

DETECTIVE

JUNE 5
10¢

FICTION WEEKLY

FORMERLY FLYNN'S



SPEEDWAY MURDER

*A Mystery
of the Auto Race
by*

**RICHARD HOWELL
WATKINS**

Also

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*A Weird Novelette
by*

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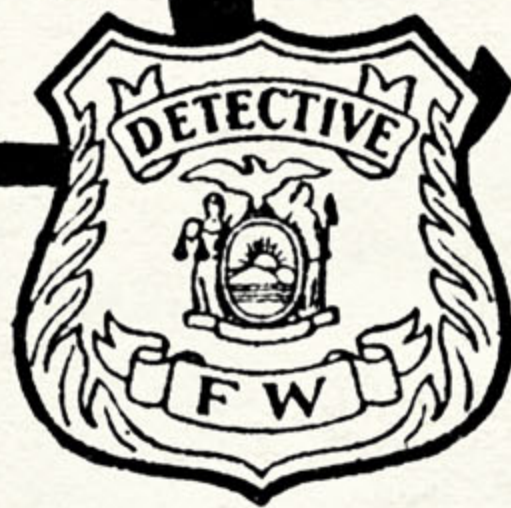
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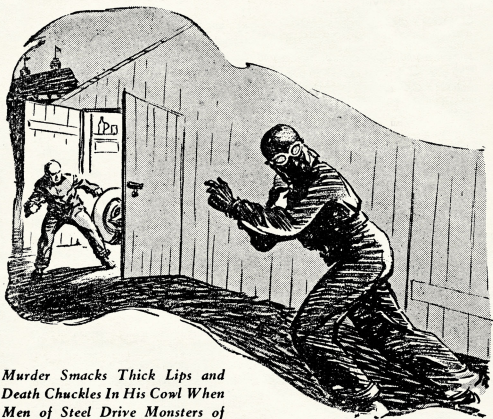
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Speedway . . .*

CHAPTER 1

When a Shoe Lets Go

THE mill wasn't right. The car was sluggish. Bleak of face beneath his crash helmet, Howdy Drake flattened the accelerator under a heavy foot as he came out onto the long front stretch of the Speedway. Driving all out, he wasn't turning the two-and-a-half mile saucer at better than one hundred and five an hour.

Beside Howdy, eyes glued to the tachometer, rode Croak Burns, his mechanic. Croak's moon face was desolate, which wasn't unusual, and he kept shaking his head as he clung tight.

"No gun!" Howdy Drake roared at Burns, stabbing his hand toward the foot jammed down on the accelerator. He snapped his hand back to the wheel again as the car swerved. "And she doesn't handle—got to keep wrestling her—all the time!"

Croak Burns stopped shaking his head long enough to nod dolorous agreement. "We ain't even—goin' to qualify—for the race!" he bawled. "I told you—we oughta stuck—to the dirt tracks!"

For a fleeting instant, Howdy Drake's lean, air-splitting face crinkled up into a rueful grin. Well the knew, now, that a fast iron on the dirt tracks didn't show up so well on the Speedway bricks. "I'll wheel the

SPEEDWAY MURDER

By Richard Howells Watkins

Author of "Key Witness," "Featherfoot Frame-Up," etc.



"Croak!" Howdy called again.
"Head him off!"

rims off 'em somehow, Croakie," he shouted. "I've got to grab that first money!"

He clamped his jaws shut as the car started weaving again. The curve was coming up ahead. Suddenly, three feet from their whirring, uneasy right wheels another car went surging past. Light blue in color, with gleaming chromium-plated running gear and frame, the Hillier Special took Howdy's mount without effort. The driver, plump, stocky Russ Undercliff, known to the racing game as the Billionaire Bullet, jerked a sympathetic

hand at Howdy; then cut over ahead of him and blasted into the curve. Racing came natural to Undercliff; his father had founded his fortune and the reputation of the staid Undercliff car on racing in the early days.

It was just as Russ Undercliff hit the low bank that his right front tire blew. Uncontrollably, the blue car leaped into the air, bounced on its wheels and then, tail whipping to the right, went screaming along the track in a broadside aimless slide.



Howdy Drake, scant feet behind, did what he could. He wrenched at his wheel. He swerved sharply up the bank, just outside the drifting blue car.

The crash wall loomed in front of Howdy as he missed Undercliff's mount. Again he manhandled wheel and brakes, now trying to drag his mount away from that solid obstacle by the sheer power of his lean muscled body. But the speed of the car made it hopeless.

Croak Burns knew a crash when he saw one. He ducked under the cowl. His left arm clamped across Howdy Drake's thighs to hold the pilot in the car when she hit. Croak's right hand found a grip on his own side of the frame.

Howdy's skittering bus, with some of its speed gone, smacked the low wall. For a moment, it seemed that the car would leap the barrier, as a wave shoots high when it hits a sea wall. But instead it jarred back onto the track with front end wrecked and axle broken. On bursting tires it spun to a stop.

Croak Burns came out of the cellar, broken-hearted. Howdy Drake darted a look down the stretch behind and saw that it was empty. He and the mechanic crawled out of their bucket seats. In silence, jolted but unwilling to admit it, they circled the wrecked machine.

Down on the grass apron, in the infield, Undercliff's blue car was stopped, resting upright on its wheels. "We're out if we don't qualify today," Croak mourned. "An' with luck I could straighten out this iron in thirty days. What does that come to?"

Howdy Drake's shoulders had sagged a bit as he looked at the car. Now he waved an okay to the observer

back by the grandstand, lit a cigarette, straightened up and tossed the match away with a gesture of airy and unbeaten defiance.

"I'll wheel 'em to hell and gone next year, Croakie," he declared, forcing a grin. "Meanwhile I guess you and I are just a couple of filling station employees—if I can find the filling station."

They retreated to the wall at the top of the bank to await the tow car.

Russ Undercliff came across the track to them, helmet under his arm, massaging his red-rimmed forehead with his hand. The Billionaire Bullet's movements were petulant. Behind him trailed his riding mechanic, lanky Tom Stone.

Howdy showed no resentment about the crash. On a track the breaks are the breaks and you take them as they come.

"Thanks for not killing me, Howdy," Russ Undercliff said. He fed himself a licorice coughdrop. "I picked a poor spot to spin."

"I've a good excuse for keeping you alive, Bullet," Howdy explained equably. "One of these days, you're going to bat to sell my new carburetor to the Undercliff Motor Corporation. No talking with an assistant to an assistant something for me."

Russ waved a hand in an extravagant gesture. He liked the rôle of lifesaver to busted racing men. "What're we waiting for?" he demanded. "I'm a director, aren't I? We'll unload your pot on 'em any day you say."

HOWDY DRAKE laughed. There was a hint of the fanatic about him when he talked about his carburetor. "Believe it or not, Bullet, I'm an engineer, not a novelty salesman," he declared. "That pot may set me

back a year before I'm ready to go."

"Hell, I'll be dead in another year, anyhow," Russ Undercliff said. He was feeling disgruntled. He sat down beside Howdy, chewed up his cough-drop and nodded toward his blue Hillier. "I can't even roll a couple of practice laps in that iron without doing a gilhooley."

"Have nitrogen in the shoe?" Howdy asked. His engineering curiosity was working in him. On that speedway, the use of nitrogen, which expands twenty per cent less than air under intense heat, was standard practice.

Tom Stone, Undercliff's mechanic, nodded mildly under his boss's questioning eye. "Nitrogen is right."

Howdy drew an engineer's slide rule out of his pocket and looked at it as if trying to solve a problem. "I hope the guy that mounted the rubber was riding with you," he said slowly. "Tires don't let go without reason. I'd hate to have the mech miss the excitement."

"He was riding," Tom Stone said succinctly. Of a sudden, he wheeled and walked back to the blue Hillier as if dragged that way by some inner urge.

"Tom's so careful he's fussy," Russ Undercliff defended. "It's that iron. It's an unlucky clunk. I had a narrow squeak in her last Thursday. And that broader I did just now before she spun off the track hasn't made her any better. An unlucky crate!"

Rather sadly Howdy Drake contemplated his own twisted and battered car. "That's one hasn't been so lucky, either," he said.

"I told you not to leave the dirt," Croak Burns moaned. "We were picking up the cash for your pot slow but sure."

"Too damn slow," said Howdy. "But I'm not building up for a loan, Bullet."

"Look here!" Russ Undercliff said. He jumped to his feet. "I wouldn't wheel that cross-grained blue jalopy on a bet. Want her for the race?"

"Want her!" gasped Howdy. "But—?"

"I'm going to do my rolling in my two-fifty-five Slater—a better car all round," Undercliff announced. "I qualified it yesterday. How about it?"

Howdy Drake stared at the plump little millionaire driver. He knew that if the temperamental Undercliff had a grudge against the blue car, he wouldn't enjoy piloting it five hundred miles at a gait of close to two miles a minute.

"It's a bet!" Howdy declared. "Only if I cop, Bullet, you get the regulation owner's cut of the prize money. I'm not—"

He stopped as big Tom Stone, shouting out something to Undercliff, came running to them. The usually placid mechanic was clutching the shredded remnants of a brand new tire and swearing as he ran. He thumped it on the track in front of his boss.

"Look at the cuts inside this casing," he cried. "Right by the spot on the side wall where it let go!"

"I see a couple of small scratches," Undercliff admitted, peering into the tire.

"Well, it looks to me as if something sharp—glass or maybe little chunks of steel—had been shoved in between the inner tube and the shoe," Tom Stone declared. "The tube prob'ly wouldn't be cut open until you threw the car into a curve, putting strong pressure on the side wall. An' that's where it's the worse news, too."

Undercliff put a coughdrop in his mouth.

"It still looks just like a few harmless scratches to me, Tom," he said without interest. "You must have been going to the movies. Want the buggy, Howdy?"

"I wouldn't touch it with a fishing pole," Croak Burns said distrustfully.

"You'll touch it with a wrench," Howdy retorted. "It's a go, Russ. And thanks for chasing my old clunk into that crash wall."

At a fast run, he started for the cluster of officials on the track in front of the grandstand, with whom he had to straighten out the change in drivers of that blue four-cylinder sixteen-valve job. As he pelted around the track, he looked like a typical cheery, daring hellbender of the reckless racing breed. And he was all of that.

But off the track Howdy Drake was a mechanical engineer and a young man of brains. And he knew from one look at that tire that somebody had tried to kill Russ Undercliff. Also he had a notion—just a notion—who that somebody was.

The killing of Russ Undercliff didn't suit Howdy's book.

CHAPTER II

A Ride and a Jolt

BACK at the pits, after the remains of Howdy Drake's ill-fated entry had been dragged off the track, Croak Burns bucked like a bad steer.

"You don't set a foot in Russ's Hillier till I've checked it," he told Howdy Drake, shooting out his round jaw to the limit. "Not while I'm your mechanic you don't."

"I've got to qualify inside of forty-five minutes or—"

"You c'n qualify for hell's inner

circle in less time than that, only you ain't," Croak said flatly. "Gi' me room, here."

He sat down and flattened out on his back. His mournful moon face and bald head vanished under the front end of Undercliff's second string car. For just an instant, Howdy knelt beside him.

"You might find out whether any of the boys gave Tom Stone a hand in mounting the Bullet's tires," Howdy suggested.

Croak muttered agreement. "Our spare wheels fit this baby—standard racing size—and that's what we'll be rolling on."

"How you coming?" Russ Undercliff demanded, dragging his rotund body slowly over the pit wall as if he were climbing a high fence.

Howdy Drake straightened up suddenly. His eyes were quick moving and keen and he raked the line of pits to see if anyone was displaying undue interest in Undercliff's movements or in his car.

His eyes flicked across Russ Undercliff's pit to the one beyond it. For an instant, his gaze encountered the glance of Lance East, Undercliff's cousin, rival and direct opposite. At once East and Howdy himself swung their eyes apart. East's pipe needed leaning. Howdy thrust his head down to look fixedly at the instruments on the panel of the Hillier. His forehead was creased by a frown.

"How's the iron look to you?" Russ Undercliff asked impatiently.

"Croak's under there trying to find out where you drop in the nickels to make it run," Howdy replied. He had to say something.

It was queer, but Howdy had been almost sure that he would find Lance East looking this way. He didn't know

much about the elegantly clad Lance East. Nobody did, for the tall driver, quite unlike Russ Undercliff, was silent, saturnine and not in the least a mixer. But Howdy had tangled with him on many dirt half-milers and he knew this much: East was a tougher, more calculating and far more formidable person than his plump, reckless relative. He usually was somewhere around Russ Undercliff.

"Russ," Howdy said abruptly, "are you sure somebody isn't trying to nudge you along to the golden speedway?"

The Billionaire Bullet chuckled amiably and sat down with a grunt on the pit wall. He ate a coughdrop. "They're times when I'm sure somebody is," he said. "Me. When I hit one of these bends without lifting my foot—"

"I'm serious," Howdy insisted. "Those cuts—"

Undercliff shook his head. "By the time the old clunk quit jumping around, that blown shoe should have been more than just cut a bit."

He got up and patted Howdy soothingly on the shoulder. "You're jittery from that crack, kid," he said like a grandfather. "Remember, you're as safe as a church until your number's up. Then—" He shrugged his shoulders.

"Somebody else might want to stick your number up," Howdy warned him.

Russ Undercliff laughed carelessly. "What enemies have I?" he asked. "Who'd profit by it—except all the drivers in the country from whom I grab prize money—and Lance East, of course? Maybe you think Lance is out to do me dirt? So he is, and you, too—tomorrow when the starter snaps that green flag at us."

Plainly bored, he climbed laboriously over into his own pit. There he was at once pounced upon by his vigilant secretary and—as the Billionaire Bullet sometimes called him—keeper.

"What's this Tom Stone tells me about a cut tire?" John Parson demanded tensely. Sparely built and full of energy, Parson was the thin, quick-moving shadow of his plump, easy-going boss. He was also a first-class mechanic with the nerve it takes to ride with a daring driver.

"Is it true that—?" Parson went on without awaiting an answer.

"Great Peter!" Undercliff growled, shooting a look of disgust at Parson. Promptly and with much more speed than usual he climbed back into Howdy's pit again. Then he faced his secretary. "Listen, you!" he said, only half humorously. "One more peep out of you on that topic and you won't ride with me tomorrow. Now leave me alone, John. You're making me all nervous."

"Very well!" John Parson put on the spectacles he usually wore when acting as secretary. He pulled a sheaf of documents and checks relating to the Undercliff estate from the inside pocket of his heather-mixture tweed coat and thrust a fountain pen at his employer. "Please sign these," he requested, quite the school teacher. Hastily, grumbling to himself, Russ Undercliff scrawled his name half a dozen times. "Always poking that pen at me when I'm busy!" he complained. "And these long-winded estate lawyers will be crawling over me when you aren't." He continued his retreat.

JOHN PARSON dropped his professorial air and stared uneasily after him. "What's been going on?"

he demanded of Howdy Drake. "I've been over in the Speedway office."

Howdy, with an anxious eye on his mechanic and his watch, told Parson about the tire.

Croak Burns had reluctantly concluded his inspection of the steering assembly and now, with the aid of Tom Stone, was changing wheels. The time was getting short. The starter was glancing meaningly toward Howdy.

"What's this chatter about Lance East coming into big money if Undercliff dies?" Howdy asked John Parson.

The secretary frowned. "I suppose gossip is inevitable," he said unwillingly. "East's father worked closely with old man Undercliff. When Undercliff died he left most of his money in a trust fund. Russ Undercliff draws the interest, a matter of about two mil—um—a considerable sum. If Russ should die without children, Lance East comes into the interest. Eventually the principal goes to the Undercliff Foundation, an organization for medical research."

"But isn't East's family—?"

"His father dived off an office building roof during the depression. Ruined. But that doesn't make Lance East a prospective killer, you know."

Howdy Drake accepted the warning with a nod. Croak Burns, darting a final distrustful look at the Hillier, was jerking his arm. The motor was thundering softly.

"Time to go," said Howdy, jamming on his helmet.

"Good shooting!" John Parson's alert brown eyes were already locating his employer's round, low visibility body. He started off after him.

At Howdy's elbow, Lee Whitman, boss driver on that track and favorite

to win tomorrow, laughed harshly. "I don't see how anybody could be as dumb as Russ Undercliff pretends to be," he commented. "I've been watching."

Howdy jerked his head noncommittally.

"All set, Croakie?" he cried, wriggling into the bucket seat.

"How would I know?" his mechanic muttered in the deepest doubt, climbing in beside him.

Howdy opened her up. The starter raised two warning fingers—two warm-up laps. Howdy nodded, slid through the gears and lifted his speed gradually.

"Smooth, Croakie!" he commented as they blared around.

Croak Burns' expression doubted it. The motor gathered power as it warmed to its job. They came around into the long front stretch. Howdy's right foot demanded speed. He got it. He lifted his hand to signal.

The starter snapped his flag. Howdy forgot Russ Undercliff's troubles, which had so nearly ended in this same blue Hillier. He was moving, with a mill delivering the revs in a velvety roar of power to a chassis and whirling wheels that were perfectly lined up.

Smooth as that brick surface was—the time trials had been delayed by the resurfacing of the track—the car lurched and jarred as it surged on at such a gait.

Howdy, crouching tensely over the wheel, strong fingers nursing it, went blasting around, lap after lap, watching his mount intently at spots when a long straightaway swung into a banked curve, opening up again after the first swirling thrust onto the turn.

The starter was out on the track again, this time with the new white

flag that meant "Last lap!" Howdy gunned on and around. Croakie Burns, a bent statue of misery, was on the job. Into the front stretch—and the black and white checker from the starter. Finish!

"Say," shouted Croakie Burns suddenly, as Howdy lifted his throttle foot. "Stone told me that Sam Ganz, Lance East's riding mech, gave him a hand with them shoes of Undercliff's."

"What d'you think we made those laps in?" muttered Howdy. He came suddenly out of his driving daze and jerked his head toward Croak. "What's that? Sam Ganz did? Helped Stone? The dickens you say!"

They rolled around to the pits and stopped beside the starter.

"They clocked you at 115.24, lead-foot," said the official genially. "That starts you right in the middle of the field."

"It ain't where you start that they pay you for," mumbled Croakie.

"Sam Ganz!" whispered Howdy, as he swung off the track.

CHAPTER III

Alone

RACES are won in garages before they are won on tracks. Croakie Burns' story was that he had merely glanced at the iron that afternoon. His idea was to tear the car down that night from soup to nuts, put the parts on a bench and take a real look.

Howdy went to the mat with him and won a compromise—but the inspection job he agreed was to be done would take till well after midnight, anyhow. That seemed more reasonable. A few fast gruelling laps don't mean that a car will stand up for two hundred of the same.

"Leave me be!" said Croak when

they pushed the blue Hillier into one of the endless row of garages inside the Speedway grounds. But though Howdy had picked up some local talent for pitmen and assistants he spent a hard four hours helping his moon-faced greaseball to get to grips with the job. Then Croak insisted that he clear out.

"It's my neck you're taking for a ride in the morning," Croakie said, sending the sweat beads flying off his shining head with a jerk. "Go get some sleep like it says in the book of rules. Scram!"

Howdy Drake stepped outside the garage. Ten feet took him from the feverish atmosphere of fast, unremitting toil into a different world. Under a black sky loomed the huge grandstand, even blacker. It was silent as a pyramid. Howdy glanced down the long row of garages. Most of them were shut, padlocked, quiet, the machines within ready at last for their supreme test after months of effort.

Howdy Drake walked down the row. In a few of the sheds with light streaming in straight, brilliant lines from their open doors weary mechanics still worked. Russ Undercliff's was locked and dark. The next was empty.

Then came Lance East's garage. That, too, was closed, but thin lines of yellow radiance around the doors told that it was well lighted within. Howdy was not surprised. East's mechanics rarely worked with the doors open, like all the others. East's car was a private matter; the taciturn, secretive East saw to that.

Howdy gave that closed garage only a glance; then turned and walked past the corner of the grandstand toward the track. A few lights, mere widespread pinpoints in the dark, showed on the enormous expanse of the Speed-

way grounds. The track itself was black, deserted, somehow sinister. It slept, apparently without another eye on it. Within twelve hours more than three hundred thousand eyes would be glued to it and to the thirty-three cars which would blare away on their long dash to nowhere at the drop of a green flag. Somewhat grimly Howdy confronted it. He stood there a long time, absently fingering his slide rule.

It was a great game!

About thirty-five thousand dollars would be waiting at the end of the grind for the winner. On the way, certain disaster—probable death—lurked for some of the contestants. But it would be a clean, speedy death, not a mean finish through the dirty contriving of some hidden enemy, such as might well get Russ Undercliff.

Thirty-five thousand! His mind went back to the money. With a stake like that he could finish the job on a carburetor that would not waste half the gas that went through it. It was worth risking his neck, a prospect like that. And Russ Undercliff, that jovial, fat fatalist, was the man who had given him a shot at it and would willingly help him further.

Howdy Drake frowned. He liked to pay his debts. He shoved his rule in his pocket and turned from the black track. He had a good idea of where Russ would be.

Rapidly he made his way toward the Speedway office building. The windows there were ablaze with lights; the rooms would be full of cheery, but completely sober contestants all too strung up to turn in for a rest.

As Howdy entered the building, Russ Undercliff, singing discordantly, drunk only with anticipation, came pounding down the steps. After him teetered thick-lipped, thin-mustached

Bet Bradshaw, juicy red of face, drunk with something else.

"Howdy, Howdy!" Russ Undercliff greeted him. "They're giving us a break, Howdy. Latest weather report 'Fair and cooler.' Not so tough on the tires, kid. I'm a little sensitive about tires."

"Hello, Howdy!" Bet Bradshaw shouted. He had a small memorandum book in his hand; Howdy had seen it many times before. Greedily Bet licked his finger and riffled the pages of the book. "How about p-putting down a li'l bet on yourself? G-Give you twenty to one—"

"Shut up, Bet!" snapped Undercliff. "Your blasted meat-packing family left you a million; can't you lay off cadging bets from the poor guys that make the wheels go 'round?"

"Yeah? I'll just give you ten to one, Russ, that you don't make the—"

Russ Undercliff planted his fat, flabby-looking arm against his friend's chest and propelled him backward with surprising force. Bradshaw hit the stairs, sat down hard, hiccupped loudly and fell to studying his book.

"Speaking of tires," the Billionaire Bullet said, fumbling amiably for a licorice coughdrop, "a funny thing happened just now. Some fellow called me on the 'phone upstairs—don't know how he knew I was there—and said he'd give me the real low-down on that blowout."

"S-Satan!" interrupted Bet Bradshaw, his thick lips working in surprise. "I only got f-forty-two thousand dollars up on this r-race! N-not a n-nickel on you, Russ."

"Go on, Bullet," Howdy urged as the fat driver paused to think of a retort.

"Well, this 'phone friend said he'd spill the works to me if I'd meet him

down at Garage 22—that's the empty one next to mine," Undercliff finished.

"I'll go with you," Howdy declared with a certain grimness.

"D'you think I'd go all that way to take a kidding or listen to some nut burble?" Undercliff asked with dignity. "Not a chance! I sent Tom Stone down to hear what he had to say."

"Alone?"

"Sure!" said Russ placidly. "It's all right. Even if somebody was out to crack my skull, they'd never mistake Tom for me. He's a foot taller than I am and nearly a foot thinner. Hey! Wait!"

Howdy Drake had whirled around and was running back toward the garages. He ran fast, faster than he had run that afternoon. The vague premonition of evil that had bothered him ever since the crack-up was now pounding like an evil medicine drum in his head.

CHAPTER IV

The Black Face

A ROARING motor reinforced that hellish tattoo in his brain as Howdy neared the line of garages. It filled the night.

He sprinted along the row. In front of Lance East's quarters, he checked his pace. It was in East's garage that that motor was revving. Its full-throated roar seemed little muffled by the tightly closed door of the garage. That was all.

Howdy ran to the next door, the door of unoccupied Number 22. For an instant, as he clutched at the peg thrust through the staple on the door he glanced around warily. There was nobody in sight along the line of garages. Over by the edge of the shadowy

black grandstand he thought he made out something moving.

The peg came out of the staple under the forceful pull of his fingers. Shielding himself, poised on the balls of his feet, he swung back one side of the double door.

The instant he opened it, smoke, thick, acrid, choking, came billowing out into the night. Howdy knew well the smell of it. Motor exhaust fumes! There should be no car in here. He flung the door wide and stepped over the threshold. He held his breath. His smarting eyes raked the blackness.

Something at his feet stopped him. He bent. It was the body of a man, crumpled up by the door.

Howdy Drake clasped his arms around the waist of the man and dragged him out into the nearest patch of light. It was the tall figure of Tom Stone. Howdy knelt beside him.

Stone was dead. Carbon monoxide works fast. The fingers and knuckles of the mechanic's hands were bloody. The flesh was torn off them. Stone had fought frantically to open that well-fastened door in the few minutes he had retained consciousness.

Howdy Drake leaped toward East's garage. He jerked the door open. Inside, the motor of East's mount was still running full gun. Two men in overalls, flat-nosed Sam Ganz and a scarred, older fellow, Gus Hart, Lance East's riding mechanic, were bending over the engine in tense concentration.

On the end of the exhaust tail-pipe, stretching out behind the bucket seat of the car, was a length of hose. It led into the side wall, the wall dividing this garage from the empty one next to it.

Howdy's hand closed on the kill button on the steering wheel. The motor died. The mechanics straightened

up and stared at him. Their astonishment seemed a bit overdone; their eyes a trifle shifty.

"You've killed a man," Howdy said coldly, with a wave toward the exhaust line. "Run over to the Speedway office, Hart. Get a doctor and a respirator. Jump, man!"

He wheeled to the door as Hart obeyed. Silhouetted there, Howdy kept his head turned toward Hart, running along the row. But his eyes, half closed, peering fiercely out of his stern face, searched the blackness over toward the grandstand. The light streaming out of East's garage vaguely revealed motion of some sort—a man slipping silently away. The course the lurking figure took was toward the other end of the line of garages.

Howdy did not dart off in pursuit. "Croak!" he shouted, making a trumpet of his hands. "Croak!"

Further down the line Croak Burns suddenly emerged into the little patch of light in front of Howdy's quarters. His bald head gleamed.

"Croak!" Howdy called again. His voice rang with his urgency. Abruptly he jerked up a pointing arm. "Croak! Head him off!"

The arm stretched full length in the darkness indicated that retreating blur. And on the instant Howdy sprinted after the man. Tom Stone's face had not been pleasant to look upon. Cold fury possessed the driver.

There was nothing wrong with Croak's reaction. With a yell he shot away. The unknown's drifting, cautious movement became a swift run. But Croak was in a good position to cut him off from the corner. The two men were converging rapidly. Howdy was pelting on behind.

Croak and the fugitive closed in. They met. To Howdy's ears came a

distinct cracking sound and a cry of pain from the mechanic. The other man dodged past Croak and ran several steps further. A shout from somebody else near the corner changed the pursued man's course. He streaked toward the black grandstand.

Howdy was closing in during this doubling back. The running figure became more distinct but the man's face seemed as black as his coat. Other men were calling out questions. Croak was in wavering pursuit, too, but losing ground.

The fugitive rounded the corner of the grandstand. Twenty feet behind, Howdy spurted on. As he cut close to the corner of the building, he suddenly saw his quarry. The man had flattened out against the wall, waiting for him. His silent stop had been unbelievably fast. Even as Howdy caught a glimpse of a black featureless head and a glint of lenses, he tripped over the fellow's out-thrust leg.

For a few futile steps Howdy fought for balance; then plunged head first to the ground. In spite of his outstretched hands his body hit hard. His breath went out of him. But he had the will to start clambering to his feet.

For an instant he was conscious of his enemy looming over him. Then fiery pain blazed in his head and he dropped to his chest again. Not out but dazed, he tried to get up. He was only on hands and knees when Croak Burns, who had been well behind, came thudding around the corner.

Croak blundered onto him and went sprawling over him. The mechanic's gasp of agony brought Howdy to his senses. He got to his feet and staggered along. At the front of the grandstand he halted uncertainly. Blackness—and many directions in which flight

was possible. He listened. He could not hear the sound of running feet. Hopeless!

Slowly he turned and went back to Croak. The mechanic was on his feet, swearing dolefully.

"That blasted son broke my arm!" Croak snarled. "Left forearm! He clubbed me with something as heavy as a gun when I tried to grab—" His voice choked up. "A hell of a riding mech I am now! You all right, boss?"

While they stood there wearily with the huge grandstand towering darkly over them, Howdy put a consoling hand on Croak's shoulder. The mechanic almost collapsed under the light touch.

Howdy threw an arm around him and steadied him. Croak was holding onto his injured left arm with his right. It was the torture of his fall after the arm had broken that was almost putting him out. But when Howdy prepared to swing him onto his shoulder Croak rebelled.

"It ain't my leg!" he muttered. "I c'n walk!"

"Come on, then," Howdy said. He took only one step before he stopped.

A man was coming toward them, from the direction in which the fugitive had vanished. Howdy heard his footfalls. The newcomer's white face and then his darker body showed in the blackness. Howdy clenched his fists and got set on his feet.

"Who's that?" he demanded sharply.

CHAPTER V

A Nickel Saved

THE man hesitated; then came on a few steps. He spoke:

"Lance East. What's all the shouting about. Who are you?"

"Drake." Howdy's voice was low and controlled. "Drake."

East halted in front of Howdy and looked from him to Croak Burns.

"I heard a chase, and then somebody came tearing along in front of the grandstand," East said. His breath was a trifle fast. "I tried to stop him but he wrenched himself away. I clawed this thing—a mask—off his face. He was too fast for me. I ran into a wire fence. Who was he?"

Howdy had reached quickly for a box of matches in his pocket. Now he flicked half a dozen, bunched, across the box and held them up. Their first flaring brilliance revealed Lance East's saturnine face and the thing he held in his hand, a black leather racing mask built around a pair of goggles.

Howdy looked harder at the mask than at the face.

Few pilots even on dusty dirt tracks wear racing masks below their crash helmets. Howdy had tangled with Lance East on several rutted, dusty bullrings when East himself wore such a mask.

"I don't know the man I was chasing," Howdy said slowly. "I ran after him just on a hunch. Tom Stone, Russ's mechanic, has been killed. You'd better come back with us."

They were some time covering the short distance. Croak Burns, insisting that he could walk, fell, unconscious, before they had gone far. They were met by a bewildered special cop and several mechanics who had been trying to pick up the chase without any luck. Howdy carried Croak on his shoulder to the spot where a crowd clustered around Tom Stone's body. The respirator was in use and the doctor from the Speedway office had administered a shot of adrenalin. But Stone was dead.

The doctor turned his attention to Croak Burns.

Russ Undercliff, quiet enough for once, awaited a word with Howdy. Bet Bradshaw, shocked to sobriety, was with him. John Parson, worried and restless, fidgeted at Undercliff's shoulder. Over Stone's body stood Captain McCarthy, chief of the Speedway special police, glum, thoughtful.

Undercliff came over to Howdy. "I warned poor Tom to look out for rough stuff, Howdy," the millionaire driver muttered. "But he thought some of the boys were kidding us, just as I did. It's my fault! Murder!"

Abruptly Lance East, who had been standing still and taciturn since he arrived, broke the silence:

"Probably when Stone went into the empty garage my motor hadn't started running. While he was waiting in the dark there one of these special cops, a watchman or some other passerby might have seen the door ajar. Knowing the garage was unoccupied this unknown person might have pegged it shut. Then, when the motor started Stone was trapped."

"Have you been shooting gas through the wall into that empty shed right along?" John Parson asked suddenly.

East shook his head. "We thought doing it only tonight, because I wanted my doors shut during the last tuning job," he replied curtly. "There was a hole in the wall big enough for the hose. How could we guess anything like this would happen?"

There was a long silence. It was East himself who broke it. "I'm sorry your riding mech is out of it," he said stiffly to Howdy. "If you need a man with nerve to race with you tomorrow I can let you have Sam Ganz. Hart is my riding mech. I told Ganz

that I'd let him go if he could get a mount."

Howdy Drake thought fast, with Tom Stone's face mirrored in horrible clearness in his mind. Sam Ganz! It was Ganz who had lent a hand with Undercliff's treacherous tire. It was Ganz who was East's mechanic, Ganz who, with Hart, had sent the deadly gas swirling into the garage to which Undercliff had been summoned. Nothing could be proved against East but his follower, Sam Ganz, was a man to be closely watched.

"Thanks," Howdy Drake's voice was steady. "I'll take him on if he wants to ride. But Croak Burns is still my chief mech and he gives the orders."

Sam Ganz' face parted in a grin under his flat nose. "Sure, I'm your man, boss," he said softly and looked sideways at the white and shaken Burns. "Any orders?" he inquired.

"Just one," muttered Croak. "We padlock the iron in the garage so the rats don't get at it while I'm havin' this wing spliced. Come on!"

Waveringly he led the way. Without another word Lance East turned back to his garage. Howdy walked over to Captain McCarthy.

"Look here," he said. "If you don't want a murdered millionaire on your hands you'd better have a couple of smart detectives keep an eye on Russ Undercliff. Somebody in this racing crowd is out to get him."

McCarthy nodded his massive head. "Mr. Undercliff's secretary, John Parson, has been sayin' the same and demandin' protection. And Mr. Undercliff's gettin' protection whether he wants it or not. It would mean my job—"

"Good!" said Howdy. He withdrew from the crowd and walked over to—

ward the grandstand where, beside a refreshment stand, were a couple of telephone booths. McCarthy was only a special cop. As he neared the booths he heard the sound of a voice. With newly acquired caution, he moved forward softly. Somebody was telephoning.

Howdy went closer to the door of the occupied booth which was ajar. He recognized the voice. It was that of John Parson. He was speaking with grave impressiveness.

"I needn't tell you, Inspector, what a black mark it would be for this city and particularly the police force if Mr. Undercliff were murdered—"

Howdy put his nickel back in his pocket and turned away. John Parson was taking no chances on losing a pleasant and lucrative job.

"I'm not a police department and I've got a race to win," Howdy told himself. "My job's to keep Ganz from starting anything else. And the same goes for Cousin Lance East."

He knew he had no evidence against either man, as a detective would reckon evidence. He wished that men were more like motors. He knew what made motors tick. But there was a certain boldness and a certain contempt for suspicion about the attempts on Undercliff's life that fitted in well with the daring and disdainful character of East. There was consistency here.

"East drives just the way that he plots," Howdy told himself, heading back to his garage. "He tackles another pilot on a curve recklessly, not giving a damn about the risk. It was East's mech who fixed that tire; it was East's car that gassed Tom Stone; it's East himself who comes walking back, straight at me, with his mask in his hand, from the direction the masked man took after slogging Croak and

me. It adds up—but any third rate detective would tell me I didn't have a thing."

He wished suddenly that he did have a real clue.

CHAPTER VI

Time to Go!

TRANSFORMATION! Next morning a hot sun blazed down on the Speedway, chasing black shadows, drying up the sinister mists of dawn. And people, in tens of thousands, poured in, filling up with clamor and excitement the vacant expanses so recently silent and empty. The day of the race! They babbled of who would win, not of who had been killed.

Day had merely increased the tension of the night for the racing crews.

Howdy Drake, standing set to ride beside the blue Hillier in front of his pit, saw the taut last-minute action before the race as a series of pictures—snapshots. If properly combined, might not those snapshots bring out into the open the murderer of unlucky Tom Stone, the would-be murderer of Russ Undercliff? He fingered his slide rule but it was of no help to him in a mystery plainly not mathematical.

Fatigue and pain heightened the vividness with which Howdy saw things. The swift seconds in which he had fought for life in his skidding car; the bruising jolts he had taken when tripped and slugged, all gave him a feverish vitality that might burn out in less than five hundred miles at high speed.

Pictures! Moving, talking pictures—but, for all that, mere glimpses of a kaleidoscope.

Lance East, with his crash helmet under his arm, saturnine, firm-lipped, a graven image beside the wall of his

pit, watching Gus Hart, of the scarred forehead, fill the oil supply tank of his blood-red eight-cylinder mount. His cold eyes never moved from his car. Not much help to a solver of mysteries there.

Russ Undercliff, stamping through the scurrying throngs of pitmen and mechanics in a frenzy of exasperation. "Detectives! Blast them!" he raged. "Detectives everywhere! Outside my door! Behind my back! Detectives in my coffee! Hell with them! There'll be one in my gas tank!"

At Undercliff's shoulder, half amused, half remonstrating at that outburst of extravagant wrath, anxious-eyed John Parson, riding mechanic's coveralls thickening and blurring his spare, quick-moving body. His spectacles and sheaves of papers to be signed were nowhere in sight now. He finally herded Russ back to his gleaming, silvery Slater, power incarnate hidden beneath a miracle of stream-lining and beauty. Once Russ Undercliff slid into that bucket seat he would not need to worry about detectives following him.

Circling about Howdy's own car, stiff-legged and wary-eyed as a couple of hostile dogs, were Croak Burns and Sam Ganz. Croak's round bald head the epitome of desolation, his watchful eyes red-rimmed and angry-looking from a whole night's vigil over the blue Hillier, his left arm in splints and sling. And Sam Ganz, faintly contemptuous, huge jaw working on a cud of gum, flat nose separating his deep-sunken, shifty black eyes, hands empty of tools, by curt demand of Croak.

More pictures! Thick-set Lee Whitman, twice winner of this classic, favorite to win today, sitting ostensibly at ease on the wall of his pit, next

to Lance East's, wolfing down a last-minute hot-dog that somebody had left on the wall with the wrenches and spark plugs. Beside him his mechanic, also busy with a frankfurter. Confidence incarnate, both men.

CLOSE to Whitman, talking and almost fawning upon him, Bet Bradshaw, he of the thick lips, thin moustache and ever-present betting book. Now gotten up in overalls, a travesty of a pitman, having worried Russ Undercliff into giving him a badge, the betting millionaire's face was almost green and his hands were shaking as if his life, rather than some money, depended upon this race.

"Good luck!" Bradshaw shouted to Howdy Drake. "I'm sure you'll beat Lance East! I'm sure!" His agitated voice rose almost to screaming falsetto.

Howdy came out of his mood of general observation. "Betting on me?" he asked.

Bet licked his lips. "No—on the field—against East," he quavered. "There's a lot of money bet on East—ten thousand in one lump—I gave ten to one that he wouldn't win. It should be easy money but—" Again he wet his lips.

Howdy reached out and gripped his wrist as he started to move away. "Is East betting on himself?" he demanded curtly.

"No; no; he doesn't bet," Bradshaw asserted. "And I'm sure Lee Whitman will beat him. I stand to lose more than a hundred thous—" His voice faded out as he mouthed the sum.

"You're unfortunate," Howdy's tone was dry. "All that the rest of us may lose is our necks. Who put up that ten thousand on East?"

His eyes drilled the owner of the

memo book. But the sight of Russ Undercliff, barging past just then, startled Bradshaw. He jerked his arm out of Howdy's grip. John Parson, following Russ, halted a moment and tapped Bradshaw on the shoulder.

"Hop back in that pit before one of these officials boots you over the top of the press pergola, Bet!" he warned. "You're just a greaseball here!"

Hastily Bradshaw obeyed. It was well he did. The starter was motioning to the drivers to line up their mounts. The stands were roaring for action; a hundred and fifty thousand people couldn't be disappointed. Time to go!

Thirty-three cars, muttering in restrained power, crawled away at a mile a minute gait. In good formation they rounded the four corners of the two and half mile track and came down the long front stretch. Howdy Drake, back in the seventh row with a car on either side of him, with eighteen cars ahead and twelve behind him stared down the track at the white-clad starter.

The pace lifted. The starter, eyes raking the ranks, clutched his flag.

"It's a start!" Sam Ganz yelled in Howdy's ear.

The flag dropped. Gun! Thirty-three right feet—the heaviest feet in the country—flattened their throttles. The cars, smooth, brilliant, vari-colored projectiles, shot ahead. In one simultaneous surge of power they leaped toward that first curve as if it were the last. Eight hundred curves stretched ahead, not one, but Howdy Drake, like the others, bored into it, instantly starting the fight for position. His eyes swiveling from side to side and then leaping ahead, dwelt for an instant on Russ Undercliff's glittering mount.

Undercliff, in the third row, was shooting at the curve as if bent on taking the lead. But Lance East and Lee Whitman, in the first rank, had their own ideas about that. They jammed ahead, locked in a tight battle for first place. Right then, in that roaring tangle of hurtling steel, Lance East could have only one matter in mind.

Howdy, with power under his foot, tore along. Well he knew the importance of racing wide open at the start of the race, while the scrubbed bricks under him gave his whirring tires a sure grip. Later, the steady drip of oil and an occasional pool where a piston flew through a crankcase would film the bricks. The time to work into a good position was now.

Howdy knew that—but he didn't know his car. Fast as he drove on the stretches, he lifted his foot as he went into the curves, feeling out the sway and whip of his rear end. He kept iron control over the car and made up what he could on fast acceleration into the straights. This was a long race.

A sideways glance told him that Ganz, jaws working on his gum, was grinning derisively. As a riding mech Ganz wasn't bad. He kept close check on the tachometer, oil and temperature, gauges and the air pressure on the gas tank, kept his left elbow away from the wheel and watched for cars behind. But it was plain to Howdy that Ganz felt he was riding with a feather foot. That didn't annoy Ganz; it amused him. The grin stayed on his working lips as the laps whirled past.

Lee Whitman and Lance East were out in front, waging a terrific fight for first place. Only Russ Undercliff attempted to match their pace. He hung on grimly, his gleaming Slater dogging them into the bends. The pace of the

three carried them half a lap ahead of the field. Then, on the north curve, Russ Undercliff's tires suddenly shrilled complaint. The car drifted up the bank. Howdy made out that Russ was forced to lift his foot to control his mount; by the time he had straightened it out and regained speed the two leaders were half a mile ahead of him. A good second-rater, Russ Undercliff, no matter what he wheeled.

Chastened, Undercliff eased the Slater into the curves much less recklessly. Like many another pilot, his excess daring was abruptly replaced by excess caution. The leaders widened the gap to half a lap and still roared on. A couple of cars passed Russ Undercliff; he did not challenge.

Howdy began to get the feel of the blue Hillier. He hit the curves harder and jammed his mount past one car—another. The Hillier had the stuff; when a driver disputed his passing Howdy called on his motor and it did not fail him. Cautiously he whittled away at his factor of safety on the corners. But still as the track reeled under his wheels he knew he was not equaling the speed of Lee Whitman in his flying black machine or of Lance East in his blood-red eight. They would lap him if they held that pace.

The time came when Howdy was surging along a scant two hundred feet behind Russ Undercliff's Slater. John Parson, half turned in his bucket seat, was watching him warily. Howdy waited his chance.

Of a sudden, something jerked Howdy's head to the right. There was a car alongside him—a scarlet car. It was Lance East, granite-faced, crawling past in a burst of speed and crawling on, toward Russ Undercliff. East had stormed past Whitman and now, forcing his car to the limit in spite of

the long road ahead, was rapidly overtaking his cousin.

Howdy Drake, stepping on his own mount till he felt it swaying uneasily on lifting wheels, saw that John Parson was watching East intently. But though he saw East shoving his front wheels up close alongside the silvery tail of Undercliff's car, Parson did not shout a warning in the ear of his driver. East swept by his cousin and cut over to the infield in front of him.

"Here comes Whitman!" Ganz roared at Howdy.

Howdy voiced no rebuke. Ganz had not given warning of his former boss's approach.

What puzzled Howdy was that John Parson had failed to tell Undercliff the same fact. Howdy had never figured Parson as yellow and yet—What other answer was there to his permitting East to go past without giving Undercliff a chance to fight him off? What other answer was there?

CHAPTER VII

A Crash That Failed

WITH less than a gallon left in his sixteen-gallon gas tank Howdy Drake pulled into the pits. Croak was organized to get him away fast.

"Keep your mitts off this automobile!" Croak snarled at Ganz as the mech jumped from his seat. "Get that radiator!"—this to the pitmen who helped him pour in the gas and water and fill the oil supply tank.

"Motor okay. Tires okay," Howdy said, wiping his face and rubbing his swelling forearms.

