son.

THEY carried the body up the ladder, stretched it on a litter, and threw a brilliant light over the gray features. Davis pushed Dr. Young forward.

Suddenly Davis bent over. An ambulance surgeon bent over, at his signal, with him.

They tugged at something between the teeth, something red and elastic. A fragment of it broke off in the surgeon's fingers. He handed it to Davis, nodding significantly.

"What is it?" Davis asked, quickly.

"Ask him." The surgeon pointed at Dr. Young.

Davis turned to the gaunt dentist, standing, mute and dry-eyed, at his side. He held up the bit of red rubber.

"All right," he said, "finish the story."

Dr. Young drew his breath in deeply, clenched his hands.

Then he began to talk again, rapidly, in a fever of surging emotions that would not be contained.

"I brought her here after she struck me—I was determined to have my revenge—she had been drinking—I told her I forgave her, urged her to have another drink—she drank more, from a bottle I had, more and more—She was very drunk presently, laughing stupidly—I poured more whisky between her lips—more and more—"

"She fell on the bed, in the cottage—I had a tank of somnoform in there—used it for experiments—I put the cap over her face—the red cone—red rubber cone—that's part of it—then I hooked the hose to the somnoform tank and turned the petcock—"

"I let it run—it smothered her completely—I tried her pulse—she was dead—not a sign of a heartbeat—I tried to take the cone from her face, but she had bitten into it—I tore off what I could, but her jaws were locked in death—I couldn't get it all—

"I took her out and dropped her into the cistern—I covered the body with some newspapers and fastened them down with rocks and clods—then I came out the next day—"

"With her own son, that he might make her crypt," Davis cut in.

"Yes, with her son. He mixed the mortar and I poured it over the newspapers and over the body—

"I thought once he was going to find out—he slipped up behind me when I was in the cistern—but he never knew—"

Davis regarded the man, overwhelmed at the stark coldness of his recitation.

"I believe you enjoyed killing her," he said.

Dr. Young looked squarely at him through the darkness.

His sunken eyes gleamed like smoldering coals.

"I did," he said, coolly. "She made me miserable, tried to ruin me. I enjoyed seeing her die."

This was Dr. Young's story. But it didn't end there. Dr. Young had one more gaudy chapter to add to his spectacular drama, a gesture of climax, as diabolical and startling as his slaying

of his wife and his plotting of the unsolvable mystery.

He went to trial, under the fire of Asa W. Keyes, nationally known as Los Angeles's district attorney. Keyes attacked him with a searing arraignment, charged him with plotting the deaths of his wife and his stepson, even his father-in-law, to get their money.

In a flaming burst of oratory, he demanded that Dr. Young go to the gallows.

Dr. Young wilted under the arraignment. He broke down again, burying his face in his hands. That afternoon, when court closed, they led him away to his cell, trembling in fear and terror.

He never came back to the courtroom.

The next morning, when Judge Hahn took his place on the bench a bailiff stepped upon the dais, whispered something in his ear. The judge paled, quickly signalled Keyes, and followed the bailiff.

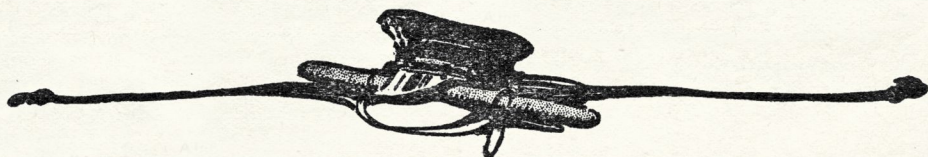
He led them to Dr. Young's cell.

Dr. Young lay on his cot, motionless. A thin bit of copper wire bit cruelly into his neck.

His right hand clutched a bit of stick, fashioned into a crude tourniquet, with the copper wire that had been taken from his private radio.

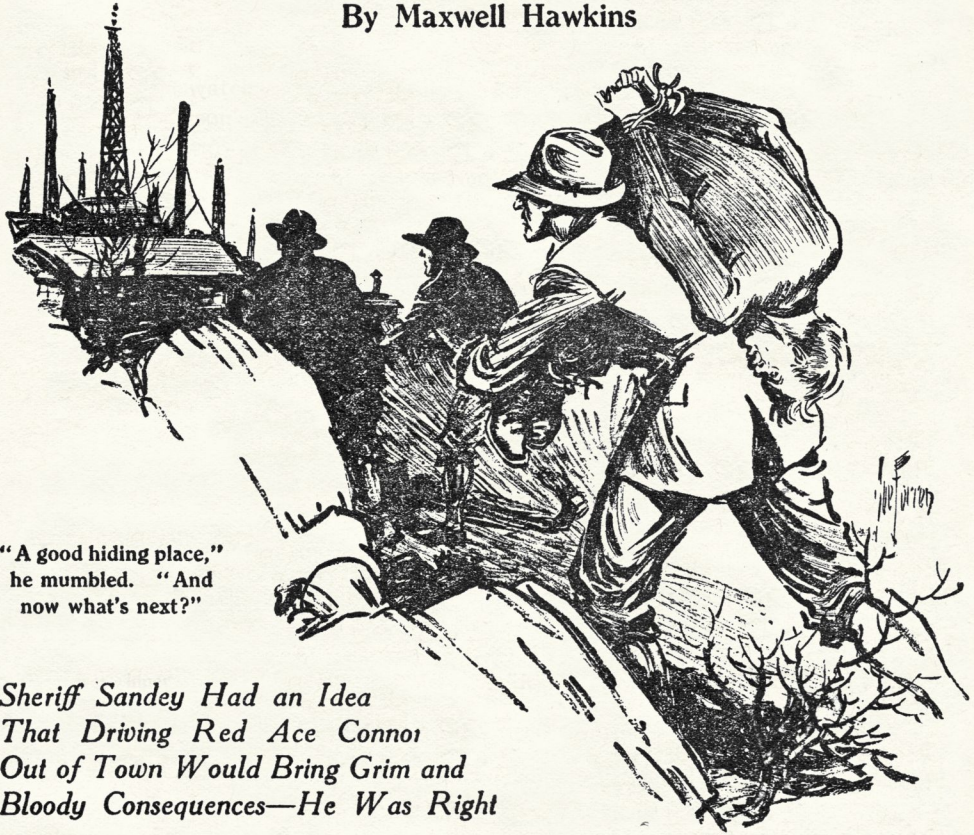
His face was blue, his tongue protruded between his teeth, his eyes stared unseeingly at his gray cage.

He had cheated Keyes and the gallows of their game.



Rat Bait

By Maxwell Hawkins



"A good hiding place," he mumbled. "And now what's next?"

Sheriff Sandey Had an Idea That Driving Red Ace Connor Out of Town Would Bring Grim and Bloody Consequences—He Was Right

RED ACE CONNOR was leaving Gusher Creek.

As a matter of fact, he already was more than a mile beyond the limits of that turbulent oil-boom town. But he wasn't going away from it of his own free will. He was departing at the suggestion and under the stern eye of Sheriff Joe Sandey. And the tough-as-saddle-leather little sheriff was giving point to the suggestion with a pair of old-fashioned six-guns.

As Red Ace Connor trudged along the dusty road, stumbling in and out of the deep ruts, he was spitting curses with every step; he had called down all the maledictions of heaven and hell

on the slightly bald head of Sheriff Sandey till his voice was hoarse. His oaths now had a distinctly frog-like croak.

Red Ace had been a sort of frog in Gusher Creek; a big, ugly and evil frog in a little puddle. That is, until Sheriff Sandey had decided to send him hopping on his way, along with a lot of smaller frogs and plenty of tadpoles who had also been living in the slime of Gusher Creek.

And when Sheriff Joe Sandey decided to do something, it was already as good as done. He was a direct actionist, a little man who did things in a big way.

That was why Red Ace O'Connor had so much company as he plodded through the heavy dust of the road from Gusher Creek to McKinleyville. There was Whitey Simms, who had run one of Connor's dice tables, and Bud Payne, who had taken care of the liquor peddling.

Whitey, tall and shifty-eyed, was walking along sullenly, kicking up little cyclones of dust with every step and now and then looking over his shoulder to shoot a baleful glare at the grim-visaged sheriff astride a big roan horse.

