INVISIBLE CRIMINALS

*True Story by* Robert Sneddon

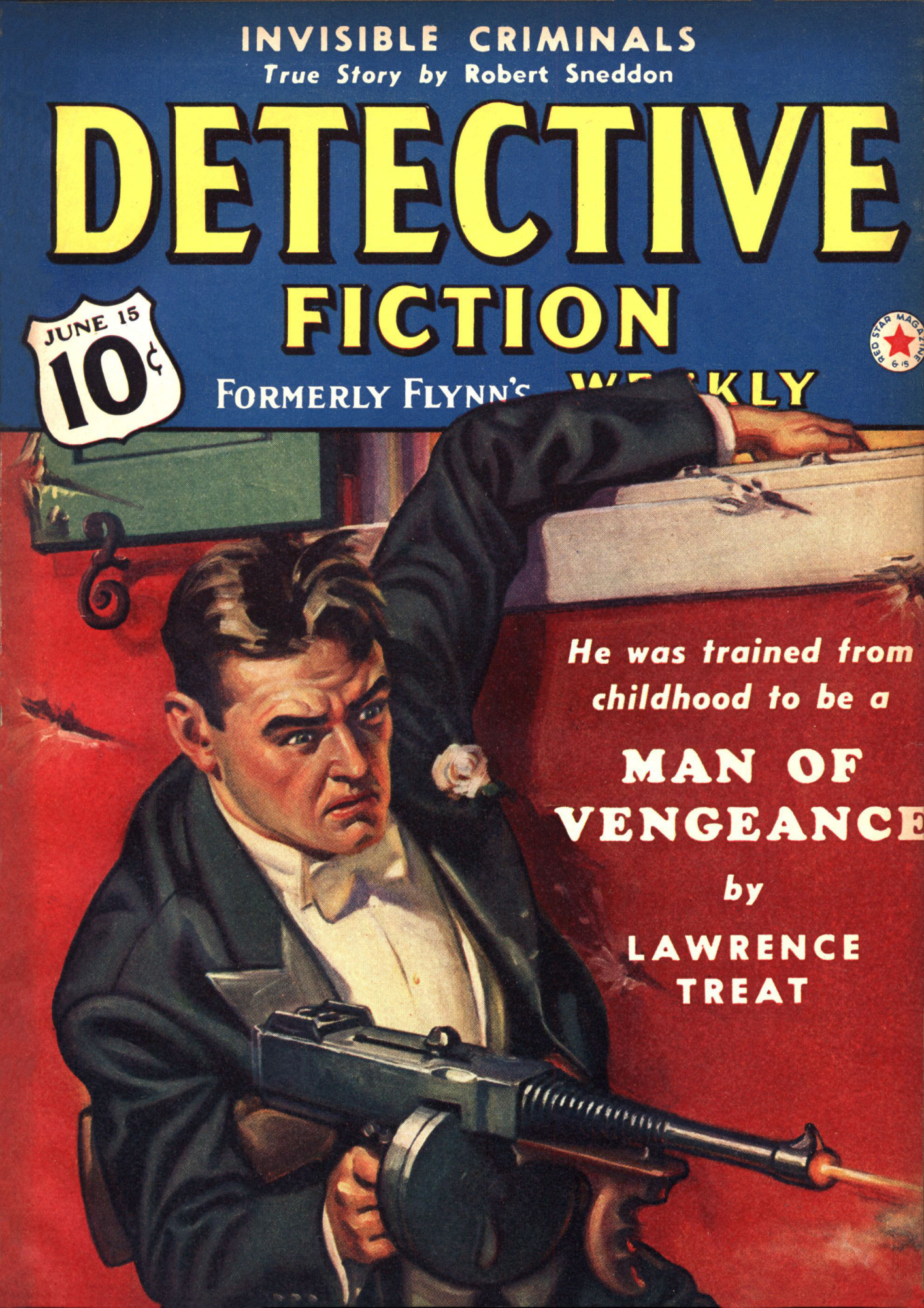
# DETECTIVE FICTION

FORMERLY FLYNN'S WEEKLY

JUNE 15

10¢

RED STAR MAGAZINE 6-15



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TITLE REGISTERED U. S. PATENT OFFICE

*Formerly* FLYNN'S

Volume 137 JUNE 15, 1940 Number 5


## Serial



## Novelets



## Short Stories



## True Story



## Features




*A* RED STAR *Magazine*

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| 29x5.50-19 | 3.35 | 1.45 |
| 6.00-17 | 3.40 | 1.40 |
| 30x6.00-18 | 3.40 | 1.40 |
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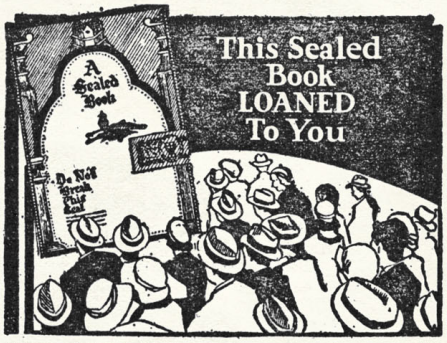


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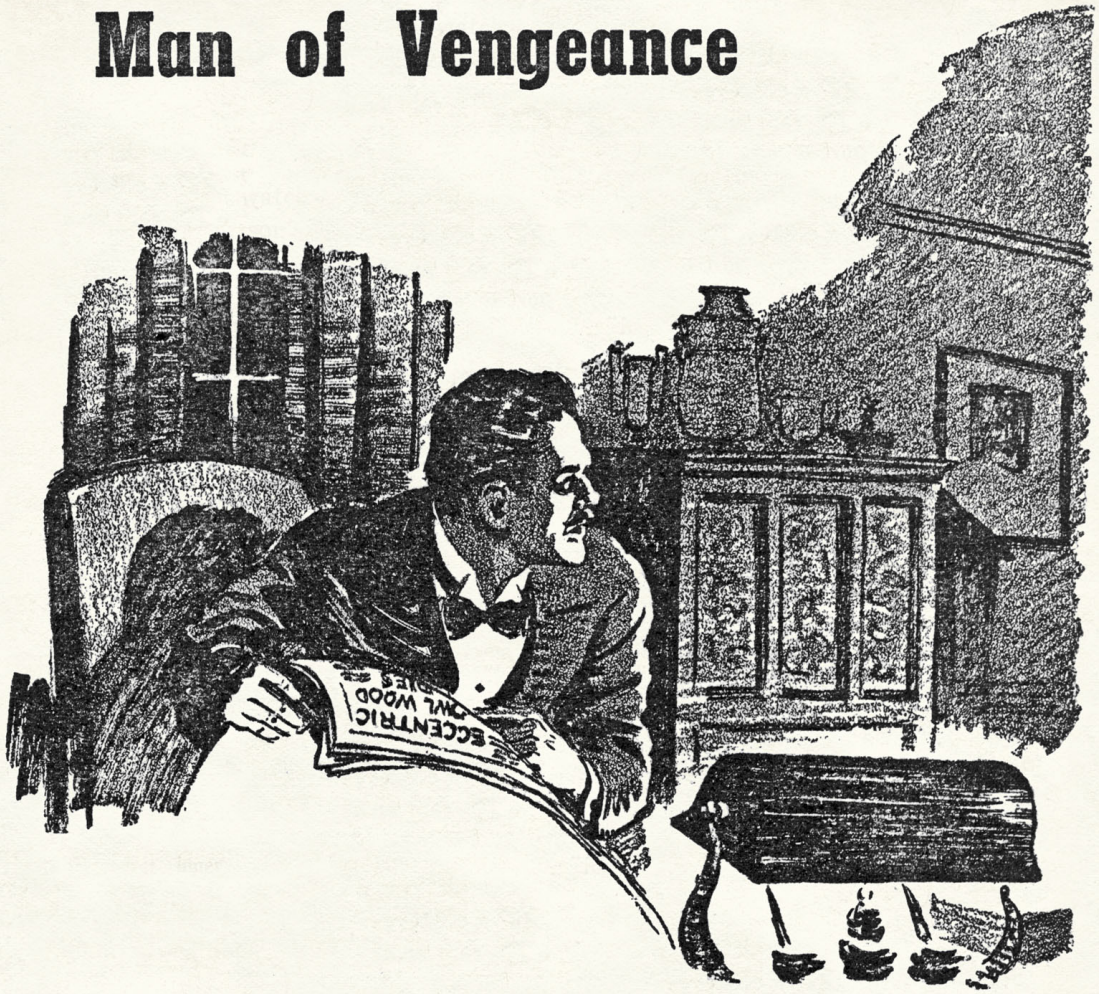
# Man of Vengeance




***Only the most fanatical hatred could have created such an awesome instrument of destruction as Thor Mackiner***

I

OLD WARREN MACKINER lay like a death's head, so thin, so slight, that the bedclothes barely wrinkled over the outline of his ravaged frame. In the center of the blanket a single hump marked the position of his upturned toes.

Facing him sat the young man whom crippled Warren Mackiner had raised, had trained and had educated for the thing he himself could never do.

Blue eyes, streaked with yellow. They both had them, father and son.

They stared at each other fixedly. They had stared so for two hours, each motionless, impassive. Deep hate or deep sympathy or complete indifference —no third person could have guessed which.

Suddenly the cripple tried to rise. His massive head forced itself up, his arm extended shakily, struggling to lift up. When he was clear of the pillow, he spoke.

"Go!" he intoned. His eyes gleamed yellow as a panther's.

Then he sank back.

With neither a word nor a backward

"But you're dead!" he gasped

# By Lawrence Treat

glance, the younger man got up and left the room. No sign of emotion crossed his face, no creak of shoe leather told the sound of his passing. There was merely, a half minute later, the slam of the front door.

It was thus, at the age of twenty-three, that Thor Mackiner for the first time in his life left the house of his father.

He went without regret, without doubt, without fear. As his feet gripped the pebbles of the road that led from his home to the strange outer world, he knew not whether his father lay living or dead. Nor thought of it.

But Warren Mackiner was not quite dead. With infinite pain, with no part of him alive except the fierce will that forced the motion of his feeble hands, he was writing. The letters were palsied, ill-formed, and each slant of the pen was dull, racking effort. Yet he wrote.

As the last agonizing word was completed, the pen dropped from those already defunct hands. There was no death rattle, no other sign of his passing, for the man himself had already died. His lines were no threat of breathing man. They were a message from hell.

PEOPLE pointed to the house and wondered who lived there. It resembled a Renaissance *chateau,* and with

its grounds it occupied half a block. For six months of the year it was closed, the shades were drawn and the gates locked, and no one approached except the watchman who patroled twenty-four hours a day. But whether it was inhabited or not, it was always guarded.

The vestibule was built of white marble and the fountain in the center had once bubbled up in the main courtyard of a palace of the Medicis. Plants and statues, alabaster and colonnades. It took a warm, flooding energy to fill the vast lobby and turn it from a museum into a home.

Dawson Grange had that quality. Ruddy and robust, with thick, black hair and glossy mustache, he distended the entire world with the pressure of his superiority. He was a king without title, a general without a commission, a leader without scruples.

Now, seeing his guests to the door, his laughter poured out in torrents, bellowed through the doorway and reached the spiked iron fence that isolated the house from the city.

"Glad to have you," he rumbled. "And don't forget what I told you about Symonds—I want his resignation. You can manage it, old man. Sure you can.

Grange's big paw tapped lightly on the tall man's shoulder. The tall man tightened inwardly, but his assent was suave and reassuring. You don't buck men like Dawson Grange. Not unless you like head-on collisions at sixty miles an hour. Maybe there are people who do, but the tall man wasn't one of them.

As his car moved forward, he saw Grange standing in the doorway, strong and massive and domineering. Samson, thought the tall man. The strength of Samson and the guile of Judas. A hard combination to beat, an implacable foe.

Grange, sure of the effect he had created, watched the limousine slide down the gravel driveway and through the gates. The watchman closed them with a clang, locked them and strode off on his rounds. Grange rubbed his cheeks with thick thumb and forefinger. He stood thoughtfully, motionless, until he heard the discreet cough behind him. He turned then and cleared his throat.

"All right, Benson," he muttered. "You can lock up."

Grange strode heavily through the marble entrance hall, circled the fountain of the Medicis and entered the living room. Cards were still lying face up on the bridge table, the empty highball glasses still stood flat and stale in their holders. Suddenly he felt tired.

"What's the trouble, Daddy?"

He gave a startled jerk and then laughed. He hadn't noticed Linda there in the corner with a book. She stood up now, a tall, slender girl with black hair and gray eyes, somehow reminiscent of pine trees and shadows, with the sunlight sifting through.

"Nothing," he said. "Nothing at all."

"You seemed so preoccupied tonight."

"Did I?" He gazed at her with gloating pride. His daughter. The thing for which he lived. The reason why he could justify all he did, and the reason why he couldn't crack. "Just a headache," he replied. "Bothering me all evening."

She made no reply because there was none to be made. It was the first time in his turbulent life that he'd ever had a headache, and she didn't believe him.

"I'm going upstairs," he announced gruffly. "Have a little work to do." And awkwardly because of the lie, he kissed her goodnight.

As he went up to his study, he was aware he'd started her wondering. That wouldn't do. Maybe he ought to send her up to the country ahead of schedule. Anything to get her away for a while. But he wasn't sure whether he'd dare follow.

He paused, reflecting. Damn fool to worry like this. Nothing had happened and nothing was going to. A madman had died, and the important thing was he was dead. Finished and over with at last, the whole damn business. He ought to be rejoicing for the first time in twenty years.

HE ENTERED his study, closed the door softly and stood listening for a moment. Then he turned the key in the lock.

It was the first time he'd been alone all day and he was perspiring slightly. He strode to the liquor cabinet, removed decanter, syphon and glass, and poured out a stiff one. He put the glass on the desk, leaned back in his chair and picked up a cigar.

He was in the full glare of a writing lamp built into the desk in front of him. The polished surface gleamed, but the rest of the room was dim. Suddenly a nameless dread gripped him and he got up and walked to the closet where he kept files and records. He yanked the door abruptly and then laughed. Nobody. Naturally not. People don't creep into the homes of men like Dawson Grange. In the first place they can't get in. And in the second, they don't try.

Grange returned to the desk, took a deep gulp of his whisky and soda and opened a drawer. He pulled out a newspaper, unfolded it and read. As his eyes scanned the column, his hands began to shake and he had to prop the paper against the drawer. The article he was reading was headed:

**ECCENTRIC OF OWL WOOD DIES**

"Warren Mackiner," it said, "for over twenty years a mysterious cripple, died today in his home at Owl Wood. The body was found by a tradesman, John Hopper of 43 Ridge Road, in an upstairs bedroom. Although three of the many rooms had been slept in recently and although at least one other person was known to have lived with Mackiner, he was apparently alone at the time of his death.

" 'I rang the bell as usual,' stated Hopper, who had been delivering groceries. 'Usually, a gray-haired man with a limp answers the bell and takes the stuff. Once or twice I saw Mr. Mackiner in the hall, going around in a wheel chair. When I didn't get any answer this morning, I tried the door. It was open, so I went in and yelled. It was sort of creepy, yelling in that big place and not getting an answer, but I went on anyhow. There were a lot of funny looking rooms with all kinds of junk in them, and I kept going until I came to the door of Mr. Mackiner's room. He was lying there in bed with that sheet of paper across the blanket. I didn't have to look twice to see he was dead. I was pretty glad to get out of the place, too, so I went straight to town and told the police.'

"The police, suspicious of foul play, made a thorough investigation. But according to the medical examiner, Mackiner, a helpless cripple, had died a natural death.

"The rooms were curious and the police could only guess at the use of some of them. Several were either laboratories or junk shops. Machine room with forge, carpenter shop, chemical and psychological laboratories fitted up with the most modern and technical

devices were side by side with rooms resembling second-hand shops. Guns and perfume bottles, locks, parallel bars, costumes, bells, lanterns, ropes, looms —every conceivable variety of object was found.

"There were many devices as ingenious as they were incomprehensible. Among the few whose use was obvious was a wheel chair for the crippled Mackiner with which he'd apparently been able to go up and down stairs.

"Perhaps the strangest part of the establishment, however, was the garden or park at the rear of the house. Ten acres in extent and surrounded by high walls, it contained a rifle range with target, a small but very deep pond, sections of brick wall, concrete platforms, an old dismantled Ford, a jumping pit and a pair of ferocious, half-starved dogs.

"Doubtless Warren Mackiner was mad, but who were the people who lived with him, and where and why had they fled?

"He has no known connections or heirs. Except for one thing, the police were inclined to dismiss the whole establishment as the harmless eccentricity of a wealthy but insane scientist, and his death as a normal one, without consequences. That one thing was a sheet of paper lying on the blanket in front of the body. Written in a shaky hand, as if composed in pain and under the shadow of approaching death, were these words: 'He who once wronged me will read this and tremble, for I have started that which, in death, I can never undo. May his soul rot!"

Dawson Grange read the last words twice. Then with trembling hand he lowered the paper and reached for his whisky and soda. But halfway to the desk, his fingers closed convulsively. Wide-eyed and terror-stricken, Dawson Grange stared at the apparition of Warren Mackiner.

## II

WHEN Thor Mackiner left the house of his father, he headed unerringly towards the city. After two hours of walking, he reached the top of a hill from which, though it was already night, he sighted the towers of New York.

Motorists, passing here on a bright wind-swept day, would narrow their eyes and point out the spire of the Chrysler Building. Yet it occasioned Thor no surprise that he could see it at an hour when, to most people, there would merely be a yellow glow reflecting the lights of the city. Though he did not know it, darkness made him like a one-eyed man in a world of the totally blind. Warren Mackiner had taught well.

Thor walked all night and most of the next day. Twice during the night he felt hungry, and each time he simply turned off to the nearest house, picked the lock of the back door and raided an ice box. His footsteps were silent. Though he appeared to wear shoes, he was actually barefoot, with soft pliant uppers laced under his calloused soles.

On the exterior there was little to distinguish him. He was a shade under five-eleven in height, broader than the average but giving no hint of his phenomenal strength. His hair was blond over a wide forehead, his features regular and rather pleasant. His eyes, no doubt, would have arrested a close observer, but normally no one would notice their peculiar yellow streaking. And Thor had the knack of narrowing and partially lidding his eyes to make them inconspicuous.

At dawn he was still trudging to-

wards the city, but it was late afternoon before he reached it. He felt no need to sleep or eat again. He had been schooled too often to go for two or three days at a stretch without food or rest. And now, in the new and miraculous environment of the city, he was wide-awake and interested in everything about him. Trucks, trolleys, stores, even women and children—he had never seen them before, except in pictures.

At first the clatter of city life absorbed his whole attention. The rumble of trucks and the blare of horns and the shouts of children—these were loud brusque noises. But what fascinated Thor was to hear the variety of sound, to listen to a sparrow chirping and a fly buzzing and to the click of an elevator through the open hall of an apartment and to the conversation of a couple fifty feet away. Had he been told that most people heard merely the trucks and horns, Thor would have been amazed.

It was evening when he finally arrived at his destination—the house of Dawson Grange. Thor circled the big mansion twice, less to reconnoiter than to satisfy himself that it was exactly as he had expected. Warren Mackiner had described accurately and to the last detail. Thor was familiar not only with the exterior and interior of the building, with the arrangement of the rooms and the placing of each stick of furniture, but also with the number of servants and the habits of every inmate.

For about ten minutes he loitered opposite the mansion. His entire life had been directed to this moment, and now that he was here some force held him back. Not fear, certainly. Rather a reluctance to leave a phase of existence that had been pleasant and that he could never regain. Trained to action and disciplined to pure thought, Thor was enjoying the luxury of his first emotion.

Presently he glanced at the street to make sure it was empty, crossed and approached the iron grill fence. It was some seven feet high and spiked at the top. But formidable as it would have been to most people, to Thor it was an old friend. Hundreds of times on the estate of his father, Thor had practiced leaping an exact replica of the iron paling. He came at it with a bound, stepped up with one foot as purchase and slapped his hand on the iron bar between the sharp points. Using his grip as fulcrum, he vaulted and landed on all fours, lightly as a cat.

CROUCHING low and keeping to a line of shrubs, he dashed across the grass to the protecting shadows of the building. There he waited, breathing easily and listening. His keen ears detected sounds inside the house, but nothing to alarm him.

He flattened himself against the wall and moved quietly to the living room which showed chinks of light between the curtains. Through a thin slit he could glimpse a card table and, by shifting his angle of vision, he could examine each of the four players. Dawson Grange he recognized at once, and Thor studied him thoughtfully. But exactly what went through his mind, even he himself could not have told. It was something like the interest a zoölogist might feel in seeing some rare specimen of animal that he has waited many years to find.

On the two guests, Thor wasted little time. Merely a glance by which he might recognize them in future. In his memory, a face once seen was never forgotten.

The girl, however, Thor inspected

long and with rapt attention. Her great gray eyes, her black, lustrous hair, her small nose and mouth, the soft richness of her skin—he had never known that anything could be so lovely. He watched her long, completely oblivious to the danger of standing there.

Suddenly she laughed at something. Her lips parted delicately over even, white teeth, a dimple creased the oval of one cheek, and her small straight nose crinkled with mirth. Her change of expression broke the spell. Thor realized his exposed position and ducked at once.

He was hiding among the rhododendrons when Dawson Grange stepped to the front door to big good night to his guests. When the big, ruddy millionaire re-entered, Thor ran across the lawn to the side of the house facing a quiet side street. He glanced swiftly down the block to make sure no one was either in view or approaching. Reassured, he pulled on a pair of thin but strong silk gloves. Thor Mackiner would never leave fingerprints behind him, no matter what he did. Then he began climbing the wall of the house.

It was built of heavy ashlar, great chunks of gray uneven stone bulging convexly from their joints. His bare toes found easy footholds, his hands clutched every projection and gripped solidly. He ascended rapidly and quietly, and as confidently as a monkey running up a coconut tree.

He had only to reach the second floor where he had noticed an open window. Just outside, he halted for a moment to listen. Then he flung a leg over the sill and climbed in.

He was in a small dressing room. Despite the darkness, he could easily distinguish objects—furniture, clothes spread out, the three doors leading respectively to Grange's bedroom, his bathroom and the corridor.

Thor stood close to the bedroom door. He neither swayed nor emitted the vaguest hiss of breathing. Absolutely immoble, he was neither stiff nor tense; merely in a natural position.

He heard the sound of footsteps beating on the rug of the hallway. From the forceful, energetic tread, he guessed it was Grange approaching. And it was.

Grange, however, did not enter the bedroom. He walked past it to his study, closed the door and locked it. Thor heard him pacing, opening the liquor cabinet. Then a chair squeaked. After a short silence, the chair creaked again and Grange circled the room. When the springs of the swivel chair had grated for the second time, Thor came silently from his retreat.

He did more than walk silently. Most people, with care, can move without noise, but few can avoid some indication of their proximity. We call it a sixth sense, that of sensing the presence of someone else, but in reality it is one or more of the other five. But Thor gave no such indication. He could enter or leave a room without the smallest hint of his passage—literally, like a shadow.

In front of the door to the study he took from his pocket a pair of strong wires that were flattened slightly at the ends. Moving slowly and with precison, as only the steady hand of a surgeon or a painter of miniatures can move, he inserted the wires in the lock and twisted the key.

Then began the delicate business of opening the door, pushing it a fraction of an inch at a time. For hours on end, under the eye of Warren Mackiner, Thor had practiced opening squeaking doors until he was alive to the barest sound. Almost before his ears had caught it, he could feel a creak and apply pressure in the opposite direction.

THOR slipped through a crack two feet wide, and as cautiously as he had eased the door open, he shut and locked it. Then he stood there, watching Dawson Grange read a paper.

Thor gazed with interest. He was in no hurry and no danger, and it amused him to spy on a man who thought himself alone. And it amused him particularly because the man's hands were trembling slightly and his whole body gave off the smell of fright.

At length Grange lowered his paper and reached for his drink. As he did so, he raised his eyes and saw Thor. Thor, who in the dim light was the image of his father of over twenty years ago.

Grange gasped and his voice came in a whisper. "Mackiner!"

Thor bowed sarcastically, as if acknowledging an introduction. "Grange," he replied.

"But—this!" Grange tapped his newspaper. "You're dead!"

"If you don't mind my contradicting you," replied Thor, "I'm not."

"And you're old, you're crippled."

"Think so?"

Grange gulped. The sound of his own voice plus the normal replies of the man in the room brought him back to reality. "Who are you?" he demanded.

"Mackiner. You said so yourself."

Grange frowned. As his first fears left him, he regained his usual arrogance. "You're an impostor! You broke into my house and you'll go to jail for it!"

"I'm Mackiner. I climbed in, and you're glad I didn't ring the bell or let anybody see me."

"Mackiner — Mackiner!" blustered Grange. "You keep repeating the name as if I were scared of it. Who's Mackiner, anyhow? A dead lunatic! I don't know anybody else by that name."

"You knew Warren Mackiner well enough. I'm his son Thor."

"What of it?"

"Your voice cracks and your hands tremble, and you ask me what of it. You should know better than to try to bluff me."

Dawson Grange's voice snapped with rage. "Damn fool! Crazy as your father was, but this impertinence is going to end up with the police! What did you expect to do, anyhow?"

"I came to deliver a letter," remarked Thor. And then, in a harsh threatening tone, "From Warren Mackiner!"

"Let's have it," said Grange quietly.

Thor took an envelope from his pocket and flipped it across the room. It landed with a slight thump on the blotting pad of the desk. The black-haired man stared at it, then glanced at his visitor. "All right. Now get out."

"Better read the letter first."

"I'll read it when I damn please."

"Without turning me over to the police? You're backing down, Grange."

Grange tried to laugh, but his throat was dry and the sound was bitter, unnatural, rasping. "If there's an answer to this, I'll send it."

"There's no answer, and you can't reach me. You're rather slow grasping the fact I'm giving orders."

"I told you to leave!" shouted Dawson Grange. "If you don't—"

"Then what?" inquired Thor.

"Then I'll throw you out!"

Thor smiled quietly. He was mildly amused at the threat, and at the same time annoyed by Grange's obstinacy.

"You couldn't do it. Neither could your watchman nor your butler nor any of your servants. Nor, for that matter, could all of them do it together. And there's no sense edging your chair towards that bell cord. I'm not going to let you ring it."

Grange scowled, then turned deliberately and reached for the rope.

"Stop it!" Thor's voice was low, sharp. Grange paid no attention.

Thor did not grab the ash tray near him and throw it. His arm merely swooped, and the ash tray hurtled through the air to thud against the nerve on the underside of Grange's wrist. Grange's hand dropped as if it had been paralyzed, and with a grunt he started to rub his numb wrist.

THOR had barely moved. Merely the bend of his body, the streak of his arm. And for all the expression of his face, he might merely have stooped to knock the ashes from the end of a cigarette. Except that he didn't smoke.

Without a word, Dawson Grange slit open the envelope and unfolded the three sheets of paper inside. He read.

At first his face flushed red with anger, but as he scanned the lines the color drained slowly. His cheeks turned pale, then lead-gray. During the five minutes it took him to read, he aged ten years.

When he had finished, he dropped the letter on his lap. His face was lined, haggard. "You can't get away with it," he said hoarsely. With speech, his courage came back and he worked himself into a new rage. "You try any of that and I'll have the whole police force on your neck. You can't beat me, see? I'm too powerful, too big. I'll crush you as easily as I crushed your father. I've got you now—it's all on paper here. Blackmail. Extortion. You know the sentence for that?"

"I haven't the least idea what's in the letter. My father wrote it, I merely handed it to you."

"Then what are you going to do?"

"That," replied Thor, "is my affair."

"I don't know your game," snapped Grange, "but I want you to clear out of town. I'll pay your expenses to wherever you go and give you enough extra to set you up in business. How about it?"

Thor smiled. "Your daughter's coming," he said, and strode rapidly across the room to face Grange.

A few seconds later Grange heard footsteps padding the length of the corridor, and someone knocked at the study door.

"Daddy?" called Linda Grange. "May I come in?"

"What do you want?" replied Dawson Grange's voice.

"I heard you talking and I'd thought you were alone. Is anything the matter?"

"Nothing. Somebody from the office is here discussing business. Run along to bed."

"All right then. Good night."

Dawson Grange listened with awe to the retreating steps of his daughter. He had not opened his mouth in answer to her. Nor had Thor Mackiner, four feet away, so much as moved his lips.

### III

THOR was the first to speak. "Thanks," he remarked, "for sending her away."

Grange scowled. Mackiner was playing tricks on him. Well, the best thing was to humor him until Grange could get the upper hand. And then—the police, and a charge of breaking and entering. As for that watchman, he'd pay for this. With this job.

"Now let's go over your affairs," continued Thor. "It's getting late."

"My affairs?" spluttered Grange. "What are you talking about?"

"Your money, investments, records," explained Thor impatiently. "I want to see them. Doesn't the letter explain?"

"You're crazy, and I've had enough of this. Come see me tomorrow at my office. Explain your proposition then, and I'll give you my answer."

"There's no proposition. Either you consent or you take the consequences."

Grange grunted, stood up and started to lift the telephone. Thor's arm whipped out, seized Grange's hand and held it in an iron grip. Grange doubled back a fist and struck.

The blow never landed. A hand smacked at his foreram, slapped it back with stunning force. Then Thor's own fist shot out, a strange twisting blow that seemed to unfold too slowly, hesitate, and then whipped in with stunning impact. It struck Grange in the region of the parietal lobe.

As Grange collapsed, Thor caught him and eased him into a chair. Then Thor cut the wires of the bell cord and went to work.

The work took about a half hour. Twice during the time, when Grange showed signs of returning consciousness, Thor struck him deliberately on the parietal lobe, a short booming thump, and each time Grange went quietly and peacefully back to sleep. It was a simple enough procedure . . . merely catching the man at the right time and the right place.

Thor rummaged through the desk drawers, glancing at check books and accounts, jotting down notes on a scrap of paper. But as he had expected, the desk contained little of importance or value.

Next in order, he turned to the closet. It was lined with filing cabinets containing correspondence. He glanced through them quickly, appropriated two or three letters and then knelt by the safe at the back of the closet.

He held his ear close to the dial of the combination. He had spent hours working on this type of safe, and so it was simple to open. His marvelous hearing registered unerringly each click of the falling tumblers. He turned the dial slowly, reversing each time he heard the mechanism work, and in five minutes it was open.

Here he found what he wanted. Records of stock holdings, lists of investments, tabulations of income, insurance policies, notes—in short, the documents and memoranda with which an income tax prosecutor could have hog-tied Grange. And Thor scrawled notes so that when he had finished he had a complete survey of Dawson Grange's holdings.

In one compartment of the safe Thor discovered a pile of currency. He counted it rapidly—$2,075—stuffed the roll in his pocket and returned to the

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limp form lolling in the chair. From a wallet, Thor extracted another four hundred in large bills.

He was about to depart when an idea struck him. He seized a pencil and on the top sheet of a pad of paper he wrote with his left hand, in writing that bore not the slightest resemblance to his ordinary script, "Thank you for initial contribution of $2,475.—Signed, The Dawson Grange Foundation."

THOR chuckled as he left the study. In front of the dressing room he hesitated. To leave by the route he had come was by all odds the simplest, but it exposed him to any passerby, or more important, to the night watchman. And since Thor was already in the house, he decided that the most sensible procedure was to march boldly out the front door and through the main gate.

As he reached the bend in the wide corridor, a door opened and Linda Grange stepped from her room. She was wearing a silk kimono that enveloped her small figure in great sweeps of green material. Only her face with its smooth, small features, its crown of black hair and its large gray eyes was revealed.

Thor stopped short at sight of her. For a moment they stared at each other, each embarrassed and catching his breath—he because she was so lovely, and she because she'd expected to see one of Grange's clerks, awed and obsequious.

For perhaps five seconds they stared, drinking each other in. Then Thor broke the silence.

"You're beautiful."

He spoke simply, directly, stating a very obvious fact. And though she blushed, she knew he had meant nothing by it. Nothing? Or everything? There was small difference between the two, as she might have realized had she cared to be analytical.

"I'd better take you downstairs," she said in a clear, low-pitched voice that made him tremble. "The door's locked and you might have trouble opening it."

"Thank you," he replied, smiling at the idea of having trouble opening a door.

"I didn't hear you come in," she said, leading the way down the broad marble staircase. "Benson locked up as soon as our bridge company left."

"I was waiting."

"Oh." His answer satisfied her. He'd come in while they had been playing bridge, and doubtless he had been sitting upstairs. Still, it struck her as funny that Benson had failed to mention it. And also that she hadn't heard Thor when he'd arrived. "Were you waiting long?" she asked.

"Yes," he replied, with perfect truth. "A very long time."

She looked over her shoulder, eyeing him sharply and suspecting a double meaning. But his blue eyes, streaked so mysteriously with yellow, seemed guileless, innocent.

Then they were at the door and she was slipping the bolts. "You see," she explained, "you have to push back this bar or the thing won't unlock. It keeps people from getting out once they're in the house. Daddy bought the patent from the inventor for some reason or other, and then he had it installed here. It seems useless, doesn't it?"

"No, not quite. But it's good of you, I'm sure."

The door was open and he bowed. As he stepped past her she called to someone in the street. "George, let this gentleman out. He's just been visiting Mr. Grange."

She had spoken to the night watch-

man, making his rounds and passing the entrance. Thor smiled to himself, but striding down the driveway he kept his eyes lowered, his face in shadow. And as he drew level with George, Thor dropped a key, then stooped quickly to pick it up. The ruse served to keep his face hidden from George. With a quick goodnight, Thor went down the street.

HE WAS disturbed. In Linda Grange's eyes he had seen something and felt something the existence of which he had never before suspected. It set him wondering how he differed from most people, whether his background hadn't somehow omitted a thing that was important. And the possibility bewildered him.

He knew that his education had not been a normal one. He had been brought up carefully and deliberately for a purpose, and never for an instant, even now, did he question that purpose. Yet he was bothered by strange, unfamiliar feelings. He kept seeing Linda's face, hearing her voice. Somehow she was set apart from all other people. But how? Why? He had no clue to the answer. Warren Mackiner had never told him about this.

Thor tried to forget her by thinking of his mission. He did not know the reason for it, yet a force, a habit, a subconscious schooling urged him to set about accomplishing it. Behind him were twenty-three years of intensive training, and they could not be disregarded. As most men set about systematically to build a fortune, Thor was setting about a systematic destruction.

