FRED MACISAAC'S *Latest* NOVEL

DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY

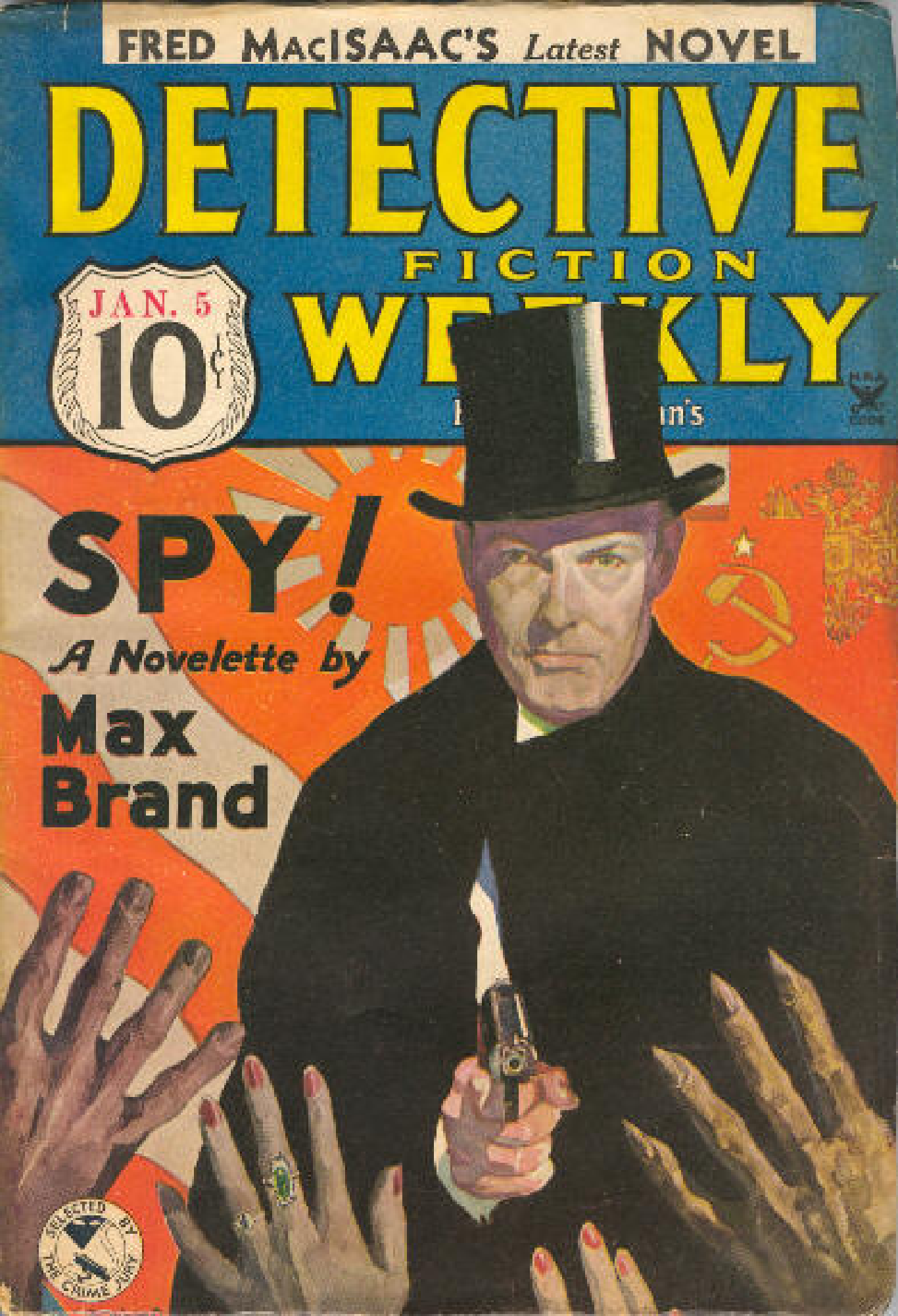
JAN. 5

10¢

SPY!

A Novelette by

Max Brand



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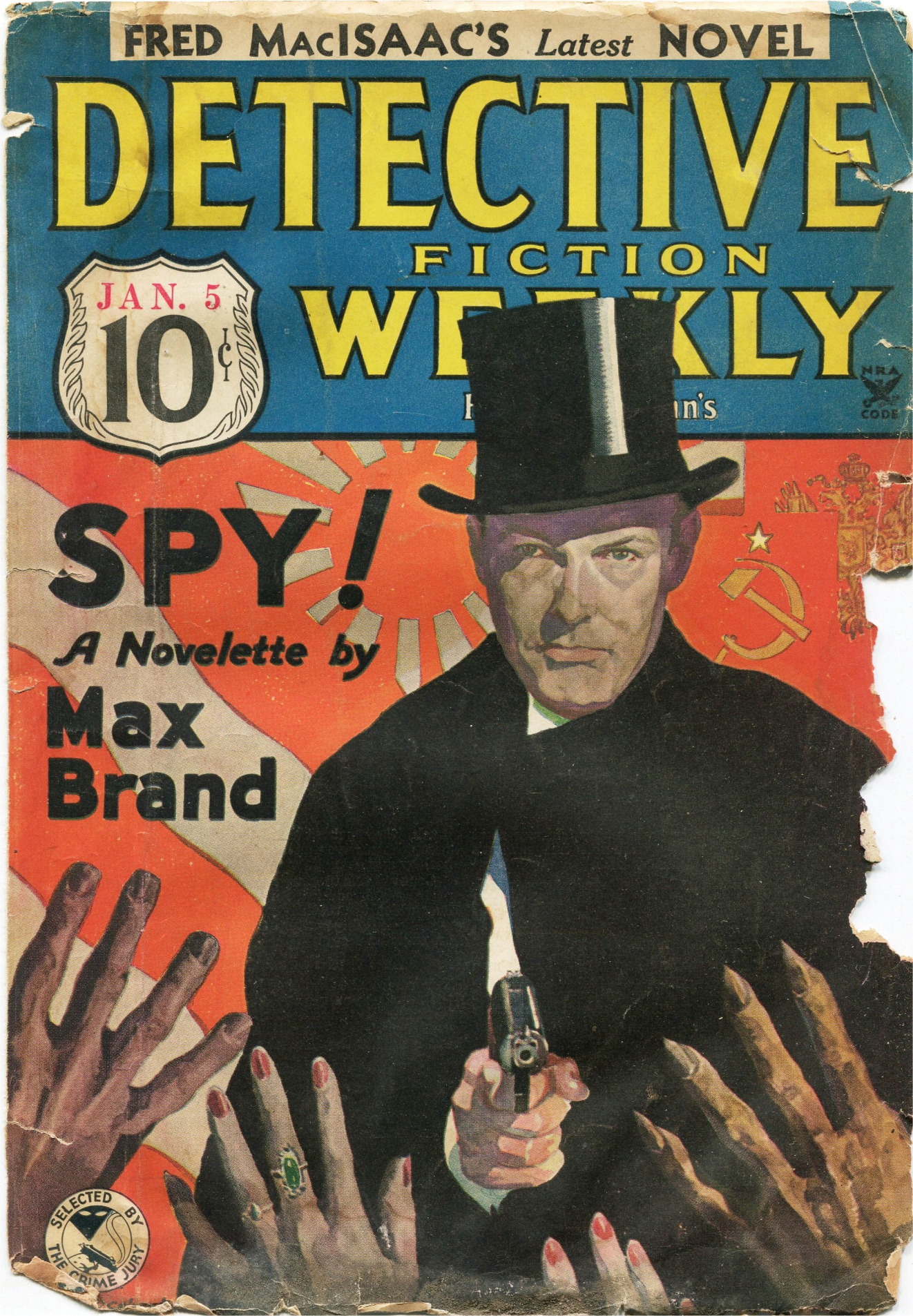

SELECTED BY THE CRIME JURY

"MONEY TO BURN"... yet he uses this 25¢ Tooth Paste... WHY?

YOU'D be surprised what sharp buyers most wealthy men are—even in little things. That's one of the secrets of their wealth.

Hundreds of the nation's tycoons last season took their ease at Palm Beach, Miami, Nassau, and other millionaires' playgrounds. Their yachts, their horses, their cars, their planes were a brilliant part of the parade of wealth and society.

It was amazing to find how many of such men—and their wives—used Listerine Tooth Paste. Why, with money to burn did they choose this 25¢ dentifrice? Only one answer to that! Results—quick, clean-cut, undeniable.

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Listerine Tooth Paste cleanses teeth better than ordinary pastes containing slippery ingredients, says a great dental authority. That is because its cleansing agents come in *direct contact* with decaying matter on teeth. With the aid of the tooth brush, they get at hard-to-reach crevices and sweep destructive matter away. The teeth are left healthy and shining.

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You can feel the difference Direct Cleansing makes, the moment you use Listerine Tooth Paste. Your teeth actually feel cleaner when you run your tongue over them. Try it yourself and see. And your mirror tells you that they *look* cleaner within a few days.

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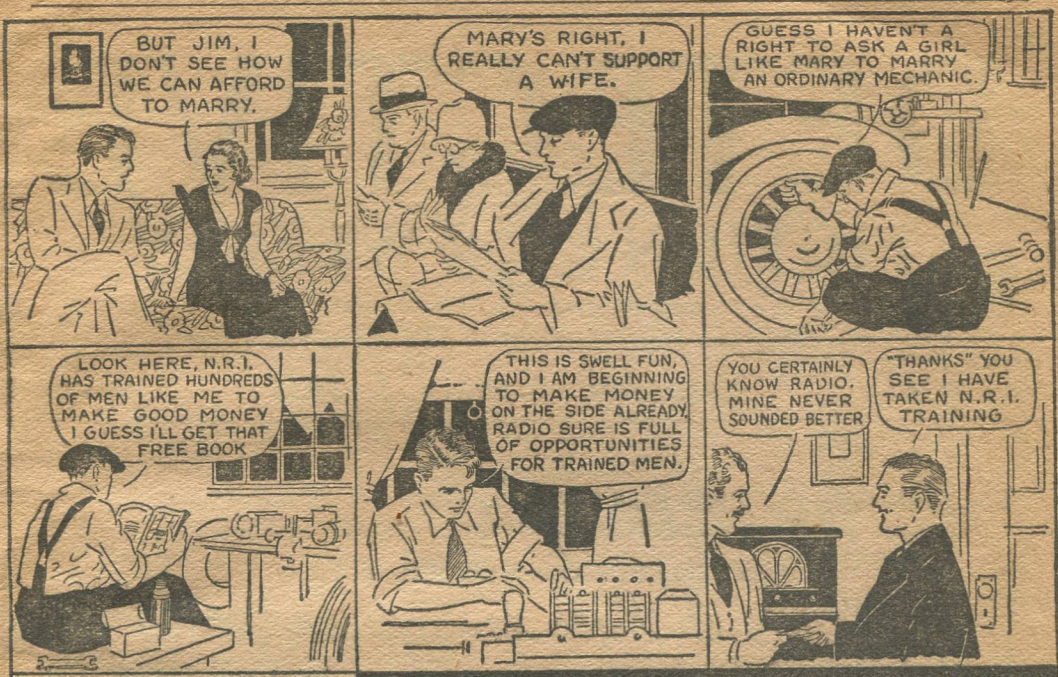
Why not give Listerine Tooth Paste a trial? Make it prove its results to you. In every way this modern tooth paste is worthy of the quality name it bears. Lambert Pharmacal Co., St. Louis, Mo.

LISTERINE TOOTH PASTE • 25¢



I'LL TRAIN YOU AT HOME
In Your Spare Time For A GOOD RADIO JOB

J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute

The man who has directed the Home-Study Training of more men for the Radio industry than any other man in America.

Mail the coupon now. Get the facts about Radio—the field with a future. N. R. I. training fits you for jobs in connection with the manufacture, sale and operation of Radio equipment. It fits you to go in business for yourself, service sets, operate on board ships, in broadcasting, television, aviation, police Radio and many other jobs. My FREE book tells how you quickly learn at home in spare time to be a Radio Expert.

Many Radio Experts Make $40, $60, $75 a Week

Why struggle along in a dull job with low pay and no future? Start training now for the live-wire Radio field. I have doubled and tripled salaries. Hundreds of successful men now in Radio got their start through N. R. I. training.

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Hold your job. I'll not only train you in a few hours of your spare time a week, but the day you enroll I'll send you instructions, which you should master quickly, for doing 28 Radio jobs common in most every neighborhood. I give you Radio Equipment for conducting experiments and making tests that teach you to build and service practically every type of receiving set made. Cleo T. Retter, 30 W. Beechwood Ave., Dayton, Ohio, wrote: "Working only in spare time, I made about $1,500 while taking the Course."

Find Out What Radio Offers

My book has shown hundreds of fellows how to make more money and win success. It's FREE to any ambitious fellow over 15 years of age. Investigate. Find out what Radio offers you. Read what my Employment Department does to help you get into Radio after graduation, about my Money Back Agreement, and the many other N. R. I. features. Mail the coupon in an envelope, or paste it on a 1c. post card TODAY.

J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 5AK
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

HERE'S PROOF that my training pays

With R. C. A. Victor
"I am with R. C. A. Victor. I have been promoted several times. Am in full charge of Radio Frequency Testing Dept." Louis F. Lyet, 17th & Tioga Sts., Kenderton Apts., Philadelphia, Pa.

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"Since 1929 I have earned my living in Radio. I owe my last three jobs to N. R. I. I am now in the main control room of one of the large broadcasting chains." Serge A. De Somov, 1516 Library Ave., New York City.

MAIL THIS NOW

J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 5AK
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Smith: Without obligating me, send your book which points out the spare time and full time job opportunities in Radio and your 50-50 method of training men at home in spare time to become Radio Experts.
(Please print plainly)

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In answering this advertisement it is desirable that you mention this magazine.

DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY

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TITLE REGISTERED U. S. PATENT OFFICE

"The Magazine With the Detective Shield on the Cover"

VOLUME XC — *Saturday, January 5, 1935* — NUMBER 3

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NOVELETTE AND SHORT STORIES

TRUE STORIES

FEATURES AND FACTS

This Magazine is on sale every Wednesday

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Classified Advertising

The MAN with

By Fred MacIsaac

"I was decoyed up to the seventeenth floor!" Bill shouted

Bill Anderson, the Cowboy Hotel Dick, Was on a Spot— a $500,000 Diamond Stomacher and an Unknown Blonde Had Made Him an Accessory to Murder!

CHAPTER I

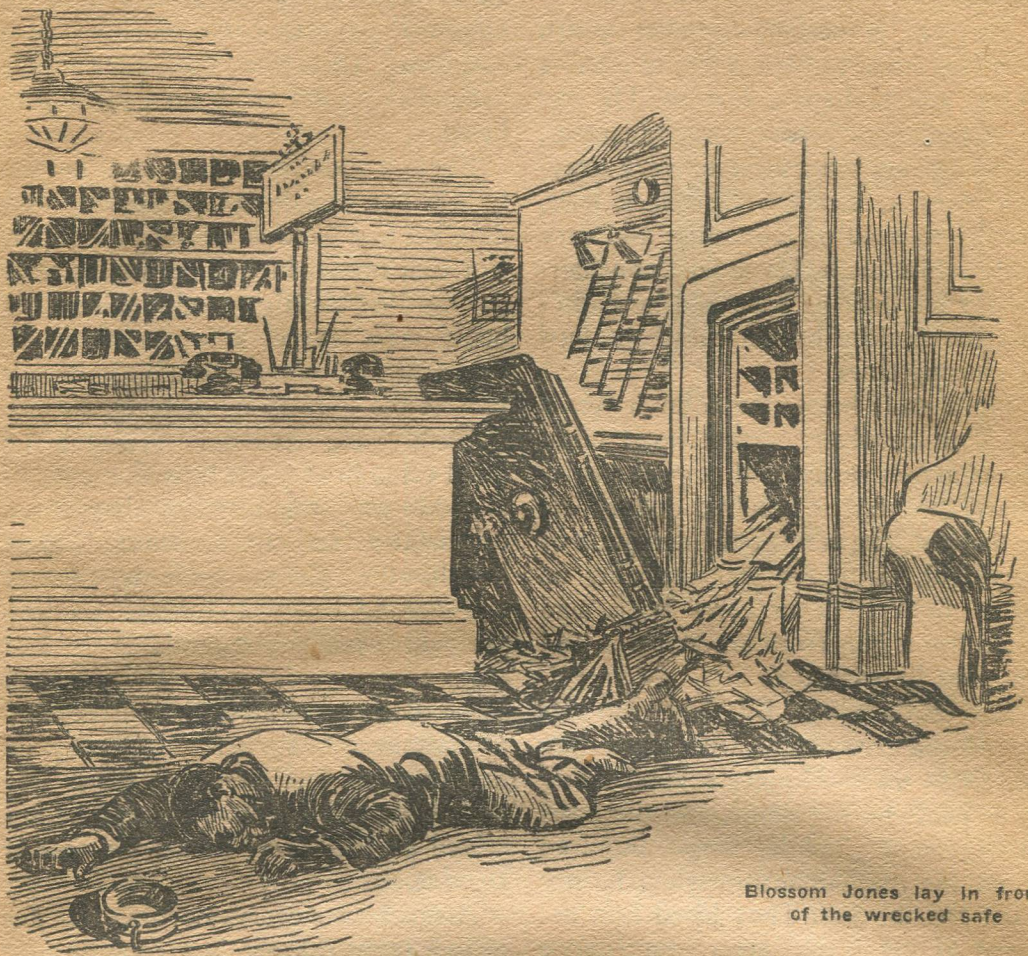
Woman Trouble

WILLIAM PELL ANDERSON entered the St. Christopher Hotel at 11.45 P.M., after attending a film at the Roxy and eating his dinner at a cafeteria on the corner of Sixth Avenue. He went into the locker room and hung up his hat and coat, and then relieved Hawk Hoban at the hotel desk.

Miss Jane Smith, the phone operator, went off duty at midnight with Hoban, and all Anderson had to do was to run the switchboard and the desk and boss Blossom Jones, the black bellboy and elevator operator, until eight in the morning. The job paid twenty dollars a week and threw in a small, hot room on a court on the eighteenth floor.

To William Pell Anderson it seemed like a good job. And it wasn't so bad for a young man of twenty-five who

the CLUB FOOT



Blossom Jones lay in front of the wrecked safe

had come to New York from a ranch in Arizona wearing a six-gallon hat and cowboy boots, and having only fifteen dollars in his wallet.

The St. Christopher was a tall hotel on a narrow lot between Sixth and Fifth Avenues in the Forties. It was nearer Sixth than Fifth. It was a class hotel, meaning that it did not cater to theatrical people. Not that actors were turned away, but it made no professional rate.

On the other hand, its rates were moderate, and the night clerk had instructions to admit anybody who was sober, looked respectable, and had baggage. It was a hotel referred to in sophisticated circles as a hide-away. Its lobby was too small to permit people to congregate. It drew neither from Park Avenue nor Broadway, so it didn't interest newspaper columnists.

Between twelve and two A.M. a good many guests came in from supper places, but after two the lobby suggested a country graveyard. Its lights

were dimmed, its switchboard rarely twinkled. Bill Anderson sat where he could watch both the front door and the switchboard, and read improving books.

He was a serious-minded youth who had come to New York to make a living, and perhaps a fortune. He was a young man with heavy features, bushy black eyebrows over very gray-blue eyes, a shock of jet-black hair, usually in need of trimming, and very even, white teeth. He looked considerably older than he was, and he hadn't lost the healthy brown color obtained by chasing cows.

On a shelf below the counter was a .45 Colt revolver. Most hotel night clerks are entrusted with a gun to safeguard the fifty or hundred dollars left in the cash drawer for the demands of the night, but there was probably no other night clerk in New York who could fire a gun from any position and hit what he wished to hit.

Out on the range, Bill Anderson was considered remarkable with a six-gun, but there was no longer a good living to be made on the range, and the hotel management hadn't even inquired about his marksmanship when he applied for the job. They hired him because of his frank, open countenance and his willingness to accept twenty dollars a week with gratitude.

For six months Bill had held down the night watch at the St. Christopher, and nothing in the least interesting had happened. During that period he had read about three hundred and fifty books from circulating libraries, averaging two books a night, and obtained a wide knowledge of the crime and vice which prevailed in New York without personally encountering any of it.

He slept until four or five in the afternoon. He breakfasted when other people were having dinner, he attended motion pictures in the early evening, learning almost incredible things about the behavior of society and the habits of gangsters. He was alert and suspicious, therefore; but saw nothing around the hotel to awaken his apprehension.

For six months he had been entirely without female companionship and didn't know he was missing anything. For that matter he had been without it for most of his life; good-looking girls being very scarce, Western novels to the contrary notwithstanding, in the part of the country he came from.

Such young women as resided in the hotel came in at night heavily escorted, and he was asleep when they came downstairs in the morning. Miss Smith, the phone operator, wasn't bad-looking, but when he came on duty she was usually tired and cross and eager to escape from the switchboard, so he didn't have more than a "hello" acquaintance with her. Anyway he had no money to spend on girls. He had to attend to his job, and he received all the entertainment he needed from books.

Around two every morning the detective from the precinct came in and looked over the registration cards. Occasionally he slipped Bill a police circular which had pictures of male and female criminals on it. If Bill recognized any of these criminals it was his duty to call the police at once, but wanted persons apparently gave the Christopher a wide berth.

As a matter of fact he was a reasonably contented young man. Not having a trade or profession, and having a rather sketchy education, he didn't have thwarted ambitions. He figured that if he made good on his job in the

hotel he'd get promoted, maybe learn all about the hotel business, and become a manager some day.

ONE night at the St. Christopher was just like another. William Pell Anderson, aside from his colorful life on the range, and his rugged attractiveness and his sterling honesty and his almost bovine contentedness with a punk job, was pretty much like night clerks in scores of other sidestreet hotels in New York.

He had no means of knowing that the placidity of his life was about to be disturbed; that he was about to become the center of turmoil and excitement and that peril would come upon him. From England a great liner was bringing people who would have an influence upon his career. From Brazil a steamer was transporting a weird human being who would menace him. He was about to be shocked out of his indifference to the female sex.

If Bill had been the dull fellow the comparatively few guests of the St. Christopher who had come into contact with him supposed, if he hadn't possessed unexpected qualities of shrewdness, daring and charm, this tale of what happened to him would not be written. And if circumstances hadn't forced William Pell Anderson to deviate from the direct lawful path which he normally would have followed there wouldn't be any story at all.

This particular night started like every other night. It grew still as death after two. The police detective dropped in and departed. A few people rang for ice water, and by three o'clock everything seemed to have settled for the night.

At three-thirty, however, a young woman came in alone. She was blond and very pretty, and wore a black velvet wrap over a pink evening dress. She looked kind of fluttery, he thought, as she approached the desk.

"Give me a room, please, with bath."

"Yes, marm. Certainly, marm. You've baggage, of course?"

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "You're from the West!" She smiled at him eagerly.

BILL ANDERSON

"That's right," he said, grinning with pleasure. "How did you know?"

"By your speech, of course. I used to live in Yuma, Arizona."

"Think of that, now. Arizona's my state."

"How interesting! Do I sign here?"

"Yes, marm. How about your baggage?"

She lifted her eyebrows. "Oh, that? I missed my train—to Westchester. I've been to the theater and supper and lost my party. Naturally I have no luggage."

"Then I'm sorry, marm, but I can't assign you a room. It's a rule."

She leaned over the counter and smiled at him beseechingly.

"But what shall I do? I've been turned away from three hotels."

"Haven't you any friends you can go to?"

"Nobody that I dare wake up at this hour."

"Now that's too bad. I'm awful sorry."

She clasped her hands together. "But I'm afraid," she said tremulously. "I can't walk the streets all night. Men speak to me and follow me. That's why I ran in here."

She was a girl with fine straight features and fine teeth and obviously refined. Bill was distressed. No such situation as this had yet confronted him.

"You could sit in the lobby, here," he suggested.

Tears came into the girl's eyes. Great tears which oozed over her long golden lashes and streamed down her cheeks.

"But I'm so tired," she pleaded. "I want to go to bed. Couldn't you sort of suspend the rules just this once?"

"I'd lose my job. They're awfully strict. I—I suppose you can pay for a room?"

"But I can't until I call somebody up in the morning. You see—I sort of quarreled with the man I was with. I ran out on him. I didn't have any money with me. I could give you this ring. It's worth lots."

She pulled a solitaire diamond in a platinum setting from her finger.

"NO, no, keep it," he implored. "Look. I've an idea. I've a room. You needn't register. You can go up there, but you have to go out before eight in the morning. That's when I get off duty, and the day clerk would ask questions. The bellboy's a friend of mine and he'll keep quiet."

"I hate to take your room," she said dubiously.

"I won't be using it. You can bolt the door on the inside."

"Eight o'clock is so early," she protested. "You can't make it nine?"

"I'll call you at a quarter of eight," he said firmly. "Here, Blossom. Show this lady up to 1817."

"I appreciate what you're doing very much," she said gratefully.

"That's all right. I couldn't turn a lady like you out into the streets."

After the bellboy had conducted her up in the elevator Bill sat down, but he couldn't get interested in his book again. He kept thinking how pretty she was, and wondering why she had quarreled with her friend. Probably it was her fiancé, judging by the diamond ring. Anyway she was a lady and came from his country, so what the heck.

Blossom Jones, who was an incredibly thin darky with one front tooth missing on account of an argument in a crap game, came down after a while.

"Say, Mr. Bill," he said. "Youse taking an awful chance."

"Shucks, she'll be out before anybody's around. Blossom, I've covered for you plenty, eh?"

"Oh, I ain't sayin' nothing, Bill!" exclaimed the bellboy. "Wild horses couldn't make me say nothin'."

Blossom, as a matter of fact, admired the night clerk inordinately, not because he was his superior officer, but because Bill had been a cowboy out West and occasionally regaled the darky and whiled away the interminable hours with tales of the range.

The night dragged along as usual and Bill began to worry about his job. Suppose a chambermaid saw an exquisitely beautiful woman coming out of the night clerk's room? He'd get fired sure.

It was cold and making light slowly,

the month being November, when he rang his room at 7.45. He had to ring three times before she answered.

"I do wish you had a bathroom," she complained sleepily. "I ought to have a bath to really wake up."

"You've got to hustle, lady," he said earnestly. "The chambermaids are due any minute."

"Oh, all right," she said petulantly, and hung up on him. He sent Blossom right up with the elevator and was tense until it came down with the fair passenger. She emerged, looking radiant, or so it seemed to him, and waved good-by to him as she passed. As she lifted her arm her cape fell back and he observed, to his concern, that the strap of her gown was broken. Her left shoulder and part of her left breast was bare, and there was a deep scratch about six inches long upon her white skin. She instantly readjusted her cape and passed out through the revolving door into the street.

It was four minutes of eight by the office clock. He beckoned to Blossom Jones. When the Negro stopped in front of the desk Bill lifted the revolver menacingly.

"I ain't shot anybody for ever so long," he stated. "But if you ever say a word about that lady being in the hotel you will have made your last remark, black boy."

Blossom, whose Western reading had informed him that cowboys killed men upon the slightest provocation, almost turned white.

"Fo' de Lawd, boss, I won't ever say nothin'," he promised. "Gawd strike me if I do."

Bill replaced the weapon. He breathed easily and realized that he was sleepy. He had violated about six rules in letting that young woman spend the night in the hotel without baggage and without registration and in an employee's room. And he had gotten away with it. A minute later the day clerk came in, a few minutes ahead of time for the first occasion in hotel history. Bill sucked in his breath. It had been a narrow escape.

He went upstairs. There was a dent in the middle of his bed where her slender form had reposed. He touched it and it was still warm. He remembered the shine of her yellow hair and the loveliness of her smile and the great gray eyes from which the tears had oozed. He undressed and laid down in the warm spot. There was a subtle aroma in the room—her perfume. Was it a wonder that William Pell Anderson could not sleep? For the first time in his life he had woman trouble.

CHAPTER II

A Man in Her Room

THERE was a small restaurant in the St. Christopher Hotel. Its ventilation was faulty, its waitresses slovenly and its coffee atrocious, but as there was nothing in particular which the cook could do to eggs, while ham may be fried by the worst amateur if it is laid in a pan with fire beneath it, Bill Anderson was accustomed to go there for breakfast. He was given a twenty-five percent discount on restaurant checks, which was an object.

About 4 P.M. he wandered in, seated himself in the vacant café and ordered ham, eggs and tea.

Just as the order was being served there came into the place Detective Sergeant McCaffery from the local precinct. Mr. McCaffery was a large man in every way. He had big shoulders and big hands and feet and a big belly and a large nose which was

shaped like the inverted prow of a boat. He had deep-set gray eyes, with no lashes, but he made up for the lack of lashes by bushy eyebrows.

During Bill's period of service at the hotel he had seen the sergeant several times, but they were not friendly. McCaffery looked like a person who

THE UNKNOWN BLONDE

couldn't be friendly. He had a cigar uptilted at the left corner of his mouth, and his gray felt hat was cocked on the side of his big head.

"How are yer?" he said gruffly, and to Bill's surprise he pulled out a chair at Bill's table and sat down heavily.

"On duty last night, wasn't you?" he asked in a peculiarly guttural and unpleasant tone.

"Yes."

"I'm lookin' for a dame," he said. "This dame was riding in a cab with a guy and stuck a stiletto into the back of his neck and he's one of the coldest stiffs in the morgue this minute."

"You don't say?"

"The hell I don't," said the sergeant indignantly. "Think I talk through my kelly? She hops out of the cab at a traffic signal somewhere along Sixth between Forty-Second and Fiftieth Streets, and she probably skidded into some dump like this."

Bill was silent and not particularly interested.

"The cabby says it was about three G.M. Did you get a gander at her?"

"No," said Bill.

"How do you know? I ain't described her. The cabby says she was young and blondined and wore a black coat or something."

"Nobody registered after midnight last night." Bill said this thickly, but McCaffery had decided to light his cigar and didn't observe that the clerk was agitated.

"Where's this smoke that keeps the night watch with you?"

"Asleep, I suppose."

"Well, don't wake him. There are about fifty of these warehouses in fifteen blocks and I got to make them all. So you ain't seen no moll answering to that description, eh?"

"No," said Steve firmly. "You mean the man was dead?"

"You cluck, don't you understand the English language? I said he was in the morgue. Name of J. Montague Forbish. He used to live at the Dante Club. Rich as mud. I suppose you sleep on duty most of the night?"

"I do not," said Bill heatedly.

"Well, you're a sap if you don't," replied McCaffery with what he flattered himself was a smile. "If it should turn out you lied about this, you go up for a stretch as an accessory after the fact. So long."

He rose and sauntered out, leaving behind him a young man in a horrible state of mind.

Mr. Anderson was on a spot. If he had confessed to admitting a young

woman answering vaguely to the description given by the officer he would have had to admit that he had let her in without baggage, without registering, and that she had slept in an employee's room. For admitting that he would lose his job.

By denying that she had been admitted, he had become an accessory after the fact in a murder case.

However, that was not the most potent of his reasons for lying to the police sergeant. He was confident that the young girl of the night before was not the blondined murderess, even if she wore a black coat or mantle or cape. This girl was pure and sweet and refined. True, she might have been forced to leave a cab, but it was in the interests of her honor. He had had a glimpse of a long scratch which indicated that there had been a struggle in the cab, but she was incapable of sticking a stiletto into her companion, and she was not in the least likely to have a stiletto.

This girl was a lady, not a moll. She must not be involved in an affair of this kind. Wild horses would not get an admission which might turn her over to the brutal Sergeant McCaffery. He had slept where she had slept, breathed her perfume, and he was her true knight.

Bill had a notion that if she had, in an agony of fear for herself, driven a sharp weapon into the neck of a drunken and dissolute companion, she would have been justified. But he was confident that she had not. No doubt there were lots of women who had left cabs and drunken companions on Sixth Avenue in the small hours, and there were millions of them who had blond hair and wore dark clothes. Anyway he wouldn't say a word to make trouble for her, and he would again put the fear of God in Blossom Jones.

AFTER breakfast Bill went out and bought the evening papers and read about the murder. It seemed that Forbish had been dancing with the blond young woman in the Robin Night Club and had been intoxicated when he departed with his companion. The waiters at the club declared that the girl had been unknown to them and the taximan said she was new to him. The victim had paid the bill from a fat wallet and the wallet was not upon his person when the police searched the body.

Half a dozen young women known to be night companions of Forbish were being questioned, and a dragnet was out for female criminals answering the taxidriver's description of the girl who had left the Robin Club with the fellow. There was a picture of Forbish, who was a rather good-looking man in his thirties.

While making a resolution that if he got out of this mess he would resist all female blandishments in the future, Bill went on duty that night as fully determined as before to keep his mouth shut about the girl. As usual, the clerk on duty and the phone operator vanished with a hasty good night. Blossom Jones was hanging about apprehensively and waiting to speak to Anderson as soon as he was alone.

"Did youse read about de murder, Mr. Anderson?" he demanded.

"Yes."

"I 'spects it was her, all right," said the darky.

"Did you talk to Sergeant McCaffery?"

"Yaas, suh. I tole him I ain't seen no such puhson."

Bill grinned wickedly. "Then you

can go on living," he conceded. "But if you open your mouth—"

"I tole you I ain't sayin' nothin', Mr. Anderson."

"This was an entirely different young lady."

"Yass, suh. It sho' was."

"Go to your bench and sit down."

After that Bill was busy for an hour. When things quieted down, he settled himself with a detective novel. It looked as though it were going to be an uneventful night at the St. Christopher Hotel. About 3 A.M., however, the light flashed on the switchboard below Corridor 17. Bill slipped into the operator's chair.

"This is Mrs. Gibson of room 1706," said an excited female voice. "There is a man in my room. He ran into a closet when I woke up. Help, quick!"

Bill called, "Coming!" He reached for his gun and vaulted over the desk.

"Watch things, Blossom," he cried to the half-somnolent Negro. "I'm going up to the seventeenth."

It was a slow-moving, old-fashioned elevator, but in a minute he stopped it at the seventeenth floor. The corridor phone was directly opposite the elevator, and there was a woman with gray hair standing beside it. She was tall and heavy and wore an orange bathrobe which went badly with her florid complexion. She was also much agitated.

"I'm the night clerk, marm," Bill informed her.

She handed him her key. "It's a wonder I wasn't murdered in my bed," she said shrilly. "I never got such a fright in my life."

"You actually saw a man go into your closet?"

"Just as I switched on the light. I'm a light sleeper and some slight noise woke me. I turned on the bed lamp and distinctly saw the closet door closing."

"You keep back. I'll go in first," he said as they moved swiftly down the long corridor. He inserted the key, thrust the door open and stepped back. The room was dark. Cautiously he thrust his hand inside and turned on the switch. He saw a rumpled bed and an empty room.

"He went into that closet next the bathroom door," she whispered. She was leaning against the wall at his left elbow.

"Stay outside," he said gruffly. He held his gun in his right hand. He took hold of the knob of the closet door with his left. Keeping back of the door, he pulled it open abruptly and called, "Come out. Got you covered."

THERE was no response and nobody came out. Bill crouched, thrust his head forward and peered into the closet, which was shallow and sufficiently lighted by the overhead room lamps. Nobody appeared to be in the closet.

He straightened up, stepped inside and verified the impression. It was empty.

He turned and grinned at the woman, who had stepped inside the room.

"Reckon you had a nightmare, marm," he remarked.

"I tell you I saw him go in there."

"Then he got away."

Bill proceeded to look into the bathroom, and then he looked out one of the windows. The fire escape was at the end of the hall and there was a hundred and eighty foot drop from both windows of the chamber.

"If he ever was here, he got away," he remarked.

This was a signal for a tirade from

the lady, who demanded to know how he dared to doubt her word. Endeavoring to soothe her, he drew upon himself a storm of abuse in a rising tone which indicated that hysterics were approaching.

"I'll call a doctor, marm," he said nervously. "You're all upset."

Immediately the woman calmed down. She dropped into a chair, said she felt faint and asked him to fetch her smelling salts from the drawer of the night table. After fumbling around and locating the bottle he brought it to her. She smiled up at him.

"Thanks so much," she said. "I'm a lone woman and nervous and easily frightened, I suppose, but it was not a nightmare. I think I need some brandy. It's in the lower drawer of my bureau. Get it please."

He poured her a drink of brandy, which she sipped. She invited him to join her.

"I don't drink, marm."

"How strange to find a young man who doesn't drink! By your voice you are from the West."

"Yes, marm. Arizona."

"Really? I spent two whole seasons in Tucson. There are lovely hotels there, and the climate is salubrious."

As she seemed fully restored Bill said good night, but immediately she became alarmed.

"Oh, please don't go yet! Suppose he should return."

"If you'll bolt your door on the inside, marm, there is no possible way he can get in."

"I suppose you are right, only I can't be left alone yet."

"Let me wake the house physician."

"No, no, I'll be all right in a minute. It was a frightful shock, you know."

"I'm supposed to be on duty downstairs. I've been away twenty minutes. Really I can't stay, marm."

"Then send up the house detective."

"He's not on duty tonight," Bill said with embarrassment. The truth was that the St. Christopher had been without a house detective for months, as poor business had caused the staff to be slashed to the bone.

She made no further effort to detain him, and he heard her bolt being shot after he made his exit. He walked down the corridor to the elevator and started down to the lobby.

It wasn't the first time that Bill had been forced to ascend to soothe nervous, elderly women. This was just another case of hallucination. He hadn't expected to find a man in her room, and the man wasn't there because he had never been there.

He stopped at the lobby floor, opened the door, stepped out—and stood rooted to the floor with horror.

Blossom Jones lay in the middle of the lobby with a wicked gash on the top of his head. The office safe was open—no, the door was gone. The interior of the safe was a wreck.

With an oath Bill rushed out of the hotel into the street and gazed up and down. It was deserted. There wasn't even a taxi parked outside, for experience had taught the drivers that there was no late business from the St. Christopher. The robbers had come and gone.

He returned, shaking with excitement, into the lobby and crossed to the desk. The safe door had fallen against the edge of the desk. It had been blown from its hinges. All the compartment doors had been forced and were wide open. Such contents of the safe as had not been carried off lay in a pile on the floor.

There was a phone light from a

room on the fourth floor. Mechanically he answered it. A man wanted ice water.

"Coming," said the clerk, and then called the police station.

"Safe robbery at the Hotel St. Christopher," he reported. "Robbers escaped."

"What did they get?" demanded the police desk man.

"Everything, I reckon. Hurry up."

"Okay."

CHAPTER III

Lost Lady

ALL this had occurred in less than a minute. Then Bill was bending over Blossom Jones. The boy's heart was beating, but he did not regain consciousness as the night clerk lifted him and carried him to a big leather couch. There was nothing he could do for him. By heck, he should have phoned for an ambulance! He rushed back to the switchboard and put in the call. Then he phoned the room of the manager, woke him and told him what had happened.

"Be right down," said the still drowsy manager. "Stay on the job."

A ridiculous order, since Bill had no intention of not staying on the job. He gazed ruefully at the ruined safe and then there flashed upon him something he should have thought of immediately.

Mrs. Gibson's summons had been a ruse to get him to the top of the building and hold him there long enough to permit the robbers to do their job. He glanced at his watch. He had noted the time he left the lobby—3.16. It was now 3.36. He had been gone nearly twenty minutes.

The safe was nothing but an old iron box—imposing, glittering, with an elaborate combination layout, but old-fashioned and a cinch for safe burglars. All they had needed was a few minutes of uninterrupted work.

The thing to do was to nab Mrs. Gibson. But he had been told to stay at his desk. While he hesitated, a matter of a few seconds, two officers, a sergeant and patrolman, both unknown to him, came into the lobby.

Bill advanced to meet them.

The sergeant drew a notebook and pencil.

"Who are you?" he demanded sharply.

"The night clerk. Quick, officers! I was decoyed to the seventeenth floor by a Mrs. Gibson, who claimed there was a man in her room. She kept me up there nearly twenty minutes, which gave the robbers time to blow up the safe. She must be in league with them."

"Mulligan, go up and get her," said the sergeant to the patrolman.

"I can't run an elevator, Sarge."

"Where's the elevator man?"

Bill pointed to the sofa. "He was knocked out. I'll go up with the officer."

"Go ahead. Yank the dame down here pronto."

A couple of minutes later they were knocking on the door of the room. There was no answer. Although he knew the door had been bolted on the inside, he tried his pass-key and to his astonishment, the door swung open. The light was on, but the room was vacant. He rushed to the bathroom and looked in the closet. Empty, of course, as might have been expected. He pulled open the bureau drawers. The contents were gone.

"Don't waste your time, buddy," said the patrolman, smiling broadly. "She skipped, of course."

"But she didn't go through the lobby."

"What's the matter with the service entrance and the roof and the fire escape?"

"They're locked, except the fire escape. She was a heavy, middle-aged woman. She wouldn't dare go down the fire escape. Besides, her luggage?"

Mulligan phoned down to the sergeant, who sent officers who had arrived in a second car to watch the exit from the fire escape, an old-fashioned outdoor device.

Mr. Stacey Steuben, the manager, was in the lobby when Anderson returned with the uniformed officer. The sergeant, who had been questioning Mr. Steuben and making notes, closed his book.

"She scrammed, eh?" he sneered. "You boob, she took it on the run the instant you left her room. What business did you have leaving your post like that? Where was the house dick?"

"Ahem," coughed Mr. Steuben, who was a tall, pale man with nose glasses and thin, sandy hair. "At the moment we have no night detective, but the clerks have orders to turn such cases over to the night watchman."

"Sure. Why not send up the night watchman?"

"He was making his rounds. Try to find him," retorted Bill heatedly.

"You should have sent the elevator man up to find him. You had no business leaving your post," declared the hotel manager sternly. Bill stared hard at him, and his pale eyes shifted.

"You told me yourself, not four weeks ago, to pacify a guest in a case like this," said Anderson with spirit. "This woman was screaming her head off in the corridor. It might have been fifteen minutes before the watchman got to her. I was obeying orders, Mr. Steuben, and you know it."

Stacey squared his thin shoulders and lifted his chin. "You're lying and you're discharged," he snapped. "And I'm not so sure you were not in on this."

Anderson's temper flamed. He lifted his fist. "Try to pin it on me, will you?" he shouted. Steuben stepped hastily behind the sergeant.

That officer grinned. "I take it, mister," he said, "that the night watch in this joint is the night clerk, one bellboy and a watchman. Right?"

"Well—ah—temporarily."

The sergeant laughed coarsely.

"Temporarily!" he jeered. "Say, there's scores of shabby genteel joints like this getting by with nobody on guard, and people sleeping upstairs thinking they're protected. The bellboy brings up ice water. The clerk goes up to settle arguments—and anybody could walk in here with a can opener and take the lid off that cracker box you call a safe."

"The safe has been robbed. Why don't you pursue the robbers?" exclaimed the manager, whose face was red.

"That'll be attended to. Any notion what was in the safe?"

"About five hundred in cash and a hundred deposit envelopes. Only the guests who deposited them know the contents. Our responsibility is limited, of course."

"Oh, sure. Got a record of the guests who have deposited envelopes?"

"Yes, indeed. We have a ledger with names and numbers on the envelopes."

"Glad something is right about this joint. Dig your ledger out."

HE walked with Steuben to the desk. More police came in, including a couple of officers in plain clothes. An officer who had gone up the fire escape to the top and down

again reported there was nobody lurking on it and nobody had descended by it.

Bill Anderson, feeling very much incensed, and also depressed, went over and sat on a sofa. A plainclothesman joined him and demanded that he tell the whole story over again. He asked about the most intimate details of Bill's past life and seemed disappointed that Bill didn't admit a prison record.

"Well," he said finally, "she probably slipped into some other room. You'll have to hang round all night and tomorrow morning until we can check up all the rooms. You look okay to me, kid. There wasn't anybody you could send up, so you had to go yourself. The thing was timed to a T."

"What makes me sore," confided Bill, "is that Steuben fired me for doing what I was told to do."

"Sure. Trying to cover up. We know how a lot of these hotels have been cutting down since the depression. First thing they do is fire the hotel dick. Reason more of these joints ain't looted is that crooks figure they wouldn't find anything in the safe except bills."

"I'm out of a job, and that's all that worries me."

The officer rose. "Well, you'll have plenty of company—about ten millions," he said.

During the remainder of the night, Anderson had plenty of company. Police kept coming in and going out. Bill busied himself putting back on the safe shelves what had been thrown on the floor by the thieves and he leaned the door against the safe front to make things look less rakish. As one officer remained on guard he carried up ice water to rooms on several occasions and reflected mournfully upon his future.

He remained on duty until noon, received a note from Steuben that he was through at the end of the week, accompanied police on a check-up of every room in the building—there were 150—and fell into bed completely exhausted.

CHAPTER IV

The New House Detective

THE office of the manager of the St. Christopher Hotel was on the second floor and Mr. Stacey Steuben was in conference there right after lunch with Mrs. Aurelia Bottomly, who owned the hotel and so much real estate besides that she wasn't quite certain how much she did own. She was an old woman and a grim woman. She was small and sharp-featured, with thin, bloodless lips and a long, thin nose. She was dressed in rusty black, and her hat was of an ancient vintage. She looked undernourished. As a matter of fact she grudged the cost of the food she ate.

Having inherited a large estate, thirty years before, from her father, who left instructions never to sell New York property, she had followed his instructions implicitly. Now she couldn't sell real estate if she wished.

"How much is this going to cost me?" she demanded.