Payne was taking the whole thing better than Simms or Red Ace. He was grinning, even if it was a pretty sickly grin. Frequently he pulled out his green silk handkerchief and mopped the sweat from his bulbous brow. Payne was soft and fat; the hot Oklahoma sun beating down on the prairie was taking its toll of him.

Those three were the ringleaders.

But there were a dozen more men in the hard-eyed and soft-handed gang that trudged along. All members of Red Ace's mob. Gamblers, bootleggers, ex-jailbirds and plain crooks—the scum of the oil fields, and that meant just about the scum of the universe.

Sheriff Sandey touched the flank of his horse and moved up alongside the procession.

"Just keep right on walkin', boys," he ordered. "It's only seven miles more to McKinleyville. Then you can ride the train."

Connor looked up at him with a black scowl and cursed dully, hoarsely.

"You're gonna regret this day, Joe Sandey!"

The little sheriff smiled, a slow confident smile.

"You've no kick comin', Connor. I warned you, but you didn't pay no attention. I can shut my eyes to a little

game of poker that's on the level, and I don't always see when there's liquor bein' sold, if it's good stuff. But when it comes to the kind of crookedness you've been pullin', I'm apt to get mad."

"You haven't got nothin' on us!"

"I've got my gun on you right this minute, Connor," Sandey replied evenly. "And if you don't step along lively, I may try to warm your heels with it."

Red Ace Connor clenched his hands—huge hands that were covered with coarse red hair on their backs. His face was bloated with futile rage as he unwillingly increased his pace.

Sheriff Sandey dropped back to the rear of the column of walking men, maneuvering his big roan to a position between his two deputies, mounted on tough, wiry cow ponies. They were Jeff Winters and Henry Clewson. Good men, both of them; big, easy-going fellows usually, but a couple of dangerous customers in a fight.

THE clean-up of Gusher Creek had come unexpectedly.

Sheriff Sandey, with Jeff Winters and Henry Clewson and two other newly deputized aids, had moved into the tent and shack settlement on the west bank of the creek at noon. That was when Red Ace and his henchmen were always sound asleep. He and his riff-raff mob were birds of prey that hunted by night and rested when the sun was high.

Joe Sandey had routed them all out. He'd dumped their baggage into a truck and sent it on ahead to McKinleyville with the other two deputies. And into the truck he'd also bundled the half dozen hollow-cheeked, bedraggled dance-hall girls who worked for Red Ace Connor.

"The women can ride!" Sheriff Joe

said gallantly, and then added with droll sarcasm, "But this is one time the gents walk!"

Connor had protested profanely. But his threats and curses had done him no good. They were so much squandered breath, for Joe Sandey and his deputies had gathered up a bushel basket of guns and knives. Anyway, it's doubtful if the Connor crowd would have had the nerve to put up a fight. Red Ace might have. He had a reputation as a killer. And so might Whitey Simms, because Whitey just naturally had the disposition of a moulting turkey buzzard. But not the rest. They were plain yellow.

The word of the clean-up had spread like a prairie fire. In less than no time at all, a hundred or so residents of Gusher Creek—oil field roustabouts, drillers, store-keepers, teamsters and ordinary loafers—had gathered around the fringes of Connor's Roost, as they called Red Ace's hang-out on the west bank of the creek.

They all knew enough, however, to stand back. They all knew Sheriff Joe too well to butt into his play. And most of them were in favor of the bow-legged little law officer's move, anyway.

There were plenty of men in the crowd who'd lost at Red Ace's crooked gambling tables, and not a few of them had been slugged and their hard-earned pay taken from them after they were helpless from Bud Payne's rotgut.

Now, behind Sheriff Sandey and his deputies on the dusty road to McKinleyville, a number of automobiles and trucks were strung out. They were loaded with curious spectators, who didn't want to miss the fun at the McKinleyville railroad station.

The report had gone around: "Joe's flagging the Kansas City Limited! He's

going to load the whole herd of 'em on board! That's like old Joe!"

This brought chuckles of appreciation mostly, but here and there some cautious soul would add: "Joe's taking an awful chance! Connor's a bad one! He'll get even!"

Jeff Winters fixed his eyes on the bulky figure of Red Ace Connor at the head of the line and worked his horse close to Sandey. Connor had lost his hat somewhere. His flaming red head looked almost bloody now in the bright sun. Like a centipede's head, Jeff thought.

"You really think, Joe, that Connor killed old man Mendelbaum?" the deputy asked in a low tone.

Sandey's steel-gray eyes squinted beneath his black felt hat, yanked low over his bronzed face. "Maybe he didn't squeeze the trigger, Jeff. But I'm satisfied he was the one behind it."

"Couldn't pin it on him, though," Winters suggested.

"Not a chance. Too slick to leave any evidence."

"And that's why you're runnin' him and his gang out of town, huh?"

"You might say that was the particular thing that brought it on. But he's been due to get run out of town on general principles for a long time."

Jeff Winters nodded solemn approval. Long before Otto Mendelbaum's riddled body had been discovered in the rear of his little store on the road to the new oil pool at Black-jack Hill, Red Ace Connor had become a festering sore in the side of Gusher Creek's body politic.

Mendelbaum's place was a landmark in the country. The thrifty and kindly old German had opened up his general store a good many years before—back when Oklahoma was a territory. He'd soon worked up a reputation for

square-shooting. They said he was even honest with the Indians, and that was being almost too danged honest, according to some.

In a small way, Mendelbaum had prospered. Then, with the discovery of oil, he'd actually grown rich. No doubt about it. There were two wells on the rocky forty acres he owned, and he was getting plump royalty checks twice a month.

Folks whispered that the old German was a miser—hid his money in his ramshackle store building, where he also lived in a back room. But then folks are apt to say that about old fellows who live alone and mind their own business.

Whether Mendelbaum really had kept his wealth in his store, no one knew. And in case he had, whether the ones who'd pumped him full of lead had found it, no one except his killers knew. But they'd certainly turned the store upside down in their search. Even chopped open all his stock of canned goods, thinking maybe he'd sealed his cash up in some of the cans.

Jeff Winters stuffed a palmful of scrap into his mouth. When he had rolled it into a ball with his tongue and lodged the ball in one cheek, he spoke again, still in an undertone.

"What was the idea of makin' these rats walk?" he asked. "It'd been easier just to truck 'em over to McKinleyville and dump 'em on the train."

A slow smile flitted across Joe Sandey's weather-beaten features; it might have been taken for a crafty smile, if it hadn't been so good-natured.

"That was for a very particular reason," he said quietly.

Jeff was puzzled, but he recognized

from Joe's tone that he didn't want the question pressed and lapsed into silence. But the deputy also knew that when Joe said it was for a very particular reason, he meant just that!

MCKINLEYVILLE wasn't much of a town as towns go. It had been even less before they found oil in that part of the state. Just a side track, a small sun-blistered station, a cattle pen, a store building and three or four houses.

But oil at Gusher Creek—that was the town's name, the creek was always called Little Pecan River—had changed McKinleyville. Now there was a big unpainted freight shed, a new siding, probably twenty-five houses and half a dozen store buildings, not counting the corrugated iron structure that passed for a hotel.

But the little station was still the same. And as the foot-sore procession of Gusher Creek undesirables pounded onto the cinder platform, they found the dance-hall girls and their baggage, guarded by the two other deputies, waiting for them.

The crowd of grinning spectators who had trailed along from Gusher Creek was augmented at the station by a large delegation of McKinleyville citizenry. The latter were seething with curiosity, full of questions, and when the strange proceedings were explained to them, there was much chuckling, much slapping of backs.

It was good sport watching Red Ace and his motley mob getting the bum's rush.

A faraway, long-drawn whistle from the direction of the cut below the bridge gave warning that the K. C. Limited would be roaring into McKinleyville in a few minutes.

Sheriff Sandey made his weary, but

furiously raging prisoners, line up along the cinder platform. Red Ace Connor stood at the head of the line, nearest Sandey. His flaming hair was tousled. Beads of sweat had cut streaks through the dust on his mean face. His expensive clothes were baggy, soaked with perspiration.