He was not a criminal, for he took nothing for himself except the food he needed to eat. Yet he was ideally equipped for a life of crime, trained for a life opposed to police and society. Like a god or a machine, Thor Mackiner was perfectly adapted to his own purposes.

He had no faculty which all men did not possess, but he had faculties which were trained. His ears were the unbelievably sharp ears of a blind man because for two hours, every day of his life, he had been blindfolded and compelled to depend on his hearing. Similarly his ears had been wadded to develop the quick gaze of a deaf man. What might vaguely be termed a sixth sense was actually a combination of trained hearing, seeing, smelling and touching.

Not until late had Thor been taught speech. The result was he had been forced to perceive without words what most people hear directly. Just as people often know when they are being lied to and when they are menaced, even though the lie or the menace is concealed, so Thor knew, only to a far greater degree.

To assist him, Warren Mackiner had at various times employed helpers. They had taught Thor to run, to jump, to climb, to fight; they had developed in him an almost superhuman strength. He had the security at high altitudes of a steel worker, the prehensile toes of a circus performer or a monkey, the sense of gun danger of a cowboy, the eyes of a man who has worked for years in the dark, the astounding memory of an intelligent illiterate. He was adept at all the tricks of the burglar's or the gunman's trade, and he had learned from the best.

Call him a superman or a savage—the label is immaterial. The important fact was his complete self-sufficiency. He was as self-sufficient in the city as is an animal in the jungle. He had been trained for a career in New York. He had studied maps and knew even the places where he could sleep at night without being disturbed by a stray cop.

This, the sum of his unusual habits and faculties, was the meaning of those curious laboratories which had so mystified the police at the home of Warren Mackiner.

One aspect, however, had been completely neglected—Thor's moral nature. He did not understand, in the ordinary sense, the meaning of words such as friendship or honesty. Mother was a biological term; love and emotion unknown qualities he had merely read about.

Not that he was dishonest or immoral. He was fundamentally decent and true, but he had never known companionship or social bonds. Therefore he had felt no shame and no sense of wrong in his treatment of Dawson Grange. Thor had simply done what he had been brought up to do. Every advantage he could obtain, he took. He had never heard anyone question the doctrine that the end justifies the means, never heard anyone speak of the sanctity of human life.

Nevertheless he had a deep-rooted sense of humor. It had amused him vastly to imitate Dawson Grange's voice when Linda had knocked at the study door. Thor was an expert ventriloquist with a natural knack of mimicry, and he had spoken with scarcely a movement of his lips.

But now, after Thor had left the night watchman, he was disturbed. He kept seeing Linda Grange's large gray eyes. He was conscious of a hammering of his heart, he who had never been disturbed by fear or nervousness or love. This was something new, and something Warren Mackiner had neglected to tell him about.

THOR had, however, little time for reflection. On a side street not far from the Grange mansion he turned into the basement of a brownstone house and rang the bell. A thin gray-haired man with a slight limp answered the ring. The delivery boys who had called at Warren Mackiner's house in Owl Wood could have identified him as the limping servant who always took packages.

"Thor," he said warmly, once they were inside. "I've been waiting for you. You've seen him?"

Thor nodded. "I just came from there, Wilkes. He gave me the first contribution."

"Already?" A look of admiration and loyalty crossed the old man's thin face.

Thor took the roll of bills from his pocket and handed them to Wilkes. "Use what you need for yourself. The rest goes into the fund."

"The fund!" repeated Wilkes, almost reverently.

"I'll have more for you—much more—soon."

"Tell me how you got it, what happened and what he said."

Thor recounted his entry into the house, his meeting with Grange, the blow, the search in the safe. "I made a summary of what I found," declared Thor. "Here it is, with some papers that may help."

Wilkes examined them with interest. "You've done well," he announced, "but I must warn you about Grange, warn you more emphatically than your father ever did. This Grange is powerful, and totally without scruples."

"Scruples?" Thor frowned, not quite understanding the moral implications of the word.

"I mean," explained the gray-haired man, "that he'll kill you if he can, and that he'll tell you one thing when he means another. He's expert at it and may fool even you."

"Nobody can fool me," said Thor. "My father said so."

"There are things about which even your father may have been wrong. He was withdrawn from the world and forgot many things about people. You have to be careful, trust no one and take no unnecessary chances. I'll always be here, waiting, if you want anything."

Thor nodded and stood up. "It was easy getting in, but I realize the next time may be harder. And now, I have to go."

"At this hour of the night? Where?"

Thor laughed lightly. "Just to see the city. It's too interesting, too fascinating to sleep through."

But once he had left Wilkes, Thor's mood was no longer light and adventuresome. He strode savagely and silently, pondering this thing that absorbed him. Why should he feel shy, excited and depressed at the same moment whenever he thought of Linda Grange stepping from her door, gray-eyed and wrapped in the folds of a green kimono?

Suddenly he wanted with terrific force to see her again. He felt that life would be empty and foolish unless he could at least glimpse her once more tonight. And since no hesitation ever came between Thor's desires and his actions, he turned immediately and retraced his steps towards Dawson Grange's residence.

It was an hour since Thor had left, and he was surprised to find that the street was buzzing with activity. Cars were parked at the curb and a small crowd milled and pressed at the open gate.

Thor halted when he saw that two uniformed patrolmen were guarding the gates and that a police car stood in the driveway in front of the door. His first impulse was to retreat, but the thought of Linda held him. In addition, he was curious as to the reason for the presence of the police. And so, boldly, he marched down the street.

## IV

THE two or three people Thor questioned told similar stories. They had been passing by when a police whistle had blown. The night watchman had run excitedly to the front door, a patrolman had sprinted down the block. Shortly afterwards, a patrol car had driven through the gates and the knot of bystanders had begun to gather.

Apparently there was nothing further to be learned, and Thor set about reentering the house. If the police where here on his account, reconnoitering was dangerous. But in any case, he was anxious to know what course Grange was adopting. Thor wished now that he had read the letter he had brought. It would have told him what only two living people knew—Dawson Grange and Wilkes.

Wishing, however, was idle, and Thor detached himself from the crowd and strolled to the street at the back of the house. It was deserted here. The excitement at the gate focused attention, and while he was determining his line of approach, a siren screamed from the avenue and a big black car drove up to the gate, honked and was admitted.

Headquarters men, Thor guessed, and covered by the din and commotion of their arrival he leaped the iron fence for the second time that night, ran low along the dark shrubs of the lawn and reached the side of the house.

The door of the tradesmen's entrance was open. The servants were awake and had probably opened the rear door in the course of the general excitement, so Thor walked in.

His knowledge of the house served him in good stead. He knew the location of the rear stairs, at the end of the base-

ment corridor and leading through kitchen and pantry to the upper floors. Towards these stairs he headed, noiselessly.

A short, red-faced patrolman was stationed at the basement landing. At sight of him, Thor slapped his calloused soles smartly on the floor. His silent tread could be as suspicious as it was helpful.

He tried to walk past naturally, as if he were one of the army of servants, but the cop grabbed his sleeve.

"Where do you think you're going? Nobody allowed up."

Thor's attitude was fawning and servile. "The bell rang downstairs. Three times—that's Mr. Grange's private ring for me. I'm second butler."

"I didn't hear a sound."

"There's something wrong with it, but my number's showing on the indicator. If you care to see . . ."

"All right, go ahead. This Grange guy with his private ring—what does he do when he wants his back scratched? Got a private flunkey for that, too?"

"I'm afraid I don't know," replied Thor gravely. "I usually bring him seltzer water, but you might ask Benson about anything else. You'll find him a well-informed person."

"And who the hell's Benson? King of the fairies?" demanded the officer. But Thor was halfway up the stairs and didn't bother answering.

He heard voices as he reached the top of the flight. The voices of a man and a woman, barely whispering.

The tramp of Thor's bare, calloused feet warned them even before he pushed open the pantry door, but he was a different man than he'd been a minute ago. His manner, his posture, the angle of his shoulders, the expression of his face and the gruff tone of his voice bore no resemblance to the servant who had spoken to the patrolman below. Only his lidded eyes were the same as before.

A man and a woman were standing guiltily, a few feet apart. The maid was smoothing her dress, and the man—Cummings, the second butler whom Thor had just impersonated—was eying her tenderly. Backstairs romance, reflected Thor, wondering whether this bit of knowledge might come in useful sometime.

As he stamped into the serving alcove, he shot them an authoritative glance. "What are you doing here?" he demanded brusquely. "Servants are supposed to be up in their rooms."

"Benson told us to wait here in case anything was wanted," replied Cummings, making a protective move towards the girl.

"Yeah?" Thor's face suddenly burst into a grin. "Well, better keep out of sight. If the inspector finds you, you won't like it. And neither will he." And Thor the detective crossed the pantry and ascended the next flight of stairs.

They brought him to a landing and to a door that connected with the main wing of the house. He had merely to push open the door of the partition and step into a hall which led in one direction to Grange's study, in the other to the monumental staircase above the fountain of the Medicis.

THOR listened before venturing into the danger zone. He heard the pound of feet on the marble staircase, heard them reach the second floor and muffle on carpet. They marched steadily towards him. His startled eyes saw the doorknob twist.

From the heaviness of the tread, he felt certain it was a policeman. A servant walks softly and meekly; a cop owns the world and marches accordingly.

There was no time for Thor to escape. Merely a moment in which to

squeeze between the wall and the opening door, and hope he wouldn't be seen.

The door thrust against his rigid body and bounced back. A detective stepped past, swung to close it and sighted Thor.

The detective scowled. He was a big muscular man, with clear eyes and strong, leathery lips.

"Who are you?" he snapped.

"Second butler," replied Thor, relaxing so that his whole body seemed soft and pudgy.

"Sure. Hiding behind the door. Come on with me." And a big hand gripped the lapel of Thor's coat.

Thor cringed and coughed discreetly. "I was downstairs in the basement when they rang for me. A policeman down there told me to hurry. He did more than tell me, sir, and I preferred not to have the experience repeated. I was hoping to reach the top floor unmolested."

"Yeah, weasel? We'll see about that." And he started to drag his prisoner down to the next floor.

For Thor, it was a ticklish moment. He was not afraid of the patrolman in the basement, but if the pair in the pantry saw Thor in custody, Thor who a moment ago had played detective and ordered them around like a couple caught necking in the park, then his game was up.

He decided to wait until the last possible second. If Cummings was in the kitchen, if Cummings as much as blinked, Thor's plan was made. One smashing blow before the detective even guessed anything was wrong. Dash downstairs and pitch into the patrolman. Out through the rear entrance, across the lawn and over the fence.

A second later he was in the pantry, but the pair of servants had vanished. His keen ears caught a faint creak of leather, a rustle of skirt. The couple were in the closet.

"Hey, Flaherty!" boomed the big detective. "You just chase a flunkey up here?"

"Sure," came the answer from below. "Scared to death, he was. Young guy, black suit. Second valet to the king."

From the corner of his eye, Thor watched the closet door and hoped the second butler was too busy with his second kiss to pay attention to what was being said.

The big detective released his grip and shoved Thor off to a running start. "All right, weasel. Run along up and don't hide behind any more doors."

Breathing freely again, Thor returned to the second floor landing where he'd been listening when the detective had surprised him. But this time he heard nothing. Softly, he opened the door.

From the lights he'd seen earlier, outside, he already knew that the investigation was centering around Grange's study, at the head of the "L" corridor in which Thor was now standing. He was still out of sight of the study, concealed by the bend of the hallway, but from the loud buzzing of voices he guessed that the study door was open.

The best place for him, he decided, was in the upstairs sitting room off her suite. But as soon as he had peeked around the corner of the hall, he realized it was the hardest place in the world to reach. He would have to walk thirty feet in plain sight of every casual glance from the study.

A STUPID man would have chanced it; an ordinary man would have retreated. Thor, being neither, did neither. He used his head, and one of the bag of tricks which Warren Mackiner had taught and perfected.

From his pocket Thor took a pair of glasses fitted with a small mirror, slipped them on and stepped boldly into

the long arm of the "L" corridor. Boldly, but backwards!

He walked backwards to perfection, with a forward throw of his body and his neck slightly bent. And in the mirror, he could see clearly through the partly open door. Two men were in view, one in profile, the other with his back to Thor. If anyone noted him, he would simply reverse direction and proceed normally, a servant on his way to the back staircase.

He moved rapidly, quietly, gracefully, with an ease that belied the hair-trigger alertness of his every sense. His muscles under perfect control, backing with the balance of a man going forward, his eyes riveted on the mirror, his ears keen, catching the faintest of sounds, he seemed to float in space.

Flush with the sitting room door, he was only a few feet from the study. Now for the final and riskiest bit. The man whose profile he had seen turned, saw, moved out of sight. Why? Had he casually noted a servant, dismissed the fact from mind? What would happen if seconds later he saw the same servant, but nearer instead of further away?

Thor backed steadily, seized the knob of the door. Then it was all up. In his mirror he saw the large gray eyes of Linda Grange, saw them widen with sudden surprise. Backwards or forwards, standing on his head or crawling on the ceiling—no matter what he'd been doing, she would have recognized him.

Thor jerked his head over his shoulder, put a finger to his lips and ducked into the sitting room. Standing in the dark and picking out the hiding places, he had no idea what she would do. He was a fool to expect her help, against her own father. Well, he'd put his foot in it. Linda knew he was trapped, with a crowd of people outside the window and a squad of police in the house. She could take her time.

But an instant later, Thor had other things to engage him. Voices from the study were as clear as if he were sitting there in the room. Dawson Grange was speaking, and his words told plainly enough why the police were here.

"I didn't get a good look at him," Grange was saying, "because I was sitting here with the desk lamp shining in my eyes, while he was in shadow. But he was young, tall, smooth-shaven."

"You don't know how he got in?" demanded a baritone voice that was a mixture of hard crispness and latent kindness.

"No. Nor how he got out, either. For all I know, he's still here."

"If he is, we'll get him," promised the baritone. "Anything else you know about him?"

Dawson Grange's hand slapped down on the desk. "I know his name. Mackiner!"

## V

THOR pursed his lips. Grange would move heaven and earth to get him, and though heaven might not be responsive, he had millions with which to address the earth.

"How do you know his name?"

"By the letter he handed me when he first came in. The blackmail letter, Mercer. It was signed."

"You have it?" asked Mercer.

It seemed to Thor that Dawson Grange hesitated before answering. "No, he must have taken it with him. Probably didn't want to leave handwriting that would identify him."

"Funny to write it in the first place, when all he had to do was talk up. What was in it?"

"A demand for money. Fifty thousand." Grange hesitated again, and Thor

felt certain there was no truth to the rest of his speech. "And then some bunk about my having plenty and it ought to be divided up. You probably know the type of stuff better than I do."

"Can't you remember any part of it?"

"Well, there was a threat in case I didn't pay up. My memory's foggy, because while I was reading I was concentrating on this Mackiner—whether he had a gun, how I could get hold of it."

"Did he have one?"

"I don't know."

"What else happened?"

"He came up to the desk—the other side of it—and used some nasty language. Then my daughter knocked on my door. If there was going to be trouble I didn't want her to suffer, so I made up some excuse about discussing business and she went away."

"You can corroborate that, of course, Miss Grange?"

Her reply was a low monosyllable. "Yes."

"All right," said Mercer. "Go ahead."

"There's not much more. I reached for the bell behind me, to call Benson, and this fellow hit me. Then I went for the phone, and he swung a blackjack. That's all I remember until I came to, with my wallet gone and the safe rifled, and Benson phoning the police."

"How do you figure he got in?"

"That would be fairly easy, in a big house like this. He might have come in earlier in the day, or even through the window while we were playing bridge, and then hidden in the study until he showed himself. But what I don't understand is how he got out."

"Why so?"

"Because when Captain Michaelson first got here, he examined all the windows. They were locked, the way Benson had left them. And I don't know whether you noticed or not, but I have a lock on my front door—back door too, for that matter—that can't be opened from the inside unless you know how. There's a master bolt that has to be drawn before you can slip the latch."

"That right, Michaelson?"

"Right, Inspector," answered a new voice. "Nobody went out any of those lower windows."

"Makes it look like an inside job," announced Mercer thoughtfully. "Of course, the fellow might have climbed down from the second floor, but he'd have a tough job getting over that fence of yours. Possible, of course, and it seems the only way. Unless he's still here. Michaelson," and Mercer's baritone was crisp, "better have a cordon thrown around the house."

A burly figure in uniform emerged from the study, tramped down the hallway and shouted an order.

"Mercer," said Grange sharply. "This fellow threatened to come back. He's dangerous, and I want protection. Give your men orders to shoot to kill—as I'm instructing my watchman."

"Can't do that," replied Mercer. "Can't kill a man just for entering a house."

"But I demand it!" cried Grange.

"We don't do things that way. And I take my orders from my departmental superiors, and nobody else."

"You're in line for promotion one of these days, aren't you?"

Mercer was silent, and Grange went on. "You'd better do as I say. And I want this man wiped out!"

"Against all regulations," replied Mercer calmly. "And besides, it wouldn't be fair to the man who shot him. He'd be up for murder."

"I'll take care of him, and I'll take care of you, too. Don't worry."

"I'm not worried," remarked Mercer, "and you have my answer."

THOR, standing near his partly-opened door, smiled and wondered what was in the letter his father had written.

Mercer was talking again, and from the sound of his voice it was apparent he had turned in a different direction. "You're night watchman for Mr. Grange, I'm told. What's your name?"

"George Bryan."

"On your beat while all this happened? Say around eleven-thirty?"

"Yes sir."

"Ex-cop, aren't you? Sure you didn't take a smoke for a minute or two?"

"I don't smoke."

"You were on the job right through, and you claim you saw no one leave the house after Mr. Grange's guests? *No one?*"

Thor held his breath. For a moment, the watchman seemed to be trying to remember. Then his voice came firm and flat. "Nobody," he said. "Nobody at all."

The routine examination continued, but Thor knew the other servants had nothing to tell. He considered rapidly. The trap had already sprung. A cordon around the grounds, and the house scheduled for a thorough search. Obviously he couldn't sneak out and vault the fence any longer. For a moment he thought of masquerading as a servant on an errand to the drug store, but he was certain to be stopped and brought up to Mercer and Grange.

The only alternative was to find a hiding place. But first, he had to see Linda Grange, who knew he was in her sitting room. He'd come here to see her, and it never occurred to him to leave without accomplishing his purpose.

He heard her clear voice say, "Daddy, I'm tired and I'm sure I'm not needed any more. I'm going to bed."

Thor, flattened against the wall, began to tremble. He moved away from the door so that she wouldn't see him until after she'd entered.

She seemed even more beautiful than she had appeared earlier in the evening. Softer and taller, merged there in the shadows, standing immobile while her eyes grew accustomed to the darkness. Then she switched on a small table lamp, turned and saw him. It was an encounter they both expected, yet curiously, they faced each other in attitudes of dumb surprise.

"I saw you go in," she whispered, with a sort of hysterical intensity. "Why did you come back?"

"To see you."

"What have I to do with it?"

"I wanted to see you, so I came. There was something I had to tell you."

"What?"

"I don't know," he said lamely. "When I was walking, there was so much I wanted to ask, and to tell. And now it's gone." He spoke earnestly, with a naïve directness to his speech. "I was afraid you'd misunderstand why I came here before."

"I misunderstood I'm sure, or I wouldn't have let you make such a fool of me, helping you to escape. You came to rob and blackmail my father."

HE SHOOK his head slowly, unable to think up reasons, and yet unwilling that she have the wrong impression of him.

"I'm waiting for your explanation," she continued. "Somehow, I couldn't believe you were just an ordinary thief or a blackmailer. So when I saw you go in here, I didn't say anything. I knew you were trapped, and I wanted to hear your excuse before calling in the police."

"You told the night watchman not to say he'd seen me, didn't you?"

"Only because I didn't want every-

body to know what a fool I'd been," she answered in a choked voice.

"I did only what I had to."

"You stole, you beat my father."

"I stole nothing."

"You dare to tell me he lied?"

"It wasn't stealing. I only took what never belonged to him."

"You must be mad!" she whispered. Her eyes widened and she stepped away from him. "And I'm wasting my time. I thought you'd say you were sorry, that you needed money so badly. I could have forgiven that."

"Others need it far more than I."

"Maybe you think you're a sort of Robin Hood!" she taunted him.

"No."

"What then?"

"I don't know. I only know what I'm supposed to do. The letter—that tells everything." He dropped his hands to his sides and frowned, wondering what had occurred to make everything so complicated.

Then he thought of his father, of the triumph and the righteousness in his eyes when he had finally sent Thor forth.

"It's nothing you can understand, or I can explain so you will believe it."

"I gave you your chance," she said wearily. "If you won't take it—"

She hesitated. Then, as if by a great effort, she stood erect, lifted her head and called in a clear, firm voice. "Help! He's here, in this room!"

Thor had a vision of a white, scared face. Like a steel spring suddenly released, he leaped past her, dived to the sill of the open window and vanished.

Somebody shouted from the study, and Linda Grange swayed dizzily. Men rushed past her and leaned out of the window. She wanted to close her eyes, but she couldn't. She saw someone jump to the window and disappear in the same direction Thor had taken.

"He can't get away now," shouted a voice. "You there—climb up to the roof and nab him. Skylight leading up from the back staircase. Hey—what's that? Got him?"

The sound of a shot rang loud above the din of voices and pounding of feet. A moment later there was a sharp crackling, followed by the noise of something scraping and tearing at a lead drain pipe. Then a shriek, and a sickening thud as a heavy body struck the ground outside the house.

Linda Grange reeled. Her knees felt weak and trembly. She felt her father's arms encircle her, and his deep tones asked anxiously, "Linda—what happened? Did he do anything to you?"

"Yes. I mean no. Who fell, Daddy? Tell me quickly—who was it?"


# Happy Relief From Painful Backache

## Caused by Tired Kidneys

Many of those gnawing, nagging, painful backaches people blame on colds or strains are often caused by tired kidneys — and may be relieved when treated in the right way.

The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking excess acids and poisonous waste out of the blood. They help most people pass about 3 pints a day.

If the 15 miles of kidney tubes and filters don't work well, poisonous waste matter stays in the blood. These poisons may start nagging backaches, rheumatic pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from the blood. Get Doan's Pills. (ADV.)

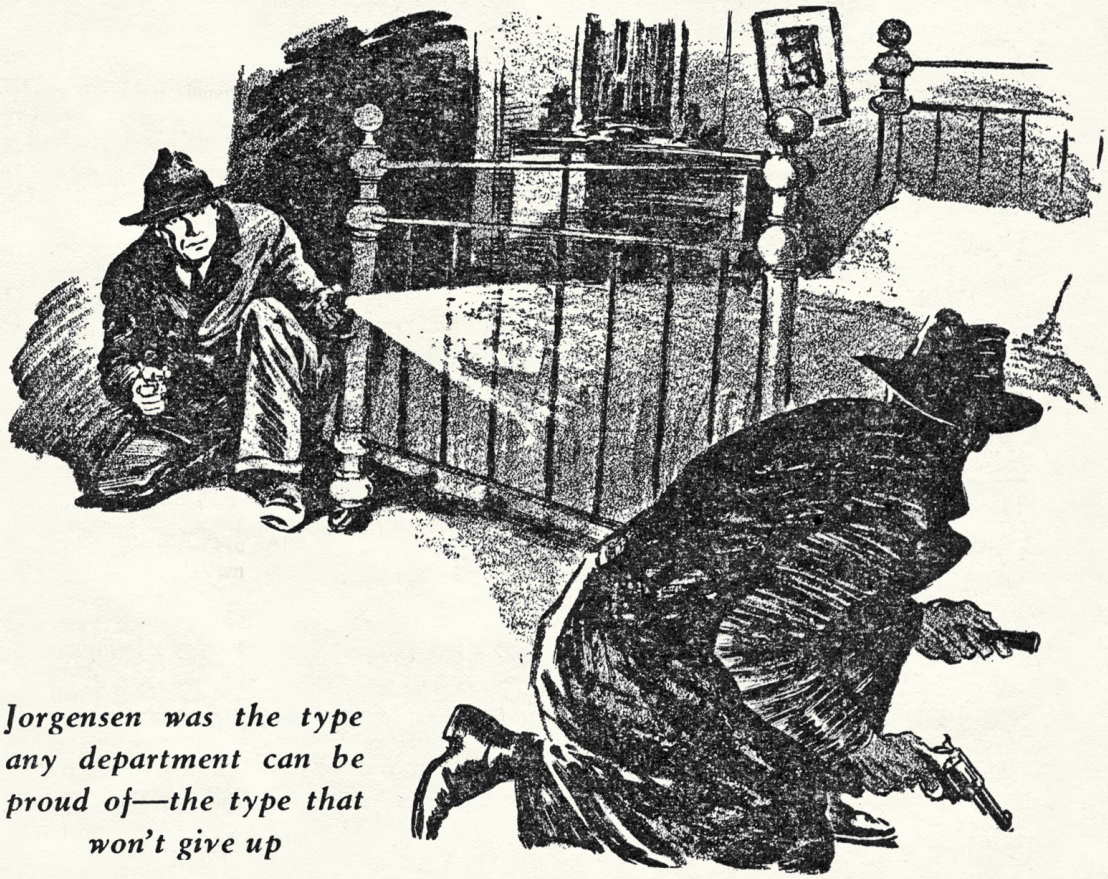
# A Simple Case of Murder

## By Philip Ketchum

THE back gate was open and that struck him as funny for he distinctly remembered having closed it when he had come out this way about half an hour before. He hadn't only closed it. He had slammed it for he had been mad. Ethel's last words to him had cut him to the quick, had stirred him up more than he wanted to admit. He had thought when he left that he wouldn't come back until he was good and drunk, and so he had slammed the gate just as he had slammed the door to the house. But now the gate was open.

For a moment he stared at it, scowling and wondering how it had come unlatched and then he suddenly realized that he was listening for something. His eyes circled the yard, probing the deep shadows cast by the shrubbery. It was dark tonight, darker than he had realized, and never before had it seemed so silent. He could hear a dog barking far away, and the faint noise of traffic from the boulevard. A cold shiver ran over his body and he thought, "This is what Ethel means . . . this is why she doesn't want to stay home alone at night."

He forced a laugh but it didn't sound very natural and it wasn't very



*Jorgensen was the type any department can be proud of—the type that won't give up*

loud. And then he started hurrying toward the house, aware of a strange feeling—a feeling that something was after him. He knew it was foolish and ridiculous but he couldn't throw it off. As soon as he turned around the sidewalk toward the front of the house and saw the lights shining through the windows he felt better. But he still didn't stop hurrying. In some way or other, as he had come up to the house, the fears he had felt for himself had been transferred to fears for Ethel, vague fears that something might have happened to her.

He opened the front door, stepped inside, looked around. Ethel wasn't in the parlor. He called her name, moved swiftly over to the hall door. There was a light showing through the partially opened door to the front bedroom and he thought, "She's in there, probably combing her hair." And he called, "Ethel! Ethel!" and stepped to the door.

What he saw in that room stiffened him like an electric shock. It drove every bit of color from his face. It momentarily stopped his breathing, stunned him, completely paralyzed his mental processes. His eyes could take in the picture, but beyond the fact of comprehension his mind couldn't go. He must have seen that the counterpane was torn from the bed, that a chair was tipped over, a curtain ripped from one window and the things from Ethel's vanity scattered about over the floor. He must have guessed that this room had been the scene of a desperate struggle. But just then nothing was important but Ethel—and Ethel lay sprawled out on the floor near the window, one arm twisted crookedly under her body, the other circling her head. She was on her back. Her dress was torn open at the throat and from her breast protruded the short handle of a knife. Blood was seeping around the gash it had made and from other gashes above and below it.

The man in the doorway sucked in a long, rasping breath. He called, "Ethel! Ethel!" And those words as they came from his throat were almost screamed. He staggered to the woman's side, dropped to his knees, slipped his hands under her shoulders and drew her body into his arms. Her eyes were open but the look in them was fixed and glassy. The man kept calling her name. Then he lay her down again, drew the knife from her breast and tried to stop the flow of blood with the palms of his hands.

JUST when it was that his mind finally accepted the fact that she was dead he never knew, but after a time he must have turned away and then gone to the bathroom, for his next recollection was of his reflection staring back at him from the mirror in the medicine chest. It was a reflection he hardly recognized. The face in the mirror was pale, excepting for blood streaks on the forehead and cheek. And the eyes were wide and startled. The chin in the mirror hung loosely and trembled.

The man stared at his reflection, shuddered, turned away. He moistened a towel, wiped his face and hands with it and threw it to the floor. Then suddenly he began thinking, or at least he thought that he was thinking. And it seemed to him that he was thinking very calmly and clearly. He knew that he should call the police, for this was a case of murder. And he thought he knew, too, what the police would do. He had seen enough picture shows, had read enough detective stories to be familiar with their work. They would look for clues to the murderer, would

search for a motive for the killing. And it might be that they would look no farther than at him.

He could see how easily a case against him could be built up. Mrs. Prentiss, who lived next door, could supply the motive. She always left her kitchen window open, had heard many of the quarrels he and Ethel had had. And Fred Hanna, his best friend, if pressed, would have to admit that he and Ethel didn't get along, that they were always quibbling. Fred had witnessed some of their quarrels. Beyond that, if the police came out and found him in these blood-stained clothes, they would at once jump to the conclusion that he had killed his wife.

His throat felt very dry and he went out to the kitchen and took a long drink from the bottle hidden on the top shelf. Then, quite calmly and deliberately, he went back to the front bedroom and changed his suit and shirt. He rolled the bloodstained suit up in a newspaper, carried it out to the garage and tied it under the car. After that he came back to the house and telephoned the police.

A reaction set in after he had telephoned the police. His calmness left him and he began to perspire and grew jittery. The sound of the police siren stabbed through him like a knife. He went out to the kitchen and took another drink, hoping that it would steady his nerves. Then he came back to the front door and opened it.

The next half hour was as he had known it would be. The first police car was followed by another and then another. Men in uniform and in plain-clothes stalked through the house. A tall, thin-faced man asked him questions and he told his story over and over, told of his quarrel with Ethel because he knew he couldn't keep that hidden, told of his departure and his return and what he had found. He answered other questions . . . questions about his name and where he worked and who he knew and where he had been born and how long he and Ethel had been married. The things that thin-faced man could think of to ask him seemed endless and many of them, he knew, could have had nothing to do with the investigation which lay ahead. Then, quite suddenly, the thin-faced man barked, "Hold out your hands. Palms down."

He held out his hands, stared at them.

"What's that under your fingernails?" asked the thin-faced man. And his words were quietly ominous.

He stared at his fingernails, began to tremble. A red stain showed under the edges. And while he was trying to stand up under that shock someone came into the room and called out, "Look at this, Ben. It's a suit I found wrapped up in newspaper an' tied under the auto in the garage. There's blood-stains on the suit an' they're still wet."

A MAN who had about him the look of a very substantial citizen stamped angrily out of the police commissioner's private office, moved across the waiting room and slammed the outer door on his heels. A reporter, slouched in a chair near the water cooler, grinned and made a note on a piece of paper. The commissioner's secretary frowned. She got up and went into the private office, returned almost at once and said, "You may go in now, Mr. Jorgensen."

Chris Jorgensen nodded and got to his feet. He was a fairly tall, square-faced young man with light, curly hair and mild blue eyes.

"Watch your step, Chris," advised the reporter. "Something tells me the

commissioner is on the war path."

Chris Jorgensen grinned. He said, "So am I, Red," but he didn't sound like he meant it. He crossed the room, opened the door to the commissioner's office and stepped inside.

The police commissioner was pacing back and forth across the room. He was scowling and he looked angry. When Jorgensen came in he stopped his pacing, glared at the detective and demanded, "Why should I sign a petition to the governor to pardon Bugs Malone? He's as rotten as they come. Why should I sign any petition?"

Jorgensen shrugged. "I'll bite. Why should you?"

The commissioner rolled his cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other. "Well," he snapped abruptly, "what do you want?"

Jorgensen moved over to a chair and sat down. He leaned back comfortably. "I thought," he suggested, "that I might like to do a little more work on this Mayhew case. The chief says I'm batty and told me to talk to you."

"The Mayhew case? You mean that guy who stabbed his wife with a paring knife last week?"

"Yeah. That's the case."

"We got enough on him, haven't we?"

"No confession, commissioner."

"Why the hell do we need a confession? There isn't any doubt that he killed her. He's admitted quarreling with her, almost constantly. The blood scrapings from under his fingernails match his wife's blood. His fingerprints were all over the room where the body was found, were the only prints on the murder knife, were found in blood on one of the walls he must have leaned against. We found his bloodstained suit wrapped up an' tied under his auto. What else do we need to send him up for life?"

Chris Jorgensen frowned. "Perhaps nothing else. I guess I'm just not satisfied."

"Not satisfied about what?"

Jorgensen drew a deep breath. "Not satisfied that he's guilty."

"What!" shouted the police commissioner. "What's that? Have you gone crazy?"

"I've got a hunch. That's all."

The police commissioner ran his hands through his hair. He stared at Jorgensen wide-eyed. "My God!" he breathed. My God! Never in my four years as police commissioner have we had a case that was any clearer. Every bit of evidence we've taken points to Joe Mayhew as the murderer of his wife. The testimony of his neighbors, of the men in the store where he worked, of his best friend, of the women who knew his wife and of the tradesmen who called at his home, all point the same way. Every clue in the home substantiates his guilt. And now you have the nerve to come in here and tell me that you have a hunch that he didn't kill her."

"That's right," Jorgensen nodded.

"Then who did kill her?" snapped the commissioner.

Jorgensen shrugged. "I don't know —yet. That's why I want permission to work on the case a little more."

"What's this hunch of yours? Just that Joe Mayhew didn't kill his wife?"

Jorgensen leaned forward in his chair, "Commissioner," he said slowly, "let me tell you about Joe Mayhew. Not the Joe Mayhew that the newspapers have painted up to increase their circulations, but the Joe Mayhew who existed until that day a week ago when his wife was murdered. He's thirty-two. He was born downstate, the oldest kid

of a large and rather poor family. He went to school rather intermittantly until he was big enough to work; then he had to get out and help support the family. When he was eighteen and there were brothers old enough to work he ran off, came to the city, hunted work. He lived in cheap rooming houses, did what jobs he could, and finally made connections with a chain store about eight years ago. After a few years with them and when the job began to look steady he married Ethel Carter who worked back of the counter in a five and ten."