"Comparatively little, Mrs. Bottomly," Steuben assured her. "You see we limit responsibility for valuables deposited in the safe to $500, and we have an insurance policy to cover that. We lost $450 in cash, and it will cost about $500 to repair the safe."

"A thousand dollars!" she cried. "You call that little? This hotel is losing money!"

"Madam, if we had had a house detective he would have gone up to

see what was the matter with Mrs. Gibson last night, the clerk would have been on duty, and I doubt very much if there would have been a robbery."

"I tell you the hotel is losing money! I can't be paying extra salaries. No doubt scores of guests will leave and lots of them will make the loss of their deposit envelopes an excuse for not paying their bills."

"All they have to do is to claim five hundred dollars loss and the insurance company will reimburse them. I don't think we will lose money on that account. It's true some of the guests may move out on us."

"If we could assure them that, in the future, a detective will be on duty night and day, I think I can persuade most of the guests to remain. Many of they have lived here for years and will hate the trouble of moving."

"How much will a detective cost?"

"Fifty dollars a week at least."

Mrs. Bottomly groaned. "I can't pay it," she declared. "It's outrageous. You tell me you discharged the night clerk. How much salary does he get?"

"Twenty dollars."

"That's more like it. I want to be fair. If there were only a bellboy and a clerk on duty, I don't see but he had to respond to that Gibson woman's call."

Steuben nodded. "I lost my temper last night. I didn't want to admit to the police we were so short-handed. Anderson is a good man. It's hard to get a reliable man. He was a cowboy out West and told me he knows how to use a gun."

The old lady clapped her hands.

"Give him twenty-five dollars a week and make him the house detective."

"But he's young. He's had no detective experience."

"What of it, if we save twenty-five dollars a week?"

"It's an idea. I'll get another night clerk and make the suggestion to Anderson. No doubt he'll jump at the chance. It will give our guests confidence. Have I authority to go ahead?"

"I suppose so," she said. "Get bids on repairing the safe. Our insurance covers us for the injury to that colored boy, doesn't it?"

"Yes, Mrs. Bottomly."

"Good." She smiled in a wintery fashion. "I suppose it will turn out that most of our guests are millionaires and kept their millions in our safe. Good afternoon, Mr. Steuben."

When the door closed on her the manager scowled. "Old skinflint," he muttered. Steuben was a nervous man of forty-five who had large responsibility and a very small salary. He was looking forward to the day when he would find a good job and could tell Mrs. Bottomly what he thought of her.

WHEN Bill Anderson came downstairs at six he found a letter in his box and a note to call at the manager's office. The letter surprised him. It was sealed in a large, square, expensive-looking envelope and there was perfume emanating from it. It was a familiar perfume.

He opened it eagerly. It contained a single sheet of paper in which was folded a hundred dollar bill. His eyes almost leaped out of his head, and he eagerly scanned what was written:

Hope this will be useful. You really should have a room with a bath.

There was no signature. The script was large, angular and feminine. He knew who it was from. He knew that perfume. His eyes filled with tears. To think that she had done this for him

in return for such a slight favor. Why, she must be rich to be able to give him a hundred dollars! Rich and generous and good. And, of course, it was absurd to think that she could possibly be the girl who had driven a stiletto into the neck of Mr. Forbish.

With a high heart he went to the manager's office. To his surprise Mr. Steuben was conciliatory. He even apologized for his treatment of the clerk, and he made Bill an astounding proposition.

"But I'm not a detective," Bill protested.

"Here's your chance to be one. Twenty-five dollars a week and your room and a restaurant discount."

Bill grinned broadly. "I'll have to have a room and bath," he said.

"Very well. You understand that you are on twenty-four hour duty. You can probably turn in about 3 A.M. and get enough sleep, but you're always on call. You can't leave the hotel for more than an hour at a time."

"Okay," said Bill contentedly. Things certainly were looking up.

From now on he would carry a gun in his pocket—not the Colt, which was too big, but a neat .38 which was owned by the hotel. He would have leisure and a chance to look at people during the useful hours of the day. Not fifty of the hundred permanent guests were known to him by sight. They were mostly middle-aged or elderly, and kept good hours.

His practical confinement to the hotel wouldn't irk him. He had nowhere else to go, and he could save money out of his increased salary. As he went down and took a seat in the lobby he was wishing he knew the address of the girl who had written him so he could tell her that, from now on, he would have a room and bath. Not that she really would be interested, of course.

There was much more activity in the lobby than usual that evening. Consternation had been created among the guests by the robbery. Residents who had never spoken to one another before were exchanging confidences regarding their losses. Women were lying about the value of the jewels which had been in their deposit envelopes, and men were boasting of the amount of cash which they had left in the safe. Old ladies were arguing excitedly with Hawk Hoban, the clerk. The phone operator was unusually busy. Insurance adjusters had arrived shortly before and were still closeted with the manager. As yet the repairmen had not got to work on the safe.

Bill saw the clerk pointing him out to people as the new hotel detective. Hoban, a lean, saturnine, dark person, was amused by the promotion of the night clerk and made satirical remarks when Bill ventured near the desk.

A new night clerk had been dragged out of the ranks of the unemployed and a new night elevator boy had been found. Bill would have company during the small hours of the morning.

He considered it his duty to study the guests who were about the lobby. Most of them were fussy old gentlemen and ladies, but there were a few good-looking young women who were smartly dressed. The St. Christopher was not a good hotel, but it was not an especially cheap one.

About six thirty a police detective came in, a new one, and sat down with Bill and insisted upon having the robbery yarn repeated in all its details. It was while the pair were talking that the Duchess of Gault swooned in the lobby.

Bill was at her side, instantly, lifted her, and, attended by a bellboy who

carried her room key, rushed her into the elevator and up to her suite. He didn't know she was a duchess, and he wouldn't have been impressed if he had known it, being a Democrat from the wide open spaces. She was a tall, raw-boned, heavy woman with a red face and stringy blond hair who wore a black tailored suit and a small black hat. The Duke of Gault arrived as the bellboy was opening the door. His grace was a short, squat purple-visaged person who wore eyeglasses attached to his left ear by a thin gold chain.

"I say," he pleaded. "Handle her carefully, my man."

Bill carried her into the bedroom and laid her on the bed. He observed that her grace had large feet for a woman, which were more noticeable because she wore heavy walking shoes.

"I'll send the hotel doctor right up, sir," Bill said to the duke.

Her grace opened her eyes. "I don't care for a doctor," she said. "Who are you?"

"The hotel detective, marm."

"Young man," said the duke pompously. "This is Her Grace the Duchess of Gault, my wife. Don't call her marm."

"I'm sorry, sir."

The duchess sat up. "My stomacher, oh, my stomacher!" she moaned.

"Something the matter with your stomach?" inquired Bill. "I better get the doctor."

The duke caught his arm.

CHAPTER V

The Diamond Stomacher

"HER grace refers to her diamond stomacher," he explained testily. "You are a detective, you say?"

"Yes, sir," said Bill proudly.

The duke turned to his wife. "He's a detective," he stated.

"I heard him," she snapped. "I want to talk to you, young man. I fainted upon being informed that my stomacher was stolen from your safe last night."

"How much was it worth, marm—your grace?" asked Anderson.

"A hundred thousand pounds."

"But you couldn't get anything weighing tons in the safe—"

"The man's an ass," asserted the duke. "It's worth a hundred thousand pounds, half a million dollars in American money, if you comprehend me."

"But we wouldn't accept anything so valuable as that," protested Bill. "You mean you had half a million in jewels in an envelope."

"Young man," said the duke, "we had no time to report our loss. Her grace went limp and, of course, we had to bring her upstairs. Kindly jot down the facts and report them to your manager. We arrived yesterday afternoon upon the Berengaria. We came here because the place was suggested to us by a friend in London who said it was refined and not very expensive.

"Hardly had we unpacked when Mrs. Youngman, who lives in a place called Long Island, and whom we have entertained at Chudly Cloisters, Bitterswamp, Wessex, phoned her grace that she expected us to dine and spend the night at her country house and that she was sending the car.

"In a country where banditry is rampant, her grace decided not to take her stomacher to the Youngman's, especially as it was an informal dinner party. The banks being closed, there was nothing to do but to entrust it to the hotel management, do you comprehend? A most lamentable error on my part."

"Was it insured, sir?"

"Refer to my husband as your grace, please," said her grace tartly.

"Yes, marm—your grace."

"Of course it's insured. But it's a family heirloom—money cannot compensate for its loss."

"Yes, sir. What does it look like?"

"Why, it's a stomacher," said the duchess.

"You may go!" exclaimed the duke. "I never met such a stupid fellow. Send up your manager. Leave us at once. Her grace wishes to rest."

Crestfallen, the house detective left the ducal pair and walked toward the elevators. Encountering a chambermaid, he stopped her.

"A lady in there had a stomacher stolen last night," he said. "What's a stomacher?"

The maid looked perplexed. "Maybe she means a corset," she replied.

"You couldn't get a corset in a deposit envelope."

"If it's the duchess that lost it, she's English. Perhaps she means some kind of plaster that you could roll up."

Bill shook his head and went down to the manager's office. Steuben listened mournfully to his report.

"It would have to be the only time that we ever had a duke and duchess in the hotel that we had a robbery," he said. "Half a million dollars, you said?"

"They said," said Bill, grinning. "A diamond stomacher — whatever that is."

"It's a kind of breastplate of diamonds. If they were real, I guess it could be worth half a million. Thank God it's insured. But it will give the hotel a black eye when this gets out. Of all the days in the year to have the safe robbed!"

"Say, Mr. Steuben!" exclaimed Anderson excitedly. "I bet the safe was robbed because somebody knew this stomacher was in it."

The manager leaned back in his chair and looked thoughtful.

"Deposit envelopes," he said, "usually contain bank books, securities that are hard to negotiate, jewelry and some cash, not more than a few hundred dollars in cash. Thieves couldn't sell ten percent of what they find in a hotel safe. I believe you're right, Anderson. This piece of jewelry is probably famous. It was known that they arrived in America with it. They were watched. The safe robbery was arranged when they were seen to put a deposit envelope in it. That's something to go on. I'll get in touch with the police. I'll go right up and get a description of the stomacher. I wouldn't be surprised if you turned out to be a fair detective."

Considerably elated by praise from the man who yesterday had threatened to fire him, Bill went back to the lobby and seated himself. It had cleared out pretty well, the dinner hour having arrived.

He had a lot to think about. There might be a big reward offered for the return of this immensely valuable piece of jewelry. He was the only one who had seen Mrs. Gibson, and he had the start on the police and everybody. Why shouldn't he solve this robbery mystery, capture the thieves and get the reward?

Why not learn to be a real detective? It was a good business. He knew how to shoot. He must develop his powers of observation and deduction, memorize faces, recognize clues.

One of the elevators opened and a woman came out accompanied by a dark, well-dressed man and followed by a bellboy laden with suitcases.

This was a tall, slender woman with a modish hat, much red hair, a dark coat with a blue fox fur collar. He gazed at her absently as she crossed toward the exit, and then she turned to speak to her companion, presenting to him her profile.

BILL gasped. This woman had been nobody he ever had seen until she showed him her profile, but the profile was that of Mrs. Gibson. It was ridiculous. That old woman had a red face. This one was pale. Mrs. Gibson had been heavily built. This woman was thin. But he remembered her profile. There was a slight dent in her nose below the bridge. This was the same nose. And the same rather heavy chin and long upper lip.

She went through the exit with her companion and her luggage as Bill stared. Say, she could pad herself, redden her face, wear a white wig and be Mrs. Gibson!

Bill was through the revolving door. The man was handing the woman into a closed automobile. The chauffeur stood respectfully on the sidewalk. As Bill reached the car, the man had stepped in and the chauffeur was about to close the door.

"Just a minute, Mrs. Gibson!" shouted Bill Anderson.

He peered into the car. The woman's mouth had dropped open and her eyes looked frightened.

"You're mistaken," snarled the man inside. "Oh, Jackson!"

Into the side of the amateur detective's head crashed what felt like a mailed fist. It was. The chauffeur was wearing brass knuckles. Bill went down like a log. The chauffeur leaped behind his wheel and the car swung away from the curb and darted down the street. The hotel doorman shouted lustily, but there was nobody to pursue the fleeing motor. So he tried to lift Anderson to his feet. Bill was out. He came to about five minutes later in the manager's office, unable to explain what had struck him.

"A hell of a start as a detective you made!" said Steuben bitterly. "You get knocked out on our sidewalk. They have to carry you across the lobby. Fortunately it was empty. Who were you fighting with, eh? Want to give the hotel a worse name than it has already?"

Bill grinned ruefully. "No fight," he said. "I was sloughed from behind. Must have been the chauffeur."

"Tell your story and make it plausible or you're sacked, and this time it goes," said the manager grimly.

"I'd know her and him again," reflected Bill aloud. "That's something. I might have made a mistake. I daren't take a chance of arresting a respectable guest."

"What the deuce are you talking about?" demanded the thoroughly exasperated manager.

"Mrs. Gibson just left the hotel. I was knocked out by her chauffeur."

"Why the devil didn't you arrest her before she left the hotel?" cried Steuben. "What's the matter with you, anyway?"

"You haven't secured me authority to make arrests yet," replied Bill, who was beginning to feel normal. "Mrs. Gibson was old and fat. This woman was young and thin. Mrs. Gibson had gray hair. This one had red hair. But I recognized her. Of course I wasn't sure. I ran out after them and called her by name. She was petrified. But the chauffeur slugged me and she got away."

"How could she be Mrs. Gibson if she didn't resemble her at all?"

"If she wasn't, why have me beaten up?"

"That's right, too," admitted Steuben.

"Here's the way I figure it. Somebody hired that room under the name of Gibson, but there was no Mrs. Gibson. This woman made up for her, padding, and false wig and sort of blotched complexion. When I left her last night to go downstairs she went to another room with this man and spent the night there."

"But you accompanied the police on a check-up of all the rooms this morning."

"Yes, sir. I remember this man. He said his wife was in bed. We looked into the bedroom and saw a red-headed woman muffled up to the chin. We were looking for a gray-headed woman."

Steuben drummed on his desk. "That's the way it was done, I suppose," he said. "However, we've found out something. We'll find out who checked out. We have a description of both the man and woman. No doubt the clerks and chambermaids saw them and would know them again. Go down and find out the name they registered under. I'm busy. The duchess is raising hell. Most unreasonable, these English. I suppose there's no way of keeping it out of the papers."

"Any chance they are fakes?"

Steuben pointed to a red book on his desk. "Burke's Peerage," he said glumly. "And they spent the night with Mr. and Mrs. William Youngman at Southampton. He's a big banker. Oh, they're real and their darned stomacher is authentic."

"Why should rich English put up at this kind of hotel?"

"Because they always do," said the manager. "People of title don't have to have a swank address. American society will chase them anyway. And they hate to pay American first-class hotel prices. We've had lots of nobility here, but never a duke and duchess before. I guess you're shrewd at that, Anderson. It was pretty smart to recognize the Gibson woman disguised as she was. I'll have a private detective's license for you tomorrow."

Bill's head still ached, but he was walking on air. Already he had made a lot of progress on the robbery case. Get the Gibson woman and her man friend and the police could probably make them name their confederates.

CHAPTER VI

The Wallet

IT was easy to identify the couple who had recently departed. They were on the register as Mr. and Mrs. Frank P. Weston of Cleveland, Ohio. They had had a double room and bath on the sixteenth floor. All the woman needed was to run down one flight of stairs and find refuge after Anderson had returned to the ground floor.

Somebody thoroughly familiar with the situation at the hotel and aware of the arrival of the Duke of Gault and his duchess, with their immensely valuable jewels, had planned this coup.

Either they had figured out that they would deposit the stomacher in the safe or had intended to rob their suite and shifted their plans when they learned of the invitation to Long Island. Bill returned to the desk and asked Hoban when the duke had made reservations.

"Got a wireless from the Berengaria day before yesterday," said Hoban. "Say, sleuth, how's your head?"

"It aches."

"Want to go back on the night watch?" grinned the clerk.

"No," said Bill sullenly and moved away from that vicinity.

Somebody who arrived on the steamer with the duke and duchess had framed this job, he was telling himself. Some big crook must have been on board who either scraped acquaintance with the duke and learned what his plans were, or had learned of the hotel reservation from the wireless man.

He'd get a passenger list and show it to the police. They knew all the crooks, or they were supposed to know them.

He went back to his chair. It certainly had been an exciting day, so far, considering he had been up only two or three hours. He glanced at the clock. Seven-thirty. Pretty near time he had his lunch.

The revolving door revolved and a party in evening dress came into the lobby. There were two women and two men. One of the women was striking, a brunette in her thirties, wrapped in ermine. The other woman was blonde and wore black seal. There were two men, wearing opera hats and long dark coats, at their heels. Bill gazed at them casually and grew tense.

Why, the younger woman—the hair, those eyes! It was the girl who had slept in his room! He rose, took a couple of steps toward her. She gazed squarely at him. Her face was like a stone, in her eyes was no recognition. In fact, as he stared she looked affronted, lifted her chin and turned her back on him. One of the men gazed at him truculently. Bill stepped back shakily and collapsed in his chair. The quartette were at the desk.

He heard the older woman say to Hawk Hoban, in a loud haughty voice:

"Kindly inform the Duchess of Gault that Mr. and Mrs. Youngman and friends are calling."

Bill was gazing reproachfully at the back of the girl who had cut him dead, but he heard the announcement. Steuben had said that the Youngmans were rich people, big bankers. The duke said they had visited his residence in England. They lived in Southampton. And this girl was with them. It meant that she was rich. Rich and proud and contemptuous. The hundred dollars in the envelope in his breast pocket was nothing to her. A tip to a waiter or a poor devil of a night clerk.

He beckoned to a bellboy. He drew forth the envelope.

"Slip this to that blond young lady," he said. "Watch your chance when the others ain't looking."

A moment later he saw the black boy glide up beside the girl and offer the envelope. Her fingers closed upon it and it slid into the pocket of her seal coat. She did not turn, however, and when she went with the others into an elevator she was careful not to glance in his direction.

Bill Anderson sighed heavily. The elevator door clanged.

She was an heiress and went round with millionaire bankers and English duchesses. She had used him and was through with him. Handed him a tip and closed the incident.

"Well," he muttered, "I reckon I better go and eat."

When he came out of the dining room half an hour later he was in time to see the duke and duchess, with the Youngmans, the girl and her escort, leaving the hotel.

Hoban beckoned to him. "You're shifted to room 1806," he said. "Why don't you move now? Nothing going on round here."

He grinned wryly. He'd been thinking of letting her know he had acquired a room with a bath. A lot she'd care.

"You bet," he said. "Give me the two keys."

HE went up to his little room, pulled his two suitcases out of the closet, opened them and laid them on the bed. He pulled open his bureau drawers, drew forth his four laundered shirts and laid them on the bottom of one suitcase. In doing so his knuckles touched the side of the bag, which was a cheap affair lined with cheesecloth. They touched something soft instead of the hard imitation leather side of the suitcase. He looked closely and saw a slight bulge. He felt of it. Something was inside the lining at that place, and there was a four-inch slit in the lining where the side joined the bottom of the bag.

Anderson inserted his fingers, touched a soft flat object, caught it and pulled it out, ruthlessly increasing the size of the slit in the lining. He held in his hand a man's flat wallet of fine leather. Stupidly he stared at it. It certainly wasn't his. He opened it. Empty. But on the inside of the wallet in small gold letters were the initials M. F.

He scratched his head. This certainly beats all. That suitcase had been laying there for six months. He'd never stuffed anything inside the lining. As he had bought it new, nobody else had.

He didn't even know anybody with the initials M. F. The slit was very neat, and he wouldn't have noticed if he accidentally hadn't touched the soft enclosure. It was very queer.

M. F. Darn funny. M. F.

Bill shook as though he had been taken with the ague. Montague Forbish. The man who was murdered! Murdered the night that girl had applied for shelter.

And the police were looking for a woman who answered her description in a general way. McCaffery said she had stolen the murdered man's wallet.

How could it be this girl—one who went round with the Youngmans? Yet, aside from her, nobody had been in his room. She had been there after the murder—slept there until eight in the morning.

"Oh, no," protested Bill pitifully. "It just can't be her!"

Maybe it wasn't Miss Unknown, but this certainly was Montague Forbish's wallet; at least these were his initials.

He pushed the suitcases to the floor and lay flat on the bed. He actually was in pain.

Despite his wide reading of popular books, William Anderson preserved the Western notions of the nobility of women. And because his acquaintance with the sex was slight, his opinion of it was more exalted. There were, of course, bad women; but these you could tell at a glance. A young, beautiful sweet girl could not be bad.

Maybe she had had to fight to defend her honor against a scoundrel. Bill would admire a woman who would have courage enough to struggle against, and even kill, a seducer; but she didn't need to take his pocketbook.

She had professed to have no money—she said she would have to call some one in the morning to get funds, but, according to the papers, Forbish had a well-filled wallet.

Whoever had hidden this one had very carefully slit the lining and slipped inside and the chances were ten to one against the owner discovering it for months, if ever. Had it not been for the change in his circumstances which gave him a better room, the suitcase would have remained in the closet for another six months.

The wretched young man was forced

finally to the conclusion that nobody but the girl could have hidden the wallet in the suitcase. It logically followed that she had been with Forbish in the cab, had stabbed him to death, robbed him and taken refuge in the St. Christopher.

She had been in some sort of struggle, judging by the scratch and the torn strap of her evening gown. She answered the taxidriver's description. She certainly had been in the neighborhood at the hour of the crime. And she had had a wallet marked M. F.

What was he going to do about it?

He didn't know. Why had she hidden it here? Why not drop it out the window or take it away with her to dispose of in a place where it never could be found? Why put a fellow who had wished only to help her in a predicament like this?

Well, she feared that if she dropped it out the window it might fall into a policeman's hands. And, being forced to spend the night here and having a guilty conscience, she was afraid she might be trailed and the police would break in and find the wallet on her person.

What had she done with Forbish's money? What kind of a woman was she to have a face like hers, and yet commit a horrible crime? Damn her! Why put him on a spot like this, a man she was ashamed to recognize when she was with her rich friends? It would cure him of women. He'd never have anything to do with one for the rest of his life. No matter how lovely they seemed they were not to be trusted. Live and die a bachelor, he would. She'd ruined his life, all right. Made him a misanthrope. Damn her! If he didn't turn in the wallet and tell the truth, he was compounding a felony. If he did, he would send her to prison, maybe to the electric chair. With an oath he rolled off the bed, thrust the wallet in his pocket, put on hat and coat and left the hotel. He walked several blocks and came to a street corner which at the moment was deserted. He stepped into the gutter, placed his foot on the curb, stooped over as if to tie his shoe, and dropped the horrible piece of evidence into a sewer opening.

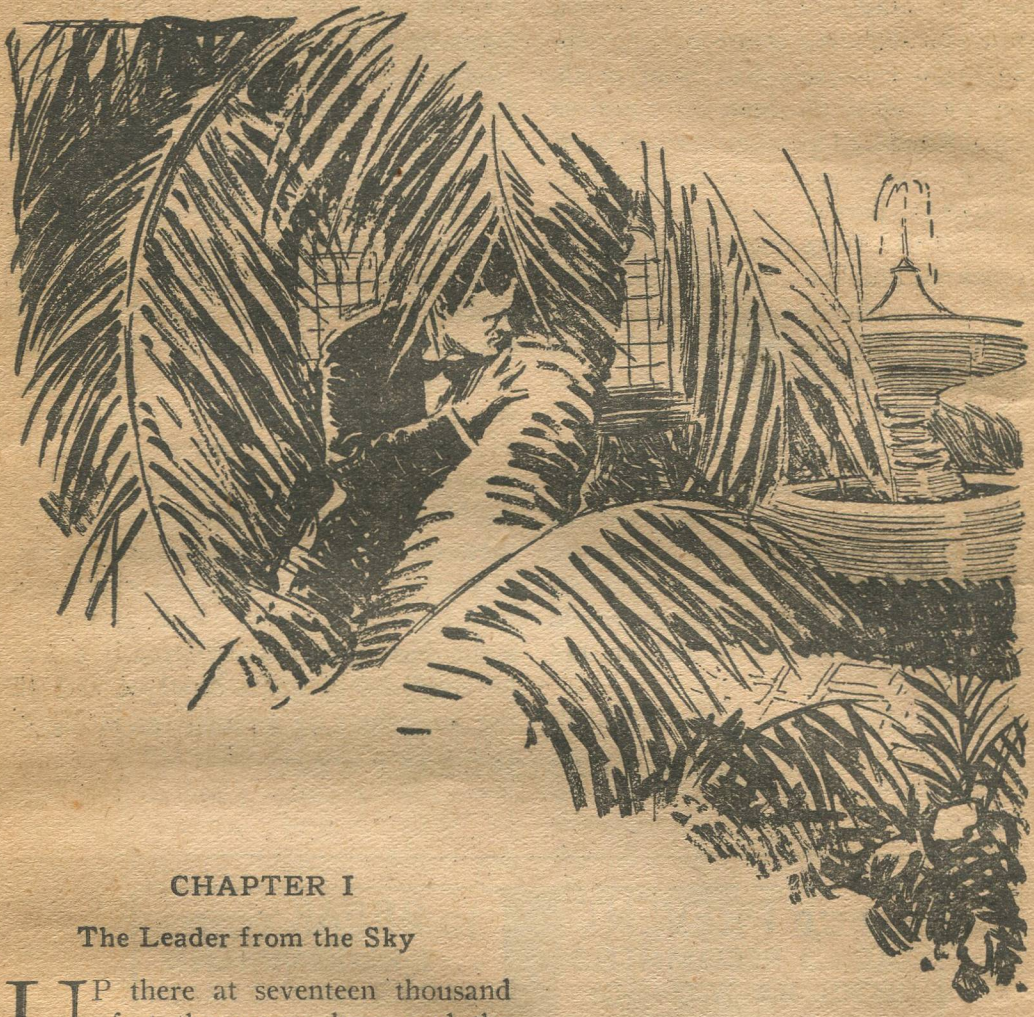
With a guilty glance to right and left, he moved away. Nobody was in sight. He'd gotten away from it, but as he slunk back to the hotel he had all the sensations of a murderer in flight.

CONTINUE THIS STORY NEXT WEEK.

SPY!

The Case of the Strange Villa

By Max Brand



CHAPTER I

The Leader from the Sky

UP there at seventeen thousand feet the moon shone and the stars were scattered, with the plane of Anthony Hamilton flung across them like a flat stone skidding over a pool. But he had to sink out of that clear beauty to the earth, and all the warmth of his electrically heated clothing could not comfort him. Two miles beneath him lay a smooth white sea of clouds, which meant a low ceiling out of which he must land.

Or perhaps clouds and fog continued all the way to the ground, and in that case he was probably a dead man. Usually he looked to every detail of

preparation himself before stepping into a plane, but on this occasion he had left arrangements in the hands of a subordinate. A parachute was missing. To get one meant delay and in the counter-espionage service of the United States delay is not permitted. Lives must be run to a schedule like a train-service. So he had taken the chance. The little monoplane had shot him through the chill of the upper spaces at four miles a minute and here he was over his goal, with the tank empty and the gasoline fading out of the reserve. There again he had been a fool to trust another man's word about the rate of fuel consumption in this new type of engine.

In spite of the fog, he knew almost to a hair's-breadth the exact scene which was clouded over. Just south lay Mont Agel with Monte Carlo at its feet, and just about under him, in the rough of the hills, lay that flat valley where he was expected.

If the head of a single mountain had lifted above the white floor, he would have been able to place himself perfectly, but perhaps not perfectly enough to locate that narrow strip of valley. At four miles a minute there is not time for deliberate calculation. He remembered, suddenly, the last time he had teed up a ball on the golf course of flat-topped Mont Agel, with a feeling that he could drive off right

He watched her put the little volume into her handbag

Out of the Clouds Dropped Anthony Hamilton to Match Wits with That Dread Man of Mystery Who Was Plotting to Strew the Earth with Ten Million Corpses

into the blue of the Mediterranean. Now all that beauty was stifled in deadly white. This great, liquid bowl of the sky had at the bottom a dirty sediment into which he had to sink.

He banked and turned, with a slight giddiness, a sense of losing balance, a pressure in his ears; then he dived. It was as though he stood still with the stars flying upwards, turning from dots into dashes of brightness. The air screamed on the struts, whistling a tune as loud as the hurrying drum-beat of the motor. The clouds lifted at him, not the smooth white floor they had appeared from above, but high-surging waves, a sea struck to ice in the middle of a storm by one touch of interstellar cold. The waves grew into hills of volcanic crystal; they exploded upwards, and now he dropped like a stone through the upper transulence through a brief margin of gray in which cloud-forms appeared, abortive and shapeless, and down into the blind hollow of darkness.

The altimeter showed him a thousand feet, and still the wet darkness blew about him. He had the inevitable feeling that the instrument was wrong and that he was about to strike that instant, on earth which would be turned hard as steel by the force of the impact. But the altimeter must be trusted. That is the first lesson in blind flying. He set his teeth, smiling a little.

Five hundred feet—three hundred—

The bottom of the well was just beneath, and still there was not a gleam, not a glimmer of light. The curtain of cloud dropped its thick fringes right down to the earth. On such a night, even automobiles would be crawling in second along the winding mountain roads.

Something appeared on his left, vague as the first loom of land to a ship at sea. He turned right and felt, rather than saw, the ragged side of a mountain. He was flying level, using that sheer instinct which was one of his greatest gifts in the air. He had readjusted the angle of his propeller blades so that they would take a smaller bite of the thick sea-level atmosphere, but he wished for more power when he felt again that presence of a solid mass on the left.

He turned right, and again from another crag to the right once more. He realized, now, that he was swirling about blindly inside the cup of a mountain valley which was very narrow but perhaps three or four miles long. It must be that he had dropped down on the very goal of his journey. He dropped his one landing-flare. The gleaming line of it flashed, went out. It had struck water.

He sank lower, to two hundred feet, to one hundred—the very sword-edge of danger was at his throat, now, when he saw three dim eyes beneath.

He circled at fifty feet. Hands blacker than the darkness struck up at him. He had slid just over the tops of some trees, but he could make out a cone of radiance extending from those three eyes—a cone flattened on the lower side. That flatness must be the ground. He shut off the motor and flattened out. Wings beat at him, left and right; more trees. The wheels struck, staggered the plane into a crazy wobbling which he righted with a delicate touch, and then the little monoplane was whispering lightly over grass, slowing, stopping.

WELL, the thing was over and in the service men must not allow themselves to ponder over many strange phases which they add, from time to time, to the history of

their past. Anthony Hamilton pulled at a few buckles, shed his heavy flying suit, and stepped out of the plane into the creamy verge of the illumination shed by the three headlights. At this moment one of them went out; the other pair swerved forward and an automobile stopped just before him. The full glare fell on Hamilton and showed him a little older, for the moment, than his twenty-seven years. He had that sight stoop of the shoulders which comes from much bending over books—or tennis-rackets. He seemed a bit grim—for this instant only—but a moment later he was smiling. He was always smiling, and this gave him an air of inexhaustible, boyish good nature.

A big man got out of the automobile and came up to him. The headlights were dimmed at the same moment, leaving only a dusty glow in the fog.

The waxed ends of the big fellow's mustaches were gleaming as he came up to Hamilton.

"This is not a landing field for airplanes, monsieur," said he.

"It is not a highway for automobiles, either," said Hamilton.

"Monsieur, I am an agent of the Sûreté. May I ask for your paper of identity?"

"Certainly," said Hamilton. "Will you take a cigarette from me, at the same time?"

"You are very kind," said the big man. He took a cigarette from the case which Hamilton offered and himself supplied the light, holding it just a part of a second longer than necessary close to the rather unhandsome face of Hamilton. And Hamilton turned, as a man will, a little to the side as he reached into a inner pocket. He took out a pigskin wallet among whose contents he began to fumble slowly. In the meantime the eye of the big man was occupied by certain characters which became visible along the cigarette, little luminous marks that showed one by one just before the paper curled and charred. The first portion of a signature became visible, letter by letter, before the agent of the Sûreté cried out:

"But you can't be the man! You're twenty years too young! I beg your pardon, Mr. Hamilton."

"I suppose I ought to thank you for a compliment," said Hamilton. "You're Harrison Victor, of course?"

"I am Louis Desaix, of the Sûreté," said the other, "and only Harrison Victor in Ohio and a few points east."

He shook hands, then called:

"Jack! Come here, will you?"

A second man came from the automobile.

"John Carney—Anthony Hamilton. This is the new chief, Jack. Carney's the man to take care of the plane, Mr. Hamilton."

"How you dropped it down the middle of this well I can't understand," said Carney. "We saw the landing flare hit the pool yonder and then we waited for the machine to smash and you to bail out and come floating down in the parachute."

"I *should* have bailed out instead of feeling my way around this room in the dark," said Hamilton, "but a fellow at the other end of the line forgot all about the parachute."

"You came anyway?" asked Harrison Victor. "You must have known that there was fog down here before you started."

"I couldn't tell that there was fog all the way to the ground. Did you bring out gasoline for the plane?"

They had plenty of it and the two

helped Carney carry the tins to the monoplane.

"How is she?" asked Carney. "I'll have to wait here alone till daybreak and I'd like to have something to think about."

"She's fast as a bullet and nervous as a two-year-old filly," said Hamilton. "She takes the air like a bird, but watch her when you make a landing."

They said good-by to Carney, who knew where to take the plane, and got into the car. Harrison Victor trundled it over the field, gained the road, and slid through the white smother with increasing speed. He seemed to feel the road by instinct.

"Will you paint the picture for me?" asked Hamilton.

"Show me the part you know, first of all."

Hamilton leaned a little closer.

"That letter was a beauty. I can recite it.

"'Number 1815'—my number is the same as the date of Waterloo, so it will be easy for you to remember—'Number 1815, you will go at once to Monte Carlo, abandoning all other work. At the Pension Mon Sourir there now resides, or frequently visits, the Number One secret service man of Japan. His nationality and name are unknown. Discover both, together with his present purpose in Europe. Our source of information cannot be drawn upon further. It is dead.' That was the main portion of the letter. The rest was a sketch of how I should proceed down here and where you would pick me up. They might have picked out an easier spot, I suppose."

ANTHONY HAMILTON

"SOMETIMES," said Harson Victor, "Washington is a little more than three thousand miles away from good sense. But at any rate you're here, and that's a comfort. Officially I heard that you were coming; unofficially, I learned that you were the man who did the big job in Okotsk. That was why I was a bit surprised when I saw you."

"You know in a Russian winter it's easy to grow a beard," said Hamilton.

"How old are you, really? Twenty-four?"

"Twenty-seven."

"I was wrong again. It must come from living a lot and not giving a damn."

"Victor, what have you fellows turned up, down here? What's the Villa Mon Sourir?"

"You know Les Roches?"

"That point which runs out to sea?"

"Yes. Mon Sourir is down there in a huddle of pines. An old Italian villa. It's owned now, or rather rented, on a long lease, by a Californian, a bearded fellow called George Michelson. He had his daughter with him. She runs the place as a pension."

"What sort of boarders?" Hamilton asked.

"Usual Riviera run. Polish girl—invalid. A German. A Czechoslovak. An American called Harbor. John Harbor. Vicomte Henri de Graulchier. Just the usual Riviera hodge-podge. No, nicer than usual, most of them. We've looked the place over as well as we could."

"Have you put an agent in the house?"

"We tried to. We sent out Louise Curran. Know her?"

"No."

"Ah, you don't know her? Louise is a card and she's turned up some good tricks in her time, for the service. She went out and tried to get a room, but the place was full up. No vacancies in sight. So I had Bill West go out to take a look at things. You know Bill?"

"He worked for me in Ireland, one summer."

"Great Scott, are you the man who—"

"Ah, never mind that."

"I mind, but I'll shut up. You're the whalebone and rubber man who did all the fox-hunting, are you? Ah, well—I sent Bill West out, as I say, and he got into the place all right."

"Find out anything?"

"Yes, he found the Vicomte de Graulchier looking down a revolver at him. Hardy fellow, that vicomte. Fat-looking little chunk, but hardy. Of course Bill had to go to jail as a burglar. He's in for five years, and nothing that any of us can do about it. That's all the forwarder we are about the Villa Mon Sourir. As far as we can make out, the place is innocent, all right. All except John Harbor. And I think that's he's the Japanese Number One. You never would expect it, either. Sleek, lazy, good-natured blighter. Likes his afternoon vermouth. But we've caught him cold taking code messages."

Drifts of blinding light poured towards them, like bright-blowing squalls of rain. A succession of automobiles wound by, each screeching a horn in sudden alarm, all of them groaning in low gears; but Harrison Victor shot his own big car along with a sort of random ease, as though he were not aware that his fenders had clinked once or twice like small bells against the passing mudguards.

"Got the code?" asked Hamilton.

"No, it's a hard one to work."

"Where does he got the messages?"

"In the Casino at Monte Carlo; but we don't know the source. We've tried, but we can't tell where he gets them. However, we have copies of a lot of them. A whole book of them. Once we decipher the code, the job will be finished."

"That sounds too easy."

"Everything is easy in this game—unless you die while you're winning."

"Japan wants the entire east for herself," Hamilton said. "If she has sent her Number One man to the Villa Mon Sourir, hell is going to pop. And I don't think it will be simple to get to the bottom of that hell."

"We've thought of that in a good deal of detail?"

"Do you know who Japan's Number One is?"

"Not even his complexion."

"No one does," answered Hamilton. "We only know one bit of information. Japan's Number One is the fellow who induced Theodore Roosevelt to intervene in the Russo-Japanese War. Honestly, you know—to prevent bloodshed, bring world peace nearer, and all that. But his interven-

tion probably saved the skin of Japan. She'd spent her last yen on the job when Roosevelt started persuading Russia towards peace. Wherever Japan's Number One is now, you can depend upon it the entire interest of Japan is invested. She wouldn't send him five minutes away from Tokio unless there were some new stars in the sky. This job is vital, Victor."

"I guessed at most of that."

"Going back to Mon Sourir. You don't find anything extraordinary about the place?"

"Not a thing. Not a single thing except George Michelson's daughter."

"Well, what about her?"

"The loveliest thing I've ever seen."

"Ah, I see," said Hamilton.

"No, you don't see," said Harrison Victor. "When I said 'loveliest' I mean just that. Perfect."

"Greek goddess, eh?"

"She's what the Greeks might have produced if they'd kept maturing for another twenty-five centuries. Phidias a little lighter in the bone. I've looked into her because I've looked into everyone in the Villa Mon Sourir. I've found out that she swims the American crawl, went around the rocks and bumps of Mont Agel in seventy-eight honest strokes, flies an airplane, drives an automobile like an Italian devil, speaks French, German, Italian, Spanish and—God help me—Russian, also."

"Describe her, will you?"

"She's going to be with her father at the Casino, tonight. And that's where I'm taking you. You'll see her for yourself. Luminous as a blonde, mysterious as a brunette. Most damned, exquisite smile."

"And she runs a little pension on the Riviera?" asked Hamilton.

"You know. Her father isn't so young or so well."

"What an equipment she has to be the world's Number One secret service agent," said Hamilton.

CHAPTER II

Red and Black

THE architect of the Casino at Monte Carlo is the man who erected the Opera House in Paris, a fellow with an instinct for overloading everything. His attempts at ornateness merely gave a puffed and stuffed effect to his exteriors and his interiors are as overwhelming as an assemblage of fat dowagers. Besides, gilding and regilding cannot brighten Monte Carlo, and all the lights cannot penetrate the grave shadow which enters the mind. The flush and sparkle of after-dinner parties who come in for a dash of play soon passes. Women assume Spartan manners. They never cry out with joy; they never groan or exclaim. They win with austerity and lose with contempt. Besides these casual visitors there are the serious players, who sit about the tables equipped with paper and pencil, making rapid notes, busy as bank clerks with their systems. These are the real devotees and their pale, stern faces tell us that Chance is a dark goddess.

Anthony Hamilton, entering in a dinner jacket in the middle of the evening, looked so young, so rich, so American, so flushed with wine and good nature, that it was astonishing to see such a man without company. His presence was felt at a roulette table at once. Even the serious players looked up at him with a faint gleam of contempt and prophesy as he began to play single numbers.

He laid hundred franc bets, three of them, always on the nine, and watched his money whisk away. In the

meantime he was spotting the characters from the Villa Mon Sourir who, as Harrison Victor had promised, were gathered at this table. By Victor's descriptions he could identify them easily. The big fellow with the rigidly straight back and the sour face who kept consulting his "system" and jotting down numbers was John Harbor, the American from Mon Sourir. The fellow with the short legs and large head, he whose swarthy skin was pricked full of small holes like needle-scars, was the Vicomte Henri de Graulchier. He had the stiff upper lip of a drinker, and his black eyes were continually empty.

Yet his dignity was interesting, and so was the purity of his English, which retained only a slight oil of the French "r's." The very blonde girl was the Pole, Maria Blachavenski, too thin to be pretty except when she smiled. George Michelson of California wore a beard and mustache, so trimmed that he had a Continental look, but a certain bigness of body and of voice betrayed his Western origin from time to time. He stood behind the chair of his daughter, Mary Michelson, watching her lay her small bets with careful precision.

She was beautiful, yet her beauty seemed to Hamilton to be a very dull affair. He was about to decide that Harrison Victor's pæan of praise was a worthless enthusiasm, when she looked up to her father with a smile. Then Hamilton saw the light; a great deal of it. It was true that she could have been lost in a crowd, but everyone who looked at her twice would be stopped.

These were the representatives from the Villa Mon Sourir. As for the agents who worked under Harrison Victor, there was only one present. That was Louise Curran, exquisitely dainty and fresh and good to see. Apparently her "system" could not occupy all her attention, for every now and then she would lift her hand-bag to powder her nose.

In reality, as Hamilton knew, she was catching in the glass, and memorizing, with lightning adeptness, whole columns of the figures which John Harbor continually scribbled on a small pad, jerking off the sheets one by one and putting them under the pad. It was in this manner, and with other simple methods, that Harrison Victor had collected quantities of the notations of Harbor. The instant the code was known, a flood of information would pour into the hands of the American counter-espionage service.

Well, all codes can be solved. That is the old saying, but Hamilton did not believe it. In the meantime, what was the source of the information which Harbor was noting down? It might have been almost anything; one of the horns which sounded dimly from the street, the almost imperceptible tremors and fluctuations of one of the lights in the room, the hand movements of some other person, writing at the table, the finger-work of the croupier as he wielded his rake. There were a thousand ways of conveying steady messages such as Harbor was writing down; and that he was scribbling a code there could be no doubt to anyone who considered the sort of numbers he employed. At roulette there is nothing higher than thirty-five, but a typical page of Harbor's notes had read:

15 — 331
245— 86
99— 191

Under this column of figures appeared a line for addition, but the sum

which appeared in the result had, apparently, nothing to do with the column of figures itself.

STUDYING the calm, still face of Harbor, Hamilton decided instantly that the man himself did not know what he was taking down. The figures were not his shorthand report. They made an unintelligible jargon until they were decoded.

Hamilton, laying his fourth bet on the nine, was surprised by a win. Thirty-five hundred francs was not a great haul, but it was something; eyes lifted to him again from around the table and he permitted himself to laugh with a vacuous joy.

It was one of the major triumphs of his art, the production of that laughter, whether it were silent or noisy. He had worked for months perfecting it until, at his will, it could sweep every semblance of intelligence out of his face and sponge all record of thought from his brain. John Harbor seemed overwhelmed by disgust as he stared at the laughing face, so overwhelmed that he suddenly rose from the table, dropped his writing pad into his coat pocket, and left the room.

Hamilton drifted behind him through the room. The size of the stake he had won furnished him with an excellent excuse for leaving the table at that particular moment. He watched John Harbor go out into the garden and slipped after him.

The fog still covered the night, so that the garden lamps shone through enormous halos. The pavement was wet. The palm trees glistened dimly. John Harbor, walking impatiently up and down, tipped one of those gracefully arching branches and cursed the chilly shower of drops that fell on him. He began to brush his coat dry with a handkerhief but still he looked about him, until it was apparent that he was waiting to fill an appointment.

Hamilton slipped quietly up behind the palm tree nearest to his quarry and then—he had eyes in his feet like any jungle tracker and the thing should never have happened—he stepped into a hole left where a small paving block had been removed, no doubt for replacement the next day, and pitched forward on his knees.

He had trusted to the tree and the fog so entirely that he fell almost in touching distance of Harbor, and that big fellow whirled about with a grunt of fear. He must have been keyed to an electric tension because, as he turned, he snatched a gun and fired point-blank.

The thing was incredible; it could not have happened; but while the brain of Hamilton was disclaiming the possibility of the entire affair his hand was jerking an automatic from the spring holster which supported it under the pit of his left arm. The first bullet had missed him; the second would not. Still down on both knees and one hand, he shot John Harbor through the head and saw the body fall face down. The impact was like the whack of a fist against bare flesh.

Hamilton, rising, waited for half a second. No footfalls came towards him; from the streets of the town roared and whined the noise of the automobile traffic. At any moment attendants might pour out around him, and in that case, he was a dead man. The first rule of the counter-espionage service is that its agents receive no government support when they operate abroad. So, for half a second, he contemplated instant flight.