"You've finished your seventy-eighth lap, 195th mile, Howdy, runnin' in fifth place," Croak Burns spat out as he worked with his one right

hand, flanked by pitmen. "Average 113 miles. Leaders East, Whitman—by a lap—Halicz, Trent. East's been in for gas—but his left front rubber's showing a worn spot that the pit didn't get. Whitman's made a gas stop—he ain't so happy somehow. Halicz an' Trent will be in for gas soon—maybe you can get 'em. Here comes Undercliff in for gas. Bet Bradshaw's doin' convulsions because East's leadin'. Take it away!"

Ganz had swung back into his seat. But Howdy, to Croak's unrestrained grief, did not take it away. Instead he grabbed Croak and spoke, close to his ear.

"Find out from Bradshaw who bet ten thousand on East!"

With motor roaring under his foot he pushed Croak clear and shot away. The Hillier was part of Howdy now. He had found the groove in the track where his mount ran easiest on its tires and the motor stayed cool. Fifth place!

"Hold on your hat!" he snapped at Ganz. "And if you let anybody else crawl up on me without warning I'll bounce you loose from that bucket there!"

"Plenty hairy, hey?" Ganz retorted, fiercely.

"Plenty!" Howdy said it with speed on that next bend. Just ahead a car in ninth place threw a red hot piston through the motor block and went sliding into the infield, the pilot blinded with oil. But Howdy gunned on, untouched. Undercliff's trouble and Howdy's carburetor were sunk deep into the back of his mind, but they were still there. Gun!

Howdy passed Trent when he went in for gas. Halicz, a blunt-faced, blond Slav from Detroit gave Howdy a tough ten-lap battle for third place;

then spun out of it and limped to the pits on a dented rim.

Race!

The half-way mark whirled past with the pace almost as hot as in the first fifty miles. The cars were dropping now. Spins, crashes, burnt-out rods, cracked motor blocks, slipping clutches, broken axles and shafts, oil pumps, motor supports, oil lines, timing gears, all were taking toll at that torrid pace. East was watching the tire that had been scraped during the spurt that had brought him into first place. His game was to ride on it long enough to eliminate a special stop—to change it when next he went in for gas. In spite of this, he held off Whitman who rode in second place and for some reason never challenged. Not until he had turned three hundred and forty miles did East signal to his pit and stop.

Ganz plucked at Howdy's arm then. "You'll kick the wheels off this clunk!" he bawled.

Howdy darted a warning glance at him. He did not speak.

Jamming on, Howdy found that Whitman's pace had slackened. He went after the favorite. While East was still gassing Howdy passed Whitman on the north turn. Second place! As Howdy shot down the front stretch he saw East's blood-red car accelerating out of the pits.

Next instant he had flashed past East, amidst wild waving and stamping from the grandstand. First place! He barreled on into the curve, nearly standing on his throttle paddle.

Suddenly the motor coughed. Howdy's eyes darted to the gauge registering air pressure on the gas tank.

"Pump that tank!" he shouted at Ganz. "Get pressure on it!"

"I been pumping!" Ganz bawled,

pumping languidly. "Must ha' got a leak in the tank!"

On the next straightaway Howdy stretched behind him with his left arm to the screw cap on the gas tank. It was loose. He screwed it down.

His eyes stabbed into the black, smouldering eyes behind the flat-nosed mechanic's goggles; then flicked to the scarlet car behind them. East was coming up fast, all alone on the straightaway.

"Pump, you yellow quitter!" Howdy snapped. "Speed get you?"

"Yellow hell!" Ganz spat out. "It ain't in the books—for you to cop first money, see? Slow down! Second money's yours—if you ain't—too dumb to take it!"

Hard, derisive, Howdy Drake laughed. His foot stamped on the throttle again.

"Pump when I tell you to," he commanded. "Then ride with your hands in your lap! I'm throwing you out—on your face—at the next stop, you crosser!"

"Second money for you!" Ganz retorted. He turned and put a hand on the cap of the gas tank.

INSTANTLY Howdy Drake grappled at the mech's arm. The car hurtling on at two miles a minute, swerved dangerously. Tires screeched but Howdy's right arm pulled it out of the slide before it became a spin. Ganz jerked his arm away from the tank.

"Second money—an' something extra on the side!" the mechanic shouted. "Cash for me an' more cash—more than first money for you! Ease up!"

Again Howdy laughed. His lean, air-splitting face flashed a challenge at the car behind and the mechanic beside him. He was a driver now, and nothing more, a reckless, lead-footed

hell-driver, shooting at one hundred and twenty toward a checkered flag. And nothing Lance East and his flat-faced heel could do would stop him.

"Money!" he taunted, both hands on the wheel again. "Do you want money? Money won't buy you—and your boss—a rubber cushion for the electric chair! D'you think I'll let you get away with Stone's murder?"

Ganz lifted a hand toward the steering wheel ready to clutch it. His other, under the cowl, poked something into Howdy's drake's ribs. It was a gun, a black, snub-nosed automatic. His eyes were flaming pits of menace.

"You'll never prove it!" he snarled. "Lift your foot—or I'll let you have it! They won't look for a bullet—not in what's left o' you after I frame this crash!"

Howdy Drake's eyes, darting sideways toward the gun, saw something else as well—Lance East's car surging inexorably past him. Trapped! Beaten! Ganz meant murder. With Howdy out of the way it might well be the finish, too, for Russ Undercliff.

East was winning more than a race. Nobody was close behind them. East, Ganz and Hart—all crooks—all victors. Was he beaten?

Howdy Drake clamped his hands tighter to the steering wheel. He gave it a swift, controlled twist to the right. "Here's your answer!" he gritted. His car, tires screaming, swerved violently toward the blood-red mount of Lance East. Crash! Things happened fast, in giddy, reeling succession. Hubs ground together. The gun roared.

East's red car shot to the right, up the bank at the start of a curve. The Hillier, with a front wheel crumpled, dug its front end into the bricks. The rear end, whipping around, smashed down on the bricks with terrific force.

The car spun, hooked its front axle into the track again and rolled over on its side.

Groggy, almost stunned, Howdy Drake had stayed with the car, hands frozen on his broken wheel, body bent sideways across the seats. Nobody was in the other seat.

Slowly he relaxed his grip. He slid down onto his knees on the track and crawled away from the wrecked car. It lay half on the dirt apron on the infield side of the course. Forty feet beyond it, also on the dirt, sprawled the body of Sam Ganz. Dead or alive, the man was motionless.

With grimly compressed lips Howdy Drake stood up. The string was out of his backbone; his leather jacket was ripped off his numb right shoulder and there were powder burns on his lips and chin, below the goggles.

He looked toward the crash wall on the other side of the track. But Lance East's car was not there.

Howdy stared down the track and saw a receding blur of scarlet. East was still in the running—traveling in first place. He had averted his share of the crash with that swift lunge away from Howdy's swerve, Howdy had failed.

A minute later the ambulance rolled up. While they were picking up Sam Ganz, Howdy turned and walked back toward the pits. It was the second crash he had walked away from within twenty-four hours. He walked slower, this time.

CHAPTER VIII

Back in the Battle

BACK at the pits Croak was waiting for him. "The dirt is our speed," he declared in a sort of gloomy triumph. "I knew that iron

would get away from ya'. Never say I didn't tell ya that."

He flung a hand around the course. "This race is haywire—screwy," he asserted. "Look at it—Lee Whitman taxicabbin' at sixty an hour toward the pits in second place—Lance East, the leader, limpin' around the backstretch with a soft shoe—an' the field nowhere! Undercliff will cop it yet."

Howdy looked up the stretch. Whitman's black car was rolling toward the pits. The star driver's perplexed crew was swarming out on the track with tools, wheels, a set of sparkplugs, but Whitman made no signal. His car moaned to a stop.

The thick body of the favorite was doubled up over his wheel. His mechanic, with ghastly, contorted face, tumbled out of the car and collapsed on the track.

The pitmen helped Whitman out of the bucket seat. He was cursing faintly. He doubled up again, arms folded over his stomach in agony. He dropped down on the track and raised a white face to the group around him.

"Relief!" he croaked. "Relief driver—mech. We're out—sick—hellish cramps!"

Through Howdy's mind flashed what he had seen just before the start of the race—Lee Whitman and his mech killing the last few minutes of tension by devouring a couple of hot dogs that somebody had dropped beside them on the wall of the pit with the tools.

Whitman's rolling eyes fastened on Howdy Drake.

"Howdy!" he gasped. "Take her—relieve me—fix it up! Get going!"

"Right!" Howdy said. "Gas her, you mechs!" He swung around. The Contest Board man was at his elbow, looking him over keenly. Howdy flung

up both arms in demonstration of his fitness.

"Okay, Howdy," the man said. "Don't crack this job. Get a mech!"

A sudden wail rose close to them. It was Bet Bradshaw, greener of face than ever, on the verge of convulsions. "He was poisoned!" Bradshaw quavered, pointing a finger at the groaning favorite. "Whitman was poisoned!"

Somebody, shocked, slapped Bradshaw back into the nearest pit.

"If he was doped!" The Contest Board man grimly left the sentence unfinished. Nothing like that had ever happened in the car racing game.

Howdy grabbed Croak Burns by his good arm.

"Get in there!" he cried. He leaped over the pit wall after Bradshaw, sunk his fingers into the man's shoulders and glared into his face.

"Come through!" Howdy demanded. "Who bet ten thousand on East—against the field?"

"Parson!" moaned the betting millionaire.

Lance East, braking hard, came rolling toward his pit, signalling for two front wheels. His gesture was deliberately controlled.

Howdy scrambled into the black car's driving seat. Croak, his round face almost cheerful, was already pumping air into the gas tank and peering at the instrument board. Howdy gunned away.

The silver Slater, with Russ Undercliff's plump body upright behind the wheel, screamed past them.

"There's one more guy we got to beat," Croak yelled. "I figure we're ridin' third. Kick her in the pants!"

The wheel felt queer to Howdy—but he knew that track now and his head was steady. He kicked her in the pants.

The black bus was a thoroughbred. He gunned after Undercliff.

Parson, watching intently, saw him coming. The riding mech bawled the news in Undercliff's ear, revolving his fist in the gesture that means more speed in the racing game. The plump fatalist aired out willingly enough to contest Howdy's passage. He stood off Howdy—gave him a beautiful fight—lap after lap. But Howdy was getting more used to the car. When Undercliff skittered up the bank on the north curve from too much, tabasco Howdy dived past inside.

As the black car blasted past the silver Slater Howdy intercepted a venomous glance of John Parson's. The riding mechanic was thoroughly disturbed by Howdy's passing. Yet he had helped Lance East to lap his car.

"Bet Bradshaw wasn't lying!" Howdy muttered to himself. "It was John Parson that bet against his boss on Lance East. Another pal of East, hey? Mr. East's getting a lot of assistance in winning this race!"

It was the first time that Howdy had ever tangled on a track with Lance East when the man had needed any other help than his heavy throttle foot. That bothered Howdy. Why had East gone crooked in this contest? A man might be tempted by two million dollars a year to plot murder—but why risk enlisting poison and conspirators to take a race? There lay mystery.

The answer was to come much sooner than Howdy Drake expected. Roaring down the grandstand stretch he made out far ahead East's scarlet car. The tire change had been slow and costly; Howdy now was on the same lap as East and only a couple of hundred yards behind. Now, if ever, he might win back the lead.

It was not Howdy's aching and bat-

tered body that controlled this roaring black machine; it was the power of his will. All the nerve and skill and blazing indignation that was in him, all the horsepower in that finely tuned motor, he bunched and used against Lance East in those next few laps. With spurt matching spurt, blasting down stretches, barreling into curves, drifting off corners, Howdy fought his enemy. Pouring in the gas, he climbed steadily closer to him. Safety meant nothing to Howdy now.

CHAPTER IX

The Black Pall

THE time came swiftly when Howdy rode wheel and wheel with the scarlet car. But step as he would, he could not jam past Lance East. Crouched over the wheel of their bouncing, lurching cars, hitting the greasy bricks on the perilous verge of a skid, the pilots rode a full quarter lap without winning or losing an inch.

Then came the break. Roaring off the front straightaway they broadsided into the curve. Ahead were a couple of machines ten laps behind but well matched and staging a speed battle of their own.

Suddenly the pilot of the inside tail-ender lost control as his mount hit a patch of oil. The machine slid. Next instant it had locked wheels with the car alongside. Tires smoked and blew as the spokes clashed. Frames ground together; then wrenched apart as one machine flip-flopped in a terrible end-over-end crash.

In an instant, a barrier of steel wreckage and injured men was flung half across the inside of the track. It was dead ahead of the two roaring leaders.

Howdy Drake, outside, had the time and space to swerve up the bank and claw past, close to the crash wall. But Lance East down by the infield, was shooting full into the jumble. He could not swerve too sharply without losing all control. He lunged past a car.

Down by the inner edge of the track there was a hole—a narrow hole, but big enough for a skillful driver like East to jam his mount through. East dived toward it, bent on squeezing past the smoking remnants of a brown racing car.

But suddenly, out of this wreck the driver, dazed but aware of cars thundering on him, scrambled. He staggered across the gap toward safety in the infield. His bent, half conscious body closed that hole. But frail human flesh was no dangerous barrier to a car going more than a hundred miles an hour.

Precisely, darting a look behind, lips framing a word to his mechanic, Lance East steadied his wheel. The mechanic ducked. Braking hard, Lance East veered from that tottering figure. Full into the overturned, empty wreck his car charged. Again chaos! Flying steel, hurtling wreckage, and two men flung about like dice in the midst of it!

"Cold turkey! A racin' man!" Croak gasped incoherently. "He took it—hard break!"

Howdy Drake, fighting the momentum that still strove to send him side-swiping the crash wall, jerked his head in assent. He had glimpsed that crash. Grimly he wrenched his machine away and man-handled it down the bank, heavy footed, alert.

But inside his head something had exploded, leaving him dizzy with the shock. Lance East, dead or alive, was

no killer and no crook. He had followed unswervingly the toughest rule in the book. He had not hesitated to chuck his life and race away to save a man. No one could have said a word against him if, in the split second left him for action, he had hit that bewildered figure.

A man like that couldn't gas, couldn't poison, couldn't play it dirty on another. East didn't need to do anything but roll his job to win. He had the gun and the guts. His sporting crash had given Howdy the clue that cleared him. Howdy's theory was all wrong. He was a fool. Other people wanted East to win a lot more than East himself did. As for the attempts on Russ Undercliff's life—Howdy's mind leaped to a new conclusion.

"Where's Undercliff riding?" he bawled at Croak.

The mechanic's finger stabbed ahead. "On the northeast bend—you nearly got him lapped."

Wearily, marshaling his resources, Howdy opened up. Weaving and swaying, fighting his swollen and tired arms, the car lunged on. For eternity he had been wheeling but now he had more than a race to win. The new theory of his demanded more speed than a race. He knew the truth and the truth was deadly.

Even Croak Burns, game as they come, glanced sideways at the way he took those next three corners. Then, with a grunt, Howdy eased up. He was two hundred yards behind Russ Undercliff.

The yellow flag, forbidding passing and demanding caution, held black car and silver behind a clunker with a blown head gasket for a long two laps, while the wreckage of that triple crash was cleared from the curve. Ambu-

lances were halted on the dirt apron of the infield. Then the green flag, the all-clear signal, was flashed and the circling cars belted into it again.

Swiftly now, Howdy climbed up on Undercliff. But a hundred yards behind Russ's silver car Howdy lifted his foot. Through filmed goggles he stared at the car ahead. He wiped the sweat from his black oily face with his arm.

"What're we waitin' here for?" Croak roared complainingly. "Only four laps to the finish—I seen it on the scoreboard."

Howdy Drake did not answer. His eyes were riveted on the silver Slater. It was smoking badly and its speed was dropping. Suddenly, on a turn far from the grandstand stretch the smoke grew much blacker and more dense. It rose in clouds behind the car, covering the track.

"Looks like his whole supply tank of oil had been pumped into his crankcase," Croak roared. "Or else—"

"There's no 'or else,'" Howdy snapped.

Undercliff's car, as well as they could see, was lurching and weaving up the track, as if something had gone wrong with the steering assembly. Through holes in the smoke, when gusts of air swept it away, Howdy made out that Undercliff was not fighting his wheel. He sat slumped back in his bucket seat. John Parson, leaning toward him, was guiding the car.

"Undercliff's out cold!" Croak shouted.

Howdy nodded. "Watch!"

The car, traveling at no more than fifty, swerved higher up the bank. It lost speed swiftly. The smoke thickened as the car slowed.

"Parson's set to jump!" Croak reported hoarsely.

Suddenly Undercliff's Slater hit the crash wall. They saw that—and had a blurred impression of Parson's lean body, clear of the car, sprawling, hands out to break his fall. Then the smoke came down in blinding earnest.

Howdy Drake fairly stood on his brakes. He sent his car sliding on hot, smoking rubber up the bank and toward the black cloud.

"Out!" he breathed to Croak and dived over the side himself. He darted on deep into the swirling darkness that screened the car from thousands of witnesses. The machine was on its side against the wall with crumpled radiator gushing steam. The motor, firing erratically, was still roaring out black vapor from its tail pipe.

From under the gaping hood poured more smoke, and back of it were darting scarlet lances of fire that leaped and lengthened. A packet of paper matches, blazing and soaked in gas, lay under one dripping carburetor.

Amidst the swirling smoke Howdy made out the kneeling form of John Parson. The secretary was beside the bucket seat of the overturned car. Undercliff, half out, was limp upon the bricks at Parson's knees. Already Parson had ripped Undercliff's thick crash helmet off his head. The driver, with a welt on the point of his jaw, was just opening bewildered, glassy eyes.

Parson's right hand, clutching a chunky little monkey wrench, rose up and then whipped downward with deadly force toward Undercliff's skull.

CHAPTER X

To Men Finish

DESPERATELY Howdy kicked out. His foot hit Parson's forearm. The wrench thudded on the

bricks, a scant inch from Undercliff's head.

Parson twisted himself around with uncanny, snake-like agility. His startled eyes glared venomously at Howdy. He caught up his wrench and was off his knees like a shot as Howdy's rush carried him against the crumpled cowl.

With all the fury of a thwarted devil Parson darted at the driver. His game was up but he attacked with wild ferocity.

It was well for Howdy then that his muscles acted with the flashing, almost instantaneous reaction time of a good speed pilot. He slid in under the blow of the wrench and clamped his arms around Parson's body.

But he might as well have tried to hold a leopard. Parson writhed with infernal strength.

"You'll never jail me!" he spat out and tore himself away.

Howdy leaped after him; then ducked. The wrench, flung with terrific force, jarred against the top of his padded helmet. He charged on.

John Parson was out of the black smoke now on the sloping bank of the track. He paused there, for an instant, eyes glaring around the oval and the myriad people that ringed him in.

A gray racing machine, six laps behind but turning the unending track at a steady hundred miles, came shooting around the bend. The weary driver was clinging to the infield edge of the bend to avoid the smoke.

Parson darted a look back at Howdy. His lips split in a grimace that revealed his teeth, a grimace of hate and triumph. Then he leaped, straight at the car.

Confession—before a hundred and fifty thousand people!

Momentarily, as the blurred outline

of the right front wheel merged with his moving figure, John Parson seemed to disappear. An instant later, as dead as Tom Stone, his mangled body rolled against the crash wall. The car, with the pilot fighting his wheel, thundered on.

Howdy whirled and darted back to the burning car. Croak, handicapped by his broken arm, was working desperately to get Russ Undercliff's leg clear of the crumpled cowl and steering wheel. The motor had died. A whiff of heat and a lick of flame from under the hood speeded his efforts. Howdy went into action, too.

Undercliff, quite conscious now, was squirming vigorously, swearing and talking. Too flat on the bricks to see, he hadn't grasped the significance of the puffs of heat and kept enveloping them.

"Parson s-socked me with that wrench!" the fat driver rasped beligerently. "While we were wheeling! B-Blast him! Go on, pull! Bet he's been r-robbing me! The estate lawyers went to check up. Ow! Hey!"

"You've been signing too many checks blind, Bullet," Howdy said with a warning glance at Croak, who was staring too pointedly toward the mounting fire. Howdy's eyes held Undercliff's compellingly; he talked rapidly: "Parson tried to kill you, Bullet, because you'd know he'd robbed you as soon as the lawyers dug into things. Throwing suspicion on East, he killed the wrong man—Tom Stone. That scared him off you—for a while."

Howdy strained until his muscles cracked and the sheet steel of the cowl gave a little. His face ran water as the flames licked toward his back.

"P-Parson changed his plan—after that," he panted. "He bet ten thou-

sand—your money—on Lance East to get back enough to square his accounts. And he p-poisoned Whitman and used Ganz and Hart to help East win. Only East—a white man all through—stopped him by crashing his car. Then Parson had to go back to k-killing you—"

"Only he couldn't get away—" Undercliff's voice died away. His mouth sagged open as he saw the flames.

"Well, for—by—Look at—Uh!"

With sudden, spasmodic energy he dragged his leg clear as Howdy bent the cowl metal again. Nimbly Undercliff rolled away from the flaming car.

A special policeman with another at his heels came tumbling over the crash wall. Further down the track a third bent over the body of John Parson.

"Anybody hurt?" the cop panted.

"You would get here when—" Undercliff gestured vigorously toward Howdy's car. "Roll your hoop!" he commanded. "This is a race—"

But Howdy and Croak were running. The yellow flag was up and, long as this grim interlude had seemed, no one back in the second division had yet passed them. They shot away, with a lean yellow car from nowhere hanging on their flank.

The end was only four laps off. Four laps and Howdy had ground out a hundred and ninety six! The green flag showed again and the last ten miles fled under his whirling wheels with the challenger blaring indomitably in close pursuit. A fine spectacle one man's evil purpose had made of that contest of clean, roaring speed but it was still a race. Howdy, stern-faced, heavy-footed, kept it that way. But, in his own mind, he was riding it not for himself nor Russ Undercliff nor Lee Whitman but for Lance East, living or dead.

Ahead on the unending track a little man was standing. Howdy stared uncomprehendingly. Then he caught sight of something the man was shaking out—a black and white checkered flag. Finish! Howdy jerked up a weary hand and in his third mount went surging past to victory.

SOcially, as was his custom, Russ Undercliff split an ambulance with his cousin Lance. Russ had strained his leg badly in the convulsive effort that had freed him from his burning wreck.

The blare of cars still finishing hung like a thunderous overtone above Russ's voice.

"Sure, Lance is all right," he assured Howdy, with a glance at his silent, white-faced cousin. Lance had his pipe gripped stubbornly between bloodless lips. "He only cracked some bones and stuff—we're always doing it in this family."

Of a sudden, Russ stared closely at Howdy. "You don't look so hot yourself," he said, moving clear of the entrance. "Come aboard! Take a ride with us."

But Howdy stood on the step and traded news. Gus Hart, who had talked under the intimidating shadow of death, was already gone to a prison ward. Lee Whitman and his mech

were feeling better but still not much interested in hot dogs. And Sam Ganz—

"His number was up," Russ Undercliff said succinctly. "Same as mine wasn't—thanks to you."

Howdy told his end of it, crisply, and Lance nodded casually when Howdy came to the flat statement that he had tried to crash Lance. It was plain that he knew and took it as no more than a break of the game.

"And that's the kind of detective I turned out to be," Howdy concluded. "Wrong from the green flag almost to the checker. Brains in my feet."


Russ fed himself a licorice cough-drop. He touched the lump on the point of his jaw raised by Parson's wrench and looked with vast respect at Howdy's right foot.

"Brains in your foot," he corrected. "The only thing that saved my skull was that heavy throttle foot. It brought you up on top of Parson just in time. I'll bet that carburetor of yours is a whiz—if it works on a foot control."

"It will be," Howdy predicted. "But before I let any outfit have it I want to test it out in a long race against mighty tough opposition."

He looked at Lance East.

East met his eyes. "I'll be there," he promised brusquely.



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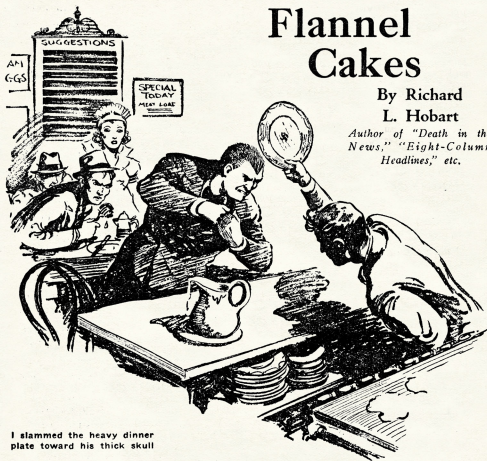
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PROBAK JUNIOR

Flannel Cakes

By Richard
L. Hobart

Author of "Death in the
News," "Eight-Column
Headlines," etc.



I slammed the heavy dinner plate toward his thick skull

I DIDN'T like the guy from the instant I laid eyes on him. I was standing on the sidewalk in front of one of the Bostwick chain of cafés when the mug sidles up to me, whispers something in my ear and lets me see a five-spot in the palm of his hand.

He was just about as big as Jess Willard, had a jaw that jutted like the front of a truck, and big thick lips. He was no college graduate. His hair almost met the top of his eyebrows, and he had little eyes that looked mean as a snake's. His hair was clipped close

A Little Food, a Girl, and Ambition Can Make a Giant-Killer out of a Bantamweight!

to his scalp, stuck up like bristles in a scrub brush and gave him a fierce—and dumb—appearance.

I was busted flatter than the flannel cakes I watched the blonde movie star in the window expertly toss around. Boy, she was a looker! And I saw a dark-faced guy, apparently the manager, standing behind her and his eyes told me he shared my admiration—but he wasn't thinking about flannel cakes. Right at the moment, I'd have exchanged a handful of blondes for a stack of flannel cakes—if they were smothered in sirloins.

But I wasn't *that* hungry—yet.

So I just turned around, put all my strength into a blow and my fist socked the guy right smack-dab on the chin.

That one blow took something out of me. A fellow can't get a lot of strength from a cup of java and two doughnuts, and that had been twelve hours before. So I guess my fist lacked a lot of steam.

But the plug-ugly didn't lack anything when he jumped for me. Boy, it was a massacre! I saw a right coming and dodged to the left—and stuck my chin into his other fist which had started from his shoe tops. It was like being hit with an El train. This guy knew his hooks and jabs and no mistake! He threw his fist at me about six times and it was like Jack Dempsey in his prime—he never missed.

About then, the sidewalk bounced up and slammed me in the face. I heard a crash, a musical tinkling. Then I saw the prettiest display of fireworks going off inside my head. I tried to sidestep, shake them out, but it was no soap. They hit me all at once.

I opened my eyes and thought I was in heaven. My head was turned a bit to the side and about ten feet away was a man in a white coat cutting slabs of red beef from a roast the size of a bale of hay. On top of some red charcoal next to him three chickens turned on spits.

And the smells!

I forgot all about being hit with the cement sidewalk. I was drooling, and if I didn't get something to rub against my palate pretty quick I was going to commit a couple of first-class homicides. A voice sounded in my ear.

"Steady, Wally, hold 'er steady, boy! Here, drink this chicken broth and take it slow."

I looked up into the eyes of a young-

ster about my age. Clear blue eyes they were, but I thought there was worry far back in their depths. It was young Ted Bostwick. I didn't have to ask what he was doing in the café kitchen; he just owned the place.

"The same old Wally White," he grinned softly down at me. "Just like you were in high school and college, you little idjit! No bigger than a minute yet you'd scrap a battery of buzzsaws at the drop of a hat. Ginnie said she saw you slug that big guy and then he swarmed all over you before he threw the brick through the window and beat it. *Tsk, tsk!*" He shook his head.

"Yeah," I grinned, sipping the chicken broth, "that's what the mug wanted *me* to do. Then I socked him."

"And you could have used that piece of change Ginnie saw him offer you, couldn't you? She knew that package under his arm was either a brick or a chunk of lead."

"Ginnie?" I asked, puzzled.

"Virginia, my sister. Don't guess you ever met her." He looked up, then back at me. "Here she comes now."

The next instant I was looking up into eyes the color of a Killarney lake set in an oval face that would have made six or eight so-called movie queens give up in despair. Yeah, it was the girl of the flannel cakes, but why the sister of a guy who owned six big cafés was working in a flannel cake window was beyond me at the moment. And I decided that maybe *some* blondes were worth more than sirloin steaks after all.

"How's the mighty gladiator?" she asked with a grin. That grin did something to me. It awed me, made me catch my breath. I don't know any words that mean more than "*beautiful*," but maybe you kind of get what I

mean. And it was a laugh about what Ted Bostwick said of me going to college. I did go—for three weeks—and then had to leave and start making money for the family when Dad got hurt.

"I feel like it's going to be thumbs up now," I told her, finishing off the chicken broth.

"Ted's been telling me about you. Wally." She called my name as if she'd been doing it the past ten years. "Especially that time you helped him lick the school bully. But I see you're not afraid of people just because they're big. B-But this time, Wally, it might be dangerous." Her face clouded, looked worried.

"Shucks." I blushed and looked away. I hadn't thought of it being dangerous. That's one of my troubles: I never do. I was a little guy, all right, and that's why none of the detective agencies of the city would put me on after I lost out with the National Agency when it folded on me. I weighed all of a hundred-forty when I was well-fed. Heck, I can't help it because I'm a half-pint. But I've been told I make up for my lack of weight in other ways. Now with a .38—

"Here's something you'll be interested in," Ginnie said, and got to one side.

I sat up quick, wobbled a moment with dizziness, and then got my molars into action. I grinned at Ginnie and Ted Bostwick.

"Excuse manners," I said, shoving rare roast beef into a place where it'd do the most good.

THEY laughed, winked at each other. I saw Ginnie looking at the bruised spots on my face and then turn away, a queer look on her face. After a while, the third cup of coffee stowed

away, Ted Bostwick nodded for me to follow him, led the way into the main café. It was cold there. And no wonder; the entire front window was gone where that mug had slammed the brick through it. The space was covered with a huge square of canvas. Only a few customers were in the café, and the waitresses stood around in dejected groups.

Ted Bostwick's face was white and haggard as we entered his private office on the mezzanine. He motioned me to a chair, sank wearily into the one facing his desk. Then he shrugged.

"Wally, it's been hell the past ten days. That's why Ginnie is down here; to look after me as she claims. She's an asset at that; people come in and try to flirt with her—but she's been places."

"Protection racket?" I questioned.

"Yes," he nodded. "As far as the public knows, the protection racket went out with Capone and those others years ago. But it exists just the same. Only now it's secret and it's so dangerous to do anything against the gang that even the police aren't quite certain it still flourishes. That window-breaking stunt a while ago happened to all six of my restaurants at the same time. I got phone calls while you were asleep." He grinned, lit a cigarette. Then: "The breaking of the glass isn't anything. The insurance covers that. But our places won't gross enough today to pay off the waiters. Outside of food spoilage, there's a darned nice profit lost too. And people don't like to patronize a place and maybe have glass mixed in with their flannel cakes. I can't hold out forever, it's costing me big money every day." He shook his head, his eyes harried.

"Any ideas?"

"I guess you'll think I'm dumb,

Wally," he said slowly, "but I'm blank on the subject. Haven't a clue although I've had letters as to what to do in order to pay off." His jaw got craggy. "And I'll be damned if I pay!"

"What do the police say?"

"They don't." His smile was wry. "Oh, I can't blame 'em! It's happened too many times now. They lay it to labor trouble but that isn't true. My employees receive more than the average and I can prove it. Of course, once in a while we have to let somebody go but our employee turnover is smaller than most. The police can't keep a man stationed in front of my places twenty-four hours a day. I've tried to hire private detectives but they shy off."

I thought a second.

"Which probably means there's a pretty strong organization," I advanced. "By the way, has Ginnie—er—your sister, ever seen this big hulk who threw the brick before?"

"No."

"Well, I'll bet he spends most of his time out at Pal Moran's place. All the petty crooks do. I'll go out that way in a day or two and have a look-see. If I can locate him I may be able to find out who he's working for."

"You'll go?"

"Sure, Ted," I told him. "You don't know it but you've hired a private detective."

"I don't get you," he said, puzzled.

"I've gone to work for you," I grinned. "All I want is my cakes and ale for a while. Maybe we can have some luck."

"But—but, Wally—I!" He flushed, looked uncomfortable, eyed me closely.

"Yeah, I know," I said, and I guess my voice rasped for he looked at me strangely. "I'm about as big as a small quarter of beef, but you might be surprised when I get a couple days of

food under my belt. No harm in trying, is there?"

"No, Wally," he said softly, and I saw grudging admiration in his face. "You've a job, at that or anything else you want to do, but for the love of Mike watch your step!"

"Don't worry. I've some hunches—"

The door burst open. The dark-faced man I'd seen in the flannel cake window ogling Ginnie Bostwick a while before rushed in, his face blanched and his eyes showed fright. He had a square of paper in his hand. He was out of breath, panting.

"Mr.—Mr. B-Bostwick," he faltered, "a—a note from—from—" He saw me, stopped in some confusion.

"Wally, this is Lemley, Harper Lemley, my manager here. Lemley, meet Wally White. He's going to work on this window breaking for us." Ted Bostwick's face was grave as he reached for the square of paper.

"Well, we need him," Lemley rapped. He'd regained his composure now, eyed me keenly as we shook hands.

Ted Bostwick finished reading the message, handed it over to me. I read:

Unless you want glass in your soup and spaghetti every day you'd better make arrangements to start paying the five hundred a week we're asking. Otherwise the glass companies are making big profits this year because we're breaking 'em out as fast as you put 'em in! After a while we're going to get tired of breaking glass—then we get personal! When you put the following sign in red paint on all your front windows we'll know you're ready to play ball—

FLANNEL CAKES
and
Pure Maple Sirup
and Coffee
25c

Later we'll tell you how and where to pay off. If you want to stay in the café business you'd better get wise—fast!

The letter was typewritten, carried no signature.

"Where'd it come from?" I snapped at Lemley.

"Some man put it on the cashier's counter, then ducked out. The girl said she didn't even get a good look at him."

"She wouldn't," I said. Things were beginning to get interesting.

PAL MORAN'S place was out on the edge of town. It was a long, low building where he had his night club, a bar and eating place, and next to it was another squat building in which was a bowling set-up, a dozen pool tables and a rifle and pistol range. Moran wasn't overlooking any bets when it came to taking money from the sporting element of the city.

He called his place Recreation Center and it was a gold mine. Every night the whole works teemed with activity, and that wasn't counting the upstairs rooms devoted to a roulette wheel, bird cages, dice, faro and other nice little pastimes.

One didn't find the elite of the city hanging around Pal Moran's place. It was patronized by the fast set, cheap gamblers—and some not so cheap—hard women, petty crooks and chiselers. But I had an idea Moran was honest. I was pretty certain he wouldn't stick out his neck for enough to be hit over the head with a protection racket charge, but I was just as certain he might be able to tell me who was behind it. And he'd tell me if he knew.

Moran attended to his own business pretty closely. There was just one thing I was banking on. That was finding Mr. Plug-Ugly out there. The guy who tossed bricks for a living would look upon the Recreation Center as most folks would grand opera. He at

least would have to be seen there, if you get me.

If I could locate Plug-Ugly at Moran's place, there was a chance I'd later find out who he worked for if I had to tail him all over the county. So it was four in the afternoon when I slid Ted Bostwick's coupé to a halt in the graveled parking lot next to the Recreation Center. I knew the merri-ment didn't start before seven o'clock, but I also knew that in the afternoon there'd be a gang of the fellows whooping it up and I might run across Plug-Ugly.

I heard revolvers cracking out in the target range as I walked into the night club section where Moran had his office. Moran was a pretty good friend of mine, and particularly so when I showed him how to do some tricks with the Police Positive. Shooting a gun comes as natural to me as pointing a finger. Coming from Arizona, and my Dad being a sheriff all his life, had made me as familiar with a six-gun as most kids are with tricycles and little red wagons.

A waiter busy setting tables left his work long enough to ask my business. He told me Moran was over in the shooting gallery. I nodded, went on outside. I was feeling pretty good. The past three days of steady meals whenever I felt hungry had ironed out all the wrinkles in my midriff, filled the hollows in my cheeks. Ted had slipped me enough money to buy a new outfit and I was on top. But I had a lot to repay.

And Ginnie—

A man loses a lot of judgment when he falls for a girl. Ginnie and her brother had been nice to me. But I'd found out some things just by keeping my eyes open that Ted didn't think I understood. If there were many more

window breaking stunts it wouldn't be long before some guy wanting an early breakfast would see a sheriff's sign on the front doors of the Bostwick cafés. Yeah, it was that bad.

With this protection racket thing out of the way, the cafés would make big money. Ted and Ginny, who had come into the chain when their father died the year before, would have a dollar for every penny I'd earned in my whole life. Sure, I fell for her like a ton of bricks. Of course there wasn't a chance and I knew it just like I knew today was Wednesday.

I heard six shots sound in the rapid fire as I stepped inside the door of the pistol range. But the bell only rang once. That is pretty rotten shooting if you ask me. At the counter facing the moving and stationary targets was a crowd of fifteen or twenty men. Pal Moran had just finished shooting when I came in. He saw me, grinned.

"Hey, you Wally," he shouted. "Come over here, boy, and show us how to hit what we're shooting at!"

He shook hands, a grin on his Irish face. I saw only two or three in the crowd who looked familiar. Plug-Ugly wasn't there. But a group of four men off to one side and not taking part in the target practice except as spectators interested me. They looked like newcomers, as tough and sinister a bunch of cobras dressed in pants as I'd seen in a long time. From the side of my eye I caught them whispering excitedly together as they got a look at me.

I got it then. These four probably were in a car parked a couple doors up the street while Plug-Ugly was trying to get me to sling the brick through the Bostwick window. Failing that he'd done it himself. And the four had a chance to see what I looked like. But they didn't know I was lined up with

Ted Bostwick. I'd kept out of sight the past few days.

"You'll have to stake me to the ammunition, Pal," I told him.

"Hell, Wally, ammunition'll never cost you anything here! I put you in the exhibition class, kid. After you finish dusting 'em off business picks up; the amateurs get ideas." He laughed, tossed several boxes of shells on the counter.

I have a Police Positive that I've done a few things to. Such as filing a certain spring that gives you a short, hair-trigger pull. It's a dangerous arrangement unless you know your guns. I threw back my cylinder, looked at the five shells in place. Incidentally, it's best never to fully load a revolver. Always keep the hammer and pin on the empty. If five shots aren't enough then you're probably not interested any longer anyway.

THE first target I took a wham at was the usual bull's-eye type. The bell tingled four times out of five. "Smatter, kid?" Moran laughed.

"First practice I've had in two months," I told him. "I'm cold, but wait a moment."

I took the chain of moving white ducks eleven straight without a miss; five in my own gun and six in Moran's which I had to grab up from the counter. The pendulum bell target, with an inch aperture over the bell, rang five times. I snapped ten pipestems—not the larger target offered by the bowl—out of twelve shots.

I began to hear comment from behind me. Pal Moran didn't know it but he was playing right into my hand. Those four thugs standing off to one side were taking it in with open mouths and wide eyes. They had a surprise coming; they didn't yet know I was working for Bostwick.

Then I caught something from the side of my eye that made me tense. Plug-Ugly, the brickman, had joined the four newcomers and was looking at me with wondering eyes. But the mug was in the background nearest the door ready to beat it. He would be! I wasn't ready to go after him yet because I had something in mind first.

"Got any new tricks?" Moran asked, tickled at what he'd seen.

I thought a moment, then grinned. "Sure," I nodded. "It's one that proves the hand is quicker than the eye. I'll need a poker chip and an old bell that's been cracked or discarded."

I put the bell on the floor, stood arm's length away. I held my hand shoulder high and dropped the poker chip on the bell. It gave forth a flat sound but was clearly audible. I took off my coat, stuck my gun loosely in the waistband of my new trousers.

"The idea is this," I explained. "I stand arm's length from the bell on the floor, put my arm out shoulder high, the chip on the back of my hand. I slowly turn my hand until the poker chip slides off. Like this." I demonstrated. The five thugs were watching closely.

"Then," I grinned, "while the chip is in the air, I draw and fire at the stationary target. I'll fire at least two shots before it clangs the bell on the floor. I don't guarantee to make a bull's-eye on the target, though, but you'll find the shots pretty close to center. The idea is, gentlemen, just suppose the center of the target is a guy's heart. Get me?" I laughed, turned to Moran. "Pal, you be the judge."

"Like hell!" Moran laughed, reaching for his pocket. "I'm betting you can do it!" He yelled: "Even money the kid can do it!"

It took five minutes to get the money

placed and the judges selected. It was a pretty big handicap for me. Usually in a stunt like that you wear a belt holster and you gain time because you don't have to crook your arm partially across your body in drawing. But it would take some moving. And I had to do it the first time!

I squared off, but the chip on the back of my hand, slowly turned it. I felt the chip start to slide. Now one of the tricks of the stunt is this: Naturally, all eyes are not on me *but on the poker chip*. They see it start to slide across the back of my hand, say: "It's falling!" But with eyes glued on the white chip they don't see my hand rise a good six inches—and that half a foot means an extra split second!

Then I jerk my hand *from under* the chip! It actually seems to be hanging in midair for an appreciable instant. for as I start the draw I close my fist and if it's done right the arched muscles momentarily kill the pull of gravity. Get it? But if you don't think it calls for some fast work just try it sometime—with an *empty gun*!

I pulled trigger *three times*. The target bell rang twice, then *tinged*. Which meant a split shot.

Then there was a flat, metallic sound as the poker chip hit the bell on the floor.

I grinned, watched Pal Moran collect his bets and there wasn't even the beginning of an argument.

"Kid," Moran said, "you'd better let me sign you up as a bouncer."

It was what I'd been working for. I snapped, quickly: "Oh, I've got a good job, Pal, and it looks like I'll get chances to use the old gat after a while."

"How's that?" he asked, interested.

"I'm working for the Bostwick cafés," I said casually. "Punks have

been breaking their windows in a shakedown racket so they put me on."

That was all I said; I just grinned. I put on my coat, walked to Moran's office with him. But I saw the five thugs hurried away after they heard what I said. I wondered if my target shooting scared them off.

Pal Moran made me take a box of two-bit cigars when I refused to take a cut on his winnings. Then I told my story. He shook his head.

"I don't know a thing," he declared. "There're five new boys came in ten days ago. Maybe you saw them watching you. But maybe that target practice you did scared them off if they're the ones. But you keep your eyes open and I'll do the same."

We talked for thirty minutes or so. The telephone rang and Moran answered it. He handed the receiver over to me.

I frowned. Ted Bostwick knew where I was, and that he was calling meant just one thing—trouble. I listened a while, then hung up.

"Well, kid?" Moran asked, voice troubled.

"Nothing much," I said wearily. "It was my boss. A while ago five men went to our Chase Street café and ordered flannel cakes. They sat in the back. They finished, threw something in the kitchen and ran. It was a small bomb. One of our men had his hand blown off and the place is a wreck. Don't guess I scared 'em enough." I got to my feet, grinned a bit with my teeth tight against my teeth. "Thanks for everything, Pal, and if I'm not back tomorrow—make it *carnations!*"

IT was nearly midnight. Outside it was raining. There wasn't a soul in the café but the night cashier, one waitress and the short-order cook.

Ginnie and her brother, Lemley and I were in the mezzanine office overlooking the tables below. The police were working on the Chase Street bombing but so far had no ideas. I told them of the five thugs at Moran's place and they had a couple men out there waiting. But it stood to reason the five ten-minute eggs wouldn't show up again.

Lemley, the manager, was worried stiff, as nervous as a cat. He was over in a corner at the mimeograph machine running off menus for the next day. But he couldn't keep his eyes off the clock.

"Mr. Bostwick," he said, face fidgety, "we're having a hard time getting people to work for us. All of them want to know what it means and I can't keep on stalling them. My secretary quit on me this afternoon and I'm having to run these things off. Had to make the stencil myself. It—it's got me worried, and customers are scarce."