"WHERE'S this getting us?" demanded the commissioner.

"Wait a minute," said Jorgensen. "Now about Ethel. She's a girl from the Mid-west, one of the thousands who came to the big city to make good, found the going too tough and finally was willing to accept any job she could get just to stay here and not go home a failure. But even at that she didn't ever give up her dreams of what she wanted. She wanted money, not as money but for what it could buy. She wanted a nice apartment, a nice car, nice clothes, furs, bridge clubs and dancing in the right places, her name in the paper, that sort of stuff."

"I suppose," said the commissioner dryly, "that you talked to her."

Jorgensen bit his lips. "When she married Joe Mayhew," he went on, "she thought that he was really going places in this chain grocery and I suppose he thought so, too. It's easy to kid yourself like that. What happened, of course, was that Joe didn't get very far very fast. For a while Ethel put up with it, then she began to get impatient. She saw herself getting older, losing her beauty. She wanted fun while she was young. She began to insist that Joe take her to more and more places. She opened several charge accounts. And after a while Joe found himself in debt and going farther in debt all the time. That's when the quarreling started.

"You sound," said the commissioner, "like one of those damned social workers."

Jorgensen shrugged. "Their quarrels," he went on, "didn't ever amount to much. They were mostly over money, or rather lack of money. Ethel probably wanted to go out more. She resented the fact that Joe was sometimes out nights and she had to stay home alone. Joe had to be out some nights. His job required it. Once a few months ago they tried to augment their budget by taking in a boarder but the man didn't stay with them long and people talked about it."

"Get to the murder," said the commissioner.

"All right," Jorgensen agreed. "On the night of the murder they had another of their quarrels and this time Joe lost his head, got mad and walked out. When he returned he found his wife dead. The sight stunned him. He pulled the knife from her breast, probably because he thought it was hurting her. He called us. Then he suddenly guessed that he would be charged with the murder and so he changed his clothing and hid it. In other words, he did just what he admitted he did. He . . ."

"Then who committed the murder?"

"I don't know. That's why I want to work on the case."

The commissioner rubbed his hands together. He said, "Jorgensen, point out one fact—just one fact that doesn't fit into our case against Joe Mayhew—and you can do anything you damn please."

"All right," Jorgensen nodded.

"When Joe Mayhew left the house that night he went out the back door, closed the gate after him. When he returned the gate was open."

"What of it?"

"That indicates to me that after Joe left someone came in that gate, entered the house and killed his wife."

The commissioner shook his head. "I said name a fact," he growled. "It's Joe Mayhew's story that he closed the gate and then found it open but even if it's true it doesn't prove anything."

"Still it's the one outstanding thing that Joe Mayhew remembers. He's told me about it over and over. He can't think of anything else to tell me, of anyone who hated his wife, who was interested in her, who came to see her. All he can talk about is that open gate. Look here, Commissioner, if he was guilty he would have thought of something more clever than that to tell us about. He would have spoken of a face at the window or footsteps in the house or a struggle in the dark with the murderer. But he hasn't even mentioned a moving shadow in the yard. Just that open gate."

The commissioner sighed. He said, "Sorry, Jorgensen. Nothing doing. So far as I'm concerned that case is closed. What happens to Joe Mayhew is up to the district attorney. There's plenty of other things for you to work on."

A slow flush came to Jorgensen's face. He stood up. He didn't get angry very often. Usually he and the commissioner worked together rather well. In the past he had handled several special assignments for the commissioner and he thought of that now.

"Sorry, Jorgensen," said the commissioner again.

Chris Jorgensen laughed harshly. He said, "All right, Commissioner. The city owns eight hours of my time each day, but that's all. And let me tell you this. Some day a case is going to blow right up in your face. When it does an' you come running to me for help, I'm telling you in advance that you can go straight to hell."

CHRIS JORGENSEN'S anger hadn't left him by the time he got back to headquarters. Things weren't heavy right now and he didn't see why the commissioner couldn't have granted his request. He sat down at his desk, scowled at the incompleted report which lay on it. It wasn't usual, he knew, for him to go off in this fashion. He had put in thirteen years on the force, four of them in the detective division, and his record was pretty clear. He thought that he was a good detective, probably better than average. He didn't think that he was the best man on the force. He had made his share of mistakes, had been wrong more often than he liked to admit. And in this case he felt that he was probably wrong again, but even that realization didn't satisfy him. The hunch that Joe Mayhew was innocent was stronger than ever.

The chief came in, looked over at Jorgensen and asked, "Well Chris?"

Jorgensen glanced up, shook his head. "No dice."

The chief nodded. He said, "Leave the Mayhew case alone, Chris. It's open an' shut. You don't get anywhere buttin' your head against a stone wall."

Jorgensen didn't answer. After a minute he reached for a paper and started making out a list of names.

The chief came forward, looked over his shoulder. "What's that for?" he asked.

"It's something I'm going to fool around with in my spare time," said Jorgensen. "And if you want more of an answer, it's a list of the names of

people who might know something about the murder of Ethel Mayhew—something they haven't yet told."

The chief laughed. "You're stubborn, Chris, aren't you. All right, go ahead—in your spare time. But right now ten bucks will get you fifty that Mayhew burns for the murder."

Jorgensen drew out a ten dollar bill. "I can use that fifty, Chief. Put it up."

ROUTINE detective work is a drudgery of the most deadening type. The steps by which most baffling cases are solved are many and most of those steps lead the detective nowhere. Chris Jorgensen knew that, but in the weeks which followed he learned it again. On other cases on which he had worked there had been other detectives to help him, to do part of the leg work, to do part of the waiting. In this instance he had to do it alone.

He began by visiting the neighbors of the Mayhews, by listening to all that they could tell him of Joe and Ethel and their quarreling and their life together. He dropped in at the neighborhood stores where the Mayhews had done their trading. He interviewed the bakery man who stopped at the house, the milkman, the paper boy, an insurance collector.

Then he began to move farther afield. He talked to the men with whom Joe had worked, with a doctor who had cared for Mrs. Mayhew during an illness a few months before her death, with Fred Hanna, who was Joe's closest friend. He visited a couple of installment collectors who had called at the Mayhew home. He talked with Ethel Mayhew's former employer and even a man, now married, who had gone out with Ethel before she had married Joe.

His list of names grew quite long and then was gradually cut down as he began to eliminate those who had alibis for the time of the murder.

The work was hard, tiring, monotonous. Sometimes Chris Jorgensen wondered why he kept it up, why he just didn't drop the whole thing. Nothing that he learned pointed to any other person who might have killed Ethel Mayhew, and his own good judgment told him that all he was doing was wasting time and making a fool of himself. For every man in the department knew of his work and of his bet with the chief. Most of them seemed to consider it a good joke on him.

Joe Mayhew's trial came up and was concluded and the result was what all men had thought it would be, what Jorgensen had thought it would be, too. The case against him was so clear that the jury was out less than half an hour.

It was the afternoon of that day that the commissioner sent for Jorgensen. The commissioner looked very well pleased. He said, "Well, Chris, what about it? Do you still think Joe Mayhew is innocent?"

Chris Jorgensen nodded.

"After all you heard at that trial?"

Again Jorgensen nodded.

"Look here, Chris," said the commissioner. "I know what you've been doing and damn it all, I admire you for it. Do you have anything at all to support this hunch you have that Mayhew is innocent? If you do, I'm back of you and I'll throw every last man on the force on the job. How about it?"

A faint grin touched Jorgensen's lips. He said, "Thanks, Commissioner, but I still don't have much more than my hunch. Maybe that isn't true. Maybe I ought to put it this way: I've narrowed my prospects down to four men. Three of them have good alibis, have

no motive in the world, so far as I've been able to discover, for having killed Ethel Mayhew."

"And the fourth?"

"The fourth is that man who boarded for a while with the Mayhews. I haven't been able to find him. His name is Harry McBride. When he works he's a restaurant waiter."

"Who are the other three?"

"Dr. Webb Kohler, who took care of Ethel Mayhew when she was ill a few months before her death. Jake Holliday, who owns the house they lived in, and Fred Hanna, Joe's best friend, a carpenter."

"And why do you suspect them?"

"Because of the open gate Joe Mayhew noticed on the night of the murder. That gate is way over in the corner of the yard and it doesn't look like a gate at all. It looks like a part of the fence. Only a person who knew the property would have known it was there. Those four men knew it. Hanna used it often with Joe. The landlord and the missing boarder knew of it and so did the doctor, strangely enough. He lives on the street behind the Mayhews. A couple of times he came that way making his calls. He told me he did it to save time."

The commissioner stared at Jorgensen. "And that's all of a case you've got after all the work you've done?"

"That's all."

"A case based on a gate the condemned man says was left open but that we don't know was open . . . or that he might have left open himself, or that might have been left unlatched and pushed open by a dog. My God, Chris. And you call yourself a detective."

Chris Jorgensen shrugged. "Joe Mayhew didn't kill his wife, Commissioner, but some one did. Some one who knew about that gate, who came in the back way, entered the house while Joe was gone, killed the woman and then left the same way, forgetting to close the gate. Maybe I haven't gotten very far but I haven't finished. I've still got a few things to do."

CHRIS JORGENSEN did still have a few things to do but they were very few. He had checked the alibis of the doctor, the landlord and of Joe's friend by every method he knew. All of them held up. He had done all that he could think of to trace the missing boarder without any success at all. There remained for him only the finding of that man and the checking again of the alibis of the other three.

Dr. Kohler wasn't glad to see him and told him so. "You know all I know about the Mayhews now," Kohler said flatly. "I was only the woman's doctor. I want you to quit bothering me or I'll call the commissioner."

Chris Jorgensen shrugged. He said, "Doctor, men in your profession get closer to people than anyone else. I want you to think back over the things Ethel Mayhew told you. I want . . ."

"I've thought back over them," the doctor snapped. "There's nothing I can add."

"When she was most seriously ill didn't she tell you anything that . . ."

"She told me nothing excepting how she felt."

Jorgensen bit his lips. He tried to think of something that might jolt the doctor's assurance, if the doctor were the guilty man, and a device that seemed perfect flashed across his mind. "Dr. Kohler," he asked suddenly, "did Ethel Mayhew ever mention her diary in her conversations with you?"

Kohler blinked. "Her diary? No. Why should she."

Jorgensen laughed a little stiffly. "No reason for her to mention it, I guess. Anyhow, I'll know when I get it."

"Just what do you mean by that?" Kohler snapped.

Jorgensen felt a thrill of excitement. He made the story better. "I've just discovered," he said slowly, "that Ethel Mayhew kept a diary. We haven't found it yet, but we're going to find it. Women put things in a diary they wouldn't tell their closest friends. If I can locate that diary it may even point to the man who killed her."

"Her husband killed her," said Dr. Kohler.

But Jorgensen shook his head. "Oh, no, Doctor. Joe Mayhew didn't kill her. Look here, if you can remember anything Ethel said about that diary, get in touch with me right away. The Mayhew house has never been rented. It was a furnished house and it's almost like it was the night Ethel Mayhew was killed. I'll be over there tonight, looking for the diary."

Kohler moistened his lips, nodded, and Jorgensen turned away. He went out to his car, lit a cigarette, frowned at it. He didn't like to bluff when he didn't hold any cards at all, but he had tried everything else.

And so Chris Jorgensen made two more quick calls that afternoon, one to Fred Hanna to ask about the diary which had been born in his imagination, and one to Jake Holliday, the Mayhew landlord, to borrow the key to the Mayhew house and to explain about the diary in telling why he wanted

IT WAS after dark when Chris Jorgensen drove up to the Mayhew house. He had brought Mike Toinelli with him. Toinelli didn't know what it was all about. He was a good many years older than Jorgensen. He was off duty and he hadn't wanted to come.

"What do we do?" he asked bluntly.

Jorgensen gave him the key. He said, "Take the lanterns in the house. I'll join you in a minute."

Toinelli grumbled about it, but did as Jorgensen had asked. Jorgensen walked around the house. He went out and looked at the back gate. It was closed, latched. Jorgensen stared at it, scowling. He had examined that back gate many times. The very sight of it gave him a queer feeling.

Jorgensen returned to the house and joined Toinelli. The lanterns Toinelli had brought cast a ghostly glow through the parlor. Toinelli was frowning.

"What do we do now?" he asked.

"We hunt for a diary," said Jorgensen. "It's hidden somewhere in the house."

"Why in the hell didn't we hunt during the daytime?"

Jorgensen shrugged. "I didn't think of it before. Let's get started."

They got to work, taking room after room, and all the time they searched for the diary Toinelli kept grouching. He seemed glad when the search was over. He said to Jorgensen, "There's no diary here. Whoever gave you the steer was all wet. Let's go home."

As they walked out to the car Chris Jorgensen disagreed with Toinelli. "I know the diary's there," he insisted. "Tomorrow I'm coming out here and rip the place apart. Listen here, Toinelli. It was Ethel Mayhew's diary. It may name her murderer. I—look here, about a month before she was killed Ethel Mayhew hired a cabinetmaker for some job or other. I never did learn what. Maybe if we ripped out the baseboards in her bedroom . . ."

Jorgensen's voice was unusually loud. He seemed all worked up. He acted as the key.

if he wanted to go back to the house, but Toinelli didn't. "Do your huntin' tomorrow," he insisted. "How the hell can you really search that place at night?"

Jorgensen didn't argue the matter. He followed Toinelli into the car and they drove off, straight down the street for a dozen blocks, then left for a block and then back again.

"I said home," Toinelli growled.

But Jorgensen only laughed. He parked the car two blocks from the Mayhew house, got out, gave the keys to Toinelli. "All right," he agreed, "you go on home. I've got an appointment . . . maybe."

He didn't explain to Toinelli, but moved over to the alley and then up the alley toward the back of the Mayhew house. And when he reached the gate he stopped abruptly, a cold shiver running over his body. For the gate was open. It wasn't open far, it is true. Only a few inches. But still it was open and he distinctly remembered that it had been closed when he had looked at it a couple of hours before.

CHRIS JORGENSEN imagined then that he felt about as Joe Mayhew must have felt when he had found the gate open. For there was no reason for the open gate. The latch held it securely shut. Unless someone had come in or gone out this way, the gate should still be shut.

Jorgensen's hand slid into his pocket, closed around his gun. He pushed the gate farther open, probed the shadows of the yard with his eyes, stared at the blank, dark windows of the house.

After a moment Chris Jorgensen stepped through the gate, then he moved swiftly up to the house and around the near side to the bedroom window. A faint glow seemed to be showing from that room. He drew close to the window, pulled his body up so that he could see through it. The glow came from a pencil-sized flashlight which was being moved slowly along one of the baseboards. Jorgensen couldn't see who held the flashlight for the shadows were too thick. But he didn't need to see. He knew that the man who held it was the man who had killed Ethel Mayhew.

Jorgensen lowered his body from the window. He crossed around to the front door, took off his shoes, tried the door. It was locked. He carefully inserted his key, turned it and opened the door, stepped inside and closed the door behind him, closed it cautiously so that it wouldn't make a sound. Surprise was important now. Surprise and shock. He had no proof against the murderer, no proof other than that he was there in the room where Ethel Mayhew had been killed, hunting for a diary which had never existed. And proof like that wouldn't stand up in court.

Testing each step, Chris Jorgensen moved across the parlor to the hall door, then down the hall toward the bedroom. The man in there was now on the far side of the room. His flashlight was still directed at the baseboard.

Jorgensen drew his gun and in his other hand took his flashlight. He squatted down, stared across the room, then said sharply, "You killed her! You are the murderer! I've already found the diary! Stand up. Get your hands in the air!"

As he spoke, Jorgensen directed the beam of his own flashlight toward the man across the room. He heard a startled exclamation break from the man's throat, saw him jerk erect, spring suddenly toward the darkness at one side. He didn't expect the shot, didn't

think that the average man could shoot straight in the dark. And perhaps it was only chance that the bullet caught him in the shoulder and threw him off balance.

He dropped his flashlight, pushed himself up on his knees, stared frantically from side to side. Another bullet whistled over his head and he fired at the flash of the murderer's gun, heard the man scream, heard the thud of his body as he fell. After that he tried to struggle erect but couldn't make it. Outside, somewhere, he thought he heard Toinelli shouting, but he wasn't sure. He was tired, awfully tired.

THE police commissioner paced back and forth at the side of Chris Jorgensen's bed in the hospital ward. "I've got to hand it to you, Chris," he said heavily. "I've got to hand it to you. The next time I'm so dumb that I won't listen to what you say I want you to kick me. You were right all along. I've got the whole story now. You saved an innocent man from the chair, do you know that? And our work on this case has done a lot to make the people respect the department. The district attorney is sore as hell, of course, but I never did like him, anyhow."

"So you've got the whole story," said Jorgensen.

"Yeah. The guy talked. He talked plenty, thought he was dying. It seems he got sweet on Ethel Mayhew and the woman owed a couple bills she hadn't even told Joe about. She asked him for money, threatened to talk to his wife if he didn't come across. He got scared, heard the woman and Joe talk that night and went in to see her after Joe left. He says he didn't mean to kill her and maybe he didn't. Anyhow, after he killed her he went out the back way, probably leaving that gate open."

Jorgensen nodded. He said, "Commissioner, would you mind telling me who the man was? I didn't get to see him very well that night in the Mayhew house. I got just a flash of his face as he whirled around. I . . ."

"Why it was Jake Holliday, the landlord. You mean . . . My God, Chris! You mean you ran that murderer down without even knowing who he was?"

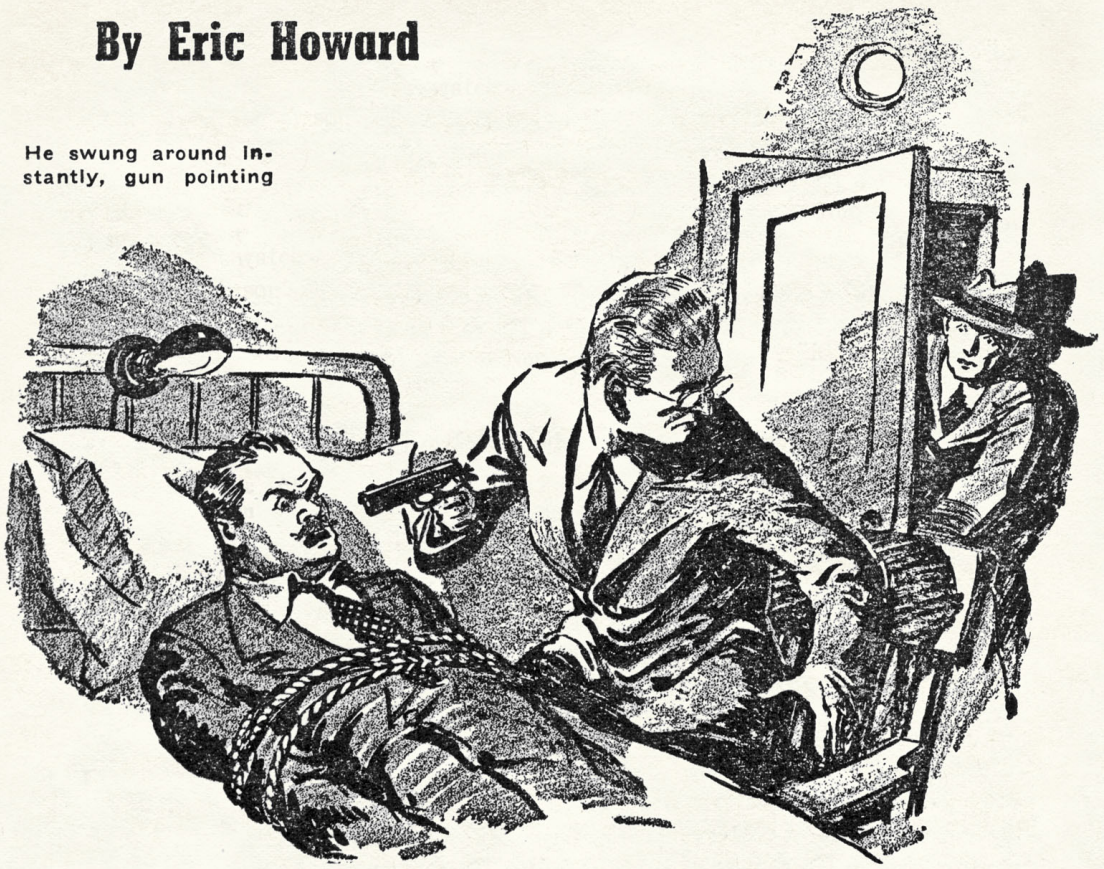
"I just knew Joe Mayhew was innocent," Jorgensen answered.

The commissioner mopped his brow, whistled. He said, "Chris, you're in line for promotion. But I promise you this. If you ever breathe a word of what you just told me to the press you'll be back pounding a beat so quick it'll make you dizzy. And that's a fact."

Chris Jorgensen laughed. "So was the open backyard gate."

## By Eric Howard

He swung around instantly, gun pointing



# You Can't Hang a Dead Man

WHEN this beggar without any legs first showed up in front of the building where I have my office, I didn't pay any attention to him. There were lots of them around town. But the elevator boys gave him the names of everybody in the building and he started giving us a "Good morning" when we came in.

He surprised me the first time. He said, "Good morning, Mr. Doyle."

"Hello, feller," I said.

"The name's Tim," he told me with a grin. "Tim Calhoun."

"Okay," I said. "Tim Calhoun it is."

"Any time you need pencils, shoe laces or anything, I run a department store."

I laughed and gave him a wave. Then I forgot him. But I saw him a couple of times every day. He usually had a word and a grin. His legs had been cut off just below the hips, and he got around on a roller-skate rig, pushing himself along with his hands. He could move fast, too. Like a lot of men in that shape, he had developed strong arms and shoulders. But in his case, I thought he had always had them. He was built on a big scale, but he had been cut in half.

Well, I began buying pencils and chewing gum from him, saying, "Keep the change, Tim." Sometimes I'd stop and chin with him a minute.

He was an awful liar, though maybe

you wouldn't call it lying, either. More in the line of entertainment. He told me at least six different ways he had lost his legs. The screwiest version was the one about the cannibals; they had cut off his legs to eat 'em.

"Just like you'd buy a leg of lamb, so help me," he said.

"Where was this?" I asked.

"Well," he said, winking solemnly, "you can bet your shirt it wasn't near here. We've got some here as bad as cannibals, and they'd cut off a man's legs . . . or his head . . . for a couple of dolllars. But not to eat."

This led to that. And after a while, when I'd got to know him fairly well, he made me this proposition. He led up to it in a roundabout way.

"I've spotted some of the people that come to see you," he said. "You know all kinds of people, don't you? Like those insurance men. An' a couple of dicks from headquarters. An' a stool pigeon. An' one or two big shots. I get around, Mr. Doyle . . . after my workin' day. There's a dump where I hang out where a boy with big ears can catch a word now an' then. I might be some good to you. Catch?"

"Yeah," I said.

"I'd like to get the hell out o' here," he went on. "If I had dough, I know a guy that can fit me up with a pair o' legs. Have to use crutches with 'em for a while, maybe one crutch or a cane all the time. But I'd be up where I belong. So if I gave you a hot tip now an' then, what would it be worth? Don't get me wrong. I'm no pigeon. I'm not squealin' on anybody. But a boy has to look out for himself, don't he?"

"Yeah," I said, looking down at his broad, heavy-featured face. He had large gray-blue eyes, bushy eyebrows, and a shock of black, curly hair, with some gray mixed in. "Yeah," I repeated. "Do me some good, feller, and I'll make it right."

He grinned. "That's good enough for me," he said. "They tell me your word is as good as your old man's was. He was one square dick."

I nodded my agreement and went on. Yes, my old man was a square dick. He was more than that. He was the finest father, the best pal, a boy ever had. But he was gone now; he had been gone three years. A bullet from a gambler's gun got him as he crashed into a joint where murder had been done . . . alone . . . in answer to a tip he'd got. A rat dropped him. The cops caught three of them as they were trying a getaway; it was a fight to the finish, and the cops won. That paid off my father's murder, they told me and I never learned any more . . . about who had tipped him off, why he had gone there alone, and which one had killed him. He had been trapped, I thought and there might be a lot back of it. But I couldn't find out.

He had made me promise not to go on the cops. He wanted me to be a lawyer. But I guess blood will tell. The law wasn't my game. And when Sally Fair's father died of a heart attack a year after I'd lost my Dad, and left her with the agency on her hands, I thought it was up to me to help her out. I was running it for her, but she was giving me a lot of help.

Right now Sally was stopping at a very swell hotel, keeping her eye on Mrs. Prentice Wentworth, who had been robbed of some very valuable trinkets.

WHEN I went into the office, big, raw-boned Luke McTavish, one of our boys, waved his hand.

"The little boss wants you to call her," he said.

I nodded, went into my room and took the phone. I called the hotel and asked for Miss Gwendolyn Pierce. Miss Pierce and Sally were one and the same. The hotel was one of those places with a large main building and a lot of deluxe bungalows built around a garden. Sally had a bungalow right next to Mrs. Wentworth's.

"Hello," Sally said, in the bored tone that went with the act she was putting on. Miss Pierce was supposed to be a rich, blasé gal who was dying on her feet of boredom, just a well-dressed yawn. Sally was doing a job of acting that Bette Davis might envy, because she was not like that. Far from it. "Oh, good morning," she went on. "Was our luncheon engagement for today or tomorrow, Terry darling?"

"Today," I said. "At the Embassy. At one?"

"At one. I'll be there. So nice of you to call."

That was all. But, in spite of her act, I caught a note of excitement in her voice. She must have learned something. Which was more than I had done.

Mrs. Wentworth was a silly woman in her late thirties who wanted to be twenty again. She had come out for the winter from the Middle Western city where her husband was a big banker. She had started circulating right away, and there were plenty of people around the hotel who were happy to know her. Including a smart boy named Dean Jarvis who took her to the races, in her car of course, and a lot of other places.

Her trinkets had been snatched one night while she was asleep. Dean Jarvis had been week-ending at somebody's country estate, which gave him an alibi. The way I got into it was through a pal of mine back in that Middle Western town where Wentworth ran his bank. This boy had done some work for him and he told Wentworth I was the one to investigate the robbery, get the jewelry back. The company that insured the stuff had a couple of dicks working on it. And the cops had been called in. But nobody had got anywhere.

It was a slick job that smacked of professionalism. The guy had unlocked the bungalow door with a key, had known just where to find the lady's jewel case, and had walked out with it. He hadn't left a print anywhere.

At exactly one by the big clock in the ornate lobby of the Embassy, Miss Gwendolyn Pierce sauntered in. Sally had even changed her walk to fit the part. I got up and advanced to meet her.

"Oh, hello," she said in Miss Pierce's bored, hollow voice. Then added, in her own whisper "I'm starved darling."

It was part of her act to be bored by eating and in that respect Sally is a girl after my own heart with my own love for thick steaks with mushrooms. We went into the grill and found a secluded corner booth. Sally leaned over impetuously, the moment we were seated.

"That fool woman!" she burst out. "She's thinking of Reno . . . and of marrying Jarvis!"

"Whew!" I said. "Wentworth ought to be glad to get rid of her. But he wouldn't be. He'll expect us to stop anything like that. Say on!"

Well, Sally had been keeping her eyes and ears open. Late last night Jarvis had called on Mrs. Wentworth and had staged a terrific scene in her living room. Mrs. Wentworth had jumped him first of all for chasing around with a dizzy young thing at the hotel, a girl named Phyllis Lowe. She was jealous.

Then Jarvis gave her a song and dance. He loved her, he said; he wanted to marry her. But if she wouldn't divorce her fat banker husband, he might as well try to forget her or go jump in the lake or something.

The dame fell for his line and promised him she'd divorce Wentworth. Then followed the talk about Reno.

"And look, Terry," Sally said, "this Phyllis Lowe girl is not just a debutante on the loose. Either I'm crazy or Jarvis is a crook and the Lowe is his moll. I've seen 'em together when they didn't know I was around."

"You are not crazy, beautiful," I assured her. "Well, relax and take on some nourishment."

She didn't, though. She sort of stiffened up, surprised, and then snapped back into her Gwendolyn Pierce act. I watched her trying not to act surprised, and saw her nod and hand out a haughty smile to an old boy who had just sat down at the only table that commanded a clear view of our booth.

"Some things," Sally announced grimly, *sotto voce,* "are too darned funny to be called coincidences. Like that old goat who lives out at the hotel and ogles everybody in skirts, being in here, seeing us here."

"Don't let it worry you, sweetheart," I said. "It probably is coincidence."

CASUALLY, as I sipped my soup, with a minimum of noise, I looked the old goat over. He was gray-faced, gray-haired, gray-clad—just a monotone in gray. A doddering old boy with the shakes. He wore heavy-lensed glasses. He smiled up at the waiter—an old man's smile—and I noticed that even his lips were gray. An unhealthy-looking old boy. Somehow he looked familiar, too, but I couldn't place him.

"Who is he?" I asked Sally.

"A retired mining engineer," she said. "His name is Burbank, Peter J. Burbank. He tries to start conversations with women at the hotel. I've had to freeze him. That awful grayness of his is supposed to be the result of a long siege of some tropic fever. He gives me the shivers."

"Forget him. Eat."

Old Burbank had only some thin soup and crackers, a baked apple and a glass of milk. Then he got up, with his waiter's help, and doddered out. He gave Sally a smile as he passed.

"We're working for Wentworth," I said. "So we have to stop his missus from going to Reno. You keep close watch on her. I'll let you know just where I'll be, all the time. If she lights out, I'll stop her—if I have to snatch her. You still think Jarvis is in the jewel robbery?"

"Yes," said Sally. "He looks like a harmless gigolo. He talks and acts like one. He had that alibi. He fooled the cops. But when he's alone with this Phyllis Lowe, he's another person."

"And where was Phyllis when the baubles were lifted?"

"In her suite, in the main building. And it would be tough proving she left those rooms."

"I'll put Luke McTavish out there," I suggested. "You keep tabs on the Wentworth. If she starts for the airport or the station, Luke can stop her. And get more on the Lowe frail, if you can. I'll check her, too. I've tried the usual sources of information on Jarvis. No soap. The stool pigeons don't know him."

We took our time over the lunch and Sally put away plenty of calories. After old Burbank had gone, she became her gay, sweet self. I am pretty crazy about her, but she treats me like a brother. Her idea is that we're too

much alike, we've known each other too long; we practically grew up side by side—and when she marries, she wants to be swept off her feet by some tall, dark and handsome stranger.

I put her in a cab and waved my hand.

"Look, Terry!" she cried, pointing at a paper a newsboy was yelling about. "Wait!"

I saw it, too—the headline, SOCIALITE CHARGED WITH MURDER. Mrs. Wentworth's picture. She was under arrest, accused of killing Dean Jarvis in her bungalow at a fashionable hotel. It was a brief story, little more than a piece of flash news. It had barely got into this edition. They had been having a late breakfast, served in the bungalow. They had been quarreling, a maid said. Then—a shot. And Mrs. Wentworth, hysterical, with a gun in her hand.

I jumped into the cab. "We'll go out there," I said.

"Why," Sally gasped, "it must have happened just after I left."

Mrs. Wentworth hadn't been taken downtown. She was still in the hotel, watched by a policewoman and two dicks, with a doctor attending her. All I could get from any of them was that she seemed to be out of her mind; she didn't remember anything that had happened.

One of the insurance company dicks was there, and he had already phoned Wentworth, the banker. Wentworth said he would catch the first plane and fly out. That would get him here tomorrow morning.

Sally led me over to the Wentworth bungalow and I took a look at Dean Jarvis . . . a handsome lad, some ten years younger than Mrs. Wentworth. He had been shot right between the eyes, as he sat opposite her at the table.

"Very good shooting," I remarked to Sally.

WE WENT out into the garden, strolled along. At the far end there was a small pool. A few people were swimming, some others sunning themselves in canvas chairs. I saw one shapely girl with a very loud pattern on her brief swim suit; she had on a floppy hat and dark glasses, but the rest of her was getting a nice tan.

Sally's breath came fast. "Phyllis Lowe!" she said. "She doesn't care about what's happened to Jarvis. She's not supposed to know him. But when they were alone together . . ."

Just then a page boy came out, calling "Miss Lowe! Miss Phyllis Lowe!"

She beckoned to him and he gave her a note. She fumbled in a little bag beside her and handed him a coin. Then she got up and wrapped a sort of loose coat around her and walked back toward the main building.

"This bears looking into," I said. "Her man is killed . . . and she don't care. That must mean something."

"Yes," Sally breathed. She whistled. The page boy turned and Sally beckoned him to her.

"Hello, Jack," she said. "How would you like to make ten dollars?"

"Gee! How?"

"Just tell me who gave you the note you handed to Miss Lowe," Sally said. "And I won't tell anybody."

The kid grinned. "That's easy. Old Mr. Burbank."

"Thanks," Sally said, and placed a folded bill in his hand. "Don't say anything to anybody."

The boy looked up at us. He was a bright-looking lad.

"You want me to do anything else, Miss Pierce?" he asked. "Like keeping an eye on them?"

"Never mind. But if you should happen to see anything that seems strange, you might tell me."

"I sure will, lady."

He beat it. I remarked to Sally, "You have a way with you, lovely. That boy is your slave."

Sally frowned. "I told you there was more than coincidence in his being at the Embassy. He gives me the jitters. Now he sends notes to the Lowe girl after Jarvis has been killed. There's a lot back of this, Terry."

I have learned better than to argue against Sally's hunches. We went back into the main lobby and sat down. The house detective was an ex-cop I knew. I fingered him and he came over. Had he seen the Lowe dame come in? Yes. She had met the old boy, Burbank, and they had gone up in the same elevator.

"I think she's making a play for him," he said. "He has all the dough in the world and she looks to me like a dame on the make."

"You ever see her with Jarvis?" I asked.

He looked surprised. He shook his head. "No," he said. "Jarvis never looked at anybody but Mrs. Wentworth."

The cops were going to keep Mrs. Wentworth here at the hotel until her husband arrived. Under guard, of course. The same page boy came up and told Sally somebody was calling her on the phone. She got up and crossed over to a booth to take the call.

When she came back, she said, "Luke McTavish, Terry. He says that crippled beggar, Tim Calhoun, claims to have a tip for you . . . and won't tell him."

"Calhoun, huh?" I had almost forgotten the guy and his proposition. What did he have that would be worth anything?