The next moment he was leaning over the dead man with swift hands

at work. Fountain pen, wallet, watch he recognized by the first sweeping touch. A hard, flat box in the left coat pocket he drew out and found it to be a book, a little volume of Everyman's Library bound in dull green cloth—"The Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile," by J. H. Speke, that strange fellow whom the great Burton had hated and envied so. He slid the book back into the same pocket, located the little writing pad with its rustling loose pages beside it, and decided to leave all in place.

He looked once more down at the loose body, the hands which grasped inertly at the stones; then he drew back into covert behind the palms. No doubt it was still dangerous for him to linger near, but it was very important to discover the persons with whom Harbor had appointed this trysting place.

Another long, long minute drew out; then he heard the quick, light tapping of heels and saw coming straight towards the dead man Harrison Victor's angel of beauty and of grace, Mary Michelson.

CHAPTER III

Cold-Blooded Angel

SHE was tall, and she moved with the crisp step of one who is enjoying a walk. From brightness to brightness, she moved across the cloudy dazzle of the tall lamps.

He waited to see her take heed of the falling body but there was no pausing in her approach. She walked straight up to the dead man and leaned over him. Her hands were busy. As she straightened he saw that she was putting into her handbag the little Everyman volume; and with it went the notations which John Harbor had been making that evening.

That seemed cold-blooded enough, but that was not all. With her handkerchief—to prevent finger-marks, of course—she picked up the automatic, which had slithered away to a little distance, and put it inside the grasp of the dead fingers of Harbor. Then with that swift, light step which seemed a special attribute of virtue, she went back into the Casino.

He followed, after making sure that there was no mark on the knees of his trousers to indicate the place where he had fallen. He was just coming in from the garden when he saw Harrison Victor pass out through the doorway. He hailed Victor with a murmur and drew him aside.

"Your beautiful angel is one of them," said Hamilton. "John Harbor is dead, and I've seen her plunder him of his notes of this evening as well as a book. What the book could have to do with the business I can't tell. She was as cool over the dead man as a bird over a fallen seed."

"Is she one of them?" said the agent of the Sûreté, sadly. "Well, I've never fallen in love without having it shaken right out of me again. What killed Harbor?"

"I did," said Hamilton. "A damned clumsy, stupid business. But at one time I was on my knees, and he was putting bullets past my ears. He was just a little nervous. But the girl, Victor—she's the one for study. If she were honest, she'd be an angel; since she's a crook, she's probably a devil. I have to be introduced to her."

"You killed Harbor?" murmured Victor, but he added, calm at once: "I don't know Mary Michelson."

"Send one of your men to the table where she plays and have him try to nail her stakes; I'll interfere; that will be introduction enough."

"If you want to go about it—if you don't think that's too much college farce?"

"I believe in college farce," said Hamilton.

"Farce in the house and dead men in the garden, eh? I'll arrange it as you say, of course."

Well, it was not strange if Harrison Victor were distinctly cool. Who could tell what disastrous effects the killing of Harbor might have? Before he went in, Victor said:

"I've just had a report from Jack Carney. The fog lifted back there in the valley and as soon as he saw a star he jumped the plane at it. He says that little amphibian swam across the sky just like a goldfish across a bowl. In three wriggles it was over the sea and through a lucky rift he was able to get down to the water. He says he still feels as though he had been riding in a thunderbolt; he's bumped a shower of sparks out of the sky."

Hamilton went back into the game rooms, but stopped a moment on the way to have a pony of brandy. There is nothing that loads the air with alcohol fumes as cognac does. If he gave the impression of having had a drop too much it would be as well.

The girl, as he had expected, was back in her place with her father now at her side. If she were a part of an international spy ring, it seemed certain that her father was implicated also. The great forehead, the noble openness of eye in this man denied such a thing as much as did the beauty of the girl; and Hamilton remembered with a leap of the heart that men and women *can* give their lives to espionage because they are capable of loving danger and their country.

He drifted idly about the table, making his bets two hundred francs, now, and merely laughing in his foolish, silent way when the croupier raked in his money. The girl had just won on the black when a long arm reached from behind and collected her entire bet.

"The lady's money, my friend," said Hamilton, and gripped that arm at the wrist. He looked up into the face of a tall man who was breathing whisky-fumes.

"Hello! Hello!" said a very English accent. "Isn't that money mine?"

"I'm afraid it is not," said George Michelson.

"Oh, I laid my bet over there," said the stranger. "Frightfully sorry."

He moved off.

"THAT was nice of you," said the girl, smiling up at Hamilton. He favored her with his witless laugh.

"I was watching your system," he said, "and I can't make a thing out of it. Deep, isn't it? I've tried systems, but can't keep on any of them for a whole evening. Some idea of my own comes buzzing along and there I go again, chasing butterflies. May I sit down here?"

"Of course," she said.

He took the chair beside her, luckily vacant. She was giving him only a partial attention, the rest going to a consideration of the lists of figures which composed her system. Now she was placing a new bet. The lack of makeup, he saw, was one thing that made her beauty a little dim, but the absence of artificial color set off the intense blueness of her eyes. He never had seen anything quite like that blue.

"You're English, aren't you?" asked he, babbling along.

"No, American."

"Ah, are you? So am I. Came a bad cropper down in Virginia a while back—schooling a green idiot of a five-year-old over ditch and timber — and the doctor said I'd better have a change of air and no horses. So over I came to take the old spin around."

He pointed to a small lump at the side of his forehead. It was quite true that he had had a bad fall from a horse, but not in Virginia. A bullet from an old-fashioned Persian musket had killed the gray Arab mare he was riding as he got out of Teheran towards healthier and less romantic names on the map. Well, that was simply another sentence that belonged to the dead book of the past.

"I know some Virginia people," the girl was saying. "Sally Keith, for one."

"Do you, really?" He flicked like lightning the complicated card index of his memory. "Why, this is like an introduction! Sally taught me my manners cub-hunting, ten years ago. Perhaps you've heard her mention me, because she still makes table-talk out of the silly things I did that day? My name is Anthony Hamilton."

"Perhaps I have heard her speak of you. I'm Mary Michelson. Father, this is Anthony Hamilton, who knows Sally Keith in Virginia."

The big, bearded man stood up and shook hands with a good, strong grip. "That was a quick eye and hand you used on that sharper, a moment ago," he said.

CHAPTER IV

Fools Rush In

WHEN he left the table he signed to Victor and met him outside the building.

"Have the Michelsons a car?" he asked.

"I have it spotted," said Victor. "Any luck?"

"No, I've registered myself as a feather-brain, a poor, harmless blighter. That's all. They're charming, but they won't be drawn. We've been introduced, and that's all."

"What do you make of her?"

"Absolutely nothing. She might be a saint, except that I've seen her pick the pockets of a dead man. Put a good man on Michelson's car. Have him fix it so that the machine will break down hopelessly a few miles out of Monte Carlo. And not too near to Les Roches. The moment they start off, send a man to my car and wake me up."

"Wake you up?"

"I'll be asleep."

He went to his parked machine. It had a compact body and one of those all-weather tops that go up and down as easily as an umbrella. The seat beside the driver's could be flattened out until it gave almost the comfort of a couch. Hamilton stretched himself on it, closed his eyes, and resolutely toppled himself off the edge of consciousness into the fathomless oblivion of sleep.

A voice at his ear brought him at a step back to full possession of his wits. A shadowy arm was pointing and the voice saying:

"There they go—Michelson and his daughter alone in the car."

He had his own swift machine instantly on the way. It had the long, low hang that he liked and it took corners as though it were running on tracks; so he snaked through the crooked streets of Monte Carlo without ever losing sight of his goal. He was not really out of the city at any time, but merely away from the thickest heart of it. Michelson drove fast,

but it was child's play for Hamilton's racer to keep in touch.

He wondered whether or not he should have spoken to Harrison Victor about the singular importance which seemed to attach to the copy of Speke's "Journal." However, that importance would no doubt be a few mysterious annotations which John Harbor might have made on a fly-leaf. Perhaps it was chiefly to receive this book that the girl had the appointment with Harbor; and yet they lived in the same house, where she must have the leisure to meet him as she chose.

These questions were so small that they were only worth registering, not long consideration.

They were well out from the city when the tail lights of Michelson's car wavered, then stopped at the side of the road.

Anthony Hamilton halted immediately behind them.

Big Michelson had the hood open and was leaning over the engine, but it was the girl whose hands were busied. "Ah, Mr. Hamilton! What a chance to meet you here!" said Michelson.

The girl, however, did not lift her head at once from the engine she was examining.

"Not a chance at all," answered Hamilton. "You see, there's not much around here for me except weather and wine and roulette, and I wanted to find out where you live. You don't mind, Mr. Michelson? Let me try to be useful."

"The carburetor's gone," said the girl, straightening at last. "Hello, Mr. Hamilton. Will you give us a lift home? We'll have to send garage people to bring in the car."

"But how could the carburetor go, my dear?" asked the father.

"I don't know," she answered. "It's a bit weird, altogether."

"I'll get your things out," said Hamilton. He was already at work as he spoke, lifting an overcoat and a wrap out of the little automobile. But first his hand had touched the evening bag of the girl—and found it empty! She had disposed of Speke's "Journal" as quickly as this. The book became, suddenly, of a vast importance. It was instantly the entire goal of Hamilton's search.

He got them comfortably into his car and drove, turning in the seat so that he could keep on chattering. But the way to Les Roches was all too short. The car was quickly among the boulders and pines of the little peninsula and now they directed him to stop at a great gate of wrought iron in the middle of a pink wall.

The yellow mimosas of the garden within showed vaguely through the mist in the glow of the headlights. The same light, passing down the length of the wall, found the rocks of a beach and the thin hint of waves under the fog. Over the gate appeared the name: Mon Sourir.

"We should ask you in," said the girl, "but we're responsible for the pension, Mr. Hamilton, and one of our guests is slightly ill and is a frightfully light sleeper."

"You know," said Hamilton, "if you have an extra room I'd like to come here. I'd move in tomorrow morning."

He stood so that the light would fully illumine the vacuous smile with which he admired her. She showed not the least amusement or contempt.

"What a pity that every room is full, just now," she said.

"But may I call?"

"Ah, of course you may. Good

night, Mr. Hamilton. How kind you've been!"

Michelson gave him that hearty handshake again.

"Drop in any time," he said. "We both want to see you."

That was all. Hamilton, watching them through the gate, studied the coat of Michelson with care. There was a slight bulge of the left coat pocket—about such an enlargement as one of the Everyman volumes might make.

HARRISON VICTOR came to his room in the hotel the next morning and sat in a corner smoking a foul black twist of an Italian cigar, turning his mustaches to more delicate points. He looked perfectly the part of Louis Desaix of the Sûreté.

"There's no note in the papers about the death of John Harbor," said Hamilton, in the midst of dressing.

"The body's been found, the Villa Mon Sourir consulted, and John Harbor is at the morgue. The papers will carry no articles about the suicide."

"Suicide?"

"Of course. The gun was found gripped in his right hand."

"The girl put it there, and his gun was not of the right calibre to make the wound."

"My dear Hamilton, this is Monaco, where the skies are so blue and the sunshine so golden that people don't want to examine into every ugly little death. The authorities help to smooth things over. Suicides in the Monte Carlo gardens don't help the flowers to bloom. And then it seems that John Harbor was a very obscure fellow. No connections to bother about him. He'll be quietly buried and forgotten. This has happened before."

A boy brought up a long white cardboard box. Hamilton gave the tip and opened the box when the messenger had left. Inside was a long sheaf of pink roses, freshened with a sprinkling of dew.

"Who's sending you flowers?" asked Victor.

"Old fellow, I'm in love. I'm taking these flowers for a morning call. Yes, a *morning* call. Because, last night I was swept off my feet, overwhelmed, devastated by meeting the beautiful Mary Michelson."

"You're a cold devil," commented Victor, without smiling.

"On the contrary, I'm burning with passion," said Hamilton, yawning. He was in his morning coat now, and he turned this way and that to examine his appearance. He was, in fact, a very trim figure, except for that slight stoop and forward thrusting of the shoulders. More than ever he looked, from behind, like a student, and from in front like an athlete.

"You know people don't go in for that sort of thing own here?" asked Victor.

"I'm an outstanding type," said Hamilton. "I'm one of those genial young asses who, having been raised in a certain way, never varies a trifle in any habit of his way of life. My mindlessness is so complete that I could never manage to vary my clothes according to my climate. And, this being the morning of the day, morning clothes are required. Also this stick."

He drew the beautiful, mottled Malacca through his fingertips, admiring its delicate luster.

"And these gloves of yellow chamois cleaned just enough times to fade them white. And the monocle, too. That's a real convenience. It can drop out of my fool face at an embarrassing moment and give me another sec-

ond to compose my answers. Besides, I have an extra glass in my pocket that turns it into a good magnifying piece."

"You're an extraordinary smooth article," grinned Victor. "Do you never lose your face? I mean, do you always remember which face you're wearing?"

"No," said Hamilton. "Years and years ago when I was just a youngster—it must have been four years altogether—I forgot myself completely while I was sitting cross-legged opposite one of those black Sahara Arab sheiks. He showed me my error by reaching for me with a knife."

"He didn't harvest you?"

"You know, if you sit cross-legged in just the right way, your feet are always free. I kicked the sheik in the stomach and managed to get to his best camel. She was milk white, and she did all my thinking for me for three days."

"Are you off now?"

"Not until you approve of me?"

"You'll get a glance from every eye. You'll be well-known to half the people in Monte Carlo before the day's over."

"If I can keep attention fixed on my left hand, Victor, I can do wonders with the right. By the way, which was the room of John Harbor, over at the Villa Mon Sourir?"

"On the ground floor, the third door on the left down the main hall."

"And the girl's?"

"Mary Michelson's? She has the room opening on the second story loggia and looking out to sea. Hamilton, I know that you're a clever workman, but I want to remind you that already we have a man in jail for snooping about the Villa Mon Sourir. And Bill West is a clever fellow, too. Awfully clever."

"Of couse he is. But he wasn't in love. You forget, Victor, that all the world loves a lover."

CHAPTER V

The Vanishing Room

RIVIERA climate is as unreal as a colored postcard. Beyond the mountains lies the land of the cold mistral, but along the Ligurian coast a fringe of summer remains when all the rest of Europe is overcast with white winter. That golden warmth seemed to Hamilton, on this morning, more like a pictorial effect than ever before, a bit of expensive staging put on by the Casino to content its guests.

But the fragrance of the mimosa was real. It carried an honest touch of spring into the air. So he was breathing deep as he drove with the blue sparkle of the sea on his left and that delicate fragrance in his face. Coming down the Avenue de Monte Carlo, he took the Boulevard Albert Premier past the great bowl of La Condamine, and so on by the gardens and palace of the prince until he came out on the road to Beaulieu.

He was taking his ease in the car, with the top down and this warmth of the miraculous summer flowing about him. Okotsk had been a different affair; and in a few days a new order from Washington might fling him half-way around the world on a new mission. Even that uncertainty was a delight to him, for it was part of the joy of the chase, whether he were the hunter or the hunted.

He turned left, now, into the road which wound among the glimmering boulders of Les Roches, and when he looked out through the trunks of the pine trees the ocean rose as a steep blue

wall on either hand, about to flow inwards and close over him. The pink walls of Mon Sourir appeared, and he drove through the open gate with an odd feeling that the panels were closing automatically behind him. The drive circled around a tall cluster of mimosa trees. He stopped his car at the side and rang the bell of the house. The dark fingering around that bell seemed to tell him that the Villa Mon Sourir had abandoned the dignity of a private residence and become a public place.

A butler in gray-striped working jacket and apron opened the door to him. Hamilton gave his card.

"I am calling on Miss Michelson," he said.

"She is not in, monsieur."

"Not in? But I'll wait for her. I'm sure she expects me."

It seemed to him that the square, solemn face of the man forbade his entrance still, but he stepped forward with his witless smile and the butler gave back.

"This way," he said, and ushered Hamilton into a little waiting room. The open window of it let him see in a group all the inhabitants of Mon Sourir except Mary Michelson. They were seated in the spicy shade under a pair of stone pines, the gigantic Czech, Karol Menzel, Hans Friedberg with no back to his German head, Ivan Petrolich, the Russian invalid in his wheelchair, the beautiful young Roumanian, Matthias Radu, sleek and soft as a Levantine, or a woman. The Polish girl, Maria Blatchavenski, was there, at the side of the huge George Michelson, and the Vicomte Henri de Graulchier was not seated but sauntered slowly about. He wore a loose tweed coat in spite of the weather and kept his hands in the pockets of it. He spoke with authority that had a caress in it, like one speaking to children, explaining difficult things with a restrained impatience.

George Michelson was saying, at this moment:

"The great southern valley of the Volga is the storehouse, the granary of the country, and if that were held securely—"

But here the butler, crossing the room to the window, said rather loudly:

"Is the light too glaring? Shall I lower the shade, Monsieur Hamilton?"

"It's very pleasant that way, with the sea breeze blowing in," he answered. "Will you put these flowers for Miss Michelson in water?"

The man carried the long box away, and Hamilton, taking a chair and lighting a cigarette, observed that he still could command a view of the interesting group beyond the window. They had altered a little. The hand of George Michelson was no longer raised as though about to emphasize an important point. Pale Maria Blatchavenski no longer sat so eagerly erect. It was as though a stress were removed and the people were relaxing after the strain of effort. The talk was still about Russia, with the vicomte now holding forth in the lead.

"Come, Ivan Petrolich! You are a Russian. Maria, you are almost a Russian—"

"Henri, no Polish woman is a Russian. I beg your pardon, Ivan Petrolich, but a Polish woman is removed by thousands of light-years from a Russian."

"Ah, I understand," said the invalid. His head sank into the cushion at the back of his chair and his pale face was smiling a little. He had almost closed his eyes.

"You are both Slavs," said Henri de Graulchier. "And when we talk of race instinct, there is something more important than national boundaries, little national prejudices and blindnesses."

"Unless one is French, Henri, and then of course it is understandable, it is necessary," said Friedberg, the German.

"WE should argue peacefully," declared the vicomte. "And the point that I wish to make is that the Russians are not a melancholy people."

"Ah, come, come!" murmured Matthias Radu, the beautiful young Rumanian.

"I mean it, and I ask for unprejudiced witness. The Russian is not melancholy. He is simply Asiatic. Because he rubs elbows with the Occident and is different from it, he is erected into a mystery by the Western nations. His music, which contains some of the natural wail and minor quality of the Asiatic, strikes the Occidental ear as an expression of sadness. The contrary is the truth. The Russian is gay."

"These are simply statements, de Graulchier," said huge Karol Menzel, the Czech. "I know a good many Russians."

"You don't!" said de Graulchier. "Not at all!"

"Ah, I don't?" murmured Menzel.

"Certainly not. All you know are the educated upper tenth of one per-cent. And those are the people who speak French and English, drink more Burgundy than vokda, and have been *expected* by their European friends to be mysterious, day-dreaming, melancholy; expected so long that soon they are willing to play the part that is desired. Half Hamlet, half Gargantua. That is your educated Russian—again I beg your pardon, Ivan Petrolich."

"You always delight me with your aphorisms, Henri," said the Russian.

"Not aphorisms. I am telling you the truth. Open your eyes to see it. The real Russian, the peasant with his bit of land, is always happy unless he is starving to death. On half a franc, he knows how to make fiesta. There is nothing mysterious about him except the depth of his beard. Admit that I am right."

"There's no use disputing with him," declared Karol Menzel. "Since the days of Napoleon, every Frenchman has argued by Imperial edict."

They talked on, but there was to Hamilton only one thing of interest in this conversation, and that was the quickness with which it had been changed in temper. When he first located the group, it had been tense with attention to the words of George Michelson, who had been declaring that the Volga valley was the granary of Russia, and that if this district were held—

Well, held by whom?

It would have meant a great deal to Hamilton to have heard even ten seconds more of the speech of George Michelson. But suddenly—as if at a signal—the talk had altered, still flowing smoothly along about Russia, but totally diverted in significance, and devoid of any importance.

In fact, the signal had been given, either by the voice of the butler at the window or by his gesture as he lifted his hand to the shade. It was very significant. It meant that even the servants in this house were deep in the affairs of the masters; it meant that the master, the guests, the menials, every living soul in the Villa Mon

Sourir was engaged in working towards a single purpose!

What was that purpose? Something which was the will of Japan, no doubt. To be sure, exactly such a hodge-podge of nationalities might be discovered in a dozen pensions or hotels along the Riviera, where the world comes to recapture spring; yet it was noticeable that in this group there were representatives of Rumania, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Germany, France—all nations which bordered on Russia or had some vital interests in its future and the fate of its government.

Perhaps there were still other representatives—in the kitchen or the garage! Perhaps Esthonia, Latvia, Finland and Sweden had sent men to this conference with Japan's Number One secret service agent.

Was he one of those men who sat there talking outside the window? A fellow who had been alive—though only in his early twenties—at the time of the Russo-Japanese War, would now be in his middle fifties at the least. Friedberg was old enough; so was George Michelson. They were the only ones. No, perhaps the smooth face of Henri de Graulchier made him seem a full ten years younger than the fact.

However, the great probability was that Japan's ace was well hidden from view. He was more apt to be an occasional visitor to Villa Mon Sourir than one who dwelt in it.

A TINGLING passed through the nerves of Hamilton. He knew perfectly that dramatic situation in the Far East caused by the swift expansion of Japanese population, Japanese ambitions, Japanese trade. They had a great floodgate opening for them in Manchuria; and even that bitter land would be a Paradise of opportunity to many of them. But they were not likely to rest content. They needed more and more soil. Their population would be a hundred million, before long—a hundred millions of intelligent, strong, active people, all welded into a single purpose.

Who could deny them? The Philippines were close to them, an ideal extension of their empire; Hawaii was not very far away. And if the fringes of China were already crowded with inhabitants — w e l l, the inhabitants could be swept out and place made for the conquering Jap. But while these great schemes were in progress, t h e wisest course for Japan was to keep the Russian bear well occupied with domestic problems west of the Urals. With war, or revolt.

The picture grew in the fertile imagination of Anthony Hamilton. Villa Mon Sourir might be the nerve-center of the entire brain of Japan, at the present moment. And one wasp-sting, planted on the vital spot, might paralyze t h e will of a nation of ninety millions.

He rose, walked to the door, and glanced down the hall. The third door down—that was the room of the dead John Harbor. Hamilton, bending his head a little, tried to listen around the corners, since he could not look around them, and when he made out no sound near him, he walked down the hall. He realized that he might be making his last steps if he were discovered prying into the rooms of Mon Sourir—that is, if his first vague conjectures about the people in it were proved to be correct.

When he reached the door, he paused for another instant, then quickly opened it and glanced inside.

It was no longer a bed-chamber. It

had been changed overnight into a living room.

CHAPTER VI

Silly Ass

THERE was no trace that the room ever had been equipped with a bed. A pair of comfortable sofas flanked the fireplace. A very good Persian rug with the famous pine-tree pattern on it occupied the center of the floor. On the window there was a pair of curtains of heavy linen, with peacocks embroidered on it in blues and in rich greens. A rather silly little bronze group of Zeus and Europa crowned the mantlepiece.

Hamilton closed the door and went back down the hall. There were reasons, of course, which the owners of the pension could give. They would declare that they did not wish to continue in the intimate rôle of a bedroom a chamber which had been rented only so short a time before by a man now dead. But what was really important was that, in this way, they were enabled to wipe out every identification mark of the man who had lived in that place. Not a footstep remained behind him — and the work had been done quickly.

An almost running footfall came up behind Hamilton.

He turned and saw the butler bearing down. There could have been many ways to interpret the expression of the fellow's face, but to Hamilton there was only one: it was physical threat.

"What's the way out into the garden?" he asked. "Awful lot of people out there, but I don't seem to find the way."

The butler paused. He was breathing a bit hard, and he looked down at the floor as though to disguise the expression which was glowing in his eyes.

"Mademoiselle Michelson, she is coming to see you," he said.

Hamilton returned to the waiting room and was not surprised to see the group outside the window had disappeared. He lighted another cigarette, because he needed to think. But before thought, in came Mary Michelson, carrying in the scoop of her arm a bowl that held the great spray of roses.

"*Did* you bring these?" she asked.

"They made me think of you," said he. "No blue in them, so they're all wrong. But somehow I thought about you when I saw them. So lovely and fresh, you know. Never can think of anything when I see a florist shop. But today I thought about you. Glad you like them."

She looked at the flowers and then transferred her smile to Hamilton. "I do like them a lot," she said. There was a certain gentleness in her voice that Hamilton had heard before, and he thought he recognized the intonation of a girl addressing a man who was patently a weak-wit.

Consequently he smiled more radiantly than ever.

"You know what I was thinking, Miss Michelson?"

"I'm afraid that I don't."

"Down at the Métropole they have a new orchestra. All-American like a football team. All champions. There's a fellow there on the slide trombone—you know how a trombone blasts the cotton out of the ears? But this chap makes it sing. Actually sing. You know, I thought we might trot down there and have a dance or two, one evening. Spot of dinner—and they have some fine old Pol Roget. Absolutely the stuff! Then we could dance a couple of turns. What do you say?"

"How sorry I am that I haven't this evening free!" said the girl. "You've been in England a good deal, haven't you, Mr. Hamilton?"

"Now, how did you notice that?" asked Hamilton, beaming. "Went to a school down in Sussex. You know the sort of place. Headmaster all full of algebra and Greek and gardening. Nothing heated except the entrance hall. Boiled in that and froze every other place. Chilblains. Great place for chilblains. Never saw so many chilblains. Hands absolutely purple with them. Good old England! You know—history and all that. Forbears, and that sort of thing. But I'd rather think about it and let the other fellow live in it."

"Would you?" she said. "Well—"

She kept on smiling, quietly, thoughtfully. She was seeing all the way through him. Or was it quite all the way? She was in very crisp white and the reflected light shone on the brown of her throat. Her smiling, he thought, was like an added color to the picture. In her hair there was a special radiance.

"Or, you know," said Hamilton, there's Ciro's, if you like that sort of thing. Wonderful cellar, there. Good music, too. We might trot around Ciro's for a while.

"There's so much to do here at the pension," said the girl, "that I never have my work finished. So I never know."

"Ah, don't you?"

"No, I really don't."

"AH, but look here. You'll come out with me one evening, won't you? Never know what to say when I have to sit and talk. That's the reason they have music. A few fox trots in the air—they give a fellow like me a chance to entertain. You *will* come out with me one evening, won't you?"

"Oh course," said the girl.

"But soon, I mean?"

"I hope so."

"I know what it is—being busy," said Hamilton. "Used to travel with a valet and it wakened me early in the morning to think out something for the fellow to do, all day. Can't give a valet nothing to do. Corrupts them. Ruins them for their next master."

"Mr. Hamilton, I lead a very simple life here and—"

"A simple life can be the devil, can't it?" interrupted Hamilton, with his smile. "My Aunt Hester leads the simple life. In a barn. It used to be a barn, at least. At Worcester, Mass. Gets along with three servants. I know all about that. But all I mean is a simple party. Listen to some music. Trot around a little. Enough music to wipe out the silences. I never know what to talk about very well."

"I think you do—amazingly," said the girl.

"Ah, do you? That's nice of you. The fact is that I think we could get on. The moment I saw you, I thought we could get on pretty well. If you can put up with a silly ass like me. My Aunt Hester always says that I'm a silly ass."

He laughed his most vacuous laugh.

"Not at all," said the girl. "And of course we could get on. I want to see you very soon."

"The butler has my card, and I scribbled the telephone number of the hotel on it. You wouldn't give me a buzz, would you, when there's time on your hands?"

"Oh course I would. I'm so sorry that I have to look after things in the kitchen."

"Oh, do you? Well, I'll trot along, then. Won't forget me, will you?"

"Of course not."

"Really, though? That's a promise."

"Of course it's a promise."

"That's fine,' said Hamilton. "It warms me up a lot. It's good to hear. This Riviera—you know—a lot of climate—blue and gold—all that—Casino—only silly girls. You know, the ones that won't listen to the music. Just chatter. I'll wait to hear from you, Miss Michelson. Tell you what—I can whang a guitar. Quit a bit. And sing a little. Nothing to write home about. Untrained. But I'd like to sing to *you*, if you can stand it?"

"I want to hear you," she said.

Her smile had almost worn away before he got out. He could nearly hear her comments behind the closed door, as he stepped into his long, low-hung racer, and shot away towards Monte Carlo.

From the hotel, he sent for the agent of the Sûreté, Louis Desaix, alias Harrison Victor, who found him lounging beside a window in the westering sun, drinking wine and eating Roquefort with crusts of French bread.

"I had to have you, Victor," said Hamilton. "When I found out that they had Chateau Lafitte, 1906—glorious year, eh? I knew that if I didn't have company, I'd finish off the bottle all by myself. Chateau Lafitte! 1906! My God, Victor, when you think of the fellows who spend their money for brandy and soda—"

"How long have you lived in Europe?" asked Victor touching his mustache ends tenderly.

"That doesn't matter. I only need to tell you that I was raised on a farm. So things go deep. Things like 1906 Chateau Lafitte."

"Tell me a dash about yourself."

"Sometime, I'd like to."

"Sometime, eh?"

"Nothing personal, old fellow."

"Hell, no," said Harrison Victor.

He poured some of the wine into a glass, looked towards the sunlight through the glass, and sniffed at the brim.

"Ah, God!" he said. "Why is it that France is so full of the French?"

"Otherwise," said Hamilton, "all the world would want to live here. It's one of the acts of the Almighty. I hope you have a religious nature, Victor?"

"If I didn't, how could I be in the service?"

"Exactly. I, for one, have a religious nature. In France, I take the French wine and leave the French."

Harrison Victor tasted the Bordeaux and closed his eyes.

Hamilton covered a bit of crust with a green bit of Roquefort and handed it to his assistant.

Said Victor, presently:

"They call Roquefort the drunkard's bread. Now I understand for the first time."

"There's the pity of it," murmured Hamilton. "We never can get drunk."

Victor sighed. "What did you find out?" he asked.

"The thing has to do with Russia. Japan's agent Number One is probably George Michelson, Friedberg, or Vicomte de Graulchier."

De Graulchier is not old enough."

"Perhaps not. I thought of that, too. But on the other hand, he's the only one of the lot who might be a Jap."

"Jap? He's perfect French!"

"You may not know all about the Japs. Perhaps you haven't lived in Okotsk. Anyway, tonight I'm going to try to find out."

"How?" Victor Harrison asked incredulously.

"By entering Mon Sourir."

"Hamilton," said Victor, "don't do it. Something tells me that those fellows would shoot anyone at night."

"Not a dog who's in love," said Hamilton. "And how in love I am! I've even asked her to spend an evening at Ciro's, and you know that costs like the devil."

CHAPTER VII

The Burglar

THERE is hardly a thing in the world so clumsy, so malformed, so apt to speak with a voice of its own at the wrong moment, as a guitar. Anthony Hamilton decided that before he had scaled the pink wall of the garden of Villa Mon Sourir. A light tap brought from the instrument a groaning sound which would not die quickly. The felt in which it was wrapped seemed to retain the sound like moisture and cherish it whole seconds after it should have died.

In addition, the night was clear. Even frost could not have made the stars glitter more brightly, and in addition there was a half moon sailing like an ancient ship across the sky and throwing its golden shadow down the sea. From the top of the wall Anthony Hamilton contemplated that beauty without pleasure, partly because light was the last thing he wanted for his excursion, and partly because the top of the wall was guarded with fragments of broken glass, imbedded in the cement. Moreover, he saw a shadowy form approaching him through the little orange trees. He should, of course, have dropped back outside the wall into safety. Instead, being Anthony Hamilton, he dropped down inside the wall and scuttled to the shelter of a black shadow beneath a shrub.

Crunching footfalls came near him from one side; footfalls which were not echoes drew close from the opposite direction. The first man paused not three strides away. The second halted facing him. Hamilton, through the black openwork of the leaves, could see them both against the stars.

"All quiet?" said the first man.

"Too quiet," said the second.

They spoke in the Czech tongue, which was just a little odd for night watchmen on the Riviera, and which strained the brain of Hamilton to the utmost. He had hardly more than a book knowledge of that strange language.

"What was that which came over the wall?"

"Nothing. What did you see?"

"A shadow dropped over. I only saw it out of the corner of my eye."

"A cat, perhaps."

"Or a man, perhaps."

"A burglar, you mean?"

"There are better things than money to be stolen here."

"No one in the world suspects this house."

"So we think, but the Head, the Master, does not think so."

"He calls 'fire, fire' so often that no one will believe him even when the flames begin to rise."

"It's better to talk about fire than it is to be burned."

"Well, what do you want to do?"

"Keep the eyes open and look about."

"For a man?"

"Yes."

"Begin here, then."

They separated. One of them walked straight towards the bush which sheltered Hamilton. He put a hand

on the gun under his coat. The fellow halted with the leaves of the shrub brushing against his trousers.

"Nobody would try on a night as bright as this," he said.

"Nobody but a fool."

"Fools don't matter."

"Aye, and that's true. Come on, then, but keep your eyes wide open."

"Do you think I'd sleep on the job when I'm working for him?"

"No, because you'd never wake up, perhaps."

They continued their rounds in opposite directions. It was very odd indeed. Even the French police might like to learn of a quiet little pension which employed two private watchmen to walk the rounds ceaselessly every night, watchmen who talked such good Czech!

Hamilton waited until the footfalls were soundless, and then he walked straight across the garden. He avoided the gravel paths, leaping over them, because the most cunning step in the world, even the velvet paw of a cat, cannot help but make a slight rustling noise when it passes across gravel. The rest of the soil was dug up about the roses and the iris, of which there was an abundance, but Hamilton knew the cunning art of sinking his feet into soft ground without allowing so much as a whisper to sound on the air. In this way, taking long, slow, dipping steps, he crossed the garden and stood in the shadow under the wall of the house.

Voices were speaking inside the place. He could not dissolve them into words and he could not identify the speakers except when a booming laughter, resonant as a note struck on a great gong, came sounding out to him. Only the throat of huge Karol Menzel could have produced the sound. He had made on the mind of Hamilton an impression that grew with the passing of time. He was a sort of smooth-shaven Richard Lion-Heart, big in body and bigger still in savage potentiality. Among the voices of the men he could distinguish slightly, the higher pitch of women speaking.

That should mean that the loggia above him would be unoccupied—unless burly Czech watchers made the rounds of the house as well as of the grounds. He looked upwards to estimate the best way of approach.

AS convenient as a ladder, the bars of a window climbed in a great, half-decorative scroll towards the loggia above. He gripped the felt covering of the guitar in his teeth, and climbed. H would have been wiser, perhaps, to have left the guitar on the ground below, but in case of a crisis such as might happen, the guitar was really his passport, his proof and voucher of idiocy.

He climbed very slowly, though even so the infernal guitar gave out certain murmurings and moanings as though ghostly hands were thrumming it. Now he stepped over the low wall of the loggia and entered the shadow cast down from the moon. The cold of danger was in that darkness.

A glance over his shoulder showed him the dusky sea, flowing with a quicksilver brightness down the path of the moon. A sail blew out of nothingness, stood black against that path and slid away into dimness again; far out a thin line of lights marked the passing of some big passenger steamer.

The loggia was full of chilly little whisperings from the sea breeze in the vines. Some pots of large, strange-shaped flowers stood along the foot of the wall. There was a mat of woven

grass and a long bamboo chair for bathing in the southern sun. Beyond appeared a double door. The glass panes of it winked at him like a dozen black eyes. He tried the handle. It was not locked, and he pulled half the door open, slowly, slowly.

In spite of all that care the door made a little trembling jingle of sound; and out of the darkness laughing voices were suddenly loud. To his sharpened senses, tongues seemed to be speaking in the very room before him, mocking the stealth of his entrance; but of course that was illusion. By degrees he placed the noise at its proper distance down the stairs. For the inner door of the room was open.

That was tenfold unfortunate. If he closed the door, a passing servant might notice the change. If he did not close it, he was apt to be seen at any instant as he began his search. One of those queer, senseless panics which he had known before swept over him. As the years went on, his nerves did not grow better. They became distinctly worse and the time might come when he would betray himself by a shuddering palsy of fear in a crisis.

He moistened his lips and took hold of himself with a firm grasp, frowning a little. Then a ray from his pocket torch — it was hardly larger than a fountain pen — cut the blackness like a knife. If by chance he were seized and searched, he would be damned by the possession of that clever little light, perhaps.

The ray glanced over the rough yellow satin of a bedcover, over the blue wall-hanging at its head; it glimmered across the mahogany top of a table, flashed like a startled eye in the triple mirror on the dressing table, touched the chairs right and left. In a moment the plan of the room was mapped faultlessly in his memory. He could switch out his light and walk as though by daylight from place to place, secure of not touching any obstacle. In Okotsk he had learned that art of moving in darkness with the surety of the blind.

Under the mattress of the bed, in the drawers of the dressing table, under an edge of the rug, somewhere in the closet, in the adjoining bathroom—through the half-open door he had caught the sheen of porcelain—in any of a dozen places he might be able to discover what he wanted—that little Everyman volume of Speke's famous "Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile." It was so important that a dead man's pocket had been picked to obtain it. Now Hamilton was determined to find the true reason for its significance.

He was about to start towards a small hanging shelf of books near the fireplace when he heard a soft pulsation—a rhythm rather than a sound, which passed down the hall. He shrank back towards the door to the loggia. But it was too late to escape that way. He was still long steps from it when a thin silhouette appeared against the obscure gloom of the hallway; then the electric lights flashed on.

A gray-headed man with towels over his arm went with a soft whisper of slippers straight into the bathroom. His head was bowed a trifle, thoughtfully. Hamilton, as he disappeared, sank on his knees behind the back of a chair.

The light in the bathroom clicked off; the whispering step recrossed the room. Once more it was snapped into darkness; but still Hamilton remained for a moment on his knees, taking breath.

When he rose, making sure that

nothing stirred outside the vague gloom of the inner doorway, he took an instant for thought. It might have been that the servant, going on the routine of his work, had seen nothing living in the room. Again, if it were true that every member of the household staff was a trained secret service worker, as Hamilton suspected, the man might have been aware of Hamilton instantly, but have gone on his way with an automatic calm, retreating to cut off the stranger's way of escape. The alarm even now might have sounded. Downstairs, not a voice was heard — then a subdued murmur of laughter.

Perhaps they were laughing as they received word that a stranger had dared come into the lion's mouth.

Still, Hamilton went straight forward to the hanging shelf of books because there was a decided understratum of the bulldog in his nature. The torch light he ran across the books in that case found them all volumes of Everyman, all of them dull green. And one, just to the right of the middle section, bore the title of Speke's "Journal"!

CHAPTER VIII

The Song of Life and Death

HE had it out instantly. He was by no means sure that this was the identical volume which he had seen in the possession of dead John Harbor, until he noticed a deep wrinkle at one corner which might have been caused by a fall. He would not have been able to mention that peculiarity if he had been asked to describe the book, but now he remembered it by touch. This was the very volume which he had taken from the coat pocket of Harbor!

He opened it swiftly, not to the text but to the fly-leaves, playing the slight radiance of his torch upon the paper, but there was not a mark either in pen or pencil, however faint!

Sighing, he shook his head with a frown and fluttered the pages of the book. A small white slip disengaged itself and fluttered away like an awkward moth. He caught it out of the air. It was a bit similar to those on which Harbor had made his notations. On it appeared the swiftly scrawled column of figures, except that there was no line for addition at the bottom of the sheet, like the following:

336 — 211
469 — 172
436 — 64

The answer struck him suddenly, with a shock like that of remembered guilt. It was simply a book code and the interpretation of the mysterious numbers which John Harbor had written down in the Casino was, simply, numbers of pages and of words on pages.

He turned to page 336 and, counting from "we hoped would soon cease to exist" at the top of the page, he got down to word 211.

"Tolerably."

That word would probably make sense in a message. It was a beautiful start, but of course he had to check the result. Very swiftly, because his trained eye had learned to calculate with a smooth speed, he reached word after word and found himself writing out a sentence:

"Tolerably Burial To To The—"

No, there was no sense in that at all.

He went back and added, to his counting, the title words at the top of the page, on the left, always, "Source

of the Nile," and on the right the sectional topics.

In this way he reached the following word group:

"Indifferent Chiefs The Villagers Fact Men Arrive Customs."

It seemed to have a vague sense. If it was a collapse telegraphic form of expression it might mean that "indifferent chiefs" had some sort of relationship to "the villagers." But "men arrive customs" was a stumbling block.

He lowered the book and closed his eyes. Down the stairs the voices were carrying on merrily. A very thin fragrance of tobacco smoke ascended to his nostrils.

Then he started his work all over again. He included this time, not only the titles at the tops of the pages but also the page numbers, including the numbers as words to be counted. In this manner he got at the following message:

"Opportunity In England Killed Rely On New Diplomacy."

A fine sweat burst out on his face. He set his teeth over an exclamation of triumph.

An opportunity in England had been destroyed. They must rely on a new diplomacy!

That made sense, perfect sense. It meant that in a single night's work the mass of copied messages which Harrison Victor had accumulated could be turned from naked figures into speaking words. It meant that Tokio *had* been stung to the quick—if indeed Tokio were at the bottom of all this. It meant that he, Anthony Hamilton, had scored another termendous success—if only the brilliance of his work would be appreciated in Washington. And at least one of the brains there was not asleep! The suddenness of his triumph would be a convincing thing, after Victor and the rest had worked so long!

He felt an imminence of something—a danger coming—and then through the trance of exultation, he heard light footfalls coming very rapidly up the stairs.

He replaced the slip inside the pages of the book, slid it back into its place on the shelf, and glided to the door. The footfalls were very near, now, but he used a precious second or so of extra time to push the door open silently, and then, catching up the infernal burden of the guitar, he stepped out onto the loggia and shrank back against the wall.

AT the same time the lights went on inside the room. He could see beautiful Mary Michelson in a dress of clouds of smoke-colored lace, with a red silk wrap thrown over her arm. She was singing softly, smiling as she sang.

Well, however exquisite, she was one of them. She would have to be involved in their ruin, when he managed to compass that. And it would go very hard if out of the mass of notes in the hands of Harrison Victor, he did not manage to build up a charge of espionage against this whole crew. The French system of justice worked with wonderful precision in dealing with such cases. Sentences were dealt out quickly, and no sentence was short.

Mary Michelson, her father, the pale Russian invalid, thin-faced Maria Blachavenski, overbearing Henri de Graulchier—they would all be erased from the scene at a single stroke!

He retreated to the side of the loggia and was about to swing himself down onto the window bars beneath when he heard a voice saying:

"Well, he could have gone up this way?"

"Where?"

"Along the bars of the window, fool!"

"That's true."

The two Czechs were murmuring quietly together.

"And then through the door of Mary's room. It's never locked, day or night."

Very odd that two hired night watchmen should refer to their mistress by her first name!

The thing was as perfect as a blossoming flower. It was rounded and beautiful and complete. Every man and woman at Villa Mon Sourir belonged to the group of international plotters.

The fly in the ointment was that the retreat of the spy was cut off neatly and hopelessly. If he stirred from the loggia, he would be seen by the two men. If he attempted to withdraw into the room — why, there was smiling Mary Michelson, who, with one outcry, could bring a swarm of hornets about him.

There was one device left. The childishness of it set his teeth on edge, but stripping the felt from the guitar, he reclined in the bamboo chair and began to sing, softly, gently touching the strings of the guitar, that popular song about "the wavering ocean" and the "flood of his emotion," with "eyes" and "rise" and "skies" all neatly rhymed in the middle of the chorus.

He had about reached that spot when the door of the bedroom was thrust open and Mary Michelson appeared, with one hand behind her. He could guess what that hand was holding. But at the sight of her, he closed his eyes, bent back his head, and gave his whole soul and his whole vocal strength to the silly words of the song.

As the song ended, he saw Mary Michelson sitting on the edge of the loggia wall, smiling at him. From the corner of his eye he was vaguely aware of two shadowy forms beginning to loom. But the girl's hand moved, and the two half-seen shadows instantly disappeared.

"Mr. Hamilton, *how* did you manage to get here?" asked the girl.

"Over the wall like an alley cat," he said. "That was a pretty good one, don't you think? I mean, kind of a good ring and swing to the chorus, you know!"

"Yes, it has a sort of swing," said the girl, still smiling.

She was watching him, not very intently.

Into the doorway of her room burst the gigantic form of Karol Menzel.

"What's this?" he called.

"My friend Mr. Hamilton dropped in with the loveliest serenade," said the girl.

"Ah?" said Menzel. "Serenade? Ah?"

"Ask him out to join the fun," said Hamilton.

"Won't you come out and join the fun, Mr. Menzel?" asked the girl.

"Fun?" said Menzel. "No. I won't join the fun. Excuse me, Mary, if you please."

"Certainly, Karol," she answered.

The giant disappeared. For the first time, Hamilton was able to appreciate his strength fully. There was something about his hands which called attention to his physical force.

"Oh, by the way, Karol," called the girl, "will you tell Henri that I'd like to see him—after a while?"

"I'll tell him," boomed the voice of Menzel, which was always like a sound out of a cave.

"I say," said Hamilton, "you know that song, 'Nothing to Tie to?'"

"No, I don't."

"It's like this." He sang:

"Nothing to hang to;
Never had an anchor;
Nothing to sigh to;
Nothing to tie to—

Do you like that?"

"It has a nice rhythm," said she.

"It picks up your feet, what?"

"I think it would," said she.

"When the old saxophone comes in there—ta-da-ta-deedle-dum! Listen, is that good?"

"Yes, it is," said Mary Michelson.

SHE nodded, smiling just a little. She was so lovely that the least bit of smiling cast a great light.