Ted Bostwick nodded. He was plenty worried. So was Ginnie, for she kept twisting her handkerchief nervously. I walked over and offered to help Lemley but he grinned at me and said he'd just finished. I picked up one of them, read the specials for the next day:

Hot Roast Beef Sandwich...25c.
Barbecued Lamb Sandwich...25c.
Spaghetti and Cheese.....20c.
Ragout of Beef.....25c.
Vegetable Stew.....

And right at that moment, something slapped me between the eyes with the force of a .45 slug. I grinned to myself, looked at the wall clock. It read ten minutes of twelve. We were closing at midnight for the simple reason it cost us plenty to stay open and no customers.

"I've got to have some cigarettes," I said all at once.

I hurried through the rain to a drug store up the block and got back at three minutes of the hour. The cashier, waitress and cook were just leaving from the side door as I walked in the front. I went behind the counter for a few moments. I heard the side door lock snap, saw the three employees hurry off. Ted and Ginnie were downstairs, had their coats and hats on. Lemley was inspecting the coffee urns.

The front door opened.

Ginnie screamed. I wheeled, my hand darting toward my gun. But I suddenly froze. Five men walked toward me from the street door. One of them carried a suit case. They were the five thugs of Moran's place.

"I wouldn't, smart guy!"

It was Plug-Ugly who snapped out the words. He advanced on me and I saw he had an automatic ready in his huge fist. Then he took my .38, stuck it in his pocket. He said from the side of his mouth: "Jeff, lock that front door."

The man called Jeff locked it, returned and motioned the four of us to walk to the rear and sit down. He sneered at Ginnie, winked. "Hey, Queenie!" he called with a smirk. Ginnie sniffed.

Plug-Ugly and the others roared with laughter. Jeff suddenly had an idea. "I'm hungry, you guys, so whata you say we have some more them flannel cakes?" He thought it was a good joke. "Yeah, and let Queenie cook 'em," Jeff suggested.

"But listen," one man said, a worried look on his face. "the copper on this beat will be passing by in front—"

"Let him," Plug-Ugly said with a laugh. "We're just five customers eating flannel cakes, ain't we? He can't

come in, he's got to stay on his beat. We'll be in the back anyway, so he can't see us. Nobody out in this rain tonight. That's all there is to it." He swerved on Ginnie. "Flannel cakes, Queenie, and make it with plenty of maple syrup."

They went to the back, sat on stools at the counter. To a person outside it appeared that the night crew was eating, didn't look suspicious at all.

I stepped up. "I'll cook the cakes, Ginnie," I told her.

"Like hell!" Jeff snapped, ready to reach for his gun.

"And have a good-looking blonde up front all the time where you can't see her?" I laughed.

"Say!" Plug-Ugly thought I had good ideas. He nodded to me. "Go cook 'em, punk, but remember we've a gun on your back all the time. If that copper passes while you're cooking them cakes just pretend you don't see him. We're going to blow this joint to hell after we've had a mess of cakes each." He looked at the man with the suitcase.

The café had a corner location with windows all around. It was easy to see up and down the street. I groaned. There wasn't a soul in sight. The rain slanted and blew against the windows, swirled in gray sheets of spattering water. It looked bad. No one was out, even the cop on the beat was staying inside.

I placed a pitcher of maple syrup before each of them, turned toward the hot plate in the window. Ginnie, trembling, had her coat off. Underneath she still wore her white uniform. Plug-Ugly made Lemley and Ted Bostwick sit down out of sight from the street.

IN two minutes I had the hot plate sizzling. I poured on the batter which I got from an electric refrig-

erator near the window. In two more minutes I had ten hot cakes on plates. I nodded to Ginnie.

"Chin up, Ginnie," I whispered to her. "Just play along and depend on me. I had to get up to the window; that's why I said what I did. I've got a trump card."

She looked at me, her deep blue Killarney eyes suddenly trusting.

"I *knew* you would!" she said softly, and picked up the plates.

She served Plug-Ugly, Jeff and the other three, returned for another helping. Suddenly I heard Plug-Ugly's harsh voice, his mouth full of flannel cakes."

"You in the window," he snapped at me. "There's a—a newsboy coming along the side street and he—he'll pass in front of you. Make a crack and—and I'll pot you, see?"

I nodded, piled five more plates full of flannel cakes, gave them to Ginnie. I carefully poured more batter on the hot plate. Over my shoulder I saw the five thugs empty the rest of the maple syrup on the cakes, wolf them down. My eyes went up without my head moving and I saw the newsboy watching me.

Then he went on.

By the time I got back to Plug-Ugly and the others the flannel cakes had disappeared. He scowled at me, jaws working.

"Get to—to hell back and cook some more there—them—flap jacks, punk, or—or—"

"Or you'll what?" I rapped at him. I'd seen something that made excitement surge through me, made little tingles race up my spine.

I reached under the counter, got my fingers on a heavy dinner plate.

Plug-Ugly was on his feet, his eyes narrowed, his huge body swaying a bit

as he fumbled with his gun. And he was sore.

I broke the dinner plate over his thick skull!

"That's for throwing that brick!" I yelled at him.

There was a scream from Jeff. He got to his feet, his hand moving for his automatic. But I was on him. I leaped over the marble counter, my fingers darting for his throat. He went back and down. His head hit hard on the floor and he lay quiet, didn't even groan.

The other three men towered over me. I jumped to my feet, dodged the slow rush of one man, tripped the other. I got my fingers on a maple syrup pitcher just as the third man got his hand on his gun. I slammed him in the face with it. The handle broke off in my hand; the man broke his forehead open on the edge of the counter as he fell.

There were three out of the way!

The other two wobbled toward me. I got hold of another plate, laid it edgewise across the ear of one of them. He went out so fast it was like he'd been cut off by a switch. The fifth man stood blinking at me. I dived for his belly and my head went up to my ears in it. He *whooshed*, went down. I slugged him with the plate which I still had in my hand. It didn't break. But the man was sleeping. I got to my feet, the plate still in my hand.

Ted Bostwick and Lemley stood up from behind the counter, awe and surprise intermingled in their faces. I was panting. But I wasn't through yet. I said:

"Lemley, damn you, you're next!"

Lemley didn't say a word. He just stood there a moment, a look of utter surprise on his face. Then it slowly red-dened as I walked toward him. His

eyes flashed hate—and fear. His hand jerked toward his left armpit and I gasped.

I'd never thought of a gun!

It just didn't occur to me that Lemley would carry a gat. I'd never seen the bulge of one, never suspected he was that tough a mug. The next instant I was looking into the end of a .32.

He had me. My thoughts snapped back to what I'd told Pal Moran. Yeah, it looked like carnations, all right. *And lilies!*

"You interfering brat!" Lemley snarled. "The game's up but I'm shooting your face out the back of your head before I lam! You queered the whole business and I had a chance to either clean up big dough every week or buy out for almost nothing. You asked for it, damn you, *so take it!*"

I saw his arm jerk, stiffen. I knew what that meant, knew that in another split second I'd feel hot lead. I pulled the old sombrero trick on him, the plate in my hand taking the place of the hat.

I stood tense, flipped the white plate up in the air close to my head. And in that same movement I dove at his legs!

There was the crack of the .32 and glass shattered. I heard the pieces spatter all over the place as his bullet smacked it instead of me. It's an old trick, works on the scientific fact that the eye in tense moments invariably swerves to a moving object. Then I had him around the knees. But the force of my drive threw us back and he fell on top of me, the gun hammering at my ribs. He didn't have a chance to pull trigger again, I kept him too busy.

I squirmed from under. There was more shattering of glass and I saw the front door swing open. Four uniformed men and a detective ran to-

ward me. I swung on Lemley's jaw. He hammered the gun at my temple. I caught it in my two hands, jerked and pulled at the same instant. Then I had it. I kicked him away from me, snapped the gun up, let my finger squeeze the trigger.

It was all over. The shot caught Lemley in the thigh, just as I'd wanted, and he was through for the night.

WHILE I panted breath back into my lungs I heard Ted Bostwick tell the story. Ginnie was sitting with her arm around me. It was all right with me if she thought I needed help!

"And this little guy," the detective nodded at me, his face blank with puzzlement, "knocked out all *five* of these mugs and then shot this Lemley?" he cried. "I see 'em, all right, but damned if I believe it!" He pondered a moment. "But I'll give him credit for being clever with that message."

"Message!" Ted Bostwick shrilled. "He didn't send a message!"

"Sure he did," the detective laughed. "If you'll look at that flannel cake hot plate up front in the window you'll see it. He wrote upside down and backwards on the plate: 'HELP—GET COPS!' Wrote it in flannel cake batter! A newsboy saw it and phoned for a riot squad."

"Well I'll be damned!" Ted turned to me. "Wally, how in the world did you know Harper Lemley was the head of this gang? He was the last one I'd have suspected."

"He couldn't spell, Ted," I told him. "That warning message we got several days ago, and which Lemley wrote and sent to himself, had the word 'spaghetti' spelled with only one 't.' Then on the menu he had to make the stencil for because his girl quit on him had spaghetti and cheese listed and

again it was minus a 't.' I saw him looking at the clock and he was so nervous I had an idea we were getting visitors at about midnight. You know the rest." I shrugged, then went limp so Ginnie wouldn't forget to keep her arms tight around me.

The detective, his name was Clifford Holland, was down on the floor over Plug-Ugly. He bent close to the mug's face, then looked up at me.

"And you knocked out five huskies, eh?" he asked softly. He started to say something but caught my frown. He grinned, looked at Ginnie and then back at me. He nodded. "Hey, kid," he said softly, "better come down to headquarters and see me in the morning. I'd say this bunch of chisclers will be laughed out of the state for letting a hundred-forty pounder beat 'em up. That is, *after* they get outa jail!"

I guess I flushed, but I nodded, thanked him with a look.

Nobody but that detective, Cliff Holland, who gets a Sunday dinner for the wife and kids from now on—*on the cuff!*—knows about it. You see, when I went out of the café at ten minutes of midnight I rushed up to the drug store and bought a big bottle of chloral instead of cigarettes. It mixes pretty well with maple syrup, you know! And Detective Holland had smelled it on Plug-Ugly's thick lips.

So that was that:

The wife, Ginnie Bostwick that was, still thinks I'm a giant killer, and if she knew I knocked out five guys who were asleep on their feet from tremendous doses of chloral she might get ideas! A ten-year-old kid could have done as well.

But listen—Lemley wasn't doped!

But Ginnie wonders sometimes why I insisted on naming the kid after a detective. The big cluck, he blackmailed me into that one!



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Wake Up With Death



Stewart crossed his fingers as a sign

By Cornell Woolrich

Author of "Round Trip to the Cemetery,"
"Blue Is for Bravery," etc.

Beads of Sweat Stood Out on Don Stewart's Face—Without Stirring from His Hotel Room, He Had to Snare the Mob Who Framed Him for the Chair

CHAPTER I

A Rendezvous With Death

A BUZZING thought, spiraling around his head like a fly, was the first harbinger of returning consciousness. "Drunk again! Why don't I cut it out?" Then the symptoms started to get to work, as Stewart came out of his shell: cement eyelids weighing a ton, mouthful of burnt feathers, head the size of an observa-

tion-balloon, balancing lightly on the pillows.

He groped out feeling for the aspirin and all he got was a fistful of empty space, so he had to open his eyes to find out why it wasn't there. He looked at one wall and he couldn't place it; then he looked at the other three and he couldn't place them either. The whole set-up was new, being broken in on him for the first time. He gave his scalp a dry-rub. "What the hell place is this?" he muttered. "How'd I get in here?"

He sat up and the whole room went swinging around him like a top. That was all right, he'd had rooms do that to him before. He just stayed where he was, and it slowed down and



stopped again. Now it was set for the day, wouldn't give him any more trouble. He figured a look out of the window might show him where he was. He swung his feet over the side, and they landed on something soft, something that felt too high up to be the floor, and too bunched-up to be a rug. He leaned over to look, and it was a lady lying there perfectly still, looking up at him.

He took his feet off her in a hurry, in such a hurry that his knees uppercutted his chin and knocked some grains of tooth-enamel loose. When he got over that a little, he crouched there on the edge looking over the side of the bed at her sort of inanely. She wasn't half bad-looking. Only, she was dead.

He got off the bed backwards, on the other side, like a trained seal, and he put his right foot in his left shoe and his left foot in his right, and left them that way. He went around and looked at her again. "Holy smoke, Toots," he whispered, frightened. "Did I do that to you?"

But that wasn't his speed. He liked them. He was a pushover for them. Even when they got him sore, he sort of enjoyed it. "Not me," he said, shaking his head and squatting down closer. "Don't try to tell *me* that, I know better!" But there she was—and there he was.

His sympathetic fingers—and they were that, though they could make swell fists too—felt her arm, told him she hadn't been in the room with him for hours. Way back last night some time, it must have happened, at the latest.

The window told him he was 'way up off the ground, that was all. Opposite, but a hell of a long ways opposite, another sheer cliff-like wall reared itself, bee-hived all over with little black win-

dow-openings just like this side he was on. Both wings were part of the same shack. And about seventeen stories below, when he opened the window and leaned out, the gap ended in a low two-story roof. But no sign of the street, or what part of town it was on.

The door, when he'd crept over to it, edged open, and the little swinging "Do not disturb" sign had rustled against him, telling him it was a hotel—which wasn't saying much. He'd suspected by now that it was no one-room tourist-camp bungalow.

He carefully closed the door again. He went back and gave himself another scalp massage. "But I've got to remember!" he groaned. "I've got to remember at least a little something, before I call them in here! If I don't they're going to think *I* did it!" He started pounding himself lightly with the back of his knuckles above the eyes. He knew how he was on days when he had a hangover. "If I don't get it now, while I'm still by myself, relaxed, I'll never get it with a roomful of people around me, shooting questions at me!" He could have sworn he'd never seen her before in his life. And yet he must have! If he could only remember who she was, where—and when—he'd met her!

IT was terrible, it was worse than amnesia. He drew a complete blank for the past twenty-four hours, and then some. Couldn't even remember when he'd gotten started on the binge, how long it had lasted, who'd been on it with him. He knew one thing, though, without having to be told: he hadn't been alone.

He wasn't a solitary drinker. There was a ray of hope there. And he was almost—but not quite—as certain that he hadn't killed her. Remember that

"not quite," though. It kept trying to rear up on him all the time; he squelched it over and over, but it was there waiting just the same. A grain of doubt. Maybe he had.

He picked up the phone. Oh, he was not going to report the murder, don't worry. He wanted to know definitely if she belonged in here with him, if he'd come in with her last night.

He said, "Desk." He said, "I was a little tight when I came in last night. How much are you charging me for this room?" They told him. He asked, "Single or double?"

"We always charge double for two in a room," was the answer.

So he'd brought her in alive. She'd been alive when this room-door he was behind now was closed on the two of them, sometime in the early hours of this morning! Doubt reared its ugly spade-shaped head full-length, and hissed in his face. He knocked it flat. "I didn't, I couldn't have!" he cried grimly. "I'm the friendliest cuss under the sun when I'm drunk. I bring home stray dogs and Bowery bums and milkmen's horses—"

He heard himself trying to say that to a roomful of detectives—and getting anywhere. He went for his hair again. "I've got to know at least who she is, where I found her. This way I haven't got a leg to stand on!"

He knew better than to lam out, or to let them find her after he was gone; he was too sensible to try that. That was for people that had really done it, for whom there was no other way out but flight. He hadn't done it, he had to stay in here with her until he was in a position to prove he hadn't.

The "Do not disturb" sign on the door was good for as long as he needed it. He had a phone in here with him, and if he just kept his head, there was

no reason why he shouldn't be able to partially—maybe even completely—clear the mess up without budging out of the room. Or he could at least reconstruct what had preceded it, as a sort of a springboard into the blank stretches of the bing. If he couldn't get at it from this end, the morning after, maybe he could get at it from the other end, the day before.

First he had to have an eye-opener. to get organized. "Room service," he said. "Send me up a great big beaker of tomato-juice and a shaker of paprika; room 1909." That had been the number on the outside of the door when he opened it just now, being very careful.

"Yes, Mr. Stewart." So he'd registered under his own name, too! Now he was sure he'd been plastered!

"Gimme an outside wire."

He tried Charlie Collins first of all; Charlie was almost sure to have been on any binge of his, at least part-time. They seemed to draw him like a magnet attracts steel-filings. "Charlie, was I with you last night?" he said huskily.

"I haven't seen you since Wednesday a week ago," said Charlie the statistical.

He tried again. "Ed, was I with you last night?" he pleaded.

"If you were, it was a dirty trick on me," said the utterly frank Ed. "You were wearing red hair to your shoulder and your name was Hazel. Next time I'm going to demand a complete set of blueprints."

Which may have been very funny at Ed's end, but not when you're trying to find out whether you've killed a girl or not.

Tom Blaine's valet told him Tom had been in Chicago for the past two weeks, and Frankie was in alimony jail playing marathon poker, and Bill's missis reminded him coldly she'd broken Bill

of his bad habits, including knocking around with Don Stewart.

HE tried again, and again, and again. Pretty soon he'd run out of side-kicks, was down to mere acquaintances. Nothing doing even there. Pretty soon he was down to barmen at the places he frequented, such of them as were open that early in the day. No, he hadn't been in last night, and how about that twenty-five he owed the house?

But he wouldn't give up. "For pete's sake, where was I? Where *was* I? Somebody's got to tell me!" The tomato-juice hadn't shown up yet, but he'd forgotten about it. He was getting nowhere fast.

Maybe he'd just been on the bust with her alone. But he could have sworn not, he knew himself too well. He liked stag drinking, and he wasn't a pick-up artist. He never went in for the two's-company sort of thing.

His were usually snowball-parties, the kind that accumulate as they roll along. Pete Rice's name came to him belatedly, and he tried him. And he got something—something he wished he hadn't!

Pete had very obviously been on a binge himself, the length of time it took him to get across his room to the phone. It fell out of Pete's hands a couple of times, after which they finally managed to get in tune.

Pete's voice was a groan. ("He should groan," thought Stewart morosely, "he should be over here at my end, he'd have something to groan about!")

"This is Stew—"

"So am I," said the groggy Pete. "No time of the day to be getting me up just to brag about it!"

"Don Stewart. Pull yourself to-

gether." And then forlornly, he'd dead-ended so many times already: "Was I with you last night?"

"Cert'ny!" said Pete promptly. "Trying to be funny? Didn't I stand up for you at Armonk, while you were getting yourself married at one this morning? Or rather, somebody held me up. You too, I guess—"

Poor Stewart nearly bent double over the phone all of a sudden, as if he had a cramp.

"You always were a sucker," Pete was saying.

Stewart started paying out the phone-cord, holding onto it while he inched slowly across the bed on his side, until he could look down at the floor on the other side. Whatever else it was, it was grotesque as the devil. He vaguely realized that even himself at the moment. But it wasn't funny, no it wasn't funny.

"Pete," he said in a voice that would have brought tears to the angels, "did she—did she have kind of wavy brown hair? Were her eyes blue? Try to think a minute." A drop of sweat rolled slowly down the bridge of his nose.

"Yeah, yeah!" said Pete agreeably. Then in sudden alarm, "You been short-changed? Was it a wig? Was one of the eyes glass? You remember what happened to Joe Boyle that time; he wakes up and finds a double-decker set of teeth parked in a glass of wat—"

"Cut it out," Stew groaned, "cut it out or I'll take a nose-dive out the window. I can't stand it."

CHAPTER II

Extortion by Phone

STEWART couldn't tell him over the phone what had happened, what he was almost sure now—he'd done it. It wasn't even that the operator down-

stairs might be listening in, it was more that he was too ashamed to have Pete or anyone hear a thing like that from him. Let him—let him come over and see for himself, that would be bad enough. "How long were you with me—with us, got any idea?"

"Just stopped by for me on your way up there, dropped me off on your way back."

"Anybody else with us?"

"Yeah, pink elephants in the rumble. And those little things—what d'you call them?—gnomes, elves; I kept stepping on them every time I turned around."

"Well, where, how, did I meet her? Didn't I tell you?"

"Have a heart, I wasn't on any 'wagon' myself. As I got it, you'd both claimed the same taxi around ten-thirty, and neither one would give in and climb out, so you finally settled it by getting married—or something."

Suddenly Pete caught on. "What's matter, something backfire?"

"Yeah, I'm in the soup."

"All right, I'll be over if it's that bad. If it isn't, tell me now, I'm in no shape for traveling—"

He got room-service again as soon as Pete was off. "Skip the tomato-juice and send me up a stiff jolt of rye." He needed it.

"For one?" he was asked.

"For one," he said bitterly.

The most important thing he hadn't found out yet. How.

Nothing showed. He had to get very close this time, use more than just his fingertips. Little round hole under the heart, under the black dress that didn't show blood to the eye. Skin pitted, point-blank range, contact-range.

The rearing Doubt wilted, coiled flat again. All but scotched completely. "I knew all along I didn't! Now I'm sure

I didn't! I've never owned one in my life! What am I waiting for? I oughta call them up right now. It'll look bad as it is, waiting this long; I can't pretend I didn't see her while I was making all those calls—"

He went to put on his trousers—folded neatly double across the seat of a chair. That wasn't his way ever—throw 'em down any old way was his habit. He straightened them out to knee into them, and they were heavy, too heavy with the black automatic-heft protruding from the side-pocket. The gun that smelled pungently even to his untrained nostrils from recent firing—that had one bullet gone out of its clip when he looked. The one that was over there in her heart.

He almost yelled it aloud, distracted. "No, that isn't mine! Pointing guns at women, putting bullets into their lovely hearts! Drunk or unconscious, no one changes *that* much!"

And yet here it was in the room with him, here it was in his hand. The doubt writhed twistingly all around him, like in that statue of the Laocoön. What good would it do to throw it out of the window, they'd only pick it up from that extension-roof below. It wasn't his precious hide that worried him so much, anyway; it was his own inner peace of mind he was after. And disposing of the gun had nothing to do with that. The gun belonged in here with her, and the bullet, and the rest of it; it must stay here.

Pete was taking a hell of a long time to get over here; why hadn't he just jumped in a taxi and made it by now? And the bracer was taking even longer to get up here. He needed them both bad! He rang Pete again. "Hurry it up, will you?" he wanted to say, "I'm in a witch of a fix here!" Only this time it kept ringing, Pete didn't answer,

he must have left already. He got Room Service then and ordered the bracer all over again.

"More whiskey, Mr. Stewart?" they said politely.

"More?" What kind of a screwy place was this? "I didn't even get the first yet."

They didn't argue the point. "Right away, sir." And then he heard the voice say under its breath to someone: "We've got one of Them with us again. This'll probably go on for weeks. Be simpler to just run a pipe-line straight up there from the distillery."

THERE was a key-tap at the door and he thought it was the bracer finally showing up. He went up close. "Hello?" he said guardedly.

"Maid?" answered a feminine voice. "Maid yet?"

"Long ago, when I was eighteen," he cracked. "Don't that sign mean anything?"

"Well, you're up, aren't you? Gotta be done sooner or later. Might as well let me in now."

"Gimme five minutes, get my shirt on at least." He was too new at this game of covering up a murder, had too clear a conscience, to be really frightened. The innocent have a moral courage that the guilty can never hope to obtain.

He felt sure he could get away with what he was going to do in the short time she'd be in the room. He lifted the girl up, put her lengthwise in the roomy mirror-doored closet, turned the shower-dials in the bath, pulled the curtains together, closed both doors. The hissing beat of the water was plainly audible outside in the room.

A lady of uncertain vintage and unquestionable belligerence came in. She parked her stuff. She said disapprov-

ingly, "You gonna stay in here while I work, mister?"

"Maybe I can pick up a pointer or two," he said drily. He sat down midway between the phone and the closet door, ready to jump for either. She'd left the hall-door open as per regulations. The sign wobbled a little in the draft. He could tell he hadn't gotten over his hangover yet, because the copper-plated numerals on the outside of the panel seemed to fluctuate a little too.

Meanwhile she was trying to make it as tough for him as she could, just on general principle. She poked a long-handled mop between his outthrust legs and used them for oar-locks, managing to bark both his shins and smear floor-oil on his trouser-cuffs.

"Your wife takes long showers, don't she?" she said, thrusting out her chin. "She'll get rheumatism doing that."

"You mind your business," he said absently. A fine friend Pete was, letting him down like this! Probably stopped off on the way for a quick one, and now he was off again on another bender!

"Maybe she needs another piece of soap, I'll go in and leave this on the rack—"

"You stay out of there, what d'ye think it is, Grand Central Station?"

He went over to the phone, backwards so she couldn't pull anything while he wasn't looking. "Look," he said resignedly, without bothering to rake up the past. "I'd like a lot of whiskey. Maybe if you try sending me up a whole bottle it'll really get here—"

"What a man!" the voice said in a muffled aside. "Anything less than a quart and he don't even know he's had it!"

He had to hang up in a hurry, the Menace was making a bee-line for the

glass closet-door knob with a rag and a can of polish.

"That's doing all right the way it is. I love dull knobs, the bright ones hurt my eyes!"

She frowned forbiddingly. "Are you interfering with me duties? I'm a Union woman, one word from me and this whole place'll be pulled!"

"I don't care if you're Confederate." He wiggled his fingers at her, broadside. "Mosey on, have fun someplace else."

She banged the door, and he blotted his forehead lightly with the back of his hand.

IT was turning dark outside already, he must have come to fairly late in the afternoon. The monolithic wall of the other wing, opposite, was twinkling with haphazard little yellow squares, smaller than postage-stamps. The phone tinkled mildly.

Pete at last! Why didn't he come right up, instead of bothering announcing—? He jumped for it. "Pete!" he yapped, "I'm sweating bl—"

"Nope," said an unknown voice drily, "call me Buster."

"Wrong room, don't know any."

"You do now, so it's the right room. Now don't bother hanging up, or I'll only call back. I'm in a posish to make it tough for you."

Well, who wasn't? Stewart thought, biting the corner of his thumbnail, while he tried to jockey himself into position to meet whatever this was. "So what're you selling?" he wanted to know, a lot more jauntily than he felt.

"Silence," was the peculiar answer. "Int'rested in buyin' a hunk?"

"Why should I be?" was about all Stewart could think of, paying out more rope.

"Do I have to tell you?" jeered the

voice. "How's the little lady that won't sit up over there? I been watching you all afternoon. I got my eye on you right now."

Stewart, with the blood all going down his neck leaving his face flat, glanced once at the tightly-sealed door, once over at the distant wing with its brass-nailhead windows, no bigger. "You're a—liar," he said throatily.

"Want me to prove it? Keep your eyes shooting straight out your window, on the same level. I'm gonna turn out my light, count five, turn it on again."

One of the little yellow dabs went black. He counted slowly, one—two—three—four—five, and he hadn't hated numbers as much since he was in I-A. It went yellow again on five. His throat needed a lot of lubrication. "You're too far away," he managed to get off despairingly.

"Not with field-glasses. Do something with your hands and I'll prove it."

Stewart crossed his fingers as a sign—holding them up in front of his glistening face.

"You crossed your fingers in front of your face."

"This is all I needed!" he groaned to himself. He drew in air and it stayed cold all the way down his pipes, like menthol.

"How much you got on tap in the room with you?"

Oh, so that was it, a shake-down, eh? "Hold on and I'll find out." Conscious of distant eyes on him he took his wallet out of his coat, carefully counted the ninety he had in it three times over, to bring it up to an interesting total. He'd be a lot better off with that guy over here than over there where he was. "Just under three hundred," he spoke back.

"That all?" The voice sounded disappointed. "Will they cash a check for you down at the desk?"

They didn't know him and they probably wouldn't, Stewart let him know very definitely.

"All right, let it go at three C's—for a first installment," the voice said broadly. "Hate to do this, but I've run up a bill here and they been threatening me with the lock-out. Seal it in an envelope and leave it just outside your door. Go ahead, I'm watching you from here. And don't try nothing, or I'll have to phone downstairs and tip 'em off what you've got on your hands in there."

Stewart hung up, his tongue lumped against the inside of one cheek, a habit of his when he was figuring on being tricky. If there were two of them, and one kept tabs on him through the glasses while the other came around to call for the money, it wouldn't work. But the voice had made all its own decisions, without stopping to confer with anyone else, he'd noticed. And then there was another way of looking at it: they weren't any keener on denouncing him than he was on being denounced himself. By giving him away they were just doing themselves out of a lot of long-term easy money.

So he put the hush-money in a hotel envelope, sealed it, laid it down outside the door, and came back in again. He waited until he was sure the guy had started out after it, then he quickly put out his light, got the gun, eased the door open a hair's breadth, just enough to make out the white of the envelope through the crack.

When he saw it move, he jumped out, pinned it down flat with his foot, and the guy straightened up into his gun. "Inside," Stewart ordered tersely, "or I'll go to town on you right where

you are, hall or no hall."

CHAPTER III

A Long Story—and True

THE guy took him at his word. He acted more disgusted—with himself, for botching things up—than anything else. For which Stewart didn't blame him. He was a pool-roomish type, bald to the 42nd Parallel, all blue beard below skin-level; diligent and industrious as a beaver—at thinking up ways of getting money without working for it. A phony diamond bulged from his pinky and a gold tooth highlighted his mouth. Every hotel has them, and there isn't much the hotels can do about them.

"You had all afternoon to line it up for yourself, and that was the best you could do?" Stewart rubbed it in, closing the door after the two of them. "What'd you think I was going to do, hide my eyes in the corner and count to a hundred while you walked off with it? Lift up your elbows a minute. All right, now sit down."

"This don't fix anything for you, you're still red-hot," his guest quavered. But he was plenty scared. He lived in that other world of uncertainties, that jungle-world, that Stewart didn't know anything about. Where there were no rules, no regulations. Where, when you were outsmarted like this, the other guy was perfectly capable of shooting you down in cold blood to save his own neck—which Stewart wasn't. Or at the very least, capable of trying to find some way of framing you with the murder already committed—which Stewart had no idea of doing. They didn't talk the same language, the two of them. "I've got a shill waiting for me over there," he croaked, "and when I don't come back—"

"You're a liar, you're in this loney-wolf," Stewart let him know, and the way his eyes acted told him he'd hit it right. He stood over him with the gun. "You've been working those field-glasses overtime all week I suppose, looking for a break like this. Especially if you couldn't leave your room without risking a lock-out. You haven't missed much, I bet. You're going to tell me a few things I want to know. Now, did you see it happen?"

"Yeah, cert'ny!" the guy started in volubly. Too volubly. "Around about four this morning. I'm lying there in my bed looking over the racing form, and all of a sudden something backfires out there, sort of a loud echo hits this wing. The rooms in this place're sound-proofed, you know. I probably heard it over here more clearly through your open window than anyone did in the rooms around you on this side. Anyway I give it the glasses, not forgetting to put out my own light, and there's only one window lit up across from me and that's yours. I'm just in time to see her fold up on the floor, and there you are—"

"Where am I, just where?"

"Around over on this side, with your back to the window."

To the window Stewart let his eye travel the four, five yards from beside the bed where he had found her lying. "Then what'd I do?" he said coldly.

The witness shrugged, as though "What more is there to say?" "You were pretty drunk, I noticed. I guess you didn't get it, what you'd done. You just let her lay there, took off your things, and flopped into bed. The lights went out. I waited awhile, but nobody came near you, nobody but me seemed to hear it—" Again one of those shrugs. "Since when am I working for the bulls? Why should I butt in?"

"Not as long as there was a chance of making a little easy money out of it," Stewart agreed drily.

"Well, when I looked this morning, the two of you are still there, you on the bed, her on the floor—"

"I know all about it from that point on," Stewart let him know. "Would you mind going back a minute? Did you watch me pretty closely right after I'd shot her?"

"Yeah, anybody would. Wouldn't you watch a guy you just seen do a thing like that?"

"By all means. Where did you say I put the gun?"

"On—on that table behind you."

"And how'd I put my pants down when I took 'em off?"

"Why, like everyone does to save the crease in 'em for next day, folded 'em out even and then doubled them across the chair."

"And how'd I take off my tie?"

Buster looked more and more surprised at these superfluous questions. "Undid the knot and slung it off, what's there to that?"

"I'm not boring you, am I? Just one more thing. You said: I flopped into bed, and the lights went out. Which came first? *Keep looking at me*, don't turn your head around to the wall!" He jogged the gun up to give the order juice.

"You—you flopped in, and then poked the lights out."

The guy was contemptuous.

Stewart smiled. He put the gun behind him, carefully out of reach on the table, without taking his eyes off his visitor. Then he stood up, motioned him to do likewise, and nearly knocked his head off his shoulders with a right hook. Buster went all the way back, the chair went over, and just the squirming soles of his shoes showed.

"NOW tell it over and tell it right. I'm not standing here and letting myself be called murderer by the scum of the earth! The gun was in my trouser-pocket and not on the table when I got up this morning. I haven't folded my pants flat, or done anything but shie them out at the nearest piece of furniture, in years.

"I've never taken off a tie in my life but by shortening one end, *leaving the knot intact*, and looping it over my head! So I was over here by the window and she was across the room by the bed, was she? That's why her skin's all pitted from being shot at contact! And it happens the light-switch in this room can't be reached from the bed; you must have been thinking of the one in your own room. I'd have had to put out the lights first and then flopped—as you so quaintly put it. I'd take up selling pencils or some other honest way of making a living, if I were you, you're not quick enough on the trigger to be on the shady side of the law."

The socked one wavered erect, holding onto the side of his jaw with an excruciating expression.

"Now I'm going to keep hitting you until you tell me what you really saw in here." A canine lift of Buster's upper lip was the only answer. He did it just once more. A wall stopped Don's target this time, and a picture of the Three Graces came down off the molding, accoladed him across the shoulder and splashed thin glass down his sleeve. "No, I've got a better idea. Did you ever hear of the water-cure?"

It was one of those rhetorical questions; he didn't wait for the answer, grabbed him by the back of the neck and hustled him into the bathroom, where "his wife's" shower still toiled away after all this time. "Y'gonna tell me what you really saw?"

"I told yuh! Halp!"

He got a reverse half-nelson on him, shoved his head backwards through the curtains, face up, held it there under the deluge. There was a lot of kicking and scraping of feet on the tiled floor. Stewart put an end to that by getting a scissors-lock on them—and still managing to keep his own. Which is a neat trick if you can do it. Coughing, strangling sounds came through the violently-agitated curtains. There are air-pockets in even the closest-sieved showers, but if you haven't time to look for them, you might as well be drowning in an eight-foot surf for all the good they'll do you.

Stewart let his head out for a hacking breath, started it back again. "Wuh-hait, ah-ull tuh-hell you!" came in heaving paroxysms.

"See that you do, no second chances! I'll turn it on hot next time and scald you to death!" vowed the terrible Stewart. They came out one nearly as wet as the other. A little pool instantly formed around the baptised one's feet on the carpet as he collapsed into the chair Stewart righted for him. He fastidiously pinched his nose and sprayed water through it with a honking sound.

"Hop into it," snapped Stewart, "Never mind the dry-cleaning act; probably the first good soaking your dirty neck's had in a year!"

"She came here with two other guys," panted the professional Peeping Tom.

"Two other guys is right, where've I heard that before!" assented Stewart gloomily.

"They checked in pretty late, about two this morning. I seen the bellhop show 'em in, I happened to be watching—something on the floor below at the time."

"SURE, just to keep in practise, I know how it is. Now keep it probable or I'll christen you some more. Since when does a hotel sell one room to three people at a time?"

"Mac, I'm doing my best," the reformed one pleaded, so earnestly that Stewart was half-inclined to believe him. "Don't crowd me, will ya? I'm not used to handing it out straight like this, it comes harder than the other way."

Stewart nodded. There was a germ of psychological truth in that.

"The three of 'em come in. I think they hijacked her."

"Kidnaped her?"

"No, not exactly. But she acted like she come here with them against her will, like they had something on her and she had to string along with them, but didn't want to. She made a couple false starts to the door like she wanted out. And one of 'em pulled her back each time. I could see him telling her off plenty, but of course I couldn't hear what he was saying.

"Then she gave up trying and came over and stood by the window, like something was worrying her. They let her alone a little while and chewed the rag by themselves. Then all of a sudden I see something that nearly makes me drop my glasses. She suddenly swings one gam across the window-sill, hooks onto the sash, and gets ready to do a parachute dive—without any parachute.

"One guy jumps and grabs her just in time and hauls her in. They slap her around a little, and then after they quiet down again, one goes out, but the other one stays there with her. She's sitting in a chair by now puffing away and acting like they've got her dead to rights, whatever it is that's up. She keeps shaking her head to him, like she was saying 'no' about something.

"So finally he seems to give up, and

he puts the finger on the door. She jumps up, sort of thanks him by touching him on the arm, then beats it over to go out like he told her she could. She's got her hand on the knob, and she turns around like she was saying 'so-long.' I give the binoculars an extra twist to bring her face up closer. So I miss seeing what he does—but hell, there's no two ways about it, what he done.

"Her face is smiling in the middle of my lenses, but her eyes are wet yet, like he had her plenty worried until now. And then her smile freezes, and her pan goes white, and it jolts. Her eyes clap closed and her face starts slipping down behind his shoulder, out of focus of my glasses. I swing them onto him and there's a feather of smoke coming from around in front of him, and he steps back and puts a gun down on the table. She folds up on the floor there alongside the bed.

"He hears something and he jumps for the door and lets the other guy back in, and they both bend over her, but when they straighten up they're still without her, so I figure just once did the trick. One of them takes a hinge out the window over this way, and the other one puts his ear up to the door and listens, but nothing breaks so they figures they've got it under control. They walk around a little and get set to lam out. One goes out first to see if the coast is clear, and the other one's left behind. He ducks her handbag under his coat, so no one can tell who she is right away.

"THE look-out comes back, but instead of lamming they put their heads together and have a high-pressure confab. After that it gets screwier and screwier. The first one goes out again, and the other one takes out a

penknife, swings the door open, and from what I can see seems to be carving his initials on it. Then he closes it, jumps in again, and waits.

"His stooge comes back again, and that's when you first show up. He's got you with him and he's got his hands full steering you. You've got rubber legs and you're rolling around and doing Leon Errols all over the place. So I say to myself, 'Jerusalem, they've got a fall guy!' and I'm all eyes.

"The one towing you shows you the door, like he was trying to prove something to you, and you start shaking his hand and slobbering down the back of his neck like he just saved your life. The one that was waiting in there stands in front of her with his legs apart on the carpet, so you can't get a look at her. They get you around to the other side of the bed, and they both go into a boy-scout act, I never saw anything like it! They help you off with your coat and kicks, they even take off your pants for you, fold 'em out nice and flat across the chair. Unhitch your tie for you too, and they keep soothing you the whole time by slapping you on the back and slinging their arms around you, and you think they're the nuts because you want to organize a quartette and sing Sweet Adeline. They lay you down flat and you go out like a light. They switch the sign around to the outside of the door, give you a kidding salute, the room goes dark, and the door closes after them.

"And that, pal, whether you wanna believe or not, is the absolute low-down. I didn't get a wink of sleep all the rest of the night, figuring out a parlay on it. I said to myself, if it's still there asking for it tomorrow, who am I to turn a soft-snap down?"

Stewart flicked him perfunctorily

across the shoulder. "Just a hard-working, ambitious little gink, and you'll get there some day—to the wrong side of the eight-ball." He got up abruptly. "Let's see what that door has to say. I only hope I don't trip you up this time, for your own sake." He swung it open, looked it over, turned accusing eyes on his continuity-man. "Show me where there's a nick from a penknife or anything el—"

But the draft coming through, like the time before when the maid had left it open, seemed to vibrate the copper-plated numerals a little, at least the two 9's. Stewart stuck his finger in the middle of the closed part of one of them, flipped it, and the 9 swung up and around into a 6. The little screw holding the stem in place had been taken out of each one. 1606 had been turned into 1909, in a hurry.

CHAPTER IV

"Meet the Wife"

"WELL it looks like you told the truth," Stewart admitted. "But what did that get them? It's all rough edges yet. I must have wanted the real 1909, and it was too good a chance for them to pass up. But what was I doing around here in the first place? I've got a perfectly good home of my own over Beekman Place way. And I"—he did some more dandruff-removing—"I been told I married this girl last night."

"Gee!" said Buster eloquently, with a look at the inscrutable closet-door.

"It won't wash, don't you see, it just won't wash." He took a deep breath. "Well, at least I know now I didn't do it, and that was what really had me down. I'll have to take my chances on the rest of it, maybe I can scrape through. I can't sit here in this room holding hands with her any longer.

May as well get it over with. Just as a matter of curiosity, when I get the cops up here, which story are you going to tell, the first one or the one you told me just now?"

Buster looked unhappy. "Do I have to talk to them at all? It never yet brought me any luck!"

"You're the only back-stop I've got," smiled Stewart wryly.

"We-ell, I suppose if I have to be around where they are, I'll tell 'em the right one. Only, I hope I can stick to it, on account of it's the truth," he said worriedly.

"So do I," said Stewart drily. "There are no threats and no rewards in this, get me? But just to make it easier for you to tell it twice alike, suppose we skip the business about the ninety bucks in an envelope at the door. You just dropped in here to catch a street-car, or something."

"Ninety?" groaned Buster disconsolately. "Was that all there was in the kitty? And I got into this mess for that!"

"Believe you me," Stewart assured him, "I'm not any keener on this than you are. I'm going to be the most popular guy in my family when I make the headlines with this! I can just see them shaking their heads, saying I told you so!" He slid his belt a notch closer. "Well, here goes."

But he wasn't even to have the credit of reporting it himself, the way it looked. He took a step across and the phone rang in his face just as he got to it. "Watch it, now. Sit tight," he warned his involuntary guest. "Yeah?" he said cautiously.

"Hey, Molino, that you?" a voice began abruptly. "I just got in, I'm at the station. What's this I got over the grapevine just now, about your landing that doll they were priming for the

Grand Jury?" But it was good news, the way he told it. He didn't know yet she'd been bumped, or he wouldn't have called here.

STEWART would have given everything he owned or ever hoped to own to know just what Molino's voice was supposed to sound like. But the Peeper's glasses couldn't help him there.

He strained his larynx, faked a hack cough. "She's here with us now." Which was no lie. "Nix on the broadcasting. Come over here."

"But I thought I was supposed to—"

"You heard me."

"What's the matter with your voice?"

"Ah, smoking all night long—!"

"You smoke?" The voice took a sudden, dangerous skeptical swing. "That's the first I ever heard of—"

"Who said anything about me?" Molino-Stewart rasped at him. "The rest of 'em been doing it for all they're worth!"

The voice regained conviction. "Yeah, you always was susceptible to it, 'member. What name y'under?"

"Never mind the name. 1606, and don't keep us waiting."

"I'm practic'ly witcha, kid!"

Stewart hung up, delightedly pulled a swing at Buster's slack lower jaw. "Did it break pretty! Did it break right along the dotted line! Now get an earful of this." He said, "Give me Police Headquarters—"

But that was all his nervous auditor needed to hear. His courage failed him at the last minute, there was a scurry and he was up out of his chair and trying to sidle past Stewart along the wall on his way out. The latter collared him remorselessly with his free hand. "No you don't!"

"Ah, lemme out of it, will you? Honest, I'm telling you I don't click with those guys, it's worse'n if I was to walk under a ladder or light three up on a match! I'm practic'ly in jail already once they show up."

Stewart drove him back with a warning upswing of his arm. "You'll be all right, just tell the story straight. I may even buy you a new pair of field-glasses after it's all over."

Into the phone he said briskly: "I want to report a murder. My name's Don Stewart and I'm in Room 1606 at the New Amsterdam Hotel. I can't tell you who did it, but there's a man on his way over here now who can, if you go about it right. Try and get here before he does."

They hadn't, by the looks of it, when the surreptitious knock came on the door about quarter of an hour later. Buster had suddenly vanished as completely as though he had never existed. The distant light of his room still glinted on undaunted, though, across the way outside.

The knock was repeated. Stewart sandwiched himself in behind the door, reached for the knob, and folded it in on himself. Then he slammed it shut again. A figure muffled up to the ears in a jaunty polo-coat stood revealed there just this side of it.

He had not, judging by his complexion, been doing much polo-playing lately; he had what is known as a prison-pallor. At least, on the inch-wide strip of face that showed between upturned-collar and snapped-down hat-brim. Which included a pair of snaky eyes.