"And there's a telegram from Wentworth, asking you to do all you can for his wife, telling you to engage the best criminal lawyer you know."

"That would be Bill Reardon," I said. "if he'll take the case. I'll roll down town and see Bill. Then I'll find out what Tim Calhoun has. You stay here, lovely. But watch your step."

I HOPPED a cab and went down to Bill Reardon's office. Bill is an ex-football star, two hundred pounds of beef, with the head of a great statesman, practically no knowledge of law except what his clerks dig up for him, and a deep voice that he knows how to use before a jury. I gave him all I knew. Would he take the case? Would he defend Mrs. Wentworth?"

"Sure!" he boomed. "For a proper retainer. I've been reading about it. I can get her off, all right, even if I have to plead temporary insanity. What's the dope on Jarvis?"

"I don't know anything yet," I said.

"Dig up some—so I can blacken his character."

We arranged that Bill was to meet Wentworth with me the next morning soon after his arrival. I went on to my building and saw Tim Calhoun at his usual spot.

"What do you know, Tim?" I said.

"Plenty. Suppose I come up?"

"Okay."

He pushed himself toward the elevator, rolled in. He didn't say any more until we were in my office. As I went through, Luke handed me the wire from Wentworth. Inside the sanctum, Calhoun pulled himself into a deep chair. Sitting there, like that, he looked enormous—as big as Bill Reardon. I shoved a box of cigars toward him and he lit up.

"Give, brother," I said.

"On this Jarvis kill, pal . . . the way I get it, the Wentworth dame didn't do it."

"How's that?"

"Well, Jarvis was getting too big for his shoes, getting out of hand, see? He was just one of the boys, and the guy who was running the show couldn't stand anybody getting out of line. See? So Jarvis had to be rubbed. The big guy hates the guts of this Wentworth —it all goes back a long way—so he frames the guy's wife. Even if she ain't convicted, the scandal won't do him any good. And with this kill on the fire, maybe the jewel robbery will simmer down. Catch?"

"Yeah, I catch. But talk straighter. Where did you get all this? Who is the big guy? Why does he hate Wentworth?"

He grinned at me and blew out smoke. "Some things I can tell you, some I can't," he said. "I picked up this an' that and put 'em together. You can make something of it, boy. But it's this way: A long time ago there was a guy in business in this burg where Wentworth is a big shot banker. Wentworth caught him in a jam, froze him, squeezed him out. The guy was strapped, see, and damn' near went to jail besides. So he turned sour. He says, 'To hell with everything. I been straight and this crook Wentworth puts the squeeze on me. From now on, I get mine any way I can.'

"He's a smart guy and he makes plenty of dough this way and that, so I hear. One of the first things he does is to take Wentworth for fifty grand. To do that he teams with a confidence man, see, and the con guy rigs the deal that hooks Wentworth. That's his revenge. He's on his feet again and he goes places. He makes a lot of jack this way and that. The cops don't catch up. A couple of times they're close, but he tosses some small fry crook into their arms and keeps going. You know how that is.

"So he's here, doing nothing, when the Wentworth dame shows up. He still has a hate on. The dame is foolish, so he thinks he might as well take her down the line. It's a set-up, see? Jarvis is picked for the job because he has the looks. Then he begins to get smart. He knows who got the dame's baubles. He gets tough. The dame is crazy about him, so he thinks he will play his own hand. He will get her to Reno where she can shake Wentworth and they will hitch up. She has dough in her own name, besides what she will get as a settlement.

"For a lot of reasons, the big guy can not let Jarvis get away with this play. He tells him. But Jarvis is tough. He says he has the big guy over the barrel—if he cuts in, Jarvis will tip off the insurance dicks. So what happens? Jarvis is rubbed and they rig it so it looks like the goofy dame did it. She is so dumb she don't even know what goes on. I'll bet she ain't sure whether she did or didn't. And there it is."

TIM CALHOUN chuckled.

"Who is the big guy?" I asked. "And who shot Jarvis?"

"I haven't got that yet," he said, and I didn't know whether he was lying or not. "Maybe I will get it tonight—in the dump where I hang out. This Wentworth is coming here, huh? If I was you, I would take good care of him. Because the big guy hates his guts."

"I will," I said.

"Is this going to be worth a pair o' legs to me—and a stake?" he asked.

"If it's on the level, if it leads anywhere, yes," I said. "Let me know as soon as you get any more."

"Yeah," he said, and jumped down to the floor and rolled out of the office.

I sat there for a while, trying to figure things. Then I called Luke in. I told him to go out to the hotel where Sally was and keep his eyes open. I told him to talk to Sally without being spotted and she would give him the dope.

"Tell her," I said, "that I am going to meet Wentworth's plane and bring him out there in the morning. Bill Reardon will be there and we will all go into a huddle."

"Okay," Luke said.

I did some phoning around, tried to get something on the Lowe girl and old man Burbank. Nobody knew the Lowe girl or much about her. She was supposed to come from Hawaii. A broker was the only one who could tell me anything about Burbank; he had a big account with the brokerage firm and he played the market. He had made his dough in South American mines, the broker said.

I kept thinking of what Tim Calhoun had told me. The big guy, as he called him, must be the head of a mob that included Jarvis. Did it also include Phyllis Lowe? And, with Jarvis out and the Wentworth dame in a spot, had the big guy set her after doddering, gray old Burbank? The old boy was ripe for a shakedown. Then I remembered that he had been in the Embassy. Did that mean anything? No, I decided; his broker's office was nearby. He had probably just dropped in there for his lunch.

The man Tim Calhoun was talking about must be a known crook, even if the cops hadn't put him away. The stoolies should know about him. I went to work again, on the telephone, and tried to check on Jarvis and the man he was working for.

But all I could get was that Jarvis had tried pictures, without any luck. He'd also tried radio and flopped. After that he'd stuck to the gigolo racket. He had started in by working out of an escort service. A rich dame had adopted him, then another—and then Mrs. Wentworth had turned up. I couldn't tie him in with anybody.

I was getting a headache. It was time to call it a day. Maybe Wentworth could tell me things in the morning. I called Luke, heard that everything was jake at the hotel, and left the office.

IT WAS dark when I went out and Tim Calhoun was gone. I dropped in at Johnny's, my favorite bar, for a turkey sandwich and a nightcap. Then I went on to my apartment.

I was at the airport at eight o'clock. Wentworth's plane was due at eight-fifteen. I decided to phone Luke again and find out how things stood at the hotel. I was dialing the number in the booth, over in the far corner of the airport, when a big mug jerked the door open. That's all I saw of him—he was big. Then I saw a beautiful display of stars. I was all in a heap in the little booth when a porter found me there and called others.

I snapped out of it and looked up at the big clock. I groaned. It was eight-thirty.

As soon as I could manage it, I began asking questions. Had the plane come in? Was Wentworth on it?

"Yes, sir," one of the guys told me. "Mr. Wentworth arrived. He was met by a Mr. Doyle, Terry Doyle, I heard him say. They went away together."

"Terry Doyle!" I yelled. "I'm Terry Doyle!"

They gave me the look you reserve for nuts. I ducked back into the phone booth, but this time kept my face turned toward the door. I called the hotel

again, asked for Luke. He wasn't there. They paged him, but couldn't find him. Sally wasn't there either. I got goose flesh all over. If Sally . . .

"Okay!" I snapped. "How about Miss Lowe? How about old man Burbank? Are they there?"

"Why, no, sir," the clerk yipped. "They both checked out last night."

That made me so mad I didn't say anything. Why hadn't Luke or Sally told me? What were the cops doing? I crashed out of the booth, ran out to the taxicab stand, and grabbed one. I told the driver to take me out to Sally's hotel and to step on it.

Out there, I ran into big Bill Reardon right away. He was mad. Why had I kept him waiting? Where was Wentworth? And so on. He had seen Mrs. Wentworth and he announced she was the craziest dame he had ever tried to defend.

I shook him off, went into a huddle with the house dick.

Phyllis Lowe had checked out about ten o'clock last night; the clerk had heard her say she was going to join a friend and they were both sailing for Honolulu in the morning. Old Burbank had been taken ill along about midnight; an ambulance had come for him and had taken him to a private sanitarium.

I called a homicide dick who would take my word for things, and told him to stop Phyllis Lowe . . . if she was really going to sail anywhere.

Bill Reardon kept after me, but I told him to wait while I hunted up the page boy, Jack.

Yes, he knew something. Sally and Luke had followed Phyllis Lowe when she left the hotel in a cab. Luke had been hanging around Burbank's room, probably trying to hear things. When the Lowe girl lammed, he and Sally had been right after her.

Where had Burbank gone? The kid gave me the name of the sanitarium, which he had seen on the ambulance. I passed him a piece of change and patted him on the shoulder.

Bill Reardon grabbed me and said, "What is this? Where is Wentworth? I want my retainer."

So I told him a few things, and he opened his eyes.

"Now let me alone, big boy," I said. "I'll try to find Wentworth for you. I'll try to bring him back alive. So go back to your law books and take a rest."

MY FIRST idea was to take a cab out to the sanitarium. I thought old Peter Burbank might be able to tell me things about the Lowe girl and who was back of her. If they had put the bee on him, maybe that was what made him sick. I knew the sanitarium—it was a joint for mild mental and nervous cases and alcoholics; it cost more to stay there than to live at the best hotel. But I remembered that Tim Calhoun had said he might have something this morning.

I phoned the guy who runs the cigar stand there in the building and told him I wanted to talk to Tim.

Tim wasn't there, he said. He hadn't showed up this morning.

That made me mad. Where was everybody? Well, the devil with it. I'd go to the sanitarium anyway.

It was a big place with a high wire fence all around. The buildings were scattered over a couple of acres of gardens, and patients were walking up and down outside with nurses and attendants. I went up to the office. A hard-faced dame in a nurse's uniform asked me what I wanted. I said I wanted to see Mr. Burbank, who had been brought here last night.

She was dead pan. She looked

through a batch of cards, told me they had no patient of that name. No Mr. Burbank had come here—last night, or any time. I yelled at her, insisted that he had come from the hotel in an ambulance belonging to this joint. She insisted, just as positively, that I was wrong.

A fishy-eyed, bushy-haired medico, in a white smock, heard us wrangling and came in from another room. He backed up the dame. He was the examining physician, he said; he saw all patients when they entered the place. No one named Burbank, no one answering my description of the doddering old boy, had come here last night, or any time.

The doctor was one of those guys you'd like to poke, just for luck. He was a sarcastic bird, and he suggested that I might be a mental case.

"Yeah," I growled. "I might take this joint apart."

He had full red lips, contrasting strikingly with his pale skin. When he smiled, I felt like socking him.

"We couldn't permit that," he said. "We have attendants who can handle violent patients."

I took a step toward him—and all the lights went out again. As I crashed down at his feet, I had a momentary flash of sense. I thought what a dope I had been to come here alone; I had more than a hunch about the set-up. But I was out.

The first thing I heard was a moan. I thought I was making that noise, but I wasn't. It was somebody in an adjoining room. I seemed to be in a basement; a little light came in from a screened window high in the wall. It was cold and damp.

The moaner caught his breath, said sharply, "No, damn you, I won't!" Then moaned again.

A soft, silky voice replied to him. "Oh, yes, Wentworth, you will! I've been waiting a long time for this chance . . . and I'll take full advantage of it!"

I didn't know that voice. The big guy Tim Calhoun had mentioned. Automatically, I reached for my gun; it was gone, of course. I stood up stiffly and started toward the next room. There was a door between and light showed under it.

I opened the door. Wentworth, the banker, heavy-set, stern-featured, lay on a cot. A bright light was shining in his face. The other man, bending over him, turned to face me. There was a gun in his right hand.

I blinked and stared. It was Peter Burbank, if that was his name, but he didn't look old and doddering. He looked about fifty and, except for the grayness of his skin, he was in good shape. His hand didn't shake at all as he swung the gun to include me, backing his chair away from Wentworth.

"Hello, Doyle," he said. "Sorry we had to get rough, but you and your pals would stick your noses in. This is just a simple business deal between me and Wentworth. We're old friends. No call for you—"

"Doyle!" Wentworth gasped. "Are you Terry Doyle?"

"Yeah," I said. "And not too proud of it right now. I was practically deaf, dumb and blind. I took this fellow for a harmless old guy."

BURBANK chuckled. "Not bad, was I?" he said. "I've built that part up into something good. Very convenient. My old friend, Wentworth," he went on, "transferred quite a lot of money from his bank to a local financial institution—a fund for the defense of his dear wife. I've been requesting him to

authorize them to turn it over to me."

"I won't, I tell you. I'll never do it!"

I leaned against the wall. I was feeling a little sick at my stomach and the pain in my head wasn't so good either.

"So you're the big guy," I said to Burbank. "You had Jarvis rubbed . . . and made it look like Mrs. Wentworth shot him. You had me bopped and had a guy using my name pick Wentworth up. Where's Sally Fair? Luke McTavish? What have you done to them?"

"Nothing. They're all right. Just detained—until we settle this business deal and have a chance to get away."

"We? You and the Lowe dame? Yeah! Jarvis gave you the dope on Mrs. Wentworth's jewelry. You or the Lowe dame snatched it. Jarvis got tough and you settled him. It fitted in fine with your idea of getting back at Wentworth . . . for something that happened years ago. Which one of you shot Jarvis, you or the Lowe?"

He laughed at me.

I yelled, "You'll never get away!"

"Oh, yes," he said smoothly. "The arrangements are all made. When we've gone, you'll be released from here. You see, this place is one of my investments. It's been profitable, too, and useful at times. But I've turned it over to charity . . . it's to be a clinic for the poor." He laughed and put on a pious look. "I think we'll get away, all right. I see nothing to stop us. And when we're gone, perhaps you can make the police believe what you tell them . . . and clear dear Mrs. Wentworth of the murder charge. Personally, I think she killed Jarvis." His voice took on a tough note. "Come, Doyle, advise Wentworth to kick in. I don't intend to waste time. It will be easier for all of you, including your Sally—I knew her, by the way, all the time because I once saw her with her father."

Like an idiot, I took a step toward him. The gun inched up. I looked into his eyes and knew I was not dealing with a weak old guy. Burbank would kill.

Wentworth had stopped protesting. He was just moaning.

"How much money?" I asked.

"Just fifty grand," Burbank said. "What's that to him? I'm letting him off easy. He's stolen millions."

I took a long breath. I was thinking of Sally.

"Give it to him," I told Wentworth. "We can clear your wife. Give him the money. Let him try his getaway. Some time, sooner or later, the cops will get him."

"That's good sense," Burbank said. "But the cops won't get me. They never have. And, if they should, I'll bet Wentworth here wouldn't live to see me tried. Maybe you wouldn't either, Doyle. How about it, Wentworth?"

"No, damn you! I won't! I'll—"

Burbank swung his left. He had a heavy ring on that hand. He cut open Wentworth's cheek.

I started to say something when I heard a peculiar, familiar noise. Like the sound of roller skates on a sidewalk.

I opened my mouth. The last time I had heard that noise was when Tim Calhoun rolled along beside me in the entrance to my building. Wentworth was moaning, Burbank was laughing. I was leaning against the wall, beside the door.

I glanced down, over my shoulder.

Then I heard a voice.

"Drop your gat, big shot!"

IT WAS Tim Calhoun speaking, all right.

Burbank whirled, pointed at the door and fired. He was fast. But his aim was high. A legless man is not tall.

The second shot came from a gun in Tim Calhoun's hand. And it was the last. Burbank coughed once and pitched forward over Wentworth.

Tim Calhoun rolled into the room. He grinned up at me.

"How's that, pardner?" he asked. "Do I rate a set of legs and a stake? Look, chum, I pick up things last night. I hear about this joint. So here I come. A little guy like me can hide in the bushes, behind garbarge cans, under furniture. Have I cased the joint? I'll say. A while ago I spilled a doctor all over the floor an' tossed a nurse on top of him an' tied 'em together. Catch? Also, I bopped a guy. Then I phoned the cops. Right? They'll be along. Your pardner, McTavish, is down the line, kind o' woozy an'—"

"Did you see Sally?" I yelled. "A girl! A beautiful girl, with honey-colored hair and . . ."

"Sure. I'm comin' to that. She's okay. The two of 'em was battling in there, pulling hair and such. I had to laugh. The dames don't know how to fight. So which side am I on? I don't know —only your Sally looks okay to me. She sees me and she lets out a yell. She calls me by name. So I figger she knows me. Maybe you told her about me. So I cut in. Catch? I grabbed the other dame and jerked her off her pins. She is blanko right now. Go get your Sally, boy . . . the second room down the hall."

I got there plenty fast. Sally was sobbing. Her hair was every which way, her blouse torn. When she saw me, she gulped like a crying child that sees its daddy and came into my arms. The way she hung on, I got the idea she did not regard me exactly as a brother.

Well, the cops got there and we gave it to them. A hard-boiled dick went after Phyllis Lowe. She spilled everything she knew after she saw Burbank dead; but she claimed she hadn't shot Jarvis. Burbank had, she said. Maybe she was thinking the cops couldn't hang a dead man.

Mrs. Wentworth's jewelry was in a safe in the sanitarium. A lot of other stuff was there too, which proved Burbank, who had started out with a different name, had been big time in his way. The Lowe dame had got Jarvis into the gang; when he discovered she belonged to Burbank, he decided to cross them. He didn't know what he was up against.

Luke McTavish, Tim Calhoun, Sally and I rode downtown together. I left Tim in the outer office, telling Luke how he had lost his legs—a new version —and took Sally into my room, which had been her dad's.

The sorest man in town was Bill Reardon. He phoned to tell me I had done him out of a retainer and a client, because the cops were not going to hold Mrs. Wentworth. What did I care? Wentworth was paying off, enough for us and plenty to lift Tim up in the world.

I had my arm around Sally just then, so I said softly to big Bill: "I know somebody who needs a mouthpiece . . . bad."

"Who?" he shouted.

"Phyllis Lowe," I said, and hung up.

She did, too, but she didn't have a retainer.

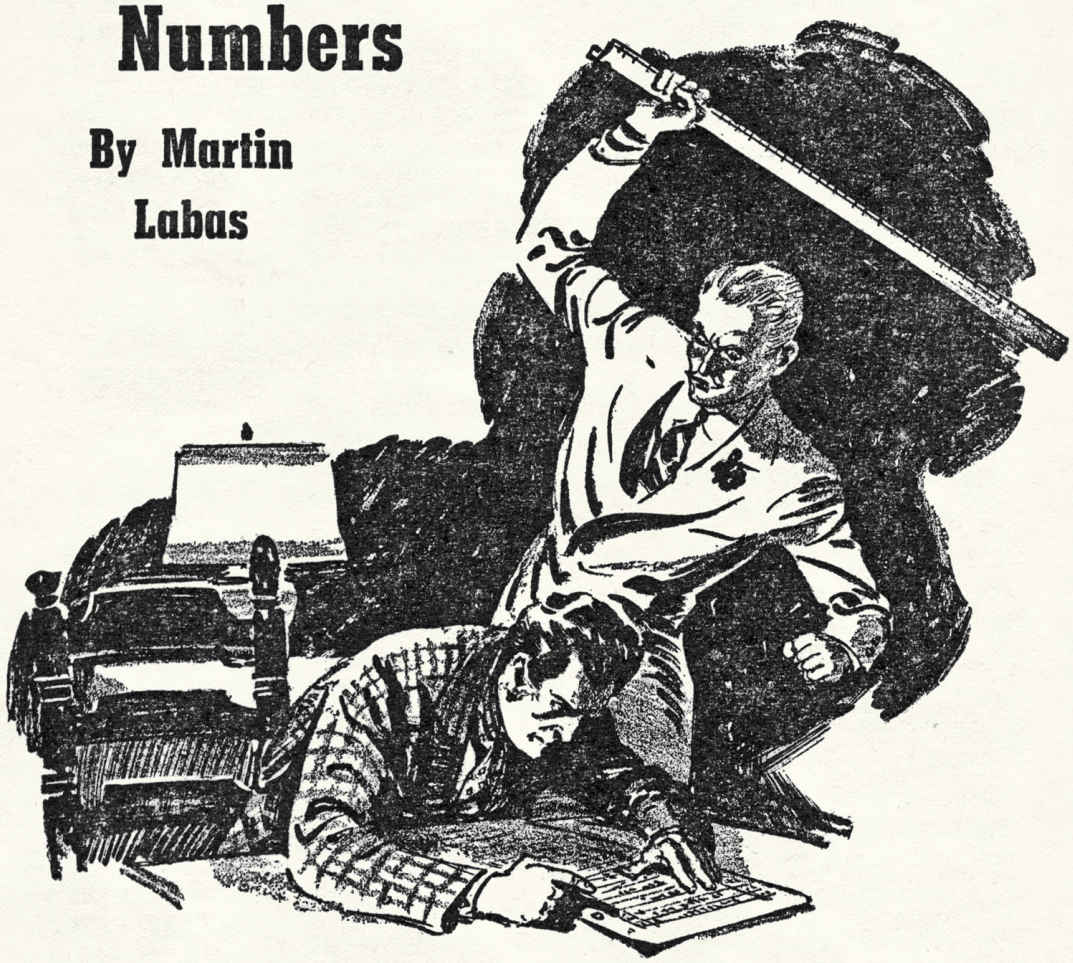
Sally was laughing at me. "What a detective!" she said. "You got so mad when you heard Luke and I were missing, you crashed in there alone—right into the spider's web. If it hadn't been for Calhoun . . ."

"Yeah," I admitted. "But, anyway, I had brains enough to take him on as an assistant. Do you know any other dick who would sign up a legless beggar?"

# Danger in Numbers

## By Martin Labas

The heavy slide rule was descending swiftly . . .



MR. EDWIN P. GLOSS left the Hatton Candy Corporation at 4:49 P. M. on the first Tuesday in June. Any departure of his was welcomed by the little workers there, for he was a strict man. But on this afternoon his going shed an extra joy because he would be away for the rest of the week. Following his unbroken custom he would take a Wednesday morning train to Philadelphia to spend four days with the luckless Pennsylvania branch.

Everybody was happy and spuriously busy, therefor, when their vice president stepped from his private room, tallish and spare, crisp of mustache and clear of eye, the very pink, of city-groomed executivehood. Mr. Gloss repressed a smile as he strode the long aisle between the desks. He could not resist wondering how all these petty clock-watchers would act if they knew what he knew. That he was not coming back Monday, or ever.

The Plan had germinated eight years and six months before. That was prior to the elder Hatton's death, when Mr.

Gloss was only assistant treasurer. He was dutifully attending an amateur vaudeville show for the benefit of Manor Park Gardens' community chest. His late wife was on the committee and inclined to enjoy the affair, but he could not share her pleasure at the hammy humor spiced with local personalities. And when three of his noisiest neighbors came out in blackface he visibly shuddered in distaste.

But their act intrigued him from the start.

"When you going to pay me that fiver you borrowed?" the first comedian demanded.

"Right now," the second replied, with much irrelevant slapstick. "Here it is."

As the first blackface prepared to pocket the stage money, blackface number three intervened.

"You can't get away with that," he said. "I lent you five dollars last year, so fork over."

Number One acknowledged the debt and "forked over."

But Number Three was not to enjoy the proceeds of the collection, for it appeared that he owed that amount to Number Two, the original possessor of the cash. "Give" commanded Number Two. It was given and all three went into their dance routine.

The hoary gag went over very well with that friendly audience, but Mrs. Gloss had to nudge her husband twice before he remembered to applaud. He had fallen into a logarithmic trance.

Mr. Gloss sat long that pregnant night, staring into the fire and eating peppermint drops, his only vice. With mounting awe he pondered the inner meaning of that wandering five. He admired how all parties were satisfied and their mutual obligations canceled by the purely theoretical displacement of the cash involved. Most particularly he dwelt on the enviable case of the Second Comedian, who owed five dollars at the outset of the hocus pocus and ended by owning it free and clear.

From owing to owning, Mr. Gloss reasoned, was the only reasonable path to travel in this mathematical universe, so . . . he spread a quire of fresh balance paper on the living room table, precisely adjusted his pocket pencil, moved the peppermints within reach and began to jot down, column by interlocking column, the intricate itinerary of his eight years' pilgrimage to Heart's Desire.

At a little after dawn he arose, white with excitement and stacked the litter of closely-ciphered sheets. And at the end of the last calculation on the last sheet he penciled the four digits of a date. Taking down the *World Almanac* he ascertained that this date, eight years and six months in the future, fell on a first Tuesday in June.

Since that night many changes touched his environment, but the Plan did not change. It was a miracle of precision and probability. As he carried out its numberless succesive steps, never a flaw appeared in the original structure.

He rose in his firm. Old Mr. Hatton died, leaving control to his only son, Lance, who had been brought up to the business. Lance Hatton, Jr. soon found that Mr. Gloss's steely intelligence and grasp of affairs made his own daily attendance at business a mere formality.

In all but name, Mr. Gloss became The Corporation.

Mrs. Gloss died also, stricken with an acute gastric condition, mercifully unaware how convenient her passing was to the ultimate objective of the Plan. Her widower lived on in his

upper-class suburban house, scarcely aware of the lady's absence, eating at restaurants and leaving the maintenance of his home to an endless chain of women-by-the-day. What was a house to him? He lived in a Plan.

NOW that the grand climactic day had come it was marked, in the course of Mr. Gloss's trip home, by one very slight change in routine.

As he flowed with the rush hour crowd in the Long Island Station he turned aside to a parcel room and took a check for his pin seal brief case. Through the year this article had become part of his visible personality; he carried it everywhere.

Burdened now only with his umbrella, he plunged again into the throng and let it sweep him to the parcel room at the far end of the station. There, in exchange for a check that was not the one he had just received, he was given a pin seal brief case identical with the first. Very close inspection would have detected one difference: it was either newer or less used.

Something like a sigh escaped Mr. Gloss as he carried this through the Outbound gate. The interval between the two brief cases had been crucial, in a way. Although no heavier than its twin, the one he now carried contained five human lives. It was the Plan's mobile unit.

In the train Mr. Homer Quillan of Garden City had held a seat for him, as usual, and greeted him with the usual tag from the headlines of the day.

"Well, I see that husband-poisoner vamped the jury after all. Twenty years . . . I call that a disgrace. She's a damn lucky woman."

Mr. Gloss confirmed the fact in his own *Sun.*

"Offhand, Quillan," he replied, "I'd call her unlucky. The odds against her coming to trial at all were between 13,000 and 13,400 to one."

Quillan stared, then laughed and called across the aisle, "Hear that, Fred? The wizard's latest . . ." and he repeated the statement. The commutor called Fred shook his head.

"I'm taking your word for it this time, Gloss. The last time I made you prove one of those million-to-one gimmicks I ran past my station, missed dinner and couldn't sleep all night." He hunched back into his seat, chuckling.

"But look, man," Quillan persisted, "do you mean seriously that for every wife they catch poisoning her husband, 13,000 other wives poison theirs and get away with it? Wow!"

"That's what the figures say," said Mr. Gloss. "Roughly, of course. The probability I mentioned includes both sexes and is not corrected for error-frequency. But the proportion of women to men in this criminal category would be, in round . . ."

Mr. Quillan jocularly hoisted his hands. "All right, I surrender. After all, I'm only an actuary, and I can't make the theory of probability play a violin upside down on a flying trapeze. Only . . ." and he rattled his paper moodily, " . . . only don't tell my wife."

WHEN Mr. Gloss got off at his station he nodded a very casual goodbye for one projecting so long an absence. And very casually he sauntered to the commutor's parking lot where he left his excellent sedan while in the city. As he touched the starter his manner changed.

He had looked forward to being alone. On this day of days he wanted to declare a recess, to let his thoughts run out and play. He could do it now, slowly

driving the tree-lined quiet mile to his home. No one would see his light blue slits of eyes soften, his decisive lips unloose, his narrow, chiseled head slacken on its erect base, almost lolling, almost voluptuous in the privacy of the little glass house on wheels.

He was seeing himself only a few hours in the future, stepping off the Philadelphia train at Trenton, buying a modest serge suit there, a hat . . . possibly lightish-tan, with a wide brim and narrow band. A suit and hat for Mr. Bascomb. Mr. Bascomb would be a small antique dealer of Buffalo. His motor licences were already in the pin-seal brief case, along with his wallet, money, a Traveler's Check, initialed watch and letter from Mrs. B.

On the essentially modern prinipal that credentials, not clothes, make the man, there were four other men in the bag. Mr. Gloss dwelt affectionately on each, for he would become each in his turn, much as the reviled caterpillar passes through several larval stages to emerge as the brilliant butterfly. The larval Bascombe would exist only as far as Buffalo. Then he would be a sightseeing broker's clerk from Chicago. At Chicago he would vanish into the personality of a British Columbian manufacturer of shingles returning home from abroad, and in far Vancouver his trail would vanish, too. But there would be a wealthy convalescent in the Cook's agency there deciding between going to Taos, New Mexico, by air or to San Francisco by water. He would choose Taos, where the amateur painters and professional Indians might or might not note the passing of Edwin P. Gloss, now irrevocably lost among America's restless tens of millions, in the person of Don José Malletson.

Already the cafés and *salas* of Tampico in Tamaulipas were buzzing of the expected homecoming of the elusive Don José. Hitherto the visits of this polyglot Croesus had been infrequent and brief, although not too brief to prevent his being the most favored suitor for the hand of Tampico's most desirable daughter. Now he was coming home for good, to his countless miles of range along the Sierra Madre Oriental. All was ready in the immense *estancia* . . . Mr. Gloss felt that he could make it without undue haste by the first of July, and began the recreation of a pair of naïve, enormous brown eyes as he turned from Garden Avenue into Arbor drive.

Once around the corner, his house two blocks away, he saw something that made him call back his wandering mind to the exceedingly bleak present moment, where it was badly needed.

Lance Hatton's long, gray convertible was parked at his door.

MR. GLOSS braked to a crawl. What faced him was not a man; he feared no man. He was faced with the most dread foe of the scientific gambler: *frequency distribution of error*. It is the thing that the pari-mutuel machine cannot compute. It is a Sunday name for the impossible long shot that romped home. Had it romped home to Ardor Drive? Mr. Gloss stopped the car for a moment and gave the matter the best thought of his life.

Then he drove up behind his employer's machine and cut his motor.

In that still interval his mind had performed a fine task of readjustment. The theory of probability, he knew, comes from men, not gods. Only the latter hold a monopoly on dead certainty. And though the difference between humanity's most careful "perhaps" and the most casually offhand "absolutely" of the Olympians is exceedingly small,

it is as cruel and capricious as the wind.

Lance Hatton's intrusion was one of these little differencees between earth and heaven. Mr. Gloss assumed that his employer had found him out and was waiting to accuse him. But even so, it needn't mean the collapse of the Plan. If he could set Hatton aside in some way, merely for a few hours, the Plan would proceed as if nothing had happened.

And how could Lance Hatton be set aside? That depended on many things that would remain hidden until the interview.

From the dash compartment he took his nickeled .32 revolver, duly licensed "for said citzen's protection from unlawful attack, trespass, etc." It slipped comfortably into his hip pocket. The pocket had been tailored so.

Then he walked into his house. The current woman-by-the-day had been listening for him, and appeared as he was putting his things in the hall wardrobe.

"A caller?" he said cutting short her greeting.

"Yes, sir. Said he had business. He's in the library."

Mr. Gloss glanced down the hall. The study door was shut.

"Thank you. You can go now—and remember, I'm going to Philadelphia and won't need you until Monday."

With a nod he strode briskly down the hall and threw open the study door.

It was always dim in there toward sunset. The single window faced east. And Mr. Gloss's vision was a little dulled by the bright streets, so that the silhouette that exploded from an armchair at his entrance seemed as featureless as a nightmare.

Mr. Gloss stood quite still; he let the figure charge the length of the room, incoherently bellowing, let it grab both of his shoulders in huge, immaculate hands, without moving a finger. Then, at a certain exquisitely judged moment he stepped aside and gently patted the hands away.

"Why Mr. Hatton, whatever has happened?" he said finally. Then there was time to press the wall switch. The room was flooded with parchment-yellow light that suddenly made both men aware that night had come.

Mr. Gloss could see his adversary now. He was formidable. Lance Hatton, Jr., was a big man, a big-boned, long-muscled, black-maned sporting man with simple brown eyes that were now black with rage.

"I've been to the bank," he ground out. "You sneaking, false-faced rat. You—"

"What bank?" Mr. Gloss spoke very quietly. The curt query was unexpected, as it was meant to be. "The Manhattan Commercial, the Exporters', The Cleveland Trust . . . ?"

Hatton's face purpled; he lowerd his big had. For a moment he seemed to consider breaking to pieces the slim man before him. But he only said deep in his throat:

"Exporters. As you damn well know. Don't stall now, Gloss. What have you done with the money? The *millions?*"

MR. GLOSS kept his eyes calm, and without turning them from the wrathful, yet bewildered face he slowly lowered himself into a straight chair. Then he said:

"I suppose you were rather shocked."

"Shocked!" Hatton roared. "What a damn fool you must think I am, Gloss. What a baby-faced fool! But not any more. I've come to get the stockholders money, my money, back. And then I'm going to smash you . . . "

"If you will control yourself, Mr. Hatton, and take up one thing at a time, I will explain this regrettable turn of affairs." Mr. Gloss rose lightly and hitched forward the armchair.

Hatton stood on the hearth rug like a stubborn bull.

"Explain?" he shouted. "What can you explain, except why you became a thief?"

"That is exactly what I meant," Mr. Gloss said levelly.

Hatton stared slackjawed.

"And about the money, where it is and how to get it," Mr. Gloss added, resuming his chair. Hatton shook his head like a wet hound and sat down.

"You're giving up . . . just like that?"

Mr. Gloss nodded wordlessly.

"Gee-rusalem!" Hatton breathed softly.

"I didn't quite catch . . . "

"What I mean," Hatton hitched forward and worked one hand into a coat pocket. "Well, I'm glad you're taking this attitude. I thought you'd argue, of course . . . deny . . . stall. Well, I'm glad . . . I won't need this."

He tugged a great black cannon of an automatic pistol from his coat and thumped it on the library table. Mr. Gloss arched his eyebrows.

"Why Lance, surely you have known me long enough to make such nonsense unnecessary. What on earth did you think I'd do?"

"Argue, of course."

"Have I ever argued a losing case?"