"Here's one of the newest of the new," said Hamilton.

He leaned back his head and sang, sadly:

"Snow in the sky,
That's why I cry;
Everything gray,
Ever-y day.
All around
Only the ground
Is bright
And white;
But when I look up, every day,
Ev-er-y-thing, is gray!

What do you think?"

"Ah—well, I don't quite know what to think," she said.

"Something neat about the words, what?" said Hamilton. "Look at that bit:

"All around
Only the ground
Is bright
And white—

I mean, it seems to mean something. And look at the way the rhymes come in so fast!"

"Yes, the lines are short!" she said.

"I was thinking about that song today," said Hamilton. "I mean, it was meant for me, today. You know—plenty of sunshine—mimosa in the air—the sea bluing itself up bluer than ever. But I was down."

"Ah, were you?"

"I was. I was wondering what you were thinking about me. Some people feel that I'm a silly sort of an ass. I was wondering: do you think that?"

"No. I think you might be very clever—one of the cleverest fellows I ever knew."

"No, not that," he answered, laughing. "Not after what my algebra teacher said to me in the good old boyhood days."

"Perhaps the classics were more in your line?"

"I got as far as Caesar's bridge," said he, "but I never crossed the blighter. He was still laughing. "You know what we ought to do?"

"What do you think?"

"We really ought to go downtown and try the Métropole orchestra. Saxophone player there with a real soul."

"I'd like to," said the girl.

"No, but really?"

"Yes, of course."

"A real party, I mean."

"That's what I mean, too."

"All the way from orchids to champagne, is my idea."

"It's so long since I've gone all the way from orchids to champagne," she said.

"Is it? Then we ought to."

"Yes, I think we ought."

"And just let the music talk for us."

"I'd like to just talk about nothing," she answered.

"The moment I saw you, I knew that there'd be something between us.

You know, sometimes you can tell. Why shouldn't we step out tonight?"

"I'd like nothing better," she said.

"But?" asked Hamilton, anxiously.

"Couldn't we make it tomorrow?"

"Well, why not? But—"

I never know why
The nights pass by."

He sang it with a wailing earnestness.

"It seems to mean that the nights we miss will never come back," he said.

"Yes, it does seem to mean that," she replied. "Suppose we say tomorrow evening?"

Henri de Graulchier's voice sounded at the door of the girl's room.

"May I come in?"

"Come in, Henri," she called. "Mr. Hamilton has just been surprising me with some music. And I was wondering if he wouldn't like to have you show him the house—because I have to go to bed so early? Won't you entertain Mr. Hamilton for a little while, Henri? Ah, but you haven't met. Mr. Hamilton, the Vicomte de Graulchier."

CHAPTER IX

The Ordeal

IT all happened so smoothly and easily that Hamilton hardly realized how he was slid into the hands of the vicomte. Mary Michelson said good night to them both with a charming smile, but as Hamilton turned away he had a distinct sensation that a telling glance had passed between the girl and the Frenchman. And he knew instantly that he was on trial for his life. When the door closed between them and the girl, he was sure that a distinct chance for mercy had been shut away.

Or could he be sure? Under her smile was the bright hardness of steel. She had turned him over to the vicomte for an acid test.

The great form of Menzel appeared in a doorway.

"Come along, Karol," said the vicomte. "You know Mr. Hamilton, don't you? Mr. Karol Menzel. Come on, Menzel. Mary thinks that Mr. Hamilton would like to see the house. She had to turn in early. Poor girl hounded by the domestic duties, eh?"

He spoke very good English, with the slight French oil poured over it. Hamilton could feel it in his throat. Menzel had shaken hands.

"Might have a drink," he said.

"A drink, of course," said the vicomte with his fixed smile. A certain difference entered his face when he was smiling. "Any man who plays single numbers at roulette is sure to like his liquor."

"Funny thing," said Hamilton, "how lucky the nine can be, you know. You find them in fairy stories. The nines, I mean."

"Do you?" remarked de Graulchier.

"You know the fairy stories, of course," said Hamilton. "Tom Thumb and all that?"

"Ah, fairy stories? Yes, of course. Tom Thumb? Of course."

He did not know them, it seemed plain. He knew them so little that actually he attached slight importance to them. And in French there are plenty of the tales. Every Frenchman knows Tom Thumb.

Hamilton looked at the pin-pricked skin, the long, oval of the face of de Graulchier, and the odd shape and intense blackness of the eyes—a blackness with no shine to it. He remembered the queer effect that a smile had on that face, the sudden alteration, and he realized with a burst of inward light that he was not walking at the

side of the real Vicomte de Graulchier. He was not with a Frenchman at all. This short-legged, heavy-shouldered man of an uncertain age was, in fact, an Oriental, a Japanese who by the grace of chance was endowed with rather Caucausian features. And if that were the case, this was the famous Number One of the Japanese secret service! This was the nameless and wonderful man who, at last, had left his post in control of the entire Japanese organization in order to go far abroad and create trouble with his own mind and hands.

Yet his French was perfect. His English was that of a Frenchman. Even the faults in it must have been acquired by infinite and patient practice.

Hamilton, pressing the guitar a little more tightly under his arm, knew that he was walking a path so narrow that one misstep would cast him over a precipice. In the choice of each seemingly casual, seemingly silly word lay the difference between life and death. Henri de Graulchier was walking down the stairs with a singularly elastic step. In fact, from his movements he seemed to be nearer forty than to the sixty which must be the truth.

They went down into the library, where Pierre brought in coffee and cognac. His square of a face retained habitually a look as sour as that of red wine.

Henri de Graulchier said:

"We keep a night watchman about? How did you manage to come across the garden without being seen?"

Hamilton winked and held up a forefinger. "I'm a hunter," he said. "When I heard footsteps, I dived into a shadow. The guitar made a moaning sound; and I thought that I was done for. But no, the watchman went on. I got up and skidded for the house. Not on the gravel paths. No, no!" He laughed.

"Ah, not on the paths?" said Menzel, looking very straight at him.

"No, no! Too much noise. Over the cultivated ground stepping with the toe pointed like a dancing master. No sound at all, except what a field mouse might hear. And so—there I was!"

"Well done, Mr. Hamilton," said de Graulchier, smiling.

"Aye," grunted Menzel.

"Queer thing, though," said Hamilton, "I was half afraid to climb up to the loggia. Really was, on my soul. It didn't seem quite the picture—climbing up there. I wanted to tune up and sing my songs standing down there at the foot of the wall. But then I remembered the night watchman, what? The jolly old boy might have collared me and walked me right off the grounds. So I climbed."

Menzel looked over at de Graulchier.

"Have another cognac?" asked the vicomte.

"RATHER!" said Hamilton. "I can always use a spot of the good stuff after an adventure like this. You don't think Miss Michelson minded, do you?"

"I think she was delighted," said de Graulchier. "Music and young girls—the two ideas go together, eh?"

"Music and young girls?" said Hamilton. "Hold on — that's good, isn't it?"

"De Graulchier is full of good things," said Menzel sourly.

"Well, perhaps I ought to trot along."

"Do let us show you the house," said the vicomte. "Miss Michelson asked us to."

"Thanks," said Hamilton. "Imagine turning in at this time of the night, though! Poor girl!"

"She runs the pension and that means a great deal of work with bills, and accounts," explained Menzel.

"Rotten luck, though," commented Hamilton. "Wonderful girl! Wonderful!"

"Let's show you the house, as she

HENRI DE GRAULCHIER

suggested. It will fill in a bit of the evening for you," said de Graulchier. "This room and the one below, eh, Menzel?"

"They're the best bits," said Menzel.

"Before the Riviera was a resort," said de Graulchier, "the Comte de Volens built this house. Built it big, as you see. Their minds were more spacious, in those days; they needed room for their ideas; and the result was high ceilings and plenty of air. You see how he arranged this room, with the windows opening onto the terrace?"

"Did he put in all the books?" asked Hamilton.

"They came with a later generation."

"I like books," declared Hamilton.

"Do you?" asked the blunt, heavy voice of Menzel.

"Yes," said Hamilton. "They give a nice look to a wall, eh? Always make me think of the time other people put in grinding?"

"In fact, they cover the wall with time," said de Graulchier. "We see their colors, but really we are seeing thought. A fourth-dimensional beauty is given to our surroundings by them."

"Really?" said Hamilton.

He opened his mouth and his eyes, and stared.

"Well, well — quite right, too," he said, and hastily swallowed his glass of brandy.

He looked up in time to see a sardonic smile fading from the lips of Menzel, but the unlighted eyes of de Graulchier still reserved a doubt. He was testing his man, but he was by no means sure, it seemed. If that doubt grew—if it increased by a single step —Hamilton was perfectly certain that he was a dead man.

"Fourth-dimensional — ah!" said Hamilton, and lighted a cigarette.

"You can find the history of the Volens family by running your eyes over their books. Solid people. Good minds. Read in four languages. And even read a little too much, as you'll see when you come to their eighteenth century books. Because there they made the fatal mistake. Their lives were not pleasant enough; they had to garnish their aristocratic minds with democratic ideas. That was the touch of garlic in the salad dressing, you see."

"Exactly," said Hamilton, staring more helplessly than ever.

"So many people of today feel the same thing," said de Graulchier. "They have possessions, taste, means

to employ their minds to the fullest, and yet they insist on adding an extra pungency. They must touch knives and handle fire. They play with the ideas of Karl Marx, make a mystery of him, and so teach the man in the street to look up as though towards a great philosopher. But that is dangerous. For the man in the street wants no ideas except those which he can use like a club to knock down others. Shall we show Mr. Hamilton what happened to the Volens family?"

"I don't think he'd be interested," said Menzel.

"The way I'll tell the story—yes—I think that that would interest him. Will you come to the room below, Mr. Hamilton?"

"Of course," said Hamilton, rising with a false alacrity.

He had been under close observation, and now he knew that a gun was to be put to his head.

CHAPTER X

The Chair of Death

THEY passed down the hall from the library to a door which de Graulchier opened, revealing a flight of descending steps. Down these the vicomte went with Hamilton behind him and the giant Menzel in the rear.

"A pity that this part of the house isn't used more, in these days," said the vicomte, leading the way across a lower hall and into a long, narrow room with a vaulted ceiling. "A little damp, but always cool. A resting place, we might say."

He laughed a little, something he rarely did. And his voice was surprisingly high and cracked. Only in his laughter did his advancing age appear, thought Hamilton. A switch had turned on one light in a wall bracket. It made a glare rather than an effectual illumination and allowed the eye to pass through a big open window at the end of the room, and so out over the moonlit, dusky sea. One chair stood before the window. There was no other article of furniture in the room.

"Observe what I was saying about the folly of dignifying ideas of social reform with the attention of people of good minds. That brought on the French Revolution," explained de Graulchier, "and the Volens family was driven out. The comte became an emigré. The revolutionists wandered for a few days through the big rooms of this place, and then they withdrew because they were not at home except in their kennels and rabbit warrens. In the meantime, the poor Comte de Volens had taken shelter on board the English fleet. He pointed out to the admiral that this little peninsula would make an excellent foothold on the coast. The English agreed. The Comte de Volens therefore landed secretly, came to the house, and prepared to make a signal from that window—a signal which would be seen at night by the English, who would send a small boat close in to observe the light. But one of those revolutionary rats ferreted out the secret of the comte's presence. He was seized. In that corner of this very room, he was tortured until pain had driven him mad."

Here de Graulchier turned suddenly and pointed to the corner of the room. And Menzel made soft, long step towards Hamilton from the rear.

"Why didn't poor Volens talk, then?" cried Hamilton. "Before I'd take the torture, I'd talk for them—I'd sing and dance for them, too."

He laughed a little; the sound echoed mournfully through the long chamber.

De Graulchier shrugged his shoulders and glanced towards Menzel. There might have been a thousand meanings in that glance.

"When they learned what the Comte de Volens had intended to do," said the vicomte, "they fastened that chair to the floor with bolts—which still hold it in place—and then—then they bound him hand and foot, and lashed him into the chair to look as long as he pleased at the sea. For the English never received the signal, never landed, and the Comte de Volens died like a dog—died as a spy *should* die!"

The voice of de Graulchier at this moment boomed suddenly through the room; he fixed his glance steadily on the face of Hamilton. Menzel, keeping directly behind the back of Hamilton, made some movement of preparation. And the horror which had come over Hamilton once before that evening, now surged up in him again.

He could not speak; and yet he had to speak—at once! For half of a terrible second he fought the panic. He could not speak, and yet he had to do something the equivalent of speech.

He walked straight to the chair and sat down in it.

"I HOPE they gave the poor blighter a cushion to sit on," said Hamilton. "Think of the ache of staying here — there isn't even a curvex to the bottom of the chair!"

He could feel, rather than see or hear, the noiseless approach of Menzel from the rear. In front of him, eyeing him steadily, de Graulchier was studying his face. A quiver of his nostrils, the slightest change in his voice, and the hand of de Graulchier would make a signal to the giant.

Hamilton said: "But after all, Volens was able to die sitting instead of standing. You know that new song?"

He lifted his chin and half-closed his eyes—so that de Graulchier could examine him even more closely, at will; and Hamilton sang:

"Wearily waiting,
Sitting alo-o-o-ne
Wearily sighing—"

"Stop that!" boomed Menzel.

"Oh!" exclaimed Hamilton, starting from the chair. "Don't you like it?"

"I do not," said Menzel.

"Come, come, Karol," protested de Graulchier.

"Beg pardon, Mr. Hamilton. I mean, the echo in this room—knocks like a hammer on a fellow's ears, you see."

"Yes, the echo—yes, that's bad," said Hamilton.

He turned about and flashed his brightest, his most empty smile at de Graulchier.

"Awfully good of you to spend all this time on me," he said. "You know, I never would have guessed that Mon Sourir had a ghost in it. Looks so pink and cheerful, you know. Never would have thought that a place like this had its dead man along with it."

"Well, shall we go back?." growled Menzel. He looked askance at de Graulchier, who nodded, and they left the room.

"I used to think that crack in the wall,, there," said de Graulchier, "was over some hidden passage."

"Strange how mistaken a man can be," said Menzel, with a certain emphasis in his accent.

"Yes, we can all make foolish decisions," said de Graulchier. "But sometimes it's wisest to suspect everything."

"Even blank walls?" said the growling voice of Menzel.

But Hamilton, a slight warmth and weakness of relief running in his blood, knew that he was safe for this moment, at the least. He was not yet clear of the forest, but de Graulchier had at least missed his first spring.

He could understand the vast difficulties which confronted the vicomte. If he searched Hamilton, for instance, and found nothing; if Hamilton were really no more than an empty-headed, serenading fool; then the rough usage would be howled forth to the sky as a frightful outrage. That attention from the French police which of course de Graulchier least wanted to draw would be poured upon him at once, and perhaps all his work would be ruined. He had to try out his suspicions merely by an artistic pressure. Now, perhaps, he was satisfied that Hamilton was no more than he seemed to be.

As they reached the upper hall, Hamilton said: "I'll have to be toddling along."

"Sorry," said the vicomte. "Do come again; but just let us know beforehand. We're expecting to have some savage brutes of dogs loose on the place at night. Wouldn't like to have one of them dine on you, my friend."

"How can they dine on bones and laughing gas?" muttered big Menzel.

CHAPTER XI

The Code

ALL the way to the gate, Hamilton was singing gaily and quite loudly, and he paid no heed to the shadowy form which followed him at a little distance among the orange trees. In the road, a taxi picked him up and whirled him off from the Villa Mon Sourir.

He sank back on the cushion exhausted, eyes closed, breathing deeply of the mimosa-scented air which streamed through the open windows. The treacherous chill of the Riviera night was abroad, now, but he needed that cold to revive him a little.

Yet he kept wondering at himself a little. He had been through a thousand dangers more obvious. It was simply the strangeness of the Vicomte de Graulchier and the deadness of his black eyes that had been wearing down his strength, with great Karol Menzel like a tiger stalking them through the house, ready to strike and kill at a word.

Half an hour afterwards, he had Harrison Victor in his room at the hotel, eating hothouse grapes and drinking a bottle of dry Chablis. Hamilton had exchanged shoes for slippers, coat and waistcoat for a dressing gown. He had the deep windows giving on the sea wide open; the tops of trees rolled like more visible waves close at hand, trembling and sparkling under the wind; the gleam of the sea, farther off, merged with the faint shining of the sky.

Harrison Victor said:

"Well — you have news of some sort, Hamilton. Or are you just in a jam?"

"I'm in a jam," said Hamilton.

"So long as I'm part of the Sûreté, and this is France, how can you be in a jam?" asked Victor, bristling his mustaches with a smile.

"Suppose you find a woman," said Hamilton, "young, lovely, generous, good-natured, virtuous, clever, educated—"

"There isn't such a thing," said Victor.

"Strong, keen, self-possessed—" Hamilton went on.

"Ah, you mean Mary Michelson?"

"Suppose that the girl warms your heart, and then you discover that her talents are all bent towards a scheme that will smash your country between the eyes and, perhaps, involve the whole world in a war that will make 1914 seem like a fairy tale?"

"Interesting! I could love a girl like that!"

"Yes, and put her in prison, also?"

"Naturally."

"How would the French act, Victor, towards a beautiful woman? A woman like that?"

"The French can't see beauty in a political enemy."

"What would they do about her?"

"Devil's Island, I suppose — for twenty years."

"They might as well send her to hell forever."

"Of course."

Hamilton sipped the ice-cold wine and breathed the strange fragrance of it. It was like the mimosa perfume in January, spring and winter combined.

"I hesitate a little," he said.

"About what?" asked Victor.

"About Devil's Island."

"Do you mean that you've learned what we want to know?"

"More than we ever dreamed of knowing."

"About the girl, eh?"

"About everything. Tell me about the Vicomte de Graulchier in the first place. You've looked him up, of course?"

"Yes. Certainly. I've looked up everybody we could trace. Everybody in the Villa Mon Sourir."

"No doubt that he's the heir to the title?"

"No doubt at all."

"Get's the title through his father?"

"Yes."

"What was his father?"

"The usual thing. Country estates, income spent in Paris."

"What did the father do with his life?"

"Nothing particular. Traveled a little—chiefly in Paris. Wrote a book about the South Seas.

"Did he ever go there?"

"Yes, for a year."

"And returned a widower, with an infant son?"

"How did you guess that? Yes, that's the fact."

"His dead or divorced wife was a Japanese girl, old fellow. This present de Graulchier is half Japanese."

"Hai!" exclaimed Victor.

"He's the Japanese Number One secret service agent," said Hamilton.

"Not possible!"

"Hasn't he been away from Europe most of the time, recently?"

"Yes, yes. A traveler for years In Africa, I thought."

"IN Tokio, more likely. He's the great agent, Victor. And he's gathered all of these people about him. We're going to find out for exactly what purpose."

"Don't string it out! Tell me how!"

"If I tell you, it means that Mary Michelson will be sent to hell."

"Do you mean that you'd let a woman stand betwen you and your work, Hamilton? My God, it may mean what you say—the peace of the whole world!"

"Yes," murmured Hamilton, "it might mean exactly that."

Harrison Victor, starting out of his chair, began to stride up and down the room. He began to grow red in the face, breathing hard.

"There was a time tonight," Hamilton said, "when she suspected me.

And if she had acted on her suspicion, I would be dead now. Dead and buried in the sea off Les Roches. Instead, she merely passed me on for further examination; and I managed to pass with a good mark. The great vicomte decided that I *am* only an ass. However, I know that she must go to Devil's Island with the rest—and then perhaps I'll keep one holiday a year in grateful memory of one of the dead!" He broke out, in another voice, "Victor, what dirty dog's work it all is, sneaking and spying and prying, smiling in the faces of people, stabbing them in the back when the chance comes!"

"Or being stabbed," said Victor.

"Yes, that's true," said Hamilton.

He took a deep breath.

"Well, she has to go," he said at last. "Who's the man who works out the code stuff for you?"

"D'you mean that you've got the key to the code?"

"I have."

"Man—where is the key?"

"In Everyman's Library. Speke's 'Journal.' It's simply a book code."

Harrison Victor jerked out a handkerchief and wiped his face hurriedly.

"But that will give us a whole library of information!" he said.

"I think that it will," said Hamilton. "We'll uncover enough to guarantee a passage for every living soul in Mon Sourir to Devil's Island. And that includes—"

"Come, come!" said Victor. "There are other women in the world!"

"Of course there are."

"See here, Hamilton, this job is going to make you the Number One of the whole counter-espionage! Remember that, and forget the girl!"

"Of course," answered Hamilton, faintly.

"I know she's lovely, but the work she's doing is probably ugly enough. You *will* forget her, Hamilton?"

"Of course I shall," said Hamilton, "when I'm dead."

NEXT WEEK—

"The Case of the Little Father of Death"

Hoh-hoh Holds a Tryst

By H. H. Matteson

Two Mysterious Strangers Were Kidnaping the Girl When Hoh-hoh Stevens Came to Thunderbird for a Kiss

WHEN, by appointment, and secret and surreptitious, I meets Hoh-hoh Stevens, at midnight, on the wharf of the Thunderbird Salmon Company, he beckons me mysterious into a dark corner, turns on his flashlight, and leaves me take a observation at the blackest eye anywhere outside of Africa. Hoh-hoh had been in a terrible grievous fight, and they hain't a doubt.

"Which I warns you, Hoh-hoh," I says severe, "that this Kwad Arney hain't to be arrested without a battle."

"But I hain't had no fight as yet with Kwad Arney," Hoh-hoh protests. "It was with another party entire, a total plumb stranger to me. This strange party gets the jump on me, Dode, and before ever I am aware, or can get organized for hostilities, he lams me over a *chukkin* in the eye closing same complete. It never was Kwad Arney that done it. No, no."

Hoh-hoh he stands there kind of confused-like. "Leave us forget this fight I just had, a few minutes ago, Dode, and go back prior. I hain't all clear."

He stands there in the dark, kind of

tapping me on the chest with his forefinger. "Foller close, Dode, and check me if I don't get these items straight and in order: Joe Albright, the United States Commissioner, he gets word that Kwad Arney is just let out of the Federal pen and is on his way back to the Aleutian Islands."

"Correct, so far, Hoh-hoh," I says.

"Simultaneous this Konaway Jervis comes surging into the office, and says how Kwad is on his way for no purpose other than to kill him, and beseeches Joe to protect him agin the murderous designs of said Arney."

"Exact," I says.

"Then Joe appoints me personal guard, and I capers over here to the Thunderbird to go on shift and protect Konaway and his folks against all felonious assaults does this Kwad arrive and make the same."

"Still correct, Hoh-hoh."

"Well then, Dode, we'll go on to the next step, and I hain't no ways sure this fight I just had is connected with the arrival of Kwad, or whether it hain't, but I kind of feel that Konaway Jervis is threatened not by just one peril, but by two."

This Hoh-hoh then goes on to relate the circumstances about accumulating this mournful optic, and this here narrative is so plumb amazing I stands on tiptoe to smell his breath, but he's cold sober, Hoh-hoh is, though otherwise delirious, and they hain't a doubt.

"This Konaway Jervis assigns me this little *barabara* out back of his big house," says Hoh-hoh, "and I'm standing there in the dark without no light, in this *barabara,* and I hears something move behind me. I jerks around. There stands a terrible big, *skookum* party, and he lets go this belt whereof I speak, and he connects same with this here orb of mine, and down I go, this being a terrible lively *chukkin* the stranger party bestows. But I'm up shortly, and I tears into this caitiff, and we kind of fight all around the wickiup, demolishing fixtures, and during the contest, which don't last so very long, I lams loose a larrup, plunking same into this party's load-line, and he emits out a snort like Konaway's steam salmon-cooker had blew up, and he collapses down, and he's my meat, and they hain't a doubt."

"Oh, yes, Hoh-hoh," I says impatient, "but whoever was this assaulting party?"

"Which is what confuses me. I don't know as yet. I know from descriptions, however, that it hain't Kwad Arney. Now don't interrupt me further till I completes my recital:

"As I was saying, this party explodes out a terrible grunt when I hits him, and he lays still and sedate, and don't make a further move or noise. And I hears a hurrying footfall, and I fetches an observation through the winder, and acrost the space between my little *barabara* and the big Jervis house, this area being lighted good by the light on the back porch, comes capering a terribly purty young girl, and she's *klatawaing* for all she's worth, her skirts whipping violent, and she's got a little war-bag in one hand, and she busts into my *barabara,* where, as I tell you, it's good and dark, and she don't knock, nor give me a hail, nor wave a bush, but rampages right up to where I stand, and reeves an arm around my neck, and kisses me very ardent and delicious, and whispers, '*Lubesnoi,*' which is a Russian word meaning 'Beloved dear.'

"And she endows me with three-four kisses more, and I'm plumb helpless and can't resist none, and she whispers further for me to meet her at two

o'clock sharp, of the morning watch, on the cannery wharf, and however things is all *hiyu*. And with that she shoves this little war-bag into my fist, and she turns and goes surging back acrost the open, and into the Jervis house, and if what I relates hain't the truth entire, I'm plucking nosegays on the icy slopes of McKinley Mount."

HOH-HOH STEVENS

"Well, well," I says sarcastic, now no ways convinced Hoh-hoh hain't fetched away in the tops mental, "seeing what follered, you hain't regretful of this bust in the eye?"

"NONE whatever," he answers emphatic. "On the same terms I'd be willing to get tore all apart, and my remnants strewed all over the Bering Sea. She was downright lovely, this girl was. Oh, I aim emphatic to hold the tryst with her, at two o'clock on this identical dock where we stand. But even yet I hain't revealed out all my narrative.

"After receiving them salutes from this lovely lady, I stands there all agash, and foolish, I'm that transported with delights, and I'm in a state that I hain't hardly aware I got an adversary knocked out cold, laying by the back of my bunk, or that I got this war-bag in my fist.

"I gets conscious of the war-bag first. I walks over out of range of the front winder, and I kind of hold the war-bag under my tarpaulin coat, directing this flashlight onto same, and I loosens the pucker strings, and there is revealed out to me clost to ten thousand dollars in real *pil chickamin*, and a double fistful of rubies and otherwise jewelry, and if this sack of plunder hain't worth a hundred thousand dollars, I'm just crossing the ice with the child in my arms."

With that Hoh-hoh shoots a paw into his hip pocket and snakes out this little war-bag. We slant the light down into it, and the jewelry flashes like the cannery is afire.

"So now, Dode," Hoh-hoh resumes on, wadding up the bag and shoving same back into his pocket, "it's after midnight, and no great time till two. Yes, it is approachng up to the hour of my tryst with the lovely lady. Such scenes as is sure to ensue between I and her, I just can't abide of no vulgarian observing at same from the offing. So you *klatawa* on out, Dode. I—"

He fetches to a sudden pause, gives hisself a knock side of the head, and goes capering off in the dark, singing out to me how he plumb forgot to hog-tie his adversary.

I got ideas of my own touching the fitness of me observing at Hoh-hoh in his tryst with the lovely lady at two o'clock, so I walks quiet down the wharf, and I kind of quill up in a corner back of some fish boxes, where I'm out of the wind, and I allows my errant fancies to prance back along the trail of time, to the *ahnkuttie*, to things as they was here twenty-odd years ago.

There I sets, in the night still, hearing plain the thud of the big tyees as they go fighting their way into Konaway Jervis's fish trap, the same being not more than three-four hawser lengths from the end of the dock where I'm setting. Yes, memories comes flooding back, of things kind and appealing, of some brutal and murderous.

It's likely twenty one-two years ago, I hain't just clear, that Melody Miller set looking anxious out of the front winder of her *barabara* on Whale Skull Island. That night was terrible dark, and the *mahtwillie* was blowing like a million cat-fights.

Bad storms made Melody nervous. While she was only twenty year old then, she'd been a widdered a year, account of her man, Hiyu, he'd put out in a dory, got ketched in just such a *mahtwillie,* and never come back.

As the months had passed, she begun to sing at her work again, and fish hands that was boarding with her bestowed this nickname of "Melody." She was, and is, this Melody, a neat, stanch little party and a *skookum* good cook.

This here night, of the which I'm speaking, in the midst of the storm's wild screeching, Melody hears a smothered shout and a crash, and she tears open the door and goes breasting into the gale and driving rain, and just in time she hits the beach and lays holt of a terrible *skookum* young party that was just getting sucked into the water by the backwash, him helpless account of his dory crashing. A shattered plank had stove his head and chest.

Spite of this young *tillicum* weighing a good two hundred, this Melody, her muscles lithe-strong like wove silk strands, she drug him and packed him alternate into her *barabara,* and she stows him comfortable in a bunk, and she washes his head, and sews up his skelp with a cambric needle, and put wet cloths onto him, and he comes to, and groans, and lays looking foolish up at Melody Miller.

Right away, account of the eggregious size of this hurt party, the fish hands, no ways derisive, but bestowing titles fitting facts, calls this stranger Kwad, from *Kwadis,* the native word meaning "a whale." He'd revealed out how his last name was Arney, so far and near he got known as Kwad Arney.

Yes, the same Kwad Arney, just released from prison, of whom this Konaway Jervis is terrified Kwad is returning back to kill him.

Going back to this time twenty-odd year ago: This Kwad, when his dory had fetched apart, he lost all he had on earth, including all his fishing gear, and he didn't have a dime *pil chickamin,* and he laid sick of his hurts for a month, and Melody fed him tender, and when this giant of a Arney demands to know what he owes her, and however can he pay her, she says how it's her system, without exception, not to never take pay for *muckamuck,* or a blanket roll off a man that's sick.

Right away, when she says that, Kwad, touched deep, and aiming to get to fishing very soon, he asks this Melody when is her birthday.

She kind of smiles wistful at Kwad, and says how her birth date is the twenty-second, but some months yet to go, wherein she will be twenty years old exact.

II

"WHICH you warp to this, Melody," says this Kwad, "and you can bank on it confident. One night, when you think I'm unconscious, not aiming none to prowl

or snoop, I overhears you say to yourself how next to fetching your man, Hiyu, back alive you'd rather have a terrible red, thick carpet onto the floor than all else. Now I hain't got powers only human. I can't fetch your Hiyu back, but I can and will lay a terrible thick red carpet onto your floor next birthday, and this I aim to do, or bust myself all open alow and aloft."

The fishing don't go so good with Kwad account of him using old, borried gear, and he meets up with a party called Konaway Jervis, who's got good gear, and they fish as partners. One time when Kwad is shore side right here in this identical Thunderbird Channel, he observes how thick the tyees is running, and he knows right off him and Konaway is as good as rich.

Kwad is so delirious happy over this he just can't resist capering back to Whale Skull and informing Melody of the bang-up luck, and while he's gone this Konaway, who's so named by the Aleuts account of *konaway* means "one who grabs everything," this Jervis, very discreet and forehanded, he goes stampeding to the commission's office, and he takes and files personal on the Thunderbird location for a fish trap, forgetting to name Kwad as the owner of a half.

Well, when Kwad, later, sees the driver set into Thunderbird, and go to driving the Jervis trap, he organizes and says how he aims to go seething in and kill Konaway, and Melody she bawls and convinces him to desist.

So Kwad resumes on fishing with his old borried gear, but he don't do no good, and Melody's birthday is clost to hand.

The night before the twenty-second of the month, and Kwad didn't have no thick red carpet, and hardly a shirt personal to his back you might say, he goes *pelton* in the head. The Thunderbird trap was taking scows of tyees and every week Konaway Jervis sees hisself richer by eight-ten thousand dollars. Konaway he's got a watchman on the trap, and him and Konaway is setting on the watch deck in the dark, and a old battered dory rows up and Kwad Arney climbs the down-haul and he's that frantic and ashamed not to have no red carpet, he turns hisself loose very devastating, and he fights Konaway and the watchman all over the trap, and he batters this Konaway till he's most ready to pour, and he breaks loose a *chukkin* that knocks the watchman clean into the spiller and he sinks, and when he's dipped out with the brail he's deader than the whale that drifted into Sin Swept Sea the year before.

Oh yes, it fell to me to arrest Kwad Arney. I took him to Juneau and they bring him to trial, and they give him twenty-five years for manslaughter, and they send him to the Federal pen.

A lot of tillicums, and I'm one of 'em, we think Kwad was kind of justified. But law is law, and killings is killings. Melody she starts petitions to get Kwad paroled, or pardoned, but Konaway, by then lousy rich, he spends plenty *pil chickamin*, and he induces a lot of outcasts to write in protesting saying how Kwad is a killer and no ways fit to be at large.

That time, Konaway he's got a wife and a child, a girl, and they're in the States getting educated and refined. And Melody she tries her petition again and it's no go, and she keeps on trying and here now, this last clatter, when Kwad has been in twenty years, it's granted, and word comes how he's on his way back to his home, if any such, on Whale Skull Island.

Oh yes, when Konaway hears Kwad is on his way he liked to have blowed his clews. He just knows Kwad is on his way to kill him and, private, I got ideas similar.

Then when Konaway goes frantic to Joe Albright, praying for protection, Joe tells him not to fret none, that he'll station a terrible stanch hand, meaning Hoh-hoh, over to Thunderbird, and if this Kwad heaves in belligerent and throws his war bonnet on the ground, how Hoh-hoh will mollify him and subdue him down.

"Which that assurance relieves me very great," Konaway says. "You know my wife and my daughter Talis, now eighteen year old, they're up from the States, and, being civilized from living in cities, they're all ways nervous, and it would distress them deep did their husband and father get killed by a felon."

Again Joe reassures Konaway, and immediate he dispatches Hoh-hoh over to the Thunderbird to go on guard and prevent casualties.

WHEN Hoh-hoh gets over to the Thunderbird, Konaway meets him very exuberant, and he points out one of the little *barabara* standing in the yard just abaft of the new big Jervis house.

"I just fired a hand," Konaway confides, "which leaves that little house there vacant, and you move on in and it's yourn, though I do hope, for a spell, Mr. Stevens, you won't sleep much, and if so very light."

Night is coming on then, and Konaway takes Hoh-hoh into the kitchen, explaining how his missus, with city ideas, can't abide the idea of any one eating in the big dining room 'less he's wearing dinner clothes, which Hoh-hoh hain't, being garbed simple in tarpaulin pants, and him and Konaway eat, and Konaway says again how he'd fired a hand who occupied the little *barabara* former, but his wife don't know as yet of the discharge of this former employee, and his daughter, Talis, special don't know.

Hoh-hoh is no ways interested, but he eats hearty, and he goes ever to said little *barabara* and spreads his blankets. During the evening Hoh-hoh kind of squanders around, down the dock and back, and around the big house, ear and eye alert to detect signs of Kwad Arney surging in.

It's returning from one of them strolls when the mysterious party attacks Hoh-hoh in the *barabara,* and he gets kissed subsequent and acquires the little war-bag of *pil chickamin* and jewels.

I set there quite a while in the dark, on this dock, thinking of Melody Miller and how twenty vain years had went by and she didn't have no carpet as yet, when I hears a soft footfall on the planks of the wharf and I'm instant alert and agog.

It's in that same second I hears a terrible rucus from the direction of the little *barabara* back of the big Jervis house, and I deduct very accurate that the adversary had came to. But this racket ceases prompt.

I again fastens attentions on the approach of someone, and I see it's the round, snug figure of a young female, and she's got a kind of big war-bag or something in one hand, and she pauses frequent to turn her head his way and that like she's making search to locate someone.

While she's advancing on cautious and fearful, stopping every few feet, I hear the heavier tromp of a big man approaching up, and just then another sound broaches my intellect, and it's

just the faintest wash of a ship prow, and there's a big tug boat creeping in, and they's two men on the stern sculling same silent and skillful, and this boat just creeps up beside the dock quiet as any ghost ship.

It's then the girl comes up to where she's athwart the ship, and she kind of looks around anxious and nervous and whispers a name kind of hoarse:

"Orgof! Oh, Orgof!"

But it hain't Orgof that comes alongside her prompt, it's Hoh-hoh Stevens. He takes off his sou'wester hat very polite, but he claps same back violent when, for the first as I figure, he gets a observation at the ship that's stole in.

That instant two big tillicums that had been sculling the boat—and I see then they're wearing them high-peaked Astrakan caps like Russians does—they jump from the tug to the wharf and they make a run at the girl, and they lay hands onto her violent, and they start to drag her scratching and screaming frantic to the boat, and they got her likely half way when this Hoh-hoh is onto 'em like a striking cougar.

Observing at this *pukpuk* from where I'm setting salubrious in my corner, it looked like Hoh-hoh was showing off a lot before a lady. I don't know as I ever did see Hoh-hoh go into action violenter. Why, the very first *chukkin* he releases out it's like the fall of a three-ton driver hammer, and the Astrakan cap party on the who it's bestowed just raises up into the air and turns and twists, and when he hits the planks final he's a good ten foot from where he started. He keeps on sliding, and he fetches up plowing agin the bitt that's bolted to the wharf stringer.

And not scarcely stopping to swing off his fist, only changing direction of same, Hoh-hoh he donates same to the second Astrakan cap sport, thereby tearing him loose violent from his holt on the girl and heading him all leaned over to catch his balance down the wharf.

But this here indignity is a terrible affront to this second party. He comes about sudden, on a even keel, and he lays a course back at Hoh-hoh, and when he arrives up he's organized with a knife and he swings a flaming slash with same, and Hoh-hoh yelps and jumps back and I know he's cut, and the party swings again with the steel, and it's then I draws my old six and crawls out of my lair for eventualities.

But this Hoh-hoh hain't as yet in the need of aid, assistance or succor. Very neat, Hoh-hoh plucks that swinging knife arm out of the air, and he clamps down and gives a twist and a heave and I hear clear the cracking of bones and a moan of pain, and this second party collapses down kind of huddled on top of Number One.

III

NOW while this Hoh-hoh has just had his second dish, it don't suffice. He takes and jumps from the stringer to the after deck of the tug and he goes seething for'ard, and there's a shadder showing through the open pilot house winder, and Hoh-hoh he shoots both arms through and he drags a man out violent and gives same two-three belts in the face and belly and is reducing same very rapid when a hatch flies open and a party emerges out of the engine hold swinging with a starter wrench.

Hoh-hoh, as I figure, hain't aware of this fourth party. So I'm starting fast as age and rheumatiz will allow when the fourth party laces out with his spanner and lucky part of the

chukkin hits Hoh-hoh on the arm or shoulder, but not entire, for the wrench end kind of hits Hoh-hoh on the head, sending him supplicating down onto his knees. The party is organizing for another swing when I convince him to refrain, by the means I poke the muzzle of my big six-gun into his ear and start boring with same like I aim to extricate out his brains.

This Hoh-hoh hain't hardly stunted by the belt, and he's up prompt, and I got a pair of old handcuffs swinging in my suspender loop, and Hoh-hoh tears away the whistle cord and in no time we get them four outcasts rove up very secure to the foot of the hoisting mast.

This here churning *pukpuk* has both alarmed and disappointed the lovely young lady, her giving expressions by screeching hysterical and slinging her big war-bag and then running frantic back toward the house screaming like the noon shift whistle.

Half way down the dock she meets up with Konaway Jervis, but she tears right on by, and Konaway he comes up nervous and fearful, organized with a eight-gauge goose-gun.

Shaking violent like he'd open every seam he's got, Konaway he approaches up and makes further explanations to me, Hoh-hoh not being present account of he'd went rampaging down the dock, whether in pursuit of the young female to keep his tryst I just don't know at the time.

But he returns very prompt indeed, Hoh-hoh does, seeing as how he's got cargo balanced acrost one shoulder in the shape of a party rove up with strands of seal rawhide who he dumps down ignominious on the dock.

Konaway leans and fetches a observation at Hoh-hoh's prisoner and remarks out,

"Oh, so, and this is Orgof Nerivitch, the former butler whom I fired."

"Which if this party buttles skillful as he fights," says Hoh-hoh generous, "why he shouldn't ought to be long without a job."

When this Konaway learns about Hoh-hoh's fight with said butler, he goes raring back to his house and he drug his girl back prompt to the wharf, and when Hoh-hoh menaces at this Orgof and the skipper of the tug, threatening bloody to gouge out their eye, all hands break out with information. And this girl, Talis, she's that mad if it hain't Hoh-hoh restrains her gentle and firm by holding her clost in a embrace, Talis would have clawed this Orgof all up fine for fish bait.

Them facts elicited out of Talis, this Orgof and Konaway hisself shows on the log book as follers:

About a year before, Mrs. Jervis and Talis, then living in their fine home in Seattle, and making endeavors to put on plenty dog, is seized with the notion it would be good navigating to employ a skilled butler who can instruct all hands authoritative on what implements to employ when attacking food.

A tall, good-looking, poetic-appearing sharp answers the advertisement, admits he's a jo-darter of a butler and says his title is Orgof Nerivitch, and he has buttled for kings, discarding all the dueces.

Very short, this Orgof begins making love hectic to Talis, and reveals out he's traveling under a false manifest, and hain't no common kitchen hand at all, but is one of them Russian noblemen that got all confiscated by the Soviet.

This here news confidential sets Talis all a-twitter, and her mother similar, and seeing how Konaway's tastes is low, they don't confide in him

none that Talis and the count is articled to marry.

When Mrs. Jervis and Talis hits the Thunderbird, why Talis she begins a hold-out on the old lady, and her mother hain't aware none that Talis and the count is all organized to go capering over to Kamchatka, where this nobility claims he's got extensive estates.

This Orgof very cunning he suggests to Talis that his estates being terrible run down, it would be discreet for Talis to gather up all loose *pil chickamin* and jewelry and meet him at two o'clock in the morning on the dock, when they'll squander over to Kamchatka, and bid the Greek priest to climb into his parka a lot and roll his game.

So this Talis garners all cash she can and jewelry similar, hern and her mothers, and she goes stampeding out to the *barabara*, not knowing Konaway had got disgusted and fired Orgof, and by error in the dark she confers into Hoh-hoh embraces and the little warbag.

WHAT Hoh-hoh elicits out of Orgof and the other Russians is what sets this Talis girl to honing ardent to obtain this butler's heart. It's a *tseepee*, the whole shebang, a frame-up and a scheme. This Russian boat is to slide in by arrangements made by Orgof, and Talis is to get grabbed and Orgof similar as a blind, and they all go to Kommandrov Island on the Siberia side, and all the *pil chickamin* and jewelry is to get confiscated, and word is to be sent to Konaway Jervis to warp in to Kommandrov with a further generous bundle of *pil chickamin* or Talis will get tortured unspeakable and killed.

Why this Orgof hain't no count. He's a Russian half-breed that was a kitchen-swamper for a rich family in Vladivostok.

Well, the upshot of this ranikaboo is that Konaway calls in the watchman from the fish trap, him being a good engine hand, and the watchman and Hoh-hoh starts out with the confiscated Russian tug, with them five prisoners aboard, and they deliver over boat and all to Joe Albright, the United States Commissioner.

Beseeching Hoh-hoh to return back to the Thunderbird prompt, and resume vigilance agin the arrival of Kwad Arney, which Konaway says he feels and knows is sure to occur, I and the girl, Talis, and Konaway go back to the big house, and Talis, bawling bitter, runs upstairs to her room, and I and Konaway set down for a good long revealing *wawwau*.

Final, when morning approaches, though we're into the long nights and it's anyways an hour till light, to appease this Konaway I staggers forth and patrols around to make sure this Kwad Arney don't encroach in and crawl Konaway's hump a lot.

Strolling along the dock, I quills up in my former hide-out account of the fog rolls in raw, and I hears a sound familiar and I'm all agog.

Furtive I creeps to the far end of the wharf. I observe out into the offing and listen sharp. Instant I deduce and put two and two together, and I just know that the luckiest gent of the evening is the watchman who got took off the job to go with Hoh-hoh and the prisoners.

Yes, the rich Jervis trap is getting pirated. They hain't a doubt. I can hear the steady rattle of web, and the threshing and the plunking of a gaff, and the thud as plenty forty-fifty pound tyees are slung into a dory.

Yes, the Jervis trap is getting

pirated, and while I can't see none, I know as I know my thumb from a thimble that Kwad Arney has returned back and has went into action agin the Thunderbird.

And there I set and leave him pirate. Yes. Likely I was compounding felonies, but leave 'er go as she looks.

After while I hear a heavy-loaded dory getting sculled away cautious and I know Kwad has got his cargo, and I go sauntering back along the dock, and sudden, like a swinging sail boom fetches you a belt on the binnacle, it crashes my brains that this is the twenty-second of the month, and the birthday of Melody Miller.

Well, well, well!

I go on back to the Jervis house, and it's daybreak, and I go in and the cook, just going on shift, sets me out *muck-amuck,* and a pannikin of hot coffee, and I'm devouring and swigging same when in prances Hoh-hoh Stevens.

Hoh-hoh, reporting all prisoners delivered safe, he sets and eats similar, and I tell him how I got private enterprises of my own, and I am to borry a dory off Konaway and go surging forth on plenty devices of the which he wasn't capable to understand.

Konaway he leaves me have the dory, and pleads nervous for me to return back soon, and for Hoh-hoh not to press his blankets too long in the little *barabara,* and away I go.

It's a longish row, and I don't hurry none, and it's ten o'clock when I haul out at the little dock on Whale Skull. I makes inquiries diplomatic of the wharf tender and he reveals out that Kwad Arney did arrive up the day before on the packet boat, and a terrible big bundle was unloaded and stored in the wharf house with sixty-two dollars collect agin it, and how Kwad had capered in a while before, plunked down the sixty-two, and had went staggering off with his burden.

"This prison life hain't denuded this Kwad none of his energies," says the wharf tender. "No, no. At daybreak he was in here with a dory heaped with tyees, and he sells all them fish to the buyer when the latters warps in here about seven this morning."