Nevertheless, there was something about the big figure of Connor to inspire a sort of respect. He looked dangerous, deadly. The respect he aroused was the same as an angry rattlesnake in the path would produce.

Joe Sandey, however, wasn't much afraid of rattlesnakes. And he appeared even less concerned about the venomous threat in Red Ace Connor's hard and furrowed face.

The sheriff's hands moved swiftly. They halted, and in each one was a shining six-gun, the steel the same color as his piercing eyes. It wasn't just showing off, this lightning draw Joe Sandey made. He knew his foes, and he knew that it wouldn't hurt what he was going to tell them if he proved that his skill on the draw wasn't just a rumor. He could get his guns horizontal with the fastest of them.

"You folks are climbing on this train," he said in his slow, even drawl. "It goes to K. C. I'd advise you to ride it clear through. But my authority ends at the county line. That's thirty miles north. After that you can suit yourself. But get this—" He paused to let his words sink in.

"Any one of you who sets his dirty feet inside Wasage County again, does so at his own risk. And it'll be quite a risk!" he added significantly.

He ordered Clewson to ride to the far side of the tracks. Just in case any of the Connor gang tried to get on one side of the train and sneak off the other. There was a screaming of

brakes, a rush of air and a small shower of cinders as the limited ground to a stop.

Red Ace Connor was the last to swing aboard. He turned on the step and shook a huge hairy fist toward the small sheriff, sitting immobile in the saddle of his big roan on the station platform.

"I'll get you for this!" Connor screamed, beside himself with fury.

Joe Sandey said nothing, merely smiled that quiet, taunting smile. But the crowd behind him let out a flock of jeers and cat calls and mocking laughs. A final fanfare of derision for the big red-headed man who'd been the tempest and terror of Gusher Creek.

A volcano of steam erupted from the locomotive, and the limited began to move. As it pulled past the station, Clewson spurred his pony around the last car. He drew up beside Sandey and Jeff Winters. The three men who symbolized law and order at Gusher Creek watched the train pulling up the track.

It had gone only beyond the spot where the road crossed the rails, when a man's figure, a giant figure with a flaming red head, appeared on the rear platform. It stood there for a brief moment. Then there was a puff of white smoke.

Joe Sandey laughed. He swept his black felt hat from his head, and ran a finger through the round hole that was cut through both sides of the crown.

"Mmm," he murmured dryly. "Connor'll owe me a new hat when he comes back."

"Comes back?" Jeff Winters was aghast.

"You — you think he's comin' back?" the slower Clewson echoed wonderingly.

Joe Sandey clapped his hat back on his head and yanked it low.

"Hell, yes! If he don't, I'll be pretty doggone disappointed!"

GUSHER CREEK settled back once more into its bustling routine after Red Ace Connor's humiliating exit. Of course, there was still plenty of excitement in town. They'd drilled in a wildcat well a mile north and this had brought an added rush of workers and hangers-on.

Then, too, no town ever exactly settles back while an oil boom is on. Sandey was kept busy, even though he'd routed the town's most baneful influence. There was always a wild-eyed drunk or so to quiet down with a night in the wooden calaboose. Now and then, he had had to step in and restore order after a shooting brawl, usually more noisy than dangerous.

But by and large things were no more unruly than was to be expected in such a place, and Sheriff Joe had no difficulty in keeping a tight grip on the situation.

Gusher Creek wasn't the county seat of Wasage County. That was over at Sage Centre. But they hadn't found any oil close to Sage Centre, and things were pretty quiet there. All the activity was at Gusher Creek. So Sheriff Sandey spent a good part of his time in the office he'd set up alongside the wooden Gusher Creek jail.

And yet, Joe Sandey didn't seem to be exactly at ease these days. More like a setter dog out hunting a covey of quail. He even had the appearance of trying to scent a quarry, the way he often lifted his short snub nose in the air.

"What's eatin' on Joe?" Jeff Winters asked Henry Clewson as they were idling in the tar paper office just be-

fore dark about two weeks after the exodus of the Red Ace gang.

"How's that?" Clewson asked, blowing on a sheaf of cigarette papers to separate one.

"He's got something on his mind."

"You askin' my opinion?"

"Yeah."

"Well, then, it's my belief that Joe's expectin' to turn over a card almost any time and discover it's a red ace!" Clewson gave a self-appreciative grunt.

They got no further with their discussion of the small steel-eyed sheriff. Sandey himself stepped through the open door accompanied by another man, a round-shouldered man of middle age dressed in khaki field clothes and high laced boots.

The sheriff's black hat was pushed back from his forehead and there was a fanwise crinkle at the corners of his eyelids. His companion looked worried, and gave an apprehensive glance to the two deputies.

Although the round-shouldered man didn't seem to know them, both Winters and Clewson recognized him. Gridley was the local manager of the Samson Torpedo Company, the outfit whose business was setting off tremendous charges of nitro-glycerine in the bottom of oil wells in order to "shoot" them and make the precious crude flow more freely.

Sandey nodded to his two assistants.

"Howdy, boys," he said briefly.

They caught the hint in his eyes. Winters got up and strolled to the door. Clewson followed him out into the street, which was showing signs of increased activity with the ending of the day and the arrival of workers coming in from the oil fields.

"Have a chair," Sandey said to Gridley, when they were alone in the shack. He sat down himself, and let

his glance rest on the torpedo company manager.

Now that he was alone with the sheriff, Gridley appeared to have dropped all attempt to conceal his feelings. He was patently filled with alarm, even terror. He crossed one booted leg over the other, then recrossed them quickly.

"Well," Sandey urged, "let's have it!"

The crimson tip of Gridley's tongue ran along his dry lips.

"It's just this, sheriff," he began huskily. "Ed McAndrews, one of our oil well shooters, has disappeared. Dropped completely out of sight! And his shooter's wagon with eighty quarts of nitro has disappeared with him!"

Sandey nodded slowly and made a clucking sound with his teeth.

"Eighty quarts! That's a lot of explosive!"

"It's enough to blow Gusher Creek off the map," Gridley muttered. "But what I'm worried about is McAndrews."

"Don't suppose he might have taken a notion to go somewhere?" the sheriff suggested. "Say, drive up to Tulsa—and just forgot to mention it?"

"That's not like Ed. He wouldn't skip out when he had a job on his hands."

"Job?"

"Yes. Ed was to shoot a well on the Beeman lease this morning. He reported at seven o'clock at our office here in Gusher Creek. Then he drove out to the magazine at Blackjack Hill and loaded up with nitro. I found that much out. Checked our stock at the magazine."

"Where's the Beeman lease?" Sandey asked.

"About seven miles west of town. Beyond the Little Pecan bottom lands.

Ed never got there. Something happened between the magazine and the lease."

"How'd you know?" Sandey asked, looking shrewdly at the torpedo company manager.

"Because the Beeman foreman came into town mad as hell about ten o'clock this morning. It was important that they get that well shot. Everything was being held up for it. Ed knew that, and he was supposed to be there at eight o'clock this morning."

"What'd you do?"

"Sent another shooter out to handle the job. Then I started out looking for Ed. I've driven all over this part of the country. Couldn't find a trace of him. Met some people who'd seen a nitro wagon, but when I investigated, I learned it was the second one I'd sent out to the Beeman well."

"Too bad," the sheriff murmured.

"How's that?"

"Trail's a little cold now," Sandey explained. Then he added suddenly, "Looks like somebody wanted a pile of nitro-glycerine for some reason."

"By God, sheriff, this is bad!" Gridley broke out. His forehead was speckled with tiny beads of moisture. "Nitro-glycerine's tricky—dangerous! And if anyone who doesn't understand it has got that stuff—" He didn't finish his sentence, but he ran a shaking finger around under his collar as if to loosen its pressure on his throat.

Little Joe Sandey was silent for a long time. He had tilted his chair against the wall and was sitting with his head thrown back and his gray eyes almost closed. His mouth was pursed into a thoughtful pout.

He got the picture that Gridley's unfinished sentence had indicated. Eighty quarts of nitro in unskilled hands. A careless move, then a ghastly thunder-

ous explosion that would jolt the entire countryside and spread devastation and death.