Mr. Gloss's Chesterfieldian *sang-froid* was having its effect. The big young man's face was no longer purple. His mind was functioning more calmly and he could listen. Mr. Gloss noted with satisfaction. He had accomplished the first step. The second might also succeed, if he stepped cautiously. He leaned toward his guest.

"Have you studied the theory of probability, Lance?"

Hatton glowered. His mood was dangerous still.

"I didn't come here to chat about . . . "

"You came here to see about the Hatton Corporation reserves; I'm well aware. My question has to do with that."

"All right I haven't studied it, but I've heard of it."

"Good." Mr. Gloss's face was austerely serious. "It has been my hobby since boyhood. I worked summers in my father's insurance and real estate office. Got to reading actuarial books. They led me into the abstract science of probability."

"Now see here! If you're stalling for time . . . "Hatton kneaded the chair arms in his big hands.

"What possible good could time do me now?" Mr. Gloss made a slight gesture of resignation. "You caught me."

"Then why all the talk? Where's the money? You got it. I know you. You didn't gamble it away, not you. Or spend it. You've got it, so give it back."

"That," Mr. Gloss remarked impersonally, "is a complex subject. If you will hear me out?"

"All right, talk." Hatton groweled.

"I MENTIONED the theory of probability," Mr. Gloss resumed. "That was in connection with you having caught me so neatly. The odds were heavily against that happening."

"The devil they were!" Hatton sneered. "A baby could have caught you. It just happened that I was overdrawn in my personal cash at the First State, and dropped in at the Exporters' for a loan . . . Five minutes talk with

old Wardell and I knew. You had gutted the firm."

"You *just happened* in?" Mr. Gloss smiled thinly. "Lance, the odds against that happening, in the way it did, at the time it did, were . . . "

He took a large, yellowish ledger sheet from the table drawer and glanced over it. Then looked up again, his eyes faintly glinting.

"The odds against your catching me today were 22,989,400 to 1."

"What!" Hatton came out of the armchair slowly, as a man comes up from dreaming. "Say, it hadn't occurred to me . . . have you been feeling well lately? You're such a demon for work, man. Overdue for a breakdown. Maybe this embezzlement thing was just . . . one of those . . . something you did without . . . "

"Please!" It was a sharp command. Mr. Gloss stood, drawing his chair back. He was grinning mechanically, but his long face was gray and drawn. "No lunatic could have accomplished what I have done over the last eight years. The figure I quoted is exact. I computed it in 1929 and it has not altered one jot . . . until you happened—" he paused to land the word emphasis—"into the Exporters' Trust today. The odds were 22,989,400 to one, sir." Look! Here are the figures."

He leaned and squared the closely ciphered ledger sheet to the table edge. This would be Step Two. It took iron concentration, an almost killing effort of will, but it was working.

Lance Hatton came around the end of the table and sat down in the straight chair. Mr. Gloss pointed to the lower right-hand corner of the sheet.

"See that date?"

Hatton bent over the tiny, precise digits.

"That's today," he said.

"It is today. But I wrote it down eight years and six months ago."

Hatton bent lower, muttering a strong word under his breath.

"You see, if you had not come today, I would have been gone. Wait. I can show you on the slide rule. Short-cut."

A shoulder-high sectional bookcase, quite empty, stood behind the study table. Its top was bare but for one object, a slender pigskin case something under four feet in length. He carried this back to the table, unsnapping the cover. Hatton raised his head from the maze of numbers and watched with involuntary curiosity as Mr. Gloss drew from the case the beautifully fashioned and infinitely complex bar of white enameled boxwood and polished brass.

"Is that a *slide rule?*" Hatton explained. "I didn't know they came that big."

Mr. Gloss laid it beside him for his closer inspection. "There is a size larger," he remarked. "There is little that this instrument cannot compute. For instance—"he picked it up, holding it delicately in his long, tranparent bookeeper's hand—"it will confirm the odds I have mentioned against this—I may be excused for saying unfortunate meeting."

"The hell it will," Hatton said, but there was fascination in his eyes.

"If you will read me the figures at the top of the second column . . . " Mr. Gloss stepped back, raising the heavy instrument to eye-level under the light of a wall-sconce, Hatton bent again over the table, his unpracticed eye searching for the figure.

"At the top of the second column," Mr. Gloss repeated encouragingly.

Then he took a swift, cat-like stride, raising as he moved the slim white bar high over his head. When he brought

it down it made a ghostly fan-shaped gleam like a saber stroke. There was a *thunk* as the massive boxwood bit bone, and Hatton's big head plummeted to the table.

MR. GLOSS stepped back, and for some thirty seconds stood in the middle of the room and took note of its every physical detail. The great slide rule hung from his hand. A splotch of blood the size of a dime on its lower edge was large enough to obliterate several score of the minute calibrations. He carried it to the table, returned it to its case, returned the case to the book case top.

Hatton had sagged to one side, his left arm dangling straight, his right outstretched with spread hand on the table top. The large pistol lay a few inches beyond the hand. A puzzling picture, Mr. Hatton reflected, which would give the average detective pause for a few hours at least.

After turning out the lights he went to the hall, closing the study door. Step Three. His face showed none of the relief he felt. It was eager, attentive, as he took his panama, umbrella and pin seal brief case from the wardrobe. He turned out the single light that the woman-by-the-day had left burning in the hall. Outside, the street was just turning dark. He shut the front door and heard the spring lock lick behind him. For a moment he frowned at Hatton's conspicuously expensive convertible, then walked down to it and started the motor.

There was barely room in his modest garage for the gaudy car. He locked it in and returned to his own sedan. At last he was driving fast through the narrow, leafy avenue that led to Northern Boulevard, to Buffalo, to the Pacific, to the estancia of Don José Malletson of Tamaulipas!

It would be perhaps forty-eight hours, perhaps mucch longer, before the misfortune that had overtaken Lance Hatton, Jr., would become known. In that interval Mr. Gloss would vanish. Meanwhile the Plan still stood like Gibraltar, requiring but a single minor adjustment. The pretended start for Philadelphia was useless now. He would skip Trenton; go directly to Albany.

He took the shortest route, across Manhattan via Triboro and George Washington bridge. On the Jersey side, at Englewood, he would garage his car —that is to say, abandon it—and take a bus north on Route 1.

Boulevard, parkway, the amazing new toll bridge over two islands, river and skyline flowed by, scarcely marked by the austere dreamer. More slowly, 125th Street, bright and raucous. Then the leafy elegance of Riverside Drive. He was making good time.

Night had come, and Heart's Desire. What was that figure that had amazed the young man so? It was even larger now. The odds for his ultimate success must be near the 23-million mark. It would be pleasant to compute them, on horseback in Tamaulipas.

Surprisingly soon he was feeding gas up the spiral ramp of the George Washington Bridge. It was his first view of the thrilling span; there had been no time for sightseeing. The immense net-work soared above him like a tremendous mathematical fugue. It went straight to his heart like music.

At the crest of the ramp he straightened out, feeling for the required coin. It was then that he saw the men.

They had been clustered under the floodlights at the toll booth, some hundred yards ahead on his lane. At his approach they strung out in a line

across the way. Police. At least seven of them, and three or four men in civilian clothes. Mr. Gloss, his eyes starting from his head, saw the bright flash of brass buttons and the dull gleam of gun butts.

One of the men stood a little forward from the others, holding some papers in his hands. The others, empty handed, quiet with easy confidence, simply stood waiting for him.

Whatever had gone wrong was too wrong to remedy now. He had forseen everything, provided for everything except what was the figure the young man thought so mad?—except the 23-millionth chance.

Mr. Gloss brought his car to an abrupt stop and raised the small nickeled revolver to his graying head. Then the equation became impossible to solve, for it exploded in a universal roar.

The waiting line of policemen broke at the shot and sprinted to the stalled sedan. A man and woman from the car just behind were before them, peering through the windows.

"Shot himself, I guess," the man said to the patrolman who pushed him aside. "Who is he?"

"How should I know?" the officer grunted. "We were waiting to give him a free fifty-trip ticket. Every millionth car gets one. Beat it, now . . . wait, bud. You in that coupé back of this?"

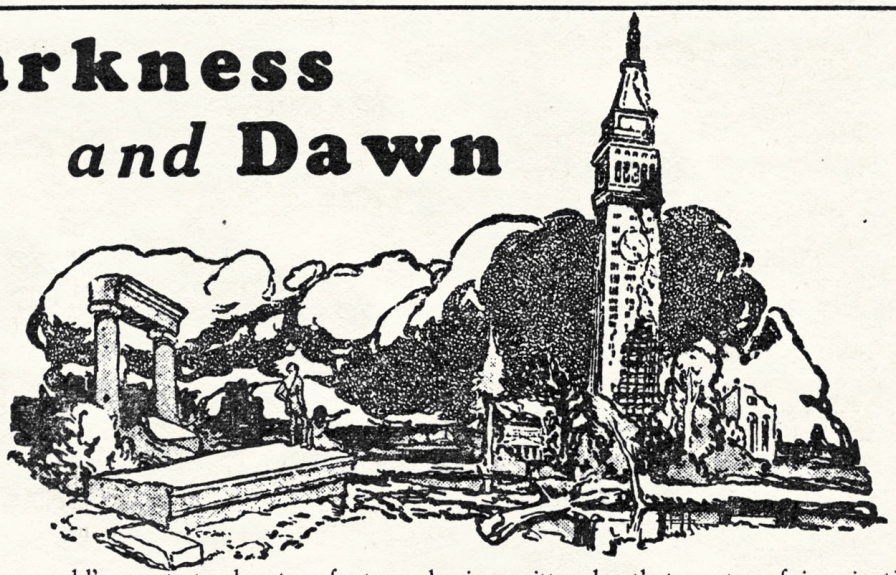
"That's right," the man said.

"Guess you get the free ticket then. This guy was number 23,000,000 but he won't need them. Tell the collector you were next in line.

The man's companion had come up, staring round-eyed.

"Gee, are you lucky!" she said.


**Darkness and Dawn**



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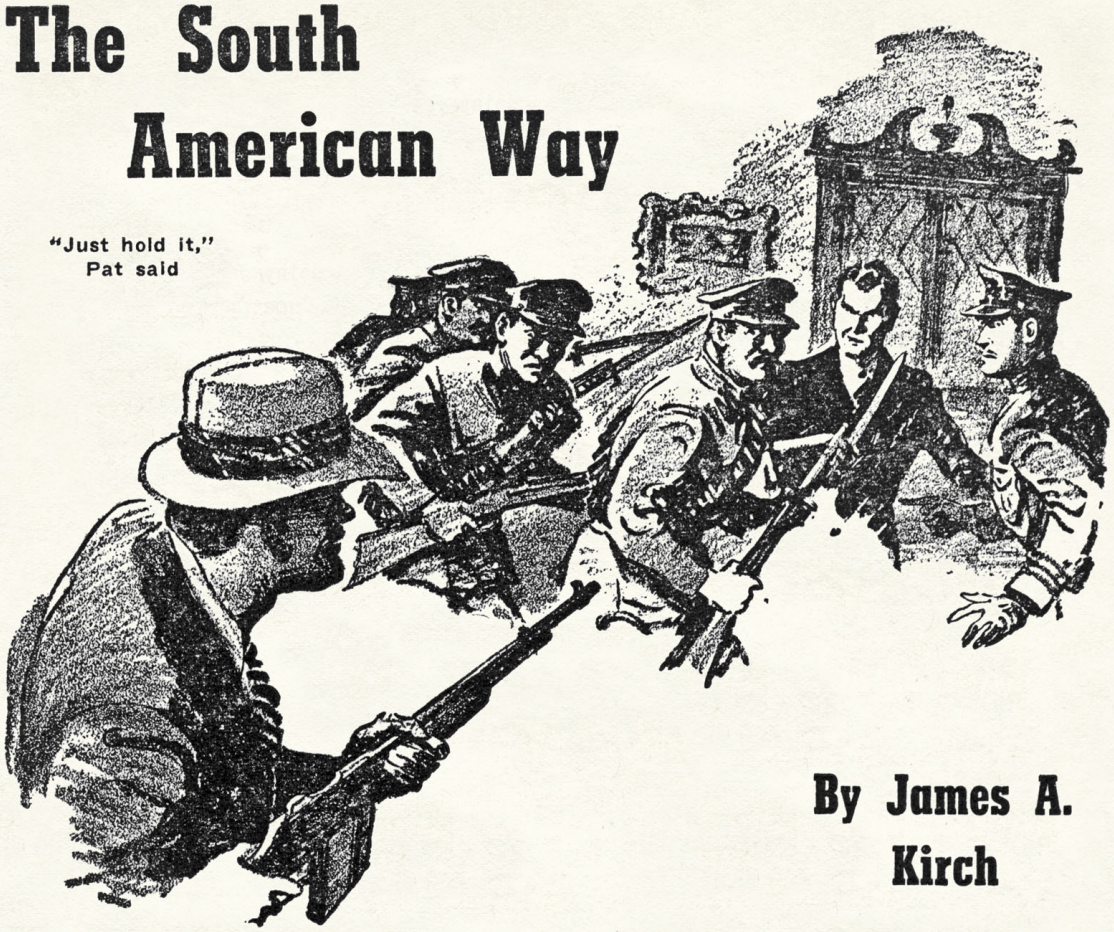
# The South American Way



"Just hold it," Pat said

**By James A. Kirch**

***You got to play it their way: smile, bow—and then run like hell***

THE dark-skinned faces were turned to the speaker's stand; eager, attentive. They weren't missing a word, a gesture. This boy was good.

He should have been good. He was a ranking U. S. Senator, with the earmarks of class. Cordell Hull and Senator Borah, carefully mixed. He knew what to say, all right. But, more important than that, he knew how to say it. It was the inflection the crowd was going by, the smooth measured tones, with just the right note of sincerity. He spoke clearly, forcefully, and they strained their ears to catch his words.

And not one of them, not one guy there, savvied English!

He was finishing now, winding up in a blaze of glory. He said, earnestly, "I can truthfully say that the President of the United States joins me in holding the greatest respect for your country, our sister republic." He bowed briefly and walked to the side of the stage. That was my cue.

I moved in, mis-translating, as before. I said, in Spanish:

"Senator Coran has told you earlier of his own great respect for our candidate, *Señor* Maregas. But now he adds the words of another, the great President of his country. His President, he reports, has only the highest regard for the work of the *Señor*. He realizes that to elect him as Mayor of Los Degas

will be a forward step for the future of this nation. The Senator thanks you."

For a half second, the arena was silent. And in that half second, I saw my plans blowing apart on me. I was afraid I'd laid it on too thick. That they'd realized, somehow, that I was giving them the wrong dope.

I needn't have worried.

They swallowed it, whole hog. They stood on chairs, the full ten thousand of them, and rocked the arena with cheers for the Senator, for the President, and for *Señor* Maregas. Ten thousand workers and farmers of the little South American republic shook the sky above the arena with shouts of approval.

It was a sweet job; one of the neatest campaign sells I'd ever put over. The boys back in Brooklyn would have been proud of me, for that one.

I left them that way, cheering, waving their big hats in the air, shouting the praises of *Señor* Maregas, Candidate for Mayor of Los Degas. The election was in the bag.

Pat McNulty was waiting for me outside, his big head slumped over the wheel of the Rolls. His heavy shoulders straightened as I jerked the door open and he rolled his head, letting his pale blue eyes turn my way. The eyes were red-rimmed, bloodshot from lack of sleep, but they were still eager, questioning.

I said, "It goes, Patrick, it goes," and the big Irishman slid his lips into a grin. "I can hear 'em, me boy" he agreed.

He shook his head, spilling the short locks out over his forehead, turning his eyes toward the sign advertising the next attraction—the monthly bull-fight. "You beat 'em to it, Martin," he said, softly. "You beat 'em to it. Martin Taggar, the bull-thrower." His deep chuckle drifted through the night.

He was getting a helluva kick out of this, Pat was. In fact, he'd been getting a big kick out of the setup ever since we'd wandered into Los Degas and practically walked into managing the mayoralty campaign for *Señor* Maregas.

It was a screwy setup, at that. Me, Martin Taggar, the best campaign seller Brooklyn ever had, on what was meant for a vacation tour of South America. And, because my mother was half-Spanish, and I knew the language backwards, I'd been asked to make a speech at a Los Degas business men's dinner given by *Señor* Valtos, banker and Reform leader.

A speech on good Government. Nice, that. And it was a nice speech.

It was just a step from that to helping handle the campaign of the Reform candidate for Mayor. And another step, a short one, to my being made campaign manager, with Pat McNulty as chief assistant.

A behind-the-scenes manager, sure. It wouldn't've done for a guy like me to've been out in front, running things. But that's how I like it, on the quiet. Once in a while, like this time, I'd step into the picture. They'd needed an interpreter to pass on the Senator's words to the workers, and Martin was right in there, misfilling the bill.

It had been a pretty safe gamble. We could spot the news reporters who spoke English, and we'd steered them away, without much trouble. Which meant that the Senator, poor lad, had swung a few thousand votes our way, without knowing it.

Back home, we'd've laid three bucks apiece on the line for those votes.

PAT was thinking of the same thing as he shot the Rolls in gear and started down the winding street. "Maybe twenty thousand bucks worth, Mar-

tin; twenty thousand bucks worth. And all on the house."

There was dough in this thing, remember that. And where there's dough, you'll find the boys from Brooklyn in there swinging, taking their cut at the ball.

Los Degas is a seaport town, and a red-hot one. You don't touch the customs, I've learned that much. There's a rule down there, and a pretty good one. On anything like that, anything national, the President's outfit get their cut, and the local officials lay hands off. But they get the city stuff, the gambling, the houses, all the local gravy.

And the gravy has meat in it, buddy; plenty of meat. And Pat and me are meat eaters.

We cut back toward the center of the city, driving slowly. We passed a half-dozen of the Civil Guard on the way and waved to them, not even laughing at their pouter-pigeon antics in the tight-fitting red and blue uniforms.

We could've used those boys, could've packed the polling booths with 'em. Except for one thing.

Francisco Deltores was an ex-captain of the Civil Guard. And *Señor* Deltores was the incumbent and the opposition candidate for Mayor. That was the bad angle; that was why we had to slip the kid gloves on, up to the elbows, and play the game like the silk stocking district. That was why we were sitting back, like in Europe, waiting for the other guy to make the first dirty move.

It was a mistake, that. We found out later how bad a mistake it was. Because when those boys moved, they shot the works.

Pat swung the car toward the entrance of the Cabellero Club, pulling up with a flourish. He eased his thick bulk from behind the wheel, tossing the keys to the flunky that jumped on the running board. He swaggered around to the off-side of the car, waiting for me.

The bright lights of the neon sign sparkled against the polished surface of our Rolls, glowing like Christmas bulbs. Inside, cutting through the still Latin night, we could hear the clink of glasses, the shrill sound of laughter, an unchecked burst of song. The Club Cabellero was going full blast.

And it was a nice job, that club. As swanky as the International Casino, air-conditioned, smoothly decorated. A clip joint of the highest type, South American way. It didn't seem right that a smug little louse like Deltores should be getting the gravy from it. Not with times the way they are back in Brooklyn.

They gave us the class treatment. The doorman let his body bend from the hips, the hat check girl let her white teeth flash out at us, the head-waiter broke his back ushering us to a table. It was smoothly done; too smoothly done.

In English, it was the Malarkey.

There was something up. We didn't know what it was, or how it would hit us, but there was oil in the air, waiting for the match to set it off.

Even the waiter who brought us our *Cuba libres* put a little too much service in it. We'd been expected, which was only natural, but there was more than that to it. They were waiting for us, really waiting. I didn't like it; not at all, I didn't like it.

That's where Pat has the edge on me, by a good length. He asks for trouble, red-hot trouble. His specialty is high-class strong arm work, and he's one man who enjoys his job.

He was enjoying himself now. He let his eyes wander around the dance floor, watching the smooth forms sway to the mounting beat of the Rhumba, watching

the rapid movements of the gourd players, and adding the whole thing up, mentally, in dollars and cents.

He leaned across the table toward me, his pale blue eyes bright with ideas. "What a system," he said, softly, in English. "What a system. Feed 'em, wine 'em, dance 'em, and then lead 'em to the slaughter." He paused a moment, calculating, then went on. "With a crowd like this, Martin, you could run an honest wheel and make dough. Think of it, me boy—Patrick McNulty takin' his cut from an honest wheel."

"Easy, Pat," I warned him. "Easy. Deltores cuts this place. And Deltores is still Mayor."

"Today," he agreed, smugly. "Today, Deltores runs the town. Tomorrow, *quien sabe?*" He stopped suddenly, his pale blue eyes darkening, his head jerking slightly to the left.

"The Brownsville gang, Taggar," he whispered.

Without looking, I knew what it was. We'd sensed the oil in the air, felt it the minute we entered the club. This was the match.

I STAYED where I was, my left hand resting on the table, the fingers of my right curled around the rum glass. If there was a blow-off, it was up to Pat to give me three seconds, that's all. Just three seconds in which to start operating. You've got to act casual as hell around those southerners, if you're going to impress them. Until the break comes, that is. Then you move, and you move fast.

*Señor* Deltores was dressed in white dinner clothes—what we'd call a mess jacket in Brooklyn, with a bright red cummerbund around his waist. He cut a nice figure, the *Señor* did, for such a small guy. He cut a nice figure; and he knew it.

He had his buddies with him, two officers of the Civil Guard, and a third man, a fat fellow with glasses. Right at first, I didn't place the fat one.

Deltores and his lieutenants, Gerono and Alegra, came across the dance floor, and the fat one swaggered along beside them. He had a large moon face, with deep valleys under his eyes and dirty yellow teeth that protruded below his upper lip. He was very drunk.

He said, in Spanish, "I heard every word of it, every word. And Taggar's 'translation' was false. A net-work of lies."

They were closing in on us, now, fanned out a little across the dance floor. The music had stopped, the dancing had stopped.

We were the show.

Give your Latin a little drama and he'll drop everything to watch it. Even if it's phoney drama. This particular bit was phoney as hell.

Deltores bowed from the waist, stiffly, too obviously for my money. He had the Spanish habit of rolling his words, letting them flow smoothly from his lips. He said, easily, "*Señor* Ryerson heard your Senator's speech, *Señor* Taggar. He believes you were guilty of mistranslation. He claims you have deceived the people. That would be unwise, *Señor* Taggar." He rolled the "r" in my name, giving it a Spanish sound.

I let my lips smile at him, half rising. Courtesy, the old soap, that's how you play it down there. It's one of the rules of the game. You call a louse the honorable hidalgo, even when you're turning the knife in the wound. Dirty, but that's how they play it. And I was playing it their way.

"The *señor* is drunk, your excellency," I suggested. "The *señor* is generally drunk. He means no harm."

I'd placed the fat man, now. Ryerson, they'd called him. A busted American reporter, drinking himself to the pink elephant stage, picking up a couple of bucks wherever he could find them. Which was all right, too. That was his racket, and no worry of mine. I said, again, "He means no harm," and Ryerson said, "Lies. all lies."

They were waiting for me, then. Mayor Deltores, in his trim white suit, the cumberbund a flash of red around his slim waist, and the two toy soldiers. This was the high-spot. This was where I was supposed to fly off the handle and slam the punk in the jaw. That was all they needed—one move from me. And Martin Taggar would spend election eve and most of the next day in the can. They had it all figured. At least, they thought they had.

So I crossed the play. I stayed where I was leaning against the table, my lips still smiling at them. I said, very softly, "Many people disagreed with Ryerson. And Ryerson is drunk." I shrugged my shoulders and motioned to the rum bottle, suggesting a drink.

For my money, the show was over.

And Deltores figured it my way. He stiffened to attention, clicked his heels, and headed off, across the dance floor. His stooges closed in, following him. Ryerson lagged behind a moment, steadying himself. He announced, loudly, "Lies. All lies," and Pat moved in.

Not touching him, not making a move toward him. Pat knew better than that.

He let his pale blue eyes rest on the reporter for a moment, then leaned back in his chair. To the crowd, he was relaxed, settled; but the guy was really on springs, ready to take off. He said, to Ryerson, "Scram, mug." He said it quietly softly, but there was dynamite in his tone. And Ryerson got the dynamite, all right. He wasn't *that* drunk.

He scrammed.

To me, the blow-off was dead. They'd laid the oil, set for a blast. Then they'd brought Ryerson over as the match to set it off. And we'd stopped Ryerson, killing the party. That's how I saw it.

My mistake was in Ryerson. I had him tagged as the match, but he wasn't, exactly. He was the fuse. A slow fuse.

THE blonde girl moved out across the floor, a red spot bathing her lush figure. The spot shifted to green, yellow, and then back to red again. They were taking no chances on anybody's missing this honey's build.

It was wasted worry.

There were too many curves, too many lines, for the boys to've missed up on it. The little girl was right there with the umph. A little stocky, maybe, a little on the peasant side, but not enough to kill the picture. She was class, right down the line.

She was singing the Russian song they play in the clubs back home—*Dark Eyes*. But she wasn't singing it slowly, the way the Americans warble; not this kid. She was putting fire into it, fire and feeling, combined. It wasn't three-eye league stuff; it was big time. And the girl knew it.

I was watching her, listening to the soft, full tones of her voice, when I should've been listening to Pat. He raised his voice, half shouting the words at me.

"I don't like it, Martin," he said. "I don't like it. It was too easy, that one. They're figurin' somethin'. And when a cabellero starts to figure, watch yourself. They're smart."

"Sure," I agreed, hardly hearing him. "Sure, they're smart. So's this." I nodded my head toward the spot.

The blonde kid had finished her song, and taken the bows. She was moving our way, drifting across the floor. And without those colored lights on her, she was an even better number than I'd figured. It was her way of walking, maybe, or the way she carried herself, her blonde head held firmly erect above the soft movement of her body.

I raised my hand, cutting Pat off, and just sat there, staring at her. I wanted an eyeful. And got it.

She stopped at our table, her full lips curving into a smile, and we got up, fast. She smiled again and then slipped into the chair next to mine. She spoke Spanish, with a slight accent. A Russian accent, though, not English.

She said, "You are *Señor* Taggar?" and then, without waiting for an answer, went on, letting the words melt from her lips, "I am Sanya Girtov. I have been in your country."

I said that was fine, that she had been in our country. I said our country was lucky to have seen her. I almost meant it. She was that good.

She went on, telling me what she had seen in our country. Brooklyn, she had missed. She was very sorry she had missed Brooklyn. I was sorry she had missed Brooklyn, too. I was beginning to wonder. If the girl liked American men—it seemed she did like American men.

"But you are tall, taller and leaner than most of your countrymen. You have the strength of the Russians in your face." Like I told you, this kid was good.

We'd been talking for close to ten minutes before she mentioned Ryerson. That is, she didn't mention him, exactly; she asked me who the drunk was who'd been arguing with us. I told her.

She had trouble with the name. "Riordan?" she asked, softly.

"Ryerson," I told her, clearly. "Ryerson." I raised my voice the second time.

She leaned across the table, her dark eyes suddenly flashing.

"But you must do nothing," she said. Her voice was tense, high-pitched. "You must cause no trouble. You must forget."

I said I didn't intend to cause trouble, but the kid didn't seem to hear me. She went on, her voice rising. "He did not understand. You must forget the matter. You must not harm him!"

Pat sliced his chair toward her, caught her arm. His voice was cold. "We're not hurting him, sugar," he told her. "We're not hurting anybody. If he's your boy friend, okay. Stop worrying."

The girl let her eyes shift to him, shaking her head. "No," she insisted. "No, no, no!" She sat there, staring at us, saying it over and over like a drunk. "No, no no!" So Ryerson was the white haired boy.

We'd had enough. Pat got up, scowling at me, and I followed. We walked to the door slowly, not looking back, wanting to get the hell out of there before we stepped into a worse scene. The limelight was beginning to burn.

At the doorway, I turned and looked back across the room.

The girl was still sitting at our table, her head resting on her arms, her blonde hair spilling out over the cloth. Everybody else in the place was facing me, watching us leave.

I got my hat from the check room and followed Pat outside.

It must have been then, right at that time, while we were on our way to Maregas', that they lit the fuse.

THE hacienda of *Señor* Maregas, a long, low series of buildings, spread out across the hills at the edge of the

city. It huddled tightly to the rough earth, looking cool and peaceful in the hot southern night.

It was cool enough. And, right at first, it was peaceful.

Pat dropped me at the front entrance and swung the car toward the rear, twisting it back under the palms.

*Señor* Maregas answered the door himself, bowing and smiling. He was trying to restrain himself, trying to keep the Latin mask of indifference, but the man was happy, all right. He'd begun to feel that maybe the Reform party was in the lead coming down the home-stretch. And the Reform party meant *Señor* Maregas.

A tall man, taller than most Spaniards, the crest of his snowy hair gave him a quarter inch on me. His head was the type Goya liked, strong, handsome, without being pretty. There were deep creases under his black eyes, shallower lines at the edges of his lips. His hands were the hands of a rider, gaunt and powerful.

The man made an impressive picture; which was one reason he was going to be mayor of Los Degas.

I was the other reason. And we both knew it.

He said, "The news is favorable, my friend. They tell me your Senator made an excellent speech." He bowed again, still smiling, and motioned me ahead of him, into the drawing room.

*Señor* Valtos was waiting for us. Valtos was less excited, more assured. He had just come in from checking the votes among the peasants and workers. He looked like a man riding high with hopes of a victory, and showing it with a cocky self-confidence.

He was small where Maregas was large, large where Maregas was small. A short, stocky body, with a round fat face, and fat little eyes, to go with the face. He was president of the *Banca Estreda* and chief financier of Maregas' campaign.

He said, "It goes well, *Señor* Taggar?"

I said it went fine. I said it looked like a cinch from where I stood. The little banker bobbed his head in agreement.

Maregas said, slowly, "We will owe a great debt for this, *Señor*. We can never repay you." The old oil. I used a little of it myself. I even gave him a bow with it.

"Your election will be my payment, my friend. A liberal government for the people of Los Degas." That wasn't all hooey, either. There's plenty of gravy in a fair administration. Take the Cabellero Club, now. Like Pat had said, even with an honest wheel, that place would make plenty over the nut. There were enough square gambling rackets to keep Taggart & Co. in velvet for life. I wasn't worried about the payment angle.

To tell you the truth, I wasn't worried about any angles. In my book, it looked like another landslide. It was the perfect spot, the night before a clean-up election. A sweet time for a drink. I moved across the room, picked up a bottle of rum from the sideboard, half-filling a jigger glass. I raised the glass to my lips, grinning.

I put it down, fast.

Lieutenant Alegra was standing in the doorway, finger-tips pressed tightly into the seams of his bright trousers. But he wasn't funny, now. Not to me, he wasn't. He had four men behind him, civil guards, and there were bayonets in their carbines. A bayonet would make the Wizard of Oz look tough.

He said, formally, "*Señor* Martin Taggar?"

I didn't say anything. He knew damn well I was Martin Taggar. I just stood

there, watching him, wondering what the play was. I found out.

He took three steps toward me and his guard spread into the room behind him. He bowed to Maregas and the banker, but the boys behind him didn't bow. They were half crouched, bayonets fixed, as if they were ready to spit something.

That something was me.

Maregas said, "What is the—" but that was all he said. Alegra cut him off, sharply. "You are under arrest, *Señor* Taggar. You will come peacefully, no?"

"Yes," I said, softly, "No. What is this? A frame?" I knew damn well it was a frame. I just didn't know how good a one it was. That came later.

A fifth guard came in from the reception room, carrying his shiny carbine casually, an older rifle in his left hand. He held the rifle out to Alegra. It had been found in *Señor* Maregas' gun rack. It did not belong to the Senor. And it had been fired recently. The build-up was on.

Valtos said, "It was not there when—" and then stopped, suddenly, realizing what that meant.

I kept my voice low, quiet. "The charge?" I asked Alegra. I could see the steps, now. The lieutenant bringing the gun with him, planting it in the gun-rack. But it wouldn't stick. I told him it wouldn't stick and asked again what the charge was. And the guy smiled at me.

He recited it, practically. A sing-song speech, that must've been rehearsed. "We have witnesses who heard your argument with Ryerson this evening. And another, one who tried to persuade you not to harm the *Señor,* when you threatened him. A party who warned us, but too late, that you had sworn revenge on your countryman."

He paused, getting the full drama out of it, then went on. "The body was discovered on the road here from El Cabellero, a bullet through the back. *Señor* Ryerson is dead. The charge is murder."

It clicked, then. The pieces started building up, mapping the lay-out for me. And it wasn't a pretty lay-out.

The little Russian. Sanya, the blonde who had missed Brooklyn. Who'd tricked me into shouting Ryerson's name across the table at her, and then gone into phoney hysterics about my hurting him. I could remember the words, now: "No, no, no! You must not hurt him. You must not!" And I got a flash of those words being repeated by the two hundred people who'd heard them in the Cabellero. Being repeated before a Los Degas judge, with a jury hand-picked by Deltores.

I'd been wrong. It *would* stick.

I said, "So Ryerson was just the tie-in, eh? You staged that scene to fix the motive. And then you burned him, for the blow-off." I said it in English, not thinking, and nobody understood me.

Maregas cut in, frowning. "*Señor* Taggar is American. I will communicate with his consul," and I shook my head at him. The American consul would like my mixing in local politics, I didn't think. He'd be one helluva help to me.

"I'll handle this," I told him, and Alegra said, "You will come peacefully?"

That was a laugh. He knew it was a laugh. I'd be a sweet sucker to let them get me in the jug with a charge like that against me. For that matter, it looked like I'd already been the sucker.

I said, quietly, "You'll *take* me, buddy." I had it all figured. Alegra was

going out, and out fast. With him as a shield, I might be able to get by the guards. It was worth a try.

I didn't get a chance to try it.

HE WAS smart, that guy was. He shifted to the right, out of line of his buddies. He said, crisply, "Arrest him!" and the guard started forward, bayonets fixed.

This was the pay-off. Or damned close to it.

Pat said, from behind them, "Chop, chop, chop!" He said it in English, not caring whether they got it or not. They didn't have to get it. They could see it.

He was half lounging in the doorway, an automatic rifle resting in the crook of his elbow. A nice new rifle, latest model. It belonged to the Los Degas Civil Guard. Or, it had belonged to them.

He said, again, "Chop, chop, chop!"

Alegra took one step toward him a doubtful step.

Pat swung the muzzle of the gun slightly, covering him. "I wouldn't," Pat said, easily, "Not if I was you, I wouldn't."

He didn't.