But I don't listen further. I go stampeding up the trail that leads to Melody Miller's little *barabara.*

She opens the door prompt, and her face is plumb glorified. Them brown eyes is shining like the Pole Star was a twin and they was hern.

"Come right on in, Dode," she says very hospital, "and plant your *muck-lucks* onto my new red carpet."

She's just gurgling with delight, this Melody is, and she looks all ways the girl she was twenty years before."

"It's my birthday," she says, smiling gorgeous, and wringing them capable little brown hands of hern. "And look-it. I got my terrible, thick red carpet at last. Oh, I am so extravagant happy. Kwad Arney is home. Yes, he's home. At last he's home."

IV

I APPROACHES on in, and sets down, and I points to my *muck-lucks,* which I always did have feet uncommon big and ungainly, and I says very solemn, "Melody," I says, "there's a verse into the Good Book which says, 'Beautiful is the feet of him who brings glad tidings.'

"All right then," I says, again pointing at them feet of mine, "if the such is true, which it is all ways if a party can understand, why them hoofs of mine is the beautifullest anywhere in the North, which you all will agree when I break out the news."

"What, Dode," she says, that plump

bosom of hern storming excited. "What?"

"Why," I says, "I has a war-talk with Konaway Jervis last night. Konaway has been and is plumb fearful of getting killed by Kwad, the which, as I points out to him emphatic, is account of he deserves to get killed."

Melody's face just lights up seraphic, as she hits a guess of what I'm to reveal out. But as she looks down at her red carpet, then around the room, that glad look fades of a sudden. Her gaze has come to a stop, and she's looking wild through the open door into her bedroom, though it seems all ways snug, and I don't observe nothing to terrify her none.

"Listen good, Melody," I says, making endeavors to haul her back to the topic. "Listen. This here is your birthday. You hain't but forty year old, and all ways yet a girl for charm and beauty, and you got plenty happy years ahead you—and Kwad Arney," I adds.

But she hain't hardly hearing what I says, but stares on through the door into her bedroom.

"Why, Melody," I says, "you and Kwad is scandalous rich this minute. Yes. They's three hundred thousand dollars, cash and drafts, laying in the Thunderbird safe, and it's Kawd's the minute he capers in, shakes hands friendly with Konaway, and agrees not to go poaching violent after Konaway's skelp."

Still Melody is looking wild.

"Wherever is this low sculpin of a Kwad, anyway?" I demands. "Why hain't he here to listen unto the glad tidings and learn how manful I struggles this morning to resist throwing down onto him with the old six-gun and burning him a lot. Wherever can he be?"

Melody gets up kind of unsteady, and her voice is plumb strange and unusual. "Kwad is staying in the little *barabara* abaft," she says hoarse. "I'll fetch him."

She bumps off the door jamb as she goes out, and in a minute she's back, and no fish ever swum the Bering with a belly whiter than her face, and she's got a little folded paper in her hand. She stands there terrible dramatic, poking the paper at me with one hand, while the other points into her bedroom.

"My six-shooter," she says. "It was Hiyu's. It always hung by the head of my bed. It's gone."

I gives this folded paper just a hasty flash, and I'm up and I go just seething down to the dock, and as luck would have it, a cannery tender is in, and I jumps aboard, and I informs the skipper his craft is commandeered by the law and to lay a course for the Thunderbird, and to go faster.

And he done it, and it hain't so long until we're warping up to the Jervis dock. Instant I'm out onto the planks, and at that identical second is a deep roar of a old-fashioned six-shooter, and the shatter of glass.

Fast as I can I rush over, and double the corner, and just outside the winder of the cannery office stands Kwad Arney, and the glass is broke, and smoke twists still out of the muzzle of the old six-gun, and at the desk inside Konaway Jervis is huddled down like a wet sack.

I yells out frantic, but Kwad don't heed, and he lifts the big, old *sukwalal* again, takes aim steady, and as he turns this ancient deadly arm loose again Hoh-hoh, traveling faster than any human I ever seen, he slings hisself for'ard and the big slug hits Hoh-hoh somewhere in the upper body and just knocks him spinning.

I'm there next, and the swing of my six-shooter just busts Kwad's weapon right out of his hand.

No, no. This Konaway hain't hit at all. He's just fainted dead.

But Hoh-hoh's hit. The slug kind of plows in under his collar bone, but, lucky, it's way out to the shoulder side an' don't injure his lung none.

Now this Hoh-hoh is tougher than ary tanned walrus hide you ever seen. Shot grievous as he is, up he gets and he ranges on one side of Kwad and I on the other, and we lead him into the cannery.

When this Konaway emerges out of his sick spell, we've explained things to Kwad and we get 'em final to shake hands, and Konaway he hands out a bundle of *pil chickamin,* you'd think it was a bedroll, and she's dealt all ways satisfactory.

The cannery first-aid sharp dresses this wound of Hoh-hoh's and Kwad stands by, terrible sorry and apologizing.

"No, no, Kwad," explodes out Hoh-hoh. "I don't allow to prefer no charges agin you whatever. You're nervous and fretful, all you have went through, and you discharges that weapon inadvertent. Far as I'm concerned, you're as free now, Kwad, and will so remain, as ary seagull in the Northern climes."

Hoh-hoh he sets there grinning imbecile after delivering of this speech. "Fact is, Kwad," he says foolish, "I'm indebted to you. This hurt, no ways grievous, will release me from duty for a spell. During my vacation, I am to lollygag around the Jervis home right smart, and leave Talis learn me how to buttle."

California's Meanest Convict

IT was to Folsom Prison in California that the authorities transferred Ernest Booth, bank robber, "doing it all" after his sensational attempt to escape from San Quentin. Booth, a well-educated man, had written a number of magazine articles, and he was well thought of at the prison.

With William (Big Bill) O'Connor, he made an attempt to escape from the prison hospital by using a rope fashioned from bedding. This was to lower them down three stories to the yard. Booth went down first, O'Connor waiting anxiously his turn, but just as the bank robber was about thirty feet from the ground, the rope parted and he fell, breaking both ankles.

Big Bill, realizing now that his chance was frustrated, leaped for his bed in the infirmary and here the guards found him, fully clothed. He was sent to solitary confinement, while Booth was returned to the hospital.

Fifteen months later it developed that a convict named Swartz, serving twenty-five years, had leaned out a lower window, watched Booth cautiously descend the fragile rope; waited until the man was halfway down, helpless, then cut the rope. Prison officials, fearing reprisal on the part of other inmates, kept the affair secret while negotiations were made for a parole for Swartz for his act.

—*R. W. Francis.*

ILLUSTRATED CRIMES

by Paul Berdanier

THE MYSTERY OF THE OPEN DOOR

Mrs. Emmeline Harrington, estranged wife of Guy, an actor, returned to her apartment in uptown Manhattan the night of December 20, 1927.

The next night she was seen opening her mail-box in the vestibule. No one saw her alive after that. The morning of December 23rd a woman tenant in the flat below heard screams from the Harrington apartment. Hastening upstairs she rang the doorbell, but no one stirred behind the locked door. The neighbor left. She decided it was none of her business.

A week went by. Then another tenant noticed that the Harrington door was ajar. When there was no response to repeated ringing, she entered. She recoiled in horror. Mrs. Harrington's body lay on the bathroom floor clad in a nightgown. Big splotches of dried blood stained the tile near the head.

MRS. EMMELINE HARRINGTON

Medical examiners held that the woman had been beaten to death probably with a hammer. Her valuable rings and a $500 fur coat were missing. Her apartment door, which had been locked, had opened and let out a murderer who had left it ajar in his hasty flight.

COMING NEXT WEEK—

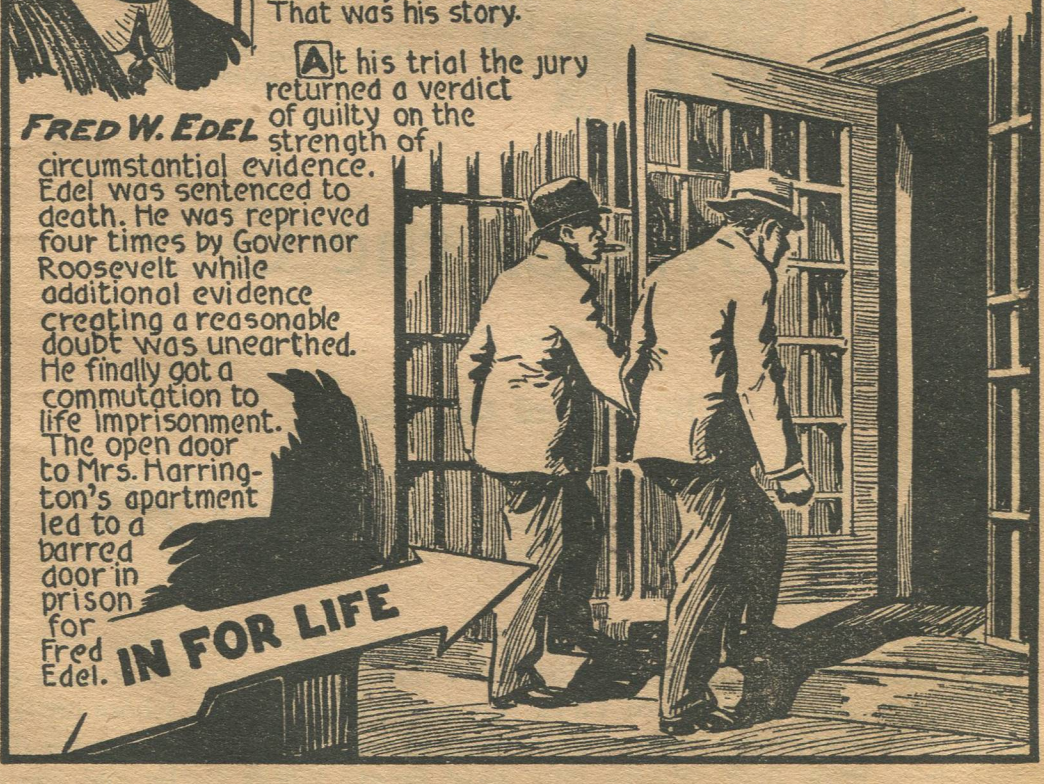
The victim's husband identified the body. He was completely baffled by the murder, as were the police. In a few days word came from New Haven, Conn., that a man hurriedly checked out of a hotel leaving behind Mrs. Harrington's fur coat and valuables.

A young woman who had been entertained by the mysterious fugitive hotel guest said she had seen a hammer-like tool in her host's hand bag. She had also noticed spots on his vest that might have been blood. The man was finally identified as Fred W. Edel, a restaurant worker. He was an ex-convict whose record included forgery and suspicion of two murders in Connecticut. Edel eluded capture until the following March, when he was arrested in St. Paul.

FRED W. EDEL

Extradited, Edel admitted having known Mrs. Harrington, but he denied that he murdered her. The fur coat and jewelry had been delivered to him in his hotel in New York, he said, by a messenger from Mrs. Harrington. The night of December 23rd, he was to meet the woman for a tryst in Springfield, Mass. She failed to appear. He had left her things in New Haven when he had read of her murder. That was his story.

At his trial the jury returned a verdict of guilty on the strength of circumstantial evidence. Edel was sentenced to death. He was reprieved four times by Governor Roosevelt while additional evidence creating a reasonable doubt was unearthed. He finally got a commutation to life imprisonment. The open door to Mrs. Harrington's apartment led to a barred door in prison for Fred Edel.



THE WIFE-SLAYER OF DETROIT

Her moving finger spelled, "I will do anything for you"

Widows of the Gun

A True Story

By Howard McLellan

What Murderous Fascination in a Gunman's Eyes Lures Respectable Women from Home and Children to Share the Bloody Thrills of Crime?

MEN who live by the gun, die by the gun. Yet, in spite of the unceasing operation of this ancient law, there are women who marry them, bring their children into the world, take long prison sentences for serving them, die for them and die with them. They are the widows of the gun, human enigmas whose professions of deep and undying love for the most savage killers startle and shock law-abiding society.

They are not always victims of a mad infatuation for the killers. The motives which impel them to mate with murderers vary; there are as many different motives as there are varying shades of women's hair. Fatal Marie, the professional widow of gangland, had an unusual motive. She married early and she married often, as seven mounds of earth will testify.

She was born Margaret Mary Collins. In New York City she tried going it alone as a shoplifter, a student of the art of hoisting and boosting under Pretty Alice Feeney, the kissable siren whom Skush Thomas used to lure enemies within range of his deadly baseball bat. In spite of the schooling which Pretty Alice gave her, Margaret Collins was a poor hand at the boost.

She had a voice, not too good, not too bad. Shoplifting had gotten her nowhere in the underworld, but she yearned to muscle herself into the big time. She emigrated to Chicago and there had her drab brown tresses dyed the newest platinum shade. A platinum blonde was something new, something different, something really startling. Blondes have always been preferred above brunettes by the big-shots of the underworld. Margaret took a job singing blues in a roadhouse at the time Chicago was under the deadly dominion of Al Capone and Dion O'Banion.

The blues-singing musclewoman cast her net for a big-shot. The first fish to get tangled in the meshes was Dandy Jack Sheehy. He had started adult life as an ordinary hood, a hoodlum employed by O'Banion, an underworld czar, to crack the skulls of enemies. Sheehy had often been shot at, and had been jailed so often he couldn't keep track of the number of arrests. He not only survived bullets, but through his political pals he was no sooner in jail than he was out. Neither bullets nor the law could touch him.

FATAL MARIE

MARRIAGE to the silver-topped "blues" gal who had been christened Margaret Mary Collins, meant a death sentence to a gangster. Seven times she was widowed by the gun! Yet the fascination of this platinum blonde who was the queen of the Chicago underworld of which Dion O'Banion was king, made gunmen eager for her fatal embrace. They rushed with her to matrimony and death. She was a widow of the gun and deserves a place in this, the fifth of Howard McLellan's thrilling series about Killers' Molls.

He became Sheehy the Immune, at last a big somebody in gangland.

Sheehy had power, and this probably explains why Margaret Mary Collins married him. With Sheehy the Immune as her spouse she would muscle into the big-time company, wear

diamonds and furs, ride around in big armored cars and share the spotlight with Sheehy.

On her twenty-eighth birthday, Mary, now called Meg, the Silver-topped Blues Gal, pulled a wild party in a Chicago night club. All the big guns were there and the platinum-haired lady was the life of the party. Towards daylight she became very fractious and loud, as bleached blondes sometimes do under the influence of fizz water, and for no reason at all, she felt a sudden dislike for the inoffensive trap drummer in the orchestra, who was doing his level best to promote gaiety for her birthday party. With a wild wave of her hand she beckoned a waiter. Then she gave him an order. "Get me a bowl of cracked ice that I can pitch at that trap drummer."

The waiter looked at her dumfounded.

Sheehy spoke. "Did you hear what the lady asked for?" he demanded.

"Yeah," said the waiter. "But I can't let a thing like that happen in here."

Sheehy the Immune whipped out a gun and fired three shots at the waiter. He fell dead. The shots attracted cops. When they piled in, Sheehy raised his gat at them. A police bullet ended all earthly immunity for Sheehy the Immune. Mrs. Sheehy brushed a hand over her platinum tresses, drew a fur cloak about her, and walked calmly out, a widow for the first time.

THROUGH her marriage to Sheehy the young woman had muscled her way into the O'Banion clique and was therefore entitled to call herself an O'Banion moll. She had been Sheehy's private property, and as such, was entitled to the respect of the crowd, even the respect of O'Banion, the little lame man whose power was even greater than Capone's. O'Banion cast covetous eyes at the widow of his henchman, and pretty soon the widow was calling herself Mrs. O'Banion and wearing clothes and diamonds in keeping with her new place as the king's queen.

O'Banion conducted his gang business in a flower shop. Here, among orchids and roses, and potted ferns and palms, he had called off the names of at least twenty-five men who lived only a short time afterward.

On a bright day in April, O'Banion and Margaret were seated in wicker chairs exchanging wise-cracks with Big Boy Bates and Tight Lips Altieri, two O'Banion tommy gun men enjoying a brief respite from their dangerous labors. A man sauntered in by the front door and asked to look at some roses. O'Banion got up, but never reached the roses. The customer pumped fatal lead into him as his bride looked on.

FROM a stoop his blond widow decked out in sombre raiment, looked over the vast crowd of mourners as Husband Number Two was carried out in a $10,000 silver-trimmed casket which was followed to the grave by five trucks laden with floral offerings. She must have felt a moment of triumph between tears. Although the gun had robbed her of her spouse she had made the grade. She was the widowed queen of an underworld czar.

In the crowd of mourners were many O'Banion clansmen who slurringly referred to her as Fatal Mary. Two husbands in a few months, and both downed by the gun. Fatal? She was all of that.

She was not dismayed. Her next catch was Irving "Sonny" Schlig, an aviating bootlegger and gunman. But, after a few thrilling trips in the air with Schlig, Fatal Mary was again a widow. Machine guns brought Schlig down from the air. A month later she became the bride of Johnny Phillips, a handsome gangster, who was laid away with a pound or so of lead under his hide.

Again Fatal Mary was a widow. She had muscled herself into four marriages, but bullets had muscled her out of them. She had done well in marrying O'Banion. That marriage had sent her up the social scale, but her subsequent marriages had dropped her a little. She started on the climb again by taking to spouse Big Boy Bates, alias Jew Boy Jerus.

Big Boy Bates was no small-timer. For five years he had done some murderous rooting with Red McLaughlin, who had machine gunned many enemies for O'Banion, and who had conceived the stunt of putting his tommy gun men in police uniforms. Bates had been one of the guests at the fatal birthday party. He knew of the violent ends which had overtaken his predecessors, but Fatal Mary was still, in his eyes, the widowed queen of the great O'Banion. Marriage to her would not only keep her in the O'Banion camp, but it would be a feather in his cap to marry the widowed queen.

Fatal Mary was spared the sight of seeing Bates bumped off. His body was found floating in a lake, and for the fifth time Fatal Mary was plunged into widowhood.

As if by right of succession Red McLaughlin became her next husband. Pals and relatives warned him. Red's brother took him aside just before the wedding and said:

"She's poison, Red. I'm telling you —you'll get yours if you mate up with that moll."

After the wedding Red McLaughlin made hurry-up preparations to journey to New York City and kidnap Arnold Rothstein, ruler of the gambling empire. Fatal Mary kissed him a fond good-by and her knight of the rod set out for the field of battle. She didn't hear from him for days. Then the screw of a tug churning the lake threw up Red's body, bound with wire and bullet-pierced. The police found a note in his pocket.

I'll be loving you forever.
—Marie.

It was this note which provoked gangland to change her sobriquet from plain Fatal Mary to Fatal Marie, while it also provoked the police and Red's pals to wonder how she had happened to write the farewell note if she had been unaware of the fate that awaited him? Fatal Marie took unto herself a seventh mate, one Sam Katz, who hadn't been married to her a month when a cop's bullet ended his life.

Off with the old and on with the new. This was Fatal Marie's creed. Katz hadn't been in his grave a fortnight when she became the wife of Sol Feldman, an expert fur thief. In the matter of worldly goods she had not fared so well. None of her previous husbands had left her a cent. When she married Feldman her wardrobe was somewhat shabby. Winter was drawing on and she craved a fur coat. Perhaps she married Feldman only to get a fur coat. At any rate he was found sneaking out of a fur shop window with a valuable sealskin cloak of Marie's size. A cop spotted him and dropped him with a bullet.

Feldman was convalescing in the hospital when Fatal Marie breezed into the sickroom and bent over the bed to kiss him. He pushed her away.

"Nix, baby, you don't kiss me," he said. "I'm getting well. Save the kisses for some guy that wants to die."

A detective on guard at the bedside asked her: "Why don't you quit this bird and give him a chance?"

Fatal Marie tossed back her head. "Say, I should quit a live guy like him. Quit kidding me."

Feldman thought differently about it. He gave Fatal Marie a wide berth when he came out of the hospital and he is still alive.

Eight husbands and seven of them dead by violent means. Such was Fatal Marie's record. In the course of those alliances she had traveled up and down the social scale of gangland. Her only reason for marrying them was to further an ambition to be a queen of the underworld, while the men who married her after she had been Czar O'Banion's consort, regarded marriage to her an an opportunity to fall heir to the power which had been O'Banion's.

Though she has survived er many ill-fated marriages, Fatal Marie is today a harried, haggard figure, penniless and deserted. Even gangland shuns her. Too many men died trying to wear the shoes of her departed mates. She was a true and persistent widow of the gun.

II

MARGARET COLLINS made no claim to respectability, nor was she infatuated by the killers she took to spouse. They were merely stepping stones to advance her social ambitions. There are other women who became the married molls of killers merely to experience that moment of weird and terrifying ecstasy which comes to slayers in the stress of the kill and in the deadly excitement of the getaway, that flight from the avenging machine known as the law. Such a thrill-seeker was Burmah Adams.

When she left high school in Santa Ana, California, she was nineteen. The striking thing about her was her eyes. They were brown, like her wavy hair, and they were incessantly wide open. It was as though they were made never to close. She wore a perpetually startled look. Her face was small and round and her enormous wide-open eyes gave her an innocent doll-like appearance. Her favorite rig was a white dress and white hat, and she impressed neighbors as a child of angelic qualities. Her parents were genteel, respectable folks and it was reasonable for the neighbors to assume that Burmah would marry some nice young man, settle down and make him a quiet, dutiful wife.

The first indication that she was not of such a disposition was when she called Santa Ana a slow town and went off to Los Angeles. She took a beauty culture course and went to work in a beauty parlor. A great many dark-haired women were having their hair done over from dark to lighter shades, and it was the firm conviction of the young women who did the hair dyeing that blondes had a better chance of getting by with men. Whereupon the young high school graduate from quiet Santa Ana joined the fast-swelling ranks of bleached blondes.

It was a striking transformation. Great big, mooning brown eyes and hair lighter than flailed straw and an all-white costume, white gloves, white hat, white shoes, white hose. And still, when Burmah went out on the make

looking for a man, she passed unnoticed. Well, there were too many blondes around, that was the trouble. Perhaps, if she got herself a fine big car and cruised about, some wealthy gent might fall for her.

Accompanied by another disappointed blonde Burmah got into a big car owned by somebody else and drove it away. It gave her quite a thrill, hopping into a big car like that and driving off. Then it was quite exciting to cruise around, aware that the police were looking for her.

The thrill was not of long duration. She was promptly pinched and hustled off to the Ventura School for Girls. Two days later she took French leave, was recaptured and sent to San Quentin Prison. When she was paroled she went back to Los Angeles and at a dance met Thomas N. White, a man a little older than herself, with a glass eye. The real eye had been gouged out by a fellow-convict in Folsom Prison, from which White had recently been paroled from a term for a stick-up.

He was a brooding person. He not only harbored a deep grudge against society and the law, but he envied people who had two sound eyes. He was the one man in the world Burmah Adams should have stayed away from.

Of a summer evening they were together in a maroon sedan, cruising through a residential section of the City of Angels, White at the wheel and white-clad Burmah at his side. He addressed her upon the subject of marriage.

"Say," said Burmah, "before I marry and settle down I'm going to get a big kick out of life."

White narrowed his good eye at her. "And if I give you the big kick?"

"I'll marry you."

Nodding, the paroled convict asked her to take the wheel. He had spotted a blue sedan just ahead, in it a man and a woman enjoying a leisurely trip in the cool of the evening.

"Get set for the big kick," said White. "Catch up with that blue sedan. Drive alongside and give it a scrape." He laid a hand on his right hip. Burmah tossed back her blond head and shook it. She stepped on the gas, and when the car drew up alongside the blue sedan, the running boards met. White jumped out onto the running board, pulled an automatic, leveled it at the man at the wheel, ordered him to stop and shell out.

The man at the wheel dug into his pockets, drew out eighteen dollars in small bills, while the young woman laid a few dollars in White's hands.

"Much obliged," White grinned. He raised his gun level with the young woman's brow and fired. The bullet did not touch her, but the flash blinded her. White jumped back into the maroon sedan and Burmah Adams, snorting through distended nostrils, drove off.

"How'd you like that?" White grinned at her.

"Just great," said Burmah. "But why did you fire?"

White screwed up a corner of his mouth. "Why should she have a pair of good eyes? What about marrying me, babe?"

"Certainly. Right away — if you promise me more big kicks."

WHILE newspapers screamed news of the savage attack which had blinded a young woman, and broadcast descriptions of a blonde all in white and a thug whose eyes were like a rattlesnake's, Burmah Adams and her thrill-provider found a justice of the peace in a nearby town

and were married. The proceeds of the robbery were hardly sufficient to pay the marriage fee and buy oil, gas and a wedding breakfast.

Their honeymoon was a reign of terror. For five days the bridegroom with the rattlesnake's eyes and his white-garbed bride found one thrill after another in holding up couples out driving. Twelve couples were waylaid in the same manner as the first. Out of these stickups trifling sums — ten, twelve, never more than twenty dollars—were obtained. But the Whites were not after loot. They were on a mad hunt for thrills, and their honeymoon was spent that way.

The women of Los Angeles were particularly aroused, not only because one of their sex had been blinded, but also because one of their sex had participated in the atrocious attack. Clubwomen got together and made up a fund of $15,000 to be used in running down the pair and in prosecuting them to the limit.

Burmah White was not frightened by this action of her outraged sisters. On the sixth day of her honeymoon she invited friends to her apartment, along with her mother and sister and White's sister. There had been no time for a formal celebration of the wedding. The blonde and her husband were too busy with the gun. Now, however, there was a breathing spell and a belated wedding party.

White, as cool as an iceberg, left the apartment to get a bottle of gin and some cookies, leaving the women sitting on the davenport and chattering about the marriage. A fist banged against the hall door. Burmah opened it, expecting more company. Two men stepped in. She protested.

"Say, what a nerve you've got to come in like this."

"Never mind that," said one of the big fellows. "Where's your man?"

"What do you mean, my man?"

"The killer you've been driving around in a maroon sedan," said the detective.

There were gasps from the ladies sitting on the davenport.

"You're completely crazy," said Burmah White. "I have no man."

The detectives bolted for a clothes closet, opened the door and were groping around in the dark when a pistol cracked in the hallway. The women screamed. Burmah ran into the hall, stumbled over a bottle of gin lying at the head of the stairs, then glanced down the stairway and shrieked hysterically.

On the stairs lay White with a bullet through his heart. At the foot of the stairway stood a detective with a smoking revolver in his hand.

"This is terrible!" yelled Burmah, frantically tearing at her bleached hair. "Gawd, we've only been married six days and you've killed him!"

The man with the gun in his hand came up a few steps. "Did you expect me to put my face up to that rattlesnake and let him kiss it?" he yelled up.

That was the end of the wedding party.

At her trial for robbery and assault to kill, Burmah displayed a bravado and mentality seldom equalled in a decorous court of justice. It was obvious how she had been caught. Victims of the rattlesnake had described the maroon sedan to detectives, and they had located it in a garage.

"Why didn't you abandon that car?" the prosecutor asked her.

"Well, I'll tell you. Tom did want to get rid of it. I begged him not to. It was a swell car, if you want to know.

I could turn a corner with it going forty-five miles."

The prosecutor went on. "You got very little money out of those holdups, young lady!"

"Money!" she glared at him. "We weren't after money. We were out for thrills."

"And you got the thrills?" the prosecutor inquired.

The witness gazed up at the ceiling. "Yes — it was thrilling — while it lasted."

Jurors gazed at each other in astonishment. The young woman on the witness stand casually took a stick of rouge from her hand bag and applied it to her lips. Then she proceeded to do what had gained many a bleached blonde gun moll a reputation. She tried to throw the blame on her dead spouse, asserting that at the point of a gun he had compelled her to drive him about from one honeymoon stick-up to another.

But the jurors had looked long and solemnly at the young woman whose sight had been ruined by a blast from White's pistol. They promptly found Burmah guilty. The future of this thrill-hunting widow of the gun was sealed by six short words from the man on the bench.

"Thirty years to life in prison."

III

IT is difficult to fathom the nature of a woman like Burmah White, who professed no affection for the man she married and embraced matrimony only to gain deadly thrills. It is less difficult to understand why Rosalie Rizzo, a raven-haired miss, married red-haired Johnny Rooney in Chicago. She was infatuated with the gunman, and thought she might make something of him.

Sitting at the wheel of her car one afternoon Johnny came running up and jumped in. He ordered her to drive like fury for the Wisconsin woods. While the car was on its way Johnny boasted.

"Say, you ought to see how neatly I knocked off that guy back there. I plugged him with the whole clip."

Rosalie's dark eyes regarded him with horror and she drove on faster. After a night's hard driving they reached the Sand Lake country in northern Wisconsin and took quarters in an inn. Rosalie then proceeded in her wifely way to read the riot act to Johnny. A streak of reform ran deep in her. She loved Johnny.

"You've got to quit this dangerous game," she told him. "You've just got to check yourself or you'll die in the chair."

"Trying to reform me, eh?" said Johnny.

"I love you and I'm married to you and I've got a right to make you change your ways. And you're going to start by coming home at night, and not after six in the morning."

For years Johnny Rooney had not gotten to bed before six in the morning. Like all gunmen night was his prowling time. "Listen, kid," he said to Rosalie, "my best time is the night time, see?"

"Yes—and the night time is when you meet all the hoodlums and cook up your schemes. Why don't you try sleeping at night and get some sun in the daytime? You need it. You look perfectly awful."

"I was born an owl and always will be," said Johnny.

"Well, if you cared that much for me" — Rosalie snapped fingers — "if you want me to stick to you, Johnny Rooney, you'll have to get in before

6 A.M. Come on, Johnny, try getting in at twelve tonight."

Johnny grunted and buried his face in the pillow. Next night he showed his affection for Rosalie by wandering in about midnight—the first time in years he had come in before the roosters began to crow. Rosalie was delighted. Johnny Rooney was reforming, and that was one of the reasons why she had married him. She was not the first little moll who ever tried it, and not the last.

Both were sleeping soundly about one. Suddenly Rosalie was awakened by the flash of a light. A big man stood at the foot of the bed, a gun in one hand, a flashlight in the other, its white beam on Johnny's face. Johnny came up with a start. Rosalie sat up and drew her nightie tight about her shoulders.

"Whatsa idea?" Johnny demanded of the big stranger.

"No idea at all," he grinned. "Come on, up out of the sheets and I'll take you back to Chi to take the rap for bumping off that guy." He switched on the lights and Johnny, glared at Rosalie. The expression of face semed to say: "And you, you little twist, you would make me come home early at night—and the first and only night I do come home I get this!"

Mr. and Mrs. Rooney now retire each night at 9 P.M. Not together, of course, for Rosalie is doing twenty years in one pen while Johnny is doing life in another. Rosalie insists that she will never love any man but Johnny. She too is a widow of the gun, one of countless young women who have been seized with an infatuation for killers, and a vain urge to reform them.

Sometimes the reform works out. Apparently it took that course in the case of the country's first bobbed-hair bandit.

CELIA COONEY was born Celia Roth in the slums of New York City. She spent a great deal of her childhood sleeping in ash cans in cellarways. She was a tiny girl and could do it. She was still tiny at 20, exactly five feet one inch tall. She weighed less than one hundred and twenty pounds. She had known no home life when she met red-haired Edward Cooney in May, 1923. Cooney had an excellent record as a gob in the navy during the World War. He had a sailor's love for the free sea. He could shake a wicked leg in a dance and was a rollicking mate for little Celia Roth.

They were married in a church. Both seemed to be deeply in love. Motherhood for Celia was only a month away when she began to brood about home and where they were going to get clothes, food, a baby buggy and a crib for their first-born.

"I never had anything at all when I was a baby," said Celia.

Edward Cooney bristled. "We'll go out and get the money we need. Just one try and then we can go to Florida and the baby can be born there in a little cottage near the water."

If young Cooney had suggested walking down to the river and throwing themselves into it, Celia probably would have done so, for the light of her life was the red-haired Eddie. He spotted a big limousine and very soon the Cooneys were off together on the clout, each armed with an automatic. Celia's hair was dark, so she bought a few blond curls and stuck them under her little tight-fitting hat. Anyone would have taken her for a blonde. A little cluster of hand-made, red cher-

ries gave a touch of bright color to her hat.

On their initial holdup Celia proved to be a young woman with an easily aroused temper. While Cooney was putting on the works with his gun and snatching a payroll in a biscuit maker's office, Celia, with her gat, ordered three men into a closet. When they locked the door from the inside her temper flared and she let go three shots through the door, one of which took lodgment in the thigh of one of the prisoners in the closet.

The newlyweds escaped with several hundred dollars, but they were not through with the stickup. For a week they put on stickups. Once they held up and took possession of a truckload of sugar. Their headquarters was a furnished room where, between clouts, Celia worked on baby clothes for her unborn heir. The landlady, Mrs. Catherine Gallagher, thought they were a nice, respectable young couple until she missed a photograph of a baby from her dresser.

She suspected Celia of the theft, and womanlike, sought to repay in kind by swiping a snapshot of Celia and Eddie. In this photograph Celia wore her blond curls and her hat with the cluster of red cherries. Shortly afterwards the Cooneys departed for Jacksonville, Florida, where they prepared to receive into the world their first child.

Then Mrs. Gallagher happened to read in the newspapers about the young lady not taller than five feet one, who mite with blond curls and red cherries red cherries on it, and who had accompanied a young stickup man on twenty robberies. Mrs. Gallagher summoned a detective and showed him the photograph.

In a rooming-house in Jacksonville Celia brought her child into the world. It died shortly after birth. Cooney was comforting his young wife when he heard gruff voices outside the door. Cooney's face paled. He took out his gun. "This is the end, Cel," he said. "It's either fight those dicks outside or kill you, then myself."

"Wait!" cried Celia. She went to the door and shouted through it. "If you dicks don't shoot we won't!"

"Open up and we'll see if we have to shoot!"

Celia turned to her husband. "Give me that gun!" He handed the weapon to her and she opened the door. Two New York detectives came stalking in. One had the snapshot in his hand. Celia spotted it and glared at them.

"Oh, you don't need to go any further," she said. "I'm the bobbed-hair bandit, all right."

Cooney jumped up from the side of the bed. "But whatever shooting was done on that biscuit company stickup, I did," he cried.

"Nothing of the kind," cried Celia. "I did all the shooting and I got Eddie into all this." Then she opened a bureau drawer and, rummaging through it, brought out the photograph of the baby which she had stolen from the New York landlady. She handed it to the detectives. "Give that back to Mrs. Gallagher, will you? And please let me have that snapshot?"

"Sure. We're through with it." The detective handed her the snapshot. Celia smiled at it. "This is the only snapshot we have of our honeymoon," she said.

At their trial for armed robbery, Celia shouldered all the blame and refused defense counsel. The victims of eleven stickups identified her as the mite with blonde curls and red cherries on her hat who had given them the order to elevate their hands. As they

left the stand Celia met them and apologized for all the trouble she had caused them. When the man she had shot through the door of the closet left the witness stand she apologized profusely to him, and added: "You made me so mad locking that door. You shouldn't have done that."

IV

THE first of the bobbed-hair bandits to appear in America, Celia Cooney proved herself an interesting witness:

"I think," she said, with the authority of an expert on the subject, "that if all the clerks and managers were women you could hardly get away with robbing at all. It's not that the women fight, but they talk and argue and they won't do what you tell them. Men always act like sheep when you get them at the point of a gun, but you never can tell what a woman will do."

Celia loked at the jurors, then added a word about her "Pinkie," as she called Cooney. "I love him. You'd be surprised how gentle he is. If it hadn't been for me he wouldn't have been in trouble, but, you see, I thought the world owed us a living. That's all wrong."

On pleas of guilty the Cooneys were sentenced to serve from ten to twenty years. Cooney was taken to Sing Sing, his wife to Auburn prison. And fate played one of its strange tricks on them. Cooney lost a hand in a prison factory machine and the state, admitting its negligence, paid him the handsome sum of $15,000 as damages.

When the couple were paroled both left their prisons on the same day and established themselves in a bungalow somewhere along the coast of Florida, where, from all reports they lead quiet lives, and Celia Cooney brings up the child born to her after a prison term had altered her outlook on life.

By the thinnest margin Celia Cooney escaped the rôle of a widow of the gun. It was her own tact that rescued her from the rôle. "If she hadn't shouted through that door that morning when we went to their room in Jacksonville," said the detective, "we would have pumped enough lead through it to get them both. We were taking no chances, because you can never tell what a woman'll do. But generally you can trust them when they fly a flag of truce, and she did that."

If the reform of the Cooneys is complete it is doubtless due to a love which was real. It may be difficult to comprehend a nature willing to sacrifice all to share life with a killer. But life pours a strange fluid into the veins of women who mate with killers.

There was, for instance, Yvonne Richman Marco, an alluring beauty who gave up a glamorous career on the stage, married Harry Richman, noted radio entertainer, and gave him up to become the wife of Frankie Marco or Marlow, New York gunman, whose hide-away night club had often been turned into a shambles in gang wars.

Shortly after she wedded Frankie, enemy gangsters dropped in on him in his hotel room, riddled him with bullets, dressed him and dropped his body out the window. It landed on the sidewalk, a bit of ghastly evidence that early widowhood is what the wife of a gunman must expect.

Yet at the funeral in Cleveland the only tears shed were those which fell under the veil which shielded the distracted features of his penniless widow, who had foresworn fame and luxury to share his bed and board, such as it was. Yvonne was only one of the many

apparently respectable women who have cast their lot with killers as their lawfully wedded wives.

Strange as it may seem, two women will share the love of the same criminal. Thus Ernest Conner, a fifty-one-year-old convict, was found to be the husband of two women living in his own home, both mothering his two-year-old child, the daughter of his first wife. One woman was Inez Conner, forty-eight, the other May Gledhill, twenty-six-year-old beauty who had won nation-wide acclaim as the beautiful and daring Canadian Ski Girl.

"I have no feeling against May," Inez explained. "She thinks she loves my husband. She is only twenty-six now and she may change when she's older. I don't believe it possible for a man to love two women at the same time but I guess it's like this: I have been his wife for years. I think I truly love him but he may only admire me and love May. In his life I have become like an old piece of favored furniture to which he comes for comfort after he has had his fling with May."

While Inez and May are not widows of the gun they are nevertheless denied Conner's company and his support, for he occupies a cell in a Vermont prison, while they go on working for a living and mothering his child. A strange triangle; but then no stranger than the one which joined the lives of Mrs. Grace Berri, known as the Belle of Petalume, California; Melverne G. Sturtevant, notorious racketeer of San Francisco; and his wife and the mother of his children.

STURTEVANT was forty-two years old, the partly bald czar of rum row in San Francisco, when Grace Berri left her husband and two children to be his moll. He was already the husband of a woman against whom no breath of scandal had ever been raised. She lived quietly with her children—until a gunman killed Sturtevant and threw his body down a cliff, shot Grace Berri in the breast and dumped her out in a wooded ravine, where she was found and rushed to a hospital.

There she was asked about her husband. She said:

"Arnold Berri was never anything to me. I mean anything beautiful, exciting or romantic. It was just like living with a piece of machinery. Mel Sturtevant was just the opposite in every way."

Then Mrs. Sturtevant called at the hospital. She went to the bed where Grace Berri lay, took her hand and said: "I wish I could give your sweetheart back to you."

Grace Berri sat up, staring wildly. "Oh, God," she exclaimed, "I wish you could! I wish we could both have him again. But I'll fix the man who took him from us!"

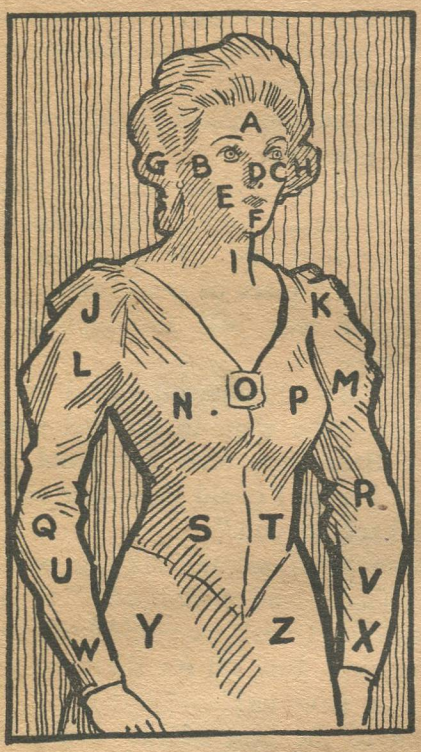
And to the best of her ability she did. Though she was warned that she would be taken for a ride if she peeped about the internal workings of Sturtevant's booze empire, she took the stand and named his one-legged slayer and lived to see him put away for life.

Then there are those tragic figures, who have slaved for killers, raised their children — for what?

The law of the underworld permits a killer to have one wife and many molls. Frankie Uale or Yale came under this law. His wife was a brawny-armed, swarthy woman, who kept a neat house and raised his two daughters in the early years of their marriage.

It was abject slavery the first few

years. Yale was a nobody who took any kind of work he could get. Then he got into the big money, bootlegging, running policy slip games and racketeering on a wide scale. The family moved into a handsome apartment



KATE SOFFEL

and the daughters went away to private school.

Yale's income had jumped to $100,000 a year. He wore jewels, $200 suits of clothes. A diamond-studded belt buckle contained seventy-five brilliants. Mrs. Yale had her own big car and chauffeur, plenty of spending money and fine clothes galore. In a little while they would buy an estate in the hills and live the life of nobility.

Frankie Yale had his molls, dozens of them, but this was quite all right with Mrs. Yale. A man in his business was supposed to have many molls. He was a king of racketland. He could do no wrong. Then Yale got a phone call from a blonde and hastened away in his car to meet her. They never met. Yale was pumped full of machine gun slugs.

His funeral set an all-time record for such obsequies. Floral pieces were banked high on the sidewalk in front of the Yale apartment. Mrs. Yale, weeping with her daughters, watched the cortège move away, the hearse carrying a silver-trimmed casket which would have done honor to a king. After the funeral Mrs. Yale took stock of her resources. The funeral expenses came to more than $20,000; repairs to the big roadster in which Frankie had ridden to his death cost $1,100. And somehow all his diamonds had vanished.

In a week the landlord put her out for overdue rent. Now Mrs. Yale lives with her daughters in a shabby tenement in Coney Island. Every morning at six she leaves for work. And the daughters, with part of a finishing school education, have to work when they can find it. Of course they once enjoyed luxury. Frankie had been a swell provider, but long before the gun had brought him his wealth the Yales were as poor as mice in a deserted granary.

All through her days of slavery, Mrs. Yale worshipped her man and the worship continued even when she knew that his enemies were dying fast by violent means while his bankroll grew thicker and thicker. The molls got his diamonds and the best part of his bankroll, but the woman who loved him and slaved for him got the tears and the bills and the poverty which seems to be always the lot of widows who have slaved for gents of the rod and who have brought their children into the world.

What can it be that rouses even in women of respectability the mad infatuation that draws them to these wolves of human society? Can it be the light that lies in a killer's eyes—that deadly, reddish gleam that burns so fiercely in eyes trained to the gun and lusting for the kill? Sometimes it is — a swift glimpse of a killer that fires women with an unreasoning passion for them, and seals their doom.

V

OF all the women who have been gripped by this strange infatuation for killers, Kate Soffel should have been the last to fall under its spell. She was the wife of a prison warden; a young, timid, frail woman who lived with her husband Peter and their four children in the warden's quarters in the Pittsburgh County Prison.

She had seen killers and thieves by the score. She knew of their propensity to kill; and she must have known of the tragedy they brought into the lives of their women, for on visiting days she could see the wives, mothers and sweethearts of caged men pouring wearily into the prison to spend a few gloomy hours whispering to their men through a stout wire netting which prevented them from so much as touching hands.

Kate's father was also a resident of the prison, assigned as guard to watch condemned men caged in the cells of murderers' row. One afternoon Kate stood talking to her father. Suddenly eyes glared at her from the nearest cage. She stood as if fascinated by two brown eyes burning at her between bars. The face was that of a man of twenty-eight, a long, gaunt face topped by a shock of graying hair. The man's temples were touched by gray, but the striking thing about him was the reddish gleam in his eyes.

Kate turned to her father. "The poor fellows, Dad. Doesn't anybody bring them anything?"

"Now, Kate, you're not letting your sympathy run away with you. Those two fellows in that cage are cold-blooded killers."

They were the brothers Biddle, Ed and Jack. The face which Kate had seen was that of the oldest, Ed. They had not long to live. In a week they would walk to the gallows and die for the murder of a grocer, one of a number of men they had killed in stickups.

Softly Kate said to her father:

"Dad, I feel I ought to bring those poor men something."

She went away and returned with a basket of fruit. As her father passed it into the Biddles' cell her blue eyes were fixed on Ed Biddle's face. She saw him look up and smile and hold his gleaming eyes on her. Her father came away from the cell. When he was out of sight she stepped furtively up to the bars, put her hand in. Ed Biddle caught it.

A few days later she was back at the cell with a full-length photograph of herself, taken when she was a girl. When her watchful father's back was turned she slipped the photograph between bars and Ed Biddle caught it. He started to speak, but, at the approach of her father, Kate tiptoed away from the bars and went scurrying off.

Whatever it was she had seen in Ed Biddle's eyes completely distracted her, for she wandered about her quarters wringing her hands and gazing off through a window. She neglected her husband, her children. Her thoughts were centered on the tall man with only a few days to live.