Gridley managed to get a cigar going and blew a few quick nervous puffs through his lips.

"I—I don't know whether I ought to phone McAndrews' family in Tulsa or not," he mumbled.

"McAndrews' family?" the sheriff queried.

"He's got a wife and a couple of children there. If he's been—if he's dead, it'll be tough sledding for them."

Sandey's chair snapped back on all four legs. Simultaneously the sheriff got to his feet, and with a quick hitch to his gun belt, wandered over to the door. Gridley followed him questioningly.

"What'll I do?" he asked.

"Leave it to me!" Sandey exclaimed grimly.

He stood for a moment watching Gridley's round-shouldered form moving up the street. Then he turned slowly, meditatively back into the office. At that moment the jangling of the telephone broke rudely in upon his thoughts.

JOE SANDEY hung the receiver up with an enigmatic smile. He deliberately took out each of his shiny long-barreled six-guns and spun the cylinders, inspected the twin weapons to make certain they were ready for instant use. Still smiling, he stepped out into the street.

The tar paper shack that housed his office was on the second cross street back from the river. Sandey walked swiftly down the half block that separated it from Main Street, which dropped straight and steep from the bluff top toward the river.

At the foot of Main Street, where

the roadway came to a dead end at the two-story brick building of the Trader's National Bank, he swung left on River Street toward the bridge across the Little Pecan.

Some of the people he passed recognized him and spoke to him. He acknowledged their greetings with a friendly wave of his hand, but didn't stop.

Darkness had settled down in the valley, on the sides of which the town of Gusher Creek spread out, clinging to the steep inclines that swept up from the stream. Most of the town was on the east bank; only the small settlement that included Connor's Roost occupied the west.

Sandey crossed the bridge. The other shore wasn't built up much. Except for the Roost, not more than a score of scattered shanties, many of them nothing more than tents with rough board floors and walls.

From the bridge the main road wound up the hill toward the oil pool at Blackjack Hill. A mile away it passed the small store where old Otto Mendelbaum had been so brutally murdered. But Sandey didn't follow it. At the far end of the bridge he plunged into the blackness of the grove of pecan trees that lined the stream's edge.

Here and there he could see lights in some of the shacks as he picked a slow, cautious way, guided more by remembrance of the dark route he was taking than by any of his senses. At last he came to a stop close to the trunk of a giant pecan and peered into the gloom.

He could discern faintly the outline of a large building. It was the unpainted pine of Red Ace Connor's one-time dance hall. Huddled near it was a slightly smaller structure, in which

Connor and some of his mob had lived, and where he had set up his gambling tables and sold his liquor.

Connor's Roost!

As he looked at the place, Sandey suddenly narrowed his eyes. For a moment he stood squinting dead ahead; at the bottom of one of the rear windows he had caught sight of a feeble ray of light. A trace of a grin passed slowly over his face and he began to move forward again.

Inching his way along, he circled the building until he reached the window. The light was coming from a tear in the closely drawn blind, but the rent was so small he was able to get only a faint, useless glimpse of the interior.

He placed his ear against the window pane. No sound came from within. For a few seconds he stood motionless, as if trying to decide upon his next move. At last he started once more for the front of the building, pressing his short wiry body flat against the siding as he advanced. His groping hand found the door's edge, then the knob. He gave it a cautious turn. The catch yielded silently and he pushed the door open.

His hand slid across his hip and came forward with one of his guns gripped firmly in his trained fingers. Every nerve taut, he slipped over the threshold and into the inky blackness of the building.

Red Ace Connor had returned.

He had come back with a lust for revenge gnawing at his black heart like a cutworm. Revenge for the indignity and humiliation he considered the little sheriff of Wasage County had heaped on his fiery head.

But Red Ace Connor hadn't come hell-roaring back. He was too cautious, too sly for that. He wanted his

pound of flesh and blood, but he wanted to be certain that after he claimed it, nobody could point to any crimson stains on his hairy hands.

That was Red Ace Connor; murderous as a lobo wolf, yet sneaking and careful as a weasel.

Only two of his gang had returned with him. The others had scattered, some going to Tulsa, others taking Joe Sandey's advice and riding the limited straight through to Kansas City. But Whitey Simms, lean and dour, and Bud Payne, fat and treacherous, had stuck with their leader.

AFTER ten days spent in Tulsa, hiding out, planning and plotting for their return to Wasage County, the trio of devil's spawn had driven back and established themselves temporarily in one of the sheds at the abandoned mine of the Wasage Coal Company. It was an ideal hideaway, a mile back from the road and ten miles from Gusher Creek, concealed in the wooded breaks; almost never visited.

"We've had good luck so far," Red Ace Connor muttered. "But from here on we've gotta watch our step."

Whitey Simms nodded and cast a bilious glance toward a dark corner of the shed.

"What're we gonna do with him?"

Both Red Ace and Payne followed his glance. McAndrews, the Samson shooter, was lying on his back on the dirty floor. His hands and feet were tightly bound, and a gag had been plastered over his mouth with adhesive tape.

"We can decide that later," Connor said sourly. "Our job now is to get Sandey."

"Sure, but how?" Payne asked. "He ain't no fool."

"We'll make one out of him!" Red Ace Connor growled.

"How?" Payne persisted.

Connor didn't answer at once. Instead, he took out his watch. The hands pointed to eight o'clock. Already the sun had dipped below the hills and its afterglow was turning the sky into a vast inverted bowl of dripping red.

"Here's the way," Connor said at last, the words coming harshly from between his yellowed teeth. "Whitey and I are slipping back to the Roost in Gusher Creek. On the way we drop you off near the Shamrock Pumping Station. Give us half an hour to get ready at the Roost. Then you phone from the pump station to Sandey's office in Gusher Creek."

Bud Payne, about to light a cigarette, halted his hand halfway to his mouth. In the orange flare of the match, his fat, ugly face with its pig-like eyes, wore a startled expression.

"Phone Sandey?"

"You heard me. You make out that you're somebody who's afraid to give his name. But you're handing the sheriff a straight tip. A tip that I'm back in Gusher Creek—hiding out at the Roost!"

A sardonic grin creased Payne's fat cheeks.

"I get it! And when he goes to the Roost—"

"Whitey and I'll be ready for him!" Connor snarled.

Simms was dubious. "What makes you think he'll come lookin' for you alone?" he asked with characteristic skepticism.

Red Ace Connor turned on him sharply.

"Because Sandey's a wise-guy! He thinks he's the whole cheese—can lick the world! But in case he does bring

along his deputies, we can fade out the back way and try again later on."

"Okey!" Simms shrugged.

"Come on! Get going!" Connor ordered.

A split-second after he had crossed the door-sill into the stygian darkness of Connor's Roost, it looked as if Sheriff Joe Sandey had played his cards badly.

His quick ears caught the sound of movement, but even before the roar of his six-gun had died away, the little sheriff imagined that all the stars in the heavens had landed on his slightly bald head. He felt himself falling, falling into a bottomless abyss. Then all was black.

A circle of light played over his crumpled form. As it showed his closed eyes, Simms uttered a whispered oath.

"You've killed him," he muttered softly.

"Not a chance!" Connor snapped. "I've swung too many pipes not to know how hard to hit. Pick him up!" he added sharply.

Whitey Simms lifted Joe Sandey from the floor and hoisted him over his shoulder like a sack of grain.

"Lucky he don't weigh much," he grunted.

"We've gotta get the hell out of here!" Connor growled. "The damn little —, shootin' like that! Out the back way! Fast!"

Not until the car had been stopped at the roadside to pick up Bud Payne did Sandey regain consciousness. He was trussed up, helpless on the floor in the back of the sedan, a heavy foot resting on the small of his back.

By the time they reached the abandoned mine, however, some of the pain from the blow he had received was gone, and his head began to clear.

As Simms dragged him unceremoniously from the sedan and put him again on his shoulder, the sheriff caught the outline of the structure over the mine shaft against the sky. He knew every foot of the country, and immediately identified the spot where his foes had brought him.