"Oh, yeah?" he said, with instant, admirable presence of mind. "Well, whatever this is, it's your tough luck!" The ready gun was even more ubiquitous, seemed to grow out of his hand.

"No," said Stewart, "it's yours, lame-brain. I never met so many incompetents in one day in my life. They tell you their life-histories over the phone, they barge in places without looking first, they think that by spiking the number of a room on the 16th floor they can pass it off as 19. It must be this cheap imported coolie labor doing it!" He was going backward effortlessly, step by step, while he delivered the spiel, bringing the caller's gun-hand out into the open after him.

"Look around and pick a nice comfortable spot to fall on," the latter suggested. "You're about to get dropped."

The knife-edge opening along the bathroom-door banged and puffed smoke, as if somebody were dusting himself off with body-powder in there. The gun turned turtle like a T-square and fell out of the punctured hand holding it. Two little jets of blood looped from the severed vein across the back of it. The polo-player opened his mouth wide and looked straight up at the ceiling, losing his cocky hat.

A PAIR of detectives came out of the bathroom. The room got quite full of people, where it had been so intimate.

They made quite a procession crossing the lobby on their way out later. Because there were also two men now carrying a large covered hamper. Stewart, bringing up in the rear, heard a loud yawp of acute recognition come from somewhere around him, and the faithless Pete flung himself at him.

He disengaged himself with cold, aloof dignity, as one does at the wind-up of a long beautiful friendship. "Backer-outer," he remarked reproachfully. "Letter-downer! Just hold your breath till I ever phone you for help again!"

"But Stew," wailed the bosom friend, letting himself be dragged bodily across the slippery lobby-floor like a trailer—"I been here hours, looking all over for you! They sent me up to 1909, she's up there now, worried sick—"

"She?" said Stewart, finally pausing in his March of Time routine.

"The girl you married last night! And Stew, no matter whether it was kind of sudden, I'm disappointed in you, treating anyone like that. She's been waiting for you to come back since three this morning, and she hasn't a cent on her to pay for the room and—"

"I gotta go along, me and this little fellow here," said the stricken Stewart, "while they book that guy, and send out an alarm for two others wanted for murder—"

Pete did a lot of rapid-fire fixing. "Listen," he pleaded to the captain of detectives, "his name's Don Stewart, he'll be there at the arraignment or whatever it is. I'll vouch for him, I'll make myself personally responsible. Only first you gotta let me take him upstairs with me a minute so he can meet his wife."

"What kind of people are yez?" gasped the scandalized captain. "Donnelly, stay behind with this young fellow that marries 'em first and gets introjuced to them second—and bring

him over to the station with you later."

She didn't have wavy brown hair at all, that was Pete's cockeyedness; but she was pretty much all there. Stewart felt like reaching across his own shoulder and patting himself on the back, for being a good picker even plastered.

"Pleased to meet you," he mumbled formally.

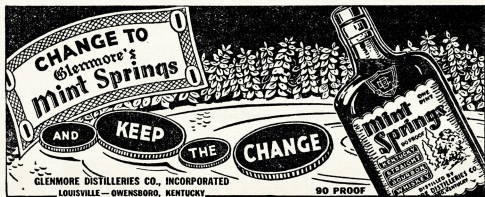
Pete gouged him with his elbow, knocked him warningly on the shin. "Nix, nix, it's the frau," he breathed out of the corner of his mouth.

"I mean, h'lo darling."

A ghost of a smile twitched the corner of her mouth. She seemed to be willing to overlook a lot, but not some things. "Let's get out of this spooky place," she pleaded. "Every half-hour all afternoon long mysterious odors of tomato-juice, whiskey and things have been coming to the door. They keep stepping them up too. Last time it was a whole bottle. I'm afraid they'll send a whole case next. It's got me down."

She turned her back to put on her hat in the mirror. Stewart signalled his friend, drew him out of earshot. "I like her," he whispered, "I think she's swell, but—what's her first name?"

And did he finally get straightened out on it? Well, if he didn't it's a dirty trick on their young six-months-old daughter; she's tagged Asphodel, after her mom.



This advertisement is not intended to offer alcoholic beverages for sale or delivery in any state or community where the advertising, sale or use thereof is unlawful.

Voodoo Vengeance

By Dugal O'Liam

Author of "Blood on a Rose," "Death Signs Its Name," etc.



Two figures emerged from the underbrush, running —a man first and then a woman

African Magic Chose Between Two Men Suspected of Murdering the Man No One Could Wish to Kill

THE old watchman tilted his broken chair against the nude pine boards of his shanty and stared out across the sinuous undulations of the Cano de San Antonio.

To his back lay the nondescript hovels that were the outskirts of Puerta de la Tierra and farther back, along Puerto Rico's ragged shore line, the lights of San Juan leavened a sullen sky.

There was a strip of muddy beach almost at old Enrique's

feet and suddenly, out of the gloom of a clump of underbrush to the left, two figures emerged and ran down that gray strip: one a man, who ran ahead; the other a girl, slim and white faced.

They were encroaching on the property of the construction company the watchman had been set to guard, and he had a duty to perform, but before

he could bring the chair down and get to his feet, the pair had disappeared beyond his right-of-way and he went back

**TRUE
STORY**

to his teetering, muttering a little and wondering at the meanness of men and women, especially at night when shadows welcome chicanery.

Almost immediately, he was startled from his lethargy again. Four sudden shots split the stillness of the night; four quick, heavy shots such as would come from a pistol. They came from the direction the running couple had taken. The watchman's hearing was sharp and it seemed to him that the shots came from a distance much greater than those two could have transversed in the little half-minute since they had run past his shanty and disappeared into the thickets beyond the road cut.

He listened attentively and then bestirred himself once more. He walked down to the thicket's edge where the two had gone and peered through the shifting shadows. He saw nothing and ventured to move into the thicket, pushing aside the branches and ignoring the buzzing insects which plagued his face and hands. He walked on through the underbrush until he emerged in a clearing, but he saw nothing of the man and the woman and he saw no signs of violence anywhere in the vicinity.

Back to his shanty he plodded again, cursing the perfidy of modern automobiles which backfire. Back to his tilted chair and his contemplation of the undulating surface of the Cano he went and for him the night wore on peaceably enough.

Down the ragged line of the Cano, however, all was not so peaceful. The sun came up to wash the Bay of San Juan in shimmering gold and to touch the turgid backwash in the Cano with a lightening magic.

All this was peaceful enough, this April day of 1925, but down in the

Cano, Luis Franco and Camelo Rodríguez, fishermen out for the early catch, watched a floating mass a few hundred feet off shore and looked at each other with mounting apprehension. Taking courage, they rowed out to the floating mass and Franco prodded it with his light gaff. The mass turned over and a white face materialized in the water and dull eyes whose last moment of vision had been cast in terror, stared sightlessly at the April sky.

"The launch," Rodríguez said, waving a trembling hand. "We must get to the launch!"

Down the Cano shore-line two hundred yards, the patrol launch of the 365th Infantry, United States Army, rode at anchor. There would be men on it, the fishermen knew. Theirs was the business of handling such matters as this. Poor fishermen only courted trouble when they acted alone. So they put their boat about and both fell upon the oars and rowed with all speed toward the launch, at the same time trying to keep the outline of the floating body in sight.

Fifteen minutes after the army men had taken the body from the lagoon waters, Colonel George Warburton Lewis, commander of the Puerto Rican insular police, Dr. Luis Palmieri, medical examiner, and Detectives Juan Quinones and Irvin McManus arrived on the scene. Immediately Doctor Palmieri knelt by the body for a superficial examination and McManus searched the dead man's clothes. Almost simultaneously they made their first revelations.

"This man has been shot four times, presumably in the back," Doctor Palmieri announced. "I will know about that after a more thorough examination."

"And that isn't all," McManus said. "This man is The Good Samaritan—"

"What?" Colonel Lewis was aghast. "You don't mean Father Heredia?"

McManus handed the colonel a wallet. The wallet contained papers identifying the body as that of José M. Heredia, a Protestant missionary who had become known throughout the island as The Good Samaritan because of his kindly deeds and his tireless activity in behalf of his flocks. Though a Protestant, he always was called Father Heredia by the natives and foreigners alike and he was known as the most sincerely beloved man in all of Puerto Rico.

FOR years he had had his mission in San Juan, but he had branches throughout the island and currently he had been devoting much time to the relief of suffering in and about the Puerta de la Tierra district. He made his home in Barrio Oberero, another suburb of San Juan. There he lived with his twenty-four-year-old wife, some thirty-five years his junior, a beautiful and devout woman who had been one of his flock and who had worked with him constantly since, as a girl of eighteen, she had fallen in love with and married him.

Word of the death of The Good Samaritan traveled over San Juan and its suburbs like a pestilence. Within an hour after the discovery of the body, the community was up in arms. Already there were mutterings against the delay of the insular police in taking some sort of action. Always there had been much resentment against the insular police, commanded by American agents and operating on the modern American police pattern and this mur-

der of one so esteemed as Father Heredia was the signal for fresh outbursts.

Colonel Lewis, aware of the temper of the natives, threw the machinery of his organization into instant operation. Leaving Doctor Palmieri to make a complete examination and Quinones to call additional men and make a full check of the vicinity of the Cano de San Antonio, he took McManus and started for Barrio Oberero to question the young wife. He knew, too, that he would have to tell her of the tragedy since none of the natives would have the courage to face her with the news.

He found the young wife but recently awakened. Her hair was still falling over her slim shoulders and it made a vivid black frame for her strikingly white skin. Although a native, she was extremely fair, despite her black hair and black eyes, and was considered a great beauty on the island. She had a soft and sympathetic manner and had become almost as universally beloved as her husband during the five and a half years she had been working at his side.

As gently as possible, Lewis told her of her husband's death. For minutes she sat there, staring at Colonel Lewis. Then she got slowly to her feet, bit her lip reflectively and suddenly smiled.

"You are mistaken," she insisted. "There was no reason why this should happen to my husband and so it could not happen! You must have found some other poor man."

Colonel Lewis showed her the wallet he had taken from the pocket. McManus, who had known The Good Samaritan well for many years, solemnly told the girl that there could be no mistake, that the murdered man was her husband. At this, she sat down quickly, grasping the sides of her chair

with her white hands and tears came to her eyes. She fought them back and in a soft voice from which she could not dismiss the sobs, she said:

"Something will prove you wrong. I say this because there could have been no reason for killing Father José. He had not an enemy in the world, nothing but the kindest and most loving friends, so that there could have been none jealous of him—"

She stopped suddenly and one white hand went to her lips. She looked up at Colonel Lewis, then at McManus.

"Isn't it possible that someone might have been jealous of his marrying you?" Lewis asked. "You are very beautiful and many young men of hot blood and reckless ways may covet you."

"No, no, it's hideous!" the girl sobbed. "I never gave anybody any reason to think— Everyone knows I lived only for him."

"But you must have had suitors before you married," Lewis insisted.

The girl shook her head again, resolutely. "I had none. I was sixteen when I met him and my people would not have allowed me to see men then. After I met him, I wanted to see no other men. They were all so small and insignificant beside Father José."

Nor did Lewis progress any further in other searches for a motive for the murder of The Good Samaritan. Nowhere in the island was there one man who would raise his voice against José Heredia whereas almost every man had praise for him.

THROUGHOUT that day Lewis and his two picked detectives, McManus and Quinones, combed the Puerta de la Tierra vicinity for some sign of a clue as to The Good Samaritan's last movements. Carefully they

searched the banks of the Cano for footprints that would have been left by anyone carrying the body down to the water's edge. There were none. Nor were there any signs of a struggle anywhere along the bank and the mystery of motive remained as deep as ever.

The morning of the second day after the discovery of Father José's body came. Colonel Lewis had been early at his desk. Once more he planned to comb the shore of the Cano. But as he was ready to set out, an excited orderly entered the office.

"It is the Señora Heredia," the man explained. "She is very agitated and says she must see you at once."

"Certainly," Lewis said, crisply. "Show her in immediately."

The pretty young widow entered the office. She wore deep mourning and she moved with ghostly silence toward Lewis's desk as he stood to receive her. Without a word, she took from a black handbag a gaily decorated card. It was a Christmas card, a cheap piece, obviously purchased some months before. She laid it on Lewis's desk and stood watching him as he picked it up and scanned it confusedly.

"My dearest wife," said the writing across the back, in a strong, secure hand, "do not grieve for me. I have done my work and now I am taking my own life in such a way as to leave no burden for you."

"This—where did you get this?" demanded Lewis.

"I found it in the top drawer of the desk in his study," the widow said. "It was there when I went to put his things together."

"But it can't be your husband's writing surely?"

The girl nodded her head vaguely. "It is his writing," she returned, "yet I am sure he did not commit suicide. He

had every reason to live and he had so much work yet to do."

"Of course he didn't commit suicide," Lewis said. "A man does not fire four shots into his body when he commits suicide. And into his back, at that! The bullets used were .45 caliber steel-jacketed and sharp pointed."

Lewis dismissed the widow when Palmieri came in with further detailed reports about the body.

"Were there any signs of violence on the body?" Lewis asked.

"There were two or three bruises about the scalp as if the man might have been slugged either before or immediately after the shots were fired," Palmieri said. "The heart action had not stopped when the wounds were inflicted, and for that reason, I am reasonably certain they were inflicted before the shots were fired."

"Meaning what?" McManus said.

"Meaning little or nothing," Lewis said, "unless it suggests two parties to the slaying—one who struck him down from the front with some blunt instrument and another who did the shooting."

AFTER listening to Palmieri's report, Quinones and Lewis drove in Lewis's car to the point along the shore of the Cano de San Antonio where the new government highway touched the banks of the lagoon. There they encountered for the first time the bent figure of the old watchman. They found him tilted back against the bare wood shanty, surrounded by a group of gesticulating native workmen who had come for their day's toil on the road.

"I saw it all, *Señor Coronel*," he said. "I saw a man run and a woman run after him and then I heard the shots, but the devils got away before I could

follow. I am not so young as I was once, *Señor Coronel*."

Quickly Lewis hustled the old man to the waiting automobile and drove him to headquarters in San Juan. Then he questioned him at length and the watchman told of seeing the strangely behaved couple, told how he had tried to follow them and failed, how the shots had followed immediately after they had run across the clearing in front of his shack. As nearly as he could recall the descriptions, he gave them, the man tall, muscular and dark, the woman slim and pretty and obviously angry.

"Would you know them if you saw them?" Lewis demanded, eagerly.

The old man was silent for some time. Slowly he shook his head in embarrassed negation. "I couldn't say I'd know them of the face," he said. "It was dark and my old eyes are not so keen any more. But I would know them by their size and perhaps by the way they walked, or ran. That I would, *Señor Coronel*."

Lewis, balked, decided to give the old man's story to the newspapers. In that way, someone else who had seen the strange couple might come forward with a more complete identification. Almost as soon as the statement had been given out, it appeared on the street, on the news stands, was hawked through the town and the suburbs and after this had been done, Lewis sent his men into Puerta de la Tierra to question all suspicious persons. An hour after they had been dispatched, Detective Remedio López threw open the door of Lewis's office and pushed a slim, over-rouged girl with flashing black eyes and bobbing ear-drops, into the room ahead of him. She walked quickly across the room and, without invitation, took a chair opposite Lewis.

"Señorita Ana María Betancourt has something to tell you," Remedio announced. "She accosted me in the street in Puerta de la Tierra and said she had to talk to you about this murder—to you alone."

"And I meant the *Señor Coronel* alone," the girl said, insinuatingly. "I cannot even talk if the *Señor Policeman* is to stay in the room. I cannot trust him, only you, *Señor Coronel*."

LEWIS nodded to Remedio and he left. Outside he passed a quick signal to two clerks and McManus. Immediately they went into action, hooked up two recording dictaphones, one on each side of Lewis's office, and two headsets. This done, another clerk opened Lewis's door as if by mistake as a signal for him to begin the questioning and Lewis swung around in his chair to face the girl.

"You have a story to tell?" he asked. "I hope you are not taking up my time needlessly."

"Indeed, I am not," the girl said, "but I must know that you are my friend. It is a very bad story I have to tell and I must know that anything I may have done foolishly will not be used to cause me trouble because I am innocent of any intention of wrong doing and must not suffer."

Lewis coughed slightly and eyed her again. "Of course you understand, señorita, that this is a case of murder. You could scarcely expect the police to make any arrangements which would condone a homicide, if you had a part in it."

The girl gasped and covered her mouth with a tiny, gloved hand. "Oh, *Señor Coronel*, it is not that," she said. "But I was indiscreet. I made an engagement to meet this man I am about to tell you of in a very bad place

—a very bad café. You see, I wanted to be free, to have a good time, and I met him there.

"I am the girl the watchman saw on the Cano shore night before last. I went there with a man I have been in love with, but I no longer am in love with him. He is too horrible for words.

"We walked down along the bank and near the opening where the new road is being built he stopped me and took me in his arms. He rained kisses on me and he was overpowering me when Father José came along the bank and seized him by the shoulders and whirled him around.

"'You should be ashamed of yourself,' Father José said to him. 'Let that girl go, or I'll report you to the police.' The man was so angry he couldn't even answer and Father José walked on down along the shore past the construction camp.

"The man then started to make love to me again, and when I told him that he shouldn't he became so mad that he slapped me and I fell to the ground.

"Then he started running in the direction Father José had gone and I ran after him, trying to stop him. He has a terrible temper and I was afraid he would beat Father José. Of course, he ran faster than I did and just as I lost sight of him momentarily in the thickets on the other side of the road work, I heard a shot. I ran harder and came out into a clearing just in time to see him fire three more shots into Father José's back.

"He grabbed the poor old man up then and ran down to the water and threw him in. I tried to run away, but I was so frightened I couldn't move my legs and he came back and grabbed me and shook me and told me that if I ever breathed anything about this, he would kill me too. Then he ran away

and I went back up to the town and went to my home and stayed there until I heard about the watchman seeing us. Then I came to you."

The girl finished with a sudden, breathless silence and stared at Lewis. Lewis, the trace of a smile on his heretofore harassed features, leaned over his desk, tapping a pencil on its shiny surface.

"And now," he said, persuasively, "you've told us everything we want to know but the name of the murderer."

"It was a member," the girl almost shouted, "of your own Insular Police!"

FOR a brief moment, Lewis did not change positions, but remained leaning across the desk, his eyes staring, his mouth open. Then he leaned slowly back in his chair and found a faint voice.

"What—did—you—say? What is his name?"

The girl gave him the policeman's name.

Lewis got slowly up from his chair. The girl covered her face with a handkerchief and sobbed hysterically. Lewis walked around his desk and stood over her, looking down at her heaving shoulders. For a minute he stood there. The emotions that raced through his stricken brain precluded all possibility of cohesive thought. The young man she had named was one of the prides of the Insular service, upright, brilliant, devoted to duty, a son of a fine, honorable family, a youth who'd been known as clean-cut and ambitious and reliable.

Now this hysterical girl had accused him of the most horrible murder in recent Puerto Rican police annals. To Lewis, trained officer though he was, it didn't make sense, didn't add up. Yet

the girl's story tallied perfectly with the story of honest old Enrique Romano and here, in the fury that passion engenders in a thwarted youth, was the last element needed in the murder, the motive.

With heavy tread and heavier heart, Lewis walked back to his desk and pressed a buzzer. A clerk came in.

He ordered the clerk to summon the young policeman to his office. "Also, send for Captain Felipe Blanco and tell him it is urgent that he come at once to headquarters." The young officer had been a protégé of Captain Blanco.

At the mention of the policeman's name, the girl had leaped to her feet. She ran to Lewis, clutching at his uniform lapels.

"Please," she pleaded, "I cannot face him now. I am afraid. He will kill me. I know he will kill me. Please do not let him kill me."

Lewis soothed her. "You will not have to meet him now," he said. "You will be taken to the matron's quarters. You may wait there until we send for you. You will be safe there."

"Oh, thank you," the girl said. "I will be ready to face him when the time comes if I know he cannot reach me."

As the girl was leaving Lewis's office with a matron through a side door, the young man was brought in the front door, McManus on one side of him, Remedio on the other. He had not been told why he had been summoned and he was discussing the case eagerly with his fellow officers. Lewis wasted no preliminaries. He was talking to a police officer now. He could speak best if he spoke directly.

"Young man," he said, "where were you on the night of April 6, between nine and nine-thirty?"

The policeman hesitated. He flushed. He looked quickly at the floor, then

squared his shoulders quickly and smiled. "I was on my appointed post in San Juan, sir."

"You were not on post at that hour," Lewis said. "Your tour of duty ended at six o'clock."

"But you know, sir, that I habitually frequent my daily post during my off-hours in order to be more familiar with my duties," the young man insisted.

"Yes, I know you have done that, but is it not a fact that you were on the shore of the Cano de San Antonio at the time I have mentioned? Weren't you seen there by a girl and by the watchman for the road construction company?"

The policeman paled. He stared at his chief. He shook his head from side to side, then mumbled, "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Ana María Betancourt told me a little while ago about your rendezvous there, how you shot down José Heredia because he surprised you and the señorita and rebuked you for your actions."

The young man looked first at McManus, then at Quinones. The two detectives did not look at him, but stared at Lewis. He looked at Lewis again.

"May I sit down, sir?" he asked.

"Stand up!" Lewis snapped.

THE young officer drew himself up, clenched his big fists. His lips trembled and he bit them fiercely to gain control. Then he faced Lewis again and began to talk.

"Sir," he said, "you know my record. You know I am engaged to be married to the daughter of one of the splendid families of our country. You know that no one ever has seen me trifling with any women whatsoever. You know I do not drink, that I have a clean record,

both as a citizen and as an officer. Is that not so, sir?"

"Granted," Lewis said, "but what of that? Lime has eaten many a man with a record as good."

Trinidad winced. "I was with Señorita Betancourt on that night."

"What?" Lewis snapped out the single word as if the most dreaded eventuality of all had come. His face went white again and McManus and Quinones turned to stare at Trinidad.

"She met me in the street in San Juan," Trinidad went on. "She asked me to meet her there on that night. She said she wanted to talk to me, that she knew I could not go to her home and that I would not want to be seen with her and she believed such a spot would be best. I went and met her there and she threw her arms about my neck and begged me to kiss her."

"I held her off, but she fought tigerishly. She began to cry and said I had been persecuting her, that she loved me and would do anything I asked. She said she would go straight if I would only promise to be good to her and not persecute her, if I would see her some times, when we could be alone where I would not risk loss of my reputation."

"Then you knew her?" Lewis said.

"I did," Trinidad said. "I don't like to bring up old records, but she was arrested by me once on a petty thievery charge. Then I arrested her again on a counterfeiting charge. Again, I had to warn her on a morals charge. I felt sorry for her and she seemed to think I was persecuting her."

"How about that night?" Lewis interrupted. "Did you see José Heredia?"

"I did not. I frankly admit that I became excited when she threw her arms around me a second time and begged me to kiss her and lost my head."

I didn't know what to do, so I threw her arms off and ran. She ran after me and I ran across the cut where the new road is being built and into the thicket beyond and managed to lose her, although I heard her screaming for some time."

"Why did you say, a few minutes ago, that you were in San Juan on the night of the sixth?" Lewis said.

"I had tried to avoid bringing her name up again," Trinidad said. "I didn't want to persecute the girl and so long as she had offended no one else, I saw no reason for causing her embarrassment. That is the truth, sir, and I hope you believe it."

"I wish I could, but the circumstances are difficult. Did you, by any chance, hear any shots on that night you say you fled from this siren?"

"None, sir."

"Yet the watchman was certain he heard shots fired almost immediately after you ran across the clearing." Lewis's face hardened again. "Young man, you are under arrest. I am frankly ashamed of the shallowness of your alibi. I credited you with greater intelligence."

No sooner had the news of his arrest gone around than the evidence against the officer began to pile up enormously. No fewer than fourteen persons appeared at police headquarters to declare that they had seen him and the girl in the vicinity of the construction hut on the murder night. The watchman, although he steadfastly refused to make a positive identification, declared that Trinidad was the size and build of the man he had seen.

In the midst of these identifications, Captain Blanco arrived at headquarters. Lewis received him. Blanco was in a rage. Heedlessly he demanded that his young officer be released at once. Lewis

tried to reason with him. Blanco would listen to no reasoning.

"This boy is as innocent as you are," he stormed.

"In the face of identifications of him by fourteen witnesses as the man seen on the shore of the Cano on the murder night?" Lewis said.

"Identifications? What do they mean?" Blanco's fury brooked no abatement. "Hasn't he already admitted that he was there? What if the entire island of Puerto Rico and the rest of the West Indian archipelago identified him as that man? What would that prove after he admitted being there?"

"But the girl's story," Lewis protested. "It tallies with every known fact in the case."

"The story of a girl who had an idea she was being persecuted," Blanco raged, "and wanted to get even, or put her tormentor out of the way. She might not have expected to have this opportunity when she lured him down there that night and again she might have. But she didn't miss her opportunity and it's a mighty good opportunity for her, too."

LEWIS flatly refused to release the young man and, indeed, he did so wisely. Blanco, no longer actively connected with the police, asked for the records in the case. These Lewis gladly gave. He studied the reports of Doctor Palmieri minutely, then suddenly confronted Lewis again.

"This man was killed by four steel-jacketed bullets," he said triumphantly. "The Insular police service equipment calls for leaden bullets and none of our officers carries any other type. Yet this girl says she saw this officer pump four steel-jacketed bullets into José Heredia's body."

"Steel-jacketed bullets can be bought

by anyone with the price," Lewis said.

"Right, but our Insular police aren't considered to have the price," Blanco said. "The United States government sees to it that the army men here have steel-jacketed bullets, but our police have to use the cheap, old-fashioned type."

"This officer is not poor," Lewis said. "He was amply able to afford steel-jacketed bullets if he wanted them."

"What?" Franco roared. "You mean to tell me that he went out and bought four steel-jacketed bullets on that night, fired them into the back of a man he had no idea of meeting and then returned to his regular issue?"

"Who said he returned to his regular issue?" Lewis parried. "I don't know what sort of bullets he used. He could very well have been using steel-jackets."

"You have his gun, haven't you?"

Lewis looked a little surprised. He opened a drawer of his desk, pulled out a .38-caliber service revolver, broke it and dropped a handful of shells into his hand.

"Lead," he said, flatly.

"Lead, and a thirty-eight," Blanco said. "Palmieri reports this man was killed with steel-jacketed, .45-caliber slugs."

Blanco was silent briefly, then he bowed and strode to the door. There he turned and called back: "My only request is that you throw no hindrances in my way if I work privately on this case, Colonel."

"You know you don't even have to ask that, Captain Blanco," Lewis said.

"Then place Detectives Torres and Cedino at my disposal until further notice, subject to no interferences," Blanco said, whirling about and facing Lewis across the room.

Lewis pressed a buzzer on his desk. A clerk appeared, saluted.

"Inform Detectives Torres and Cedino that they are to be at Captain Blanco's disposal until further notice," he said.

BLANCO, Cedino and Torres spent three days checking the career of Ana Maria Betancourt in Puerta de la Tierra. They discovered a number of things. One was that she had been employed as a maid in a lodging house and had frequented disreputable cafés. That, they agreed, was not especially startling. The thing that provided capital for Blanco's alert mind was something altogether different. Cedino, in the course of his investigations, had discovered that the girl was afflicted with a dramatic complex. She habitually dramatized her own troubles, invented troubles when she had none of her own. Thus she had, in the course of two and a half years, reported the death of three fathers and a half dozen brothers and sisters, not to mention two mothers, although she was known to have been an orphan when she arrived in Puerta Tierra and to have had no living relatives.

Again, she had dramatically accused an innocent man of attacking her, staging the accusation in a busy café at a rush hour. Several times she had embarrassed men on the streets, never for blackmail purposes, always for the sake of being temporarily in the limelight.

"We can dismiss this girl," Blanco said. "She has a dramatic ambition. She wants to be in the limelight. She would send a man to prison to gratify that desire. Here was opportunity for such gratification—plus an opportunity to harm a man who had spurned her charms and who had at times made life disagreeable for her in his official capacity. She was not one to pass it up. Her record proves that."

Now Blanco, putting the Betancourt angle aside until such time as he could squash it completely, busied himself with the subject of the bullets. They had been fired from a .45-caliber pistol and they were steel-jacketed. Only army men carried such bullets. Father José had met and befriended many army men.

A cold realist, Blanco contemplated the problem of Father José's youthful bride. She had beauty, she had imagination, she had fire. He was often away, for many long days and nights. What had she done during those absences? This was no sentimental hour now. The life of a friend and a good friend was at stake. He sent Torres to trace every movement of Juana González Heredia. Torres came back soon, much sooner than had been expected.

"Once," Torres reported, "when Father José had remained away some time, she left him. She went to Caimito. There is an army post there. But she was not seen with a service man, only a young man in mufti and then at the home of her people. But he was a strange one and no one saw him close enough to describe him."

"He could have been a soldier in mufti, then," Blanco said. "They are permitted mufti when on leave."

Satisfied, Captain Blanco waited. Headquarters heard no more of him. Cedino and Torres went back to report in to Lewis. Blanco was, for the time being, finished with them. Their lone obligation was to withhold all information they had gathered for him until he gave them permission to disclose it.

A WEEK passed and strange reports began filtering into Lewis's office. There was a young man visiting the widowed Señora Heredia. He was a handsome young man, kindly and

sympathetic. He visited her only in the day time. He ministered to her tenderly, gave her money, read to her, watched over her, said little when there were neighbors about. Always he left before darkness fell and always he was circumspect and forthright.

Lewis began to worry. He waited to hear from Blanco. He heard nothing. He determined to investigate. The neighbors had reported some weird happenings. He sent McManus and Quinones to investigate.

"Be careful," he said. "Try and spy on them. It may help. I do not like the look of this young man. She says he was a devoted friend of her husband's whom she did not know until he came to her and offered to help her in her hour of need. Watch him and report to me."

The detectives went to the house in Barrio Oberero at dusk. They hid themselves in the shadows of overhanging trees and shrubs. They reached a window, found a narrow slit of light. They peered inside. They stood, fascinated, watching the tableau there.

The youth was on his knees in the center of the floor. Before him burned a low, sulphurous fire. A tiny yellow flame licked at a blue smoke as it rose and permeated the room. Thrown back from the youth's head was a strange mask. Long hair, black and straight, hung from the mask. His body was covered with a long, red shawl.

Opposite him the widow knelt. She watched the fire, alternately opening and closing her eyes. Her lips moved, but she made no sound. The youth's lips moved in unison with hers, but he, too, made no sound. Now and then he passed his hands through the rising column of smoke, then touched the widow's forehead and his own.

Twice he repeated this, then he

pulled the mask down over his face and the girl bowed her head as if to hide the hideous sight. He began to mumble and wave his hands about his head. Then he rose and commanded her to look upon him. He strode sinuously around her and the fire, stopping every second time to pass his hands through the smoke and touch her forehead.

Suddenly the girl sat upright, then stood up. She started to speak, but he silenced her. Quickly he went to the windows. The detectives saw him and quit their watching point. In a moment the pair, the widow and the youth, minus his shawl and his mask, emerged from the house. They walked into the middle of the clearing before the house, looked intently around. Then the girl spoke softly to the man, he listened briefly, took her hand and left her as she turned back into the house.

Beyond the shrubbery fence that surrounded the house, the youth broke into a run. He ran down a side street toward a dark blob of a building that blocked the little street. He ran toward a gloomy postern midway the length of the building. He bent over suddenly and affected a limp. Out of the darkness came a single word.

"Tuto?" Captain Blanco said.

"Fido Gighliotti, 365th," came the answer from the now limping figure, a scarcely audible hiss against the silence of the street.

Two hours later, Captain Blanco led a swarthy, shifty-eyed, evilly handsome youth in a military uniform before Colonel Lewis. Colonel Lewis eyed the youth questioningly. A second youth, small and baby faced and almost shy, followed the pair into the office. Lewis saw him and smiled blandly.

"Tuto," he said. "Tuto Rivera. What brings you?"

"Voodooism," said the baby-faced

undercover agent for the Insular police. "Gighliotti here will explain."

Gighliotti told Lewis the story he had told Blanco. He had fallen in love with Señora Heredia. He had seen her when she left her husband because of his many absences, absences contrived, in most cases, by Gighliotti himself. The girl had fallen in love with him, but she pitied Father José and refused to divorce him.

On the night of the sixth, Gighliotti had appeared at the Barrio Oberero house and told Father José that his mother was ill and was calling for The Good Samaritan. Father José had left with him. The girl had followed. She had seen the pair take a boat and row into the Cano. She had seen, through the gloom, Father José take the oars, had seen a sudden movement by Gighliotti, a flash of steel, the quick blades of four orange flashes of fire, had heard four detonations and seen Father José topple over, strike his head on the edge of the boat, then slide into the water.

"I rowed to shore and saw her," Gighliotti said. "I told her that if she told anyone, I'd kill her, too. She promised she wouldn't. And she wouldn't have, either, if this pretender hadn't prayed with her and pretended to be doing voodoo rites." He stopped to glare at Tuto Rivera, then went on: "I fixed up the Christmas card note later and left it where Señorita Crespo would find it and make Juana take it to the police. I thought it would be a good alibi. I didn't think they'd ever find the body, but it floated inshore instead of riding the tide out to sea."

Lewis looked at Blanco. "How did you do it?"

"Voodoo," Blanco said. "I called in Tuto. I sent him to the house. He started slowly, worked up to a climax with the widow. Tonight he did his best

voodoo act. The girl thought he was putting a hex on her husband's slayers, went to pieces, gave him this man's name while half hysterical and when we had him, told her story before him and he told it over again for us. You really should have Tuto give his voodoo show sometime. It's better than Chamber music for a dull Sunday afternoon."

Five minutes later, the falsely ac-

cused young policeman was out of jail. Within a month, Gighliotti had been convicted of murder and Ana Maria Betancourt was serving a two-year sentence for malicious slander.

Juana González Heredia, the grieving widow? She went back to Caimito. People understood her better there. Probably because they were under no delusions about her piety.

A Militant Warden

ALTHOUGH tragic enough in most respects, the prison break of thirty convicts at Carson City, Nevada, in 1877, was not without a touch of comic relief that added somewhat to the gayety of nations.

The break was hardly over when a prison guard struck out for town to apprise the Governor of the State. He was overtaken by the captain of the guard with a team, overpowered, returned to the prison and locked up in a cell.

But, with half a dozen slain, and thirty prisoners gone, the news could not be suppressed for long. Governor Bradley held Warden Denver responsible for the break, and demanded his keys. Now Denver had been elected Lieutenant Governor—to which office that of Warden was an "ex-officio" attachment—by popular vote, and he maintained that the people alone could deprive him of either office. So he refused to surrender, ran up a battle flag, and manned the outer walls of the prison with armed guards.

The Governor ordered out the State militia, and a battalion came by special train from Virginia City. It was only when a battery of artillery trained its guns against the prison walls that Denver weakened. And he then sought to save his face by issuing an "order of the day," stating that "military necessity, due to superior numbers," had forced him to surrender the fort. To guard against a possible repetition of the farce, the following session of the State legislature passed an act making the wardenship an appointive office.

—J. L. Considine



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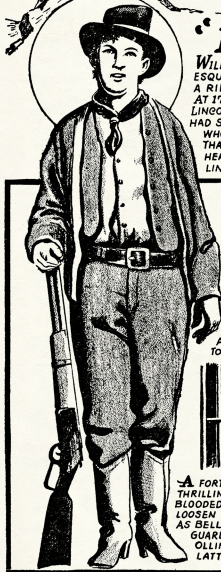
ILLUSTRATED CRIMES

by STOOKIE ALLEN



"Billy the Kid"

WILLIAM BONNEY, ALIAS BILLY THE KID, PICTURESQUE BAD MAN OF THE OLD SOUTHWEST, CARRIED A RIFLE WITH 22 NOTCHES BEFORE HE WAS 21. AT 17, HE WAS A LEADER IN A CATTLE WAR IN LINCOLN COUNTY, NEW MEXICO. THE BLOODY FEUD HAD STARTED WITH THE KILLING OF A CATTLEMAN WHO EMPLOYED BILLY. BONNEY EMERGED FROM THAT RANGELAND WARFARE WITH A PRICE ON HIS HEAD FOR MURDERS COMMITTED AFTER THE DEADLINE DATE OF AN AMNESTY PROCLAMATION BY GOVERNOR LEW WALLACE.



THE KID, MEANWHILE, HAD TURNED HORSE THIEF AND IN 1880, HE SHOT A MEMBER OF A POSSE. HOWEVER, ANOTHER POSSE UNDER SHERIFF PAT GARRETT CAUGHT UP WITH THE KID'S BAND AND CAPTURED THE KID AND THREE OF HIS MEN IN AN AMBUSH. BONNEY WAS QUICKLY SENTENCED TO BE HANGED ON MAY 13, 1881, AT LINCOLN, N.M.

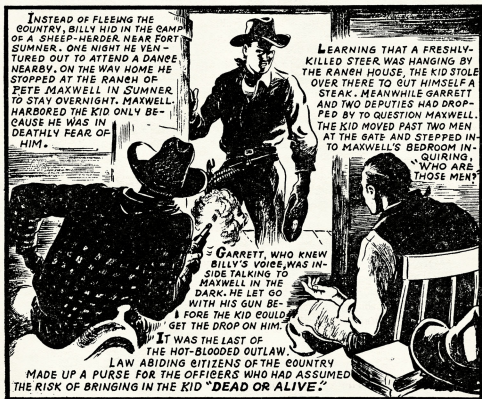


A FORTNIGHT BEFORE THAT DATE, BILLY EFFECTED A THRILLING ESCAPE, COMBINING TRIKERY WITH COLD-BLOODED MURDER. HE GOT J.W. BELL, HIS GUARD TO LOOSEN THE HANDCUFFS THAT WERE CUTTING HIS WRISTS. AS BELL TURNED TO LEAVE, THE KID SNATCHED UP THE GUARD'S GUN AND SHOT HIM DEAD. JUST THEN BOB OLLINGER, THE JAILER, RUSHED IN. BEFORE THE LATTER COULD DRAW, BILLY DROPPED HIM DEAD IN HIS TRACKS.

Coming Next Week—



TAKING THE KEYS FROM BELL'S BODY, BILLY UNLOCKED HIS HANDCUFFS AND DASHED OUT OF THE LOCKUP, MOUNTED THE FIRST HORSE HE SAW, AND FLEW OUT OF TOWN. THIS BOLD EXPLOIT WON FOR THE KID A PLACE IN THE POPULAR IMAGINATION AS A MAN OF RECKLESS BRAVERY.



INSTEAD OF FLEEING THE COUNTRY, BILLY HID IN THE CAMP OF A SHEEP-HERDER NEAR FORT SUMNER. ONE NIGHT HE VENTURED OUT TO ATTEND A DANCE NEARBY. ON THE WAY HOME HE STOPPED AT THE RANCH OF PETE MAXWELL IN SUMNER TO STAY OVERNIGHT. MAXWELL HARBORED THE KID ONLY BECAUSE HE WAS IN DEATHLY FEAR OF HIM.

LEARNING THAT A FRESHLY-KILLED STEER WAS HANGING BY THE RANCH HOUSE, THE KID STOLE OVER THERE TO CUT HIMSELF A STEAK. MEANWHILE GARRETT AND TWO DEPUTIES HAD DROPPED BY TO QUESTION MAXWELL. THE KID MOVED PAST TWO MEN AT THE GATE AND STEPPED INTO MAXWELL'S BEDROOM INQUIRING, "WHO ARE THOSE MEN?"

GARRETT, WHO KNEW BILLY'S VOICE, WAS INSIDE TALKING TO MAXWELL IN THE DARK. HE LET GO WITH HIS GUN BEFORE THE KID COULD GET THE DROP ON HIM.

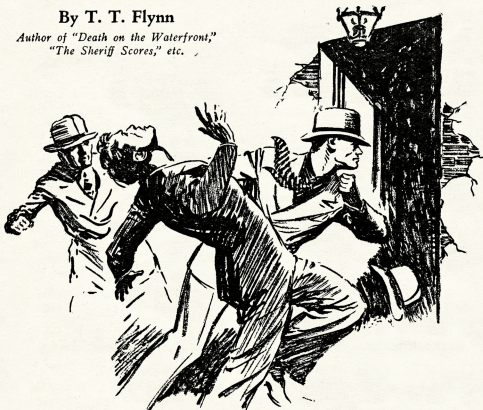
IT WAS THE LAST OF THE HOT-BLOODED OUTLAW.

LAW ABIDING CITIZENS OF THE COUNTRY MADE UP A PURSE FOR THE OFFICERS WHO HAD ASSUMED THE RISK OF BRINGING IN THE KID "DEAD OR ALIVE."

The Needle War Murder

By T. T. Flynn

Author of "Death on the Waterfront,"
"The Sheriff Scores," etc.



Hanson came reeling back. Savage met the solid wooden door and lunged

Tony Savage Moves in the Midst of Confusing Clues—the Dead Are Walking—and Bellamy's Old Friends Are Proving Themselves False . . .

PART IV

WHAT HAS HAPPENED—

NORTHWARD along a main Florida highway, Anthony Savage, ace private investigator for the Pan-America Insurance Company of New York, and his assistant Briggs, were driving in their coupé—with a new, radio-equipped trailer attached. They are suddenly halted by the appearance of a hatless, bearded man—a typical Florida cracker—who stumbles on

the macadam road almost dead from a bullet wound.

Savage gets out of the car and rushes to him just as the man expires and whispers, "Bellamy!" To Savage this is a significant coincidence, for he and Briggs were on their way to "Flamingo Groves," the Florida estate of Roger Bellamy, a heavy policy holder with the Pan-America Company. Savage carries the corpse of the unidentified native to the side of the road, and drives but a short distance when a small auto overtakes the car and trailer, and an indignant girl accuses them of leaving the scene of a hit-and-run accident. At the point of a gun, she orders them to drive to "Flamingo Groves," informing them that Bellamy lies dead there.

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MURDER CARAVAN



The woman is Rita Carstairs, reporter for the *New York Star*.

They drive to "Flamingo Groves," where Tony, after he has identified himself to the sheriff, begins his investigation of Bellamy's death. The wealthy man had been found dead—caught up under an overturned boat. He had been insured by Pan-America for \$300,000 for natural death and \$525,000 in case of an accidental death. The New York office of Pan-America phones Tony full authority to proceed with his investigation. Savage concludes Bellamy was murdered.

During his further inquiries, Tony meets Joan Bellamy, daughter of the deceased, and Jerry Goddard, her fiancé, a young man of unstable character. He also meets Prendergast, the family lawyer, and Clark, a boatman on the estate. The latter grudgingly rows Tony to the scene of Bellamy's drowning. There Clark suddenly assaults Savage and during their fight, Clark is mysteriously sniped by someone hidden in the thicket ashore.

Savage makes his way back to the dock. From Anne Teasdale, friend of Joan Bellamy, he learns that Goddard has been overheard calling Clark "father." Briggs tells Savage that Bellamy had been in financial straits, and that a man named Larnigan had taken over control of Bellamy's Arcade Steel Company. Larnigan left town before Savage could question him.

It is known that Larnigan is a crack marksman and that he had had a rifle with him. Savage arranges

to have him investigated in New Orleans, where he maintains his residence.

A short while later, Savage learns from the local telephone operator that Larnigan had been found burned to death in the charred wreck of his automobile, near Torrington, close to the Alabama line. Savage and Briggs drive out to the scene of the wreck, and note that Larnigan's rifle is not among the wreckage.

Savage is informed by his New York office that Larnigan had phoned, previous to the accident, to a Miss Moira Sullivan—Larnigan's confidential secretary. Savage and Briggs, anxious to locate the Sullivan woman, go to New Orleans, where they meet Bill Nugent, gusty supervisor of the Pan-America Insurance office in that city.

Nugent and Savage go to Larnigan's residence. They force their way in and undertake a little investigating. Rita Carstairs, accompanied by Larnigan's butler, Jasper, show up at the house a little while later. Jasper claims that Larnigan had appeared that evening at his home to pick up some clothing.

Savage learns from his home office that (1), Jerry Goddard is headed for New Orleans; (2), that Pan-America underwrote a \$90,000 double-indemnity policy on Larnigan; and (3), that Jerry Goddard phoned a Hollywood number listed under the name of Lorette Armond, who wants to collect quickly on Larnigan's policy.