I moved across the room next to Pat, staying out of the sweep of the rifle. I said, "The guns, my friends. The guns. Drop them."

They were watching Alegra, waiting for a sign from him. They looked almost crazy enough to try to rush the chatter gun. That would have been messy. And Alegra evidently knew it would have been messy.

"Drop them," he ordered, dully. The chatter gun was centered on him, right for the mid-section. "Drop them," he repeated. They did.

Pat swaggered forward, into the room, forcing them back. He stopped near the pile of guns and I scooped them up, emptying the magazines. I kicked the empty guns toward the wall and nodded to Pat. We moved back to the door.

Pat stood there a minute, a step behind me. His pale blue eyes were bright, his lips were pressed in a thin, white line. But the guy was enjoying himself. Really enjoying himself. He said, lightly, "Little boys who play soldiers should take care of their toys." He patted the butt of the gun, letting his lips smile at them. "Come over and see it sometime," he suggested.

Then we were outside, running through the night.

The Rolls was in back, heading for the dirt road that ran behind Maregas' place. And the motor was running. That guy thought of everything.

I shot the car ahead, speeding her up, getting my foot down to the floorboard, jouncing across the rough ground. I was trying to put as much distance as possible between us before they got on the trail. I felt Pat's hand tugging at my sleeve and turned my head his way.

"Easy, Martin," he told me. "Take it easy. There won't be any chase. Not right away, anyhow. Not until they reconnect the ignition. And that's going to be hard, with six inches of wire gone." Like I said, that guy thought of everything.

And he was still thinking, twenty minutes later, as we swung the car in close to a wharf, at the tip of the harbor. "We can pull this palace down a ways," he suggested, "park it half under that wharf there, and leave it to rot. It's built high enough to run in a little water and we can squeeze it back far enough to cover it. Look."

We were at the far end of the harbor, out of range of the lights. It was an undredged, disused strip, with two crumbling old piers and a strip of sand running between them. We slid the

Rolls down the embankment, parked her in under the wharf.

PAT dropped the chatter gun over the side into the six inches of water. "A lucky find," he said, grinning. "Damn lucky. I knew they always carried one in their cars, and I saw the boys march inside, each carting just his own carbine. I figured there'd be a tommy-gun there. And there was. But I don't like the damn things."

He reached forward, into the panel safe, and pulled out the two thirty-eights we carried, holding one out to me. "There's a boat," he said, slowly, "pullin' out tomorrow night, late. If we could get on board her now, somehow, and sit tight, we'd maybe get out of this damn mess."

"They'll search it, Pat," I told him. "From stem to stern. They're sure to."

"Yeah," he agreed. "Yeah. They will. These guys play too rough for my money. Imagin' knocking off Ryerson just so they could drop it in your lap." He shook his big head, wonderingly. "Dutch Schultz was a sissy," he pointed out. "These guys play for real. But it don't seem right, knockin' the guy off for nothin'. Seems they could've found a better way to fix your wagon."

He had something there. I wasn't quite sure what it was, but he had something. He went on, trying to figure it out.

"Maybe you could sell a jury a bill of goods on that idea, huh? Convince 'em that Ryerson was killed just to frame you."

"Maybe," I told him. I knew darn well I couldn't, and so did Pat. He was just talking. Hell, if it didn't listen good enough for *us*, how would a jury feel about it?

That's what I thought.

There was something here, though. Something I couldn't quite get, that would tie the whole thing up, give me a chance to get my teeth into the deal. But I couldn't place it.

I said, "It listens screwy, boy. It adds up all right, but it listens screwy. The motive is wrong. This guy Ryerson was an American. There's dynamite in that. They could've framed me with a guy nobody gave a damn about just as easy. There's a reason, Pat, and when I find that reason, we'll split this wide open."

"Sure," Pat said, "Sure. You'll find the reason. But if it takes longer than tomorrow night, I'll be way out in the ocean, buddy. And I'm not kidding."

I jerked open the door, balanced on the runningboard, and pushed off, jumping to the lower beams. I pulled myself to the top and stood there until Pat moved up beside me.

They don't have the sort of dark down there that we're used to. They have a misty, soft blackness that makes strange shadows out of the buildings, out of the piled heaps of bananas waiting for shipment. It lends an air of stealth to everything—there's secrecy in the quick glimpse of a man going down the street at night for cigarettes. That's why their women get away with so much in the mystery line—and that's why I was hoping we'd get away with wandering around unchallenged. If we were challenged, we were through.

Pat said, "So my idea's lousy. And yours?"

"The dame," I pointed out. "The little Russian cutie who missed Brooklyn. Sanya. She's got some chips in this."

"And damn pretty ones," Pat agreed. "You lay off the dame, Taggar. She's trouble."

"*Your* trouble," I suggested. "I figured on you to contact the dame. Me,

I'm going to be busy, checking on Ryerson. So, if you could pick up the cookie, find out anything, and meet me later down near Ryerson's place, maybe we could work this thing out. But if you'd rather skip her . . ."

He cut in fast. "She knows something, Taggar. Like you say, she maybe knows something. We'll play it your way." That was the Irish in the guy. He was whistling softly to himself as he walked away through the mist.

I stood there a minute after he'd left, trying to add it up.

The figures were all there, the reasons for the frame, the chance for the frame, the build-up to it. And, finally, the shot down the center that left me sitting behind the eight ball. The figures were there, all right. But the answer was wrong.

Ryerson was the catch, Ryerson was big stuff, in spite of being a bum. It was probably the only time he'd been big, and it wasn't his fault. But, like him or not, he was a Yank. And knocking off a Yank in Los Degas, to win an election, smelled to high Heaven.

The thing is, there were ten thousand natives around there who'd've made nice stiffs. They could've framed me with any of them, as I saw it. And it would have been strictly local stuff.

That's what smelled—badly. There was another catch, too, a small one. The whole damn thing had been too pat, too smooth. And yet they'd gambled a little; gambled that we'd be on our way to Maregas' place, and the time element would fit for the murder. If they'd gambled on that, maybe they'd gambled on a few other angles, too.

That was the straw. That's what I was counting on. That they'd gone through the movements, put on the show, and, somehow, slipped up on it.

It was a pretty thin straw.

I FINISHED my cigarette and walked slowly away from the wharf, heading toward the end of town. I cut past the loads of bananas heaped on the loading platforms, past a shipment of rum cases ready for export, and a long line of dirty brown boxes labelled *Maregas, via Bancestra.* I wondered how the *Señor* and Valtos felt about the election now. They'd figured we were in, coasting in. By this time, they probably knew we were sleigh-riding.

There was a guard standing near the end of Maregas' shipment, a cigarette cupped in his hand. He saw me, all right, but he wasn't interested. He wasn't interested in seeing anybody who might report him for smoking on duty. That meant the alarm wasn't out yet. That was my first break.

I cut back, through the tiers of boxes, coming out on El Casa street. I walked three blocks south without seeing a cop. At the fourth block, my luck ran out.

He was an efficient guy, or maybe just bored with standing around. He stiff-legged it across the street toward me, carrying his gun loosely in his right hand. I saw the gun, all right; but I saw more than that. I got a flash of ten little pouter-pigeons lined up with carbines pointed my way, and Alegra popping out the order to fire. And I got another flash, a quick one, of the South American buzzard, blacking out the sun in search of his meat. That was me. Buzzard meat.

I shifted my right hand to my pocket, loosened the safety catch on my gun. If the guy stopped me, it meant trouble. Serious trouble. They drag you before the judge down there, to figure the right ransom. So that even if this one didn't know the heat was on me, he'd be pretty sure to put it on.

If I let him. I didn't figure on letting him.

He broke out of the stiff-legged walk, speeding his pace. He had both hands on the carbine now, getting ready to flag me down.

That's when the dame came out of a doorway on my right, falling into step ahead of me. She was tall, dark, with a certain heavy attractiveness, a little on the shabby side in clothing. I'd never seen her before, but I'd seen enough like her. She was my out.

I moved up alongside her, let my left hand catch her on the elbow. I said, "Which way, *Señorita?*" I was still tight, tense. The palm of my right hand was slimy with sweat against the gun butt, but I was still holding the gun. The click of the officer's boots sounded close behind me. If I'd been wrong about the dame. . . .

I hadn't. She said something I didn't get and pressed against my arm, swinging us around. We almost smacked the Civil Guardsman as we turned. It was that close. I let my left eye close in a wink.

It was the wink that did it, I guess. That and the fact that he'd figured my reasons for wandering around where I was, and no longer had me tagged as a crook. He said, *"Buenos Noches, Señor,"* accenting the first word, and just stood there, half grinning, as we walked by him.

He was still watching us when the girl led me into a dingy white patio halfway up the block and stopped before a door leading in off the courtyard. I shoved a dollar bill in her hand and told her I'd be back in twenty minutes, with more. I waited until she'd closed the door on the inside and then slipped out the back alley, onto the street behind.

Before the twenty minutes were up, I was at Ryerson's house.

He'd lived in a four room, dobe-type building, evidently alone. I pushed open the door, felt my way into the blackness. The rooms had that slightly damp, musty smell that comes from bad ventilation and stonework combined, an odor that gave a clammy touch to the silence. But it was the silence that I liked. It meant that I hadn't come too late.

And my run-in with the cop had taught me one thing. If I was going to break this case at all, keep myself at the right end of the rifles, it was going to have to be done fast. Hiding out in Los Degas was a hell of a lot harder than in Brooklyn.

I went through the living room in a hurry, into the small room at the rear. It was fitted out as a study, with books lining the wall, an easy chair, a typewriter, and a heavy mahogany desk. It was the desk I was after.

And it was in the desk that I found what I wanted.

An American bank-book, showing deposits over the last six months totaling close to eight thousand dollars!

That was the beginning. That was the first sign that I was right. The second sign was a honey.

A little brown book, with figures. Figures and notations.

*2,000 tons of scrap iron. America. Sept. 25.*
*150 cases farm machinery. America. Sept. 17.*
*Textiles. England. Value $5,000. Sept. 15.*

There was more of it, seven pages of comments and notations.

And at the head of each page were the words: *Maregas, via Bancestra.*

I fanned through the book and a few loose papers fell out, scattering over the floor. Copies of invoices, made out to Maregas.

That was the works. But it was enough.

It was adding up, now. The picture

was focusing, every detail falling into line.

Ryerson getting in to hear the speech. The timing of the murder, while we were on our way to Maregas'. And the gun. That was important, that gun.

It was going to turn into ten shiny carbines. Ten shiny carbines, waiting the order to fire. Just the way they'd planned it. Except—the guy at the wrong end of the guns wasn't going to be Martin Taggar.

At least, that's how I figured it, before I called Maregas. I figured from here in it was just coasting. Which shows how wrong you can be.

It took me five minutes to locate the phone and another five to get Maregas' house, and, when I finally got it, it was no dice. Maregas and Valtos were both out.

But the houseboy had news for me. Big news.

A girl had been there, looking for me. She'd spoken to him, left a message for *Señor* Maregas. She wished to confess, she had said. She had been deceived, tricked into a murder plot. The houseboy did not understand what was meant.

I JUST stood there, holding the phone in my hand, not moving. I understood, all right. Sanya was a pawn, an unwilling pawn. She'd been ready enough to play the game on an election gag—to create a scene that would drive home Ryerson's argument with me.

And she'd sold her way into murder, without realizing it.

I said, softly, "The *Señorita* is there now?" and the houseboy's "No," seemed too flat over the wire to me.

"She has gone,' he told me. "The *Señorita* has gone, and *Señor* Maregas is searching for her. He spoke of taking care of her."

"Yeah," I said, in English. "Yeah. He'll take care of her. If he can." I let the receiver drop back on the hook, just standing there, taking it straight.

Like I'd figured, we were on the homestretch. The only trouble was, I'd been left at the post.

I got out of there, fast. Half-way down the block, I saw the low, choppy outlines of a Reynault. Empty. Unlocked. And not a pouter pigeon in sight.

I burned that thing to the Cabellero Club, practically lifted it off the road. I had only one idea in mind, then—to get there, and get there fast. There was a card at the side entrance, showing Sanya Girtov's suite as the third floor. I made the stairs in a running climb, my right hand covering my automatic. I was betting I was too late.

And I was, actually.

*Señor* Maregas was standing in a corner, near the girl. His back was toward me, but in the dim light I could see the horror stamped on the girl's face; a horror that meant only one thing to me.

I said, "All right, Maregas."

He turned slowly, his hands held waist high, and before he'd come completely around I realized I'd been partly wrong. The *Señor* didn't have a gun out. That meant the show was mine.

I said, again, "All right, Maregas," and the old gentleman shook his head at me. His voice was low, troubled.

"It is too bad," he said, softly. "It is too bad."

"Sure," I told him. "Sure. It's too bad. For you." I kept the gun on him, not moving. I was taking no chances, or thought I was. "It's been a nice racket," I admitted. "A sweet game while it lasted. You run as Reform candidate. But you don't want a Reform government. You can't afford one. You can't

afford anything that may cut into your deal. There was plenty of gravy here, Maregas; but you boys have been pouring it too thick."

Maregas said, "You are making a mistake, *Señor*. You are making a terrible mistake." He said it as if he really meant it.

I grinned at him. For my money, the old boy had nerve. And his cheating the government was no worry of mine. That was his cross, not Martin Taggar's.

But a man had died. I reminded him that a man had died, and he said, slowly, "You are wrong, *Señor*. Very wrong."

"Right," I told him, shortly. "I'm wrong. But add it up. Ryerson was blackmailing you, and he had the goods. You'd been cheating the customs on imports from abroad. That's no local graft, Maregas—that's cutting in on the government. And it's serious. You couldn't let that come out. You had to get rid of Ryerson and at the same time make sure a new administration didn't come into power." I hesitated a moment, then went on.

"That was funny, your not wanting a new administration. But even with you as Mayor it would have been dangerous. You had a deal with Deltores, and you knew his men were okay. But you'd've had to appoint Reform party members in positions of authority if you'd won the election, and that would've killed your game. It was a bad spot."

He was standing there, not moving, half in front of Sanya, shaking his head slightly at the end of each sentence. That burned me up. I gave the rest of it to him cold.

"You and Deltores arranged the frame with the girl, Sanya. She stepped into it, not knowing it was a murder play. And then you killed Ryerson, throwing it on me. You're the one who knew Pat and I would be coming to your place tonight, right after the Cabellero. You're the one who gave Ryerson the dope on my speech. And you're the one who planted that gun outside, in your gun rack. At first, I figured Alegra had brought it himself—that was dumb figuring. But when I remembered that Pat had seen them come into the building, with no extra gun, I realized where the slip was. It had to be you, Maregas—there's no one else who fits the picture."

The *Señor* let his lips half smile at me, a weary, incomplete smile. He said, "You forget—"

"Valtos!" The voice behind me was clear, sharp.

I started around, fast, then froze. I let the gun drop from my hand, not thinking. That was dumb, dropping the gun. I should have made the move then, and taken the gamble. But I couldn't move. I just stood there, staring at him.

The little banker was half crouched in the doorway, a fat pistol clutched in his right hand. He was holding it like a pig-sticker, thrusting it out at me. But that didn't matter. It was pointed my way, and it was too close to miss.

This was the business.

He said, softly, "You forget Valtos. The banker. The man who financed Maregas' campaign, who has financed all the reform campaigns. You forget that I also financed his business, that his shipments cleared through my house, *Banca Estreda,* or *Bancestra.* You have the music right, the melody right, but you have forgotten the words." His pink little mouth was pursed in a grin, but the dark eyes were cold, lifeless. "You would have guessed it, in time, perhaps. But now, it is too late."

I didn't say anything. There wasn't anything to say. I'd busted the hand,

wide open. I'd had all the cards, right out in front of me, and I'd played it wrong. Me, the smart boy from Brooklyn.

Valtos said, again, "It is too late. He seemed to be enjoying himself, gloating over us. He let his eyes shift to Maregas and bowed slightly. "You would have made an excellent Mayor, *Señor*. But you will also make an excellent corpse." He was rolling the words over in his mouth now, hopping himself up with them, the way some guys do with dope. He needed a lift, a lift to give him nerve enough to squeeze the trigger, and he was getting it that way.

He was getting most of it from Sanya. He was that bad. His eyes had passed over Maregas, were caressing the girl. Not with warmth, but with a queer, sharp intensity. Her face was white, but her soft green eyes were still steady. He watched her a second, watched her lean stiffly against the wall, hating him with her eyes. When he spoke, his voice was thick:

"You were willing to stage a show to injure Taggar. But when Death stole the show, you attempted to run. It is fitting that Death should stop your flight." A pretty idea, that.

Nobody had said anything. We just stood there, watching him, waiting for it. It was his party.

That is, right up to a certain point, it was his party. Right up to the spot when he got ready to squeeze the trigger. And then, Martin Taggar wasn't going down like a scarecrow.

YOU could tell from his eyes. You could see the pupils narrow like a cat's, tightening up with the rest of his body, too tense to move. He kept them on the girl, drinking in her beauty, and then, suddenly, the pupils spread out, relaxing.

This was it.

I moved toward him, fast. I wanted to get my hands on his neck, just for a second. And I didn't give a damn how many slugs I had in me before I reached him, as long as I got there.

The thing was, I couldn't do it.

His first bullet caught me in the shoulder, slamming me back against the wall. There was no pain. Just a sudden smack that threw me across the room.

I came forward again, heaving myself at him. I didn't care how Maregas went out, or how the girl went out. I was going down swinging, or not at all.

I went down, swinging.

His pig-sticker way of holding the gun made it hard for him, and easier for me. Not enough easier, that was all.

I felt the bullet go through my leg this time, clean through. And my shoulder started aching. I remember thinking it was funny my shoulder should start aching from a bullet in the leg, and then I was pushing myself forward, trying to get to my feet.

There wasn't a chance.

He leaned over me, poking the gun in my chest. He said, in Spanish, "Pig!" and then his eyes widened again, ready for the trigger squeeze.

Pat shot him three times from the doorway. Before the guy could even move, before we'd realized he was in the room, Pat started triggering his automatic.

His body jerked forward at the first shot, the knees buckling into my face. He straightened, his eyes opening wide, and the second shot doubled him up again. He tried to turn, taking the gun out of my face, swinging it toward Pat. The last shot caught him in the side, under the shoulder, and he stopped trying to turn and spilled out over the floor. His feet kicked once, twice, and

his eyes fluttered before they closed. He didn't move again.

I leaned over him, grinning. "Pig," I said, shrilly. "Pig, pig, pig!" I put my right hand down on the floor to brace myself while I looked at his face and my hand slid out from under me, letting me flatten across the rug. The pain walloped me once, behind the eyes, and then stopped walloping me.

I was out, cold.

THERE'D been a lot done before I came to. A thin-faced doctor towered over me, lips pursed in a tight smile.

"His condition is not serious," he was saying, importantly. "Flesh wounds, and not dangerous. It is fortunate I was able to treat them so soon."

Pat was behind him, his chubby face twisted into a grin. His thin blue eyes were jumping nervously, but at the doctor's words they stopped jumping and centered on me.

"Boy," he said, softly, "Boy, you're nuts."

"Yeah," I agreed. "That's me. Nuts. I had it figured for *Señor* Maregas. I never thought of Valtos. That was dumb."

Maregas moved closer, shaking his head. His strong face was still taut with shock, his gaunt hands trembled slightly. "It was a natural error," he said. "A natural error. Everything pointed to me. I would as soon have suspected myself as *Señor* Valtos." He stopped a moment, considering, then went on.

"I have been in touch with the President's office. There will be a special detail of his staff here by tomorrow night. The election will be postponed, pending investigations. Meanwhile, though, the City will be strictly regulated, with all gambling houses closed. We have won our victory, *Señor.*"

I didn't get it. Right at first, I didn't get what he meant.

Pat got it, though. He swung on the *Señor,* savagely. His voice was cold. "You mean," he grated, "you mean to tell me they're going to *close up* this town? That there won't be any clubs, any gambling?"

The *Señor* nodded, happily. "Under the military government, the city will be strictly run. After that, a Reform party should win, once Deltores has been exposed. The days of profiteering in Los Degas are over." He said it again, relishing the though, "Over. Finished."

I was getting it, now. Now that the game was over, now that we'd won, I was beginning to find out *what* we'd won. This guy meant business. He was a real reformer. And I was finding it out *now!*

I twisted my head toward the doctor, forcing a grin. "I can move, eh, *Señor?* A boat trip?" The doctor nodded gravely.

I turned toward Pat, not saying anything. I didn't have to say anything. Pat figured it, all right. He was way ahead of me on this thing. He had the phone in his hand, was giving the operator the travel agency's number. He hesitated, clapping his hand over the mouthpiece. His head shifted a little, toward Sanya.

"Two?" he asked. "Two tickets?"

Well?

I'd been a sucker all the way through the damn mess. And the dame would be a hit in Brooklyn. There was a chance of squeezing her in Manny Davis' place, with a 10 per cent cut for her manager. It was a business proposition, strictly business.

"Make it three," I told him, wearily, "Make it three."

And it wasn't a half bad idea, at that.


ILLUSTRATED
CRIMES
by STOOKIE ALLEN
The TALKING SHOES
IT WAS CLOSING TIME IN THE CINCINNATI SHOE STORE OF MORRIS HOCKFIELD AND HIS WIFE MARIE, ON FEB. 5, 1935. THE GIRL MRS. HOCKFIELD HAD BEEN WAITING ON, LEFT. MR. HOCKFIELD'S CUSTOMER FINISHED LACING A PAIR OF NEW OXFORDS, DREW A GUN AND ANNOUNCED: "THIS IS A STICKUP!" WHEN MRS. HOCKFIELD SCREAMED THE ROBBER SHOT THEM BOTH!
FOR CLUES POLICE HAD: THE SLAYER'S OLD SHOES, THE FACT THAT HE HAD FLED WEARING A NEW PAIR SIZE 7½, AND THAT THE MURDER BULLETS CAME FROM A .38 CALIBER S.&W. REVOLVER. A DRAGNET BROUGHT IN WEARERS OF NEW BLACK OXFORDS FOR QUESTIONING — BUT THE KILLER HAD ESCAPED.
DETECTIVE GEORGE SCHATTLE CONSULTED A SHOE EXPERT WHO SUBJECTED THE OLD SHOES TO TESTS, THEN ANNOUNCED: "LOOK FOR A YOUNG MAN, ABOUT 6 FEET TALL, 160 POUNDS, A HARD DRINKER AND BROKE."
BELIEVING THE KILLER A RESIDENT DUE TO THE EASY ESCAPE, DETECTIVES COMBED THE SECTION AND LEARNED SUCH A MAN HAD TRIED TO SELL A .38 S.&W. AT A BAR. HE SAID HE HAD JUST TRADED A RADIO FOR IT AT A PARTY.
THE PARTY WAS TRACED THROUGH CHECKING BEER DELIVERIES.


THE HOSTESS OF THE PARTY STATED THAT ONE NORMAN PEACOCK, WHO ANSWERED THE MURDERER'S DESCRIPTION, HAD BROUGHT A RADIO BUT ANOTHER GUEST HAD TAKEN IT AWAY. THE LATTER, FOUND, ADMITTED THE SWAP OF THE .38. AT PEACOCK'S ADDRESS IT WAS LEARNED HE HAD VANISHED ON THE NIGHT OF FEB. 5. AN EX-CON, HIS RECORD PROVIDED FINGERPRINTS. THE SHOE EXPERT HAD HIT HIS HEIGHT EXACTLY AND HIS WEIGHT WITHIN 7 POUNDS!
WANTED
MURDER
PEACOCK
WANTED CIRCULARS WERE SENT OUT AT ONCE. AN UNANSWERED TELEGRAPHIC REQUEST TO A RELATIVE FOR MONEY SENT DETECTIVES TO CRAWFORDSVILLE, IND., UNDER THE ASSUMPTION PEACOCK WOULD TRY TO SELL THE MURDER GUN. HE HAD; THEY FOUND IT IN A HARDWARE STORE.
INSPECTOR WILLIAM McMAHON SAN FRANCISCO
INSPECTOR GEORGE ENGLER SAN FRANCISCO
PEACOCK WAS APPREHENDED IN SAN FRANCISCO A FEW MONTHS LATER. CREDITED WITH 52 ROBBERIES IN A YEAR, HE ADMITTED HE HAD BEEN FIRST ARRESTED AT THE AGE OF 9 -- FOR ROBBING A CHURCH! HE PLEADED GUILTY TO THE HOCKFIELD MURDERS AND WAS ELECTROCUTED.
Peacock

# In the Bag


*A Happy McGonigle Story*

## By Paul Allenby

EVEN an innocent pastime like reading the evening paper can mean trouble when my pal, Happy McGonigle, is around. This evening I am reading the *Gazette* and, for once, I am not paying my usual close attention to the racing results, because I have a job in mind and there is something which is interesting to me on this particular page.

Happy is a kibitzer reader. He does not enjoy a newspaper if he has to hold it in his own mitts. He likes to rest his chin on your shoulder while he reads. So, there we are. Me, I am interested in a sale of suitcases—yes, suitcases—because, with this job I have figured out, we need something to carry our stuff out in.

Something on the same page is very interesting indeed to my dopey pal, Happy McGonigle, because when I try to turn the page, he says:

"Hold it a minute, Blackie. I am not through as yet. You are not very polite, I must say so."

I give him a dirty look out of the side of my good eye, and I snap back, sarcastic like: "Okay, Mr. Emily Post, you should know—especially what it

says about reading over a citizen's shoulder, when you do not pay for the paper yourself."

I give him the paper. I see all I want to. There is a sale at Gilroy's Department Store on suitcases—genuine, imported pigskin traveling bags for only five ninety-five—and I am planning to get one. I do not think they are imported, but they are nice looking and no one, particularly the cops, will think that ten grand worth of rocks is going to be in such a nice, respectable looking suitcase.

And ten grand worth of rocks is what I am looking forward to when Happy and me finish the job I plan for a week from now. The insurance company will probably pay out that much to Mrs. H. Ponsonby Gillingwater, who now owns these same rocks, when it is found that some certain smart citizens have heisted them on a certain night. Only, I have things worked out so the cops will have not one single idea indeed that said smart citizens are Happy McGonigle and his very smart partner, me, Blackie Roberts.

I find from long experience that it is not a good thing to tell Happy too much about plans in advance. It is enough to say: "Such and such a night we do a job, Happy. Do not make any other plans for such and such a night." And usually we make out all right—well, except in some certain cases you know about already.

So I tell Happy just that much and he gives me a nod while he goes on reading the paper. I add that I am going out and for him to meet me back here at the hotel for supper later. I do not say I am going out to pick up one of these genuine, imported pigskin suitcases, because I see no reason to burden his feeble mind with such details. Anyhow, he is not paying any attention to me. I leave him, still reading the paper.

It is only a short walk to Gilroy's Department Store and I have no more than the usual trouble with floorwalkers and such flunkeys before I am at the right counter. A big lug with a beard looks me up and down and decides that it will not hurt the reputation of Gilroy's Department Store if he takes my five ninety-five for one of these extra-special genuine, imported pigskin suitcases.

He figures me for a cash customer and he is busy making out his sales slip when I cross him all up by saying: "Send that C. O. D."

He gives me a dirty look but I got him, so I give him the name and stuff and finally I leave, happy that I am one up on the bearded gent. It is my first and only victory over a sales clerk. I am feeling very happy when I finally get back to the hotel. It makes me feel no less happy after I make a couple of stops on my way at certain gin mills on the way.

When I am back in our room, I do not find Happy, but there is a note for me in his very best Fourth grade script: "Blackie," it reads, "I may perhaps be a little late. I am having a date with Terpsichore." That's all.

Well, once it was a phony Russian countess . . . so now he has to take up with a Greek, or something. I decide, because my mood is a very happy one indeed, that after all Happy is entitled to some fun. But I wonder is this Terpsichore gal a gold digger, or maybe a trouble maker, or something?

I FALL asleep waiting and, by some consequence . . . or maybe it is a very handy rye bottle . . . I do not awake until the next A. M. I do not even hear Happy when he comes back

from his date with this gal with the funny name.

I am awake very early indeed for me. I do not feel so good, and I am one of those guys who likes company at such a time. So I wake Happy up. Do I care whether he likes it or not? That's right, I do not.

"How was the date, pal?" I ask.

He nods very sleepy like. "Oh, fine. Just fine . . . at first," he answers me.

"What do you mean at first?" I ask. "You do not mean you get fresh later and she lays one on your puss, maybe?"

"Oh, no, Blackie, nothing like that. Only it is very difficult to do. . . ."

I look at him. I wonder is he kidding me this early in the morning. "Sounds very interesting," I say, "Do go on. So you have some difficulty after a while . . . why?"

"She says I should relax," Happy says. "I should not be so tense."

I hold up my hand. "Wait, Happy," I say, "I do not get you the second time, yet."

"Well," says Happy, "Mademoysl Nanette is a graceful person . . . but I am not light on the feet . . . her feet, in fact."

Now he has me on the ropes. "Mademoysl Nanette?" I ask. "What happens to Terpsichore?"

Happy gives me a laugh which I do not like. "I see you are a bit befuddled, Blackie," he says. "Nothing happens to Terpsichore."

I nod. "So it is a double date!—What's the matter, is not one gal enough for you . . . at a time?"

"There is only one gal, Blackie," he says, "Terpsichore was a gal, but she is not any more."

I look around for the rye bottle. Maybe there is a snort left, because right now I need one.

"So she is not a gal no more," I say. "What is she now . . . and don't give me none of that scientific stuff?"

"She is a figure of speech," he says.

Now where am I? I look at him, again trying to figure out if he is maybe handing me a rib. "How do you go about having a date . . . with a figure of speech?"

He laughs again. I am ready now to let him have a right to the chin. "I meant by my note that I was going dancing. There is no such person as Terpsichore. She was a goddess of dancing back in the ancient Greek days. My date was really with Mademoysl Nanette. See?"

I DO NOT. Not right off the bat, but I finally figure it out. Happy means he had a date with Mademoysl Nanette—whoever she is—and they go dancing. I ask him why he does not say so in plain language . . . even plain Brooklynese.

"You have no feeling for nicety of speech," is the way he answers me.

I am dressing when I notice the suitcase over in the corner.

"I see it came," I say to Happy.

He looks at me blank like. "You feel all right, Blackie?" he asks me.

"Sure. I am referring to the genuine, imported pigskin suitcase over in that corner . . . and don't tell me there is not one there!"

"Oh, yes, Blackie, there is one. Nice, isn't it? I—"

"I am glad you like it," I break in. "Cost only five ninety-five and we will need it for the job I tell you about last night."

Happy shakes his head. "Oh, no, we do not use that suitcase, Blackie. I need that for my dancing clothes."

"Dancing clothes? What's the matter with your blue serge? It is all right . . . maybe the shine will not show. We use

that suitcase for the job, and no arguments. I buy it for that and that is what it is getting used for. I . . ."

"You buy it?" Happy asks. "Why, Blackie, you do not feel well indeed. Why, I buy that suitcase myself yesterday afternoon at Gilroy's Department Store. I pay . . ."

There is a knock at the door which interrupts him and it is just as well as I am getting very sore indeed. I open the door and a hotel flunkey is outside.

"C. O. D. for Mr. Roberts," he says, " . . . five ninety-five." I give it to him, plus a tip.

I open the package . . . and now we have two genuine, imported pigskin suitcases. We have a good laugh on that.

I remember something. "You mention dancing clothes, Happy," I say. "Do you mean soup and fish, or what?"

Happy shakes his head. "No, Blackie, I am not studying ballroom dancing, I am studying . . ."

"Studying?" I interrupt. "You mean you are taking a dancing lesson? A great big lug like you?" I start to laugh and I am rolling on the bed from it.

"I do not think it very nice to laugh at me, Blackie," he says, hurt like. "It is a form of exercise and I need that and besides it is a great art, *Adagio* is."

I do not stop very long to listen and I start to laugh again. In between breaths I manage to get out: *"Adagio* . . . with a face like that . . . with a name like that . . ."

I do not remember anything for a long time after that. If I am not mistaken, when I come to about one o'clock that afternoon, my jaw hurts very much indeed, probably because Happy has got sore and let me have one of his very best Sunday punches. But I forgive him that—maybe I should not laugh at him that way. He is not around when I come to, and his suitcase is not around either.

I POSTPONE the job we plan because Mrs. H. Ponsonby Gillingwater suddenly takes it into her head to have a lot of guests for a couple of weeks. That makes too many people in the house, and I do not believe in taking chances. I figure the rocks will keep. I read that Mrs. Gillingwater's guests will hang around for a couple of weeks, so I put the genuine, imported pigskin suitcase away for when I shall need it.

Happy is happy indeed because if we go through with our plan in the first place, he will have to give up his dancing lessons and he does not like to do that, he says, because Mademoysl Nanette says he is getting along very well. Now, we got a extra two weeks and in that time Happy figures he will be a very good, topnotch *adagio* dancer indeed. I do not laugh at him any more . . . I have to admit the exercise is doing his heft some good. He loses ten pounds the first week.

It is two nights before the job is all set when I am taken over to Mademoysl Nanette's studio to see the mademoysl and Happy McGonigle in action.

I see that she has a pretty good racket here. She has six girls giving lessons and six men . . . well, who am I to argue the point? Live and let live, I say always . . . doing the same thing. I see also a lot of other people, men and women, coming and going in and out of the place. It is a busy place indeed.

And, Mademoysl Nanette is very easy on the eyes. I suddenly have a feeling that maybe I could go for a bit of *adagio* with this very nice little number . . . and I begin to figure how I can maybe postpone the job and take up dancing itself.

Mademoysl Nanette is very happy to see me. "I am so thrilled to meet you, Mr. Roberts," she oozes at me. "Mr. McGonigle has told me so much about you. You know Mr. McGonigle is one

of the fastest learners we have here." She gives me the wink with that.

Happy, he beams from stem to stern. Me, I just mumble something and I am uncomfortable because I see by the babe's eye that she is not exactly giving me the cold shoulder.

While the doll is dancing with Happy, I look around me and nobody stops me from wandering around. I am a bit wondering about some of the people I see coming in and out of the place. Some of the citizens do not look like the sort of lugs who would be interested in *adagio* or the art of Terpsichore. But neither does Happy McGonigle, so I shake my head and coin a phrase to myself: it takes all sorts of citizens to make the world. I like that, maybe I can use it again sometime.