"A good hiding place," he mumbled. "And now, what's next?" He decided to play possum for a while longer, since his captors seemed unaware that he had regained consciousness.

Red Ace Connor led the way. At a gruff command from him, Whitey dropped the sheriff on the floor of the shed beside McAndrews. Sandey's eyes looked as if they were closed, but through a narrow slit between the lids he saw the bound figure of the Samson shooter beside him as the flashlight swept over the floor.

Connor and the other two men withdrew to the far side of the shed. From time to time their faces were visible as they struck matches for their cigarettes. And although they conversed in low tones, Sandey's straining ears were able to catch most of what they said.

"Well, we got him," Whitey said at last. "What's our next move?"

"We lie low right here till just before sunrise," Connor replied. "Then we take the shooter's wagon to the top of the hill on the east side of town. From the top we let her go—right down into the Trader's Bank!"

PAYNE gave a low laugh. "There won't be no building left when all that nitro hits it."

"It'll flatten it all right," Red Ace agreed. "But I figure the steel vault'll stand up pretty well. And the explosion should rip it open. While every-

thing's in confusion, we whip into town, and if we have any luck, we ought to be able to get at the jack in the bank."

Sheriff Sandey understood the plot now. The nitro had been stolen so Red Ace and his cutthroat pals could raid the Trader's Bank. It was a simple scheme, and one that stood a fair chance of success, he admitted to himself.

But its fiendish disregard of consequences made Joe Sandey grit his teeth. The nitro wagon running wild down the steep Main Street and into the bank building. A lot of innocent people sleeping near by would lose their lives in the blast.

There was a short silence; then Payne asked:

"What'll we do with Sandey and the shooter?"

Red Ace Connor gave a laugh. The chill heartlessness of the sound grated on Sandey's usually steady nerves.

"We'll leave the shooter here. If they find him, all right. If they don't, all right, too. But as for Sandey—" He laughed again, this time with a note of triumph. "I'm more interested in fixing him than in getting the dough from the bank!"

"The money'll come in handy," Whitey said dryly.

Connor paid no attention.

"I'm getting even with him for what he did to me—making me walk from Gusher Creek to McKinleyville with everyone watching and laughing."

He cursed Sandey again and again, as the bitterness that had been simmering deep inside him began to boil over. Like every crook, Red Ace Connor was sensitive to derision, and his humiliating tramp over the dusty road had cut his pride to the quick.

"When that nitro wagon rolls down Main Street hill," he suddenly snarled, "Joe Sandey'll be tied in it!"

Even Whitey Simms and Bud Payne, calloused as they were, were momentarily silenced by the viciousness of Connor's scheme for vengeance. Finally Payne mumbled, half in protest:

"If you hadn't been in such a hurry to bump off old Mendelbaum—"

"Shut up!" Connor spat out. "What if I did? We were after his money and he gave us an argument!"

Through the long hours of the night, Connor and his two pals took turns sleeping and guarding their prisoners. Joe Sandey stayed wide awake. Repeatedly he gave cautious but determined tugs at the cords which bound his hands and feet. But it was no use. They'd been too expertly fastened to offer even a slender hope of slipping them.

His position was growing more desperate with every passing minute; yet he seemed powerless to escape the hideous fate that was so relentlessly approaching. There was nothing to do but wait, to watch and hope for some lucky break. And he realized that his life hung on his ability to match his wits against Red Ace Connor, because physically he was hopelessly outclassed.

It was that pitch black hour which follows the false dawn and precedes the real rising of the sun, when Whitey Simms hoisted Sandey to his shoulder and lugged him from the shed. Connor and Payne were standing beside the big sedan, parked on a level stretch of ground near the mine shaft.

"Shall I throw him in back?" Simms asked.

"No. Prop him up in the front seat," Connor replied. "You can sit

behind and watch him. Bud'll drive the nitro wagon."

"What's the idea? I brought it up here," Payne demurred.

"Scared?" Simms asked with a sneer.

"No, I ain't scared! But that's a lot of soup to be pushing over these rough roads."

Connor settled the dispute quickly. "Both of you go. I'll drive this car. Guess I can handle this little runt here," he added, jerking a thumb at Sandey.

"Sure you can! When I'm all tied up like a roped calf," Sandey said mockingly.

Connor stepped over to where Simms had put the sheriff in sitting position on the front seat of the sedan. He shook his fist through the open window.

"You close your trap! Or I'll close it for you!" he snarled. He walked around the front of the car and climbed into the driver's seat from the opposite side. He stepped on the starter and the big motor began to purr.

Payne and Simms had vanished into the darkness, but a minute later a pair of automobile headlights were switched on. As the other car passed them, heading down the narrow road that led from the mine, it cut through the path of the sedan's lights. Sandey recognized the shooter's wagon—a big Buick with a nitro box on the back, its sides emblazoned with the warning: *Danger Nitroglycerine*.

Eighty quarts of the wicked explosive were tucked away in it, he knew. Packed in gallon cans which rested in snug felt-lined nests.

Red Ace piloted the sedan in silence, following the nitro wagon over the rocky, rutted lane. The going was slow. Payne and Simms apparently

were taking no chances with their ticklish cargo. When the sedan swung off the side road onto the highway that led to the Main Street hill, Connor turned to Sandey.

In the rays of the dashlight, his hazel eyes glinted redly, glowing with an insane triumph. He chuckled and the sound was less than human.

"You made me walk, damn you! But I'm going to make you ride—straight to hell!"

CONNOR halted the sedan at the top of the big hill. For a hundred yards the road dipped slightly, then at the crest of the bluff above Gusher Creek it suddenly dropped down into the town at a fifteen degree angle, ending in a short level stretch of ground before the Trader's National Bank.

The two men ahead had stopped the nitro wagon at the crest of the bluff. Sandey could see the glow of the tail light. Red Ace dimmed the lights on the sedan.

There was a long wait. Connor began to show signs of nervousness, and Sandey heard him curse under his breath. Then a fat figure evolved out of the darkness. It was Payne.

"What the hell's been keeping you?" Connor demanded angrily.

"We were waitin' for you."

"For me? I told you I was going to park up here at the top. We want this car back out of danger. Let's get started!"

Payne hesitated a moment, then muttered:

"Whitey and I've been talkin' about that nitro."

"What about it?"

"Well, it's funny stuff. We figured it might not explode, all packed in the way it is. Sometimes it lets go at a

slight jar, and sometimes even a hell of a jolt don't explode it."

Connor got out of the car with a growl.

"There may be something in what you say. But I can fix things."

"How?" Payne asked curiously.

"Take a couple of sticks of dynamite from the running board box. Tie 'em to the front bumper. Then when she hits, she'll sure pop!"

He started to move away from the sedan.

"How about him?" Payne asked, indicating the sheriff.

"Aw, hell, he can't get loose," Connor said impatiently. "Come on!"

As the two men disappeared, Sandey began to jerk violently at his bonds. It didn't do any good. His ankles were firmly fastened. His wrists had been tied behind his back too tightly to be reached by his groping fingers. Exert himself as he would, he could not bring his tied arms beyond his hip, so there was no chance to get at the knot with his teeth.

He glanced quickly around the front of the sedan, seeking in the glow of the dashlight some sharp edge. He found nothing on which he could saw at the cords.

Then he drew a quick breath and his eyes lighted. A tiny metal object on the dashboard had caught and held his attention.

"By God, it's my only chance!" he exclaimed.

Swiftly he slid forward in the seat, bracing his shoulders against the back, until his knees touched the dash. He closed them tightly about the bit of shining metal, then wriggled back again. Between his knees was the dash cigar lighter, which already was glowing brightly at the end of its long cord.

Then he moved too quickly. It slipped from his hold and snapped back against the dash. There were drops of cold sweat on his brow as he tried again. This time he was more careful, fighting down the impulse to hurry, even though he knew that any moment Red Ace Connor might be back.

Slowly, surely, he maneuvered his knees with the hot lighter between them against the car door. At last he managed to hook the cord over the handle which raised and lowered the glass. The lighter stuck there, and he breathed a sigh of relief.