Savage decides that it is time to interview Moira Sullivan and investigate her connection with the case,



but he fears that she may already be murdered.

CHAPTER XVII

Miss Moira Sullivan

"SO you think she may be dead?" said Clancy, as the small coupé rushed across the lights of oncoming traffic on St. Charles Avenue, and swung uptown on the other side of the parkway. Anthony Savage smiled wryly. There was not too much concern in the little detective's question.

You got that way, probably, by the time you were a branch manager of an international detective agency. You trapped embezzlers, thieves, bandits, killers, until your emotions became calloused and a problem like this Moira Sullivan left you unmoved. Her years of service at Larnigan's side, her fight over the telephone with Larnigan's sister for the right to bring back Larnigan's charred body, her tears when denied that privilege, her visit alone to Larnigan's house—you ignored those visible signs of one woman's tragedy and grief and reduced her to a pawn in a problem.

Savage answered the question: "I hope she's not dead. I'm sure she's in danger."

"Something in those two telegrams Nugent brought you?" Clancy shrewdly guessed.

"Nothing specific. But a background is shaping up. I'm not sure what's coming. None of it seems pleasant. I need answers to half a dozen questions."

"How's your arm?"

"Hurts. I think the bleeding's stopped."

"Hitch will get that fellow who shot you, if there's only one latent fingerprint to work on," said Clancy of his

jaunty brother-in-law, Detective Lieutenant Hitchcock.

"Good man, is he?"

"One of the best. And if that Carstairs girl doesn't show up before long, Hitch will have a general alarm out after her. He doesn't like mysteries."

Clancy looked over from the steering wheel. "You don't seem worried about her. She was alone upstairs there in the dark. And you had a gun battle downstairs—and then we find she's missing—and you take it in your stride."

Clancy had not known of that swift stab of fear when they had found Rita Carstairs gone. Savage chuckled now.

"I'm beginning to know her. I think she'll take chances like an idiot—but I think she knows how to take care of herself. If anything had happened to her in Larnigan's house, she'd have screamed. She had something on her mind she didn't want me to know about. Lieutenant Hitchcock can pick her up and bring her to Headquarters. She's registered at one of the hotels."

Clancy was driving above the speed limit, overhauling car after car. He crossed the wide, decorated cañon of Canal Street, crowded tonight, already gay with the promise of Mardi Gras—which began on the morrow.

Soon they were on Chartres Street, suddenly a narrower thoroughfare, not so brightly lighted, and different, vastly different.

They were entering the French Quarter where they had dined earlier in the evening—the old walled city the Spanish and French had built here at the swampy bend of the Mississippi centuries past.

THE streets were narrow, and the old houses were built to the edge of the narrow sidewalks. Quaint sec-

ond-floor balconies with railings of handwrought iron hung over the walks in many places. You could, if your mind was not closed by the brassy rush of modern life, move in these narrow streets and hidden courtyards with the phantoms of cavaliers in armor, pirates off the Spanish Main, Kentucky flat-boatmen with skin caps and long rifles, and proud Creoles, and chained Africans fresh from the Bight of Benin.

But Clancy was a man of single purpose. Clancy drove to Jackson Square, where the gray stone walls of the old Cabildo and the Cathedral faced one side of the square, and the venerable red brick of the Pont Alba apartments loomed three stories high along two other sides of the square, and all faced the corrugated iron docksheds of the river.

Clancy parked midway of the block on the south side of the square.

"She lives in here," said Clancy briefly, and led the way into a narrow high-ceilinged foyer from which a graceful rosewood staircase spiraled steeply and high toward the top floors. "Oldest apartment buildings in America," Clancy said as he briskly climbed the stairs. "The tourists eat 'em up."

After that Clancy was out of breath until he stopped before a third floor door, read the neat card, *Miss Moira Sullivan*, and knocked. Clancy's eyebrows lifted as the knock was unanswered. He rapped again. His look at Savage had an unspoken question.

The grim look returned to Tony Savage's thin dark-tanned face. Then he relaxed as a bolt was pushed back inside the door.

He had come with curiosity about this Moira Sullivan. He was startled by the sad auburn beauty of her in the open doorway.

Here was no faithful office drudge who found life's end in ledgers, files and shorthand pothooks.

She said: "Yes?" and the timbre of a vibrant personality was in the one word. The shadows under her eyes did not matter. The sombreness which had gathered under her high cheekbones could not hide the fact that here was a woman not yet thirty, who looked younger, whose tall figure had the lines of a girl, whose mouth was made for merriment, and whose eyes were wise and kindly for all the stunning effect of their long lashes.

"Miss Sullivan?" Savage said, removing his hat.

"Yes."

Savage introduced himself and Clancy. "There are some matters in connection with Mr. Larnigan's insurance that need clearing up this evening, Miss Sullivan."

She was at once vaguely hostile. "Mr. Larnigan's sister is the one for you to see."

"Mrs. Roche is out of town."

A shadow came into her eyes. "Yes—I know," she said briefly. "But I'm afraid I can't talk to you."

She started to close the door. Clancy put his foot out to stop the door. She looked at Clancy. Clancy took his foot away. And she would have closed the door, if Savage had not spoken calmly.

"Did you take anything from the wall safe at Larnigan's house when you were there yesterday afternoon?"

The smooth column of her throat contracted as she swallowed.

"What do you know about that, Mr. Savage? What business is it of yours?"

"The safe door was found ajar this evening. The safe is empty. The desk in the study has been searched."

She opened the door again.

"Come in, please."

AT a glance Savage guessed the living room furniture to be authentic Louis XIV. The restrained dignity of the room went well with this Moira Sullivan. She was startled, concerned—color was in her cheeks as they sat down.

"Please tell me about it?" she requested. "How do you know I was in the house yesterday?"

"The house was being watched," said Savage.

"By whom—not the Roches?" She caught herself, frowning at having mentioned that name.

"It doesn't matter, does it?" said Savage. "You were there. The safe was opened."

She studied him gravely, leaning slightly forward.

"I opened the safe," she admitted. "It was empty when I left it. But the safe door was locked. I'm very careful about such things. Who discovered the safe? Only Mr. Larnigan and I were supposed to know it was there."

Clancy said sharply: "Only Mr. Larnigan and yourself?"

"Yes." Her eyes followed the look Clancy directed at Savage.

"The file cabinet in front of the safe," said Savage, "had been moved out from the wall a bit."

"I carefully pushed it back in place against the wall," said Moira Sullivan.

"You're sure of that too?"

"Most sure. And I did not ransack the desk. Someone else has been in the house."

"Yes," said Savage. "The butler saw a light and went over. He caught a man coming down the stairs with one of Larnigan's bags. The man said: 'Is that you, Jasp?' It frightened the butler. He snapped off the light and ran out of the house, thinking he had met a ghost."

The color ran out of Moira Sullivan's face, leaving her frightened, wide-eyed. Her lips even were pale, and suddenly stiff, as she spoke.

"The man called him, 'Jasp'?"

"Yes."

"But—but—" Unbelief was fighting in her eyes.

"Some of Larnigan's clothes were carried off," said Savage, watching her.

"He's dead," she said huskily. "You know he's dead—don't you? Did Jasper see the man's face?"

"No."

Clancy's soft quick voice slipped a question in with the smoothness of a rapier blade. "Who is Sam?"

She looked at Clancy uncomprehendingly. "Sam?"

"You don't know?"

"I'm sorry—should I know?"

"My mistake," said Clancy, leaning back in his chair and watching her.

And Savage asked: "What would anyone have been looking for in the safe or the desk?"

He could have sworn she was bewildered, for she said: "Money, perhaps. Although there was seldom much money in the safe. Never any jewelry. Only securities and papers that were of interest to Mr. Larnigan."

And suddenly the terror of unbelief was in her eyes again.

"He's dead," she repeated. "There's no doubt he's dead. Why should anyone be interested in his safe or desk?"

"We're trying to find out," said Savage patiently. He paused for the space of a breath, and casually asked: "What do you know about Loretta Armond?"

The question struck her like a blow. She quivered, and sat very still. The blood crept back into her face in a fiery wave, and her answer held a quick flare of anger.

"I think you've asked enough questions!" she said with a finality that brooked no argument.

You could not, Savage realized, bully such a woman. You could hurt her with your knowledge; you could cut into her raw grief, drag into the open her emotions and love. But in the end she'd still hold to her decision.

But you could turn her emotions in on herself.

"I THOUGHT you might know about the Armond woman," Savage said casually. "She gets Larnigan's insurance. She's applied for it already. We have reason to believe she can stand some investigation in connection with Larnigan's death. This is confidential, of course."

He doubted if she heard the last. For Moira Sullivan sat very still, looking beyond him, beyond the room. And all her guards were down and her grief was there for them to see; and there was antagonism close to loathing in her manner as she said:

"So she's after the money already?" She stirred and her immaculate pink nails dug into her palms. "*She* knows something about his death?" she demanded in a stifled voice.

"The answer to that," said Savage, "depends on the information we can get. From you, perhaps."

"If I knew anything that would connect her with his death, I'd take it to the police if I had to crawl on my knees!"

And Savage thought he had never seen such concentrated aversion on the face of any woman. He said nothing. Nothing was needed. Moira Sullivan was again looking past him, at memories neither he nor Clancy could know.

"Jim met her in New York," she

said in a brittle voice. "A little, soft, fluffy thing who could wring a man's heart with her innocence. She was an actress. She'd achieved a small part in a minor Broadway success. The show had closed and she was at liberty for the summer, and Jim met her at an entertainment given by the head of one of the big advertising agencies.

"Jim fell in love with her. He was like a drunken man in a roseate haze. He thought he'd found everything he'd ever dreamed about in a woman. He stayed two weeks longer in New York than he should have. He was going to marry her.

"But he had to come back to New Orleans for a week or so. He took a plane both ways. And when he got back to her, before he saw her, he heard there'd been another man while he was gone. She'd met the man at the same kind of a party.

"And when Jim went to her, she told him the man had gotten her drunk at the party, and started to take her home, and didn't. It broke Jim's heart. He put away the idea of marrying her. But he was still in love with her, or thought he was.

"He left her name on his insurance policies, and pulled wires to get her a good part in another hit, and finally a Hollywood contract. And from then on, Jim's one consuming hate was the man who'd broken his dream."

"Roger Bellamy, of Arcade Steel," said Savage.

Moira Sullivan gave him a startled look.

"You knew about it," she accused.

"Not all the details. So Larnigan 'got' Bellamy. Took Arcade Steel away from him. Ruined him."

She nodded.

"Do you think Larnigan hated Bellamy enough to kill him?"

She denied that instantly, with a flare of protection.

"Jim would rather have seen Bellamy live bitterly." And she was hostile, suspicious. "Are you trying to involve Jim's memory with Bellamy's death?"

"I'm trying to get at the truth," said Savage; and he smiled faintly and said: "The truth is buried rather deep."

"But you think this Armond girl was capable of conniving at Jim's death to collect his insurance?"

"Do you? Do you know her? Do you know anything else about her?"

I KNOW she was dishonest," said Moira Sullivan instantly. "She lied to Jim about Bellamy. She wasn't the decent kind. I think everything about her was a lie. And—and so I think she'd be capable of anything. But I must be sure about this. I must know. If she's guilty, she mustn't be allowed to get away with it!"

"She won't," said Savage dryly. "D'you know anything about her life in Hollywood?"

"Jim didn't say much about her after she went out there. She wrote to him. He sent her money and presents. But he didn't like to talk about her." And too late Moira Sullivan tried to preserve the outer illusions. She said: "After all, I was only an employee. I didn't know everything about the boss."

Savage let it stand.

"Who was Mr. Larnigan's dentist?" he inquired.

"His teeth were perfect. He took pride in never having to visit a dentist. Why do you want to know?"

"It was a routine question. One more thing. What did Larnigan say when he telephoned you from Cohatchie night before last, before starting back?"

"He told me that his trip had been successful, and that Mr. Bellamy had accidentally drowned, and asked me about the mail, and gave me a few routine instructions, and said he was starting back at once." And Moira Sullivan stirred restlessly in her chair and said: "But I must know also about this man who was in the house last night. This man who called the butler 'Jasp'." She gulped. "Jim called him that. No one else did."

"The police are trying to find him," said Savage. "This evening there was another visitor. Perhaps the same man. He was after something. We weren't able to catch him. He got away. It would help a lot if we knew what he was after."

"Isn't that blood on your sleeve, Mr. Savage?"

"The chap used a gun. Nicked my arm with a bullet."

The telephone ringing in the next room covered her amazement and concern. She murmured a word of apology and left them.

And Clancy leaned forward as she closed the door and said under his breath:

"She's telling the truth—but she hasn't told what she got out of the safe. I'll lay you twenty to one she got what they came later to find."

Savage nodded.

And Clancy guessed: "You want her watched because you're afraid they'll do her in to get whatever she took from the safe."

"That's it."

"Not a bad idea," Clancy nodded. "It's wanted badly, whatever it is."

And then Clancy suddenly went rigid, leaning forward in his chair and listening. And Savage did the same thing. For they both had heard the low cry beyond the door.

"Jim—Jim darling!" And then something under her breath, and a pause. . . .

CLANCY jumped up. But Savage was already on his feet, crossing the room to the door with quick, quiet steps. He got there in time to hear her low voice say: "Yes—yes . . . yes. . . ."

And then he heard the clash of the telephone handpiece going down in the cradle and he turned back hastily to his chair.

But he needn't have hurried; it was some moments before Moira Sullivan stepped back into the room. And if he had thought her striking before, and pretty, Tony Savage knew now she was a beautiful woman. A miraculous change had occurred.

Moira Sullivan had come to life in a few short minutes, had bloomed, been swept from grief to delirious happiness. The glow of it was in her eyes, her color; it sheathed her in a radiance she could not suppress. And she was trying, Tony Savage realized; she was trying to suppress it, trying to be casual, to look as if nothing had happened. And she could not do it.

Clancy opened his mouth to say something. Savage's look stopped him. Clancy tried to look indifferent, and made pretty much of a mess of it.

Moira Sullivan kept them on their feet by continuing to stand. And Savage spoke calmly. "As I was saying, the police are looking for the man who shot at me."

"I hope they find him," said Moira Sullivan. But she did not really care now. She was not thinking about Larnigan's house, or gunshots or intruders. She was impatient for them to leave, and she remained standing, adding: "I'm sorry there's nothing more I can do to help you."

"You've been very kind, Miss Sullivan. I'll let you know if we make any progress."

"Please do," she said automatically. But she didn't care at the moment; she didn't care whether they ever let her know anything.

They did leave, and as they started down the stairs, Moira Sullivan locked, bolted the door behind them.

Clancy suppressed his emotion until they were below the second floor; then Clancy's seething excitement burst forth.

"You heard her at the telephone! Why didn't you do something? She called him 'Jim' before she knew what she was doing! That was Larnigan! Hell, man, it couldn't have been anyone else! Did you see how she looked when she came back in the room? Stars in her eyes! Her heart was on her sleeve! She's mad about the fellow—and she's found out he's not dead after all! And what do you do?" demanded Clancy bitterly. "You shut up and walk out on her!"

"One word," said Savage, "and she'd have been on guard. You saw enough of her to know she wouldn't have talked then. With her feeling for Larnigan, they could take her to Headquarters and sweat her for a week, and she wouldn't talk. She was so excited I don't think she realized we knew anything. If Larnigan's alive and in touch with her now, she'll lead us to him."

"AND if Larnigan's alive, and telephoning her, he's guilty as hell about that body in his car," said Clancy positively. "And if he's guilty about that, he must be the boy who killed this Roger Bellamy over in Florida. He got panicky about it. He decided they'd get him for it. He planned to vanish for good."

"I didn't think so," said Savage frowning. "Now I'm not so sure. Larnigan *could* have picked up a man on the road, killed him and left the body in the burning car. It's been done before. It might explain why Larnigan's rifle was missing out of the car. He could have been attached to it. But it doesn't explain the two men and the trailer at the Mobile toll bridge shortly after, or all these queer happenings at Larnigan's house. But one thing I'm sure of now—the man who drove that trailer over the Mobile bridge was in Larnigan's house tonight. I've got to locate that trailer."

"Hitch can help you."

"I'm beginning to wonder if it's in town at all," said Savage. "It may be miles out, hidden in some inaccessible spot, licenses changed, colored differently perhaps. That's one problem trailers are going to make. Criminals can move in them and avoid the usual contacts of trains, hotels and such places where they're usually checked."

"Well, Hitch can try," said Clancy.

"By all means. I'd like to have the city combed tomorrow. I'll wait here in your car now, in case Miss Sullivan comes out. Get to a telephone and have your men come here to watch her. And then I have some other matters for your agency to handle out of the city."

CHAPTER XVIII

Proctor's Report

BILL NUGENT was sprawled back on the divan in the trailer, high-ball glass in one hand, cigar in the other, and the built-in radio at the head of the divan playing loudly.

"Where's Clancy?" demanded Nugent as Anthony Savage entered.

"Gone back to his office."

"Good place for him," roared Bill

Nugent heartily. "We've still time to circulate a bit."

"Not for you, my boy. We're circulating to your office as soon as I re-bandage this arm and get into a fresh suit. Give me a hand here."

Bill Nugent was still grumbling when a taxicab dropped him before his office building.

"Hell of a way to hold a reunion! Get yourself shot up and dash around town like the Banshee was at your heels. Pan-America can spare your priceless services for one night."

"Wire Johnson in New York and ask him," chuckled Savage.

In his office Bill Nugent threw himself into a chair and watched with disgust as Savage sat at the desk telephone and called Sheriff Proctor, at Cohatchie, Florida.

The wait was short. Proctor's drawl came plainly over the wires.

"Anthony Savage speaking, Proctor."

"Figured it was you when they said New Orleans was calling," said Proctor. "The sheriff at Torrington said you'd call me, suh. Kind of a mess over there with that burned automobile, wasn't there? Was that why you lit out of here so quickly?"

"Partly," said Savage. "What luck have you had there, Proctor?"

"Luck?" echoed Proctor. "Well, now, suh, I ain't got around to calling it luck. We found a kind of a camp back over on the other side of the swamps that looked as if a fisherman or two'd been staying there a few days. But they didn't leave anything behind but a kind of a brush lean-to and some garbage scraps. So far no one's turned up who seen them."

"Interesting at any rate," said Savage. "How about footprints you might get casts of—and possible finger-

prints? And newspapers, cigarette ends or anything like that?"

"Nary a newspaper," denied the Cohatchie sheriff. "I found some good footprints down by the water and poured some plaster of paris in them. And did the same to some tire tracks their automobile left."

"Ahh—so there was an automobile?"

"We found the tracks where they backed it in a thicket near the camp," said Proctor. "An' I turned up an old Negro about three miles down on the old Piney road which runs near there, who said a car passed his cabin, going out, a little after sundown the day all the trouble happened. It was about dark. He said he thought it was a dark colored car and had a couple of men in it."

"But he's so old his eyes aren't much good and he ain't very sure about anything. But about ten miles on down the Piney Branch road, I found another nigger who said there'd been a trailer parked over near the river for several days. He'd seen the car drive away from it, like the men was going fishing."

"But there's been quite a few trailers back in there this year, with fishing parties, an' he didn't pay much attention to it. The trailer was gone when we went to look an' he didn't know when it left. The tire tracks of the car seemed to match the tracks at the camp. I made casts of them too."

"GOOD work!" cried Savage with enthusiasm. "See if there isn't some more information on down the road. And now, what about that autopsy report of Bellamy?"

The line was silent for a moment. "Hello," said Savage impatiently.

Proctor drawled: "I was just won-

dering if anyone's listening in on this line. I've kept the report quiet so far. Bellamy's heart was perfect. There seemed to be nothing organically wrong that could have caused death. The evidence seems to indicate he went to sleep while he was fishing—and never woke up."

"And while he was asleep he crawled into the water and overturned his boat, I suppose?"

"I don't know what happened," said Proctor. "But the autopsy report shows that Bellamy had taken almost a lethal quantity of chloral shortly before he died."

Startled, Savage snapped: "Chloral? Knock-out drops?"

"Yes," assented Proctor. "And he took it on an empty stomach. He hadn't been eating."

"I can't believe it! That would indicate suicide. All the evidence suggests he did not commit suicide."

"The autopsy report—"

"I know, I know," said Savage impatiently. "I'm taking for granted the chloral was there. But I'm wondering how it got there. A man of Bellamy's intelligence would hardly take chloral for suicide. Chloral is used for sleep. A lethal dose might produce coma hours before death. Bellamy would know there was a chance he might be found in that time. For suicide he'd have used something more efficient."

Bill Nugent commented across the office. "If I'd had Bellamy's money, I'd have built a skyscraper and jumped off. There's headlines in that."

"Shut up, Bill! This is serious business!"

Proctor was saying: "Bellamy was upset. Probably hadn't slept much for a night or so. Mightn't he have decided to get some sleep out in the boat and taken a sleeping potion?"

"In a lethal dose?"

"It does seem hard to believe, suh," Proctor confessed. "And there's no doubt about the amount he took."

"ON AN empty stomach," Savage murmured. "Wait a minute—I'm getting an idea. Bellamy was undoubtedly alone in the boat. He wasn't eating. No one forced the chloral on him. He took it voluntarily. And why would he take it voluntarily at that time and place?"

"I'd tell you, suh, if I knew," said Proctor's puzzled voice across three states.

"It was a warm day. The sun was high and hot. Twice as hot out there in the boat. Bellamy was undoubtedly quite thirsty. He drank freely. The chloral must have been in his drinking water. Or a whiskey bottle. What contained his drinking water, Proctor? Was the container recovered?"

"No one thought of it," said Proctor with audible chagrin. "And, suh, I think you've hit it! Bellamy probably had a vacuum jug, suh. And I suppose it's on the bottom of Gator Sink."

"I'm wondering," said Tony Savage. He was sitting forward on the edge of the chair now, gripping the telephone tensely as ideas flooded in on him. "I mentioned to you that I'd found wood fibers under Bellamy's fingernails. One of the nails was broken, as if he'd been clawing hard against wood. Imagine a bit more, Proctor. We'll let the drinking water theory stand. It's the best idea to date."

"We have the water in Bellamy—and the chloral. Bellamy gets sleepy, dizzy. Damn!—what have I read in the toxicologies about chloral poisoning? You get weak—sleepy—breathing becomes labored—there may be delirium before coma. Bellamy may have fallen

off the seat into the bottom of the boat, passed into a phase of delirium and clawed about the wet floor boards, where the wood fibers would be damp and loosened. The broken nail and fibers would be solved there."

"And after he was asleep, suh," reminded Proctor mildly, "Bellamy turned over the boat?"

"No, of course not! The further you go into it, the better the picture shapes up. If there was chloral in the drinking water or whiskey, someone put it there. And not to kill Bellamy outright. They could have used something a lot more efficient."

"If they'd wanted to kill him with poison, they'd also have known it would probably be discovered, and the remains of the poison found. No, Proctor—you see how it's shaping up? They wanted Bellamy asleep out there in the boat. Why? So he could be approached at leisure and dropped into the water. Perfect, Proctor!

"Put the unconscious body in the water, overturn the boat—and let the evidence speak for itself! The man tipped his boat over and drowned—and who'd think twice about it?"

"We're doing a heap of thinking now," reminded Proctor dryly. "Maybe I could find Bellamy's water container on the bottom."

"I doubt it," said Savage promptly. "If the boat was tipped over, the water container was taken out and carried away. Or at least washed out thoroughly. If this theory's right, it's a damnably clever bit of business. And it explains several other things."

"You're guessing," Proctor reminded.

"Sure I'm guessing, man. Guesses as good as these sound are needed right now. Someone put the chloral in the water container. Someone who knew

Bellamy's habits and plans and would logically be handling the container."

"Old man Clark, at the boathouse," guessed Proctor.

"Right! And it was on Clark's mind when he very unwillingly took me to Gator Sink late that same day. And when Clark saw me go over into the shallow water and begin to round up evidence that Bellamy had been murdered, Clark resolved to do me in."

"AND what about the man on the bank who shot Clark?" asked Proctor over the long-distance wire with a trace of sarcasm.

"Clark wasn't working alone. The men in that camp, man! Our outboard motor made a lot of noise. Anyone within a mile or so of the spot would know someone was visiting the place where Bellamy died. And if guilty enough might slip over there to see what was happening. And seeing Clark losing his nerve and making a mess of things, killed him before he involved anyone else."

"And when you got away under way, suh, the fellow made tracks for camp and left the neighborhood?"

"Exactly!"

"But what about Lafe Peckham?"

"That chap knew something. He was killed so he wouldn't tell it. And that's all the guessing I can do there at the present," said Savage.

"You've done a heap," said Proctor. "But why should old man Clark have wanted to kill Bellamy? Tell me, suh, why Clark would have been working with strangers camped out in the swamp?"

And Tony Savage thought of Jerry Goddard, and what the girl, Anne Teasdale had told him about Jerry Goddard and Clark. Father and son! But that had better not be told as yet.

"It's something to find out," said Savage slowly. "Also, you might test the boat Bellamy was using and find out how easily it tips over. There's a chance that Bellamy tipped the boat over as he began to pass out from the chloral. And try to check that water container and who handled it, or anything else you can think of."

"I've got a man out there now who can do that under cover," said Proctor. "The assistant gardener quit and I had the gardener take on a man in his place whom I deputized."

"So the assistant gardener quit?" said Savage thoughtfully. "He said to me he intended to leave. Where did he go?"

"No one knows. He told the gardener he'd had enough excitement an' drew his pay an' walked off. Hitchhiked down the road, I reckon. He was gone before I knew it. And that brings me to this man Larnigan, Mistuh Savage. He was under suspicion, you know. He was out all day. Do you still think it was Larnigan's rifle which killed Lafe Peckham and old man Clark?"

"I don't know," said Savage, and it was the truth and not an evasion. "If you turn up anything that I might like to know, Proctor, send a collect wire to Pan-America Insurance here in New Orleans, will you? Or reverse the telephone charges on a long-distance call if it's in office hours?"

"I will, suh," Proctor promised. "And good luck there—at whatever you're doing, suh. Good-by."

Bill Nugent shook his head as Savage hung up.

"The old sleuth himself," commented Bill admiringly. "Why not try a Ouija board on this dizzy mess you're guessing at? It couldn't be any wilder than your guesses."

"Pipe down," said Savage briefly. "I've a letter here I have to digest."

CHAPTER XIX

A Message from New York

JOHNSTON'S air mail letter, written before the two telegrams had been dispatched, was a summation of various reports that had been sent in to the New York office. Tony Savage scanned them quickly.

"... report on Jerry Goddard by detective agency at Palm Beach says:

"The Palm Beach number which Cohatchie called to find Goddard is the Gulfstream Hotel. Goddard has occupied room 227 for seven weeks. Has moved to some extent in local society. More time will be needed to gather further details. Subject tips modestly and occupies one of the cheaper rooms in hotel. Background and movements are rather vague from information at hand.

"... Miss Anne Teasdale has been coming to Palm Beach each season for at least four years. Has a varied acquaintance among the younger set. Palm Beach background appears to date from a finishing school friendship with a Miss Reicherson, now Mrs. Enoch Yardley, Jr., who has sponsored Miss Teasdale socially. Miss Teasdale is living at the Gulfstream Hotel. Moderately expensive room. Appears to be well supplied with money."

The letter contained reports from Chicago and New York on the telephone numbers called from Cohatchie by Robertson and Chatham, associates of Larnigan. Suspicion was not indicated in that quarter. There was a knock on the door.

Bill Nugent signed for a telegram and brought it to the desk with a martyred air. The wire was from Johnston.

PALM BEACH REPORTS MISS ANNE TEASDALE NOT AT HOTEL STOP IS APPARENTLY OUT OF TOWN FOR AN EXTENDED STAY ALTHOUGH RETAINING ROOM STOP DID NOT ACCOMPANY BELLAMY PARTY TO CLEVELAND.

Tony Savage whistled softly. "I wonder if *she's* headed for New Orleans?"

"Who?" demanded Bill Nugent.

"A good-looking young woman."

"Another one? Are we holding a convention?"

Savage stood up, lighting a cigarette.

"Might spot her getting off the train if she's headed this way," he muttered. "Goddard ought to be in tomorrow evening."

Bill Nugent asked with resignation: "Are we going out tonight?"

The telephone rang. It was Clancy.

"My brother-in-law just telephoned from Headquarters, Savage. They've located Miss Carstairs at her hotel. A detective is bringing her to Headquarters to explain where she went when she vanished from Larnigan's house. Interested?"

"I'll be there immediately."

"See you there," said Clancy. "I'm curious."

"I don't roost here alone," said Bill Nugent flatly. "Where are we going, and why?"

"To Detective Headquarters to see a young lady. Come along, if you're coming."

"To Detective Headquarters to see a young lady!" parroted Bill Nugent. "What an evening!"

CLANCY was there ahead of them, in a big spacious room that had half a dozen desks along the right hand side. Clancy's jaunty brother-in-law,

Lieutenant Hitchcock, was also there. And half a dozen grinning detectives and two uniformed men were listening to a conversation between Rita Carstairs and Lieutenant Hitchcock.

Rita Carstairs glanced toward the door as Savage and Nugent entered. She broke off in mid-sentence—and met them with a burst of indignation.

"I was right! You were at the bottom of this, Anthony Savage! You caused me to be brought here! Virtually an arrest in my own hotel room!"

"Ghastly!" sympathized Savage.

"Don't shed crocodile tears! It *was* you, wasn't it?"

Lieutenant Hitchcock chuckled. "Atta girl! Lay into him, Miss Carstairs."

"Judas!" Savage said to the Lieutenant. "I'm frightfully sorry, Miss Carstairs—even if Lieutenant Hitchcock is not—but it was necessary to talk to you."

"And so you had me arrested!"

"I can't believe the Lieutenant would be so unfeeling."

"What do you call being given a choice between a taxi and a patrol wagon by that big flatfoot there?"

That big flatfoot was one of the grinning detectives.

"It was just a stall, Miss Carstairs," said the detective. "No one has a warrant for you—yet."

"Yet! Yet? Why should anyone issue a warrant for me?"

Lieutenant Hitchcock smothered a broad grin with a cough.

"As I said, Miss Carstairs, we want to know why you skipped out of Mr. Larnigan's house without an explanation. Where did you go?"

Rita Carstairs gave Savage a smoldering look, and smiled dangerously at the Lieutenant.

"Was there any law that required me

to stay? Do I have to account for my movements while I'm in New Orleans?"

"Well, no-o—but—"

"It was just boyish curiosity, wasn't it, Lieutenant? I didn't obey Mr. Savage and stay crouched in the little chair in the corner—and so I must be dragged to Police Headquarters and made to tell all."

"It might be rather important," Savage suggested.

"Do you really think so, Mr. Savage?"

"I don't know where you were when it happened," said Savage. "But the chap we were expecting arrived."

"And you said 'Boo!' and he ran?"

"We had a gunfight through a closed door," said Savage. "He shot me in the arm and got away before I could do much about it. So you see, we're curious about everything that happened to you."

"Shot *you*?" said Rita Carstairs uncertainly.

"LISTEN, Miss Carstairs," said Clancy bluntly. "A couple of inches over and that bullet would have put Savage on the floor for good. The man was a killer. This isn't any time for temper or kidding. Do you know anything or don't you?"

"Why didn't some of you grinning idiots tell me? Tony Savage, how badly is your arm hurt?"

"Just a nick. Nothing to think twice about."

"Are you sure?"

"My word on it."

Rita looked relieved. But for a moment stricken concern had been on her face.

Lieutenant Hitchcock suggested: "Your reason for leaving was important, of course?"

Two more men entered the big room and joined the group, with a question from one of them to the nearest detective. "What's breaking, Robinson?"

Hitchcock answered carelessly for the detective.

"Nothing worth walking back to the pressroom with, boys. Someone tried to prowl the Larnigan house a couple of hours ago. The name might make a few lines for you. It was James Larnigan's house—the chap who was burned in his auto yesterday over beyond Mobile."

"Make any arrests?"

"No. And nothing was taken."

"Who's the lady?"

"She's with Mr. Savage here. He's checking up for an insurance company," said Hitchcock, steering lightly through the truth.

"Pan-America Insurance," reminded Savage calmly. "You might mention us, if you write it up."

"Sorry, brother—we sell advertising space," was the cheerful reply. "Nothing taken—nobody arrested? Not so hot. Larnigan's name might carry it for an inside head."

The two reporters strolled out. Rita Carstairs gave Savage an enigmatic look.

"I'm sorry I caused so much excitement," she said calmly to Lieutenant Hitchcock. "There seemed such a remote chance that anyone would come to that house, that I slipped down the back stairs and went about my own business."

"What business, Miss Carstairs?"

"An interview I wanted to get. And now, please, may I go?"

Hitchcock glanced at Savage.

"I'll take Miss Carstairs to her hotel," said Savage. "Bill, old man, I see I'm not going to make it this evening. I'll give you a call in the morning. Clancy, you'll be at the office?"

"For an hour or so," said Clancy.

Bill Nugent's farewell was suspiciously envious.

"Call me out if you need any help, Tony. I'm always ready to rally around."

However suspicious Bill was of his friend's intentions the rest of the evening, Bill was tactful enough to linger behind and let Savage and Rita Carstairs depart alone.

CHAPTER XX

Trailing Trailers

RITA CARSTAIRS did not speak until they were descending the broad front steps to the street. Then: "I was intending to see someone."

"Man or woman?"

"Woman."

"Larnigan's secretary?"

"I don't see how you do it! You can read minds," said Rita Carstairs ruefully.

A taxicab dropped two passengers and held the door open for them.

"Cruise around a bit," Savage directed the driver.

"You can let me out at the St. Charles," said Rita Carstairs.

Savage chuckled. "When the detective found you, you were ready to call on Miss Sullivan. But quite a bit of time had elapsed since you left Larnigan's house. What happened in that time?"

She was motionless for a moment, and then her voice was troubled.

"I wasn't going to tell you. But—I didn't know all that had happened at the house. I did slip out intending to see this Miss Sullivan. I had an idea you'd get to her quickly, and I wanted to be first. And I thought it would be amusing to vanish. The butler had described the house to me. I had no trouble slip-

ping out the side door, which was bolted inside.

"I left the grounds through the butler's gate on the side street. On the chance you were right, and a suspicious car might be in the neighborhood, I drove slowly around the block. I was over on the next street when a car raced past the intersection toward St. Charles Avenue. It simply had no business going that fast in that quiet neighborhood.

"I judged it would head toward town, and drove fast myself to the next corner and broke the speed limit toward St. Charles in time to pick it up again. Do you think the man who shot at you was in that car?"

"I shouldn't be surprised—I hope so," said Tony Savage hastily. "Did you find out where the car went?"

"I lost it once, and took a chance on a turn around a circle and picked it up again, heading into Carondelet Street. I followed it into the French Quarter, and saw it swing into Bourbon Street and stop at the curb. I went on around the block, and when I came back it was gone," said Rita Carstairs.

"What kind of a car was it?"

"A small dark sedan. Two men were in it I think."

"Can you find the house where it stopped?"

"I'm not certain. It was in the middle of the seven hundred block."

Savage slid the glass panel over and spoke to the driver.

"Turn over into the French Quarter and drive slowly along Bourbon from the six hundred to the nine hundred block."

Savage patted his companion's hand. "Good girl. This may be a big break. I'll trade you back as good. I've seen this Sullivan woman. She's got something hot. I'm having her watched.

Leave her to me. I'll pass along anything that breaks—if you'll promise not to print it until I'm ready."

"Word of honor." Rita Carstairs was eager. "What is it? You *can* trust me, you know."

"You can be rather devastating, Rita," said Tony Savage. "I'd like to trust you enormously."

There was a heady perfume in her nearness, and the quick intimate flash of her smile.

"**Y**OU'RE rather nice yourself, Tony," said Rita Carstairs. "But don't forget that I'm working for the *New York Star* and not Pan-America Insurance. I think this is a big story—and I mean to have it for my paper and our press service."

"Why not?" said Savage more readily than he would have thought possible a day earlier. "Just so you don't break the facts too early."

"I promised."

"Larnigan," said Savage, "is *alive*. He telephoned Moira Sullivan while Clancy and I were there tonight."

"Tony! Are you certain?"

"Take an oath on it."

"I'm giddy with the implications!" cried Rita excitedly. "It definitely involves Larnigan with murder! A man of his standing! And who is this man, Sam, who was in Larnigan's house with a gun?"

"I hope we'll soon know," said Savage.

They were in the French Quarter, on narrow Bourbon Street, where the shabby old buildings pressed close with their memories of the past. Savage requested the driver to go slower.

Rita was looking out the window on her side as they came to the seven hundred block. She shrank back, crying softly: "Don't let her see you, Tony!"

Savage had already marked the smartly dressed young woman on the corner who glanced casually at the passing taxicab. He was abruptly tense with excitement. The latest wire from the home office had stated that Anne Teasdale had dropped out of sight. But what was Anne Teasdale doing here on this Bourbon Street corner?"

"Did you see her, Tony?"

"Yes."

Savage was cautiously glancing back through the rear window. Ann Teasdale apparently had noticed nothing.

Rita's hand caught his arm. "I don't understand it, Tony. She should be in Palm Beach. Not here. Not on *that* corner!"

Savage gave the driver a curt direction. "Go back on Royal Street to Toulouse, and then over to Bourbon."

"Toulouse is a one way street, mister," said the driver over his shoulder.

"I'll get out at Toulouse. Drive around to Bourbon and wait near the corner."

Rita said: "I looked at the house as we passed. The automobile was not there."

"Chances are it will return," said Savage.

He left the taxicab at Toulouse Street, hastened over to Bourbon—and, a block north, the slim boyish figure of Anne Teasdale was still waiting. A quarter of an hour later she walked slowly to the middle of the block and entered a house.

SAVAGE reentered his taxicab, ordering the driver to go through the seven hundred block once more. This time he managed to get the house number. The shuttered windows facing the sidewalk were dark.

"The nearest telephone," Savage said to the driver.

Over the telephone he rapped orders to Clancy.

"Get this Bourbon Street address, Clancy. Our friend Sam went to it. There's a young woman in the house now who's as important as Sam. She's several years past twenty-one, wearing a dark tailored suit and a small dark hat tonight. I don't want anyone to leave the house undetected."

"I'll have men there in five minutes," promised Clancy. "The Sullivan woman hasn't left her apartment. No visitors either. Where will you be?"

"I'll drop Miss Carstairs at her hotel and come to your office. No arrests or publicity on this, Clancy."

"I thought you were stalling about rushing the lady to her hotel," said Clancy amiably. "I'll be here when you can make it."

Rita Carstairs refused to be dropped at her hotel, insisting: "If this Anne Teasdale was acting as a lookout for that gunman, anything may happen."

Clancy lifted his eyebrows when they both arrived at his office.

Midnight found them still waiting. Rita Carstairs was beginning to look wan from fatigue. Savage decided: "Bad for you, young woman. I doubt if anything more happens tonight. I slept all day in the trailer and I'll catnap here in a chair in case something does break."

"Will you telephone me if it does, Tony?"

"Yes, although there's not much we can do. If Miss Sullivan goes out, she'll be followed. If Larnigan's in that Bourbon Street house, we have him bottled up. Or anyone else inside. Clancy, can you get a John Doe warrant and a detective to serve it in case it's advisable to get into the Bourbon Street house in a hurry?"

"I think so," said Clancy, yawning.

"I'll get some sleep in the back room on a cot. I often do. And it wouldn't take much to make me advise using a warrant at once. If Larnigan's hiding in there, we've got everything in the bag."

Tony Savage shrugged.

"I'm not so sure now. I'm wondering, since I saw that girl go into the house, if this isn't bigger than Larnigan. Come along, Rita, we'll have some coffee on the way to your hotel."

At 7:15 in the morning, when Savage freshened himself in the washroom and went out for breakfast, Clancy was snoring on a cot in the back room.

Overnight the festive spirit of Mardi Gras had taken possession of the city. Banners and flags along Canal Street were stirring in the morning breeze. Along the sidewalks the first trickle of revelers gave hint of the crowds that would be abroad in an hour or so.

It was grimly sardonic, Savage thought, that on this first day of the carefree Mardi Gras period, the covert drama of death, murder and treachery should be playing up to an increasing tension.

At 7:50 when Savage returned to the office, Clancy was barking wildly into the telephone.

"How the hell do I know what to do? No, don't arrest her unless—wait a minute, here he is now!"

Clancy's shirt collar was open, Clancy's uncombed hair was a riotous shock, and Clancy ripped out excitedly:

"Hell's to pay! The boys followed the Sullivan woman to the airport! She has a reservation to Houston, Texas! She's in the plane now and it takes off in four minutes. Do you want them to drag her off?"

"Is she alone?" demanded Savage.

"Yes! One suitcase. She taxied straight to the airport. Hasn't met anyone there. Time yet to stop her."

"LARNIGAN," said Savage, "may be on the plane—but he wouldn't admit it to your men. They haven't time to identify him. Hasn't your agency a Houston office?"

"Yes. Tom Gerard's in charge. He's a good man."

"Let her go. Have her tailed when she leaves the plane in Houston. If Larnigan's not with her now, she's certainly going to meet him."

"Hell's cats! What's happening then?" rasped Clancy. "Three minutes ago the men watching the Bourbon Street house called in. Nobody's gone out—but a man just arrived there with a suitcase."

"Is the detective still there with the warrant?"

"Yes," said Clancy, poised with suspense.

"We'd better clean out the house and see what we get," Savage decided.

Clancy donned his necktie and combed his hair in a speeding taxicab. A few minutes later they were consulting with one of Clancy's men and a Headquarters detective on the Bourbon Street corner where Anne Teasdale had stood.

Hanson, the detective, had a stubble of beard on broad cheeks, and was gratified at the chance for action.

"I'll take the door first, with the warrant," said Hanson. "There's no car out in front. We've got 'em inside."

Savage, Clancy, and Clancy's man stood close against the adjoining house as Hanson knocked on the door through which Anne Teasdale had vanished.

Hanson had to knock twice. Then the door opened only slightly. Hanson crowded the door open with his shoulder and stepped inside. Savage ran to follow him—and Hanson came reeling back with blood spurting from a split

cheek. Savage met the solid wooden door with the full impact of his flying weight and lunged inside.

A fist glanced off the side of his head; he reeled, caught a coat sleeve, grappled with the man, not sure that he wasn't drawing a bullet the next second.

And then he recognized his opponent, as Clancy and the others rushed in. Jerry Goddard was the man, young Jerry Goddard, Joan Bellamy's fiancé. And Goddard looked stunned, then angrily resentful as he jerked away.

"What the devil does this mean, Savage? Did you follow me?"

Hanson was wiping blood from his cheekbone and holding a revolver.

"I oughta slug you dizzy for that smack!" snarled Hanson. "Who the hell are you? Where's that woman who ducked back when I started in?"

"Put your arms up," said Savage to the prisoner.

Goddard had no weapon. He was glowering sullenly.

"Come on!" barked Hanson, "Where's the dame? Who else is in the house?"

"I insist on a lawyer before I talk," said young Goddard through tight lips.

"You'll get a smack in the puss!" threatened Hanson. "Get back into the house there and let's see who you're covering up! And if there's a back way out and they're gone, I'll ride you!"

SAVAGE would have been more suave about the matter—but the city detective's temper was flaring and this was no time to debate among themselves. Clancy's second man had appeared. He remained guarding the front door while they searched the house.

Clancy yelled upstairs: "Downstairs, lady, downstairs! Don't argue!"

Anne Teasdale was wearing a blue dressing gown and blue silk slippers as she came down the stairs. And when she saw Anthony Savage she was suddenly afraid. Young Goddard, despite his sullen defiance, was uneasy and afraid also, Savage had already decided.

The house had no back exit. Anne Teasdale and Jerry Goddard were the only occupants. And when they made sure of that and gathered in the front room again, Savage spoke calmly to the two prisoners.

"You came a long way to meet again."

Anne Teasdale's eyes clawed him as they had when she left the trailer by the Bellamy boathouse back there in Florida. She had not forgotten his biting words, or ceased to hate him. But she was worldly enough, despite her youth, to have a measure of composure now.