At length she appeared in murderers' row with another basket of fruit. This time her father permitted her to hand it to Ed Biddle. As she did so he handed back her photograph. She glanced at it, hid it in the folds of her skirt and hurried away. A moment later she was intently studying it.

There were penciled letters all over her image, the complete alphabet. "A" upon her brow, "B" and "C" over her eyes, and so on, with the final letters of the alphabet scratched upon her dress at the thighs.

She stole back into murderers' row, and, standing at the side of her father, moved a tapering finger from one part of her body to another. Ed Biddle's fiercely gleaming eyes followed the movement of her finger as it spelled out the words:

"I love you." Then, "Will do anything for you."

Ed Biddle's finger began to move and touch parts of his body. He spelled out: "I love you. Bring two guns. A file. We will elope."

In a box of cookies which she handed into the cell next morning was something more useful than a file. Two hacksaw blades, and the man who passed the cookies in was Kate's father! Next day Kate brought a basket of fruit, and again the trusting father passed this into Ed Biddle.

Kate stood staring at her old father, put there to guard the two killers. She kissed her father, then, covering her eyes with her hands, ran off. In the basket of fruit her father had handed to Biddle were two revolvers, loaded.

Presently she was standing at her father's side again, clutching at his arm. The guns were inside, in the hands of the Biddles. At what instant they might be used on her own father she did not know until Ed Biddle's finger started moving about his body again spelling out more words.

"Put warden to sleep. We will meet you outside tomorrow morning."

THE frail little woman scampered to her quarters, lavished kisses upon her children, put on her hat and cloak and told her husband that she was going out to visit an old friend. Then she looked at her children in bed, ready to go to sleep and stood pondering. No, she couldn't leave now. The Biddles were not to break until morning and she was under orders to put her husband to sleep. Warden Soffel retired, Kate at his side. She arose early, went to the prison's surgeon's quarters and got a bottle of chloroform. She saturated a towel with this and laid it over her sleeping husband's face. Then she fled, taking with her a photograph of her children.

In the yard as she ran along a gallery she saw the scaffold, its rope and trap door ready for the Biddles. They had two days to live.

Outside, in the shadow of a tree, she stood as dawn broke, her eyes fixed on the prison gate. She heard distant shots within the walls and then Ed Biddle and his brother came plunging out, guns in hand. Ed Biddle caught the frail woman in his arms and the trio made off through the woods, halting at a sleigh standing in front of a farmer's cottage, a horse hitched to it and the animal pawing the snow. They got into the sleigh, Jack Biddle taking the reins. Kate sat between the two brothers.

Ed was silent a long time, his upper lip between his teeth. He spoke:

"Kate, you can get some cloth at the next town and make us all nun's costumes. Then we'll have no trouble getting to Canada."

"Anything, Ed, to—to help."

Suddenly Ed Biddle straightened, took out his gun. A double sleigh blocked the road ahead. Jack halted the horse. Ed arose and looked back. Another sleigh was coming at them from the rear. There were men in it, armed with shotguns and rifles. Ed raised his revolver, pulled the trigger. Buckshot and rifle slugs crashed into the back of the sleigh. Ed answered with two shots. His brother fired twice, but the sleigh filled with armed men bore down on them.

Kate Soffel jumped up and threw her arms about her lover. "Ed — they're coming for us!"

The killer curled a lip at her. "You made a botch of this."

"No, Ed! I did everything! I love you!"

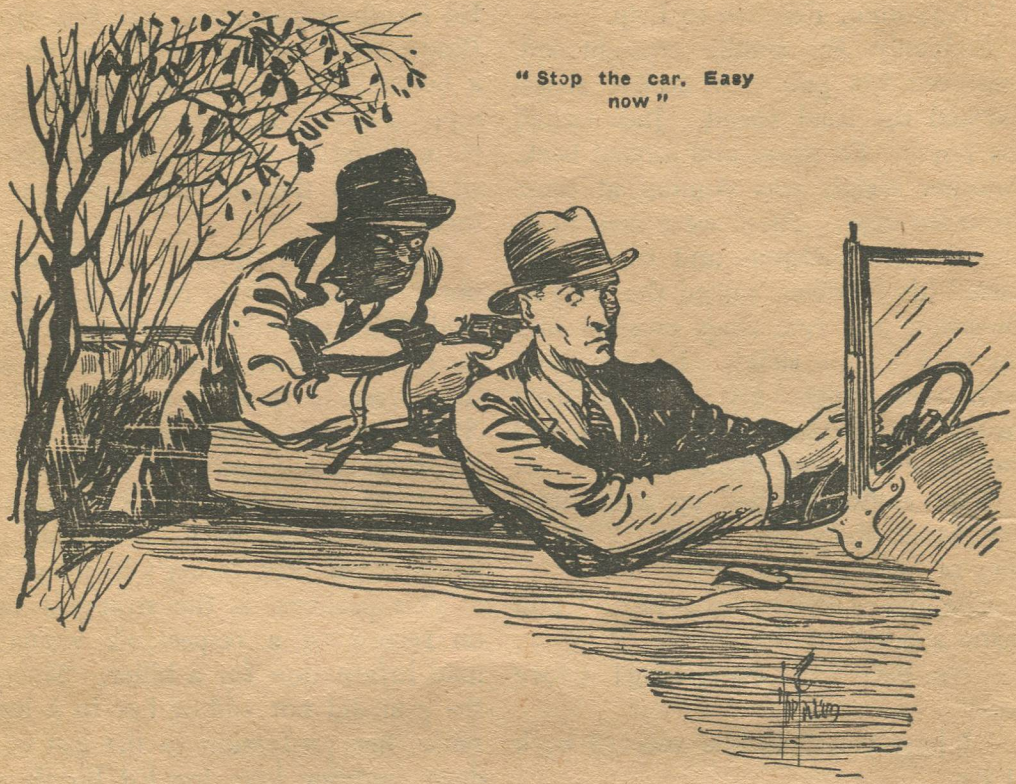
"I hate you!" Biddle sneered back at her.

The woman sank into her seat, glaring wide-eyed at the killer. She caught his gun. "Please," she cried, "please for God's sake, kill me!"

Biddle pressed his gun into her breast and fired. Through the chill air a rifle bullet whistled and caught Ed Biddle in the chest. He fell. Jack Biddle tried to whip up the horse, but a bullet came singing at him and he toppled over the form of his brother. Kate Soffel lay back in the seat, insensible, when the pursuers came up to them.

The brothers Biddle were not dead, nor was Kate Soffel. Nor did the scaffold claim the killing brothers. They died from bullet wounds on the day they were to have been hung. Kate Soffel recovered, pleaded guilty to aiding in an escape and went to prison, to the same prison of which her husband had been master until she had put his life and her own father's in jeopardy.

This perhaps, is the strangest case on record of a respectable woman's mad infatuation for a killer. Though the gun did not widow her in a legal sense, her profession to the last of a deep, undying love for Ed Biddle indicated that in spirit, if not in law, she considered herself his widow — a widow of the gun. To Ed Biddle she was nothing more than a tool to aid him in escape — his getaway moll, a rôle which many women have played in the reckless lives of desperate killers.



"Stop the car, Easy now"

Greed Crazy

A Corpse Would Be Worth $500,000 to Him if He Could Work His Sinister Double-Cross

By George Harmon Coxe

DETECTIVE - SERGEANT JANSEN of the Central Office put the note gently on the walnut, flat-topped desk, twisted his tall, spare body in his chair, and glanced at Detective Sullivan, then across at Warren Hayward.

The note was on cheap sulphite bond; the message, neatly printed in its entirety, read:

> We made it easy at first. Just a little fee that plenty of rich guys pay for protection—$10,000. Now it'll cost you $25,000 and it's your last chance. Put an ad in the *Herald* personals this afternoon addressed to Eddy and we will tell you what to do. Either that or somebody will be paying more for you. Cross us with the cops or on the ad and you won't get a chance to pay.

"They sound kinda tough," Jansen said finally. "You got them other notes?"

"I threw the first one away," Hayward said, reaching into his pocket, "but here's the second; came last week."

Jansen studied the similarity in the

two pieces with an expression of stolid weariness which was a component part of his weathered, big-nosed face.

"What were you waitin' for?" he grunted. "They got you scared this time, so now you call us in, huh?"

Hayward pushed back in his chair behind the desk, spread his hands, palms up, let them flop back in his lap. He was a good-looking blond young man, well set up, smartly dressed in brown tweeds and immaculate linen. Healthy-skinned, blue-eyed, he had a narrow mouth and a chin that looked aggressive, as though it were accustomed to get its owner what he wanted.

"Hell," he said irritably. "I thought the first one was some crank's idea. The second one worried me—and this one, well"—his face wrinkled in a wry grin—"sure I'm scared. That's why I called you. I don't want anybody picking me up out of the gutter with a chest full of slugs. I got too much to live for."

"Everybody has," Jansen said.

"Maybe," grunted Hayward, "but I'm interested in me. I'm young, I got a job I like; I have a lot of fun. In two more years—when I'm thirty—I come into half a million. I want to be able to spend it."

"Who wouldn't?" Sullivan said and glanced sideways at Jansen, who was thoughtfully surveying the end of a thin, muddy-black stogie that smelled like the heel of an old pipe.

"You could pay, then?" the sergeant said.

"No," snorted Hayward. "I can't. And that's the hell of it, because the way I feel that's just what I'd do."

Jansen began lifting his thick brows. "You said—"

"When I was thirty, I said," Hayward interrupted. "My father died when I was a kid. His half-brother's been bringing me up—old Alvan Crocker—"

"The real estate guy?" Sullivan asked.

"Yes. Dad left about a million. The will says Crocker handles it and gets the life use of half of it; gets the use of my half till I'm thirty. Meanwhile I get a measly five thousand a year."

Sullivan sighed and shook his head. "Tough," he said sadly. "And some day you'll get it all."

"What do you want we should do?" Jansen said, folding the two notes.

"I want you to call on Crocker and tell him this thing is on the level. I told him about the second note, called him when I got this. I wanted to get an advance. But he thinks I'm trying to gouge him; says it's all poppycock. Maybe you can convince him."

"Why?" Jansen asked flatly. "It ain't my idea you should pay off?"

"Well," snapped Hayward, "see him anyway. Tell him that—"

"Well check up," Jansen said, and stood up. "The best thing is to put the ad in, find out what the layout is and then try and fix a plant."

"Hah!" Hayward stood up and scowled. "Read the end of that note again. I'm taking enough chance, just telling you about it."

"We'll check up," Jansen said, "and let you know what to do."

Hayward walked to the door, and two detectives moved down a short hall to an indirectly lighted, chromium-decorated showroom whose imitation tile floor was studded with a dozen or more glistening automobiles that actually looked bigger, more colorful, more dazzling, than the magazine advertisements.

Jansen continued to the street door, turned to speak to Sullivan, realized he was alone. He turned all the

way around before he saw that the young detective had succumbed to temptation and was standing in the center of the room, gazing awestruck at a low-slung, jade-green phaeton with an aluminum hood.

Jansen sighed wearily and moved slowly back among the glittering display, his faded black topcoat slapping at the calves of his long legs.

Sullivan was busy. He kicked the huge tires, ran his hand over the top, finally climbed in behind the wheel and worked the gears and the clutch pedal.

"What a job," he breathed reverently.

"Come on," Jansen said.

Sullivan had trouble obeying. He was a young, solidly-built fellow with a freckled, good-natured face and quick blue eyes that were now covetous and glistening.

"A Frascotto," he said, tugging at the wheel. "Italian job. I wonder what it would cost a guy to drive one."

"About ten years, Sully, if they caught you," Jansen said. "Come on before you get ideas."

Sullivan got out reluctantly. As he followed Jansen to the door he said, "Imagine selling these. Boy!"

"You'd go broke," Jansen said. "I bet there ain't twenty of 'em in town. Who's there to buy 'em nowadays?"

ALVAN CROCKER led the two detectives into the library of his home on the West Side, waved them to chairs. Sullivan sat down at once, but Jansen continued to stand for a moment as he studied the room.

It was old-looking, high-ceilinged, gloomy. Books filled two walls, and the furniture was heavy, formidable. An enormous teakwood chest, ornately carved, stood under the two tall windows at one end of the room. The top of the chest was open as though to air the contents, and a pungent odor that seemed like a combination of incense and disinfectant hung over the room.

"So he went to the police, eh?" Crocker moved behind the desk and sat down. "And I suppose he sent you here to—"

"Just checkin' up," Jansen said. He went on to tell of the conversation with Warren Hayward.

His initial feeling of dislike for Crocker grew as he studied the man and his manners. He was as tall as the sergeant, thinner, with a definite stoop. The top of his oblong head was bald and shiny; his eyes were black, intense, yet nervous; he had a hawklike nose and false teeth that did not fit too well, so that he was continually making little sucking sounds with his tongue.

"It's his own fault," he snapped when Jansen finished. "I told him. I gave him a job in my office, smoothed out the corners for him. But no. He wants bright lights and women and and a perpetual good time."

Crocker sniffed and his hueless lips dipped at the corners in familiar and well worn grooves, augmenting an attitude that suggested the world had soured on him.

"Always after me to increase his allowance. That job of selling cars! Huh! Sold one all last year—but he can buy a demonstrator at half price and swell around in it. If he stayed away from night clubs and places like that these gangsters wouldn't see him, would they? Wouldn't think of him as a victim, would they?"

Jansen fingered the brim of a felt hat that had grown limp and shapeless with constant cleaning. With no preconceived notion of suggesting the

money be paid, he found himself doing so now. He was stubborn that way, Jansen. He saw there was nothing to be gained at this end, and his argument was dryly malicious.

"I told him what he oughta do," he said flatly. "But if he wants to pay, that's his business. Plenty of 'em do. And you could advance him the money, and—"

"I could, could I?" flared Crocker. "I have to account for every penny of that estate. I'm responsible for that money and it's against my best judgment. It's poppycock. I won't do it."

"You could loan it to him," Jansen argued. "Have him sign a note and take it out of your own pocket."

"I haven't got it — of my own. Nothing but real estate. I'm overextended, hanging on for some kind of an upswing."

He stood up. "No. It's his own doing, he'll have to take it. The sooner these crooks find out he hasn't any money, the better it'll be. Why, if they get away with it once, think what might happen."

"Yeah." Jansen said dryly. He took a deep breath and let it out slowly as he moved to the door. Then, standing there with his hand on the knob he said, "If something happened to Hayward, who'd get the estate?"

"I would," Crocker said quickly. "I—"

He broke off as though realizing the implication of the question. He took a step forward, his bony face outthrust.

"See here, young man. Are you trying to insinuate—"

"I just wanted the facts," Jansen said. "In case we needed 'em some time."

He led the way out of the house and when he climbed into the battered police touring he said, "Did you hear him, Sully? Young man, he called me." He made noises in his throat. "Guys like him get my goat."

Sullivan stamped on the starter, clashed gears and literally yanked the car from the curb as he let in the clutch. "Just a nice, big-hearted, lovable old soul," he said, and took the next corner in a fast, tight turn that put the right rear wheel over the curbing.

Jansen grabbed at the door with one hand, his flapping and slightly askew hat with the other.

"Take it easy," he growled. "You're still thinkin' about that Bascatti."

"Frascotto," Sullivan said, and the freckled corners of his eyes wrinkled in a grin.

II

JANSEN'S stogies were called Little Wonders. He bought them in a round tin; fifty for eighty-nine cents. At two o'clock the following afternoon he was sitting in his office, his feet cocked on a desk drawer, cutting the end off a prospective smoke with a careful and reverent manipulation of his penknife that would have flattered a Corona Corona, when the telephone rang. Ignoring the shrill summons until he had finished his job and rolled the amputated end between his lips, he lifted the receiver.

The voice, rasping, high-pithced with excitement said:

"Hello — Jansen? Hello — hello. They got him. I got the note. They got him."

Jansen's feet thudded to the floor and he jerked upright in his chair.

"Wait a minue," he barked. "Take it easy. They got who?"

"Hayward. Hayward, damn it!"

"Hayward!" Jansen went slack-jawed a moment.

Memory flooded his brain with a detailed review of his investigation. He and Sullivan had gone back to talk with Warren Hayward the afternoon before, after they had finished with Crocker. He had endeavored to argue Hayward into inserting the advertisement in a late edition of the *Herald;* so they could try and trap the extortionist. He had also offered to furnish a police guard for a few days.

But Hayward had a date that night, said he would get in touch with Jansen in the morning. When he had not called, the sergeant had partially dismissed the case as having petered out, and because the notes had not been sent through the mail he had not notified the Federal men.

"I didn't get the letter till an hour ago," Crocker whined. "The housekeeper found it, called me at the office. Warren wasn't at his office, hadn't been in. He wasn't at the club last night. Didn't sleep home, but his car is here. I don't know—"

"Hold everything," Jansen said. "I'll get a flock of men and—"

"No," cried Crocker. "You can't do that—"

"What the hell do you mean I can't?"

"This note. It says if I tell the police I'll be killed. They want fifty thousand. I'll pay—I've got to pay. But I'm afraid to do it alone. You've got to help me. But you've got to promise not to tell anyone until—"

"How can I promise?" growled Jansen. "I gotta tell the Captain."

"You can't, I tell you! I won't let you in the house—won't tell you anything more. I can't take the chance. But if you don't help me and something happens I'll see to it that the District Attorney—"

Crocker went on, half hysterically, but Jansen did not hear him for the moment, so busy was he with his own thoughts. Duty according to the regulations was clear. But a man like Crocker carried some weight about town. And if anything went wrong—

Jansen was in a spot either way, but he made his decision quickly.

"All right," he said, interrupting Crocker's tirade. "I won't spill it—anyway until I talk with you. Sullivan and me'll be right up."

"Not in a police car," Crocker said. "The note says I'll be watched and if I go to the police, or any police come to my house the deal is off and I'll be—"

Jansen spat out a curse. "All right, all right," he said. "Take it easy. Stay right there. We'll figure out someway to get in without tipping our mitt. Sit tight."

"You'll be careful?" Crocker quaked. "I'm taking a terrible chance just calling you. You won't—"

Jansen slammed down the receiver on the rush of words. He glanced at the stogie, its outer wrapping now flapping wide, cursed and threw it at the spittoon. Striding to the lone window he looked out on the busy street below.

"Is he yellow; boy, is he yellow!" he muttered savagely. "And gettin' me to spot myself to help him out. Am I a magician or something to sneak up there and—"

He broke off as his eyes flicked over the street to the row of three and four-storied brick buildings opposite. Hardware, grocery store, news-stand, plumber—

"Yah!" he growled and spun away from the window. Leaving his topcoat on the hatrack, he went into the hall, called Sullivan from the de-

tective's room, hurried downstairs to the garage in the basement.

HERE he told Sullivan what had happened. They purloined two suits of greasy overalls, one sweater, a blue jacket. They went across the street to the plumbing shop. Jansen did not have to argue long with the owner, because the sergeant was two parking tags up in favors.

Five minutes later a battered truck with a tool bag in the open box body and *Empire Plumbing Co.* lettered on the tail board bounced out of the alley. The truck took the intersection on orange and red, squeezed in front of a limousine by the grace of God and the other chauffeur's locked brakes, nicked a taxi fender and roared on down the middle of the street.

Jansen's pent-up breath whistled out and he jerked his eyes from the road to Sullivan's bright-eyed face.

"Listen, Sully," he said sardonically. "It's plumbers we are, ain't it?"

"Sure," Sullivan said, holding the throttle open. "And a swell idea, too."

"Then don't spoil it. Slow down so's we can be like other plumbers."

Alvan Crócker began to voice his fears as soon as Jansen and Sullivan—lugging the tool bag—came in the back way.

The sergeant interrupted, asked for the note. It was identical with the other two. Sullivan read it over Jansen's shoulder.

It asked for fifty thousand dollars, gave explicit directions for the delivery, made the usual threats if the police were informed or the money not paid. The servants were to be dismissed for the evening, and Crocker himself was to make the delivery, leaving the house at ten o'clock and driving Warren Hayward's distinctive Frascotto roadster, which was now in the garage behind the house.

"If the car is here," Sullivan said, "They musta snatched him last night when he put it away."

"You gonna get the money?" Jansen said.

"Yes," Crocker said, "I hardly know—"

"Then you better get going," Jansen said. "before three." He hesitated. "We can't go with you—a couple would-be plumbers." He scratched the back of his neck, tugged at the brim of his borrowed cap, finally added, "Call up the bank and send your housekeeper for it. It oughta be safe enough that way."

Crocker apparently had no stomach for further argument at the moment. He dispatched the housekeeper, and when she returned a half hour later the three men went into the library.

Crocker began to count the money, bending low over the desk, his long fingers deftly dealing the old twenties asked for in the note. He was about half way through this task when he said:

"I've taken enough chances already, telling you about this. I don't like—I mean, those men will have me at their mercy if I go out alone to deliver this." He sucked at his loose false teeth and they wiggled with the sucking. "Why can't you go in my place?"

His beady, nervous eyes caught Jansen's, held them. And the sergeant felt a slowly-rising anger within him at the sight of the man's obvious fear, his cringing attitude. Yet he also realized that the idea was clever. It would give him an actual contact with the kidnapers; his experience, his

powers of observation should give him some sort of a clue that would help in running down the men when Hayward was safe.

"You're the same build," Sullivan said. "And you got the same kind of noses and—"

"I always wear a black felt hat," Crocker interrupted eagerly. "And my gray coats are—ah—quite distinctive. You could easily—"

"Okay," Jansen said. "But get this. Me, I don't like all this clownin' around. Plumbers and all that stuff. I'll deliver the cash, but the way to handle it is to shut off the roads out there, plant a couple of squads of men—"

"No—no," Crocker said fearfully.

"These guys are smart," Jansen said. "Look at the place they pick for the touch. Damn near ten miles out of town, out there by the old airport where there ain't a tree, nothing you can hide in for miles. But we could block the roads—"

"You promised—"

"I promised I wouldn't spill anything till I talked with you."

"If we don't play fair, they'll kill Warren—me, too," Crocker said, and the emphasis was on the, "Me, too."

"Well, just the same," Jensen began and then broke off. Exasperation filmed his lean face and he continued irritably, "Sully's a witness that I'm only doin' this because—"

"That's fine," Crocker breathed. He continued counting the money. When he finished he said, "Do you think—I mean, maybe we could make a dummy bag, not have to give up all this money?"

"Sure," Jansen said bitterly, "and then all they'll do is crack down on me and put the slug on Hayward. If you wanta take a chance with him let's cut out the run around, get some cops out there and maybe we can trap the whole gang."

"No," Crocker sighed. "It's a lot of money, and it's Warren's own damn fault. But maybe we can get it back afterwards."

Sullivan glanced at Jansen, shook his head and wrinkled his nose in disgust.

Jansen stood up. "Let's look at the garage."

III

THEY went through the back hall, out the door and across a wide paved court into a spacious triple garage that now held a single car, a black and chromium Frascotto roadster with the top down.

Sullivan went dumb with admiration. Jansen turned to Crocker.

"We got to haul out of here pretty soon—even plumbers can't stay too long. I'll come over this fence"—he pointed to the brick wall at the rear of the garage—"at exactly five minutes of ten tonight.

"At 9:57 you bring out your hat and coat and the money and put it in the car for me. That way nobody'll get a chance to see us together and get wise—and nobody'll get a chance to lift the money bag. Now you better get rid of the servants. We'll be in and get our tool bag soon's we look around."

When the two detectives came into the library a few minutes later, Crocker was not around, and Jansen said:

"Listen, Sully, am I in a spot! Will I be the sap, if this thing flops and I don't get something to hang on these snatchers. The captain'll say I shoulda tipped off the whole force, and—"

"What the hell," Sullivan said. "If

we tip 'em off and they pick up the kid's body tomorrow we'll be in a spot, too."

The "we" did not escape Jansen and his eyes showed fleeting appreciation.

"Okay, we'll give it a whirl," he said. "I gotta meet these guys right in the middle of that four-mile stretch of road, and you can't hide on it. But there's a crossroad right near there; you know, dirt; goes up a little hill. There's some woods there and you won't be much more'n a half mile away. I think you can stick there, and if you take another guy with you—Werber, maybe—only don't tell him why—and a sub-machine gun and a riot gun and—"

"I wish I was built like you," Sullivan said irrelevantly.

"You wish?" grunted Jansen, scowling.

"Imagine drivin' that Frascotto."

THERE seemed to be but one light in Crocker's house—at the front—when Jansen climbed the brick fence and tiptoed across the paved court at five minutes of ten that night. The leather money valise was tucked up on the floor-boards under the dash; a coat and a hat lay on the seat of the roadster. Jansen changed in the darkness, climbed in behind the wheel. Fumbling with the unfamiliar and cluttered instrument board for a minute or more, he finally had to strike a match to find the light switch. It was a full two minutes longer before he discovered the ignition under the steering column, and he was sweating with exasperation at the unlooked-for delay.

The right hand drive confused him and he narrowly missed the side of the house as he went jerking down the driveway. It was not until he had passed the suburbs that he became at all confident of his ability to operate the heavy car.

Then he realized he was shivering. The sweat had become a film of ice, he thought; and he cursed Crocker and his thin coat; Hayward for getting himself kidnaped, for having the top down on the roadster.

Soon he was starting along the flat straight road that led past the old airport, abandoned now because the land was too marshy. A moon helped him realize that his visualisation of the terrain that afternoon had been correct. It was as if he were surveying the district through dark blue glasses, and he could see that there was hardly a tree within sight. In the distance, topping a gentle rise to the left, a fuzzy skyline told him of the wooded section more than a half mile away. Somewhere up there was a road. He'd pass the intersection in another mile and Sully'd be up there waiting. Sully and Werber.

It was funny, though. There wasn't another car in sight. Maybe he was early. No. A glance at the clock on the dash told him he was late if anything—and all because of this damn Italian car with all its gadgets.

Maybe s o m e t h i n g scared the snatchers off. His thoughts stuck here for a moment. If they didn't show up it meant it was a gag, or that somebody got wise. A new and chilling uneasiness seeped into his brain. And there was his lieutenancy. He was looking forward to that in a few years.

Jansen was conscious first of a peculiar jar. It was faint, but definite, and he could not explain it. It served to pull his thoughts to the moment, gave him a few seconds of warning that were wasted.

He half turned in his seat. Then the gun—he could tell it was a gun by the cold roundness of the muzzle—jabbed against the back of his neck. A hoarse, muffled voice said:

"Stop the car! Easy, now!"

Jansen stiffened. Instinct put his feet on the clutch and brake pedals. He pulled over to the side of the road, automatically snapped off the ignition.

"Now, just open the bag so I can make sure."

Jansen reached for the bag, fumbled with the fastenings. Two thoughts cropped out from the jumble in his brain: the fellow had been in the rumble seat from the start; and he was staging his coup ahead of time. The appointed spot was a half mile away, the intersecting road a quarter of a mile beyond that.

"He crossed us. Wouldn't come himself. Sent a copper, huh?" the voice said.

Jansen opened the bag, but his eyes were sweeping the dusky blue landscape. It was the man behind him who made the discovery.

A vicious, outraged curse jerked the sergeant's attention to the bag. Then his breath caught in his throat. The valise was filled with folded newspapers. The other man's voice pounded at his ears.

"You —— You crossed me!"

"No!" Jansen said, too dumfounded to feel fear as yet. "I thought—"

"He got it from the bank," the voice rasped. "We checked."

"I thought the dough was there," Jansen flung out. "He musta switched. It's the truth. He musta—"

"The two of you crossin' me, huh?" The pressure of the gun was steady, but the voice moved as the man told Jansen to shove over and then climbed down on the seat behind the wheel. Reaching for the ignition switch he said, "All right. We told him what we'd do. Here's where we make good on it."

Jansen glanced at the man at his side for the first time. A long black handkerchief with slits cut for the eyes, hung from under a dark felt. A long slicker covered the man's clothing. Beyond this Jansen could not see, but his nose wrinkled as it picked up a strange and enigmatic scent, strange, yet somehow familiar.

The gunman let out the clutch with a jerk, drove over a shallow ditch to the adjoining field, making a quick, wide circle back to the road. Gaining this he jabbed Jansen with the gun.

"Open the door!" he said.

Jansen obeyed, trying to judge the speed of the car. It wasn't much, but—

The gun slammed against the back of his head. Half-conscious that he was falling, he jumped. A voice that sounded strangely dim called:

"Here's where you get out."

Then he struck the macadam on his feet and pitched forward into the opposite ditch.

The racing car was already a quarter of a mile away when Jansen staggered to the middle of the road, but he fired twice regardless. He did not hope to hit the man; but he seized upon this method as the simplest for summoning Sullivan.

IV

SULLIVAN, hunched over the wheel, said, "Imagine chasing a Frascotto in this crate! Those jobs're guaranteed to do a hundred and ten."

"You just open her—and keep her open!" said Jansen.

"We can't help Hayward much right now. But the money's at Crocker's. We might save his yellow, double-crossing hide if—"

"Yeah," Jansen said grimly. He remembered that peculiar smell of the kidnaper now, and he told of his discovery. "You know that funny incense smell that came from that big chest in Crocker's library yesterday?" Sullivan said he had. Werber grunted. Jansen went on hurriedly. "Well, this snatcher had that smell."

"Crocker? You think he was hidin' there?" Sullivan broke off with a curse. "Then he knew I was waitin' up in the woods; that's why he pulled the job ahead of time. And nobody knew about that but us. He was hidin' in that chest, listenin' to every word."

"He crossed us on the dough." Jansen said, as though talking to himself.

"Remember?" Sullivan continued excitedly. "Crocker wasn't around when we came in from the garage—when we went in the library and talked this setup over! He was hidin' there. It was a frame from the start.

"He phoned us in the first place so there'd be an excuse if Hayward was found dead. He suggested you go in his place—so he could hide in the rumble. He crossed us on the dough and his gag is to make you open the bag so you can swear there's no cash. That gives him a chance to get the kid knocked off, have him found dead s o m e p l a c e. Everybody'll blame Crocker for holding back the ransom—but what the hell does he care? He stands to make a half million. We gotta find Hayward before—"

"Yeah," Jansen said. There was a peculiar brittleness to his voice now, as though he had not paid much attention to what Sullivan had said.

"If a guy goes nuts and goes around framing jobs like this it's okay with me. But when he builds me up for the sap, that's different," Jansen went on.

The touring was racing along the avenue now, and the sergeant turned to Werber. "We'll park outside the house. Get that riot gun set and if anybody comes runnin' out let him have it."

Sullivan stopped the touring car with one front wheel over the curb and the bumper against a telephone pole. Jansen's long legs kept him in the lead. He went through the darkened hall to the lighted living room, threw open the library door and barged in with his gun up.

He was poised there, breathless, his eyes riveted on the macabre picture on the floor when Sullivan ran into him. The young detective's husky oath stirred the hair on Jansen's neck.

Alvan Crocker, his bony face relaxed and placid in death, lay on his back in the center of the room, his arms outflung, his knees bent and twisted sideways at the hip. The fabric of his vest was moist, red-stained by blood from two holes in his chest. Jansen saw this at a glance, catalogued it and forgot it. Because there was a piece of paper on the man's stomach, and it was this which held his bright, hard gaze.

One step took him to the body. He did not have to kneel to read the message. Across the top of the sheet, printed in large letters, were two words: DOUBLE-CROSSER.

Beneath this smaller letters spelled out: *We keep our word both ways. We got the money and the kid can go.*

"Still tryin' to bluff, huh?" Jansen said. He stooped and ran his finger across the face of the paper, so that he made a bluish smudge.

Sullivan, wide-eyed and slack-jawed with amazement, blurted:

"Who?"

Jansen straightened up. "The ink's still wet. Maybe he's still around."

"Who? Damn it, who?"

"Hayward!" ripped Jansen, and was jerked to stiffness by the low roar of an automobile engine which shattered the stillness of the night.

ACTION was synonymous with thought. He sprang towards the window overlooking the driveway, seemed to unlock and throw it up with one quick, continuous movement. Then, leaning out, bracing himself with one hand, he whipped up his gun, fired once, quickly, at the darkened roadster outlined in the moonlight.

Instantly the sound of the motor faded. There was a grinding clash of gears, a new roar and the car shot backward. Jansen called:

"Let's go, Sully," and went through the window.

At the entrance to the courtyard, he flattened himself against the corner of the house, yanked the racing Sullivan to a stop.

"Take it easy," he whispered. "Go around the right side here, stay outside the door. I'll be goin' in. If he comes out alone you better get him the first shot."

"But listen," Sullivan said. "Why don't I—"

"Why don't you do what you're told?" Jansen said, and gave the young detective a shove. Then, as soon as Sullivan reached the far wall, the sergeant stepped warily towards the roadster, which had been left in the center of the court.

He saw that it was empty, and crouching, he leaped for the shelter of the garage. He slid along the front of the building, reached the first, jutting half of the opened door. Pausing here for a moment, he listened, risked a glance beyond. The blackness of the interior swallowed up his gaze. There was no sound but his own breathing.

Jansen made his decision at once. A fast moving target was the thing; better that way than try to sneak in with the moonlight at his back.

He went to one knee, took a deep breath, then launched his attack like a charging football lineman. He shot up and forward into blackness, took two long steps, threw himself towards the safe shadows of the right wall.

Twice in that quick rush a gun roared. The first shot shattered a glass pane in the door; the second slapped into the brick wall. Chips and dust showered down on his hand. After that there was silence, thick, ominous, deadly. Jansen waited on one knee, trying to pierce the blackness.

The first seconds were anxious, nerve-tingling. He heard a faint sound of movement off to his right. Then the tension began to grow and he became conscious of his cramped, taut-muscled position. He began to breath through his mouth, easing the air in and out silently. Then, in shifting one hand, he touched a tire which was propped against the wall.

He decided to gamble. One handed, braced there one one knee, he pulled the tire from the wall. When he had it headed across the width of the garage, he brought over his gun-hand to help.

A quick, noiseless shove started the tire on its way. Jansen brought up his gun, made ready to shoot in any direction. For five seconds or so the movement of the tire was barely perceptible, with a noise so faint as to defy

analysis. Then it hit the opposite wall with a crash that seemed deafening after the silence.

Things happened with lightning quickness then; yet each detail was etched in Jansen's brain as though unfolded in slow motion.

Hayward shot at the crash. So close was he that the gun seemed to explode in Jansen's ears. As he swung his arm over, Hayward fired again. This time the flash of orange flame threw out an instantaneous picture of the strong-chinned face in profile, of a figure crouched with his back against the wall not four feet from Jansen.

He could have shot him then, Jansen could. Why he didn't he never could explain—except that he thought he had a chance to make an arrest, and he had been drilled to shoot only when no other course was possible.

So he took off from his knee again. The onslaught was accurate, but too forceful. His shoulder hit Hayward squarely and the two of them went over on the floor in a tangle of arms and legs. But Hayward, although taken by surprise, had youth in his favor. He threw Jansen clear, scrambled to his feet. When the sergeant rolled over, Hayward was halfway to the door.

Jansen's gun came up again, and this time his trigger finger was tight. He yelled a warning. At the same time he remembered Sullivan. He yelled again, then squeezed the trigger as Hayward swung through the doorway.

Beyond the flash of his gun, he saw another flash—from Hayward's gun. Mingling with the crash of his shot, were two others, and he knew one was Sullivan's. Then Hayward was a silhouette. A blue-hued silhouette who held a gun in one hand, a bulky valise in the other. And the silhouette sagged as Jansen watched; sagged, and dropped the valise and then crumpled over on top of it.

V

SULLIVAN paced back and forth across the library floor, muttering, "Hell—hell!" and with each turn, glancing at the lifeless figure of Alvan Crocker. They were waiting for the ambulance and the examiner now, and Werber was outside standing guard over Hayward's body.

Jansen, bare-headed and disheveled, was looking at the two leather bags on the floor, one of which was stuffed with newspapers, the other filled with old twenty-dollar bills.

"I figured it was Crocker," Sullivan said and scowled. "I thought you did, too."

"What made you think so, Sully?"

"Well, hell!" Sullivan pulled at one ear. "I doped out all those motives. How he could've framed it and everything, and you didn't argue."

"I was thinkin' about something else," Jansen answered. "I might've heard your motives, but most of 'em would stick with Hayward, too. He stood to get the million, same as as Crocker. He coulda been in the chest all the time—instead of just while we were talking about the plant for you and Werber."

Jansen hesitated, stepped to the window, looked out, same back to the center of the room again.

"Hayward was hard up. He wouldn't get his half million for two years. So he doped up this plan to kidnap himself, and he made it look right because he knew old Crocker would never pay for extortion letters. And if the money had been in that bag tonight, he probably would've got away with it.

"He had a car we couldn't catch. He could've ditched it, hid the cash and turned up with a bump on his head or something— wandering about like he'd just been turned loose. If he'd stuck to his story—and he was the kind of guy that would—he'd been clear. We'd never hooked him even if we tied him up with it. And he'd had fifty grand to tide him over till he got his estate."

"He musta been nerts," Sullivan broke in.

"Yeah," Jansen said thoughtfully. "Anyway, off his nut about one thing! He had plenty of dough coming, but he couldn't touch it—and he liked a good time.

"He got a crazy idea of getting fifty thousand from Crocker. And Crocker was crazy too; greed crazy. So tight he crossed himself out of this world." The kid thought the money was in that bag. When it wasn't he came straight back to get it.

Jansen walked over to the chest now open.

"Just wrote a note," he said slowly, "left it where the housekeeper could find it, then made himself comfortable here. Then sometime tonight he sneaked out and got in the rumble seat.

"Neat. And the only thing we know is that the job flopped. Two guys with a half million each—and now nobody gets it. A million bucks, Sully; a million dollar flop."

"Yeah," Sullivan said.

"But I coulda been right. Crocker coulda framed a snatch, too. That smell you tumbled to; either one of 'em coulda hid in that chest."

"Sure."

"Then how the hell'd you tumble to Hayward?"

"You never drove one of them Bascattis, did you, Sully?"

"Frascotto," Sullivan grumbled. "No."

"Know where the ignition switch is?"

"I could damn well find it."

"So did I. But it took about three minutes."

"What's that prove?"

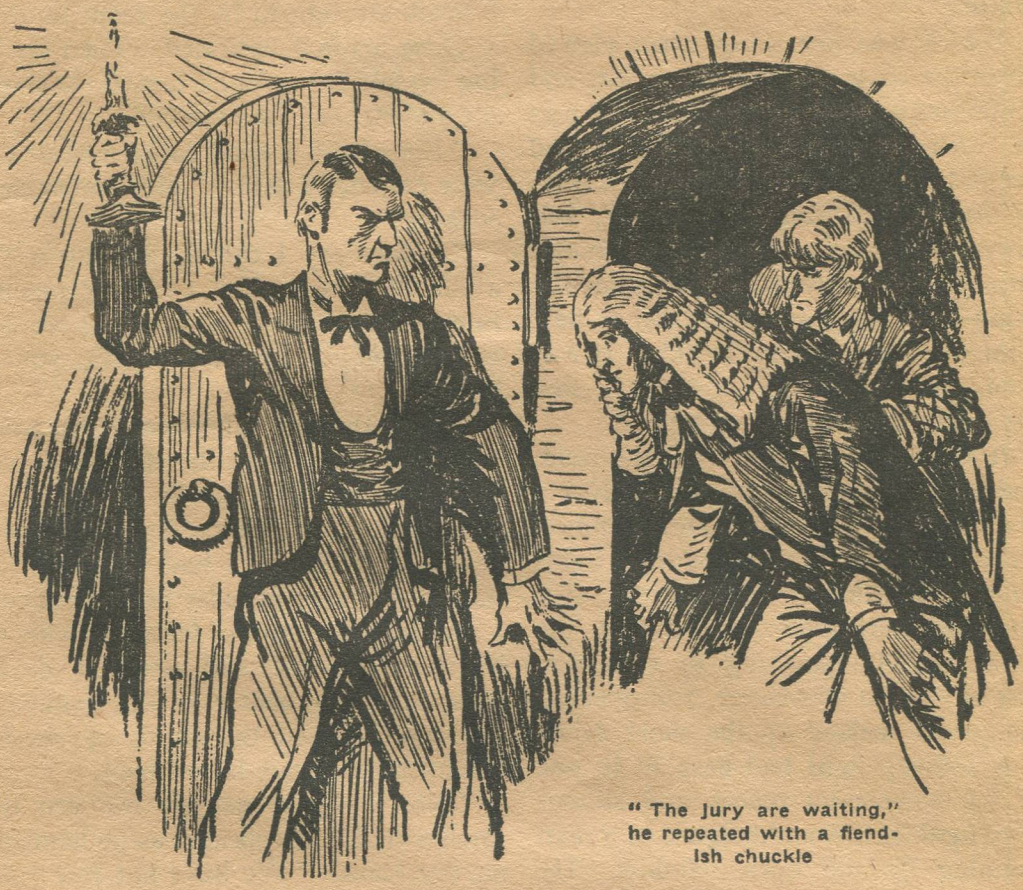
"There ain't many cars around like that, Sully. And for some damn reason—because I was rattled I guess—I turned off the switch. And from where he was in the rumble, this guy couldn't see me do it. But when he got ready to haul out he reached for the damn thing without even looking at it. So what would you make out of that fact, Sully?"

"Well—" Sullivan said, and a grin flooded his round, freckled face. "It had to be Hayward—or some guy that was plenty familiar with the job to turn it on without looking."

The Silent Jury

By Sapper

In That Solitary, Sinister House Sat a Jury Summoned from Hell by a Madman's Vengeance



"The jury are waiting," he repeated with a fiendish chuckle

I WAS a fool to have started at all. At first the weather had been merely oppressive. By the time I had walked four miles pitch-black clouds were gathering overhead, and the faint mutterings of thunder could be heard in the distance. And I had six more miles to go, before reaching the inn where I intended to sleep.

It was entirely my own fault. The landlord of the hotel I had left an hour before had warned me I should get a drenching.

"There's a grand storm coming," he had said. "It will be on you long before you are through the pass. And there's no roof for you to shelter under saving only Alanbridge. And I would not go there."

"Why not?" I had asked him.

"It's queer, that house. Queer like the Englishman that owns it, and who

lives there alone with only one man servant who is as queer as himself. Gaunt men they are, both of them—gaunt, strong, raw-boned men. Sometimes they go away in a motor with a caravan behind, and the house stands empty for weeks on end. Then they come back, and shut themselves up again. No, I would not go inside that house."

Which was one thing when viewed from the cover of the inn parlor, and quite another from the position I was in. Already the first big drops had begun to fall, and suddenly a vivid flash of forked lightning cut the sky, followed by a deafening peal of thunder from almost overhead. Then came the rain—a hissing downpour, and in half a minute I was wet to the skin. It was then, that rounding a corner, I saw the house just in front of me.

It stood a little back from the road, and was half hidden by trees. Not a prepossessing spot at the best of times, now, lit up every few seconds by lightning, and with the rain beating down into the undergrowth around it, the place looked depressing to a degree. But anyway it was cover, and opening the gate I walked up the short drive.

A solitary light had been lit in one of the downstairs rooms, and silhouetted against it was the figure of a man standing by the open window. He must have seen me coming, but he made no movement and said no word. He just stood there motionless until I was within a few feet of him, when he leaned forward and seemed to study me more closely.

The light from the lamp shone on my face, whereas his was in shadow. Then another flash of lightning illuminated his features and I paused involuntarily. For on them was an expression of such gloating malignity that the words of my late landlord came back with a rush. Then I pulled myself together. It would be childish to turn back now.

"I was wondering, sir," I said, "if you would perhaps allow me to shelter here until the storm is past."

"I shall be only too delighted," he answered in a curiously deep voice. "Walk straight in by the front door."

Once again I hesitated. Then cursing myself for a fool I turned the handle and stepped into the hall.

"I'm afraid I shall make a mess of your carpet," I said. "My clothes are soaking."

"I dare say I can fix you up with a change," he replied. "But come in first and have some whisky. It would not do for you to catch a cold, would it?"

It was the tone of voice of his last sentence, rather than the slightly peculiar phrasing, that made me look at him quickly; but his face conveyed nothing. The look I had surprised in that momentary glimpse had vanished. I saw merely aquiline features, with a big hooked nose and deep-set dark eyes. Then he bent over the tantalus, and one realized the depth of chest. Gaunt, strong, raw-boned men.

"No, it would not do for you to catch a cold," he repeated as he handed me my glass. "We have but few visitors here who arrive as you have done. All of mine come by car."

"You are rather off the beaten track, aren't you?" I said.

"Yes, they come by car. Don't they, John?"

I SWUNG round. Standing just behind me was the servant. He had entered noiselessly, and he was staring at me with a thoughtful look in his eyes. In build and figure he

was a replica of his master, and his whole expression was coarse and offensive to a degree.

He made no answer, but continued to stare at me until I felt myself flushing with anger. Not that his look was impertinent; rather was it appraising. At the same time it was annoying, and I then and there decided to push on and finish my walk the instant the rain stopped.

"We can't all afford cars these hard days," I said, turning my back on the man.

"They cost my guests nothing—do they, John?" remarked his master. "I pay for the petrol."

He shook with a sudden gust of laughter, and I felt a little shiver run down my spine. Was the man quite normal?

"Before we go any further—" he was speaking again—"might I inquire your name?"

"Mellish," I said.

"Mellish. We musth enter it in the visitor's book, John, mustn't we? That is another peculiarity of my visitors, Mr. Mellish. None of them can write."