Turning his back toward it, he pushed out his bound wrists. The feel of the heat was his only way to direct his movements. He burned himself time and again, but he set his jaw doggedly and persisted. Finally the acrid smell of burning hemp came to his nostrils. He pressed closer and strained with all his strength against the cords.

A moment later the bonds parted. He was free! But as he stooped to attack the knot that held his ankles fast, he heard voices down the road. Red Ace and one of the other men were coming back! There was no time now to free his legs.

In a second he had slid behind the wheel. He turned on the ignition switch and his tied feet found the starter.

The motor caught with a roar, and as he lit the headlights there was a surprised curse ahead of him. Connor and Whitey Simms, both with drawn guns, were dashing toward him.

Sandey's feet pressed the clutch, he yanked the gear lever into second, opened the throttle wide. Then, as he hurled himself through the door, the

clutch snapped back and the big sedan leaped forward.

Over and over Sandey rolled. He brought up in a ditch. For a second he had an impression that the two men in the road had jumped from the path of the driverless car hurtling down upon them. But he couldn't be sure, and he had no time to look again.

There was a deafening roar. The earth seemed to lift beneath him and then all was darkness.

BUD PAYNE was dead. They found a small piece of the fat-faced bootlegger in the crater which had been blown in the side of the hill when the sedan hit the nitro wagon with its lethal load. The coroner decided that constituted proof of death, so they buried it and put a wooden slab bearing the name Bud Payne over the grave.

Whitey Simms, too, had passed beyond the reach of human law. There wasn't a mark on his body when the terror-stricken dwellers in Gusher Creek stumbled across it by the side of the road near the hilltop. But the terrific vacuum created when the eighty quarts of nitro had let go had literally sucked the life out of him—collapsed his lungs.

About the time they were burying the only remnant of Bud Payne they could find, Jeff Winters and Henry Clewson entered the room in the Gusher Creek Hotel, where Sheriff Joe Sandey was stretched out beneath a starched sheet. The little law officer looked a bit pale, but his steel-gray eyes twinkled when he caught sight of his two lumbering deputies.

"Doc says you'll be out in a day or two," Winters said by way of greeting. "How you feel, Joe?"

"Spry as a bull calf in April,"

Sandey grinned. "It takes more than a little nitro to floor me permanently. But I guess I was lucky at that, tumbling into a deep ditch." He suddenly grew serious. "How's Connor makin' out?"

"He's banged up considerable," Clewson said. "But he'll pull through. Tough luck!"

"Tough luck, hell!" Sandey exclaimed. "I want him to live."

The two deputies stared at him in surprise. "You—you want him to live?" Jeff stammered.

"Sure. So I can hang him—for the murder of Otto Mendelbaum!"

Jeff Winters looked at him thoughtfully.

"How do you know he's guilty?"

"He admitted it. Up in the shed at the coal mine."

"But it's just your word against his," Jeff suggested.

Joe Sandey gave a quiet chuckle.

"Oh, no, it isn't. Ed McAndrews the Samson shooter was there, too, and heard it."

Henry Clewson shook his head admiringly. "You've got him dead to rights then, Joe."

"There's something I've been wanting to ask you for a long time," Winters said suddenly. "But I never got a chance before."

"Well, you've got me cornered now. Shoot!" Sandey said.

"What was the idea of makin' Red Ace Connor and his gang walk to McKinleyville?"

A broad, satisfied smile lit up Sandey's face.

"That was what you might call deep stuff, Jeff," he said dryly. "I did it so Red Ace Connor would be sure to come back!"

"Come back? Come back here?" Jeff Winters looked as if he doubted his own ears.

Sandey's head bobbed up and down on the white pillow.

"Yep. I was satisfied he murdered Otto Mendelbaum. But I couldn't prove it. So I wanted him to come back and give me an excuse to fill him with lead. I wanted him to come back to Gusher Creek and try to get me!"

"What'd makin' him walk have to do with that?" Jeff demanded.

"You ought to know, Jeff, that nothin' gets under a crook's skin like bein' made out a fool. I made Connor a fool before all the folks. I figured that'd get him so red mad he'd come rarin' back to get even. And I figured right."

Clewson shook his head.

"You took an awful chance, Joe."

"A sheriff's got to take chances, Henry," Sandey drawled. "But I'll admit that Red Ace came a lot closer to gettin' his revenge than I expected."

"I get the scheme," Jeff put in. "You were just using yourself as bait for catching that big rat!"

"Yep!"

"Well, you sure caught him."

Little Joe Sandey closed one steel-gray eye in a wink.

"I sort of showed him I was the big cheese around here—and he should have known that cheese is dandy rat bait!"

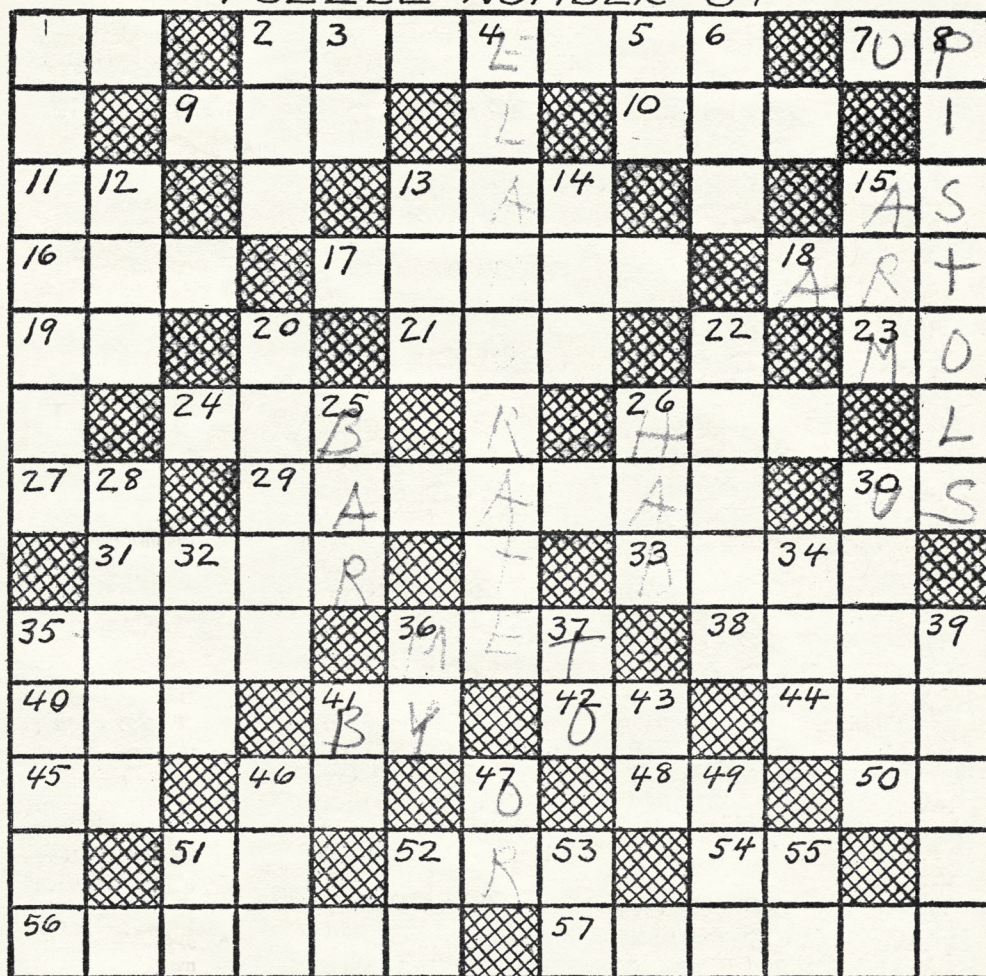


Narrative Cross-Word Puzzle

THE PROHIBITION OFFICER SCORES

By Richard Hoadley Tingley

PUZZLE NUMBER 84



A-ACROSS

- A 17 The night club owned and operated by the notorious entertainer, Jane, located only a few off the Great White Way, was one of the most establishments of its kind in New York. It been in successful
- A 18
- A 38
- D 4
- D 26

D-DOWN

- operation for years, defying every ... of the prohibition authorities to close it ... After each successive attempt, involving much time, and money, had ... with failure, Jane would come through smiling,, and

carry on more openly than before. Everybody knew that the élite of Broadway frequented the club; that elderly and young, old men and youths lined up at the; drank all manner of booze; got and foolish and maudlin to their hearts' content. And seemed to care a one way another. After each raid and the officers were aware of it, Jane would reopen times moresplendent than before, A 42 D 34 and! what a of a time there would, as though himself had taken charge of the place.