"Isn't that our business?" she countered coldly.

"You have a reason for this meeting, of course?"

She shrugged. "Do we need a reason? I wanted a change after the unpleasantness at Bellamy's. Mardi Gras promised to be amusing, so I took the plane here. I lease this house to use when I'm in town." Her smile had an edge. "You can confirm that at the real estate office."

Savage accepted it with a nod. "Does anyone else live here?"

"No. Friends visit me now and then." Again her smile had an edge. "Friends such as Mr. Goddard here, who stopped off the plane for a few hours on his way to the coast. Is there any law against that, Mr. Savage?"

Hanson rasped: "A few hours? There's only one plane west a day!"

Jerry Goddard moistened his lips.

His color was returning, and with it a sullen assurance.

"Trains run, I believe," he reminded. "And I still don't understand this. I didn't know there was a law against stopping to see a friend. Savage, I suppose, is still bent on making an ass of himself about Mr. Bellamy's death and the insurance. I hope, Savage, you know exactly what you're doing—and your company is ready to defend a suit for false arrest."

"Never mind that kind of guff!" said Hanson roughly. But Hanson was watching Savage for the next word.

Savage chuckled. "We usually know what we're doing. Miss Teasdale, please get dressed. Sit down, Goddard. Hanson, Clancy, will you step outside a minute?"

Out on the sidewalk, Savage spoke hastily.

"Clancy, Goddard's presence with Miss Teasdale stumps me. I'm afraid to think what it means. The important thing right now is that Larnigan isn't in the house. I don't think he's in the State now—or the trailer either. The

Sullivan woman must be going to meet him. You have enough grounds to hold these two for questioning for a day or so. Hanson, that warrant will let you keep someone in the house in case anyone comes.

"If anyone does, hold them as long as possible. I have my doubts now that you'll get anything out of these two. So far they're in the clear, as far as the law goes."

"And where will you be?" demanded Clancy.

"MISS SULLIVAN has started west. Our friend Sam has already left, it seems. Miss Teasdale *might* have been telling the truth about Goddard's being on his way to the coast when he changed to the plane to save time." Savage smiled bleakly. "I don't want those two in there to know it, but in about twenty minutes, I'll be on my way west—and I hope to find that trailer somewhere close to Miss Sullivan's destination. Let Miss Carstairs know, will you? And don't mention trailers to Miss Teasdale or Goddard."

Is Jim Larnigan actually among the living? And if he is, will Moira Sullivan lead Tony Savage to him? Of all the people who comprise the cast of this amazing drama of duplicity and murder, there is no one whom Savage would rather question than the elusive Jim Larnigan. Find Larnigan and the case is two-thirds broken. But that is Tony Savage's problem. Watch him try to work out a solution in the next installment of MURDER CARAVAN—coming to you in the next issue of DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY.

Secret Loveliness

Tiny glints of gold
make dull hair
romantic

USE
MARCHAND'S
GOLDEN HAIR WASH

Practical Finger Printing

*Fascinating Details
of a Great New
Profession*



How to Handle Finger Prints

By Lieut. Charles E. Chapel

*U. S. Marine Corps; Member, International
Association for Identification*

LET us imagine that we are members of a Homicide Squad of a big city detective bureau. With us is a photographer, a man who maps the scene of the crime, a ballistics expert, a fingerprint expert, and a Sergeant or Lieutenant of Detectives who directs the activities of his associates. As assistants to the fingerprint expert we can speed up the investigation by dividing the work among us, one man taking the room where the murder took place, another examining the doors and windows where the killer broke into the house, while still another fingerprint assistant takes charge of fingerprinting the members of the household, and any other persons who might be regarded as suspects.

In carrying out our duties we shall look for three sources of fingerprint impressions. First, visible prints, those left by fingers smeared with blood or dirt which have been pressed against papers, the wall, the table, or any other surface. These visible prints are easy to find. The fingerprint man draws a

circle around them with chalk, numbers the circle, and calls on the photographer to take a picture of these impressions.

The next easiest group of fingerprints will be those found on candles, bars of soap, putty, butter, pomade, cake frosting and similar soft objects. These are called plastic prints. Before they can be photographed they must be "developed." This is done by sprinkling them with powder so that they will show up clearly in the photograph in contrast to their background.

The most difficult of the three sources of fingerprints is the class called *latent* prints. These are usually invisible, but often they can be seen for a second by blowing on them, or by turning a flashlight on the surface of the object they cover. The senior fingerprint expert will take care of this part of the investigation, since it requires experience and skill to locate and develop these obscure prints.

He looks for latent prints on window panes, mirrors, glasses, bottles, earthenware, crockery, polished furniture, the smooth surface of weapons, the bodies of motor cars, ax handles, sheets, shirts, papers, and even on the fingernails of the dead man. In fact,

the human skin is about the only reasonably smooth surface on which latent prints have never been found.

There are many fingerprint experts who believe that latent prints are left by the natural oil of the body, but this is not quite correct. The natural secretions from the fingers, palms, toes, and soles contains no oily substance, as do the fatty portions of the body. Latent prints, then, are primarily caused by natural colorless substances left behind when perspiration evaporates. Since the excitement of committing a crime increases the flow of perspiration, the fingers deposit perspiration in the form of a pattern determined by the presence of ridges on the skin.

We do not know the exact reason for ridges on the hairless portions of the body, particularly the hands, and feet, but we believe that they are there to aid the sense of touch and as friction surfaces to prevent slipping. These ridges are pierced by tiny holes which are the mouths of the perspiration glands. If the hands have come in contact with the face, the latent print may be partly caused by natural oil, but in general the secretion from the sweat glands is over 98% water, with fatty acids and salt taking up a good portion of the remaining 2%.

The old reliable method of developing latent prints so that they can be seen and photographed is to use black powder on a light surface, and white powder on a dark background. The most practical black powder is made by mixing two parts by weight of finely ground black carbon with one part by weight of lampblack, sprinkling it over latent prints with a saltcellar. A good white powder is one ounce of Chemist's Gray mixed with three ounces of fine talcum powder. The Chemist's Gray is nothing more than finely powdered

chalk and mercury which can be bought from any large drug store.

Using a saltcellar is rather crude, but it was a favorite device for dusting prints in the early days. Today, the fingerprint expert dips a camel's-hair brush into the powder, shakes the brush over the print, and then blows off any excess powder with his breath or an atomizer. If too much powder is left on the print it clogs up the fine details and results in an indistinct picture.

Returning to the work of our homicide squad at the scene of a murder, we find that the senior fingerprint expert has directed us to carry some of the suspected objects to the identification bureau, where he can develop any latent prints under more favorable circumstances. These include glasses, pistols, books, and even a door which was taken was taken off its hinges for this purpose. We fasten the pistols to boards with string, put the glasses between two pieces of wood held together by braces, and place the books in boxes so that the surfaces carrying prints will be well clear of the sides of the boxes. All of this is done to prevent the destruction of latent prints.

At the Identification Bureau, the fingerprint expert has a choice of several means to bring out the impressions on the books. He can use the black powder we have described, but if he is afraid to ruin a valuable book by soiling it with the charcoal, he can substitute powdered metallic antimony, and proceed in the usual method.

One of the best methods for handling paper is to moisten the rolls of a clothes-wringer with a 10% solution of silver nitrate, run the paper through the rollers, let it dry, and then expose it to sunlight until the prints come out clearly and distinctly. If kept in a dark room, the paper will retain the visible

patterns for many months, but the usual thing is to photograph them as soon as they are revealed by the action of the light.

Another good treatment for paper is the iodine process. Place some iodine crystals on the bottom of a glass bowl, lay the paper over the top of the bowl, and then cover the bowl and paper with some larger object that will keep in the fumes. In five or ten minutes the prints will appear as distinct brown patterns, and can be photographed if we move quickly, otherwise they will fade and we shall have to repeat the process. To speed up the process, heat applied under the bowl will cause the iodine crystals to give off their fumes very rapidly, but beginners in fingerprint science are cautioned that the heatless method gives more certain results.

Glasses and bottles found at the murder scene are dusted with the black powder, excess powder blown away, and then, when the prints stand out clearly, they are photographed. Sometimes the photographer gets a good contrast between the prints and their background by using aluminum powder on the latent impressions, filling the bottle or glass with black ink, and then photographing the prints. Ingenious departures from routine are the distinguishing mark of the real expert who is not bound by the rules that wisely restrict the beginner to time-tried methods.

In bringing out latent prints on firearms we can use either aluminum powder or copper powder, the latter being heavier and less likely to be blown away, and at the same time it adheres to the metal practically as well as aluminum. Strangely enough, the fingerprint man's biggest problem with firearms is to find his latent prints be-

fore the ballistics expert claims the guns for his office, develop them, and photograph them so that even if they are rubbed off by the ballisticians they can be introduced in court through photographs.

Fingerprints on cloth worried the experts until they sought the assistance of police chemists who discovered a sure-fire treatment. The shirt or handkerchief is sprayed with a 10% solution of silver nitrate, dipped in a 10% solution of acetic acid and then left to dry in a dark room. When dry, it is exposed to the sun or ultra-violet rays which bring out the prints clearly enough to be photographed. To fix them so that they can be seen in court, the garment is dipped in water several times and sprayed with a 5% solution of ammonium hydrosulfide, rinsed again with clear water, and then dried in the sun, for the second and last time. Obviously, this treatment is only necessary for latent prints; impressions made on cloth with blood or dirt are photographed directly without any treatment.

The fingerprint camera is so constructed that it can be placed directly over the prints, thus eliminating all outside light. Pressing a trigger turns on flashlight bulbs inside the camera, automatically exposing the film, and giving a natural size picture which can be enlarged for court room evidence. In case a dispute may arise over the photographs of fingerprints, the detectives have two witnesses verify the work of the photographer at each step.

Bloody fingerprints against a colored background require the use of color filters. Fingerprints in dust, and those on objects like candles, soap, and butter are made with an oblique light. Since there is no way to use filters or oblique light with the fingerprint camera, the police photographer sets up

the conventional kind of camera and goes to work. When he is through, one of the laboratory men makes a plaster cast of the prints found on objects like soap and candles, the surface of the cast is hardened with shellac, and carefully saved for evidence.

When photography is impossible by direct means, the print is first developed with powder, and then lifted by covering it with a paste that resembles gelatine. The coloring material in the fingerprint sticks to the paste when the paste is peeled off the marked surface. There are several ready made transfer sheets of this nature sold by various manufacturers of police equipment, some of them resembling tire tape, while others look like sponge rubber. All of them are good in the hands of an expert, but if a beginner lets the transfer sheet slip while he is putting it on, or taking it off, the fingerprint is destroyed. However, when this treatment succeeds, the photographer finds it an easy matter to take a picture of the print that now appears on the transfer sheet.

If you wish to experiment with this process you can make your own transfer sheets at little cost. Buy some old camera film, soak it in a solution of hyposulphate of soda and water until the silver deposit leaves the film. Rinse the film in cold, running water, dry it before an electric fan and then cut it up into small sheets.

To test this type of transfer sheet, press your own fingers against some smooth surface, such as a table, or a window pane. Powder the area of the latent prints with aluminum powder, blow off any excess powder, and your prints are developed. Now slightly moisten your camera film with a few drops of water, press the sticky side of the film against the latent prints,

and then slowly peel off the film. Avoid leaving your own prints on the film. If the process is a success the prints are now on the film, with nothing left on their former background. If you fail, part of the prints may adhere to the film, while the rest stays on the original surface.

If you are especially ambitious, you can even make your own gelatine transfer sheets. Mix one part of sheet gelatine, four parts glycerin, one part water. Slowly heat this mixture, adding lampblack until the substance is jet black. When the ingredients are well mixed, pour the mixture on a slab of glass and let it cool. Before it hardens, roll a sheet of cheesecloth over the surface. As soon as it is cold and hard, cut it up into little squares.

This gelatine sheet is handled very much as we have already suggested for the camera films, directly against the prints after they have been developed with powder. Running a roller over the cheesecloth backing gives an even pressure with little chance for fatal slipping. Peel off the sheet, and there's your lifted print!

To avoid the danger of leaving any type of fingerprint at the scene of the crime, the professional law violator resorts to the wearing of gloves. If he is a burglar, he must use oil, and his gloves become so greasy that they leave an excellent pattern of their material on smooth surfaces. The weave of the fabric, defects due to manufacture or normal wear, and torn places provide valuable clues for identification.

Glove prints are photographed directly if they left an impression in dust, on plastic objects, or in blood, but if they are of the latent type, they are colored with the white powder carried in every fingerprint kit, and developed in the usual manner. When a suspect is

brought into the bureau, his gloves are inked, and then pressed against a record card, which is then compared with the impressions found at the crime scene. Both the crime set of glove prints and the set taken at arrest are photographed. We may appear to emphasize unduly the photographing of everything concerned with crime, but the failure to do this often spells the difference between the conviction and the acquittal of a criminal.

Fingerprints, and even glove-prints, often carry occupational clues. A burglar who sometimes worked in a flour mill left a few grains on a window sill where he pressed against the wood with his gloved hands. A housebreaker who made his entrance by breaking panes of glass had tiny particles of glass in his gloves that were traced to a home where he had robbed the owner of valuable jewels.

Some kinds of manual labor coarsen the ridges in the finger tips, while those who work in hot water or acid exhibit fingerprints whose patterns are largely destroyed, requiring careful study

under the microscope before the investigator can find enough characteristics to reasonably assure identity. Criminals have even been known to scrape their fingers against sandpaper to wear down the ridge patterns. The police meet this situation by enlarging the photograph of any such impressions found at the crime scene, and then accomplish identification from the system of pores in the finger tips or on the palms of the hands.

Crooks who leave good prints in embarrassing places sometimes try to destroy their ridge patterns on the way to jail. This is difficult if the police are vigilant, but if it happens they are placed in handcuffs until they grow a new outer skin layer showing the same old patterns with which they were born. From the cradle to the grave, those designs remain the same unalterable, individual signatures, whether we leave them as honorable citizens on the personnel cards of a great organization, or print them in blood in the commission of a crime that can never pay anything but a free passage to the gallows.





With a piercing scream, the prisoner toppled headlong off the roof

Old Calamity Stops a Leak

By Joseph Fulling Fishman

Author of "Old Calamity Sniffs a Clue," "Old Calamity's Stick-up," etc.

Eleven Escapes Through Prison Walls—Until Deputy Fletcher Found Their Rat Hole and Plugged It Up With Bullets

THE Deputy Warden picked up the telephone receiver gingerly. "Long distance calling Mr. Fletcher, of the Cosmopolis Penitentiary," came a voice.

"This is Mr. Fletcher speaking," the Deputy replied. Buzzes, clicks, broken words and other noises crackled on the wire, and then a brusque, masculine voice said:

"That you, Fletcher?"

The Deputy acknowledged the fact. "This is O'Neill at Springfield," came the voice again. "Could you run down here right away? Can you get down by tomorrow?"

"Why, I don't know," the deputy, known as Old Calamity to the 3,000 prisoners in his institution, replied. In the suave, pleasant voice so characteristic of him, he went on. "Is it very important?"

"I should say it is," said Warden O'Neill. "My prisoners are walking out on me in wholesale lots. We soon won't need any warden here if this keeps up."

"Yes, I saw something about it in the papers," Old Calamity replied. "Three of them got away, didn't they?"

"You only read half the story. Three of them got away a week ago and four of them the following day. Then four more got away yesterday. That's eleven inside of ten days. They simply vanished into the air. You've *got* to come down and help me out. My Board's raising the devil with me. They're having the monthly meeting here tomorrow to go into the matter. I'd like to have you at the meeting, if you can possibly get here. It's at three in the afternoon. Won't you try to make it?"

"All right," Mr. Fletcher said, in his usual modest manner, "I'll be glad to do anything I can to help you. I'll take the sleeper tonight."

The next afternoon at three o'clock, Fletcher was introduced to the seven members of the Board. He sat quietly in a chair to one side of the table while the usual prison business was disposed of. Then, under "new business" came the matter of the escapes, and he moved a bit closer to O'Neill.

"Mr. Chairman," Warden O'Neill began, "the members of the Board, I believe, already know practically as much about these mysterious escapes as I do. But in order to get the facts properly assembled, I will repeat them briefly. The first three escapes, as you are aware, were on Saturday, August 12th. Three men—three bad men, Darmstadt, Elliott and Lyons, all members of "Slug" Brewster's mob—got away during the recreation period. They must have escaped from the yard in some manner. We turned the prisoners out as usual at about two o'clock

and took the count before they left the cell houses. The count was correct. They were marched in from the yard at about five o'clock for supper, and then marched back to their cells where the evening count was taken. The count was three short, and a check-up showed that these three were the missing ones."

"WERE all the tower guards on duty while the men were in the yard?" Mr. Ambruster, the chairman of the Board, inquired.

The Warden nodded. "Yes, sir. We always have them on guard during the recreation period. As you know," he went on, half turning toward Old Calamity, "we have a thirty-foot wall. It would be almost impossible with these guards on duty and almost two thousand men in the yard for these prisoners to get over the wall without being seen. The guards in the towers can see every single corner of the yard. When the escapes were reported, we felt sure the men were hiding out, but a search of every corner of the institution did not reveal their whereabouts. There was no doubt but that they had gotten away."

"And then these others?" Mr. Ambruster inquired.

"That was the following day, Sunday, August 13th. The count was correct when the men were marched into the yard, but again there were some missing. This time there were four, also members of Brewster's mob—you know we've got about twenty of them in here. We again made a thorough search to see if they were hiding out, but they were gone; there is no doubt about that. On the following Sunday, just one week later, four more—and Brewster's mob again—mysteriously disappeared out of the yard in the same manner. I admit that I'm completely

baffled. In my eighteen years of prison experience, I have never seen anything like it. For the benefit of the other members of the Board, I wish to say that I then got Mr. Ambruster on the telephone and requested authority to ask Mr. Fletcher down here, to see if he could solve the mystery."

"I am glad you did," said Mr. Ambruster. "All of us, of course, have heard of Mr. Fletcher and his extraordinary success in solving several prison mysteries. I think, though," he added smilingly, "we have one here which will tax even his ability to the utmost. You can imagine how the newspapers are going for us; eleven of the toughest mob in the State escape in less than two weeks. Would you like to say something, Mr. Fletcher?"

"No, sir, except to admit that you're probably right about it's being a difficult case. It does look like a pretty hard thing to solve. I'd just like to ask Warden O'Neill one question, and that is, if the men were in the yard on Saturday, August 19th, the day before these last four escaped."

"No," the Warden replied. "It rained so hard that day that we couldn't let the men out."

"You only give them the privilege of the yard on Saturdays and Sundays?"

The Warden nodded assent.

"Well," said Old Calamity, "that does seem to indicate that the escapes were from the yard, and not after the men were marched back to the institution. However, I'd like to take a look around the place with the Warden."

FOR the next two hours Warden O'Neill and Fletcher walked through every part of the big institution, inside the walls as well as out. The institution was rather unusual in

construction, the two main cell wings stretching out for approximately 400 feet on each side of the administration building and forming part of the enclosure, the rest of the thirty-foot wall stretching back from them. At the end of each of the main cell houses, a guard tower was located on the roof. Old Calamity observed the unusual construction of the institution with interest. He was particularly interested, however, in the buildings which stretched away inside the walls: the long corridor leading to the four supplementary cell houses, the mess hall, chapel, kitchen, and next to the latter, the boiler house; and across a paved walk from the latter, the maintenance and workshops of the institution. He went into each one of these buildings and examined them thoroughly from top to bottom.

Warden O'Neill, deeply interested in the Deputy's maneuvers refrained from making a single remark.

And Old Calamity became so absorbed in his investigation that he scarcely was aware of his companion. He poked into forgotten corners of the refrigerators, the bake-ovens, the boiler room and the various shops. He then asked Warden O'Neill innumerable questions concerning the routine of the institution, the kind of equipment which it possessed, the operation of the machinery, the kind of fire boxes and stokers in use, the size of the utility corridors, and the underground piping. All of these questions the Warden answered precisely, wondering the while what they had to do with the escapes which so puzzled and worried him. The tour of the prison completed, Old Calamity announced that he would like to ask the chief engineer some technical questions concerning the layout and operation of the machinery.

Finally finished with this interview, he walked back to the Board room where the Warden had gone after being summoned by a runner. The Board suspended the business matter under discussion when he walked in, and Mr. Ambruster looked up at him inquiringly.

"Solved the mystery already?" the chairman inquired. He spoke in the "kidding" and somewhat patronizing manner often adopted by business men in speaking of anything involving crime detection.

"I think so," Old Calamity replied, calmly.

Mr. Ambruster and the members of the Board stared at him in wide-eyed astonishment.

"You don't mean it!" Mr. Ambruster managed to say at last.

"Yes," Old Calamity said quietly. "I think I have, but I'm not entirely sure. I won't know definitely until the next time the men go in the yard. That will be this coming Saturday, if the weather permits, won't it?" Warden O'Neill nodded.

"All right," said the Deputy, "I'll come back then. I'm afraid that you have an easy means of escape in your institution."

"BUT," Mr. Ambruster suggested, after a long silence, "if we have, suppose prisoners take advantage of it before next Saturday?"

"They won't," said Old Calamity.

"You mean to say," Mr. Ambruster objected, "that if there's a way of escape it can be used on Saturday or Sunday, but not on Monday or Tuesday?"

"I didn't say that," replied Old Calamity. "I said the prisoners won't use it. I'd be glad to tell you about it," he added, "but I don't want anything

to happen, either accidentally or otherwise with plans of escape. Besides, if any with plans of escape. Besides, if any prisoners try it on Saturday or Sunday, and they probably will, we may be able to obtain some information concerning the whereabouts of those who have already gone."

"I must say," Mr. Ambruster said, "that it all seems a bit silly and mysterious to me."

"I'm sorry, sir, that you feel that way about it," said Old Calamity courteously. If you would prefer me to withdraw from the situation entirely, I shall of course be glad to accede to your wishes."

He smiled genially.

Mr. Ambruster frowned. He was not used to being talked to in this way by anyone he considered his subordinate or inferior. It is hard to say what reply he would have made had not Mr. Englehardt, another member of the Board, spoken up. "I think Mr. Fletcher is quite right," he said. "We asked him to come down, and I think we should permit him to work in his own way."

"All right," said Mr. Ambruster. "What do you want to do, Mr. Fletcher?"

"Nothing at all," Old Calamity replied. "I'm going back to my own institution and will return here next Saturday."

True to his word, the following Saturday noon found Old Calamity in Warden O'Neill's office. The Warden jumped from his chair at once.

"I'm sure glad to see you," he said, wringing the Deputy's hand. "I can't tell you," he added with a wry smile, "how nervous a Saturday afternoon or Sunday makes me now. The newspapers are beginning to kid us; they call this 'the prison of week-end

escapes' and are having a swell time lampooning us."

Old Calamity nodded sympathetically. "I know how it is," he said. "You go along for years with a prison full of the worst thugs in the country and don't have any trouble, yet you never get a pat on the back for it. But, the minute anything goes wrong, they are all on your back like a pack of wolves."

"I'll say they are," said the Warden, fervently. "I certainly hope that you will be able to find out what it is all about today."

"I'll do my best," Old Calamity said. "I'm glad that it's a nice day so they can go out in the yard. Have your men check the count very carefully."

"Right," said the Warden. "I'll do that, and if any prisoners are missing, I think I'll keep my guards on the towers all night."

"No," said Old Calamity. "Don't do that. That's the very thing I don't want you to do."

"But suppose they are hiding out in the institution?" the Warden objected. "They might be able to get out under cover of darkness, if I don't keep the wall covered."

"I know," said Old Calamity, "but I wouldn't change my routine at all. It's very important that you keep it just as it is. Let your wall guards leave after the prisoners are marched in from the yard, just the way you always do."

AT two o'clock the men were marched out from the cell houses into the long corridor, and down the corridor to a door which led into the yard. Old Calamity stood near the door with Warden O'Neill, watching the apparently never-ending line of gray-clad men shuffling through the hall. Prisoner after prisoner grinned and

nodded to Old Calamity, some of the older ones pulling at the peak of their caps in a sailor-like fashion. The Deputy nodded to all of them, speaking to some by name: "Hello, Mike," "How are you Stumpy?" "Sorry to see you in again, Hendricks," and so on, as they filed past him.

At the Deputy's request, Warden O'Neill pointed out the remaining members of the Brewster mob. "Hardly any left," the Warden said regretfully.

After the men had finally gone, he turned to Old Calamity as a guard stepped up to him and handed him a slip. "1867 men," O'Neill said. "Checked the count twice, and it's okay."

"Fine," the Deputy said. "You go ahead and do anything you like, Warden. Don't worry about me. I'll kill time in some way until the men come in." The next three hours Old Calamity spent walking through the institution and out into the yard. He watched a very noisy, if not particularly well-played game of baseball between the white and colored prisoners, strolled over and watched some men playing handball, looked over the shoulders of some others following a game of checkers, and generally spent a restful afternoon.

At a quarter of five the shrill prison whistle stopped the various activities, and brought the prisoners into line for the march into the mess hall for supper. The Deputy followed at the end of the line and went to the Warden's office. The Warden was plainly nervous, fingering a pencil, tapping with his fingers on his desk, and shifting from side to side in his chair.

"I'm waiting for the report of the count," he explained. In about a half hour, which time they had spent talk-

ing over various prison occurrences and acquaintances, the institution telephone buzzed. The Warden picked up the receiver. After a few hurried words he put the receiver down and turned to Old Calamity. "Incredible," he said. "Four more missing. Only 1863. That makes fifteen altogether. My God, I might as well quit. Just wait till the papers get hold of this."

"Take it easy, Warden," Old Calamity said. "I don't think the four have gone yet. They're around somewhere, inside the prison."

"Yes, but where?" said the Warden. "They're making the usual search, but they made it three times before and didn't find anything."

He appeared beaten.

"No, and they probably won't this time either," Old Calamity replied. "But I think the men are still inside the institution just the same. Suppose we walk around together?"

ONCE more the Deputy walked through the prison accompanied by the Warden, and once more he poked around in the most impossible places, while Warden O'Neill again wondered just what all these crazy maneuvers meant. The Deputy looked into the ovens in the kitchen, now cold; into the long cans in which the large cubes of ice were manufactured; into the fire boxes of the boiler house from which the fires had been drawn in order that some necessary cleaning and repair work could be done; into the entrances to the guard towers and numerous other places.

"I'd like to go up on the roof of the two main cell wings," he said finally, turning to the Warden. They walked up into the guard tower at the end of the block, and through a solid iron door which led on to the roof. The slate roof

had a slight slant for drainage, with the usual number of abutments.

"I don't see what you can expect to find up here," Warden O'Neill said at last. "They couldn't possibly come over this roof without the guard in the tower seeing them."

Old Calamity smiled. "I don't expect to find them here now," he said. "I would, however, like to come up here in this guard tower with you and five or six good guards just before it gets dark. I want them all armed. You'd better have your gun, too."

"You want them to stay inside the tower?" asked the Warden, wonderingly.

"Yes," said Old Calamity. "For a while, at least. Well, we might as well go to dinner now."

About a half hour before darkness descended on the rather gloomy looking buildings of the prison, Old Calamity, Warden O'Neill, and six husky guards climbed into the guard tower at the end of the east main cell block.

"Be careful," Old Calamity warned, as he led the way. "We'd better sit on the floor so no one can see us through the windows. It will be dark within an hour and then we can be a little more comfortable. It will be all right to smoke if you want to, but leave a window open on the opposite side." He turned to the guards. "As I explained to Warden O'Neill a short time ago, men, I think the four men who are missing are still within the institution, and that they will try to get out over the roof when it gets dark. Keep the door unlocked, and I'll keep watch. When I see them coming—if they do come—I'll say 'ready,' and then we'll push open the door and go out to meet them. I don't think they'll put up any fight, but if they do don't take any chances."

The ensuing wait was one of the most irksome which Old Calamity had had in his long career. Darkness came at about 8:15. Old Calamity, who had previously glanced cautiously out of the corner of the window overlooking the roof of the cell house, now took his station squarely in front of the window, knowing that he could not be seen from the outside.

THE Warden and the guards in back of him, as nine o'clock, ten o'clock, eleven o'clock dragged wearily on, marvelled at the patient immovability of the slender, gray-haired figure in front of them. Hour after hour Old Calamity stood silent, placid and motionless before the window, staring into the outer darkness dimly lighted by a moon now in its last quarter. Once or twice he turned around to caution the men in back of him not to talk so loudly. Then his gaze returned to the window, and he stood once again immovable until eleven-thirty and then twelve o'clock.

"I'm afraid we're on a wild-goose chase," Warden O'Neill sighed, as they heard the faint gong of the distant town clock.

"Possibly," Old Calamity replied evenly. "We'll see."

"How long do you expect to wait?" Warden O'Neill inquired. He was decidedly sleepy and restless, and the thought of bed came pleasantly to his mind.

"I don't know," Old Calamity replied. "Probably until daylight."

The Warden sighed again, wondering at the endurance of the Deputy. Fletcher was apparently as fresh, as alert, and as even-tempered as he had been when he appeared at the institution that noon, after an all-night ride in a sleeper.

It was almost one o'clock, and the tired guards back of him were nodding and trying to keep awake. Old Calamity, staring intently into the darkness, thought he discerned a movement at the other end of the cell house roof where it joined the administration building. Knowing how one's imagination can play tricks when the eyes are intently watching one spot, Old Calamity turned away for a moment, shut his eyes, then turned back toward the window and suddenly raised his lids. There was no doubt about it—there was a figure, or possibly two figures, crouched low at the other end of the cell house roof! Old Calamity suddenly turned.

"They're coming," he said in a sharp whisper. "I've got the door off the latch. Stand behind me, and when I say 'ready' I'll pull the door open, and we'll all pile out on the roof."

The dozing men in back of him sprung into sudden activity, rubbing their eyes, and then pressing their hands to the side of their holsters, to release the safety clasp which held their guns.

"Not yet," Old Calamity whispered. "There are only two of them now. I think the others will be along soon. Yes, there's a third one now. He just dropped down."

"Dropped down?" repeated Warden O'Neill, wonderingly. "Dropped down from where?" But Old Calamity did not hear. His body was in the tower, but his mind and his entire consciousness were out on the end of the roof with the crouching figures shrouded in the surrounding gloom of the night.

A long minute passed.

"There's the fourth now," Old Calamity suddenly whispered, without turning his head. "We'll wait a few seconds and give them a chance to move."

THE seconds seemed like hours. Old Calamity, still peering out of the window, laid his hand on the knob of the door.

"They're all together," he whispered. "They're starting. Here they come. They're taking it easy—crawling on their hands and knees. Everybody on their toes now! We'll start in a second. All right! Ready!"

With a sudden violent pull, he flung the door open and leaped to the roof, followed by the Warden and the six guards. Four moving figures crawling on hands and knees suddenly stood upright. Their gasps of amazement or fright could be plainly heard over the few feet separating them from Old Calamity, and the seven blue-clad figures standing behind him.

For a fleeting second the two groups stared at each other. Not one of the twelve figures moved a muscle. Not one of them realized the drama of two conflicting groups, the pursuers and the pursued, standing motionless on a cell house roof in the early morning, silhouetted against a waning moon. The spell was broken by the soft, almost caressing voice of Old Calamity.

"Well, boys, not this time. You'll have to try again."

There was a sudden movement on the part of the foremost figure facing him, a glint of moonlight on steel, a burst of flame and a sharp report. Old Calamity spun around at an angle of forty-five degrees and dropped to one knee, as a lead slug grazed the side of his left temple. He was up again in a moment, gun in hand.

"Come on, boys," he yelled to the men in back of him. Taken completely by surprise, they had pulled back a step or two and were hesitantly waiting as if for someone to lead them. The Deputy, steadying himself on the slant-

ing roof, pulled the trigger of his gun. There was a cry of pain from one of the figures in front of him and then a groan as he dropped to the roof. The gun which fell from his hand was picked up by one of his companions, who grabbed for it frantically as it slid down the sloping roof. He raised it to fire, but, before he could do so, Old Calamity was upon him. His fist shot out. The man staggered back a few steps, stumbled, clutched at the air, slipped to the roof and began to slide down the sloping surface. His foot caught on the copper spout. He steadied himself for a moment and fired. There was a muffled gasp from one of the guards in back of Old Calamity, and then the Deputy's gun spoke again. The man on the edge of the roof straightened himself for a moment, swayed crazily back and forth, clutched wildly in front of him and then, with a piercing scream, toppled headlong over the roof into the prison yard below.

OLD CALAMITY turned. In a swift glance he saw one of the guards, a dark red splotch on his blue uniform, sliding slowly down the incline, clutching feebly at the slippery slate to save himself. Another guard was standing poised at the peak in the center holding on to his wrist, from which blood was dripping in a steady stream. The others, guards as well as prisoners, were in a tangled mass on the roof, fighting fiercely for the possession of the weapons, the entire mass sliding slowly but inevitably toward the copper spouting which marked the roof's end—and a sixty foot drop to the cement yard below.

For a second Old Calamity hesitated. Then he struggled a few steps up the steep incline, grabbed the wounded guard, and pulled him to the roof's

peak. He laid the guard on his stomach across the peak so that his head was down on one side and his feet on the other, to prevent him from sliding off.

Then the Deputy turned. One of the prisoners had managed to detach himself from the mass. He was rising unsteadily to his feet. In his hand he held a gun. He started along the roof to the guard tower—and liberty. Then he saw Old Calamity. Automatically the prisoner's right arm straightened out. Death was a matter of seconds, and Old Calamity knew it. Like an avalanche, he hurled his hundred and sixty pounds down the steep incline. His arms closed round the prisoner, the impact of his body sending them rolling over and over down the steep surface toward the end—and certain death!

Old Calamity braced himself for the shock. Fleeting images raced through his mind. Episodes in his adventurous life flashed with lightning-like rapidity in and out of his consciousness. Kaleidoscopic visions, vividly etched, were woven into a crazy dance before his eyes, as though he were watching some mad performance in a theatre. Then everything stopped—stopped utterly, finally, completely.

THE room was small and white. A figure was standing nearby, bending over a table on which there were several bottles, a pitcher and a glass. He turned as the man in the bed made a slight movement.

"Awake, Mr. Fletcher?" he inquired.

Old Calamity looked at him for a moment. His first consciousness thought was that of the pain when he breathed.

The man who had been bending over the table went to the door and whispered a few words to someone outside. A few seconds later Warden O'Neill

entered the room, followed by another man. The latter went over to the bed.

"I'm Dr. Hargrave, the prison physician," he said. "How're you feeling?"

Fletcher was now completely conscious. "All right, I guess," he said. "How many bones did I break?"

The doctor smiled. "Nary a one," he replied, "nothing but some bruises."

"Bruises!" exclaimed Fletcher. "After that fall!"

"But you didn't fall," spoke up Warden O'Neill. "You were caught by a stone projection which had been built up above the level of the roof."

Fletcher pondered over this amazing piece of news. "Did any of them get away?" he inquired.

"Not a one. They wounded two of my guards, but not seriously. We got them all. Dr. Hargrave says you can get up later in the day. The Board has called a special meeting for five o'clock, and believe me, they're anxious to hear your story."

"WELL, Warden," said Mr. Ambruster, a few hours later, "we laid the ghost at last, didn't we?"

"Yes, sir," replied Warden O'Neill, "thanks to Mr. Fletcher. I guess you should receive your report from him. He knows much more about it than I do."

"Well," said Old Calamity, "I guess there's not a great deal to report. The first day I came here, I walked over the institution and particularly investigated conditions in the yard. I was convinced that the prisoners who made the get-away could not get out of the yard in broad daylight with the wall towers all manned. Therefore, they must have hid somewhere in the institution during the day."

"One of the first prisoners who escaped, Darmstadt, worked in the boiler

house, and undoubtedly was the one who conceived the getaway plot. You know that on Saturday afternoon during the ball game all the prisoners, even those on special detail, go out in the yard to watch the game. It was during the game that the prisoners who escaped walked into the power plant, which is right at the edge of the recreation field. They hid out in the boiler house until dark, and then got away."

"Hid out!" Mr. Ambruster exclaimed. "Hid out where? I thought you said you made a thorough search, Warden."

"I did," said Warden O'Neill. "Made a very thorough search. I haven't the slightest idea where they could have hidden. The fires were drawn, so I even had them look in the fireboxes."

"Warden O'Neill made a very thorough search," said Old Calamity. "But there are many places where they could have hidden, and I was not sure of the hiding place. I suspected where it was, but I did not want to look there. I didn't know whether the prisoners might be hiding out some other place where they could see me, and then change their plans in some way. I thought the best thing to do was to catch them in the act. That is why we went up on the roof, as Warden O'Neill has just told you."

"But I don't know yet where the men hid out," said Mr. Ambruster, "nor how they got on to the roof."

"They hid out in the smokestack," said Old Calamity.

IN THE smoke stack!"

"Yes. They crawled through the fire box and the combustion chamber, and climbed up the ladder inside the stack which is used for cleaning and repair purposes."

There was a stunned silence on the

part of the Board. "Yes," said Mr. Ambruster, after a while, staring with frank interest and admiration at the slight man in front of him, "and what then?"

"They stayed in the stack until it became dark, as they knew that the wall guards were on duty until the men were brought in from the yard. They couldn't go then, and they didn't want to go afterwards, as there was danger of their being seen in the daylight. So they waited until the early morning, when they thought things had quieted down a bit. Then they came up from the inside of the stack and climbed down the ladder on the outside, walking from there over to the cell house roof. This was the only possible way they could get out, unless they went into the yard and climbed over the wall, with the attendant danger of being seen by the yard patrol."

Again there was silence for a moment.

"But you told me," Mr. Ambruster said finally, "that it was not possible for anyone to get away during the week. If they could get out through the stack on Saturday and Sunday why couldn't they get out any other time?"

Old Calamity smiled. "That was easy to figure out," he said. "The fires were burning during the week. They were only drawn on Friday evening so the necessary repairs and painting could be done over the week end. This Darmstadt knew. He also knew that this condition would continue for several weeks, and that even the men making the repairs went out in the yard to see the ball game. So he arranged for a few of his mob to escape every week end."

"Why didn't they all go together?" Mr. Ambruster asked.

"I'm not sure," Old Calamity replied,

"but I think they felt that if twenty prisoners were missing at one time, the Warden would have the institution surrounded for several days. And it probably didn't seem possible that so many men could get away without being seen."

"Well, you certainly did a marvelous job," Mr. Ambruster said. "I want to apologize if I was a little skeptic the other day."

"Oh, that's all right. I'm glad to be of service."

He turned to go.

"But there's one thing I still don't understand," persisted Mr. Ambruster, "and that is where this last mob got that gun. Can you explain it?"

"I'm not going to try," said Old Calamity with a laugh. "I'm not a mind reader. One mystery at a time is enough."

Cipher Solvers' Club for March

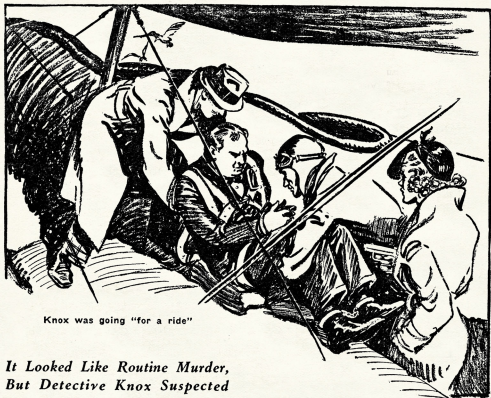
OUR readers sent in 22,610 answers to the 78 puzzles published in our cipher department during the first three months of this year, topping by nearly three thousand solutions last year's total of 19,691 answers for the same period! The March total was 6,839 answers, in response to puzzles Nos. 55-78, inclusive. Solvers who submitted answers to one or more of the March brain-teasers are duly credited in the subjoined list. The degree and dagger signs, respectively, indicate membership in our °Inner Circle Club (1,000 solutions) and †Honor Roll (100 yearly solutions). The Solvers' Club for April will be published soon! Watch for it, folks, and be sure to try this week's puzzles!

Twenty-four Answers—°Aachen, Hollywood, Calif.; °Jay Abey, Maywood, Calif.; †Ajax, Staples, Minn.; °Los Ang, Los Angeles, Calif.; Don Armstrong, Brooklyn, N. Y.; †Arrowhead, Pawtucket, R. I.; †Baab, Verdun, Quebec, Canada; °Herbert E. Batho, Avalon, Calif.; °See Bee Bee, Hamilton, Kans.; †R. L. Blaha, Newark, N. J.; †S. B. Booth, New York, N. Y.; †Warren G. Brown, New York, N. Y.; †Bugler, Elizabethtown, Ky.; Frank S. Burlingame, Winter Haven, Fla.; †T. F. B., Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada; °Mrs. C. G. Burroughs, Madison, Wis.; °H. Le Care, Norfolk, Va.; °Blue Hen Chick, Middletown, Del.; °CIPHERMIT, Houlton, Me.; †Judson H. Clark, Elmira, N. Y.; †Cliff II, Branch, Mich.; GKC, Seattle, Wash.; °Comrade, Baltimore, Md.; †Mrs. Bertram Craven, Rensselaer, N. Y.; †Jos. M. Crosby, Hayes Center, Nebr.; †Cryptanalyst, Clinton, Iowa; †Cucumber, Redondo Beach, Calif.; °W. E. Dalton, Marion, Ind.; Thomas Dibbins, Brooklyn, N. Y.; †Leity Did, New York, N. Y.; Righty Did, New York, N. Y.; †Dogmaamgod, Massillon, Ohio; °Edward J. Drumm, North Hollywood, Calif.; †Ah-Tin-Du, St. Paul, Minn.; °M. E., Scranton, Pa.; °Edmaca, Albany, N. Y.; Envy El, Minneapolis, Minn.; °Arty Ess, Scranton, Pa.; Estece, Riverside, R. I.; †Farad,

San Francisco, Calif.; †Helen P. Foote, Elizabethtown, Ky.; J. M. F., Montgomery, Ala.; °C. F., Baltimore, Md.; °G. Fulton, Cleveland, Ohio; Allah Gator, Massillon, Ohio; †F. A. Gauntt, Detroit, Mich.; Michael G. H. Gelsinger, Buffalo, N. Y.; Gracias, Chicago, Ill.; †The Griffin, Swansea, Mass.; H. J. Haewecker, Brooklyn, N. Y.; °Makem Harder, Berkeley, Calif.; Hawk, Baltimore, Md.; °Dr. S. F. Hedgcock, Glencoe, Ill.; °T. Hegarty, Brooklyn, N. Y.; Mrs. R. C. Herring, Dallas, Tex.; Hilda II, New York, N. Y.; †Holly, Dallas, Pa.; H. M. Hopkins, Baltimore, Md.; °G. M. Howe, Allston, Mass.; †Mrs. Opal Hurt, Albert Lea, Minn.; H. Hyman, Ventnor, N. J.; †Alter Idem, Welland, Ontario, Canada; °Mrs. F. M. Ingalls, Glendale, Calif.; Ixaxar, New York, N. Y.; †jaefsee, Accord, N. Y.; °U. U. Jeff, Massillon, Ohio; J. A. Jonassen, Brooklyn, N. Y.; †Jonesibus, Austin, Tex.; †Mrs. Lynn Kaiser, Biloxi, Miss.; °Kate, Crowley, La.; †Ker, Saginaw, Mich.; †Keystonian, New York, N. Y.; °Kismet, Corona, N. Y.; †Doc K, Cicero, Ill.; †Edward L. Kowalski, Chicago, Ill.; †J. C. K., Gary, Ind.; †Lethargic, New Orleans, La.; †G. E. Long, Cripple Creek, Colo.; †Leotta Lowery, New York, N. Y.; °E. H. Loyd, Jr., Chicago, Ill.; †Mrs. Bertha Luckmun, Ocheyedan, Iowa;

(Continued on page 123)

When Killers Take Off—



Knox was going "for a ride"

*It Looked Like Routine Murder,
But Detective Knox Suspected
Montaigne, the Great Magician,
Was Trying Out a New Trick*

By Bob Gordon

*Author of "You Can't Kill a Leatherneck,"
"Murder Comes Home to Roost," etc.*

WAYNE KNOX, house detective at the Aldrich Hotel, caught the frantic signal from the desk and came striding over. Harold Raveling, the manager, didn't wait for him to get there, but hurried around to grab him by the arm and to lead him toward the elevator.