I wander back in the main studio and I am almost bowled over cold by what I see. If I live to be a thousand, I will never forget what Happy McGonigle looks like in tight pants, white shirt, and red sash about his middle. He has black pumps, size 13, on his feet, and he is prancing around like you could never hope to see anything prance.

It is not easy for a guy like me to hold in laughter. It is not easy to keep from saying things under situations like that . . . so I had to let go, and when I do, Happy stops in the middle of a prance and heads for me with murder and mayhem in his eyes. Mademoysl Nanette is not far behind and there is sharp, long daggers in her eyes also indeed.

I wonder to myself why she is so all sore about it . . . or will my laughter maybe queer her very good racket. This dancing is doing Happy some good, but it is better and cheaper if he goes to a gym. He will never make a *adagio* dancer; that, I am sure of.

I apologize to Happy and Mademoysl Nanette and I get my pal cooled down enough so that he can go on with his lesson, but I see by the way he follows instructions that his heart is not in this thing. Anyway, a bell rings and the lesson is over.

I go out into the reception room and wait for Happy to get out of his monkey suit. I watch the citizens who come in the place and I figure Mademoysl Nanette has a lot more customers than I first think. A lot of guys and gals leave the place, carrying suitcases . . . with probably their monkey suits inside.

HAPPY shows up then and I get up from my seat before I notice he has Mademoysl Nanette with him. She whispers something to him and he nods and smiles and I figure Happy is making himself a date for tonight and I might as well go out and get plastered all by myself again.

I see Happy has his suitcase and then I realize he has more than one suitcase.

When we are halfway down the stairs from the studio . . . it is one flight up, but you do not save a nickel . . . I ask him how come the two suitcases.

"Oh, I have to deliver this to Mademoysl's mother uptown," he answers me.

"What's the matter," I ask, "she can't handle the job herself? You're no errand boy, or are you?"

Happy shakes his head. "Blackie, you at times surprise me. I offered to do this for the Mademoysl. She is a busy little lady and it was the only gentlemanly thing to do after she mentioned it."

I let it go. "Well, where does mama live? Might as well take it up now. Then we can take in a show, or something. This is our last night to see Broadway for a while."

We are near the subway now and I start to turn to go down. Happy stops me.

"Oh, I'm not to take it up tonight, Blackie," he says. "Mademoysl's mother will not be home tonight. It is tomorrow night I . . ."

"Tomorrow night!" I yell at him. "Why, you big, dumb lug, tomorrow night's the night we got that job on."

He looks at me blank like. I can see he forgets. "I'm sorry, Blackie," he says, "we'll have to postpone it, I guess . . . or give it up."

"Postpone it! Give it up!" I am practically screaming so that several citizens look around at me. "You think I am going to give up ten grand of easy dough just so you can play Galahad or something for a phony dame! You are nuts, in all languages including the Scandinavian!"

He does not answer me, and there it lays. We go back to the hotel. Now we have three suitcases—three genuine, imported pigskin suitcases. Yes, that's right, the suitcase Happy is to deliver is the same thing like ours. Gilroy's Department Store sure must be coining the dough on that suitcase sale.

AS THEY say in the movies, or used to say, came the dawn—only dawn was noon for Happy and me this day. I do not sleep very well because I have a problem. Happy tells me in no unmistakable terms that he is not going to fall down on the job for Mademoysl Nanette. He is going to deliver that suitcase and I shall have to make the best of it. You cannot get nowhere with Happy when he gets stubborn. So I am figuring in my sleep practically all night.

I time things out finally and I figure there is nothing we can do. If Happy delivers the suitcase, as he insists, at around ten o'clock which is the time momma will be home, we are late for the job, because mama lives way up around Dyckman street and that is practically halfway to Albany and we cannot be down to Greenwich Village where Mrs. H. Ponsonby Gillingwater lives before ten o'clock. This is the time which I figure is the safest time to crack Mrs. Gillingwater's house. My plans do not have any leeway on this and I tell Happy the way things stand.

"I am sorry, Blackie," he says, "but I cannot be so ungentlemanly as to fail to carry out what I agreed to do."

"What about what you agree to do with me?" I snap.

"That is different," he says.

"Now you're talking," I say. "It *is* different . . . ten grand worth of difference."

"Don't be so mercenary, Blackie," he gives me.

"Nuts!" I answer. Then I change my tactics. "Now, Happy," I say, "I appreciate how you feel and I am upset about this thing indeed. Suppose you take the suitcase up tonight, after we do the job. We come back here . . . I do not plan it this way, but we can take this one chance . . . after we do the job. Then you take this suitcase up to mama and meet our train at 125th street."

Happy nods. "Well, Blackie, why would it not be better, if you do not like to come back here, if we take our bags and check them at Grand Central. Then we come back there after the job is done, check the other bag also, and I will get Mademoysl Nanette's bag and take it up and then meet you as you say."

I think it over and it is a remarkable idea for Happy. We do not, in this way, take any chances that the hotel people will think it peculiar indeed if we show up later with another suitcase. Hotel people are like magicians almost—they seem to know what you have in your room, even to the last collar button.

We decide to do things the way Happy suggests. We leave the hotel,

checking out with all our luggage, which is plenty.

I leave Happy with all the bags except the empty one which we are to take along to the abode of Mrs. H. Ponsonby Gillingwater on Washington Square South.

I tell Happy to take care of checking the bags and to keep the check-tags straight, and to meet me at the ticket window where I go to buy our tickets for Chicago at least.

I head for the ticket window with the empty suitcase and I am feeling all right because the way things are it is six-two-and-even that we will come out all right. In fact the odds are better than that, I think at the time.

We talk things over and I make sure that Happy has our plans well in mind. He forgets about the Mademoysl and the suitcase he has to deliver while we talk, and I am glad to see he is getting back into the feel of things . . . our things, our life's work, if you call it that, and our livelihood.

WE TAKE a cab to Eighth street and get out. We walk down to Washington Square and through the park to Third Street where it is very dark, and in no time at all we have ducked in the back way to Mrs. H. Ponsonby Gillingwater's little abode and are about our work.

We are very thorough in our job, Happy and me, and what we find is very good indeed. When we leave I feel like Robin Hood or something, because I keep telling myself that Mrs. H. Ponsonby Gillingwater has too much dough indeed and she does not do anything with it however, except to support eight cats, three Pekingese dogs, and four gigolos. At least, Happy and me, we share the wealth better.

We take less time than we figure and it is only fifteen after ten when we leave the residence of Mrs. Gillingwater. We grab a cab at Sheridan Square and head for Grand Central station. I give Happy the bag and he takes it to the checking spot.

He meets me a minute or so later and I notice he does not have the pigskin suitcase he is to deliver to the mama of Mademoysl Nanette. I ask him how come.

He shakes his head. "I did not get it, Blackie. I will have to be a little late, I guess. I am nervous for some reason. I do not know why."

I smile. This Gillingwater business is our biggest job. We find cash money besides the rocks and the take is probably nearer twenty grand . . . I do not stop to count of course. I figure that is why Happy is nervous. Me, I am not nervous at all.

"What you need is a drink, pal," I say and I lead him to the nearest bar.

We have two or three quick ones and I see Happy is indeed feeling very much better. We decided to leave and I say to him:

"Well, let's have the baggage tags, Happy, and we will get our luggage . . . Yours, mama's bag and mine and the rest of our luggage, and then we are off for the West."

I notice he feels in every pocket and I begin to get a little worried. If he gets those tags mixed up we are in a pickle. But he smiles and he says:

"I am bright, Blackie, I do not get the tags mixed up as you think probably. I have them in separate pockets, see?"

So he pulls tags out of his vest pockets and gives a batch of them to me. He keeps one himself, and I take it that is the one for mama's bag.

"I hope you got these straight, pal," I say, and he nods and we have a quick fourth one to celebrate the marvelous

workings of Happy McGonigle's mind, or something.

I HAVE a little trouble at the checkroom. It seems that Happy has not given me all the tags he should have. I am short one tag. I get our two old bags and one genuine, imported pigskin one. I am panicky at first because I figure maybe I have the bag with Happy's monkey suit in it and stuff and the bag with the Gillingwater loot is the one which I do not have the tag for.

I do not want to put up a kick because I do not want to go through a lot of red tape getting back the other pigskin suitcase. You have to tell what is inside and I can not very well tell the station master that there is a lot of rocks and cash money inside. I do not think he would be unsuspicious.

A bright idea hits me. I heft the suitcase and I smile. It is heavy. The bag with Happy's monkey suit in it would not be this heavy, I reason, so everything is okay. I do not feel too badly about leaving Happy's monkey suit and stuff behind. It is doubtful that Happy will be wooing Terpsichore again.

I am feeling very kindly indeed and I tip the redcap a half slug as he stows our luggage in the compartment I take for Happy and me. I do not even worry that Happy will not meet the train at 125th Street. This is our very lucky day, I say to myself, and I sit back and dream up all the things I am going to do with the cash money and the dough which I am sure I will be able to get from fencing the rocks in Chicago. I know who to go to there to get the best price.

Happy meets the train at 125th Street all right and for a moment, when I tell him I leave behind his dancing togs, he is downcast, but I point out that two very wealthy citizens like us will have no time for any Terpsichore stuff, especially *adagio*. We will be able, very easily indeed, to pay to see such stuff, I point out; why sweat to do it ourselves, or rather himself.

We wake up the next morning and we are, I know, in Albany. It is very early, but after a while when the train is on its way again, we get dressed and make our way to the dining car. It is a very nice car indeed and the service is very ultra, to say the least.

I pick up the newspaper which is on our table and I look for a certain story which I expect to find. I find it . . . how could I miss? There is a picture of Mrs. H. Ponsonby Gillingwater looking very sad in her three chins. The story says that burglars—I do not like that word—got away with ten thousand dollars in gems and fifteen thousand dollars in cash the previous evening while Mrs. Gillingwater was at the opera attending a performance of *Faust*.

All this I know and I like the part best where it says that no clue to the burglars is held by the law, although they expect an arrest any hour now. The usual malarky. I hand the paper to Happy who is otherwise busy figuring out how much ham and how many eggs he can get for ten dollars.

He reads and then I see his eyes get big. I see his finger tracing along from left to right and his lips moving and he is evidently laboring under some very great stress indeed, or something like that.

He hands the paper to me and says: "Look at this, Blackie!" He had his finger on a story I did not notice in the first place. In bold face type there is the word: "EXTRA." Then below it is another bold face word: "BULLETIN." Then the story goes on to say that Treasury men raided an apartment at 4856 Dyckman Street and found something very startling indeed.

Treasury men, after months of undercover investigation, raided the apartment of Mrs. Minnie DuBlanc, alias Cokey Mary Mulloy. Mrs. DuBlanc was arrested and the Treasury men, acting on information which indicated that they would find a large cache of narcotics in Mrs. DuBlanc's apartment, were surprised when their search revealed a pigskin suitcase containing jewelry and cash.

This was later identified by Mrs. H. Ponsonby Gillingwater as being the loot taken from her Greenwich Village home by burglars on the previous evening. Mrs. DuBlanc insisted that she had no knowledge of what the suitcase contained, but the T-men were of the opinion that Mrs. DuBlanc and her gang, beside their narcotics endeavors, also were responsible for many robberies in various city homes during the past two years.

An earlier raid, at the dancing studio of Mademoiselle Nanette in the Times Square sector, netted a cache of $50,000 worth of narcotics. Three men and four women were taken into custody. Nanette is known to the police records as Fanny Lipshutz, and has a long record of arrests. T-men believe she is the head of this narcotics ring.

All of a sudden I do not want any breakfast. I see that Happy is slightly green around the gills and it is not hard to figure out why and how it must have happened.

I do not need a crystal gazer to tell me that the genuine, imported pigskin bag which is now reposing in our compartment has without a doubt inside of it a mess of snow for which we could spend the rest of our lives in the can for possessing. And here we are, just a few minutes before, figuring what a swell time we are going to have spending all that cash money from our trip into the abode of Mrs. H. Ponsonby Gillingwater.

I have the distinct impression that we shall probably do some spending, but it will be time at Atlanta or Alcatraz, I do not care which—in fact, I do not care for either.

We do not eat. We kick the food around a bit on our plates and we drink six cups of coffee a piece at least. As fast as we can, we get back to our compartment and start to do some fast thinking.

Our subject is how the hell are we going to get rid of a suitcase full of dope. It is broad daylight, there is a lot of people around. You cannot tear a suitcase up in little pieces and toss it out the window. . . .

IT IS Happy what mentions the window and I almost kiss him when this leads to an idea which comes up and clouts me one on the brain. It might work.

I explain to Happy and I guess he likes the idea because he comes right back and agrees with me. It is very simple, this idea. We wait until it is dark. We open the window of our compartment and we toss the damn suitcase out —way out where it gets banged up maybe on rocks and stuff and cannot be identified with us.

I do not worry that once we get rid of the suitcase there is any chance of it being traced to us. After all, I point out to Happy who brings up that question, we had three suitcases all alike, all bought at the Gilroy Department Stores' big sale. Probably there are a thousand suitcases like this one. He sees the point and we set back and hope that night will not be long.

It isn't, although it seems sometimes as if we are in the land of the eternal sun. But at last it is very dark out and we did not bother to stick our heads out to see if we maybe might hit somebody outside. We are probably out in the hills somewhere and nobody is so foolish to be walking around in such a place right now.

I sling the suitcase out and then we settle back. We get so plastered it is a shame indeed. But who can blame us, we are so happy. We are not very flush in the pocketbook but we think it is possible we may be able to turn a buck or

two in Chicago when we get there.

We have a big breakfast the next morning and we do very well on the bill of fare. In fact, we knock it for a loop and I do believe the waiter thinks we have just crossed the desert and are starved. But we tip him well and we leave.

I am reading a newspaper which this time does not upset my indigestion and Happy is taking a nap when I notice the train is stopped. I look out and I see we are parked alongside of a freight. I take it for granted that the station is on the other side and this is probably a water stop or something, because I do not see buildings and things like that which might say we are in a big town.

A knock comes at the door and I get up and open it. The knock wakes Happy up and as I open the door I see, out of the corner of my good eye, he is rubbing the sleep out of his eyes.

It is the conductor, our porter, and a guy in blue overalls. That is easy on the eyes, more or less, but what the guy in blue has in his hands is not at all easy to take. In fact, I am so surprised I back up a foot or so and I turn my head to look at Happy. He is white, very white, and his mouth is wide open.

It is our suitcase back again! The one we tossed out the window the night before. We are in it again.

THE conductor is the first guy to speak: "Sam here," he points at our porter, "says he thinks this bag belongs to you. Does it?"

I stammer something and manage to come out with: "How . . ."

The conductor butts in: "It must have fallen out of your window last night. Lucky thing it fell into an open coal car on this freight alongside. Joe, here," he points to the guy in blue, "happened to be in the car, looking for bums. Almost conked him. Good thing we weren't late coming in here or we might have missed the freight. Better open it up and see if the things in it are all right."

"Better—open—it—up?" I ask.

"Sure. Ordinarily, Joe would be supposed to take this in to the claim office in Chicago, but we thought maybe there was something inside that you fellows might need."

I snapped out of it. "Oh, there's nothing in it that's very important. A few odds and ends. Thanks very much, mister." I dig in my pocket and get out a ten-spot and hold it out to Joe, the guy in blue.

"Just so we can keep the records straight, mister," the conductor says, "better check over the things inside. I can make out a report and put it through the claim office as if you picked it up there. Then neither Joe or me will get in dutch with the office."

"Why don't we just forget about the whole thing," I say.

"Oh, no, we cannot do that, mister," the nosey conductor says. "Joe breaks one regulation to get this back to you; you wouldn't want to see him get in dutch, would you?"

I shake my head. I look at Happy McGonigle, and he shakes his head like an echo. "Why can't . . ." I start to say, and then I shrug my shoulders . . . Fate catches up to us at last, is how I am thinking.

I give Happy the nod to open the suitcase. The conductor has a pad in his hand and he has his pencil ready to put down what is inside. I think I can tell him and save all this trouble, but Happy has the catch open now and is opening the suitcase—the genuine, imported pigskin suitcase that sells for five ninety-five at Gilroy's Department Store.

I take one look as the suitcase opens

and the last words I hear as I pass out is the conductor's, saying:

"One pair black trousers . . . one red sash . . . What the hell's the matter with that guy? Get some water, Sam . . . One pair of black, patent leather pumps—a sissy costume, this . . . oh, oh, there goes the other guy! Tell Sam to make it two glasses of water . . . six books . . . on dancing . . . one white. . . ."

## Cipher Solvers' Club for February, 1940

(*Continued from June 8th issue*)

*Ten*—(*Continued*)

Frank Robison, Chicago, Ill. †Seegie See, Golden, Colo. Teco, Chicago, Ill. †Mono Verde, Minneapolis, Minn.

*Nine*—†Brandywine, Washington, D. C. Andrew Halioris, New York, N. Y. Ruskin W. Huffman, Kokomo, Ind. E. G. Sloane, Milwaukee, Wis. †Wes, Mt. Vernon, N. Y.

*Eight*—Steel Chest, Alameda, Calif. B. M. E., Brooklyn, N. Y. J. S. II, Waterbury, Conn. L. J. Wells. Providence, R. I.

*Seven*—Robert H. Delude, Roxbury, Mass. Herman Edis, Brooklyn, N. Y. Lester L. Eyrich, Dundee, N. Y. °Pearl Knowler, Wendling, Oreg. Connecticut Yank, Hartford, Conn.

*Six*—May Brown, Bridge River, British Columbia. Cerebrator, Brooklyn, N. Y. †Daffy Dill, Bangor, Me. †Seymour Gerber, Bronx, N. Y. Gene Gifford, Memphis, Tenn. †Graschue, Detroit, Mich. Guss, Englewood, N. J. Art Hur, Seward, Nebr. †Jack II, Wichita, Kans. †Peggy Lennox, Belhaven, N. C. †Miny, Cedar Rapids, Iowa. †O'Hicky, Cortland, N. Y. °Don Ricardo, New Orleans, La. Peter Weiperth, Chippewa Lake, Ohio.

*Five*—Bill Bevvo, Sanatorium, Tex. Bombardier, Philadelphia, Pa. †G. Hirano, Las Animas, Colo. George A. Holmes, Southbury, Conn. †Ian, Glace Bay, Nova Scotia. †Jean, Oklahoma City, Okla. †B. I. Lane, Seattle, Wash. Samuel P. Rothschild, Bronx, N. Y. †Ruth, Laramie, Wyo. D. M. S., Columbus, Ohio. J. H. T., Fall River, Mass.

*Four*—H. F. B., Jamaica, N. Y. †Educator, Chicago, Ill. †Edna Hallack, Dallas, Tex. †Fred Hallack, Dallas, Tex. †Hallie Mackintosh, Cleveland, Ohio. °Pangram, Kenmore, N. Y.

(*Continued on page* 107)


# The Green Lama

***and the strange case of***

## "The Man Who Wasn't There"

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# Invisible Criminals

*A True Story*

**By Robert Sneddon**

SOME months ago an excited man appeared at Police Headquarters of the city of Lyons, France. He saw the Commissioner who had solved more than one extraordinary crime.

*"Monsieur,"* he said, "I want protection."

"Protection from what?"

"The spirits, *monsieur.*"

The commissioner had listened to many a strange story in his day, for the city is the temple of many cults.

"Continue," he said quietly. "What is the complaint?"

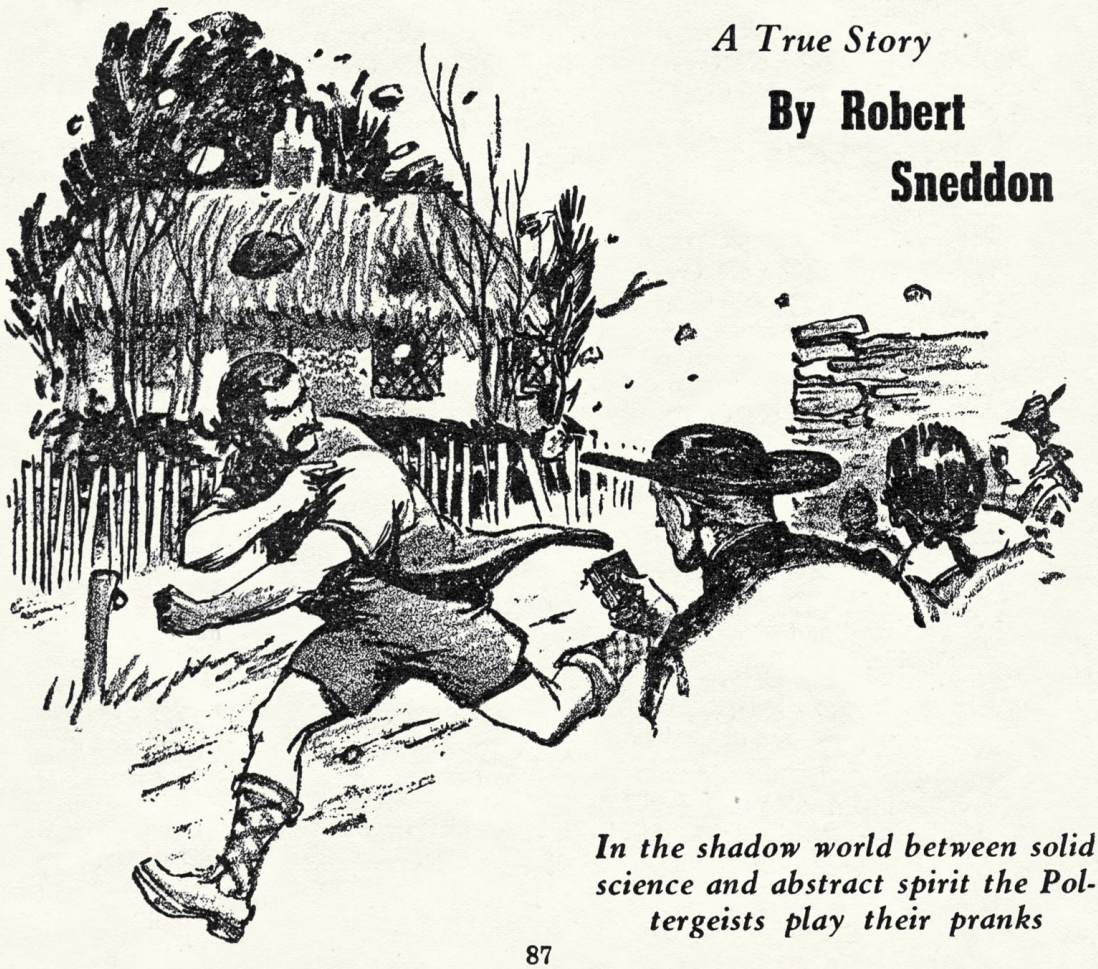
"It is this way, *monsieur.* My name is Henri Dupont. I have a café restaurant, Avenue du Nord, number forty-six. For three days now spirits have been throwing stones and pieces of coal into my café, breaking glasses and frightening customers."

"You have an enemy, perhaps. A rival in the trade."

"Never in the world. No, *monsieur,* it is not an enemy one can see, but something that is invisible. Something which throws stones, all day long. You must do something."

The commissioner called two of his men.

"Accompany this man. He says he is being bombarded by stones by some-



*In the shadow world between solid science and abstract spirit the Poltergeists play their pranks*

one he can not see. Examine all surrounding houses. If needed, post men on the roofs. Oh yes, *Monsieur* Dupont, where are the stones coming from?"

The man shook his head.

"No one sees them till they are in the rooms."

The two detectives went along. To them, this was merely a stupid prank by neighbors . . . a practical joke. But when they reached the café and went inside, they were puzzled. At once one of them was struck on the shoulder by a missile, which dropped to the ground. He picked up the piece of coal, his eyes popping.

"You see, *messieurs,*" said Dupont, "I told the truth."

One detective went outside while the other remained with Dupont whom he watched intently. Yet in spite of this, pieces of coal continued to fly about the interior of the café, doing damage. The missiles appeared to come from the direction of the ceiling, but how they entered the building or by whom they were propelled, the two detectives could not discover. They went back to their chief.

He himself came to the café with a number of men whom he ordered to search the houses looking on to the café. He ordered all the windows to be closed. Men were posted on roofs. But still the pieces of coal kept flying, and in addition, small fragments of scrap iron.

This went on for two more days.

"You must stop it," Dupont pleaded, "I shall be ruined."

"How can I stop it, imbecile," said the commissioner at last. "Can I arrest something I can not see? What can police do against an invisible, an unknown quantity, a criminal *X.*"

Fortunately for all concerned, at the end of the fifth day the phenomenon ceased, never to repeat itself.

Newspaper reporters classed this strange occurrence as another example of what has become known, for want of a better name, as Poltergeist activity. Poltergeist means literally "noisy ghost"; it might even be called "rough-house ghost." But these happenings have nothing to do with spirits of the departed dead returning to haunt the living.

INVESTIGATORS of the phenomena which have worried police in every country of the world have come to the conclusion that aimless mischievous violence, the displacement and throwing of material objects, is merely the exercise of some force as yet not clearly defined. They say that it is set in motion unconsciously, in most instances, by some human being who is a medium or an agent of this force.

Others, more credulous than scientific, profess to believe that these manifestations are due not to any direct live intelligence but to the storing up of some corrupt force in old buildings in which murder has been done. Thus the force takes on an evil and malignant aspect.

However, we are not concerned with superstition, but with a super-physical force which sooner or later will hold no more mystery.

In October, 1883, the Hampson family—father, mother, a four-year-old son, and a year-old baby—were having tea in the large kitchen of their farm in Shropshire, England. Also present were two servants. Suddenly without warning the teakettle was swept from the stove. An unseen force pulled the cloth from the table scattering and breaking dishes. Pieces of burning coal and wood were thrown about the room. One cinder fell on the baby's clothes, setting them on fire and burning the child severely.

Chairs were upset, and one broken. There was no wind blowing at the time.

The terrified family ran out of doors calling the neighbors. Constable Lea was soon on the scene, and himself saw crockery taken from a dresser by some invisible agency and thrown. Spectators, who had entered the room, were struck, but strangely enough not hurt.

In a few minutes this confusion subsided and did not recur. The phenomenon was not explicable on natural grounds.

In spring of 1912 a similar occurrence took place in another English farmhouse, in Hertfordshire. Crockery was smashed, pots and pans thrown about without human hands. A kettle of boiling water was carried from the kitchen stove and slammed down on the dining room table. Stones were thrown, windows broken.

A reputable reporter states that with his own eyes he saw stones flying. Also, that while talking in the yard with the woman of the house he saw the fourteen-year-old daughter carrying a sheaf of straw to the stable; suddenly the sheaf was snatched up into the air, though there was no wind, and carried against a roof where it scattered into straws. The girl nearly was frightened to death.

The only explanation was one offered later by an occultist. He found that there had been built into the farmhouse timbers from a house with a sinister history of murders and suicides, and concluded that this had something to do with what had happened.

FROM Ireland came a number of instances investigated by both materialists and occultists, stories of stone bombardments, bins of potatoes set in motion and flung into the air, beds moved with the occupants, bed clothes snatched off.

One of the oddist is that of a family in County Fermanagh who had a three-room farmhouse. They complained of noises, rappings, and of something unseen that appeared to have a grudge against boots, shoes, and lights of every kind. They could not keep a lamp or candle in the house. A clergyman advised that an open Bible, with a large stone to hold it down, be placed in the living room. But the stone was lifted off by unseen hand, seventeen pages torn out, and the Bible thrown on the floor.

A neighbor brought a lamp which had been sprinkled with holy water, but that too disappeared and could not be found again. Various observers, including clergymen, visited the house, heard the noises, were assailed with flying pebbles, but could find no trickery of any kind. Finally a religious service was held in the house and the manifestations ended.

Another incident from Portarlington relates to the building of a new house. No sooner had the owner moved in than his troubles began. Some unseen hand threw the furniture about and broke it, while the man himself was injured. He tried to stick it out, but finally vacated the house. No tenant could be found and the house still stands empty.

To cite another case, I have before me a statement attested by six Scottish ministers and nine farmers and others as to what they saw and heard in the house of Andrew Mackie in his farm known as Ringcroft of Stocking, Parish of Rerwick, Kirkcudbright.

The trouble began in March, 1695, with stones being thrown, mostly at night. The minister of the parish, Alexander Telfair, was called in; he saw and was struck by several stones. In addition he and others were struck across

back and shoulders by an invisible staff, so severely that the noise of the blows could be heard some distance away. The side of a bed was torn away, and the whole house resounded with rapping and hammering.

This continued until April second, many neighbors being stoned in the house or going to and from it. Some reported that an unseen hand tugged at their clothes. One man's side was gripped so tightly by something that he howled with the pain of it. And at night the bedclothes were lifted and the children beaten as with a human hand. Then came a whistling sound so lifelike that the dog kept running to the door.

On April fourth two ministers arrived to spend the night in prayer; they were assailed cruelly with large stones, some weighing as much as seven pounds. The Reverend Mr. Ewart's head was wounded and the Reverend John Murdo was equally abused. Showers of stones fell in the morning, inside and outside the house.

April fifth, some straw in the yard went on fire without human agency, and stones fell on a crowd of neighbors who had gathered in the house. Five days later, the Reverend Mr. Telfair went to the farm with five other ministers. All day long they were the object of attack. Some watched outside, some in. Yet in spite of this watch stones fell, some even coming through the thatched roof, and several witnesses were hurt by stones thrown at them. Also, some unseen force upset the ministers by catching at their legs. Six other witnesses testified to this day's happenings.

The next few days straw was set on fire, men hurt with flying spades and other implements, heads bruised. And the forces were especially active on Sunday which had been set aside as a day of humiliation and prayer for all. And three days later it, whatever *it* was, set fire to the house, and the occupants were kept busy running with pails of water. Finally one end of the house was pulled down.

Next day as the house continued to catch fire, Mr. Mackie extinguished all the cooking fires in the house. Nevertheless fires broke out in different places. On May first, the sheep house went on fire and was consumed, but the sheep were saved. And from that day there was no more trouble about the house by night nor by day. This is a very brief account of a detailed statement enumerating the various attacks and injuries suffered.

PRACTICALLY the same thing happened in December, 1838. The scene again was a farmhouse, this time in the North of Scotland. Showers of sticks, stones and clods of earth flew about the yard and premises without sign of human agency. Hundreds of people came to watch and wonder. After five days this business ceased outside. Inside, however, dishes and household utensils were caught up and whirled from room to room, in the presence of scores of gaping spectators. The minister of the parish and the elders all came to investigate, but they could not find the source of all this trouble. Finally the police took a hand; they decided to jail the two maid servants.

The trouble stopped thereafter and it was triumphantly pointed out by the police that this was proof of the guilt of the servants, even though numerous witnesses had stated that the two girls were occupied in stable or barn while dishes and pebbles flew about the house for periods as long as five hours, the witnesses said, and they were in the house while stones fell outside it.

The Paris official court *Gazette* of Febuary 2, 1849, carries an account of an investigation by police into happenings of a like nature. A new street was being cut to join the Sorbonne and the Pantheon and many old houses were being knocked down. One house in the center of the block was still standing when one night a watchman was terrified to see that its front was being assailed by numbers of stones, pieces of pavement, entire blocks of building stone which, from their weight and the distance they came, could not have been hurled by the hand of man.

Next morning it was seen that the house looked as if it had sustained a siege by cannon. There were holes in the masonry; doors and windows were smashed.

The police headed by the chief himself examined the premises and men were stationed there next night. They saw the arrival of these missiles and the damage done, but could not trace the origin.

And, as the *Gazette* tells, this bombardment went on for twenty-one days under the eyes of the police. Police were stationed on surrounding roofs. They swore the missiles passed over their heads but they could offer no explanation. Fierce dogs were let loose to aid in the watch but the dogs found no culprits. The chief himself spent every night on guard. He saw that the missiles took the same course and conceived the idea that a catapult was being used, but if so, no search or amount of watching could find it.

When the trouble stopped, the police withdrew. The problem was unsolved.

The *Paris Law Journal* reported another case in June, 1860. An official of the Department of Justice, Lesage, applied to be freed from the lease of an apartment in Rue de Noyers. He said he could not live in it because he and his family were being frightened and wounded by stones and other missiles, such as pieces of coal. The missiles crashed through windows, shattering the glass. The police had been called in. They saw the stones showering in, but could not find where they came from. Monsieur Hubaut, police inspector of the quarter was himself struck and made a most determined investigation without finding any answer. The application was granted by the landlord. He too, he admitted, had suffered the same experience, having thousands of francs damage done to furniture, china and glassware.

IN 1922 for a period from September to the end of December in a farmhouse in the Ardeche district of France, the occupants were plagued by showers of stones and potatoes. There was no house nearer than four hundred yards. Neither police nor other investigators were able to furnish any light on the trouble. The clergyman of the district made a careful study of the case. He saw the missiles and was struck by them, but in this instance he remarked that the blows were of a very trifling nature.

Police were called in to investigate strange doings in a house of a Belgian village in February, 1913. They saw stones passing through the air from a house one hundred and fifty yards away. At least that was the direction, but officers stationed in the house saw no one throw the stones.

These stones, whatever the agency propelling them, came with mathematical precision, striking windows until every pane was broken. If a stone was stuck in the frame the next one would strike that stone and complete the damage. They were of various sizes and

weights, and though the wind blew with varying force there was no deviation in the aim.

The strange part of this uncanny warfare was that though three hundred stones were counted, and several persons were struck they did no injury to anyone, not even a bruise. The police reported that they were unable to discover any human source.

There was a similar failure in a Swiss case. Here, in addition to stone throwing, the interior of the house of a worthy government official appeared to have been visited by a cyclone. Dishes were lifted from one place to another. Chairs and other furniture violently moved. Pictures were taken from the wall and then restored to their places by unseen hands, while witnesses gaped and shuddered. There was knocking and hammering all over the house—so violent as to make everyone fear the house was about to come down about their ears. This lasted twelve days and then the family moved out. They couldn't stand it any longer.

Crossing the ocean we still find this unknown force at work. In a house on Columbia Heights, Brooklyn, the tenants were persecuted by the disappearance, before their very eyes, of various household objects, by tipping up of the dining table when guests, some of them well-known men, were present. The tenants moved.

That reliable public organ, the New York *Sun,* June 22, 1884, carried an amazing story. Six days earlier, George and Albert Sanford were hoeing in a field of a farm near Trenton, New Jersey. All at once they were pelted by stones. They looked about them alarmed. There was no building anywhere near, no trees, no wall or fence behind which anyone could hide.