But the chief of the prohibition unit, his now thoroughly aroused, resolved try once more.

"That woman has got on nerves," he said to his deputy. "And must get to business and close up her joint some means. The department expects to do and mistake. I have kept a on her for months as I've been to and in that district, and like to the properly this time, and to that hussy if I can get her."

He continued with an of finality, "And I've a plan that I'm sure will work if you willoperate with Are you enough to try?"

The deputy nodded and this is the of just how they went about it, and of the plan worked

Under the guise of a representative of the well-known bootlegging house of Miller and Co., of St. Louis,, the deputy, whose name was Belcher, was driven in a to the club where he without difficulty. He opened wine for Jane, and as a waiter the wire from the cork and poured the champagne, they drank and

D 35
D 25
A 56
A 57
A 35
D 47
D 2
D 14
A 27 (prefix)
A 42 D 34
D 41
D 20
D 32
D 37
D 36
D 51
A 33
A 41
A 30 A 19
D 3
D 49
A 9
D 52 (cont.)
A 50 A 13
A 51
D 13
A 1 (prefix)
A 45 A 10
D 39
D 46
D 12
A 23 (abbr.)
A 52
A 29
A 2
D 30
A 40

in Jane's private office, his ready making it easy matter to convince her that was all right. But he was about to leave with a good order for booze they were startled by the hoarse cry of "....., there, hands up!" uttered by two thugs with drawn One of them commanded the to hand over his money, to which the cashier demurred, saying there wasn't any.

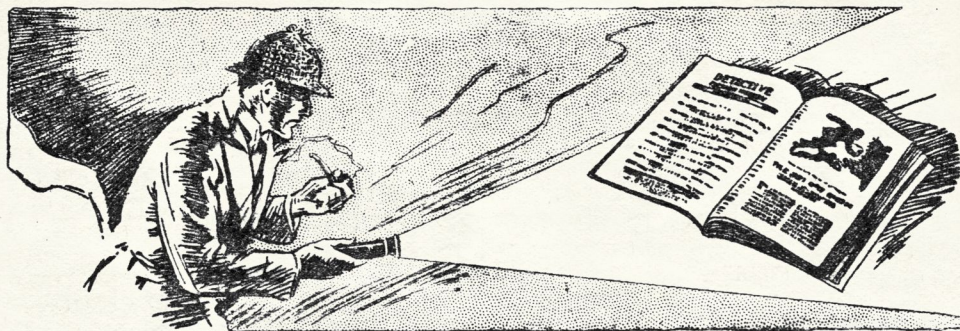
".....!" shouted the other bandit as he began to the man in the ribs with his fire..... And the thugs were right, for the safe yielded least a thousand dollars.

But were these bad men allowed toscond with this loot? No, sir. It happened that the bartender was too much for He sneaked out unobserved and called police headquarters, and before you could say a squad of cops surprised the bandits and took them into camp, but in the and cry and confusion Belcher escaped with a bottle of the "evidence" in his pocket and the long successful of Jane's place came to an end. She has had her, and has now gone to join the great army of beens.

A 44 D 53
A 46
A 15
D 43
D 8
D 1
A 31
A 24
D 15
A 48
A 54 (prefix)
A 11
D 5
D 55
A 16
A 21
D 6
A 26

ANSWER TO LAST WEEK'S PUZZLE

D	A	W	N		H	I	S		A	G	O	G
E	R	E			M	O	N	E	Y		O	U
S	E	N	T		W	E	E		D	A	T	E
P					T	H	O		X		F	I
I	S				E	L	A	P	S	E	D	
T	A	P			D	R	E	A	D		A	P
E	V	E	R		T	R	Y		O	D	O	R
					E	N			H		I	
I	D				L	I	V	E	R	E	D	
R					M				M	I	N	
I	D	E	A		A	C	T		P	A	R	T
S	U	N			G				E	A		
H	E				B	O	L	D	E	S	T	



FLASHES FROM READERS

*Where Readers and Editor Get Together to Gossip
and Argue, and Everyone Speaks Up His Mind*

STOOKIE ALLEN, who draws "Illustrated Crimes" for DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, stands at least six feet three in his stocking feet. He is undoubtedly one of the largest artists on record. And his life has been an adventurous and rough one. Here is his story:

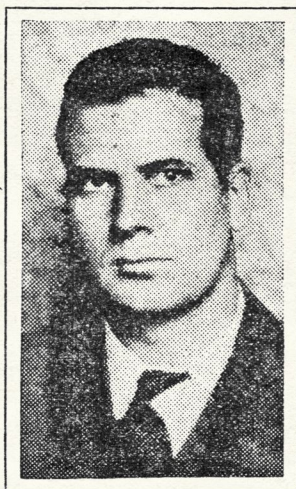
I was born in Brandon, Texas, of these here United States, a town about as big as the back end of a bowling alley. I was moved to Corsicana so that I could attend the public schools in that rip-roaring oil town. In case anyone hasn't heard, Corsicana is the second oil town in the U. S. Oil City, Pennsylvania, was the first. After many happy hours in the public schools, where I spent most of my time drawing funny pictures instead of studying, I journeyed down to Austin, Texas, to attend the University of Texas.

I was always crazy about sports and

spent most of my time in the University out for some team or another, and did practically no studying. Made trips to California, Mexico, and New York while I was in school, and also

took frequent trips on oil tankers. When my four years were up I decided to see a little of the country, and for two years was a tramp. Rode the blinds of the best passenger trains all over the South so many times I can't recall them. Have been chased by the cops through most of the big towns of the South and West. Ended up at Amarillo, Texas, working for the Marland Oil Company as an oil scout.

After a year of this a slump hit the oil business because of overproduction and the field closed down. Out of a job, I decided to play a little professional baseball for a living and grabbed the blinds of the Sunshine Special for St. Louis to see Branch Rickey about becoming one of



STOOKIE ALLEN

his hirelings. Mr. Rickey had wanted to give me a contract when I was in school, but I had strained my back and lumbago set in and he was afraid to take a chance on me.

In St. Louis he examined me carefully and then sent me back down to Jackson, Mississippi, of the Cotton States League. Jackson was in the thick of a pennant race and needed pitchers. Three days after arriving there I had ruined my arm because I tried to pitch before I was in shape. I moved over into Louisiana and got a job with the Standard Oil Company on a Seismograph crew. Our job was to row around in the flooded swamps and look for gas bubbles coming up in the water. If we found any a charge of dynamite was set off and we caught the vibrations on the instrument.

When this job played out I moved over to Natchez where a pipe line was being laid across the river from floats and tugs. This lasted all one summer. I then caught a freighter for New York, and was all set to leave for South America to go to work for the Lago Petroleum Company, but I happened to run across another job drawing animated movies, and took it instead. After about nine months of drawing cats and dogs for the screen I heard that United Press needed a sports cartoonist and applied and got the job. And now I'm doing "Illustrated Crimes" for DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY.

SWELL MATERIAL

DEAR EDITOR:

Please let me give you a plug for your magazine that is a plug. I have been reading them all and I should be in the good old position to know.

For the last five years I have been a watchman and if you know watchmen you must know that they have a lot of time on their hands. Detective magazines are my big failing and I read

every one I can get my hands on. Yours easily leads them all and costs not nearly as much as most of them.

The serials you have run written by Fred MacIsaac and the stories by J. Allan Dunn cannot be matched in any other magazine. Please keep them with you. I have taken two courses in writing myself and read these two boys religiously as examples of swell material. I also enjoyed T. T. Flynn's mystery story of not so long ago. It was a bit different.

Before I close I don't want to forget the Illustrated Crimes series. It is the first thing I turn to each week.