"Looks like we've got one of those bathtub murders on our hands," Rav-

eling explained, struggling to keep his agitated voice low. "Mrs. Cushing phoned down, said she found a body in the bathroom of 290."

They pushed into the elevator. Knox slammed the door shut before anyone else could enter.

"Two-ninety," he commented. "That's Allen Montaigne, the magician."

"The Great Montaigne," Raveling confirmed sarcastically. "Bills himself as 'Great' and can't even get a booking. We've been giving him credit for months—now he has to ruin the hotel with a juicy murder."

They left the elevator at the second

floor. Two-ninety was a corner suite in the old wing. Knox knew the layout well. The door at the end of the hallway opened into Montaigne's sitting room. Back along the hall was the narrower bedroom, then the bath. All three rooms had hall doors, but a key was issued only for the sitting room; the others remained unlocked, to be bolted from inside.

Mrs. Cushing, middle-aged, ample and Irish, had been a chambermaid in this Herald Square hostelry for nine years. Knox and Raveling opened the door to find her limp and wide-eyed in a sitting room chair.

"It's in there," she quavered, pointing toward the bathroom. "I niver in me born days seen anythin' so ghastly since they brought my husband home in a basket, blown up from dynamite—rest his soul."

"Okay," Raveling snapped. "Show us what you found."

"With all due respect to ye, Misther Ravelin'," she declared firmly, "ye can show it to yersilf, an' the devil take ye."

But with Knox in the lead, the two men were already passing through the bedroom to see Mrs. Cushing's ghastly discovery for themselves.

They opened the bathroom door and stood there on the threshold, surveying the pool of blood that spread, red and sticky, over the white marble floor in front of the old-fashioned tub. There were spots on the washstand too—bloody smears of fingers, and a crumpled towel on the floor was sodden with crimson.

From where they stood they could see nothing in the bathtub. Both men stepped over closer, pausing at the edge of the gory pool and leaning forward. The tub was empty, except for a stiletto in the bottom, the blade

crimson to the hilt. Here and there the enamel was smeared with red daubs. They let the weapon lay, for they couldn't reach it, couldn't get close enough to the tub without stepping in the blood on the floor.

"Mrs. Cushing," Raveling called brusquely, "have you been hitting the gin bottle again?"

"Niver a drop," she replied piously.

"But you said there was a body in the tub," Raveling insisted. "There's blood here aplenty, and a dagger, but no body."

"Man!" the chambermaid shouted belligerently from the front room. "Are ye blind? She's layin' in the tub wit' no more clothes on her than a new bor-rn'd babe; exceptin' fer that knife in her gullet, and stockin's on her legs."

Raveling strode back to the sitting room, shook Mrs. Cushing's plump shoulder until she climbed unsteadily to her feet. She opened her mouth to protest, and the strong fumes of liquor smote the manager full in the face.

"I thought you said you hadn't been drinking!" he accused. "Your breath reeks of the stuff."

"Ye asked me about gin, Misther Ravelin'," she declared with dignity. "An' by all the saints, I ain't had nary a drop. I did take a dram o' Misther Montaigne's scotch from the decanter on the table, what with the shock o' findin' the body o' that poor soul, but as fer gin. . . ."

"But I tell you, woman, there is no body! Sober up now and . . ."

"Couldn't your little argument wait," Knox suggested softly, "until the mystery of the disappearing body has been solved?"

Both paused sheepishly to look at the house detective. The wide, genial face of the man who had been a soldier

of fortune, aviator, cop, in a brief forty years, yet managed to look ten years younger, seemed to bring a sense of reality to the bizarre situation. Both spoke at once.

Raveling said: "Do you think there really was a body?"

Mrs. Cushing exclaimed: "Ye mean to say it's disappeared?"

"Correct on both counts," Knox answered, holding up a woman's dress and underwear which he had found in the bedroom. "You forget that The Great Montaigne is a professional magician."

A great light seemed to dawn on Raveling, to be reflected on his thin face. He turned back to Mrs. Cushing.

"You really did see a nude woman in that tub?"

"So what the devil have I been tellin' ye?" she retorted.

"Was she dead?"

"Stiff as a board, rest her soul, the shameless hussy!"

"And what did you do when you found her?"

"Oi screamed."

Knox snickered. Raveling continued seriously: "Then what?"

"I slammed the door to get the ghastly sight out o' me eyes. Thin I went to the phone and called ye up, pausin' only long enough to hilt me-silf to a bracer from the decanter. Then I sat right down here an' waited fer yez to come up."

"And you didn't hear any noise in the bathroom while you were waitin'?"

"Shure, an' if I had I'd a fainted dead away."

"What beats me," Raveling said to Knox, "is how the body could disappear with Mrs. Cushing in the suite all the time."

"That would be fairly simple," Knox answered, "since she closed the bathroom door. Perhaps you didn't notice that the hall door of the bathroom was ajar. The hard part would be to carry a body downstairs, out of the hotel. I don't think it could be done."

"That would be next to impossible," Raveling agreed. "So the body and perhaps the murderer are still in the hotel. With a killer loose, none of us are safe. I'm going to call the police."

He reached for the phone. Knox wrenched it from his hand. "You fool," he said. "Do you want to ruin the hotel with that kind of publicity? Can't you see through it? Let me handle this."

Raveling clawed for the phone, shouted:

"Publicity be damned! A murder has been committed; we can't keep it out of the papers."

Holding the handset at arm's length, so the manager couldn't reach it, Knox insisted patiently:

"This is my job. Better let me handle it my own way."

Short-tempered at best, his nerves on edge with this latest worry, Raveling planted his feet wide and grated through clenched teeth:

"Give me that phone!"

Smiling, Knox shook his head.

Without warning, Raveling swung an uppercut. Knox stepped back to avoid it, tripped over a chair directly behind him as the punch landed. He dropped the phone to break the fall with his hands.

Raveling grabbed the instrument and barked into it: "Get me Police Headquarters!"

The punch didn't hurt Knox. He picked himself up and shrugged. He could handle six like Raveling; but

what was the use of resenting the puny blow? He knew there was no malice behind it—only impatience.

"Have it your own way," he said dryly. "You're the boss."

"Not your boss," Raveling snapped. "You're fired."

The Homicide Squad responded quickly; and with customary attention to detail, questioned all the hotel employees—both day and night shifts. They were annoyed, but not greatly disturbed to find that the discharged house detective had already questioned all possible witnesses. They were annoyed, too, to find the reporters already on the scene, wondered vaguely who had tipped them off.

Several employees recalled seeing Montaigne go to his room shortly after midnight, in company with a beautiful and gorgeously dressed woman, whom they recognized as Trixie Lyndon. Everybody on Broadway knew Trixie, a former burlesque queen, who had lately graduated to musical comedy.

Confronted with pictures of the star, Mrs. Cushing readily identified the likeness as that of the nude beauty she had found in the tub.

The elevator operators were sure they had taken the couple to the second floor, equally positive they had not brought them down.

Analysis of blood on the floor revealed it to be human gore. The bloody fingerprints proved to be those of the missing magician.

Mrs. Cushing was positive that Montaigne had left his rooms about nine that morning, a few minutes before she had entered to clean up.

A porter stated that he had been summoned to the basement about that time to handle a heavy trunk, of the type used by troupings actors. He had loaded it onto a truck, which was

waiting outside, apparently summoned beforehand by Montaigne.

Montaigne had been permitted to store his theatrical equipment in the basement. Near where the trunk had been there was a pile of assorted accessories to the magician's art. The missing trunk, it appeared, had been hastily emptied of its contents.

On the basement steps, and on the concrete floor, were several drops of dried blood. The porter called the attention of the police to them, said he had remarked on their presence to Montaigne. The magician had shown him a hastily bandaged hand, and had explained that he had cut himself.

Checking over the layout of the hotel, the police concluded that it would have been quite possible, though risky, for Montaigne to carry the body to the basement unseen.

He would have had to wait until the single elevator serving that wing had gone to the upper floors, and would have been compelled to chance a meeting with someone in the hall or on the stairs.

The police agreed that he must have succeeded in doing this, of placing the body in the trunk, and of having the trunk removed before the alarm could be given.

He would have had to be lucky, though, and a fast worker. They seemed to think he was both.

The police explained to the reporters that they would have to find the trunk, find a body in it, before there was any real proof that a murder had been committed. The reporters dismissed this as a minor detail, and burned the wires to their respective papers.

And those papers went to town on the case. The third bathtub murder in a year, this was by far the juiciest of

the lot. As a musical comedy star with a brassy press agent, Trixie was news no matter what she did.

But murdered, she became sensational. The affair was a tabloid editor's dream come true. Why, the thing couldn't have been better if it had been staged.

The police nabbed Allyn Montaigne at the Grand Central Station late that afternoon, as he was preparing to board a train for Boston. They recognized him in spite of the dark glasses that partly concealed his handsome face.

A consummate actor, Montaigne expressed surprise at his arrest.

"Nuts!" the arresting detective scoffed. "The papers are full of the story. You and Trixie Lyndon have had your name and mugs on every front page for hours."

Montaigne arched a nicely plucked eyebrow and said disdainfully: "I seldom read the papers."

He appeared bored at first, condescendingly amused.

"It's all so beastly silly, this whole affair," he drawled at Headquarters. "Certainly, I know Miss Lyndon. Certainly, she came to my rooms last night. After all, we're not children, you know."

"And she stayed all night," the detective doing the grilling snarled.

"My dear fellow, she did nothing of the sort," Montaigne denied coolly. "She remained only fifteen or twenty minutes, just long enough for a scotch and soda and a bit of chit-chat. Had to catch a train or something, to some absurd place I never heard of."

A cool customer, Montaigne was. He had an explanation for everything.

"The blood? Oh, I cut my hand this morning, fooling around with a beastly

stiletto I use to open my mail, doncha know?"

The detectives didn't know. They yanked the small strip of adhesive tape from the soft base of the magician's thumb, to reveal an insignificant stab wound—one that hardly more than pierced the skin.

To imagine that all that blood could come from such a simple wound was absurd, they said. Montaigne insisted it was so, even when confronted with the expert opinion of the Medical Examiner.

The police hammered at him relentlessly.

"Why did you smuggle that trunk out of the hotel? What was in it? Where is it now?"

"My dear fellow," Montaigne began to answer, as tolerantly amused as ever.

"I'm not your dear fellow!" the detective barked.

Montaigne looked him over contemptuously. "No, of course not. A boulder like you couldn't be anybody's dear fellow."

The detective smacked him for that, hit him with his open hand, knocked him out of the chair.

Montaigne picked himself up snarling, his classic features flushed. He looked as if he wanted to take a poke at his tormentor, and appeared big enough to hold his own with the burly cop. He subsided, though, became surly, answered only some of the questions, and those with a venomous growl.

He hadn't, he insisted, smuggled his trunk from the basement, but had openly called a porter to remove it. Having a charity engagement in Boston, he had merely shipped the necessary equipment.

As for attempting to escape in dis-

guise, that was absurd. He was merely catching a train to keep his engagement. The dark glasses were worn because his eyes bothered him.

The woman's clothes, which Knox had found, he insisted were not Trixie's at all; but belonged to another woman whom he refused to name. "That wouldn't be cricket, you know."

He had no baggage stubs for the trunk in his pockets. The police sent wires asking that all trains, and the baggage and express offices at Boston, be checked. Still the trunk remained unfound.

It was seven o'clock that evening when Montaigne condescended to tell his grillers that the trunk had gone by motor freight. More frantic wires went out to coöperating New England police.

It was eight-thirty when a wire from Hartford reported that the truck had been found, the trunk searched. But it contained no body, only an assortment of magician's paraphernalia.

And it was precisely eight-thirty, with the curtain going up to open the show, that Trixie Lyndon walked leisurely into the theater.

Only Wayne Knox, waiting in the shadows by the stage entrance, saw her emerge from her limousine. He permitted himself a grin of satisfaction. His day of patient free-lance investigating had not been in vain.

Immediately upon passing through the stage door, Trixie found herself the center of a goggle-eyed, excited throng, that began with stage hands and chorus girls, and worked up swiftly to reporters, and detectives from Headquarters.

In the words of the immortal Snuffy, she smilingly demanded: "What's all the furse about?"

"Certainly, I haven't been mur-

dered," she insisted, while changing from street clothes to her costume. "Touch me! Do I feel like a ghost? I've been around Broadway a long time, but this is the first time anyone ever suggested that I was dead."

She insisted that she hadn't seen the paper, that all this to-do was a complete surprise to her.

Where had she been? Well, after the show last night she had gone to Allyn Montaigne's rooms for a drink. She refused his invitation to accompany him to a night club, wanted to get away from Broadway for a few hours. After a few minutes in the Aldrich, she left immediately for Ventnor. Her chauffeur had driven her down.

She had registered at a small hotel at the New Jersey resort under her real name of Hortense Gooch, "So I wouldn't be annoyed," she told reporters and police. She had retired immediately upon arriving, about four in the morning, and had come down to breakfast about noon. Then she had strolled alone on the Boardwalk, going the Margate way, instead of north toward Atlantic City. The Boardwalk was almost deserted, for there was a cold wind blowing that bright April afternoon. She had worn a veil.

Someone suggested that the veil probably prevented her from being recognized.

She nodded agreement, then hastened to assert: "But that wasn't the reason I wore it, of course. When one's looks are one's living, one must watch one's complexion."

Bert Meyers, her more than efficient press agent, kept discreetly in the background during the endless round of interviews, only occasionally making a suggestion, but being sure

that a representative of each paper carried away a new assortment of glossy prints, showing Trixie at her most alluring moments.

Allyn Montaigne was released, of course, with the profound apologies of the police. He accepted these with magnificent deference, said he didn't blame the dear fellows at all. There was really nothing for them to do, he agreed, but to investigate the wild imaginings of the chambermaid; but really, the hotel should employ persons less addicted to the bottle.

He wasn't quite so polite the next morning, when Raveling and the owner of the hotel chain, of which the Aldrich was a very small unit, called at his new and more sumptuous quarters to make their apologies. They would hear, in due time, from his lawyers.

They heard that same afternoon. Trixie, Montaigne, and Bert Meyers all appeared at the hotel office, with their attorney. The magician and the musical comedy star each demanded half a million dollars for damages to their professional reputations. When it was suggested that the publicity the actors had received was priceless, they pooh-pooed the idea. Everybody seemed satisfied when the hotel agreed to make an immediate cash settlement of one hundred thousand dollars to each of the injured parties.

It seemed to be settled.

The hotel owner was in the act of signing his name to the checks when the phone rang. He listened a while, then closed the check book, said:

"I'm afraid we won't be able to settle this matter tonight. I just heard from Mr. Knox, our erstwhile house detective, who seems to have been investigating this affair on his own account—probably to get his job back.

He advises me not to pay anything until I have talked to him."

Trixie and Montaigne turned a little pale. Meyer's dark face flushed in anger.

"Where is the transom-snooper now? Why isn't he here?"

"He phoned from Atlantic City," the hotel man answered. "He'll be leaving soon. He's flying to Newark, should be here in two or three hours. Perhaps we can get together again tomorrow."

Meyer's eyes flashed a signal to Montaigne, and they left as if in somewhat of a hurry. Trixie trailed along behind.

The sun was getting low when Knox alighted from the plane he had hired to fly him back from Atlantic City. He walked briskly across from the hangar to where his flivver was parked at the edge of the field, only one of a scattered row of cars. A big, black limousine stood next to his own shabby little car. He paid it no particular attention, aside from an admiring glance at its stream-lined beauty.

Even when its doors opened quietly, while he was unlocking his own car, he gave it no thought. There was no particular reason why he should. This was a public parking space.

But he turned around with a start when something hard pressed into his back. He started to raise his hands.

Bert Meyers jabbed the gun harder against his ribs, growled: "Keep your mitts down at your side. Get into our car. We want to talk to you."

Knox climbed through the open rear door of the limousine. Montaigne greeted him there with another gun. Trixie Lyndon was up in front, behind the wheel. The glass was down between the two seats. Montaigne frisked Knox, found his revolver, put

it in his own pocket. Meyers remained at the open door, pushed Knox down on the seat beside the magician.

Meyers said: "I understand you've been finding out things. You've been asking questions here at the airport, and in Atlantic City, even at the hotel in Ventnor."

"That's right," Knox admitted.

"And what did you find out?"

Knox said: "Enough to send you three to jail."

"We're not taking any chances on that," Meyers declared savagely. "We're just full of clever ideas. You're so good at guessing riddles, we've got one fixed up especially for you."

"And what might that be?"

"You'll find out," Meyers said cryptically. "Get the cuffs, Monty, while I keep him covered."

Montaigne reached behind him on the seat, and produced a pair of handcuffs that he used in his escape act—legitimate handcuffs that had to be opened with a hidden key. He snapped these on Knox's wrists. Then he took a pair of leg irons and shackled Knox's ankles.

"That ought to hold him," Meyers commented as he closed the door. "You know where to go, Trixie?"

Her pretty face was hard, tense, as she nodded.

Meyers waved and walked off. Trixie backed the car out of the parking line and drove south, crossing the Raritan at Perth Amboy, continuing on past Freehold.

A plane roared overhead soon after they got started. Trixie turned to Montaigne, said: "That must be Bert now. He'll have time to get things ready before we get there."

Montaigne merely growled a reply. He sat on the edge of the seat, watch-

ing his shackled prisoner narrowly, resisting all of Knox's efforts to draw him into conversation.

Meyers was waiting with his plane at the appointed place, a level, sandy stretch of meadow three miles from the highway, and apparently that far from any human habitation. It was after dark now, but the moon was full.

Meyers started the motor of his plane to warm it up, then came forward holding a parachute pack by the harness straps.

"Here, put this on," he said to Knox. "You and I are going for an airplane ride."

"I suppose I have no choice in the matter?" Knox asked.

"None whatever," Meyers answered, as he snapped the harness deftly onto the manacled prisoner. "And this chute might come in handy in case you should fall out of the plane."

"Thoughtful of you," Knox murmured. Then as the full weight of the pack was taken up by the straps over his shoulders he demanded. "What's in there, anyway? It's heavy enough to be iron."

Meyers stepped back and laughed. "It is iron; scrap iron and stones, in place of the usual silk."

Knox had merely felt chagrin over his capture before. The three, he had decided, were kidnapping him, planning to hid him away until they had secured the money. Now the seriousness of the situation began to dawn on him.

"Would you mind telling me what this is all about?" he asked, a trace of anxiety creeping into his voice.

Meyers turned to Trixie, demanded: "Are you still willing to go through with this?"

"Sure," she replied, a hard edge on her voice. "I'd murder my own grandmother for a hundred grand."

"Swell!" Meyers turned back to Knox. "You're wise to our game, and it's too juicy to let a mug like you queer it. I'm going to take you for a ride in my plane, that's all. Come on, get in."

With his legs shackled, Knox couldn't climb onto the wing and into the narrow front cockpit. Meyers handed Trixie his gun, "Just in case he gets funny," and the two men lifted Knox into the cockpit.

Montaigne ran to the car, returned with a length of chain, which he dropped over the handcuff link and passed under the link of the leg irons, securing it with a padlock. As long as Knox could sit with his hands between his knees, the chain would add little to his discomfort; but it would prevent him from extending his arms or legs, or straightening his body.

Meyers said to Trixie: "Can you get back in time for the show?"

She squinted at her wrist watch. "It's seven-thirty now," she answered, "and I'm due on at nine-fifteen. I'll have to hurry."

"Better get going then," Meyers suggested. "And keep your mouth shut about this. I'll see you at Monty's place tonight."

The pair hustled away to the car. Meyers climbed into the rear cockpit. Then above the roar of the motor he shouted:

"I'm going to take you up and dump you in the ocean. That scrap iron in the parachute pack will make you sink."

As the plane climbed rapidly in the moonlight, circled, and headed for the Atlantic, Knox noted that the dual rudder controls had been disconnected,

that the front stick and safety belt had been removed. With a sinking feeling in his stomach, he realized that if he just sat there, he was bound to fall out as soon as Meyers stunted the ship.

If he could only get the freedom of his hands.

Well, that padlock was stout, but it seemed to offer the only hope. Knox went to work on it, bending almost double to get slack in the chain, so he could knock the lock against the metal tubing framework at the bottom of the fuselage.

Sometimes you could open a lock that way, but this one was stubborn. The plane was over water now. It was getting higher—higher, the shore lights dimmer every minute. Soon only the lighthouses pierced the darkness with their flashes.

Meyers suddenly gunned the motor. Ah—it was coming now. With a final despairing effort, Knox slammed the lock down against the tubing.

The nose of the plane came up. A wing dipped. Knox fairly flung himself onto the cockpit floor, wedged his knees, his feet, his back, tightly against the steel frame.

Unable to see, only hanging on by the pressure of his body, he lost all sense of direction as the plane did snap rolls, barrel rolls, flew upside down, stalled, to fall off in a dizzy spin.

If only his hands were free, he might hang on. He had to grab at something—anything. His fist closed over something cold and hard—the padlock again. It was open. That last blow had done it.

The spin was getting tighter. Centrifugal force tried to hurl his body from the cockpit. Knox felt himself slipping—slipping, yet he could jam himself against the interior of the

narrow cockpit no harder. There—he was going now. He jerked sideways instinctively to grab the frame pressing against his skull.

It was a nightmare.

He was surprised, later, to find that his hands had come free, that the chain had slipped from the shackles. Even then, he could only grab at tubing, and hang on with hands and toes.

But that spin couldn't last forever. Meyers kicked out of it at last, dived to regain flying speed, then began to climb.

Knox thought he was going back up to repeat the maneuvers. Not knowing what instant Meyers might try to surprise him with the next attempt, he wedged himself in again, as tightly as possible, and waited.

It seemed ages, that long, steady climb, followed by minutes of level flight. Suddenly a wing went down. The plane was turning. Knox tightened his grip, prepared for another attempt to shake him loose. He looked up through the narrow opening, and saw the moon.

Then he saw something else, dark, against the blue of the sky—the helmeted head of Bert Meyers. The pilot was standing on the wing. He paused only an instant to thumb his nose, then was gone.

Wondering why Meyers wasn't back at the controls, Knox cautiously unjoined himself, crawled to the opening, looked back. The pilot was nowhere in sight.

Knox leaned out farther, looked down, to see the silk of Meyers' parachute billowing below, far behind. The plane was over the shore line again, headed back for the open sea, with no one at the stick. Meyers must have become disgusted at his inability to shake Knox loose, and had decided

to sacrifice the plane to get rid of him.

Speeding out to sea in a pilotless plane, Knox shuddered at the idea, then took heart again. At least his fate was in his own hands, manacled though they were. He took comfort in the thought that the handcuffs were no longer chained to the leg irons. Meyers probably didn't know that.

Well, he had to attempt it. Bound for certain death anyway, he might better risk a sudden plunge now, than to court sure disaster by waiting until the gasoline was exhausted. With much squirming, he managed to free himself from the useless parachute harness, with its dead weight.

Then, hanging onto the edge of the cockpit with both hands, he stood up on the seat, facing to the rear, braced himself against the terrific blast from the propeller. With his legs free, it would have been simple to climb out onto the wing and crawl into the empty pilot's cockpit. But his legs weren't free.

Calculating the distance carefully, he flexed his knees, then leaped upward and out, throwing his body along the fuselage between the two seats, clawing desperately for the edge of the rear cockpit.

But the fuselage was smooth and round, too wide for him to grip with his knees, since his ankles were shackled. His body slipped, gathered speed, and went off altogether. His toes bounced off the trailing edge of the wing as he fell.

Only the fingers of one hand retained their precarious hold, as he dangled over the side of the plane.

He clawed upward again, got a grip with his other hand. Chinning himself was simple. More than that seemed impossible with his hands bound to-

gether. He finally managed to get one elbow over the cockpit edge; then, inch by inch, squirmed upward until he was able to tumble headfirst into the rear cockpit, on top of the stick.

The plane stuck its nose down and headed for the sea, gathering speed with every second of the uncontrolled power dive. Wind whistled through the landing wires.

The wings vibrated violently, before Knox could unscramble himself and bring the ship under control, with only a few hundred feet of air between it and the water. Then he found out why Meyers had abandoned the idea of stunting to throw him out. The safety belt back there had been almost torn loose on that last spin.

Knox found it awkward to work the rudder with his shackled feet, but managed to make a good landing at Newark Airport. He had a detective sergeant with him when he called at Montaigne's new suite at the Regent shortly before eleven that night.

Knox rapped at the door. A voice asked: "Who's there?"

Raising the pitch of his voice, Knox answered: "Meyers."

The door opened. The two shouldered their way inside. Detective Neff seized the startled Montaigne, pushed him into a chair, told him: "You're under arrest."

Montaigne's eyes were wide, his handsome face suddenly pale.

"You — you?" he sputtered. "Where's Meyers?"

"Yes, me." Knox chuckled at the magician's amazement. "You thought I'd be at the bottom of the sea by now, didn't you? But it was Meyers who tried to swallow the Atlantic Ocean instead of me."

"I—I don't understand."

"I've got time to explain," Knox

said patiently, easing himself into a chair. "We're waiting here until Trixie shows up."

He glanced around the elegantly-furnished suite. Montaigne had done handsomely by himself, in anticipation of sudden wealth. The floors here were of hard wood, waxed to the glossiness of a ballroom.

The rugs were deep and soft, placed with a modernistic carelessness that was superbly effective. One rug, a long narrow one, ran diagonally across the mirror-like floor. Knox thought what a nice slide it would make, to run and fall on it. But he wasn't there to admire the decorations. Montaigne was muttering:

"—you say Bert is dead? What happened?"

"Meyers didn't succeed in dumping me on his first attempt," Knox explained. "And his own safety belt was tearing loose, so he didn't dare try any more stunting. So he flew back over the shore line, headed the plane back toward open sea, and jumped with his parachute.

"But he misjudged the wind and came down in the surf. He got tangled in the 'chute as it settled over him, and was drowned. We received word from the Coast Guard that they recovered his body. I changed cockpits, in spite of being shackled, and landed the plane."

Somewhat recovered from the shock, Montaigne tried to brazen it out.

"Bert shouldn't have tried it. I tried my best to prevent him from taking you up, but he thought it would be a good joke to scare you."

Knox stared at the magician quizzically a moment, then told him: "I'm afraid that line won't do you any good. The way I was manacled, that para-

chute pack full of scrap iron, that removed safety belt, will be sufficient to prove attempted murder. And your shackles would implicate you, even if a jury didn't take my word for it. Then there's the attempted extortion matter . . ."

"Dear, dear!" Montaigne sighed. "What on earth are you talking about?"

Knox's eyes narrowed. His voice became flat, brittle when he finally spoke:

"Cut stalling, pretty boy, and come across. That fake murder you and Trixie pulled was a clever little scheme, but you didn't cover up your tracks very well."

"Meaning what?"

"Do you want me to tell you about it?"

Montaigne lighted a cigarette with studied calm, reached for a drink on the nearby table, drawled: "Please do."

"The story you told the police when arrested before," Knox began, "contained a great deal of truth, which is why you got away with it for a while. Trixie did stay only a few minutes in your suite, and you made sure she left without being seen. That would be fairly simple in the old wing of the Aldrich. All she had to do was wait until the elevator went up, then she could walk down, and out the side entrance."

"So what?"

"So Trixie's chauffeur drove her to Ventnor. She registered at a small hotel just off the boardwalk, when she said she did. Then she changed clothes, put a veil over her face, and went out again. She thought she was unrecognized, but I found a bellboy who saw through her disguise—knew it was the same woman who had just

registered, though he didn't know she was the famous Trixie."

Montaigne dismissed the disclosure with a wave of his well-manicured hand. "But the dear girl readily admits she wore a veil to avoid being pestered."

Knox ignored the interruption.

"Then she drove to the airport, and Bert Meyers flew her back to Newark Airport in his own plane. Attendants at both fields verified this. I even found the taxi driver who drove the woman, who arrived in that plane, to Herald Square. She wore a brown fur coat and a black hat with a heavy veil.

"Nobody apparently saw Trixie enter the Aldrich by the same little-used entrance, but a postman, making collections from the hotel boxes, bumped into a woman at the foot of the stairs about nine o'clock. She was leaving in a hurry. She wore a brown fur coat, and a black hat with a heavy veil.

"I even found the taxi driver who drove her back to the airport, and here's the payoff—he noticed, through his rear-vision mirror, that aside from shoes and stockings, the coat and hat were all she had on."

Montaigne's face went white. He gripped the thin glass he was holding so tightly that it broke in his hand. The resulting cuts weren't deep, but blood fairly streamed from them. The magician clenched his teeth, gripped his wrist tightly, gasped:

"Put a tourniquet on here quick. I can't stand to lose a lot of blood again so soon."

He bit his tongue as he uttered the words, looked quickly at Knox and Neff to see if they had caught their significance. Knox had.

"You a haemophile?" he asked sharply.

Montaigne nodded. "Hurry! Get a tourniquet on my arm."

With a handkerchief, the stopper from the decanter, and a pencil, Knox improvised a tourniquet. Before he twisted the pencil to apply pressure he demanded: "I've been right on every count, haven't I?"

"Yes, man, yes! That's the way it was. Tighten it up now, stop the blood!"

With pressure on the artery, the bleeding gradually subsided. They went into the bathroom.

"Is it serious?" Neff asked. "Do you want a doctor?"

Calmer now, Montaigne shook his head. "There's nothing a doctor can do that I can't do for myself. It will clot after a while, once I check the flow. Here, help me put on a bandage."

"That's how you got all that blood on the bathroom floor," Knox prodded, as he and the police detective went to work with gauze and tape. "You deliberately cut your hand, knowing that it would bleed all out of proportion to the size of the wound."

Montaigne admitted that was the way it was. "We thought a lot of blood would convince you that a murder had been committed."

"And after Trixie sneaked back to your rooms," Knox went on, "you waited until you heard Mrs. Cushing in the hall. You knew she'd make up your suite as soon as you went out. Trixie undressed and posed there in the tub."

"You stuck the bladeless prop stiletto, a duplicate of the real one, on her neck, and used grease paint to make it look as if she had been stabbed—that was to fool the chambermaid. Then you cut yourself and let the blood flow onto the bathroom floor,

while Trixie helped you with the tourniquet."

Montaigne nodded. With the bleeding almost stopped, the color was returning to his face, and with it, some of his old assurance.

"To make a long story short," he finished. "I went out and immediately called the porter to load my trunk. It was ready, and—"

A light knock sounded at the door. Montaigne said: "That will be Trixie."

They were still in the bathroom. Neff suggested to Knox:

"You let her in."

Knox left the two in the bathroom, moved out into the sitting room to open the door. Neff, left alone with the magician, forgot that he was a master of sleight of hand. Lifting the lid of the laundry hamper, apparently to toss in a blood-soaked towel, Montaigne turned around with a shiny revolver in his hand.

Knox was motioning the startled Trixie into a chair, when Neff came out of the bathroom, his hands high, Montaigne close behind him with two guns, his own and the detective's, against his back.

Montaigne was saying: "I'm in charge now. Don't go for your gun, Knox, or I'll kill this flatfoot. Get your hands up too, unless you want to be responsible for his death."

Knox raised his hands. At a snarled order from Montaigne, Trixie frisked him, found no weapon. Montaigne had taken Knox's gun back at the airport. The house detective hadn't thought it necessary to secure another one, with a police officer along.

"Get over there and stand by Knox," Montaigne told Neff gruffly. Then to Trixie: "You'll find some handcuffs in my prop trunk in the

other room. Get them. We'll truss these two up. Then I'll tap them on the head, to keep them quiet while we get away."

Trixie left. Knox noted that Montaigne was standing at the far end of the long carpet. He whispered something to Neff.

"Shut up!" Montaigne barked. "I'll do the talking that's done here from now on."

Ignoring the command, Knox cursed Neff loudly for being such a fool. The cop brought his raised hand down in a chopping motion and hit Knox behind the ear. Knox fell to his hands and knees, gripped the edge of the long carpet as if in pain.

"Cut that out!" Montaigne rasped. Not suspecting the trap, he took a step forward.

He was in mid-stride when Knox yanked suddenly on the rug. Montaigne went over backwards, firing both guns. Both bullets plowed into the chaste, white ceiling.

Obedient to the hasty instructions Knox had whispered to him, Neff was leaping sideways, out of range of the guns. Knox sprang straight forward. He had Montaigne's wrists pinioned almost before the magician had stopped falling.

Montaigne pulled the trigger of each gun again, in blind, baffled rage, before Neff could close in to take away the spouting hardware.

While waiting for the police patrol, Neff said to Knox: "What I can't understand is what put you on the right trail, when everybody else fell for their fake murder plot. How did you know it was a phony—a clever scheme to extort money from the hotel?"

"You police believed Mrs. Cushing," Knox explained, "when she said she saw a corpse in the bathtub. But when you found there was no corpse, you thought her whole tale was made out of her imagination.

"I believed that she saw a body in the tub, when I saw that pool of blood in front of the tub, I realized that nobody could have gotten close enough to lift a hundred-pound weight out without leaving footprints. And nobody had stepped in that blood. Therefore the body must have been alive, must have gotten out by itself.

"I tried to prevent Raveling from playing into their hands by calling the police. I figured it was a practical joke. But when the jokers used the hoax to demand money, I decided they were being too practical."

Cipher Solvers' Club for March

(Continued from page 109)

*Nice, A. M., Indianapolis, Ind.; *Magi, Chicago, Ill.; †Fae Malon, Englehart, Ontario, Canada; *Del J. McLane, East Liverpool, Ohio; *A. Meredith, Pittsburgh, Pa.; *Minerva, Marion, Ind.; †Mossback, Randle, Wash.; †Betty Murray, San Francisco, Calif.; †Nedyah, New York, N. Y.; *Sue de Nymme, Chicago, Ill.; Edward O'Connor, Chicopee Falls, Mass.; †Hard Boiled One, San Francisco, Calif.; †Phoney, San Pedro, Calif.; †Piscator, Middletown, N. Y.; Copper-Plate,

Saranac Lake, N. Y.; †Nickle-Plate, Saranac Lake, N. Y.; *W. F. Plette, Galesburg, Ill.; †Porthos, Fall River, Mass.; †Leonard Price, New York, N. Y.; *Primrose, Baltimore, Md.; †Qpkwins, Dorchester, Mass.; †Ray Rasmussen, Chicago, Ill.; CaNaRev, Stanhope, Quebec, Canada; †Don Ricardo, Gretna, La.; †Mrs. Bruce Richardson, Saginaw, Mich.; †Charles L. Rohde, Baltimore, Md.; *Alice Routh, Oklahoma City, Okla.; Saco, La Mesa, Calif.

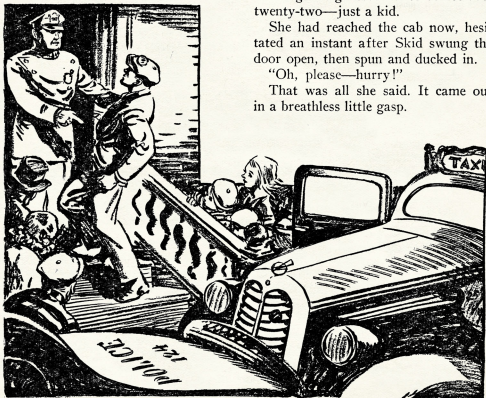
(Continued Next Week)

A Taxi to Death

*East Side, West Side, All Around
the Town, That Killer Mob Was
Hunting Skid Donlon Because He
Wouldn't Mind His Own Business*

By George Alden Edson

Author of "Rigged for Murder," "The Girl
Who Tried to Die," etc.



THE girl was terribly frightened about something. Skid Donlon, sprawled sideways behind the wheel of his cab, watching her weave through the early evening crowd, could tell that by the strained expression on her face and the wild look in her eyes. She was walking very fast, too, almost breaking into a run at times.

He twitched himself up as she kept coming straight toward the corner by which he was parked. The frenzied eyes had fixed on his cab with a sort of haggard desperation. He flung one hand back to get the door.

She would be pretty, he decided as he did it, when she wasn't so upset. She had nicely shaped features, auburn red hair and a figure which looked trim even in the shabby clothes she was wearing. He guessed her to be not over twenty-two—just a kid.

She had reached the cab now, hesitated an instant after Skid swung the door open, then spun and ducked in.

"Oh, please—hurry!"

That was all she said. It came out in a breathless little gasp.

"I want to see the cop in charge," Skid muttered

Skid pulled the door closed, noticed that she had jammed herself into a corner and was peering furtively through the rear window. Obviously she was trying to get away from somebody who had been following her. Okay. She would. He pivoted back to the wheel, meshed the gears, swung the cab out from the curb.

Giving the motor the gun, he angled deftly through the uptown traffic and caught a side street just as the light changed. For several blocks then, working further up and across the city, he played lights with all the craftiness eight years of hacking had taught him. Finally he knew no other cab could have held the trail. He slowed down.

"Where to now, Miss?"

In his rear-vision mirror he saw her pale face turn away from the back window. Fear was still on it, in her eyes, but not quite such frantic fear. She seemed to relax a little.

"Where?" She looked confused. "Why—why, one-fifty West Thirty—I mean Forty—Forty-first Street."

Skid nodded, wheeled the cab around.

"No, let—let me out here," the girl said suddenly. "The fare—I—I've only forty cents."

Skid glanced at the meter. It had already clocked forty. But then he shrugged. The poor kid's voice had sounded tired. He reached over and gave the flag a flick.

"Aw, that's all right," he muttered. "Only a few blocks won't matter. Besides I've got to go back down that way."

"But you might—"

"Forget it," Skid grunted curtly. "I wouldn't get a fare cruising this early anyway. You're sure you meant Forty-first?"

"Yes—yes, Forty-first."

And she still insisted that was the right place even when it turned out to be a commercial building obviously closed for the night.

"I—well, you see, I'm going to meet somebody here," she explained.

SKID drove slowly back toward the corner from which he usually hacked. The girl, of course, hadn't been going to meet anybody where he had left her. The lie had shown in her eyes. She had intended to be taken somewhere in the Thirties first, and then, for some reason, had shifted to Forty-first. He wondered why.

"What the hell?" he growled aloud suddenly. "It's none of my business."

Nevertheless he couldn't shove her completely out of his mind. There had been a pathetic quality about her. She had seemed so helpless. For an instant he had an impulse to turn around and try to find her again.

"You dope, you can't play chaperon to every girl in the city who acts helpless!" he told himself with a snort.

So he didn't turn. He kept on back to his corner, which by some miracle no other cabby had grabbed during his absence, and parked. He got out, stretched, lit a cigarette.

Not a very big fellow, Skid Donlon, but compactly built and wiry. The way he carried himself, easily yet alertly, and the set features of his face gave the impression that he could take care of himself without the need of more bulk.

The face was square, strong, and even the bantering smile it often wore never quite erased the hard lines life had dug in it. For Skid Donlon's existence, especially his early years as a homeless waif, hadn't been any bowl of cherries.

Only the few people who knew him

very well had seen beneath the hardness, seen the man who could be gentle, awkwardly tender, even sentimental. To most of his buddies he was just another product of the up-from-the-city-streets school; a toughy, wise to all the tricks, ready to fight at the drop of a hat.

* He lounged against the side of his cab while he smoked the cigarette down. Finally he tossed the butt away, started to get back in.

"Fifty-third, down by the river," a voice rapped.

Skid twisted to see a stocky man with one hand resting on the handle of the door into the tonneau. Another man, taller and very thin, his eyes sullenly mean, stood just behind him. Eight years of hacking had catalogued all the famous and infamous characters of the city in Skid's mind. The two men, he knew, were Maxie Kramm and Shadow Binder, who worked for Big Sam Hirsch, head of the local numbers racket.

In the instant of recognition a question flashed through his brain. This wasn't their part of town. Were they here, about to take his cab, because they had been the ones following the girl who had taken it? The hard lines in his face dug a little deeper.

"Come on, come on," the stocky one, Maxie Kramm, snapped. He had the door open. "We're in a hurry."

Skid knew there'd be no use trying to refuse them, if they wanted him for a particular purpose. He gave a little shrug and swung under the wheel.

THE question which had flashed through his brain was soon answered. On a side street, cutting over toward the river, Maxie Kramm suddenly told him to slow down. A hard point jabbed against his back. He

didn't waste any time wondering whether it was a gun or not; both Maxie and Shadow were the kind who always punctuated a command with the flourish of a rod.

"Better stop even," Shadow added.

Skid's lips were tight, his eyes narrowed and glinting, but he pulled over to the curb.

"Now we'll hear where you took the girl who hopped your cab a little while ago," Maxie said. "And don't be foolish because of any sob story she might've told you. Don't try to hand us a bum steer." He emphasized that last by another jab with the gun muzzle. "Besides we're really friends of hers. We're tryin' to do her a good turn. Ain't we, Shadow?"

"Sure," Shadow agreed enthusiastically.

Skid's mouth curled into a mirthless grin.

"So where'd you take her?" Maxie insisted. And suddenly his voice held an unpleasant undertone.

"Two-fifty West Fifty-second, it was," Skid lied. And for the sake of making the lie sound even more convincing he added: "Say, she was a pretty babe," as if that were his main thought about her.

"Two-fifty West Fifty-second, huh?" Maxie repeated. He gave Skid's back still another jab. "Sure you remembered those numbers just right, pal?"

"How could I forget 'em so soon?" Skid demanded naively.

"Okay, pal, take us there."

Skid flipped the cab into gear again. The gun eased away from his back.

"But drive carefully," Maxie warned in a meaning tone. "Any jolt might cause an explosion an' you'd end up dead. Keep that in mind."

There was a grim set to Skid's jaw

as he piloted his cab toward West Fifty-second Street. All too soon, he realized, he was going to be in a sweetheart of a spot. These birds wouldn't just leave him at the phony destination and go looking for the girl. They weren't the type to accept anything without plenty of suspicion.

One of them would doubtless keep holding a gun on him while the other looked for the girl. And when he didn't find any trace of her . . . a wry grimace passed over Skid's face. He didn't like to think about what would happen.

TWO-FIFTY West Fifty-second, as Skid had known, was a rather dilapidated tenement building. Now he realized that he should have told them something like a subway station to have given himself an out.

He hunched his shoulders a little. No use figuring what he should have done. He hadn't done it. He had been so concerned with the girl's out that he'd forgotten he'd need one for himself.

He swung the cab in to the curb in front of the building, braking to a stop.

"Well, here we are."

"Okay, pal," Maxie grunted. "She went in there, huh?"

"That's right, mister."

"It'd better be right," Maxie said in a brittle voice. "Because if it ain't . . ." He left the consequences to the imagination. "Shadow, you stay here while I have a look. An' blow a window through this guy, if he tries anything."

"Sure," Shadow said.

Maxie got out, slouched across the sidewalk, climbed to the dimly lighted vestibule of the building and disappeared inside. Skid eased over on the seat until he could watch Shadow in his rear-vision mirror. It wouldn't take

Maxie more than five minutes to check all the tenements.

Shadow was sprawled back in a corner, a cigarette dangling from his sullen mouth. One hand lying limply across his knees held a gun.

Skid felt sweat ooze out on his forehead, the nape of his neck. There was certainly no doubt about this being one sweetheart of a spot. But he'd been in spots before, and his brain kept working coldly and swiftly, seeking some possible solution.

Seconds ticked away, precious seconds, with no remotely sensible idea coming to him. He didn't have a gun. He couldn't get at Shadow with his hands. He wasn't . . . and then something clicked. He drew in a breath.

"She sure was a very neat trick," he remarked conversationally.

Shadow merely grunted.

Slumping down on the seat a little, Skid dropped a hand to the floor, groped over it. Earlier in the evening he had been fixing a loose bumper when a fare had appeared. Instead of putting the wrench he had been using back in his tool kit, he'd just heaved the thing into the front of the cab.

"Yes, sir, a very neat trick," he repeated.