And now my suspicions were becoming certainties. Obviously the man was queer. Possibly the servant, too. And since either of them could have made mincemeat of me with one hand, the situation did not seem too pleasant.

"I have twelve here at the moment, Mr. Mellish, and not one of them can sign their name."

"Indeed," I remarked. "You bring them here for a holiday, I suppose?"

"That's it. A holiday; a long holiday, when they can enjoy a complete rest. And now, Mr. Mellish, it is high time that you took off those wet clothes. John will take you upstairs."

"Really I couldn't think of giving you so much trouble," I said. "The rain has almost stopped and they will dry on me as I walk."

I might as well not have spoken for all the notice he took.

"Just about the same build, John. They should fit nicely."

"Aye, they should fit," said the man, speaking for the first time. "Come this way."

"But," I protested, "I don't want to change my clothes."

"And then we will have some dinner, John. I think I can claim, Mr. Mellish, that I have one or two bottles left in my cellar of a not indifferent vintage."

He turned away with a bow and I looked at the door. John was standing there waiting, and a feeling of absolute impotence came over me. Absurd, I know. What was there to prevent me walking out of the house? And yet, I didn't. I think it was their complete disregard of anything I said that defeated me. I felt as if I was faced with a deed that was already done.

I followed John upstairs, and he opened the door of a bedroom. It was sparsely furnished, and even to the masculine eye was badly in need of dusting. On the bed was a suit of clothes, a shirt and collar, and underclothes.

"There they are," said John, and closed the door behind him.

I went to the window and looked out. The rain had ceased, though the water still dripped from the trees. And after a while the uncanny silence of the house began to get on my nerves. Where were these twelve visitors my host had talked about? Even if they were unable to sign their names, surely they were not all dumb. But not a sound came from anywhere; no footsteps, no voices.

Crossing to the bed I picked up the

clothes. It was a rough homespun suit of good material, but of old-fashioned cut, and I wondered to whom it belonged. Obviously not to master or man—it was far too small for either of them.

And suddenly a wave of anger passed over me. Why the devil should I change into the damned things if I did not want to? I would not. To hell with them.

I went to the door and opened it; opened it and then shut it again. John was standing in the passage outside. And once again that cold shiver ran down my spine. Why was he on guard? What was the mystery of this strange house?

Slowly and reluctantly I peeled off my sodden garments, and put on the dry ones. They fitted tolerably well except for the shoes, which were too big. At last I was ready.

John was still waiting ouside, and I followed him down the stairs.

"Will you have my clothes dried, please," I said. "I shall be going on after dinner."

"In here," was his reply, showing me into a different room to the one I had been in originally.

"Confound it!" I cried irritably, "do you never answer a question?"

His answer was to shut the door, and I heard his footsteps die away along the passage outside. I was fuming with rage. I felt like a child with these two men. And the fact that in the physical sense at any rate I literally was a child compared to them did not increase my self-confidence.

II

A FEW minutes later my host joined me, and with a feeling of relief I saw that he had changed into a smoking jacket. Here at least was one normal touch in this very abnormal household.

"I see they fit passably," he said. "I thought they would. They belonged to my son."

"I asked your man to have mine dried," I remarked. "I hope he understood."

"And now doubtless you would like a glass of sherry," he continued, and I felt a wild desire to burst out laughing. It was beginning to remind me of the Mad Hatter's party. "I am one of those old-fashioned people, Mr. Mellish, who regard the modern cocktail as poison, but I think you will like my sherry."

He led the way across the hall to the room I had first been in, and I followed him meekly. The sherry, in a beautiful old cut glass decanter, was on the table, and he certainly had not overstated the merits of the wine. Flavor and bouquet were both superb.

"Excellent!" I said. "Quite excellent! By the way, sir," I continued, "I have not the pleasure of knowing to whom I am indebted for this charming hospitality?"

"It is quite unnecessary that y o u should, Mr. Mellish. Call me Mr. X. Let it remain that we are ships that pass in the night. Another glass of sherry? I can assure you it will not hurt you."

"That I can well believe, Mr. X," I remarked, humoring him. "May I ask if you supply this to all your guests?"

"None of my guests drink at all," he answered gravely.

"That is really very remarkable," I said. "To find twelve men who are so illiterate that they cannot even sign their names, and who, in addition to that are all teetotalers is, I should imagine, unique."

"Not twelve men. Ten and two

women. The last of them arrived only four days ago."

"They are singularly silent," I said. "Where are they all?"

"Resting, Mr. Mellish, resting. I will introduce you to them after dinner. A strangely assorted lot, but they seem to get on very happily together. At one time I wondered how Mrs. Gledstone, who is a fishmonger's wife, would get on with the retired naval commander, but there has been no trouble. And a solicitor seems to fit in quite all right, too."

I stared at him speechless.

"But," I stammered at length, "I don't understand. A solicitor and a naval commander who can't write! What on earth do you mean?"

"All in good time, Mr. Mellish," he said genially. "You will understand everything after dinner. Is it ready, John?"

The morose servant had appeared at the door, and gave an affirmative grunt.

"Then come, Mr. Mellish. I think I can promise you that my Clos Vouget is quite equal to the sherry. Or should you prefer a white wine, I have a few bottles of Montrachet left."

In a daze I followed him across the hall. Indubitably the man was stark, staring mad. A solicitor who could not write! The thing was crazy!

The table was laid for three, and at first I imagined John was going to sit down with us. But I found I was mistaken. He stood morosely behind his master's chair, his eyes seemingly fixed on vacancy, save when he moved to change the plates or fill our glasses. And so this eerie meal progressed.

Not that the dinner was a bad one. The food was excellent, the Burgundy all that my host had claimed for it. The reflection of the candles shone in the polished mahogany table like pools of light, the silver was beautifully kept, the glass was of the finest. And it was the very perfection of everything that made it seem the more incongruous. That, and the empty third place.

Gradually my nervousness left me, and a feeling of intense curiosity took its place. What was going to happen afterwards? Would I be given my clothes and be allowed to go, or would Mr. X expect me to remain for the night? And if the latter, what new eccentricity would be revealed?

Throughout the meal the conversation remained quite normal. He asked me about my job, and the holiday I was taking in the pleasantest of fashions, and when the talk turned to other matters he showed a keen and intelligent interest in current topics. So much so, in fact, that I began to wonder whether my first impressions were not wrong. The man seemed absolutely as sane as I was. Even the naval commander who could not write might be capable of some ordinary explanation.

At last dinner ended, and John, having placed a heavy cut glass decanter of port on the table, withdrew.

"A vintage Cockburn, Mr. Mellish," said my host. "Positively the last bottle in my cellar. But what more suitable evening could be found for drinking it than now, when my party is complete?"

Involuntarily my eyes strayed to the chair opposite, but something prevented me from saying anything.

"Complete, Mr. Mellish, in spite of the empty seat. Its rightful occupant has been unavoidably detained. May I therefore ask you to rise and drink a toast with me?

He pushed back his chair. I did likewise.

"To the absent one," he said gravely, and we both drained our glasses.

"AND now, Mr. Mellish," he continued as we sat down again, "it is time that we ceased to talk of trivialities. After all peace or war in Europe, or the trade depression in the world are but of small account to you and me. Let us turn to more serious matters—murder, for example. Are you interested in murder?"

"I—I suppose so," I stammered, all my fears coming back to me. "Everybody is, to a certain extent."

He leaned back in his chair, twirling his wine glass by the stem.

"To a certain extent of course they are," he agreed contemptuously. "But I am not alluding to the vulgar interest displayed by the man in the street over some revolting crime, such as finding a body in a trunk. That, sir, is not murder; it is butchery!"

He pushed the decanter towards me, and with a hand I vainly endeavored to keep from shaking I refilled my glass.

"Murder, Mr. Mellish, should be, and sometimes is, a fine art. And for many years past I have made a study of it. Has it ever occurred to you to think why nine out of ten murders, though otherwise skillfully carried out, are solved?"

"I can't say that I have really gone into the matter," I answered.

"A pity," he said. "It is a study that repays one. However, I will tell you. It is the discovery of a motive. Once that has been found out it points unfailingly in one direction, and leads almost inevitably to the arrest.

"But a murder without a motive would be the act of a madman," I blurted out before I could stop myself.

He leaned forward and stared at me.

"You think so?" he remarked at length. "Perhaps you are right. But I think you have slightly misunderstood me. I said the *discovery* of the motive, and naturally if there was no motive it could not be discovered."

"I see," I murmured.

"And so," he continued, "following my argument to its logical conclusion we arrive at the hypothesis that a non-discoverable motive is essential to a successful murder. I do not say that there have not been cases where, even though the motive was plain, the murderer has not still escaped. But they are rare. The police may know who did it, but cannot prove it. A link in the evidence is missing. As it so often is when that evidence is circumstantial. Excuse me, Mr. Mellish—I must beg of you not to smoke till we have finished our wine."

I replaced my cigarette case hurriedly.

"I beg your pardon," I muttered.

"Now when the evidence is purely circumstantial," he went on, "I maintain that the greatest care should be taken in sifting it. Don't you agree, milord?"

His eyes bored into me.

"Why do you call me milord?" I stammered, hoping he could not hear the thumping of my heart.

"A passing whim," he said, with a wave of his hand. "Or perhaps I anticipated a little. Don't you agree, Mr. Mellish?"

"I think the greatest care always is taken in an English court of law," I said.

"I disagree over the word always," he remarked. "Now, I wonder if you remember the case of Andrew Patterson?"

I shook my head.

"I fear not," I answered, staring at

him fascinated. A strange light had come into his eyes. He seemed almost unconscious of my presence.

"Ten years ago," he went on dreamily. "Andrew Patterson was a young man in the prime of life. The world lay at his feet; he was popular, clever, and handsome. And then into the picture there came the inevitable woman. It was only natural. He attracted the sex as a pot of jam attracts the flies. And all might have been well had this particular fly been a good one, but it wasn't.

"The woman was rotten; rotten to the core. To her he was one of a dozen, the chosen one at the moment because he had money. To him she was God's most perfect creature. Are you married, Mr. Mellish?"

"I am not."

"You have been wise. To continue, however: In spite of all warnings and advice Andrew Patterson remained infatuated with this creature, though she took all and gave nothing. He even wanted to make her his wife— Think of it!"

He glared at me with wild eyes, and I muttered something.

"His wife!" His voice rose to shout. "But that," he continued more calmly, "was not to be. She died."

"How fortunate for him," I said.

"Fortunate for him! You think so. I haven't told you how she died, Mr. Mellish. She was murdered. And Andrew Patterson was tried for the crime."

III

HE fell silent, and holding his glass up to the light he gazed at the wine broodingly.

"Red. Like blood," he whispered to himself.

Then with a little shake of his head his mood changed. He drained his glass, and leaned forward confidentially.

"I should like your opinion on the case, Mr. Mellish," he said. "This woman, whose name was Eunice Radnor, was, as I have told you, rotten to the core. Though still comparatively young—she was twenty-seven when she died—she had had several lovers. And on the night when it happened she was staying at an hotel in Bournemouth with one of them, a man called Terence Drake. They did not share the same room, but since they arrived together, and dined together their relationship was fairly obvious.

"At dinner that night—mark this well, Mr. Mellish—they were quarreling. Not loudly, or obviously, of course; but the waiter who served them was positive that they were having words, as he put it. At eleven o'clock they both retired to their respective rooms, but at 11:20 evidence was given by a chambermaid that had seen Drake in his room when the porter carried passage towards the woman's room. So much for upstairs.

"At 11:30 Andrew Patterson arrived at the hotel. He examined the visitors' book, and became very excited. He booked a room, and without waiting to see about his luggage he went straight upstairs. But—we must be perfectly fair—he was not in his room when the ported carried up his suitcase.

"Twenty minutes later he came downstairs again without his hat or stick, and in a state of even greater excitement. He went out of the hotel, though it was raining, and did not return.

"His bed was unslept in; his kit was untouched. Some more port, Mr. Mellish?"

I shook my head, and he refilled his own glass.

"The following morning a woman's scream rang through the hotel. It was the maid who looked after Eunice Radnor's room. For on entering with that lady's early morning tea she had found her dead in bed, with a dagger driven up to the hilt in her heart. The police and a doctor were at once summoned, and the doctor stated that she had been dead about eight or nine hours. On a table in the middle of the room lay a man's hat and stick. They belonged to Andrew Patterson. They examined the handle of the dagger for finger-prints, and they found them. The finger-prints were those of Andrew Patterson. So they arrested Andrew Patterson and in due course they tried him for murder. And they found him guilty. And they hanged him. What think you of that, milord?"

His voice rose to a shout. The gleam in his eyes was maniacal.

"Well, really," I said, with as much calmness as I could muster, "I don't see how they could have done anything else."

"Fool!" he roared. "You damned fool! Circumstantial, all circumstantial."

With a great effort he controlled himself.

"I beg your pardon, milord. A judicial survey of the facts is essential if we are to arrive at the truth. Let us take Andrew Patterson's story first. He admitted freely that he had been in the woman's room, where he had had a bitter quarrel with her over Terence Drake. He also admitted that in a moment of frenzy he had picked up the dagger from the table—it was a stiletto she used to cut the pages of books — and threatened her with it. But he absolutely denied that he had done more than that. He swore that he was innocent of her death, and had no idea how it had happened. His reason for leaving the hotel so abruptly was that his mind was completely deranged by finding the woman he loved in her true colors.

"Such was his story, milord. It never varied, he stuck to it through thick and thin. But they hanged him on it. What if it was true, milord? What if it was true?"

Once again his voice was rising, and I could think of nothing to say. What comment could I make?

"I say it *was* true," he continued. "I say you hanged an innocent man. I say that the murderer was Terence Drake. Listen, milord. He was seen at 11:20 in the passage by a chambermaid. He admitted that, but stated he was only going to the bathroom. He admitted that he and the woman were on intimate terms, but that they had quarreled at dinner. In that he was borne out by the waiter, and he denied absolutely that he had any intention of going to her room that night. But is that the truth? Or is it possible that he was the liar, and not Andrew Patterson?

"There was a bathroom attached to the woman's bedroom. Is it not possible that Terence Drake did go to her, and while he was in her room Andrew Patterson arrived? Drake escaped into the bathroom, heard all that went on, and saw his opportunity to be rid of someone he was tired of. So he waited till Andrew had gone. Then, picking up the dagger, with a handkerchief round the hilt to prevent his own finger-prints appearing, he stabbed Eunice Radnor himself. Is not that possible?"

"Certainly," I said soothingly. "Quite possible."

"Then how dared you hang my son Andrew?"

HIS face was thrust close to mine. I could feel his hot breath on my cheek. And I felt sick with fear. I knew now. The man was a dangerous maniac.

"I can assure you, sir," I said in a shaking voice, "that I had nothing to do with it."

He sat back in his chair, and I breathed more freely. His son! So that was the trouble.

"That is true, Mr. Mellish," he answered quietly. "Unfortunately, however, there are times when it is necessary to employ a substitute. You see, the judge who tried the case died of pneumonia a few months later, and so his actual services are unavailable at the moment. You will be his deputy."

He clapped his hands, and John appeared, carrying a red garment over his arm.

"It is time to get into court, milord. The jury are waiting."

As in a dream I found the scarlet robe of a judge flung round me, and a gray, full-bottomed wig placed on my head.

"The jury are waiting," he repeated with a fiendish chuckle. "They began arriving over nine years ago, and now, at long and last, their number is complete. Come, milord. The court is ready."

He threw the door open, and stood aside for me to pass. In front of me walked John, carrying a lighted candle, and I followed him dazedly. My brain refused to function, and yet I was conscious of an intense excitement to find out what was coming next.

Along a stone passage we went, and down some stairs to a nail-studded door. And then that too was flung open, and I became aware of an unpleasant, dank smell.

We were in a big, stone-walled room, lit by lamps. So much I realized automatically, though my attention was riveted on the incredible thing opposite. It was a wooden structure shaped like a jury box, with two rows each large enough to hold six people. And it was full.

Ten men and two women were sitting there motionless, their eyes wide open staring at me. Some were bolt upright, others lay back in their seats, and at one end a woman and a man had toppled over towards one another so that their shoulders touched. And every face save that of one man was the color of yellow parchment. His was a dirty gray.

A voice croaked out:

"They're wax." It was my own.

"Certainly not, milord. They are the genuine articles—preserved with antimony. The jury, milord, the actual jury who sent my son the gallows for a crime he did not commit. It has taken me many years to collect them, but it has been time well spent. As I was saying earlier, each murder has seemed to be a motiveless one. Who would remember that Mrs. Gledstone and Commander Percival—now leaning so affectionately up against one another—were on the same jury together? And even if someone did, would he connect that fact with their disappearance?"

He paused and indicated the gray-faced man.

"Mr. Loudwater—our latest arrival. He has been abroad for some years, and it was only recently I heard of his return. So the preservative has not yet had time to act properly. But he completes our numbers. Will your lordship be seated?"

He hurled me into a seat at the end of a long table, and then I saw the other occupant of the room. Facing me in a thing built like a dock was the figure of a young man. But in this case the cheeks were pink, the hands were white and shining.

"Wax, this time, milord. For reasons with which your lordship is doubtless familiar, I could not obtain my son's body. You found him guilty, did you not? You and the jury between you? And so they buried him where I could not get at him. Guilty! My son!"

His voice had sunk to a whisper, but I heard every word. He was standing just behind me and I could feel his hands circling my throat.

"John!"

IV

OUT of the shadows stepped the servant, and pulled back a curtain. And when I saw what stood behind it I rose with a stifled cry, only to be hurled back once more into my chair. An old-fashioned gallows was there, complete with rope and noose.

"Not quite up to date, milord, I admit; but it will serve our purpose. Now we will begin."

His voice grew loud and commanding.

"Is the prisoner at the bar guilty or not guilty?"

"Not guilty," answered John, speaking from the side of the box.

"Then he must be discharged, milord."

"The prisoner is discharged," I muttered through dry lips.

At once the servant entered the dock and carefully lifting the wax figure out he placed it on the floor.

"Bring in the other prisoner!" And John left the room. From behind me came a ceaseless muttering, punctuated every now and then by a low chuckle.

And then from outside there came a noise as if a sack was being dragged along the floor, and the sounds of moaning. Speechless with horror I stared at the door, as John entered dragging a man by his coat collar.

"Put him in the dock!" roared the madman. "Put Terence Drake in the dock!"

Emaciated, haggard, shivering with terror, the poor wretch faced me.

"They're mad!" he gasped. "Mad!"

"Is the prisoner at the bar guilty or not guilty?"

"Guilty!" shouted John.

"Sentence him, milord. Sentence him, I tell you! The black cap is on your head!"

I strove to speak; my tongue stuck to my mouth. But it did not matter. The maniac was beyond trifles of that sort.

"Hanged by the neck till you are dead!"

I heard him shouting; I saw the two of them seize the cowering prisoner, put the noose around his neck, and haul him dangling from the ground. And the last thing I remember was that the room was suddenly full of men fighting furiously.

IT was a week before I became coherent again. The wetting I had had, combined with everything else had brought on a sharp attack of fever, and when I came to my senses I found myself in a sunny room with a cheerful-looking, red-faced man sitting by my bed.

"Feeling better, sir?" he said quietly.

"Where am I?" I asked.

"In the hospital," he answered.

"Now, sir, I don't want to tire you, but if you feel strong enough I would like to hear what happened to you that night. My name is Crawton—Inspector Crawton of Scotland Yard."

"Then it wasn't a dream?" I muttered.

"It certainly was not, sir," he said gravely. "Take your time, there's no hurry."

I told him, with many halts and pauses, and he listened in silence, making a note every now and then.

"You've had a lucky escape, sir," he remarked when I had finished. "Although Mr. Drake had an even closer one. He was almost dead when we cut him down."

"But what was the meaning of it all?"

"Just what you heard, Mr. Mellish. James Patterson went mad as the result of the execution of his son ten years ago for the murder of Eunice Radnor. He was a man of considerable wealth, and gradually this incredible scheme was born in his brain. You must remember that save on that one point he was as sane as you or I. One by one he has tracked every member of that jury, and murdered them with a salt of antimony which preserves the body. Some of them he shot after they had taken the poison—his great object was to instil the poison first. Then he brought his victim here in a caravan attached to his car."

"And he was never found out?" I cried incredulously.

"He was right in what he told you about the motiveless murder," said the Inspector quietly. "And don't forget that the question of murder didn't arise. None of the bodies were ever found; each case was simply regarded as a person missing. And they were spread over nine years in different parts of the country, for many of the jury had moved. The wretched Drake he tricked by a fake message, purporting to come from a woman. He drugged him with morphine, and had kept him alive in the house for the last two months waiting for the final act. And that would have taken place but for one slip he made over Loudwater. He and that man John were seen lifting the body into the caravan, and the witness, suspecting something, took the number of the machine and informed the police."

"It's simply unbelievable," I said. "What is your explanation of the servant, John?"

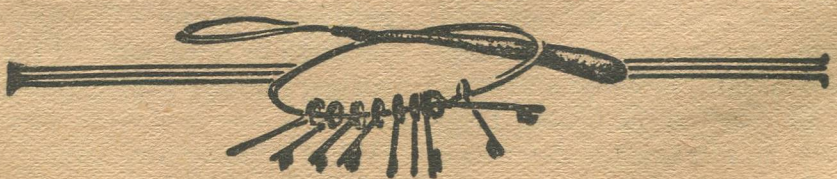
"Mental, too," he answered, rising.

"Well, Mr. Mellish, I congratulate you on coming through alive. For I don't think there is the slightest doubt that the last victim would have been the judge."

"By the way, Inspector," I said as he picked up his hat, "do you think there was any justification for his theory about the girl's murder?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"A man has already been hanged for it, Mr. Mellish. I think we had better leave it at that."



Devil's Luck

By Hector Gavin Grey

The jockey whipped the exhausted horse to its feet

Even Devil's Luck Can't Win 100,000,000 to 1 Chances—It Must Have Been a Devilish Scheme That Killed the Four Men Who Blocked Blease's Rise to Riches

J. PENNINGTON BLEASE had the devil's luck. When he and his school-friend, Thompson, the two most brilliant scholars at Thorpe, entered the competitive examination held by the eccentric automobile manufacturer, Lane Bryant, to chose a private secretary, they tied in the finals. They had to stand an extra test to determine who would get the coveted post.

Thompson won, but died from a breakdown following overstudy. So Blease got the job.

After three years' employment he was next in line to the assistant managership of Bryant's Chicago factory. The death by pneumonia of the current manager pushed Blease into the promotion.

When Blease was twenty-six, the factory manager developed tuberculosis, and Blease took his post.

In 1932 the business underwent reorganization. Its owner retired, turning it into a limited stock company. Who was to be the president? Blease, or the general sales manager, Calloway?

The directors favored Calloway, since production was already overhigh and sales were more important. However, Calloway settled the question by walking in front of a ten-ton truck while leaving his office the very day he won the appointment.

So wiry, saturnine, thin-lipped Blease became president of a successful corporation on his thirtieth birthday. His salary was forty thousand a year.

Mr. Ralph Harmsworth detailed the foregoing facts to middle-aged, middle-sized, stolid-faced Inspector Gobblin in the latter's dingy apartment on Fortieth Street.

A big, genial executive was Ralph Harmsworth, with a generous smile stiffened by shrewd eyes.

"Hearing of some of the little things you've been doing, I thought I'd put the problem up to you," he rumbled, adding, "quite confidentially, of course. It's not a police matter, and I'm making no accusations. It mayn't be a problem at all, but just Blease's devil's-luck."

Gobblin tapped his pipe. "Still, you're scared."

Harmsworth flushed slightly. "Not scared. Only—er—curious. That's it. Curious."

"And cautious." Gobblin permitted one of his rare, fleeting smiles. "You don't believe in luck?"

"Ye-es, I do. But I also believe in the law of averages. That luck evens up in the long run. A man gets bad luck and good luck, but at the end of his life he's probably had an equal amount of both, and where he's got to depend on his own skill and efforts."

It was the self-made man speaking.

"I've seen runs of fifteen on the red at Monte Carlo," he went on. "I know luck can run good or bad for an incredible time. But I don't believe it runs good forever. What are the chances of four people dying in succession at the exact moment to shove Blease up the ladder?"

"The chances that one man would die in such circumstances are remote," said Gobblin, ponderously. "One in a hundred, perhaps. One in a thousand. Assume one in a hundred. The chances of the event occurring four times are one in a hundred to the fourth power."

"One chance in ten million," said Harmsworth quickly.

"One in a hundred million," corrected Gobblin slowly. "Why are you worried?"

"MY company is amalgamating with Bryant Motors, and normally I should supplant Pennington Blease as chief executive. A friend of mine pointed out Blease's record of luck."

Gobblin thumbed his pipe bowl. "The mathematical chances of your dying this month are one in a thousand million, calculated on that record."

"The *mathematical* chances," growled Harmsworth.

"You don't think it's a mathematical question?"

"What do you think?"

"I don't know," said Gobblin quietly. "Though I'm willing, for a little financial consideration, to study it further."

"He's not poisoning them," said Harmsworth, turning in his chair.

"It doesn't seem so," Gobblin agreed noncommittally.

"Can't be. Causes of death too varied. Overwork, pneumonia, tuberculosis, street accident—"

He paused as though expecting a suggestion.

Finally realizing that the inspector did not work for nothing, he asked, "What size retainer do you want?"

Gobblin told him.

"That's a ridiculously large sum!" Harmsworth exclaimed.

"I think so too," was the placid reply. "Are you hiring me?"

"No!" snapped Harmsworth. "Not at that price!" He left the office.

Gobblin shrugged his shoulders and opened his bedroom door.

"Come out, Mr. Blease," he murmured to the visitor who had retired when Harmsworth rang the bell.

Taking the arm chair Harmsworth had vacated, Pennington Blease let a resigned smile appear on his face.

"You see what I'm up against, of course, Inspector," he said. "People suspect my good luck. It's enough to break a man. You see—these men who died were my *friends*."

He ended with a snap and thrust out his legs. Fire glowed in his black eyes.

"Are you a friend of Harmsworth?" Gobblin queried.

"I play bridge at his house. We lunch together. I like him. It was a shock to hear he suspected me — my luck."

"Who told you he did?"

"Ah—a friend," rapped Blease reluctantly.

"The same one that pointed out your lucky career to Harmsworth, do you think?"

"The — eh? What? No, impossible. I don't think — no, it couldn't be."

"It's merely a speculation," Gobblin said absently.

"Without reason to it. No — this friend suggested I should come to you —she's heard of a few things you'd done—and ask you to figure a way of avoiding malicious rumor."

"Miss—ah?"

"Miss Allist—oh, I suppose I may tell you," Blease said. "She's Violet Allistair—our expert on automobile furnishings women like. She knows Harmsworth, of course. We all know each other in this business. In fact, during these conferences preliminary to amalgamation, executives of both companies are living at the Berceuse Hotel. We have to discuss figures daily—you understand—?"

"I do. The Berceuse. Is Harmsworth there?"

"Yes."

"I might take a room."

"At my expense. I'll pay you," said the distressed man eagerly.

Gobblin nodded. "Whatever the outcome?"

"Whatever the outcome," was the ready response.

"And retainer?"

"Certainly. How much do you require?"

Gobblin told him. "It will be an interesting mathematical problem—your luck," he added as he saw Blease from the apartment.

II

"WHAT do you think, Miss Allistair?" asked Gobblin. They were at Blease's country house over the week-end. Executives of both corporations had been invited. Blease and Harmsworth were out shooting.

Violet Allistair had proved to be a short, energetic woman with close-bobbed black hair, a firm mouth and

dreamy eyes. A rare combination of visionary and business woman. She designed fittings her sex wanted.

"What do I think of Mr. Blease's luck?" she asked smartly.

"No. Of Blease himself?"

"Oh!" She swerved in the wicker chair to face him. "I think he's lucky!"

"Do you only think of him in connection with his luck?"

"Yes," she replied boldly.

"Yet you suggested he consult me to avert rumor?"

Her eyes widened. "How do you know?"

Gobblin evaded reply. "What puzzles me, is why you also prompted Harmsworth to consult me."

Hesitating, she examined her unringed fingers. "I—I did—because I wanted both men to hire you," she ended with a rush. "I thought of myself as being on your side. I wanted you to get to the bottom of things. Obviously, if both men consulted you, neither would be surprised or alarmed by your presence in the other's house or company."

He stared at her. "*You* wanted—"

Steadily meeting his gaze, she returned, "Yes! *I* wanted. Miss Calloway thought Blease tried to kill her father," she broke out suddenly. "She saw him put something in her father's glass, or thought she did — not that putting something in anyone's glass can make them be run down by a ten-ton truck or catch pneumonia or die from nerve-strain following overstudy or overwork—"

She suddenly lowered her voice. "There's Mr. Blease—returning."

"Alone?"

"Yes." She jumped up. Her face twitched. "No—Mr. Harmsworth is following."

Her nervous excitement revealed her strong expectation of Harmsworth's death.

Gobblin rose more slowly. "So Miss Calloway asked you to help convict Blease?" he murmured.

She whirled. "No. Yes—oh, I can't talk any more. Just look around—think. He has the devil's own luck! Harmsworth is about to displace him from the amalgamation. If Mr. Harmsworth dies, it will be a one in a million chance coming off to help Blease—"

"One in a thousand million," corrected Gobblin in a casual, non-carrying voice, and nodded at Blease's approach.

In the gray dawn of the following morning Gobblin lay on his stomach and pushed field glasses through a hedge. Mist hung heavy over the field where a bay pony raced with extended neck, dilated nostrils and pounding hooves.

Two men had left the house earlier than the inspector that Sunday morning. Blease and a huge negro. Blease was standing at the door to a rickety, unpainted shed at the end of the track. Gobblin had watched him weight the pony's saddle with tremendous lead ingots. Already the jockey had flogged the panting animal nineteen times around the field. It was a killing pace and a killing weight.

Blease had no name as a racehorse owner. He kept a very small stable for use of guests who liked fox-hunting. In any case, no trainer overweights or over-rides a horse destined for a race. To overstrain an animal is to shorten its life and possibly destroy its value.

Why did Blease punish his mounts?

The twenty-first time round the field the pony was stumbling. Its forelegs buckled. It came down heavily on the dew-wet turf. The jockey slipped off

and tugged it to its feet, but it was too exhausted to move.

Blease's cutting, carrying voice sounded from the shed. "Use the whip."

The jockey slashed. The pony moved heavily to the shed. It entered. Then Blease went inside and shut the door.

Gobblin withdrew from the hedge, got to his feet, and started round the lane leading to the shed. His jaw was grim.

Before he reached the corner, however, he heard the pony's hooves again. He plunged into the undergrowth and put the wide trunk of a live-oak between himself and the path.

He heard the pony going by—Blease talking to the jockey. Exact words were indistinguishable.

After a while he peeped out, and finding no one in sight made his way to the shed. The door was padlocked, but a large unscreened window with wooden shutters opened onto the eastern side. The rising sun was tinging the glass with crimson as he put his elbow through it.

He climbed in, and found—exactly nothing of interest.

This lack was in itself extremely interesting. Why should Blease and an overweight jockey lead a pony into a shed which possessed neither straw nor water, in fact nothing whatever of use to a pony?

Going his way back to his room by the kitchen and servants' staircase, Gobblin changed his clothes and waited the breakfast bell.

AT noon the cook had made what Blease called "an old-fashioned country Sunday dinner." Lethargic with food, the guests scattered. Blease collared the sales manager of the amalgamating company. Violet Allistair was reclining on the veranda. She looked drowsy. Gobblin felt drowsy himself, and very much as though he had a cold coming on.

Not being subject to colds, he dreaded this one. Colds made him miserable.

By three o'clock he knew he was going to have a cold, instead of thinking he would have one.

He rose from the bed with a full head and stuffed nostrils and gargled in the adjoining bathroom. Choosing a fresh handkerchief, he went downstairs in searchc of quinine.

Violet Allistair looked up listlessly at his entry on the porch. Her eyes were puffy and reddened.

"What's the matter?" he queried.

"I'b gettig a gold," she mumbled.

"It's not the season for colds," he remarked heavily as he sat facing her. "Do you often suffer from them?"

"Very seldomb," she replied.

"Mine's started very suddenly. Have you any quinine?"

She shook her head.

He started inside and then, on impulse ran out a side door. After a cautious look, he went along a path that seemed to lead to the driveway.

It did. He came to the driveway out of sight of the house and followed it to the highroad. It was a hot, four-mile walk to the village, but he found a doctor puttering in a small garden.

"Remedy for a cold?" said the latter, with a twinkle in his kindly brown eyes. "Go to bed—"

"No, I want to talk about colds," said Gobblin.

"*Talk* about them?"

"Yes, talk about colds and diseases in general. I might almost say, the human body in general. I'll pay for your time—"

With a perplexed frown, the medico put down his hoe. "Come into the surgery."

Gobblin read his thoughts. "I'm not mad. Not even eccentric. I want to know what lowers the resistance of the body to disease, for one thing—a subject of interest to any sick man."

"I'll be glad to advise you," said the doctor. "The very first depressor of resistance is—"

III

THE doctor smoked a peculiarly pungent, rank, black tobacco. He was a kindred soul.

They had adjourned to a shabby library to save smoking up the surgery.

"It isn't credible," he began.

"I know what you're going to tell me," Gobblin interrupted. "That educated and successful men don't commit crimes."

"Why should they?" retorted the doctor. "The same amount of brain and energy applied honestly would bring them as much or more."

"Your mistake," said Gobblin. "That's a syrupy slogan for school children. Crime pays and pays well, otherwise we'd have no crime problem."

"But an educated—"

"The educated criminal naturally makes fewer mistakes and more money."

"A business man—"

"Is business anything else than buying for less than you think a product is worth and selling it for more? I'm tickled to find a business man doing murder first-hand so I can jam him tight behind bars."

"You won't manage to prove murder. The stuff can't be analyzed."

"I'll get him in the open."

"How?"

"By being so threatening that he'll attempt to kill me by faster and surer methods."

Alarm appeared in the simple medico's eyes. "You mean to invite attack?"

"Apparently I've invited it already by accepting this job of investigation. It was Miss Allistair who really set things moving, and behind her, the daughter of a man who died. By the way, Miss Allistair has a bad cold, too. Could you lend me that inhaler to fix her up? It's done wonders for me."

"Bring it back before Tuesday. I have a patient—"

"We're all leaving for the city tomorrow morning. I'll either be dead or the winner, by then," Gobblin assured him cheerfully.

He stopped by the flower-smothered gatepost. "Who attends Blease when he's sick in the country?" he asked the doctor.

"I attend the servants. Mr. Blease hasn't fallen ill once out here."

Gobblin gently closed the gate. "He may, yet—" he said, and started back to the estate to consult Violet Allistair.

"Where is the negro who looks after the horses?" Gobblin asked her.

"I couldn't find him," she said, her voice low as they passed the veranda. "He seems to have gone off for the day. I did find out something about him. He has some South American blood in him. The chauffeur hinted he was a bad mixture. Also, he has no finger-tips. The skin on his finger-tips is smooth. Has no whorls. He is supposed to have been in an explosion at sea, an oil-tanker."

"Convicted criminal — or escaped prisoner," Gobblin commented. "I wonder where Blease picked him up—do you understand what to do?"

She nodded.

"Better memorize the questions I want you to ask him," he said.

She glanced at a folded paper in her hand. "I'll have the answers to these by midnight."

His strong, stolid face relaxed for a moment. He allowed a smile. "Even lies help. They indicate where the truth hides."

PROOF! He needed proof. No use going before a jury with: "I believe the accused did this. It is obvious the accused did that." Juries demanded tangible demonstrations of guilt—evidence appealing to the eye and touch.

Besides, few juries will convict for any but the simplest crimes, understandable by all men. The modern criminal, the skilled murderer, the paranoiac, bacteriologist, chemist, physicist, owed his immunity largely to laymen's unbelief in scientific crime.

Proof! Conrete evidence one could see, feel and measure.

Gobblin looked around the attic where he had climbed after tea and tried to guess what, amongst the heterogeneous conglomeration of rubbish there, had connection with the scheme Blease must have used before his increasing wealth permitted him to utilize race horses.

A cylindrical cage on an axle formed by two wooden discs with straight steel rods joining them, caught his eye. He hauled aside a dusty trunk and pulled out the contraption.

Under a push by his toe the cage whirled over. A treadmill device, capable of holding a small dog or large rabbit. Perhaps a guinea-pig. The bars were close together.

His leathery cheeks suffused with the grim anger that watching the pony that morning had kindled in him.

Here was one kind of proof. He bent over the machine, looking for possible blood-marks, and froze rigid.

Not a sound had he heard, not a door-creak nor footstep. He could not see behind him without turning his head, yet he feared to turn without further knowledge of what caused the dusty floorboard underfoot to spring a fraction of an inch downwards.

Not his weight alone was resting on that board. Someone stood behind him. The attic was still, dusty, stuffily hot and quiet. He felt sure he had mounted unseen. Yet—

With ostentatious ease he slowly straightened, ready to lie and bluff. An idle afternoon—an idle hour—a casual exploration of the house.

He turned and looked into the eyes not of Blease, but Harmsworth.

"Finding things interesting?" asked the big bodied executive. His geniality was strained.

"Looking around," returned Gobblin, relieved.

"So I see. But there's no need to do so any more."

Gobblin stiffened internally. "What do you mean?"

"Although I eventually agreed to pay your excessive retainer, I'm—ah—withdrawing my inquiries. You'll find a check waiting you tomorrow at my town office."

He tried to read Harmsworth's eyes, but the big man had turned at the attic door, waiting. His gaze shifted to the treadwheel and then back to the executive in time to catch a shifty, inimical and wholly ungenial side-glance.

"You've discovered the secret of Blease's Luck," Gobblin snapped.

Harmsworth swallowed and drew breath. "Perhaps. At any rate, my interest is finished."

"Just beginning, you mean," Gobblin said softly with rising inflection.

Harmsworth's tone hardened. "I don't want scandal."

"Scandal!" Gobblin suppressed amazed contempt. "You use the wrong term. You don't want it known—"

"I don't want anything known."

"Perhaps you'd like to become lucky—"

"That will do," Harmsworth said sharply. "You've found nothing. There's nothing to discover. Some men are naturally lucky." He coughed and opened a cigar case. "I made a mistake in hiring you. My ridiculous suspicions warped my judgment."

"Your judgment was never more warped than at this minute," said Gobblin, joining him at the door.

"You're fired," Harmsworth said stiffly. "Do you understand? Call at my office for your check."

Suddenly Gobblin shrugged. "Very well," he agreed.

IV

FEVER wins over sprays. A temperature of 101 caused by the cold gave nightmarish twists to Gobblin's thoughts as he lay upstairs in Blease's house that Sunday evening.

Weapons of death, weapons of power, weapons of conquest. Crime was crime only when committed unsuccessfully or on a small scale. A laborer made a long knife to stab his fellow-worker and went to jail, an inventor made a machine gun to kill a million workers, and had more decorations of honor than a coat could carry. Moral laws were for the mass, the suckers. Blease and Harmsworth were above the moral law—providing one or the other was successful.

He looked at his watch on the bedtable. Violet Allistair should be here. Ah—the door handle turned—

Blease came in.

There was a bitter, frosty glint in the lucky fellow's eye. A ruthless line to the mouth. Behind him was a dark shadow—the negro in the passage?

Gobblin felt under his pillow.

"Let it alone!" Blease snapped, and jumped.

His hand bore down on Gobblin's wrist. The negro, sliding in swiftly, hurled a sandbag from the foot of the bed.

Slowed and weakened by fever, Gobblin failed to dodge it fully.

His fingers clamped about the butt of his automatic. At least the shot would bring people.

"We fixed that!" snarled Blease as the detective's fingers twitched uselessly.

They struggled in horrible silence.

A knock, a clear triple *tat-tat-tat* on the door.

"Get her in here," Blease whispered.

The negro took his hand off Gobblin's mouth, but a pillow cut off his attempt to shout a warning. He heard the door open, the girl's strangled scream, the door shut.

And he groaned bitterly for his delay in catching up with the swift growth of criminal ambitions in that house of clever, determined men.

The keen prick in his leg would be a hypodermic.

The tingling numbness paralyzing his limbs identified an opiate.

Gobblin woke, stiff, sore and deathly weak, to find himself unbound upon a concrete floor. He lay under a cellar archway. The negro was watching him.

Utter exhaustion prevent more than a sighing whisper:

"Jim!" He was forcing his voice to the utmost. It did not carry.

Gobblin wet cracked lips. "Hey! Jim! Jack!"

No answer.

"Sam! George — whatever your name is!"

The negro turned and rolled his eyes. Gobblin turned over. Aching weakness, the agony of extreme exhaustion, held him on the floor.

The negro got off an upturned barrel and sat down with his back against the wall. He stretched, grunted, and closed his eyes. Propping a hand under his chin, Gobblin lay on the floor and regarded the gleaming black muscles. Presently a bolt shot back. A shuffling sound preceded Blease through the archway.

"Lucky" Blease was chalky pale. He kicked the negro's shins—a feeble kick.

Gobblin stared—a fixed, astounded stare at the reeling automobile magnate.

Wondering comprehension, a bewildered joy, followed on heels of astonishment.

Blease was cursing the negro. "Why haven't you put him out? Where's your knife? It ought to be over by now."

The negro lay slouching. Wearily he muttered: "Boss, I done git tired."

"Tired, you fool! And the truck is waiting!"

"It ain't no use, boss. My legs is like lead. I couldn't fix him, nohow."

Blease cast a malevolent eye on Gobblin. He reeled past the negro and fumbled in a pocket.

"This is your doing."

Gobblin exerted all his energies. "Quit it, Blease. It's no good killing me, now. I didn't dope your nigger."

"You found my stuff."

"No—someone else found it. Someone who means to get luck the way you got it." Gobblin made an effort to speak with calm assurance. "Someone who discovered your devilish trick of doping your competitors with fatigue poisons drawn from the bloodstreams of exhausted animals."

Blease made an effort to slash the detective with a large pocketknife, staggered, and clutched at the wall.

"You're drugged, Blease—with the same absorbable poison that tired Calloway so that he walked under a truck," Gobblin said.

Blease said nothing. His mouth worked. His knees were bending.

"HARMSWORTH'S turned your own weapon on you, Blease. He didn't believe in your luck. He found your treadmill in which you tired out dogs. He guessed why you raced a horse to exhaustion—tired it out, until its blood was poisoned with fatigue, and became poison when administered to a man. Harmsworth gave *you* a dose of your devilish medicine."

Blease, from the floor onto which he slumped, gasped, "Jake! Help me up!"

A groan. "Boss! Ah'm sick. Ah'm a sick man, boss. Fever done get in my bones."

Gobblin levered himself onto Blease's shoulder. Exhausted, moving slowly, the two struggled like comedians in a slow-motion film.

"What did you do with Miss Allistair?"

Blease lay flat, eyes dull. "Fever."

"Like Thompson and the factory manager, eh? You gave them fatigue poisons which lowered their resistance to disease—"

Gobblin stopped short. In Blease's face he read warning and rolled sideways as the negro's knife-arm fell.

Though the blow was weak, the negro was heavy. Blease screamed feebly as the misdirected knifepoint entered his chest.

"You devil—"

The negro's head sank onto the reddening shirt. The effort put him out.

Gobblin started to crawl towards the archway. He moved five feet, paused to rest, to locate the cellar stairs. He saw boots first, then gray trousers—and then the pale, square, pasty, savage face of Ralph Harmsworth.

"I thought Blease would have you finished off," Harmsworth growled.

"Finished?" whined Blease from behind Gobblin. "After the doses of fatigue poisons you gave us, you double-crossing swine."

"Doses I gave?"

"But I'll get you," Blease went on, in pain and rage. "Take my statement, Inspector. Harmsworth discovered my secret and offered his silence in return for technical instrution about the fatigue poisons which he could employ on his own account—"

"Stop, you fool!" Harmsworth leaped at him. "I didn't dope you—I haven't the toxin. How could I? There's something funny—"

"Very funny," came the clear, incisive voice of Miss Allistair from the archway.

She nodded to Gobblin. "I followed your instructions and gave the toxin to both."

"And phoned the police?"

She reeled as Harmsworth staggered out of the cellar.

"The police are stopping Harmsworth right now, judging by the sounds," said Gobblin, struggling to his feet.

An iron-faced policeman entered the cellar, stood aside and revealed Harmsworth in a grip of a plainclothesman behind. An elderly, gray-haired official followed. To Gobblin he spoke in a high, suspicious tone:

"What's this? Two arrests? Your assistant phoned there was a negro—"

"There's the negro," Gobblin pointed. "I hadn't time to tell Miss Allistair my suspicion that Harmsworth meant to use the fatigue toxins for his own ambitious career."

"He confessed that out there," the official snapped. "Too easy. Suspicious. Something behind it."

"There is." Gobblin supported himself by the arch and smiled thinly. "Have you ever tired a man down to obtain a confession?"

"You haven't done that—"

"I haven't touched them. The fatigue toxins they prepared for others, did it Fatigue works many ways—it lowers resistance to disease. It slows the quick movement that might have avoided a ten-ton truck. It—right now I want to sleep."

And slowly closing his eyes, Gobblin slid unconscious to the floor.

Proof in Sight

By John H. Knox

His fingers were long and muscular; he thrust one knee into the seat

When the Usher Failed to Hear the Death-Gurgle of a Man Strangled in the Balcony, Every Clue to Brant's Murderer Was Lost

SYLVANUS BRANT pushed the chessboard aside. "Your game," he said.