Sincerely,

F. L. PATTY,
Louisville, Ky.

ILLUSTRATED CRIMES

GENTLEMEN:

Give us more of Fred MacIsaac's stories. I read his work in every magazine I can find. I like the Illustrated Crimes, the short true stories by Stookie Allen.

I am going to try to get an artist's illustration from you soon. My cousin has one now. Good luck to the best detective magazine on the stands.

Yours truly,

ROBERT WILKES,
Tulsa, Okla.

"HERE'S MY VOTE"

Editor,

DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY,
280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:

1.....

2.....

3.....

4.....

5.....

Name.....

Street.....

City.....State.....

Fill out coupons from 10 consecutive issues and get a large DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY drawing.

This coupon not good after January 7, 1933

10-8

SOLVING CIPHER SECRETS

A cipher is secret writing. The way to solve ciphers is to experiment with substitute letters until real words begin to appear. In solving, notice the frequency of certain letters. For instance, the letters e, t, a, o, n, i, are the most used in our language. So if the puzzle maker has



M. E. OHAVER

used x to represent e, x will probably appear very frequently. Combinations of letters will also give you clues. For instance, affixes -ing, -ion, -ally are frequent. Read the helpful hints at the beginning of this department each week. The first puzzle each week is the easiest.

THE message conveyed by this week's Inner Circle cipher, by Bert Pinkston, is based on a news article published in a recent "Extra" edition of Bert's local newspaper, the Lubbock (Texas) *Morning Avalanche*. But with true cryptographer's instinct, our contributor has expressed the story in five 10-letter words and ten 5-letter words! A solution will be given here next week.

Last week's No. 239, by Ollie, notwithstanding its unfamiliar terms, provided a choice of modes of entry. For example, the distinctive pattern of AVNSSNUJ, noting the frequency and finality of symbol A, the ending -NUJ suggestive as *-ing* from its use after a double, and with S evidently a high-frequency consonant, would speedily yield *emitting*.

Again, a word of the pattern of SRJASEAO is always worth trying as *together*. Failing to realize on these points of attack, however, recourse could still be had to the endings -NUJ and -CUS and the 3-letter word CUL. Duly noting frequencies, positions, etc., these would readily identify themselves as *-ing*, *-ant*, and *and*, checking with LNU (*din*).

Upon substituting the letters thus

obtained, SRJASEAO MNSE (*t-g-t-- -it-*) could be completed as *together with*. ROHEATSOC (*or-he-tra*) and LNTTHROLCUS (*di-ordant*), both with the same two letters missing, would be next, obviously *orchestra* and *discordant*; and so on. The group TCHBXGS (*sackbut*), with symbol B unkeyed, could be left until last.

Low-frequency symbols could also have been utilized here by the solver. Symbol Y, for example, used twice and only as an initial, could by trial have been placed as *f*, especially upon considering word 16. Likewise, twice-used symbol I, once as second letter and once as antepenultimate, could have been spotted as *y* by the alert fan. The answer is given on page 143.

In the first of this week's puzzles, Donald Messenger's letter division, the values of four of the symbols, B, H, L, and O, may be readily found. Thus the second subtraction shows the value of B; and so on. But from here on the clues are not so obvious! A 10-letter keyphrase has been used, representing the ten digits from 0 up to 9, in regular order.

The pattern of BJCB and the use of KT between the last two words of

a series separated by commas will lead to CGBJKLMJ in May R. Petri's cryptogram. Follow up with SK and JCQR JCS, and then words 14 and 17. Comparison of AE and the endings -AEF and -APE is suggested in the next crypt, by Dr. G. Kiln, NPN-FAEF, with only symbol N unknown, will then drop into place.

In Mrs. B. Falkon's contribution the attack may be directed at the phrase UXXG-XBWXB UGVCX, having first identified the two-letter word VG and the ending of word 9. Beeswax provides entry to his crypt through the twice-used ending -QUP, which should give you a lift with *TCJSQUQ (the asterisk indicates a proper name). Also note the suggestive pattern of word 9.

No. 240—Cryptic Division. By Donald Messenger.

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S S S S ) C E K E S A R A ( K K K K
          C H H H A
          -----
          C E K O A
          C H H H A
          -----
          C E L B R
          C H H H A
          -----
          C H H H A
          C H H H A
          -----

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No. 241—No More, No Less. By May R. Petri.

ABCBADBEDDCFA EGCDH BJCB CGB-
JKLMJ HCFN OKGPA JCQR JCS
AEJKKGDFM, CGCTHDFMGN ORU ECF
SK CSSDBDKFA, ALVBTCEBDKFA, KT
SDQDADKFA.

No. 242—Fast Workers. By Dr. G. Kiln.

MONODYBATED DWAGGON AE TUPA-
NAEF RPPGADAPE HAYL BORWGOD-
DGS NBAUOE TXYPD ITS OUOEYXTGGS
CORPIO OJMOBY TY NPNFAEF CXG-
GOYD TEN KPBWON GAFLYEAFF.

No. 243—South Sea Perils. By Mrs. B. Falkon.

HXZIF BVKXI, VG YFPJYDXQ SC

SYJSHPO, YPJQ ZOZN YFVGWVGW
JXGJZYFXQ OVJD UXXG-XBWXB UG-
VCX! EPQJ IXZYDXQ ASZJ ODXG
QDZIUQ ZHHXZI SG QPICZYX SC
OZJXI! QYIZTAFXQ ZASZIB!

No. 244—Deceiving Eyes. By Beeswax.

*TCJSQUQ DNFZCFBNS BWFXNACJE
ZNWOE, WEOCUQETQUP PWOTNFNS
BJAQOJSNE GWORTQUP WDDWFNU-
OAH QBDCEEQKAN OFQRME NWEQAH
WRRCBDAQETNS.

No. 245—Extra! By Bert Pinkston.

MOHAVERDFW KPZDXEFWOB YOWJS
XHNEW UHCWB, BCLNWOFEZR MOH-
BJWZECX. KEJSB RCDOK BXHVKW-
OEZR OCEZB YUEVW ZHEBP AHVSB
YDFJU.

LAST WEEK'S ANSWERS

234—ONE: deep blur in each. TWO: beer held in a cup. THREE: undecipherable. FOUR: cheer up, Belinda!

235—"The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog" is a good sentence for type-writer practice. It uses every letter of the alphabet at least once. Check it!

236—Many cryptogram constructors use terms without regard as to whether or not they are permissible. Consequently confusion often results.

237—Foreign embassy reports sending cruiser to Salvador. Martial law invoked throughout republic. Incipient revolution quashed. Four leaders jailed.

238—William winds Waltham watch. George gazes, grinning gaily. Stem snaps, spewing springs. Will's watch sprung apart!

239—Orchestra comprising sackbut, viol, dulcimer, shawm, timbrel, taboret, together with cymbals and drum, played futuristic fugue, emitting discordant din.

Send us your answers to any of this week's puzzles and your name will be entered in our October Cipher Solvers' Club, to be published in an early issue! Answers will appear next week!

COMING NEXT WEEK!

THREE GREAT NOVELETTES

Crime Lust

By Judson P. Philips

MEN worshiped at the shrine of Ivy Trask. They dreamed of her pale, golden beauty. They thought of her slender, ivory hands, and the Madonna-like blue eyes. She was the loveliest woman on the New York stage.

But behind the gorgeous, compelling beauty of Ivy Trask crouched the soul of a vulture, predatory, evil, ruthless. She lusted for crime . . . Here is a different story. Don't miss it!

John Smith, Esquire

By H. Bedford-Jones

THE newspapers dubbed him the "Tuxedo bandit." He was suave and brazen, and played a lone hand. And when he did a job he always left behind a card reading: "John Smith, Esquire." There were thousands of John Smiths, Esquire, in the city, but there was only one John Herbert Aldington Smith, III, and it was he who was the most interested in plain John Smith, Esquire. Why, you'll never guess! It's a highly entertaining and dramatic novelette.

Piracy de Luxe

By Robert Pinkerton

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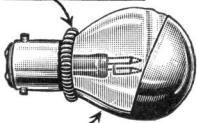
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17	1408	29	1053	41	709
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20	1316	32	971	44	633
21	1299	33	935	45	606
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