He covered the section behind his feet, found nothing. Careful to keep his shoulder from dipping, he groped gradually toward the door. Where the devil was that wrench? Sweat began to ooze out faster. He didn't have much more time. He dropped his other hand and searched on the other side of him.

"Hey, what the hell're you doin'?" Shadow demanded suddenly.

"Just scratching my leg, that's all," Skid answered in a cheerful voice. He straightened. The second hand he'd dropped held the wrench.

"Well, you better sit still," Shadow growled. "I'm a nervous guy."

"What's the harm in a man scratching his leg?" Skid mumbled in an injured tone.

"The harm is I might think you was doin' somethin' else," Shadow told him, "and do what Maxie ordered—blow a window through you."

"Okay, okay, I'll sit still," Skid muttered.

AND for a few seconds he also kept silent to let Shadow relax his guard again. Watching in the mirror, he finally saw the emaciated figure slump back to the corner of the seat and the hand holding the gun go limp once more. He gripped the big wrench tighter.

"I guess she lives up on the third floor just to the left of the door," he said casually. But his face wasn't casual; it was grimly taut. "I had to wait for her to get some money, and a light came on up there."

Tensely his eyes watched Shadow's. But Shadow's didn't roam.

"Jeez, see those shadows on the curtains! There's a fight!"

And then, impulsively, Shadow looked up.

Skid twisted a little to the left, whipped up the wrench with his right hand. He heaved the thing straight at Shadow's head. It hit just over the left ear. Shadow, who had become aware of the movement in the front seat too late, had only started to lift his gun, but the reflex action of his muscles made him pull the trigger. The bullet ricocheted off the base of the open window. Then he sighed, his eyes vague, jaw sagging, and slid slowly along the back of the seat. His gun clunked to the floor.

Skid lunged over the back of the

front seat and grabbed it. Twisting to the wheel again, he jammed the cab into gear. His right foot shoved down the throttle. The cab's tires clawed at the pavement.

From behind him, as he rocked up the street, a revolver blasted. A hole appeared in the windshield a bit to the right of the section his eyes were using. Two more cracks sounded before he hit the corner, took it on two wheels.

He slowed, glancing over his shoulder. Shadow was still out. He drew in a long breath.

Taking another side street a few blocks down, he drove to a vacant lot he knew. Nobody was anywhere in sight. He stopped the cab, climbed out, opened the rear door.

Shadow lived up to his name; he wasn't very heavy. Skid dragged him across the sidewalk onto the lot and let him plop on his back on a pile of old cans and refuse.

"So you'll feel right at home when you wake up," he grunted.

Returning to his cab, he got in and heaved a sigh. His features pulled into a wry grimace.

"And a pleasant evening was had by all."

HIS evening, however, wasn't quite over. Instead of making for the garage, having already put in a good day, he headed for the West Thirties. He realized now that the girl had something plenty real to be frightened of. Sam Hirsch was one bad egg.

He wouldn't be sending his men after a girl just so he could have a pleasant little chat with her. People he sent men after, according to all reports, generally never did do much more chatting.

No, the kid was on the spot for something or other. And staying here

in the city, no matter how hard she tried to keep out of sight, they'd eventually find her. Her only chance would be to get away quick.

But to do that she'd need a stake. The forty cents he'd finally refused to accept despite her insistence, Skid guessed, was all she had.

"And she's got to put a lot more than forty cents worth of distance between her and that gang," he muttered.

He started the search with West Thirtieth. It was only a chance, of course, that her automatically blurted direction had been for her home address, yet it was all he had to go on.

One-fifty West Thirtieth, however, was a stable which he had begun to smell long before he got to it.

One-fifty West Thirty-first looked more promising. It was a shabby boarding house. But the blowzy landlady told him that no such girl as he described lived there or ever visited anybody who did live there.

"And I'd know if she did," she said grimly, "because I keep good track of all the goings-on around my place."

The next five streets got him nothing, but up on Thirty-sixth he drew a delicatessen whose proprietor was proudly sure the pretty girl must be his daughter.

"My Sadie, she looks just like you tell it!" he glowed.

Sadie was called. Sadie proved to be a cross-eyed two-hundred-pounder.

"Close, close," Skid allowed charitably, "but she isn't the one."

Thirty-seventh and Thirty-eighth were also duds. Discouraged, he swung down the last of his possibilities. He stiffened abruptly in his seat as he neared one-fifty Thirty-ninth. A little crowd was gathered on the sidewalk and a police radio car stood parked at the curb.

He pulled his cab to a stop behind it, jumped out, shoved into the throng of people.

"What's up?" he asked one of them.

"Something's happened to some girl that lived here. They caught a guy climbing out of her window, but they can't find her. And her room's all messed up. They figure there must've been a fight in it."

Skid grunted: "Thanks," and pushed on toward the entrance to the building. So she had already been spotted. His face was bleak.

"END o' the line, buddy," a burly uniformed policeman said when he reached the steps. "No gawkers can go in. Only guys who got some business."

Skid muttered: "I've got some business. I want to see the cop in charge."

"Ya do, huh? Well, what about?"

"About the girl. I know who was after her."

"All right—who *was* after her?"

"I said I wanted to see the cop in charge," Skid rapped.

The burly policeman glowered angrily at him, but finally turned, shouted: "Jim!"

Presently a voice answered from inside. The policeman relayed what Skid had told him. The voice said: "Okay, send the bird up."

The girl's room, on the second floor, wouldn't have been much even before the fight which had upset a battered table, broken a lamp, spread feminine gadgets over the floor. The only other pieces of furniture were a small white-iron bed with a sag in the middle, a bureau with a cracked mirror, one ancient stuffed chair and one straight chair. There were four people in it: a dapper police sergeant, a middle-aged man and woman, a haggard young man.

The haggard young man was stammering something.

The officer who had led Skid down the hall broke in: "Hey, Sarge, here's a guy who claims he knows something about the girl."

The dapper sergeant glanced around, frowning, snapped: "All right, all right—just a minute." He looked back at the young man. "Let's get this straight. You say this girl isn't Ruth Smith, like she told these people that own the place here, but really the Joan Kimball the police've been hunting for as a witness against the Hirsch crowd in a killing."

Skid breathed a soft ejaculation. For an instant before he'd left her, there on Forty-first Street, he'd thought that she looked vaguely familiar. Now he knew it was because he had seen her picture in a newspaper. No wonder Hirsch had sent his men after her! The only witness to a murder which, if she made a jury believe her testimony, would strap him in the chair.

"You claim you were in love with her and were afraid they'd get her," the sergeant continued, "so you persuaded her to dodge the trial and—"

"God, why don't you do something?" the young man cut in frenziedly. "Can't you understand every minute counts?"

"Sure, sure," the sergeant sighed. "But we've only got your word that she's Joan Kimball. And you—"

"I know Hirsch's men were after the girl," Skid announced without waiting for a call to speak his piece.

"Oh, you do, huh?" the sergeant grunted, glancing at him again.

SKID looked at the young man, the middle-aged couple, and asked: "Isn't this girl about five-two, maybe twenty-two years old, slim, red-haired, pretty?"

"Yes, yes, that's her!"

"Sounds like her," the middle-aged man agreed.

"Only, like I was telling you, her hair's really brown," the young man explained to the sergeant. "I had her dye it so she'd look different."

"Well, she got in my cab earlier in the evening," Skid continued, also addressing the sergeant now. "I could tell she was frightened. She didn't give me any address, just said to please hurry. . . ." And he went on with a brief account of what had happened.

"Maxie Kramm and Shadow Binder, eh?" the sergeant muttered. He turned to the officer who had brought Skid into the room. "Phone Headquarters and have Hirsch and his gang picked up."

The sergeant pivoted back to the young man. "That don't clear you, though," he told him. "How do we know you were just in love with the girl and, as you claim, came up the fire escape to visit her because you didn't want anybody to see you?"

"I—I was afraid I might be recognized. A lot of people in the city know me—I used to play in an orchestra—and know I went with Joan. I can prove we were practically engaged."

"You'll get a chance to," the sergeant said. He turned to the middle-aged couple. "And neither of you heard sounds of the struggle there must've been here? You—" he nodded toward the man—"just came to her room with something, didn't get an answer when you knocked, so you opened the door and caught this bird going out through the window?"

"That's right," the man answered. His shifty eyes managed to meet the sergeant's steady gaze for a moment. "She'd sent me for some sandwiches, as I told you, like she often did. I decided she must've fallen asleep."

"Okay." Then the sergeant wheeled to the officer he had sent to call Headquarters, who had just returned, and ordered: "Bring in the two other roomers—one at a time."

The first one was a big man, about thirty, who slouched through the doorway with his hands in his pockets.

"Name?" the sergeant snapped.

"Joe Madden," the man grunted. He leaned nonchalantly against the foot of the bed.

"Did you hear any sounds that might've been from a fight in Miss Kimball's room?"

"Naw. I went out just as Miss Kimball came in. Met her on the steps. I only got back a minute before you guys came."

"Then you're no help. All right, you can go."

And Joe Madden strolled back to the door.

The second one was a greasy young man in extremely cut clothes. He was puffing nervously at a cigarette.

"Name?" the sergeant demanded.

"Bonelli—Frank Bonelli."

"Did you hear any sounds that might've been from a fight in Miss Kimball's room?"

"**A** FIGHT where?" Bonelli mumbled. Yellowed fingers twitched over the cigarette which he had taken from his mouth. He was obviously a cokey.

"You live just down the hall from here, don't you?" the sergeant asked impatiently.

"From here—yeah, yeah, I do. But I didn't hear anything. I—I was asleep until he—" a jab of one thumb signified the other policeman—"woke me up."

The sergeant hunched his shoulders. "Well, I guess we've got all we're going

to get here," he said to the other cop. He nodded toward the young man. "Take him down to the car and tell Murphy to watch him. Then come back. I'll want you to wait until I send a fingerprint man over. There might be some prints around that'll help us. . . . And you—" he turned to Skid—"name and home address? I may need you later."

Skid told him, as the other cop led the haggard young man from the room.

A few minutes later, in his cab, again, Skid drove slowly toward the garage. His face wore a thoughtful expression. Things didn't quite fit for Sam Hirsch to have found the girl unless he had had a devil of a stroke of luck. His two men had been on her trail, but they'd been shunted off. And it seemed pretty sure that they hadn't known where she was living. If they had, they wouldn't have wasted all the time waiting around for him, then let him cart them somewhere else. Besides, why would Sam Hirsch have bothered to have her snatched? Why wouldn't he have just had her career ended right in her own room with one of those fake suicide set-ups which were supposed to be his great specialty?

No, things had a definitely peculiar smell. Skid swung over to the curb, braked his cab, sat frowning. There was one obvious possibility which would explain the snatching.

"And I'll bet my hack that's what happened," he grunted.

He remained motionless, frowning even harder, for a few minutes. Then, suddenly, he snapped his fingers. Grabbing the wheel, he pulled the cab around.

"What a dope!" His voice was bitter. "I should've got it right off! Now—hell, probably I'm too late!" His foot jammed the accelerator to the floor.

A COUPLE of minutes of careening around corners, racing down straight stretches, brought him back to Thirty-ninth Street. Slowing at last, he coasted to a stop behind another parked car a little way from the building in front of which a remnant of the curious crowd still loitered.

That was a help. Certainly some of them would have seen the man if he had left. At least if he had left by the front door. Skid's eyes were bleak. If the man had left, he realized, the game was probably up. The poor kid would be shipped over to Hirsch before there was a chance to find her. Then left—that would be her end. Because Hirsch wouldn't waste any time closing her mouth for good.

With Death!

Skid was halfway across the street now. He spotted the chap from whom he'd got his first information standing on the curb, made for him. Reaching him, he tapped his arm.

"You been right here the last ten minutes or so?"

"Yeah, sure—why?"

"Did you see—" He stopped abruptly. "Never mind," he muttered, edged behind the crowd so that he wouldn't be seen by the man who had just appeared in the doorway and was coming down the steps.

At the bottom the man paused to light a cigarette. Then, mumbling a greeting to somebody he evidently knew, he walked up the street.

Skid waited a moment, finally turned, hurried back to his cab. Waiting there until the man had nearly reached the corner, he swung around the other parked car and idled slowly in pursuit.

The man just hit a bus at the corner. He rode about a dozen blocks on that, got out again, cut rapidly down

toward the river. Skid followed carefully, keeping always a couple of blocks behind.

The destination proved to be a ramshackle two-storied wooden house in the middle of a section of abandoned buildings. Having stopped when the man started up the steps, Skid waited until he had disappeared from sight. Then he drove on a block, stopped again, jumped out to hurry the rest of the way on foot. He kept close to the walls of other buildings.

There was no light visible from the front of the house. Down a narrow alley at the side, however, Skid saw a faint ray cutting the darkness. He groped cautiously into the boarded window through which he discovered it filtered. He couldn't see inside; the window was too high. He groped on to the rear of the building.

The front door, he had taken for granted, would be locked. But perhaps there'd be some other way of entrance. There was. He found a back door unlocked. Very carefully he eased it open, peered inside.

It gave into a hall which led down to the doorway of the lighted room. Low voices sounded. Skid crept forward, his right hand bringing Shadow's gun from his pocket.

The voices got clearer as he neared the doorway. Presently he could understand what was being said.

"... and so everything's okay," the one who had been doing most of the talking was saying. "Tony meets one of Hirsch's men—just one—gets the dough and brings him here. There ain't a chance of a double-cross on the deal."

"Fifteen grand, eh!" someone else gloated. "Five grand apiece! ... When'll they be here?"

"Oughta come any minute," the first man answered.

SKID stole toward the doorway faster. From the remark about the split he knew only the two men were in the room now. But two more would arrive any minute. He must hurry.

"Whadda we do then?" the second man asked.

"We don't do nothin'. Just scam out and leave Hirsch's torpedo with the babe." There was a harsh chuckle. "But I c'n guess what he'll do—and maybe some tramp'll find her body next winter."

A muffled little moan sounded. Skid quivered. The damned inhuman rats! Fury flamed so high within him that he took the rest of the distance to the doorway in one mad plunge.

"Up with 'em!"

But one of the men in the room, a saw-toothed guy who was evidently used to a gun, had already drawn. He fired a wild shot. Skid pumped a bullet back. The saw-tooth face went blank.

Meanwhile the other of the two, big Joe Madden, who was one of the roomers the police sergeant had questioned and the man Skid had followed, had rushed from a different part of the room. He was on Skid before he could whirl, grabbed his gun arm with one hand, battered at him with the other. Skid lost his balance and went down, Madden on top of him. The gun scaled from his fingers.

Suddenly everything seemed hopeless. Madden, strong as a bull, got a torturing strangle hold on him. He couldn't worm out of it, couldn't break it. Fire racked his lungs. His head pounded. The room began to whirl, grow black.

Yet he didn't give up. He kept struggling. He must get Madden—*must!* The frenzied thought wasn't for himself; it was for the poor kid whose terrified eyes he momentarily glimpsed

through the swirling cloud of oblivion. He was her only hope!

But his strength was fast ebbing. Madden had him on his side now, was grinning at him in insane triumph. He tried to smash a fist to that face, couldn't reach it. Then he attempted to roll over a little more, to reach his knees where he could have some purchase. He didn't quite make the grade. He got an idea, though, and heaved his weight back.

It worked. One of Madden's elbows slammed against the floor. Pain made the big man wince and loosen his hold a bit for just an instant.

That was Skid's chance. He seized it. Twisting, he yanked his body to one side. The hold broke. He was free. Dragging air into his tortured chest, he clawed to his knees and lashed a blow to Madden's jaw.

MADDEN was also trying to get to his knees. The blow caught him off balance. His arms flailed the air. Skid hit him with a straight right. He sighed sickly, shivered as if he were suddenly cold, sagged.

Skid lurched to his feet. There were still the other two men to think about. He rushed across the room, tore the ropes from the girl, pulled off the gag. Quickly he helped her up.

"Oh, oh. I—" she began.

"Come on—we've got to hurry!" he rapped.

But then, just as they started for the door, he knew they were too late. Footsteps were coming swiftly along the hall.

"Get over against the wall!" he whispered. He sprang sideways, grabbed up Shadow's revolver, spun toward the door.

Startled eyes were sweeping the room. Guns snapped out. With the first

swap of bullets Skid felt a hot stab in his right arm. But one of the men was crumpling, clawing at his chest.

Ducking, Skid fought desperately to keep control of his gun with his numb right hand. He managed another shot. The second man wobbled, but he managed to train his revolver on Skid for a last shot.

And now Skid's right hand was completely useless. Ducking again, he attempted to get the gun with his left before he'd have to drop it. He knew he wouldn't be in time, though, knew he was facing his end. But there was the look of death in the man's eyes. The girl would be safe.

A sharp report sounded. Yet strangely he felt no shock of pain. And the man in the doorway, choking out a groan, was going down.

Then Skid knew what happened. From across the room the girl uttered a horrified gasp.

"I—I killed him!"

He pivoted to see her standing with one hand on her throat, the other holding a revolver. It must be, he realized, the one dropped by the sallow-faced man who had been with Joe Madden.

"I killed a—a man!"

"Don't think of it that way," he said softly. "Just figure you gave poison to a rat."

LATER, the bullet removed and his arm bandaged, Skid sat in an office at Headquarters with the police sergeant who had been in charge of the case, the girl, the haggard young man. Only the young man was no longer so haggard. There was joy and gratitude on his face.

". . . and now, with you willing to testify, we'll put Hirsch in the chair where he belonged years ago," the sergeant was saying to the girl. "And we'll

have his whole gang behind bars until they have white beards."

"I was a fool not to have testified in the first place," the girl murmured.

"It was all my fault," the young man said.

"I know how you felt, son," the sergeant told him sympathetically. Then, scowling, he turned to Skid. "What I'd like to know is how you happened to suspect Madden. I can understand how you figured the possibility of the set-up. But why did you connect him?"

"Well, you asked him if he'd heard any sounds of a fight in Miss Kimball's room," Skid explained. "Miss Kimball's room—but she was supposed to be known only as Miss Smith. Yet Madden said he hadn't, right off. Of course it might've been logical for him to reason that you meant the room you were in—though the other guy, Bonelli, didn't until you explained—but he also mentioned meeting Miss Kimball on the steps a little earlier. I got the idea he was too glib with that Kimball. He didn't sound like he'd just found out it was her name."

The sergeant's gaze had grown admiring. Feeling uncomfortable, because he didn't like to be admired, Skid pushed up to his feet.

"Guess I'd better be getting along."

Then there was another storm of thanks from the girl and her young man. He almost had to fight to break away.

Outside, heaving a sigh of relief, he started to walk to the subway. On account of his bum arm he had called the garage and told them to collect his own cab.

Suddenly he paused. Another cab was cruising toward him. Impulsively he hailed it, got in, gave his home address. He sank back with a grin. Sort of fun to be the passenger.

Civil Service Q & A

By "G-2"

Could You Qualify as—

Police Patrolman	Special Agent (G-Man)
Police Detective	Secret Service Operative
Policewoman	Post Office Inspector
Fingerprint Expert	Customs Patrol
State Trooper	Immigration Patrol
Crime Prevention Investigator	Anti-Narcotic Agent
Probation Officer	Parole Investigator
Criminologist	Prison Keeper
Police Radio Expert	Internal Revenue Agent
	Alcohol Tax Agent

This department will give you every week typical questions asked in civil service examinations.



Shorthand Tripper-uppers



FROM a number of state and city tests given to candidates for stenographic positions has been taken the composite test reproduced below. They represent, so the examining experts claim, the severest sections of a stenographic test, in other words tripper-uppers. No matter what system of shorthand is employed the test will apply.

The test: In the blank space provided, insert the shorthand outline for each word, appropriately vocalizing if you use the Pitman shorthand method.

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. died_____ | 11. careful_____ |
| 2. accurately_____ | 12. experimental_____ |
| 3. behind_____ | 13. establish_____ |
| 4. we have been_____ | 14. deduct_____ |
| 5. centralize_____ | 15. curiously_____ |
| 6. popular_____ | 16. courteous_____ |
| 7. whether or not_____ | 17. horse-power_____ |
| 8. instructor_____ | 18. rather than_____ |
| 9. picture_____ | 19. practice_____ |
| 10. favored_____ | 20. spared_____ |

- | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------|
| 21. treasure_____ | 55. physiology_____ |
| 22. Johnstown_____ | 56. eclectic_____ |
| 23. as follows_____ | 57. artist_____ |
| 24. foundation_____ | 58. arrive_____ |
| 25. restrict_____ | 59. continue_____ |
| 26. divine_____ | 60. emergency_____ |
| 27. adverse_____ | 61. army_____ |
| 28. efficient_____ | 62. ourselves_____ |
| 29. Connecticut_____ | 63. infliction_____ |
| 30. herein_____ | 64. forgotten_____ |
| 31. itemize_____ | 65. defy_____ |
| 32. railroad_____ | 66. assistance_____ |
| 33. write us_____ | 67. alert_____ |
| 34. clerical_____ | 68. numerous_____ |
| 35. definition_____ | 69. discouraged_____ |
| 36. advent_____ | 70. memorandum_____ |
| 37. furniture_____ | 71. dinner_____ |
| 38. internal_____ | 72. overcome_____ |
| 39. worship_____ | 73. intend_____ |
| 40. warn_____ | 74. discern_____ |
| 41. wish_____ | 75. attorney_____ |
| 42. requirement_____ | 76. possibility_____ |
| 43. postman_____ | 77. representative_____ |
| 44. supplies_____ | 78. disgrace_____ |
| 45. answers_____ | 79. catalog_____ |
| 46. sooner_____ | 80. magnificent_____ |
| 47. thereafter_____ | 81. assignment_____ |
| 48. prosperity_____ | 82. fastened_____ |
| 49. comparative_____ | 83. garden_____ |
| 50. social_____ | 84. merchandise_____ |
| 51. condition_____ | 85. effectively_____ |
| 52. unselfish_____ | 86. afterward_____ |
| 53. partial_____ | 87. assortment_____ |
| 54. personality_____ | 88. zealous_____ |

89. icicle_____	95. original_____	140. ibid. _____	155. et seq._____
90. meanwhile_____	96. cancel_____	141. pro tem. _____	156. i.e. _____
91. largest_____	97. expenses_____	142. q.v. _____	157. Q.E.D. _____
92. investors_____	98. anyhow_____	143. vid. _____	158. ult. _____
93. in other words_____	99. personality_____	144. vs. _____	159. viz. _____
94. endeavor_____	100. attachment_____	145. A.W.O.L. _____	160. admr. _____

Write the plural form of the following, first in long hand then in shorthand using the blank spaces.

101. alley	_____	_____
102. ally	_____	_____
103. apparatus	_____	_____
104. bacillus	_____	_____
105. cloth	_____	_____
106. corps	_____	_____
107. corpse	_____	_____
108. cupful	_____	_____
109. crisis	_____	_____
110. criterion	_____	_____
111. passer-by	_____	_____
112. solo	_____	_____
113. n	_____	_____
114. 3	_____	_____
115. chimney	_____	_____
116. scissors	_____	_____
117. sheep	_____	_____
118. ox	_____	_____
119. beef	_____	_____
120. tongs	_____	_____
121. ski	_____	_____

Write after each word below "s" if it is singular, "p" if it is plural, and then write the equivalent (of your answer) in shorthand.

122. alumni	_____	_____
123. bacteria	_____	_____
124. criteria	_____	_____
125. data	_____	_____
126. eaves	_____	_____
127. erratum	_____	_____
128. larva	_____	_____
129. phenomena	_____	_____
130. species	_____	_____
131. strata	_____	_____
132. deer	_____	_____
133. theses	_____	_____
134. Miss Brown	_____	_____
135. sheaf	_____	_____

Write after each abbreviation below its equivalent in English and your shorthand outline for same.

136. A.D. _____	138. cf. _____
137. ad inf. _____	139. et al. _____

The following statement of facts will be read aloud. Render the same into shorthand. Speed, as well as accuracy, will be judged. (Note; the statement below is frequently used in civil service dictation tests.)

Q 171—She said, "There are many signs that indicate an awakening interest in the application of our available knowledge to the promotion of health and the prevention of disease. Our medical schools have received increased and even enthusiastic support during recent years, and much is being done through boards and departments of public health, great private foundations, life extension institutes, insurance companies, industrial plants, libraries, newspapers, magazines and a host of other agencies. Various organizations have waged aggressive warfare on tuberculosis, typhoid, malaria, cancer and other diseases. Guarding the health of the people, our cities have their building laws and sanitary regulations, their playgrounds and public parks, their water and sewage systems, their quarantine rules and hospital facilities. Governments have seen fit to control the sale of alcohol and narcotics and to regulate the manufacture and sale of foods.

"All this work must continue, but it is the school which touches the lives of the masses, that must bear an increasingly large share of the burden. No other agency reaches all classes without distinction. Since in a political democracy the efficiency of the public control of health and disease is a function of the entire popula-

tion, no class can be ignored. Unless the masses of the people are vitally interested in promoting health and combating disease, little can be done."

In taking this dictation test at home or in your office have someone read it aloud, then transcribe your notes and compare them in their entirety with the original above. In order to make a high rating candidates should take at least 90 standard words a minute. Some tests for stenographer and typewriter require 100 to 120 words a minute. Reporting or law stenographers generally are required to take a speech at 150 words a minute; question and answer testimony at 175 words a minute for five minutes; 200 words a minute for three minutes. In taking the above dictation test time your self accurately. Errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, paragraphing and sentence structure count against the competing candidate.

When you have transcribed your shorthand notes on the typewriter make such corrections as you desire, using proof-reader's symbols in each instance. You will be marked for your knowledge of proof-reading on the basis of your corrected transcript.

Key answers to questions 101 to 170: 101—alleys; 102—allies; 103—apparatuses; 104—bacilli; 105—cloths; 106—

corps; 107—corpses; 108—cupfuls; 109—crises; 110—criteria; 111—passers-by; 112—solos; 113—n's; 114—3's; 115—chimneys; 116—scissors; 117—sheep; 118—oxen; 119—beeves; 120—tongs; 121—skis; 122—p—alumnus; 123—p—bacterium; 124—p—criterion; 125—p—datum; 126—p—eaves; 127—s—errata; 128—s—larvas or larvae; 129—p—phenomenon; 130—s—species; 131—p—stratum; 132—s—deer; 133—p—thesis; 134—s—Misses Brown; 135—s—sheaves; 136—in the year of our Lord; 137—endlessly; 138—compare; 139—and elsewhere *likewise* and others; 140—in the same place; 141—for the time being; 142—which see; 143—see; 144—against; 145—absent without leave; 146—Certified Public Accountant; 147—Daughter American Revolution; 148—miles per hour; 149—revolutions per minute; 150—pseudonym; 151—wrong font; 152—about; 153—ditto; 154—for instance; 155—and the following; 156—that is; 157—which was to be demonstrated; 158—ultimately; 159—to wit; 160—administrator; 161—Judge; 162—Justice of the Peace; 163—chapters or cubic centimeters; 164—hundredweight; 165—free on board; 166—manuscript; 167—in the matter of; 168—Society Automotive Engineers; 169—Doctor of Dental Surgery; 170—Eastern Standard Time.

Coming Next Week—Written G-Man Test

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They're Swindling You!

Foreign Rackets

By

Frank Wrentmore

This is the eighty-seventh of a series of articles exposing business rackets that cost you billions of dollars every year! Mr. Wrentmore is an authority on swindles and frauds, well known to legal, financial and commercial associations.—The Editor.

FEAR of death is probably the best incentive a man could have to force him to drop some of his bad habits. When the Chinese government recently decreed death as a punishment for uncured narcotic addicts, scores of fake doctors and so-called anti-narcotic hospitals in North China cities cashed in heavily by advertising, "Barring exceptional cases, we will cure any one from addiction in seven hours,"—a manifest impossibility. One such hospital in Tientsin treated 15,000 addicts in 1936, before it was closed by the authorities.

But that concerns China. Racketeers in some other foreign countries, not content with swindling their own nationals, are now invading the American market and are trying to take the play away from the boys on the home grounds. I think our sharpers can hold their own against any foreign competition, but, because some of you might be inclined to spend your money abroad instead of patronizing home industries, I'll review briefly one or two rackets which come to us under foreign labels.

Long ago I described in these columns the American "puff sheet" racket

and since then the Post Office Department has issued fraud orders against them, or at least most of them, but now from London and Paris come variations of this old scheme.

There are several "puff" publications with offices in London or Paris. Their agents have been approaching American manufacturers and exporters and solicited publicity items containing illustrations. Before publishing any of this material, however, they send Mr. Manufacturer a substantial bill for the half-tone engravings and at the same time try to get an order for a quantity of the issue which is to carry the article. Now that's old stuff which they have borrowed from us, but it still works. They may be moderately successful for a while, but only until it becomes generally known that it is an American swindle with foreign embellishments.

The Omaha Better Business Bureau which sends me a bulletin describing another prevalent foreign racket reminds me that all gyp schemes run in cycles. Within ten years another chain letter craze will mulct a new generation. Razzle-dazzle lotteries will keep the postal inspectors on their toes. The stock gyps will be playing with television securities or some other, as yet unknown, invention.

Years ago some enterprising but

unscrupulous foreigners had the happy idea of introducing what they claimed to be a superior tool steel to American manufacturers. All they wanted, the salesmen told the purchasing agents, was a sample order of just a few inches. (Tool steel comes in bars or rods of varying circumferences.) They quoted their prices by the pound and the orders they solicited were generally for thirty or forty inches, sometimes more. The salesmen made out their orders on their own order forms which the purchasing agents signed. A copy of the order, all in apparently due form, was left with the firm and the salesman went on his way.

A COUPLE of months later the tool steel would arrive, hundreds if not thousands of pounds of it, enough to last the firm for a generation. Then the letter writing would begin and at the first exchange of letters the American firm would learn that they had been "had," as the English put it. Their method was very simple. That little "in" as an abbreviation for "inches" became, in the careless handwriting of the salesman, an "m" which is the abbreviation for "meters" — and the metric system is in almost universal use in Europe.

A meter is 39.37 inches, so the firm's order for 50 "inches" of heavy tool steel brought them a load of more than 164 feet and the steel ran several pounds to the foot. Sometimes the firm was forced to pay for the full amount at the quoted price and sometimes a

compromise was reached, but in every instance it was an expensive experience.

This scheme is now reappearing, but with new angles. The salesmen still solicit their "trial orders" as in days of old but the commodity is not always tool steel. Various other foreign products are now used in the scheme, and it is also plainly evident that the experimenters have given the basic idea some thought.

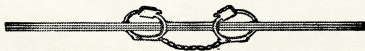
No longer is the swindle confined to the misinterpretation of "in" for "m" but other foreign measurements, and even foreign money, is used to promote the racket. It makes a big difference to the buyer if the amount of the order is figured in pounds sterling or American dollars and in some reported cases the substitution of English pounds for American dollars is the trick.

The Omaha Bureau states that the means of deception are numerous, but the remedy for the situation is simple:

"When signing an order, particularly when you are dealing with the agent for a foreign concern, be certain that his order specifies the *total amount* which you, as buyer, expect to be called upon to *pay*, and see that this total is written *in ink* on the order form in *dollars and cents*.

"Any legitimate foreign concern will have no hesitation in giving you the facts necessary for a common understanding of the transaction. This advice may appear to be elementary. However, some of the largest concerns in the country have been misled because this elementary precaution has *not* been taken."

Next Week—For Dentists and Their Patients



Solving Cipher Secrets

A cipher is secret writing. The way to solve ciphers is to experiment with substitute letters until real words begin to appear. In solving, notice the frequency of certain letters. For instance, the letters e, t, a, o, n, i, are the most used in our language. So if the puzzle maker has



M. E. OHAVER
"Sunyam"

used X to represent e, X will probably appear very frequently. Combinations of letters will also give you clues. 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.

OUR "Inner Circle Club"—which is composed of solvers who have submitted 1,000 answers to this department—welcomed two more members in February, raising the total enrollment to seventy-two! The February members are: "Makem Harder, Charles B. Weikel, Berkeley, Calif., who totaled 1,004 answers with the Feb. 6 issue; and "L. P. Carr, Soda Springs, Idaho, who totaled 1,003 answers with the Feb. 20 issue. Congratulations, new members! We are glad to include you in our "thousand club"! "I. C. C. members who qualified in March will be named in the July 3 issue.

A number of solvers have established high solving scores, and are within striking distance of "I. C. C. membership, but haven't submitted solutions recently. Subjoined is a complete list of these inactive members having scores of 800 or more answers. We invite these cryptofans to get back into the game! At least long enough to reach the thousand mark and win their degree symbols! By the way, we'll be glad to publish the solving score of any reader upon request.

Inactive List: 925 Answers—†S. C. McConnell, Tampa, Fla. 923—†Hoodwink, Bastrop, Tex. 917—†H. C. Fetterolf, Palmyra, Pa. 903—†S. P. Minnick, Washington, D. C. 898—†Broncho, Hulmeville, Pa. 897—†Neon, Rochester, N. Y. 895—†Mrs. E. E. Weinmann, Denver, Colo. 891—†Irene Laun, Washington, D. C. 878—†Bud Kistner, Cincinnati, Ohio. 849—†M. Johnson, New York, N. Y. 821—†Skrymir, Canton, Ohio. 816—†Edw. H. Schlader, Chicago, Ill. 813—Bernard McGee, Bloomfield, N. J.

A couple of inquiries concerning the validity and count of certain cipher solutions have cropped up. One question asks if a solution submitted by a constructor to his own cipher

will count on his solving score. Decidedly yes! Such answers are credited so that a constructor will have the same chance as others in getting monthly or yearly "completes," etc. Another query concerns the counting value of solutions to "par" or challenge ciphers. Such an answer counts but one unit on your score, just as any other solution. The "par" is merely an estimate as to the number of solutions which we expect to receive to a given cipher.

Clues to this week's puzzles: In Pierrot's division, note L - L and C - C as aids to finding E and U. The key runs: 012345 6789. In Chanticleer's crypt, identify U and UDR, VOA and VONK, for entry to *DAZURU and ANCOVO. In W. Swierczek's message, compare ABD and the phrases BFG PDDK RKD and AR PD RKD, continuing then with groups 9 and 19.

Every group in †Dr. Zero's triple alliteration has a good beginning—please note the initial DFW's! Try the affixes DFW-, -UWH, and -OUFW, and then look to DFWOBDOT; etc. †Eatosin's construction presents you with SK as a clew to the pattern SKPSKF. Spot your own leads in Cee Gee's cipher, and look for the answers to all this week's puzzles in next week. Asterisks indicate capitalization.

No. 133—Cryptic Division. By Pierrot.

BLUE) BALLOON (EON

BBLNM

MEOCO

MOLCR

BBUAN

BUUOB

MEOC

No. 134—Against the Light. By Chanticleer.

FD *EXDA ANCOVO FL VONK PAUS, U GUSVNUH ABHNGKA FL VOA
KXD YNHH MA ZNKNMHA ND GUSVK FL *BUHNLFSDNA,
*DAZURU, *USNQFNU, *DAY *JATNBF, *VATUK, UDR *HFXKNNUU.

No. 135—Conquest and Cultivation. By W. Swierczek.

"ABD EFGA HDKALNO BFG PDDK RKD RS BLTFK FHBUDXDTDKA;
ABD YNDGDKA HDKALNO YNRTUGDG AR PD RKD RS BLTFK
UTYNRXDTDKA."—*FNRKRXUHU.

No. 136—Silent Situation. By †Dr. Zero.

DFWNRAORE DFWNUDO DFWEPDOT DFWDRAOUWB DFWORTO.
DFWHRWUBX DFWTOBZXR, DFWERYWUWH DFWDRVOUFW,
DFWOBDOT DFWEPDOFA, DFWGUTDBORT DFWDRAOUWBT,
DFWDXPRT DFWDRAO.

No. 137—One for Wimpy. By †Eatosin.

ZABPFGA DE HYEFPPOPZK, YZLDVNXGN ZAAPOR GWPFRF SK
JQPGDZOU, ZFHZNZXVF, USYT-NZDP, SKPSKF, FHPKZOY,
UULMVZRF, GXXHTZKR. XNSQF ZKGLPO. EGZKNF CSN IVPOE
DSBPKG AGTPOZOE.

No. 138—Crossroad Adventure. By Cee Gee.

FDZTBYDG FDXOEN ZOTE DHOFR. SKTNZ USEVE ZNKDZL. GSFNG
XSRNG ZSUNE HBEFZNDTV, EUGOZMNE TNK-ASOTL KNDGVP
OUST USU-FSZT.

LAST WEEK'S ANSWERS

127—Key: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
MARCHING BY

128—These tests are used by candy makers to determine the various stages in boiling sugar: thread, pearl, blow, feather, soft ball, hard ball, crack, caramel.

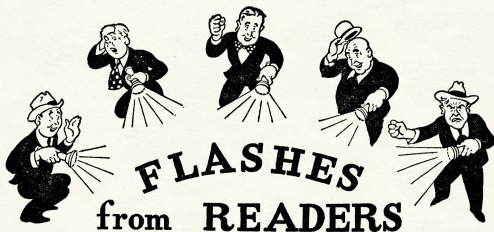
129—Motto for married men: "Misunderstood husbands who value their lives, should avoid other husbands' misunderstood wives."

130—Flags waving o'er warriors' graves; muted trumpets sounding taps; silent rifle-stacks; music from the fife and drum; cannons buried in flowers—Memorial Day impressions.

131—Swashbuckling burglars loot club, obtain cash, diamonds, etc. Patron assails bandits, who jump through window. Stupid watchman disarms victim, unwittingly aids crooks.

132—Boys camp upon hazy echo lake. Pick corn, also kale, from nigh farm plot. Rude goat ekes dire doom! Slow oafs soot find sofa.

Answers to any of this week's puzzles will be duly credited in our *Cipher Solvers' Club* for June. Send your solutions to: M. E. Ohaver, DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.



LET'S Have Something to Look Forward to" is not the name of a song, but our policy as far as this magazine is concerned. We want DFW readers to be breathlessly impatient while awaiting the arrival of the next issue.

Coming Next Week on the last page of this issue will tell you about the schedule of fine stories in store for the June 12 issue—so we'll skip that and look forward to the week after that. In the June 19 issue Donald Barr Chidsey comes to DFW with one of the finest novels ever to appear in this magazine. It is exciting, mysterious, and different in setting and plot. The title of it is *Midsummer Murders*.

In that same issue we have something new to offer—an intriguing game called *Detectogram* in which you can be your own detective and solve the baffling crime presented in this new feature.

WE do not pretend to be experts on all and sundry subjects and neither do our writers claim to present "something new under the sun" in every story they write, but when this letter came in we had to make a test:

DEAR EDITOR:

I have never written to the *Flashes* from *Readers* column before, but I enjoy reading the letters. They often express my own views.

In the letter from Stafford Lewis of Seattle, Wash., he had the same views I had after reading those stories he mentions. There is one thing I notice is growing steadily more apparent in different stories—the authors copy clues and in some cases whole incidents from other stories.

One so-called clue I disapprove of completely. In fact, it spoiled the ending of the story *The Bowery Bums a Murder* by Major C. E. Russell in the April 17 issue. The detective claims he got his clue proving the death was a murder through a book of matches being torn off from the left side and the pistol causing death was in the man's right hand. Therefore, the man had been left-handed. That has been said many times before, and I laugh it to scorn.

I am left-handed. I smoke cigarettes and use those books oftener than any other. And it's a fact I tear off as many matches with my right hand as my left. Also, my right hand fingers are stained from smoke, while the left hand fingers are not stained at all. Also, when picking up a plain match I will take it in my right hand as often or more so than the other. It is more convenient to leave the hand free that is more often used. Don't you think so? (*Yes.*)

I liked the story, *Death at Second Base* by William Edward Hayes in the same issue. I love baseball stories. Fred MacIsaac's story *Mr. Nobody* printed back in January was a dandy, but I felt so sorry for that girl losing her brother. I thought he was the principal character the way the story started out.

I think you print a fine clean magazine. I am not ashamed to be seen reading it.

E. M. CARTER
Sioux Falls, S. D.

We did not have to go far to test Mr. Carter's statement. On the staff of DFW we have a "southpaw" editor, fortunately, and without warning we walked into his office and said: "Do you have a match?" Innocently he took a book of matches from his pocket with his left hand, tore one of the sticks from the left side and struck it with his left hand. The test was complete—Major Russell's story will hold water. Try it on your "southpaw" friends.

J. LANE LINKLATER, whose Robin Hood confidence man, *Paul C. Pitt*, has long been a popular character in DFW, recently created another fiction hero, the detective *Sad Sam Salter* who seems destined to attract a large following. Here is one reader's opinion of these characters:

DEAR EDITOR:

I have been a faithful reader of DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY since 1924. I must admit that I never so thoroughly enjoyed any two stories as much as *The King Goes Mad* (DFW April 10) and *Killer's Territory* (DFW April 24). There is nothing more enjoyable in life than real humor and you certainly are able to produce it through J. Lane Linklater's characters.

To understand the underlying plot of *The King Goes Mad* requires a mathematically inclined brain. It took me several minutes of hard thinking to understand *King's* plot. That is the reason why I enjoyed it so much.

I also like real detective stories, of the Sherlock Holmes type. *Killer's Territory* was very good, the only objection I can find is that a gentleman can never have any amount of sympathy for a stool pigeon, in other words "a spy."

I hope you will continue to let us have *Sad Sam* real detective stories and I hope that *Sad Sam* will outshine "Sherlock Holmes."

A. L. GAREIS
Brooklyn, N. Y.

AN authentic setting for a story proved to be an interesting feature of Robert H. Leifred's *Black Death*. The following letter gives us more information about the LaBrea pits in Los Angeles:

DEAR EDITOR:

But for an attack of the "flu" I would have written you sooner to compliment you on the story in your April 10 issue, entitled *Black Death* by Robert H. Leifred.

The story makes use of the LaBrea pits in Los Angeles as a means of disposal of the victims of a murder gang. No one who has not seen these tar pits and viewed the skeletons of prehistoric animals that have been dug out of them, can get the real drift of Mr. Leifred's story. But his handling of the matter was such that anyone could understand the dangerous situation in which Nelson Grant found himself.

Just the same, I feel that I was one up on most of the readers, as I have visited the locale of the story, seen the poisonous gas bubble up through the viscid asphalt, and viewed the dark spot on a white stone guard-fence, where a too inquisitive visitor was pulled up after having plunged into the nauseous mass.

La Brea pits have been called "the death trap of the ages." Skeletons of prehistoric animals estimated at 50,000 years old, have been dug up out of the black ooze. Sabre toothed tigers, buffalo, imperial elephants, mastodons, prehistoric horses and camels, an extinct species of wolf, the giant sloth, are some of the specimens. And even today, birds or small rodents often get caught in the asphalt, which writes *finis* to their chapter of life.

Anyway, thanks to Mr. Leifred for an interesting story laid in an interesting locale.

S. A. NELSON
Los Angeles, Calif.

THERE'S little danger of a love-lorn department creeping into this magazine, but we are ready to print more biographies of our authors whenever space permits, as requested in this letter:

DEAR EDITOR:

Your recent low down on Fred MacIsaac was a clever bit of reporting on your part and we hope that you will continue to furnish us with intimate chatter concerning the lives of the various authors who write for DFW.

Ever since a reader several months ago suggested a Pen Pal Department in DFW I have been almost afraid to read *Flashes from Readers* for fear someone else would suggest Advice to the Lovelorn.

I believe most of the older readers will back me up when I say: "Please, Mr. Editor, keep DFW strictly a detective story magazine." For those who prefer a side dish of rare romances or some other such delicacy we suggest that they invest in some other magazine.

RALPH FRANKLIN.

OPPOSITION SHEET**By Edward S. Williams**

Like warriors, knife at throat, two papers fought it out in that little town, with justice and humanity on the side of one—and brutal, masked marauders on the other!

GHOST IN C MINOR**By Richard Sale**

Daffy Dill tackles the case of mad music in a madman's house and the restless ghost of a loyal cocker spaniel!

TWO AGAINST LONDON**By John Kobler**

Merchants of death were they, with only their lives to sell, and the might of the city of London against them!

\$1,000,000 KNOCKOUT**By K. Krausse**

A million dollars was invested in that fight, and the Champ was all set—except for a little matter of murder!

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