Horace Fillmore stared at him across the board. He blinked, his weak eyes narrowing behind the thick glasses. Brant's manner had been steadily growing more peculiar all evening. Fillmore felt vaguely uneasy.

"Ella?" Fillmore asked with a friend's blunt solicitude.

For a moment Brant lifted his head and their eyes met. For an instant only. It was as if Fillmore had touched the other's hand, and found it unexpectedly cold and distrustful. Brant was looking at the board again. He was a short man, inclined to fat, with a prematurely wrinkled face and graying hair. The thick, stubby fingers of one hand were toying with a black pawn.

"Yes," he said simply.

Fillmore shifted his lean, well-groomed body, crossed one long leg over the other.

"Look here, Van," he said, "you

really ought to get your mind off that. God knows you did all you could—paid that thirty thousand without the bat of an eyelid. And the fact that Ella wasn't brought back proves . . . well, why not face it? Your wife must be dead, Van. I know it's bitter, losing Ella like that. I feel it, too. But I can't see you ruin your life worrying."

He leaned forward, stretched out a hand to place it upon the other's shoulder, then drew it back. Something in Brant's eyes had checked him. Brant was looking at him steadily now, and for the first time he was self-conscious in the other's presence. All his suave assurance seemed to fall away. It was he who dropped his eyes this time, and he stared at the checkered surface of the board and felt his nerves flutter apprehensively. What exactly was it he had seen in Brant's eyes? Reproach—grim sardonic amusement? Did Brant know? Had he caught on? It did not seem possible. Sylvanus Brant never caught on. Fillmore lifted his eyes.

"Play another?" he asked cheerfully.

"No—not tonight," Brant said slowly. His mild but steady gaze was really disconcerting. There was another perplexing interval of silence. Then:

"You like a good murder movie once in a while, don't you Horace?"

"Once in a while."

"There's one at the Alhambra. Suppose we drop in and see it?"

"Right!" Fillmore agreed, welcoming an escape from the increasingly tense atmosphere. "Relax your mind a bit."

They walked the few blocks to the suburban theater in silence. Fillmore's mind was occupied with questions which he could not answer. But one thing seemed certain: Brant had something on his mind, he wanted to talk. Had he perhaps suggested the movie because it would be dark in there? Brant was not a man who could talk easily about things which touched him deeply. What could be weighing so heavily on Brant's heart? It couldn't be that, it couldn't be *that!*

They didn't go in together. At the corner of the block in which the theater stood, Fillmore suddenly remembered an engagement. He would have to stop at the cigar store and put in a phone call. It might take fifteen or twenty minutes. He insisted that Brant go ahead.

"Where will you be?" Fillmore asked as Brant started on.

"In the balcony," Brant said.

That confirmed Fillmore's suspicions. His eyes were bad; Brant knew it. If Brant's mind hadn't been preoccupied with something else, he would have remembered and taken a seat on the lower floor. The engagement which Fillmore had to cancel was real enough, but he also wanted a few minutes alone to think. Thinking, however, got him nowhere. He could not imagine any way in which Brant might have hit upon the ugly truth. He tried resolutely to dismiss his fears. At any rate, he would soon know the worst.

He paused for a moment in front of the theater to peer idly at the posters. He had to thrust his head close to read the print. His eyes were really very bad. He went in, waved aside the usher who stepped in front of him, and climbed up to the balcony alone.

It was almost deserted. A few of the front seats were occupied. Brant, if he wanted to talk, would be farther back. He stood a moment, allowing his eyes to become accustomed to the flicker-splashed darkness. Then he ployed up the aisle. Near the back, a voice whispered, "Here." He stumbled toward it,

located the faint blot of Brant's face, and slumped into the seat beside him.

THE main feature hadn't started. A travelogue was showing. Fillmore, a writer of travel books, didn't care for travelogue. Too much like a bus driver's holiday. At this distance the movie was only a vague blur to his weak eyes anyhow. He leaned back, staring up at the artificial stars winking in the blue velvet ceiling. The nasal voice of the announcer expatiating on the beauties of "Old Nippon, the land of cherry blossoms," drifted in an unnoticed undertone through his mind.

He was trying to study Brant out of the corner of his eye. The man hadn't uttered a word. The suspense was beginning to tell on Fillmore's nerves. Why didn't Brant say something?

Impatient with suspense, Fillmore finally took the initiative.

"Look here," he said, turning to his companion, "what's wrong this evening, Van? Something's on your mind. Why not spit it out?"

He held his breath. And the blow fell. He sensed the tensing of Brant's body, and the man's voice was strained, unnatural, as he faced about in the darkness.

"What did you do with Ella?" Brant asked.

Fillmore gasped audibly. He swallowed a lump in his throat.

"I don't understand you, Van," he managed.

"Oh, yes, you do," Brant replied in a strange, cold tone. "I've found you out, Horace. You and Ella planned that fake kidnapping, swindled me out of the thirty thousand, went off together. Now I want to know what you did with Ella?"

Fillmore felt cold from the soles of his feet to the roots of his hair. "But good God, man! You don't believe that!" he sputtered. "Why, I was in the Philippines when it happened, I—"

"All carefully planned, wasn't it? You furnished the brains, of course. Coached her, then left so you'd be off the scene when she disappeared. It's no use, Horace. I've got the goods on you!"

Fillmore sobered. There could be no further doubt about the matter. Stalling was futile. Brant had found out. Fillmore's voice was different now, low and hard, as he asked, "And what do you intend to do, Van?"

"I'm going to the police," Brant said. "I thought I'd confront with the thing first, give you a chance to tell me what you did with her." A husky note had crept into his voice. "Did you kill her, Horace?"

Fillmore was shaking now. But his mind was clear, playing over the situation as it played over a chess problem, measuring chances, marshalling forces to meet the crisis. A Japanese military band was blaring. There was no one near them in the balcony. Click! His mind had reached a decision—the only possible solution.

"It's absurd, Van!" he exclaimed, not caring now whether he was convincing or not. His hands were in his lap. They rose, as if in a gesture of emphasis, then dived for Brant's throat. His fingers were long and muscular, and as he twisted his body about he half rose, thrusting one knee into the seat. Brant was under him now. There was a faint rasping sound like a frog's croak, a blurred vision of bugging eyes and gaping mouth, a little helpless threshing about, and then it was over.

Fillmore released his grip. Brant's limp body sagged back against the seat. Fillmore seized the shoulders and dragged it down upon the floor. He sat there, breathing hard, staring about him. The silhouette of a head bobbed up between him and the screen. A man was climbing up the aisle. Fillmore held his breath, teeth gritted. Then the man sat down a few seats behind the others, near the front. Fillmore expelled the air from his lungs gratefully.

What to do now? The natural impulse to get away at once was quickly canceled. The usher had seen him come in; he could not hurry out without sitting through the show. Thank God he had not come in with Brant! That was the break that would save him. It had been a desperate chance to take, this murder. But he did not regret it. He had had no alternative but certain ruin. Now there was a fighting chance!

He wiped the arms and back of the seat carefully with a handkerchief. Then he got up quietly and sneaked to the aisle near the wall at his left. Keeping a close eye on the row of heads at the front, he crept down the carpeted steps, got as near behind them as he dared, and took a seat. He felt fairly certain that he had not been seen. He would sit here until the show was over. Then he would go out with the crowd. There was a good chance that Brant's body would not be discovered before closing time.

II

HE was lucky in this respect. He drifted out with the crowd at the end of the feature, and went straight home. He donned a lounging robe and slippers, took a drink of whisky and sat down to review the case in his mind. Luckily the Brant servants had been off for the evening. No one knew that he had been there. He went to the telephone and called Brant's house. A maid answered and informed him that Mr. Brant was out. He left his name and a request that the latter call him when he came in.

What else now? He did not intend to deny that he had been in the show. That could be proved, and he did not propose to be tripped up. And of course they would suspect him of the murder; that was inevitable. But that, he told himself could not be proved. Not unless . . .

Again he wondered where and how Brant had found out about his crime. He regretted that his panic had made him so hasty. He should have learned that before he killed the man. Had Brant simply figured it out? God knew there had been enough things in the past to make him suspicious, yet he had never seemed to notice. It wasn't reasonable that a man who had never put two and two together in his life should suddenly realize that it made four. No, Brant had been too emphatic, too certain. Ella? He could not believe that she would expose her own guilt just to spite him. Besides, Brant did not appear to know where she was . . .

The shrill clamor of the doorbell broke in upon his thoughts. It was the police, as he had expected—two plain-clothesmen, one of them a young fellow by the name of Brooke, attached to the local precinct station, the other a square-jawed, thick-necked man from headquarters, Inspector Rock.

With a puzzled expression, Fillmore led them into his study. Indeed he did know Sylvanus Brant, he confessed with a show of anxiety. He had in fact just been trying to reach

him by telephone. Murdered? Surely not . . . He was overwhelmed!

In the picture show? Not the Alhambra? It was unthinkable! Why, he had been in the Alhambra himself tonight. He noticed that they did not appear surprised at this statement, and he congratulated himself on his wisdom in coming out with it right at the start. Yes, he had sat in the balcony. No, not near the back, near the front. He gave the approximate time of his arrival and departure. And to think that he and Brant had been in there at the same time, without either of them knowing it! Yes, he had known Brant for a long time. Yes, both of them frequently dropped in at the Alhambra.

He studied the detectives carefully as he answered their questions and kept up his restrained show of concern. They were his opponents in a game of life and death; he wanted to know them, know their minds. Rock he cataloged as a typical hard-boiled dick of the old school—shrewd, tenacious.

Brooke, a younger man, with a frank face and steady, intelligent eyes, worried him more. There was a youngster with imagination. And Brooke, too, lived in this suburb; would be familiar with the lives of both Brant and Fillmore, and with any gossip which might have gone the rounds. Fillmore cultivated a friendly and open manner, particularly with Brooke.

They asked questions about his life and Brant's. He answered them with a frank and ingenuous air. He took pains to bring out the fact that he had been in the Philippines at the time of the kidnaping. He managed it without seeming to stress it, made casual mention of newspaper articles of his which would verify it.

Motive for the crime? Well, Brant had been acting peculiar the past few days, worried, nervous. Yes, Fillmore imagined it might have some connection with the kidnaping, though Brant had not said so in so many words. He had been evasive, secretive. One might well imagine that he had been threatened. What did he, Fillmore, know about the kidnaping? Nothing more than was known to the authorities. It was a painful subject to Brant, and he had not frequently discussed it.

Fillmore played the kidnaping angle up strongly. He knew that to the police the thing had been a dismal blind alley. They had blamed Brant for paying the money out before communicating with them. But they had not found one single worthwhile clue. The murder seemed a natural development of that ugly affair.

Rock finally looked at his watch. Fillmore felt that he had made the most of the occasion. He knew that he was under suspicion; he knew that they were deliberately refraining from giving this impression but at the same time he felt that their conviction of his guilt had weakened appreciably.

He walked to the door with them, making the conventional offer to "do anything he could to help them." They thanked him. Then Brooke popped a question. It came in the manner of an afterthought but Fillmore was not fooled by that.

"By the way, Mr. Fillmore," the young man said, "if you'll excuse the question, your eyes are a little weak, aren't they?"

For a moment Fillmore was staggered, but he rallied quickly.

"A little," he confessed. "Not nearly so weak, though, as one might think. It's really the eyestrain, due to my constant writing, which troubles

me, rather than near-sightedness. I see quite well."

"You can see the pictures all right from the balcony, then?"

"Oh, quite."

BUT that question worried Fillmore afterward. It was the one weak spot in his defense. Had he done right in denying the weakness of his eyes? Well, he had no close friends who might give him away, and the oculist who fitted his glasses was a thousand miles away in another city. But he knew that his mere word would not convince that young fellow, Brooke. He'd hatch up something to trap him. Well, maybe he could beat Brooke to the move.

It seemed to Fillmore that his only real danger lay in that matter of his eyesight. Lying in bed, he checked over the case. There would be no finger-prints. He did not believe that there would be any proof that he had been with Brant. He had left him at the corner just as they came into the lighted district, and no one had passed who might have recognized them. And most comforting of all was his knowledge of the fact that no case is worth a tinker's dam in a court room without a motive.

A motive was the thing they lacked and the thing they would not find. They could show no way in which he might profit by Brant's death. And the two had never quarreled. No one would be able to quote a harsh word which either had said about the other—that is, granting that Brant had not talked to anyone before talking to him. And knowing the man, Fillmore was convinced that he had not.

Next day Fillmore went into the city. He took a street car, and after getting off, plunged into a crowded street, cut through a department store, circled and back-tracked, until he was certain that he had shaken off any possible shadow which the police might have put on his trail. He then went to a hotel where he was not known, took a room, and sent out a telegram by a bellboy. It was addressed to Mrs. Ethel Brangwyn, Hotel St. Francis, San Francisco, and it read:

> HAVE YOU LET CAT OUT STOP REMEMBER UNITED WE STAND STOP REPLY AT ONCE. HARRY

He waited. Ella would understand. He could not believe that Ella had let out a squawk. They had come to the parting of the ways a couple of months before, but without animosity or rancour.

And of course, Ella was equally guilty of extortion. Nevertheless, he wanted impatiently to see how she reacted to his question.

The reply came in less than an hour:

> YOUR WIRE PERPLEXING STOP WHAT IS WRONG STOP I HAVE KEPT MY OWN COUNSELS BOTH IN GATH AND ASCALON
>
> ETHEL.

Fillmore smiled. Ella was obviously innocent. The whole tone of her message assured him of that, and apparently she hadn't heard of Brant's death. Then what? He and Ella had never been seen together on the continent. They had been careful to a fault. But somebody must have told Brant. Well, if that were true, the same person would go to the authorities, now that the news of the murder was out. But nothing had happened so far. And if it didn't happen at once, it wouldn't happen at all.

Fillmore glanced through the papers. There were no further developments reported. He looked over the show advertisements and found what he wanted. "Daggers in the Dark," the feature at the Alhambra, was also booked at one of the small city theatres.

Fillmore left the hotel and went to this theatre. He took a seat about six rows from the front and concentrated his attention on the film. He ignored the plot and gave his whole mind to noting little details of architecture, of interior decorating, scenery, paintings, minute peculiarities in the appearance of characters. Fillmore had a retentive memory.

He spent what he considered a profitable hour in the show and then took a car back to the suburb.

He went at once to his apartment hotel. No one had called for him. He walked down to the precinct station.

He found Rock and Brooke in conference, and they wore the constrained air of men whose conversation is abruptly interrupted by the appearance of the topic under discussion.

"Any developments?" Fillmore inquired cheerfully.

He saw them exchange quick glances. He studied their faces. He was good at reading faces. "It's Brooke who's on my trail," he thought.

"Yes," Rock said, "a rather interesting development."

Fillmore held his breath. "You don't mind telling me?"

"Not at all," Rock said. "We're holding the fellow for further questioning."

Fillmore tried to conceal the relief which surged over him.

"One of the ushers in the show there," Rock went on. "Young fellow with a police record—once served a term for a small burglary job."

"Yes," Fillmore prompted with interest.

III

"WELL," Rock said, "it turns out that this boy used to work for Brant—office boy or something. Brant fired him for stealing office supplies. He's known to associate with a bunch of young toughs who hang out at a certain pool hall. It's possible that they may have had something to do with the kidnaping."

"That's an interesting angle," Fillmore said. He was conscious of Brooke's steady eye on his face, studying his reaction. Brooke hadn't said anything, just sat there looking at him. Damn the fellow!

"And you, Mr. Brooke?" Fillmore asked. "You think . . .?"

"Don't know," Brooke said. "There was an interval of about ten minutes last night when this boy was missed by the other ushers. He claims he was flirting with some girl on a back seat. But he can't produce the girl. Doesn't know her name, he says. You don't remember seeing an usher walk up to the back of the balcony alone, do you, Mr. Fillmore?"

"I don't recall it," Fillmore said. "Of course, at a show, one doesn't notice . . ."

"Just where were you sitting, Mr. Fillmore?"

"About four rows from the front of the balcony. No, maybe it was five, and about three seats from the left aisle."

"You could locate the place?"

"I believe I could."

"I'd like for you to go there with me," Brooke said. "I'd like to see how easy it would be for a man to slip past in the dark without being noticed by a man in your seat."

"Glad to do it," Fillmore agreed, and he grinned to himself.

He had known it was coming. And he had been a jump ahead of them. The business about the usher was probably true. But Brooke, he could see, wasn't satisfied with that. Brooke was still interested in his, Fillmore's eyesight. Brooke was far from convinced that his eyes were so good that he would sit in the balcony simply to enjoy the show. Brooke was going to find out about that.

Fillmore chatted pleasantly as they walked to the theatre. Brooke responded in the same spirit. If the young man had any cards up his sleeve, he certainly wasn't giving it away by his manner. All the same, Fillmore wasn't fooled.

Brooke spoke to an usher in the foyer and they climbed up to the now deserted balcony. After a little hesitancy. Fillmore located the seat he had occupied. They sat down. Presently an usher came sneaking up the center aisle. For a moment his head stood out in sharp relief against the screen.

"I imagine," Fillmore said, "that I should have noticed that."

"Likely," Brooke agreed. "We'll have him try the two outside aisles now."

Their seats were near the left aisle. It was immediately apparent that a man couldn't have sneaked past there. But in the right aisle, with a section of unoccupied seats between them, the creeping usher could scarcely be seen even if one looked for him.

"He could have got up there," Brooke conceded, "without being seen either by you or the ones in front."

Fillmore chalked up a point in his favor. The main feature was now showing, the plot nearing its climax. Fillmore recognized the foggy street, the hurrying figures that were like vague blurs before his eyes. A great stone mansion loomed through the fog —gloomy trees, iron gates, swirling mists. Then the interior, the characters barking accusations, dashing from room to room.

Fillmore began his studied comments. The movie people were developing a surprising knack for accuracy. This baronial mansion, for instance. He commented on the iron grill-work of the gate, the excellent copy of a Boucher tapestry, the Louis IVth frame on a portrait by Zorn, a Persian rug, which he judged by its atrocious design to have come from Sultanabad, where he had watched the carpet weavers at work.

Fillmore's mind contained an inexhaustible fund of curious information, and he succeeded in making his comments seem natural and unforced. The young detective was obviously impressed. Fillmore could sense a change in his attitude, and by the time the picture had run its harrowing course, their relations had warmed to such unguarded friendliness that Brooke blurted frankly:

"I'll admit I was fooled about your eyes, Mr. Fillmore. You see things that even I don't notice."

"The eyes are very curious organs," Fillmore said sententiously, "and they are subject to many maladies besides near-sightedness which might call for thick glasses and cause a squint."

Fillmore was in fine fettle now. He had successfully plugged up the one hole which might have sunk his ship. The fate of the unfortunate usher scarcely occurred to him. Fillmore was not a man to waste time worrying about other people's troubles. Only one thing remained to disturb his peace of mind. It was that persistent question:

who had told Sylvanus Brant, or how had Brant found out? If someone had told him, why hadn't they gone to the police, now that Brant was dead?

Blackmail? Was the informer waiting to blackmail him? Well, let him try! Fillmore, was no fool, as he had proved. He'd manage to deal with the blackmailer as he had dealt with Brant. He dismissed the matter from his mind. One thing at a time. As the advertisements and announcements of coming attractions flashed across the screen, Fillmore opened a discussion of the merits of the mystery drama they had just seen concluded.

"I WONDER," he said, "that the police don't give more attention to the screen. Crooks do; you've read of cases where they've copied an idea from a movie. Movies have really passed the crude stage in their mystery stuff. Take this play. There's something to the 'purloined letter' idea in it—you know Poe's story, of course. Detectives flounder about while the evidence is right there in plain sight all the time. It must happen frequently in real life."

"It does," Brooke admitted.

"We might even," Fillmore pursued with the thrill of deliberately skating on thin ice, "take a personal example. Don't think I haven't realized my precarious position, Mr. Brooke. It's only faith in the old saw that truth will out that's kept me from the jitters. Why, I might have been arrested on that eyesight business alone."

"Yes," Brooke conceded, "all we lacked was a clear motive."

"And all the while this usher was right here," Fillmore added, "and might well have escaped you."

Brooke did not reply and Fillmore decided to say no more about that. No use rubbing it in. The travelogue was running now. Flashes of Japanese scenery flickered across the screen to the accompaniment of the announcer's nasal spiel. Fillmore made comments. He didn't need his eyes on this. He knew his Japan. His line of patter served to keep Brooke's eyes on the screen and gave him an opportunity to study the young man's face. Brooke seemed completely absorbed in the film. Fillmore felt himself forgotten, and the warm elation which a fish must feel as he slips nimbly from the hook, tingled pleasantly in his veins.

"A great attraction for tourists, this," the voice of the announcer droned on, "the Great Buddha at Kamakura. Cast in bronze in 1252, this matchless image combines all the elements of oriental beauty . . ."

Fillmore saw a curious change come over Brooke's face, saw him start slightly, then stiffen, blinking.

"Fascinating eh?" he murmured.

"Rather," Brooke said. He had turned his face toward Fillmore now.

Startled, Fillmore stared at the square face highlighted by the reflections from the screen. It was sober and grim, terribly grim. A premonition, chilling, paralyzing, crawled along Fillmore's spine and left him numb. "What, what . . ." he began to stammer.

Brooke cut him short. In cold, clipped syllables, he asked:

"What did you do with Ella Brant?"

"What do you mean . . . I—I don't understand . . ." Fillmore sputtered.

"You don't understand—now?" Brooke growled. He suddenly laughed harshly. "Why you fool! Maybe you'll understand when I tell you you're under arrest for the murder of Sylvanus Brant!"

Stunned, bewildered, Fillmore heard his world crashing about his ears, and his nerves went haywire. With the snarl of a trapped animal, he half rose in his seat, and his hands, obeying a blind and primitive impulse, shot to Brooke's throat.

But Brooke was not Sylvanus Brant. His square-shouldered body shot up. Hands clasped, he jabbed the wedge of his arms between Fillmore's clutching hands, tore them loose from their grasp. Then his doubled fist, with the weight of his shoulder behind it, cracked against Fillmore's jaw, and the snarling murderer fell backward into the aisle, fell there and lay cringing and whining in the darkness.

Brooke was bending over him. "Want some more?" his voice rasped, "or are you going to come along to headquarters and tell us how you killed Ella Brant, and what you did with her?"

"My God!" Fillmore's voice shrilled through the dark. "I didn't kill her! She—she's alive . . . she's in San Francisco!"

"But you did kill Brant!"

"It was self-defense," Fillmore whimpered. "He threatened to kill me. I had to—to protect my life . . ."

"That'll do," Brooke said contemptuously. "Maybe you can find a jury dumb enough to believe that, but I doubt it. Snap out of it now, and come along."

An hour later, Horace Fillmore sat disconsolately in his cell, nursing a dislocated jaw. His signed confession was already in the hands of the detectives. They were going over it now, in Rock's office at headquarters.

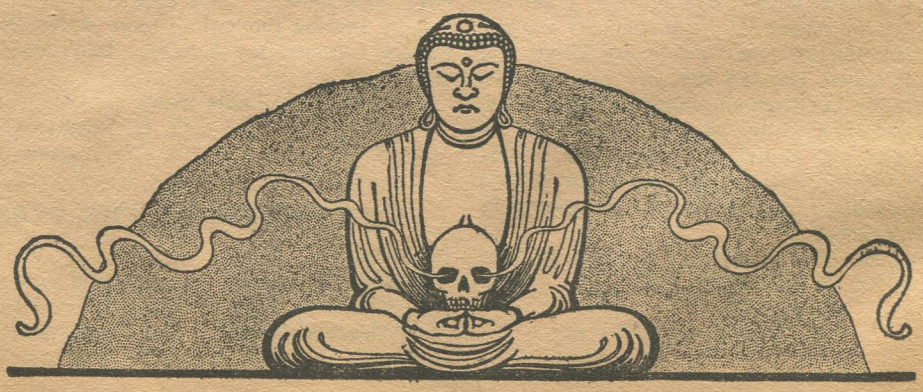
"And the dumb egg led you right into it?" Rock laughed.

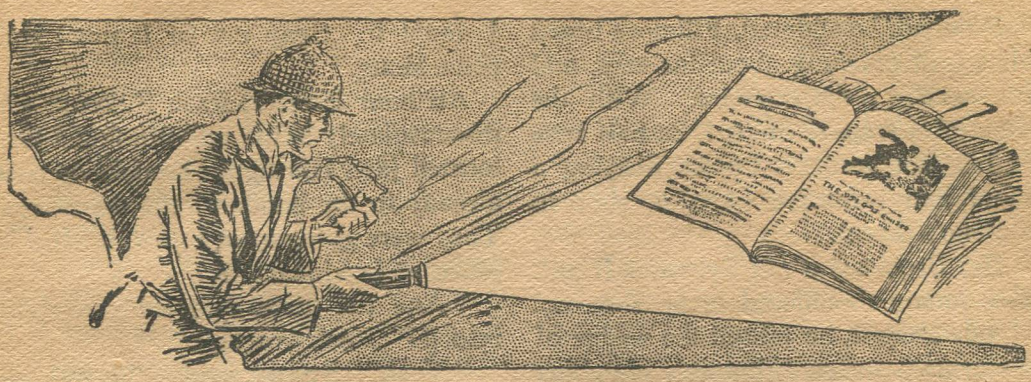
"Yeah," Brooke said. "I was already satisfied about his eyes, but he kept on talking. Then, all of a sudden, this big statute of Buddha is flashed on the screen, and a bunch of tourists standing around it. I saw this man and woman turn, for just a moment. If I hadn't been watching close, I'd have missed it. It stunned me at first. I couldn't believe it. Yet right there in plain sight was Horace Fillmore, and Ella Brant was hangin' on his arm. I couldn't be mistaken because I'd studied her pictures carefully when I was on the kidnaping case. But as I said, I was stunned at first; then I remembered how close Japan is to the Philippines, and the whole damned thing was clear."

"And he didn't see it even then?"

"Naw. He *couldn't* see it—from the balcony. His eyes are bad."

"H'mmm," Rock said, as he bit the end from a fresh cigar. "Just another case of the blind leading the blind, eh?"





Flashes From Readers

Where Readers and Editors Get Together to Gossip and Argue, and Everyone Speaks Up His Mind

We pay one dollar for each letter published in this department. Checks are mailed after magazine goes on sale.

BESIDES analyzing several thousands of faces of the readers of DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, William E. Benton has started a dispute. Some would toss him right out of the magazine, others would give him a permanent place. What's your idea about Mr. Benton and his department?

TO A "T"

MR. WILLIAM E. BENTON,
280 Broadway,
New York City.

DEAR SIR:

Yours received a few days ago and I am answering as you requested. Your character analysis of my face hits me to a "T," as my friends say, and it is almost uncanny the way you analyzed my character just from an outline of my features.

I started in life after leaving school as a day laborer with pick and shovel. Have been a lumber jack, river driver, station agent on various railroads, a boxer, army officer and a surveyor in the order named.

Thanks for your analysis, as it has helped me correct a lot of my faults.

Yours truly,
WILLIAM S. TAYLOR,
Brewer, Me.

DISAPPROVES OF BENTON

DEAR SIR:

I have been reading your magazine for a long, long time (even when it was published under the name of *Flynn's*) and have never felt there was much to complain about, until recently.

Personally, I greatly disapprove of the William E. Benton section on face analysis. I had rather see this space used for more "Illustrated Crimes" or "Solving Cipher Secrets." I believe *most* of your readers would prefer something more interesting than the face analysis. Cryptograms are so much more pleasing.

I think all the DETECTIVE FICTION stories are the best written, but we seem to be having a shortage of the *Lester Leith, Patent Leather Kid* and *Satan Hall* stories. So how about letting us have some more of these soon?

I am looking forward to more stories by Erle Stanley Gardner, my favorite. Don't disappoint me.

Yours truly,
O. D. ROBERSON,
Augusta, Ga.

THE WHITES OF THE EYES

DEAR SIR:

Reference is made to that section of your magazine, DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, conducted by Mr. William E. Benton, on reading character from the face. I suggest you turn over to him the

enclosed three pictures with this letter. [One is of our own Hulbert Footner—The Ed.]

In this letter I respectfully invite his attention to the eyes in the three pictures. He has repeatedly said in his section of the magazine that for the white of the eye to show indicates cruelty. I request that he compare the two pictures having the white of the eyes showing with the third picture—that of John S. Williams—having none of the white of the eyes showing. The picture of Williams is that of a man who is really cruel—committed several cruel murders. His eyes, instead of tending toward the uplifted, gentle, soft expression seen in the two pairs of uplifted eyes, tend definitely downward, as you can see from his picture.

It seems to me that the eyes with the white showing underneath are eyes which do not express cruelty, but rather gentleness, a lack of haughtiness, and a sort of prayerful, uplifted expression.

I have two friends who have that characteristic of the eyes, whom I have known for many years, and I know beyond doubt that there is nothing of cruelty in their nature.

I find it somewhat provoking to constantly read in that section of the magazine that the above-mentioned characteristic of the eye indicates cruelty, and I respectfully invite his attention to the enclosed pictures and to the contents of this letter.

I myself have noticed in several individuals in whom the white of the eye shows under the iris that they had all been subjected to a great deal of nervous strain; however, I do not know that I can conclude from that that nervous strain is a cause of it. It may be due to some other factor also present in each of the individuals.

Very truly yours,

A Reader of Your Magazine,
Washington, D. C.

ANALYSIS WAS CORRECT

Mr. W. E. Benton,
Detective Fiction Weekly,
280 Broadway,
New York.

Dear Sir:

Your analysis of the writer's features received today and was read with great interest.

I am enclosing a small photograph of another subject for analysis and would appreciate your comments.

As students of engineering, this party and myself are naturally interested in knowing if there is any characteristic shown in the attached photo that would lead you to believe the subject is capable of qualifying in this line. As it is a passport photo, you will appreciate the fact that the principal purpose of this and any other passport photo is to insult the subject.

Your analysis of the writer's features, particularly with regard to versatility, diversity of interests, and happy-go-lucky disposition was quite correct. Incidentally after reading it I feel that I would not be very successful in making a living by my wits, for the characteristics described do not seem to be such as could be incorporated into, shall we say, a life of crime.

Your comments and analysis of the enclosed photo will be awaited with interest.

Yours very truly,

H. A. Doughty,
Toronto, Ont.

WORKED ON THE SCHROEDER CASE

Dear Editor:

A compliment for two of your permanent features—Paul Berdanier's "Illustrated Crimes" and your true story accounts. I especially like the latter because as a newspaperman I have several times worked on some of the yarns, i. e., the Irene Schroeder case. I very nearly had to witness the final chapter written in a very oppressive little room by the inexorable electrical fingers of the Law. I am glad I didn't. The last bird I saw take it was a chap named Yarrow at Trenton some years back. He had shot and garroted a 16-year-old Sunday School teacher while drunk. He was a pretty sad sight, just a limp, hope-sapped figure. I noticed as he put his hands over the ends of the chair his thumbs were turned in under his other clenched fingers. The fighter, the game-to-the-last and to-hell-with-you man, would certainly keep them up.

It's a funny world. I was working for the *Daily News* in Philly then. A few weeks or months later I found myself covering the 200th anniversary of a church founding for a Camden sheet. Well, it's all the same whatever they throw at you and the assignment man gets the most leisure and "kick" out of the game. I've been everything from office boy at 15 to night editor of a New York tabloid at 32. I should know. It's just drudgery on the inside.

Your magazine pleases me because it depends on intelligent plots instead of wild coincidences and miracles and a plethora of slayings to attract its readers. The authors for the most part do not strain one's credulity, keep fairly free of hackneyed language and treat their technical points with a degree of accuracy. But hell, I'm the last guy to be critical. Anyway, I like to read it when occasionally I have time, and really wish you luck.

Sincerely,

Wallace McCurley,
New York City.

How Faces Reveal Character

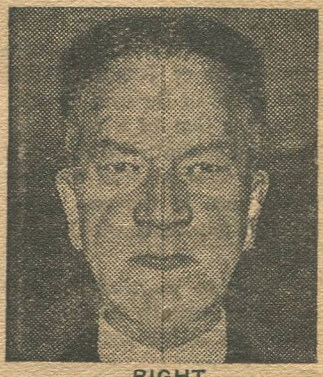
By WILLIAM E. BENTON

LEFT
or Subconscious Side

LEWIS J. VALENTINE

This is the same man!

To see the actual face, fold the page and bring the right and left sides together



RIGHT
or Conscious Side

LEWIS J. VALENTINE, police commissioner of New York City, is a rare type of dual personality. The right or conscious side of his face and nature is intellectual and benevolent. The left or subconscious side is intensely practical, stubborn and militant.

On the right side, the brows go up at a sharp angle, indicating quick, accurate thinking—and also an ability to act. The ear is close to the head, showing caution and controlled reactions to what he hears. The long, straight upper lip is a trait possessed by many lawyers. The deep, rounded chin shows a great deal of physical stamina–a willingness to fight for the right.

The left side shows all of the traits we have spoken of, intensified. The left ear stands out much farther from the head, but it does not go to a point or turn over at the top, as one finds so often in the outthrust criminal ear. However, it does show that he can change moods very quickly, go from being a patient listener to a very forceful talker and actor.

The mouth is severe on both sides, but the left looks more severe and militant than the right. He subconsciously feels that there should be no let up to vigilance, law, and order.

Next Week—Henry Ford

Let William E. Benton Analyze *Your* Face

FILL out the coupon at the bottom of the page, and mail it to Mr. Benton. Enclose a photograph of yourself and ten cents.

Mr. Benton will tell you what your features reveal of your character. You have qualities and talents that you don't suspect. Your face is your fortune. What is your fortune? You may be following the wrong occupation. You may be in love with the wrong person. You can send in a coupon, with a photograph of anyone you wish. Enclose one dime *with each coupon* to cover mailing and handling costs.

Only photographs less than three by five inches in size can be returned.

MR. WILLIAM E. BENTON,
DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY,
280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

Good for one analysis.
Expires 1-19-35.

I enclose a photograph that I want analyzed, and ten cents. Please write me what character this face reveals.

Name.....

Address.....

1-5-35

Jujutsu for Self-Defense

By JOHN YAMADO
Formerly of the Tokio Police

Deadly Grips to Break Body Holds

SOME of the most vicious jujutsu tricks are used to break body-holds. Two of them are so deadly that I cannot describe them here. But those which we will consider are satisfactory.

As in most of jujutsu, the most effective ones are generally the simplest and easiest. The one I am about to describe will not only free you immediately from a body hold taken from in front, but will leave your attacker helplessly gasping for breath.

You will learn this trick by practicing on yourself. Put your middle finger high up on your chest, and feel for the soft hollow at the base of your throat. Press it gently. As you increase the pressure—very slowly—you will find that you are cutting off your breath. You cannot miss the correct spot—it is below your Adam's apple and right above your breast-bone.

Now, if someone grasps you in a bear-hug, all you have to do is place your thumb in that spot on his neck and push hard. He must release his grip or strangle to death. If, on the other hand, you are grasped from behind, your arms being free, bend slightly forward. Press your opponent's left arm tightly to your body by clamping your left arm to your side. Grab his left hand in your right hand. Now, with a quick jerk, pull his left arm through yours until his elbow is in front of your left arm. Then bend his left hand sharply inward and press his arm to the left, holding the arm from moving by means of your left arm. In this way you will dislocate his left wrist.

Another method of breaking a hold from behind, especially useful when your opponent is pressed close to you, is to reach back over either of your shoulders and lock your hands behind his head, as low as possible. You then pull his head forward as far as you can, and bend double. He must either let go his grip or be thrown over your head. However, if you do not practice this one quite a little, he is very likely to fall on top of you, which is not so good.

Now for a front attack again. Here is another simple and easy break, which can be done in a variety of ways. One is to put either hand below your opponent's chin and shove his head back. Both hands so used are even better. The hand can also be placed with the palm over his mouth, his nose being pinched between thumb and forefinger, or between forefinger and middle finger, the tips of which will press on his eyes. When the mouth and nose are closed, stopping his breath, your other hand may be slipped behind his head to keep him from wriggling loose. He can break this grip easily—but he will have to free you to do so.

There are ways of breaking body-holds when both your hands are pinioned, but, as I said before, they cannot be described. With what I have told you, however, you should be able to work out an adequate defense.

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 used* X *to represent* e, X *will probably appear very frequently. Combinations of letters will also give you clews. Thus, the affixes* -ing, -ion, -ally *are frequent. Read the helpful hints at the beginning of this department each week. The first cryptogram each week is the easiest.*

M. E. OHAVER

THE new 1935 series of puzzles begins in this issue, giving everyone a fresh start in his cipher solving! Thanks to your unwavering interest and support, fans, the 1934 response promises to be considerably higher than the goal of 50,000 answers set for the year. Last year's exact total will be announced here as soon as the complete figures are available.

At any rate we have advanced our goal this year to 65,000 answers. As heretofore, all answers submitted to this department will be credited to the solver in our Cipher Solvers' Club, published monthly. Any reader may submit answers, and a single solution will enroll the solver in the monthly club, although many fans, of course, vie for monthly "completes."

Besides counting on your monthly score, every answer submitted also counts on your yearly score. Every solver having any 100 or more answers to his credit this year will be listed in our "Honor Roll for 1935"! Your real name, initials, or a "cryptonym" which you may choose as your pen name may be used in these published lists.

Further, it is not necessary to write out your solutions in full. The first five or six words of a cryptogram are enough to show you have solved it, and the key word or key phrase is all that is required for a cryptic division. Many fans use postal cards for submitting answers, as more convenient than letters. Keep your answers coming, fans! We'll do the rest!

In Ben Brownie's diverting No. 312, last week's Inner Circle cipher, with the finality of symbols F and V suggesting *s* and *y*, respectively, duly noting the ending -VF which would thus be *-ys*, the distinctive pattern FUVUV (*s-y-y*) would yield *slyly*. And so to UEUUAGEGF (*l-ll- - - -s*), noting the repeated letters, as *lollipops;* etc.

W. H. Brazill's division problem, first of the current puzzles, employs a 3-word key phrase of 10 letters, numbered from *0* up to *9*. For a starter, find symbol L in the subtractions R — R = L and E — S = L. Compare DBKK and DABKG in W. T.'s cryptogram, following up with X, XFG, and AGF; then words 5 and 6, duly noting XLE and AXLE.

Note the phrase AR ALK in Captain Kidd's crypt in connection with LKO, RP, and PRO. Having identified these words, substitute in BYAKORRX and fill in the missing letters, noting BY. You might try for FG, -FGP, and -YFXGD in F. E. Tinkham's contribution, thus obtaining all but the first letter of AXDFYFXGD, and so proceeding with DABNNG and NNBAXY.

Trigrammatic alliteration is featured in Hellen Griffin's message, every word beginning with the same three letters. Symbols T, R, and I make up nearly half of the cryptogram. A solution of H. F. Wickner's Inner Circle cipher and the answers to all of this week's puzzles will be given next week. The asterisks indicate capitalization.

No. 1—Cryptic Division. By W. H. Brazill.

IBE)GBRYME(RGR
TIRS

SLIM
SEER

GEBE
TIRS

TEL

No. 2—A Hint for Hubbies. By W. T.

BO QHN XFG X UXFFBGE UXL XLE QHNF DBOG ZFHDY FGYPKGYY DABKG QHN XFG FGXEBLZ *E. *O. *D., RNYP AXLE AGF X SFQTPHZFXU XLE AXFUHLQ DBKK FGBZL!

No. 3—Kith and Kin. By Captain Kidd.

BTDSYF ALK UBOTRY AR TBV BY ROSTRY PRO LKO FOBYGTRY FMSEAV RP BOTRY, BMYASK OKASOKG AR ALK BYAKORRX AR LKEU MYNEK GOKTT LST NBOHM-YNEK.

No. 4—Omnipresent Pair. By F. E. Tinkham.

ZXVQBN "N" MAANMSD FG LFKN HXGDNHVYFKN AXD-FYFXGD FG YTN LXBBXRFGP LFKN RXSZD: "NNBAXY," "RNNUBE," "OVNNGD," "DABNNG," "HXVBNN."

No. 5—Resonant Reciprocity. By Hellen Griffin.

TRIMJHA TRIO TRIGO TRIDJHUDG, TRIKA TRIMYNZONAL TRISSE TRIDT. TRIDJHUDG TRIPODS, TRIIU TRIPYSDGT, TRIO TRIMJHA. TRIBUNAL!

No. 6—Watch Springs. By H. F. Wickner.

GEZSX-DEFPYVH RZX, ZRNTHYVO ZBZSXHP ZXBTEZK LVKZXOZ, OSHDVKXH BZKZBV NTSEOSXB OSHBFKBSXB NTKBEZK; EFXB-HFTBYP DTEGKSP DZTBYP RSXTH ZESNS.

LAST WEEK'S ANSWERS

307—Key: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
G R A M I N E O U S

308—King Kong, Hollywood's prehistoric ape, with an apparent screen-height of thirty feet, was actually a mechanical model only twenty inches high!

309—His frantic fanatic mind dragged from nowhere tumultuous thoughts that became sound. His fingers found them some mystic place where music waits.

310—Grasshoppers, common insect pests, have tiny air tubes instead of lungs, and breathe through spiracles, small holes in their sides.

311—Apparently Dillinger's opponents effectively arranged difficult mission. Assailants followed villain, killing braggart!

312—Bronzed Kanaka plunks ukulele. Lei-decked hula-hula girls slyly lick lollipops, sway in zigzag rhythm. Surf-board boys hurtle shoreward atop wave crest.

Readers sending us their answers to any of this week's puzzles will be enrolled in our January Cipher Solvers' Club, to be published in an early issue! Address: M. E. Ohaver, DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

Next Week the Crime Jury Selects—!

THE dagger slit the neck and the young American pitched forward lifeless, his head upon the pile of messages he had just succeeded in decoding. He still gripped the phone over which he had been reporting his success to Anthony Hamilton, chief of the American counter-espionage agents.

The assassin who had wielded the dagger, the agent sent by the international spy ring of Monte Carlo, lifted the phone, and in a voice exactly like that of the young American he had just killed, he asked: "What name were you using in Russia, chief?"

And at the other end of that wire, Anthony Hamilton, unsuspecting, started to speak . . . His own fate hung on his answer, the fate of the world, for war was bursting out in Europe and the lives of millions depended on Hamilton and his agents outwitting that cunning spy ring of Monte Carlo. Here is the dramatic sequel to "The Case of the Sinister Villa." Don't miss

Spy!

THE CASE OF THE LITTLE FATHER OF DEATH

A Novelette by Max Brand

THE next district attorney of New York City had just killed a man! That was the amazing secret that Broadway's most hard-boiled crusader, the gossipy columnist Grant Simon, was asked to keep! And through a night packed with thrills Simon pursues the sinister Man with a Thousand Fingers, who is bringing ruin and death to the big-shots and playboys of Broadway.

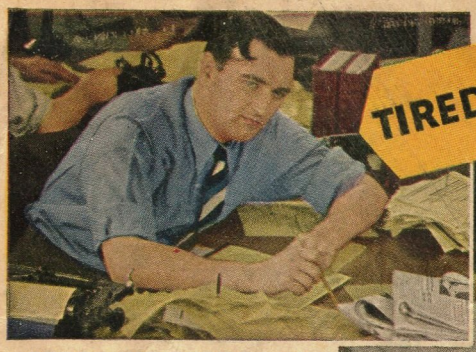
Blood Money

A Novelette by Judson P. Philips

"THE VILLAGE OF PLENTY FELLA HELL," by Murray Leinster, proves that the best man for police work in the cannibal Solomon Islands is an ex-headhunter who can use black magic to secure law and order! In "DEATH AT DANCING TREE," by Emory Black, a murderer writhes in the branches of a sinister pine afloat on the foggy waters of Long Island Sound.

The second installment of Fred MacIsaac's exciting serial, "THE MAN WITH THE CLUB FOOT." A *Dan Riddle* true story by Tom Roan—and other exciting stories and features.

DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, January 12 (on sale January 2)



TIRED OUT?

ACROSS HIS DESK flows the news of the world: Ray Baker of International News Service. 70,000 miles of telegraph wires and direct cable loops with foreign countries flash 100,000 words a day to Baker ... to be quickly judged and edited.

GET A LIFT WITH A CAMEL

PERSONAL EXPERIENCES THAT POINT THE WAY TO INCREASED ENERGY!

"The man on the INS news desk has a high-pressure job," says Ray Baker. "A big story breaks and I am on the desk for ten hours... twelve hours...working at top speed! The most enjoyable way of easing the strain that I know is smoking Camels. Whenever I feel 'all in' Camels bring back my pep, and I can tackle the next big story with renewed energy!

For over ten years I've preferred Camels. They have a distinctive flavor that just suits me. And I can smoke Camels continually without jangled nerves."

Science confirms the experience of smokers regarding Camel's "energizing effect." You can smoke them freely. Camel's matchless blend of costlier tobaccos never upsets the nerves!

LEAF-TOBACCO EXPERTS AGREE:

"Camels are made from finer, More Expensive Tobaccos — Turkish and Domestic — than any other popular brand."

HOCKEY STAR. "Bill" Cook, Captain of the famous N. Y. Rangers, says: "I guard my nerves and yet smoke all I want because I smoke only Camels. Their taste sure hits the spot!"

BUSINESS GIRL. Eve L. Miller says: "I started to smoke Camels because I appreciate mildness and delicacy of flavor. And I found that Camels give me a 'lift' when my energy is low."

Camel's costlier Tobaccos never get on your Nerves!