The next day the stones fell again. The frightened pair dropped their hoes and ran to Trenton where they told of their experiences. They returned with a crowd of would-be investigators, forty or fifty in number, and in their presence, according to the account, the stones were observed falling. No conclusion was reached.

Even in the jungle one is apt to run up against this strange trouble. A Dutch traveler, Grottendieck, in September, 1903, was exploring in the interior of Sumatra. One night he went to bed in a hut roofed with the leaves of a native tree. About one o'clock in the morning something fell with a thud on the floor just beyond his mosquito net. He lit a lamp, saw that a stone apparently had penetrated the roof, and that others were falling from the roof. But when he examined the roof and ceiling there was no sign of a hole.

He roused his boy and with flashlights they explored all about the hut for a distance of several hundred yards. Not a sign of a living creature on two legs.

Back in the hut the stones were still falling. They felt warm to the touch; once more the explorer examined the ceiling. There was no hole, no possible way in which these missiles could enter. Finally Grottendieck fired his gun several times at random into the darkness. The stones fell more rapidly. The boy cried out that a devil was in the hut, and rushed off into the darkness. He did not return and the explorer never saw him again.

In the morning he examined the stones. They were ordinary. He again went over the roof and ceiling carefully, but found no hole.

He noted that though the stones came down with a strangely deliberate slowness, he could not catch them in the air.

FROM Jamaica come many stories of stone throwing. Here the natives ascribe the trouble to what they call "duppies" or what we know as ghosts or "hants."

These duppy-flung stones may pass through roofs, or windows without damaging and without leaving any trace of entry. They may come into a room and change direction in order to strike some individual not in the line of projection. But in all cases they do no physical injury.

Police authorities have investigated numerous cases without being able to lay hands on the invisible mischief maker.

Sir Hesketh Bell, ex-governor of the British West Indian isle of Mauritius, relates a story told to him by a French priest in Trinidad.

The priest had charge of a large, populous county district. A friend bought a deserted sugar cane plantation and erected a temporary wooden building of two rooms.

"It had been built and occupied by the planter and his brother for some weeks when one evening I met them rushing towards me with the assertion that stones were falling in their house. They had been sitting on the veranda, they said, and had remained until it was dark. One of them was just about to go inside to light a lamp, when a noise of something heavy falling on the floor of the inner room startled him.

He hastily lit the lamp and went in. Two good-sized stones lay on the floor. The window was closed. There was another crash. Another stone. He rushed outside to call his brother, and, still hearing the continual noise of falling stones, they dashed off to get the priest. The priest went back to the house. As he approached, he could hear the crash of the stones. Taking a lantern, he entered the house; the noise stopped abruptly.

The floor was covered with flinty stones of various sizes, some weighing a couple of ounces, others as many pounds. The windows were all closed.

"I was perfectly dumfounded," the priest's story continues. "A sudden gust of wind blew out the lantern. Instantly stones began to descend on all sides. I could hear them whistling close to my head, but nevertheless not one of us was touched. I managed to relight the lantern, and instantly the marvelous shower stopped. The stones lay in heaps."

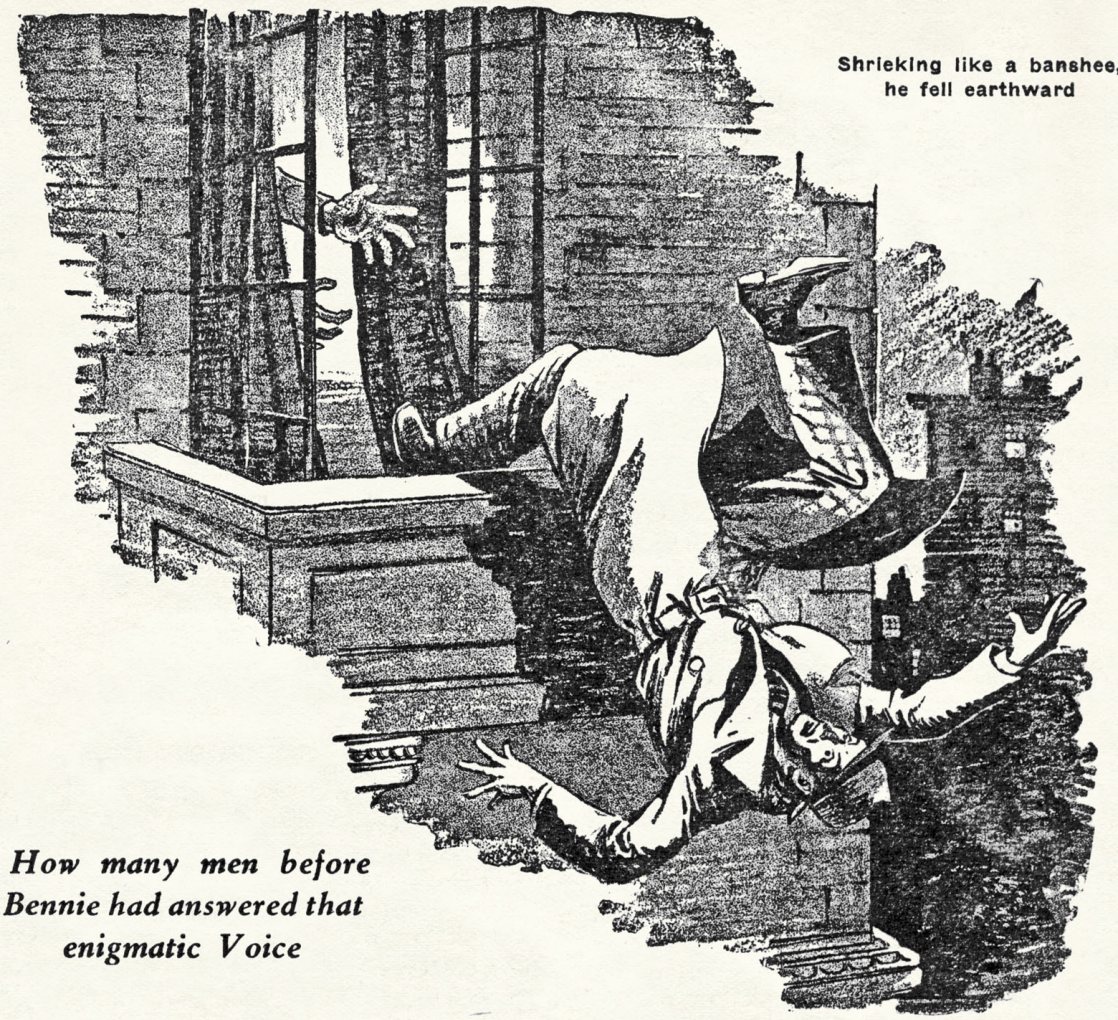
The priest and his friends piled up the stones and went to bed. The light was left on and all was silent and peaceful. After two hours the priest blew out the light and at once stones fell again. With the lighting of the lamp, the shower stopped again. At dawn the roof was examined and found whole; the mystery was inexplicable.

When the news spread, hundreds came asking to be allowed to spend the night in the house. A few were chosen; they were not disappointed. As soon as darkness came stones began to fall, but the shower was not so continuous.

The first heap of stones was untouched. Those which fell during the night were new ones. The phenomenon was not repeated.

"That the thing happened," said the priest, "I will solemnly vouch for, but that is all I know about it, and I suppose a mystery it will ever remain."

Maybe, maybe not. Someday the science of detection will reach another milestone and perhaps the invisible criminal too will be caught.



Shrieking like a banshee, he fell earthward

*How many men before Bennie had answered that enigmatic Voice*

# The Caliph's Curse

## By Charles Ingerman

THERE were once three thieves in our town: Archie Adams, Bennie Brill, and Clyde Cranmore. They all lived in an apartment house on Taliaferro Boulevard. Archie lived on the first floor, Bennie lived on the second floor, and Clyde lived on the third floor.

They were as thick—as the old saying goes—as thieves: that is, they knew each other professionally, disliked each other socially, were mutually invidious and mutually distrustful.

It was with a sense of some shock, then, and with no feeling of regret, that Bennie Brill gazed at the broken body of Archie Adams. Bennie was standing in front of an office building on Market Street. There was no one around. It was well after midnight and the business section of town was deserted.

Archie was sprawled laxly on the sidewalk, a bloody, unpretty sight. Even Bennie, who was not too brilliant, could squint at the open window

on the seventh floor of the Merchants' and Traders' Building, glance from there to Archie's corpse, and draw his own hazy conclusions.

But it was the long, white envelope in Archie's curled fingers which riveted Bennie to the spot when normally he would have vanished from the scene like a tendril of smoke in a high wind.

A long, white envelope . . . sealed and intriguing-looking.

Bennie's sharp eyes glanced up the street in one direction and down the street in the other. There was no man abroad. He caught a quick breath, tiptoed across the sidewalk, flipped the envelope with one deft motion from the dead man's clutch into his own breast pocket.

Then and then only he moved away from there, fleetly as a rat in a granary when the good farmer unstaples the door.

Of remorse, Bennie had none. His dominant emotion—and he was an emotional little fellow—was of triumph. Triumph that he had followed Archie, drawn by the thin, strong thread of curiosity because the other had been acting, of late, with such excited secrecy.

Even Clyde had noticed it, and Clyde, you must know, was so thick of skull, slow of wit, and clumsy of hand that in Bennie's estimation he all but starved to death in the practices of his trade.

Bennie thought momentarily of Clyde and his lips curled with proper disdain. The dumb palooka!

He scurried through the shadowed streets, slipped in the side entrance of the Taliaferro Arms, up the flight of stairs to his apartment.

He was just on the point of sliding his key into the lock when the door opened. Clyde, the big lug, stood there, smiling. "Hello!" said Clyde.

"What the hell are you doing in my apartment?" Bennie snarled. "If I owned a gun, I'd shoot you, that's what, and call the cops. Housebreaking!"

Clyde went on smiling happily. "When I got back from work—a little butcher shop in Hillcrest—I found I didn't have anything to drink. Didn't think you'd mind."

"I do" Bennie growled. "And how did you get in?"

"I made a key," Clyde answered proudly. "Awful simple lock you have here, Bennie."

"I'll break your neck," Bennie threatened idly, tilting his chin so that he could glare at the bigger man. "Gimme that key."

"Sure," Clyde agreed amiably. He handed it over, grinned. "But I can make another!"

"If you dare . . . !" Even Bennie must have sensed that his threatening the husky Clyde was a bit comical. "I'll have the superintendent change the lock."

"I'll bet I can make a key for the new lock, too," Clyde wagered. "In two days, spare time."

"I give up," Bennie groaned. "Did you get that drink? Okay, scram. I want to get a little shuteye."

AS SOON as he managed to close the door in Clyde's face, Bennie turned on the bright light over his favorite easy chair and settled himself to examine the envelope which he had taken from Archie Adams.

There was nothing written on the outside of the envelope, and Bennie rather liked that. It made the whole business more exciting. In addition, the flap was gummed shut, and there was a blob of bright blue sealing-wax over the seam.

Bennie teased himself by examining

that seal closely. Imprinted in the wax when it was still hot and soft were the letters: *A. A.* He felt a certain letdown, now, because that meant Archie Adams had not lifted the important-looking envelope somewhere, but had taken it with him—had sealed it shut himself.

At length, when he could stand the suspense no longer, Bennie tore off the end of the envelope, reached inside.

The first thing he took out was a flat, long key, and with it was a single file-size card. On the card, written in delicate purple ink in Archie Adams' studied handwriting were the words: "The emerald is in Box 4537, in the Long Island Station."

Just that, and nothing more.

Bennie Brill stared at the words, and they didn't seem to make sense.

"The emerald is in Box 4537, in the Long Island Station."

What emerald? Bennie wondered. And why would Archie leave it in any such outlandish place And why would he write himself a note about it, sealing it with his signet ring, that way?

"I'll find out about it the very first thing in the morning," Bennie promised himself, meaning that he would get downtown around two-thirty the next afternoon. "Yes, that's just what I'll do."

So he poured himself a nightcap and peeled out of his clothes, and crawled into bed.

But he couldn't sleep.

Visions of a green emerald spurred his mind. "It's probably a very small one," he said to himself, deprecatingly. Maybe only a chip or something."

But as he thought about it, it began to grow larger. First it was a chip, and then it was the size of a grain of wheat, and then it had become as big as a pea.

When that mysterious emerald gleamed in Bennie's mind as large as a walnut, he couldn't stand it any longer. He snapped on his bedlamp, looked at his wristwatch. It was nine minutes after four. In the morning, ladies and gentlemen, in the morning!

Bennie sat on the edge of the bed, struggling with himself. Nine minutes after four. Should he or shouldn't he? Was he crazy or was he crazy?

His mind went along merrily, conducting a solo *Information, Please!* while his hands worked himself back into his shorts and shirt and trousers and shoes.

His tie was dapperly knotted at four-seventeen. He opened his apartment door at four twenty-one.

Clyde was standing there.

"Hello!" Clyde said.

"Why don't you go to bed?" Bennie asked, irritably.

"Why don't you?"

"I can't sleep."

"Neither can I," Clyde admitted sympathetically. "Let's take a walk. That's the thing to make you sleepy."

"For God's sake, no!' Bennie returned. "I've got some business to do."

"At dawn, almost?" Clyde asked, astonished.

"Yes!"

"I'll help," the big lug offered hopefully. "Is it a good setup?"

"I don't need any help," Bennie snarled. "Go take a walk by yourself."

"Aw, gee," Clyde said morously. "I'd let you help me, if I could find a job that paid more than beans and cakes."

Bennie closed the door of his apartment, locked it. "Leave me alone, will you? And don't make another key to my door, or I'll bat your ears off."

"Well, all right," Clyde grumbled. "But I don't see what you're being so secretive about."

"Sweet dreams!' Bennie catcalled.

BENNIE'S hands were trembling as he turned the key in Box 4537. His pulse hammered in his head. He'd never owned an emerald, even for the brief space of time he had owned some other jewels: that is, between the time he stole them, and the time he turned them over to a fence.

The sheet-metal door of the luggage locker opened, and Bennie reached inside. Way at the back, nestled with a piece of orange rind and a forlorn lady's half-rubber, was a squat, square box. It was small enough to drop tidily into Bennie's topcoat pocket . . .

He was in a fever of excitement as he grabbed the subway back to his apartment. He couldn't keep his hand out of that pocket, or quit fingering the rough paper wrapping around it.

And he might have taken a chance, sneaked a look at it, except for the fact that it was getting late enough now so that a lot of early-birds were using the subway going to work.

He didn't dare take a chance. What —and he needled his anticipation with false scorn—what if it were really a large emerald?

But it wouldn't be. He knew that. Just a chip, perhaps, or a stone with a flaw in it, or maybe only an imitation.

When he finally got to the Taliaferro Arms, he was sweating a little in his anxiety to get a peek at the contents of the box.

But as luck would have it, Clyde was outside, airing the nasty-mannered little pooch which belonged to the slinky blonde across the hall from Clyde.

"How'd you come out?" Clyde asked cheerfully, and in a volume of voice which wasn't at all discreet, with a patrol car dozing at the curb.

"Lousy!" Bennie hissed with feeling. "Don't you ever sleep, dope?"

"Well, I couldn't sleep and Maisie couldn't sleep, so we didn't sleep together. She's a wonderful girl . . . such a sad life she's had!"

"Well, I'm sleepy and I can sleep, Romeo. If you will pull in that red-furred cockroach, I'll go on and mind my own business, which is good advice for you, too!"

"Okay," Clyde grumbled. "You're a hell of a pal."

Bennie went upstairs to his apartment, locked the door and put the chain in place, just in case. He turned on a light in the kitchenet, where nobody could possibly see through the frosted glass, and he took the box out of his topcoat pocket.

Did you ever get a bonus check at Christmas? Did you ever draw a winner in the Irish Sweepstakes? Well, that's the way it was with Bennie Brill.

For when he had the wrappings off the box, and the cover loose, and the tissue-paper nest torn apart, he held it in his nervous fingers.

It was as big as a pigeon's egg, as green as the Mediterranean at Barcelona, as sparkling as snow seen by candlelight.

It was far too large to be real, Bennie decided, trying to choke down his enthusiasm. But Archie had known stones — he was a specialist — and Archie had called it an emerald.

Bennie Brill held it cupped in his shaking hands, and it seemed to him as if the walls had not only ears, but eyes as well, as if even here, locked in the security of his own home, a thousand stronger, crueler, more determined men must know he held this treasure and be avid to wrest it from him.

He scurried around for nearly twenty minutes, trying to find the proper place to hide it. None of the usual caches—and he knew them all!—would do.

He thought of Clyde, and his uncanny luck with locks. For Bennie knew, with a certainty born of sad experience, that Clyde would not hesitate to ply his trade here if he saw something he wanted.

Finally in desperation, he cut open the rubber floater in his toilet reserve tank, stuffed the big emerald in there, packed the rest of the space with a couple of socks, so that it couldn't possibly fall out and be lost.

And then, staggering with fatigue, Bennie Brill took off his clothes for the second time in three hours and went back to bed.

His mind was racing . . . his pulse erratic. When, at length, he dozed off, he failed signally to sleep the sleep of the just . . .

UNCLE SAM was his name. A myopic Welshman with a cadaverous face, he was not as honest as his famous namesake with the white whiskers and the striped pants.

He screwed his jeweler's glass into his best eye and examined Bennie Brill's emerald.

"Is—is it real?" Bennie asked nervously.

Uncle Sam went on staring at the cool, green stone. His long, knotted fingers twisted it this way and that, slowly, lovingly, under the glass. Finally he spoke: "Yes, it's real."

Bennie breathed a sigh of vast relief. "Thank God! I was afraid . . . well, it's pretty damned big, you know."

"It's the biggest emerald in the world," Uncle Sam said softly. "It belonged to the Caliph of Bampuristan."

"Who?"

"The Caliph of Bampuristan."

"What a name!" Bennie exclaimed. "What a name! When was this?"

"I'm not sure," Uncle Sam said dubiously. "I guess he died about fifteen hundred A. D."

"Fifteen hundred?" Bennie laughed, looking at the stone again. "Well, it's a dead cinch he ain't gonna be raising any fuss about this stone now. What's it worth, Uncle Sam?"

"I don't know."

"What you mean? Everything's worth something ain't it? Some things are worth only a fin or a double sawbuck. Others get right up into the real tin, like say three grand . . . or five?"

"I won't buy it," Uncle Sam said firmly.

"Now, look, Uncle Sam," Bennie said earnestly. "I've done business with you for a long time. We've never had any trouble yet, have we? I've never groused about the prices you've put on goods. I ain't gonna start now."

"I won't buy it," Uncle Sam repeated, adamant. "It's yours, and you can keep it. I don't even want a part of it."

"For Pete's sake, why not?" Bennie yelled. "You said yourself that it's real. A real emerald that big's got to be worth something, don't it?"

"I don't want it," Uncle Sam insisted. "And if I were you, I wouldn't want it, either. It's bad luck. It's cursed."

"No!" Bennie squinted at Uncle Sam. "You're ribbing me!" He got a cigarette lighted. "You can't scare me with that old superstition stuff. Look, I wasn't born yesterday."

"Look yourself," Uncle Sam said, twice as serious as a judge sentencing you for thirty years. "The Caliph of Bampuristan had this stone cursed. He called in seventy different kinds of magicians and dervishes and assorted hellions and they all got together and put a curse on this emerald that would turn your hair white as mine—" he gestured

significantly— "just to listen to the first three words."

"And what happened?" Bennie asked, breathless.

"Then some dunderhead went ahead and stole the emerald anyway."

"No! And what happened then?"

"The curse began to work. Everyone who got his hands on this green ice died like a dog. Always. And horrible."

Bennie's eyes bugged. "The hell you say! Like—?" He was on the point of saying: "Like Archie Adams?" and he chopped it off just in time.

"So I don't want the Caliph's Curse to work on me," Uncle Sam said.

Bennie picked up the stone. "I think that's a lot of hogwash," he stated positively. "I'm surprised at you, Uncle Sam, pulling a lowlife trick like that on a good customer like me."

He wrapped the emerald in a ring sack, shoved it safely into his vest pocket. "You ain't trying to tell me that you believe in fairy-stories like that, are you?"

"I am," Uncle Sam averred stoutly.

"Well, I am surprised at you," Bennie chided. "Sorry we can't do business. Maybe I'll be back some day."

"I doubt it," Uncle Sam said sadly. "No one has ever escaped the Caliph's Curse. You won't either."

"Nuts!" gibed Bennie Brill. "Raspberries!" He sauntered to the door. "And double horse-feathers!"

But he wasn't feeling quite so chipper, down deep in his heart . . .

NO, SIR, Bennie Brill wasn't feeling so chipper. When Uncle Sam had passed up the chance to fence that green ice for him, he'd thought it was just one of those things. Maybe the old guy had digested his breakfast wrong, or something.

But it was the others, one by one, who took the starch out of Bennie's self-assurance: Moe Youtz, and Sid Retsbleff, and Paul Logan, and two or three more.

None of them would touch it, for one reason or another.

"There's a curse on it," Sid Retsbleff said, blinking his watery eyes. "It's sure death to own that stone."

"Nuts," snarled Bennie.

"It's the most famous emerald in the world. Every collector and every jeweler knows it. I couldn't move it," Paul Logan said, tapping his monocle softly against his soft, pink hand.

"Nuts," snarled Bennie.

"I ain't superstitious," Moe Youtz announced dubiously, "but I ain't taking any chances. The last legitimate owner was a dame on Park Avenue. She got her throat cut when it was stolen." He peered at Bennie through thick-lensed glasses. "How'd you ever get it, feller?'

"That's my business," Bennie growled.

"Bad business," Moe said dolefully. "I wouldn't give you a lead nickel for it."

"Nuts," snarled Bennie.

He went on home, after making the rounds, fuming. He couldn't get rid of it. He couldn't even give it away. And the idea of the curse laid on the stone was beginning to prey on his mind.

He tried to reason with himself. All that superstition stuff was the bunk. He'd read all about it in a book once. Nothing to it at all. Just hokum.

But he couldn't erase the worry from his mind. All those fences—they weren't fools, either!—seemed to think that stone was dynamite.

He wondered uneasily if he oughtn't to chuck it down a sewer somewhere and be rid of it that way. But you can see how silly that would be. He had a

certain investment in the stone . . . the time he'd shadowed Archie around . . . the time he'd wasted trying to peddle it to the fences.

Clyde came ringing his doorbell. "You look worried," Clyde greeted him cheerfully. "What's the matter?"

"Will you quit hanging around like a long-lost brother?" Bennie snapped irritably. "You ain't welcome now."

"Okay. Okay, if that's the way you feel. Only you seem kinda blue, and I thought I'd cheer you up a little."

He turned to go, and Bennie laid a hand on his arm, stopped him.

"You don't believe in curses and bad luck and things like that, do you, Clyde?"

Clyde stared at him. "Bad luck? Sure! Why I remember one time I was in Brooklyn . . ."

Bennie cut in on him. "I mean, like curses working out, and devils and ghosts and stuff like that?"

Clyde thought about it for a minute. "I don't know. I never seen a ghost myself with my own two eyes, but my uncle Ned—there was a one!—he saw ghosts a heck of a lot of times. Why?"

"Nothing," Bennie grumbled. "I was just thinking."

"Oh," Clyde murmured sympathetically. "That's too bad!" He sucked on his underlip as usual, said finally: "Maybe you ought to go out and get good and stinko drunk, Bennie?"

Bennie glared at him. "Go on and leave me alone, you dope.'

Clyde looked like a dog which has been whipped. He turned away and Bennie closed the door.

If he thought there was any truth in that curse business, he ought to give the emerald to Clyde! That's what he could have done.

But the guy who wrote that book couldn't be wrong, he told himself. Everyone knows that a guy who writes books has to go to college and wear white shirts all the time and know how to talk Latin. He wouldn't be throwing the baloney around, saying curses were all fakeroos, if he didn't know what he was talking about. Would he?

THE Voice was cold and The Voice was low and The Voice was filled with undertones of fearsomeness. Until the moment he died, Bennie Brill always thought of the man who spoke over the telephone as The Voice, and until the moment he died, he was filled with respect and dread for that ominous, persistent monotone.

"I hear you have the Bampuristan emerald," The Voice said over the wire. It was not a question; it was more like a command: You'd better have it, if you know what's good for you!

"Yes," Bennie Brill answered, clenching his teeth to keep them from chattering. "Yeah, I've got it."

"I'll buy it," said The Voice. "You want to sell, don't you "

Bennie nodded, gulped, stammered: "Yeah, I want to sell it."

He could not explain the terror The Voice caused in him; the rippling prickles of fear which danced along his spine. He wished he had the nerve to hang up the receiver, to forget about it all. But he didn't.

"How much do you want for the emerald?" The Voice queried.

"How much is it worth?" Bennie asked respectfully.

"Considering the bad luck attached to the stone because of the curse," The Voice rumbled, "the price will have to be reduced somewhat."

"Well, even so . . ." Bennie began earnestly, but somehow, arguing with The Voice was uphill work. "How much do you . . . ?"

"I'm really doing you a favor," The Voice persisted. "You must have heard what's happened to all the other owners of that gem?"

"Yeah, but—"

"And by getting rid of it, you can probably lessen the effect of the curse on you personally."

"Yeah, but—"

"In consideration of all that, I think I am being very generous when I offer you ten thousand dollars, cash, immediately, for the Bampuristan emerald."

"Yeah, but—" Bennie began, and then the figures sorted themselves out in his mind. "How much?" he bleated.

"Ten thousand dollars, cash."

"You've just bought yourself an emerald, mister," Bennie croaked. "Ten gra— ten thousand dollars is perfectly agreeable."

"In that case," The Voice continued unhurriedly, "I wish to give you a few instructions."

"Yeah? What?"

"Select some absolutely safe hiding place. You will know more about that, probably, than I do."

"And then?" Bennie asked.

"And then put the emerald in that hiding-place, and write out the instructions how to get it again."

Something nibbled at the fringe of Bennie's memory, but he couldn't quite bring it into the clear focus of his active mind. "Yeah, I got that," he replied. "Why?"

"You don't want to carry that baneful jewel around any more than you have to, do you?"

"No," Bennie agreed, nervous, "I'd like to . . ."

"Then do what I say," The Voice commanded brittlely.

"Yes, sir."

"Bring the written instructions to my room at the Hotel Redimac. I'll give you the money for the instructions."

"Just what I write out?" Bennie asked, amazed at this unorthodox method of exchanging goods. "All on trust?"

"Certainly!" The Voice boomed. "Of course, I trust you, just as you trust me. Though naturally, it wouldn't be wise for you to try to double-cross me."

"Of course not," Bennie agreed with alacrity, while the menace in The Voice played a *marche funèbre* on the harpstrings of his fear. "I can see that. When shall I come to the hotel?"

"I shall be out until late," said The Voice in sepulchral tones. "I'll try to make it by midnight. I'll leave instructions at the desk to admit you to my room, and you can wait for me there."

"Midnight?" Bennie whispered. "Well, all right."

"Midnight," insisted The Voice. "We'll do our business then."

The Voice broke the connection, and Bennie racked his own receiver with jittering hand, stumbled quaking to the place where he'd hidden his liquor from Clyde and downed a quick, stiff drink. One of them. Two. Three . . .

AT TWENTY minutes of twelve, Bennie walked out the front door of the Taliaferro Arms. He had finished carrying out The Voice's instructions. The emerald had been packed back into its nest of tissue paper, wrapped once more in rough wrapping paper, and stowed away in a luggage locker in Times Square. Bennie had laboriously written out the instructions for recovering it again. He had got it from a locker like that in the first place, and he couldn't think of any better hideaway for it now.

As he walked onto the sidewalk in front of the building, whom do you

suppose he met? That's right: Clyde!

Clyde, all ready to go to work, with his brief-case of tools under his arm, wearing a white felt hat, the dope! Did you ever hear of a robber wearing a white hat, made to order so that he could be spotted easily in the dark?

"Another big job tonight?" Clyde asked with notes of astonishment in his voice. "Boy, you must be working toward buying yourself a yacht!"

"Maybe I will," Bennie returned grandly. "A nice, small yacht. I've always liked the water."

"Aw, gee," Clyde said. "You're always kidding a guy, Bennie. Want me to come along and help you?"

"No!" Bennie said with stern emphasis. "I do not."

"Okay. Okay, if that's the way you feel."

Bennie jerked a thumb at the cab parked down the street, climbed in as the machine purred to a stop beside him. "Hotel Redimac," he ordered the hackie.

And even as the heap rolled away from the curb, he could see Clyde flagging another, piling in.

"Damn it," swore Bennie. "I'll bet that dope is going to tag along after me."

He lighted a cigarette with twitching fingers, lolled back uncomfortably on the cushions.

Ten minutes later, he stepped out under the marquee of the Hotel Redimac, marched through the lobby to the clerk's desk.

"I'm Bennie Brill," he announced nervously. "A friend of mine is expecting to meet me here."

The clerk looked up with sad, bloodshot eyes. "Bennie Brill? Oh, yes, Mr. Morte left word about that. Here's the duplicate key. Will you take the elevator, please? Room seven-thirteen!"

Seven-thirteen? Bennie rolled those unlucky words over the tongue of his mind, and he didn't like the taste of them. In fact, he was almost ready to throw up the sponge, but he turned toward the revolving doors just in time to see Clyde Cranmore circle in one side, peer quickly at him, and circle out the other.

Bennie took the key, stepped into the elevator.

Room seven-thirteen looked as if no human had ever been in it. All except the closed suitcase and the book lying open on the bed.

Bennie hoisted the suitcase tentatively, snapped the lock open. It held surprising contents. A half-dozen books and several dirty Turkish towels. Hotel Truex. Hotel Roumania. Hotel Limpson. The books were even less interesting than the towels. They were telephone books.

"What the hell?" Bennie Brill asked himself.

He glanced at the opened book on the bed. "Murder's What You Make It!" Bennie dropped the volume as if he had been burned.

He didn't like this mysterious business. He didn't like it even a little bit.

He went over to the opened French windows, stepped out onto the low-railed balcony. Below him, on the street, dwarfed by perspective but still recognizable because of the white hat, was Clyde, pacing back and forth patiently.

He was almost the only person within sight, for it was well after midnight, now, and most citizens were in bed already, or on their way to bed.

Bennie leaned on the stone railing and pondered a moment. Funny thing how most people wasted the best hours of the twenty-four, pounding their ear. And hurried around like mad during the daytime.

Funny about people! Take Clyde down there, the dumb lug. He could make more dough working like an honest John for a locksmith than he made prowling around on his own.

Bennie was just about to light his cigarette when the hand fell on his shoulder.

He nearly jumped out of his skin. He hadn't heard the door open; hadn't heard The Voice come in.

He eased back into the hotel room, took a good look at the man . . .

BENNIE BRILL took a good look at the man, and he wished fervently that he had never come to Room seven-thirteen of the Hotel Redimac. For The Voice was a huge fellow, much better than a head taller than Bennie.

But his face!

His face was enough to make a strong man's stomach churn, for it was covered with scars, as if he had been incautious enough to shove it into the open door of a blast furnace.

And set in that battlefield of wounded flesh, were the most extraordinary eyes Bennie had ever seen. They glowed like embers, bored through Bennie with a burning intensity.

"Did you follow out my instructions?" The Voice asked in a monotone which was even more frightening face to face than it had been over the telephone.

"Y-yes, sir," Bennie stammered.

"And you wrote out the instructions as to how to get the emerald again?"

"Y-yes, sir," Bennie answered, drawing the envelope from his pocket.

"Well, what are you waiting for?" The Voice snarled, while the eyes blazed at Bennie. "Give it here!"

Bennie clamped his fingers on the envelope. "How about the money?"

"The money? What money?"

"The ten grand you promised me!"

The Voice laughed, a horrible, hollow, mocking sound, and Bennie wished with all his soul that he had never heard that laugh.

"Ten grand?" The Voice chortled. "Can't you take a little joke?"

"Not about ten grand," Bennie affirmed, with the courage of desperation. "You said ten grand. Confucius say: No tickee, no washee."

"Give it here!" The Voice thundered.

Bennie stepped back, thrusting the envelope behind him. "Let's see the color of your money."

"Give it here!" The Voice repeated, like the bugle-call from the Judgment Seat. His hand came out of his topcoat pocket, and it was fisted around a short, ugly automatic. "This is the color of my money, dolt!"

"No!" Bennie squalled. "No, I won't give it to you!" He retreated from the threat of the weapon.

"Give it here, you fool!" The Voice insisted. "Don't spoil things now—give me that envelope." He took a step forward and Bennie backpedaled to match his advance.

"Look here, pal," The Voice spoke again, more gently. "This is no way to act. This is no way to conduct a business arrangement. Let's talk this matter over."

"Show me the money," Bennie Brill wailed. "Show me the money and I'll talk!"

"Well, wait a minute."

The Voice thrust his gun under his armpit, where he could get it again very speedily . . .

Bennie watched with bugged eyes.

And then The Voice lunged toward Bennie, fingers splayed, arched fiendishly to circle Bennie's scrawny neck!

Bennie screamed, leaped back. And

you know what happened, don't you? His legs slammed against that low stone railing, shot from under him. His rump bounced once on the top of the balustrade, and then he pitched out into the black, warm night, making tight little circles in the air, and shrieking like a banshee as he fell . . .

THE Voice stood on the balcony, staring at the dimlit street. "Just like the other time!" he said softly. Just like the other time!" He could make out the sprawled, broken body of Bennie Brill, plastered to the sidewalk, and he could make out the white blot of the envelope still clutched in Bennie's hand . . .

And even as The Voice watched, a man in a very light-colored hat darted out of the shadows, snatched up that envelope, vanished into the shadows again like a startled ghost.

"Just like before!" The Voice murmured—so softly and faintly that it might have been a sigh.

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# Handwriting Secrets

## *Character Clues in Pen and Ink*

## By Helen King

HAD you heard that certain police officials now require any person brought in on the charge of drunken driving to pass a handwriting test before being allowed to go home—or elsewhere? Yes, sir, analysis of handwriting is one more way police can check the state of your sobriety.

When brought before the authorities the suspected driver is asked to write his name, address, and a few other things in the form of a questionnaire. Later, when he has time to cool off a bit, he again writes a few things. And still later—when the judge appears to decide the question—the samples of writing are presented for approval. Liquor has a way of affecting handwriting to such an extent that the difference between a man's writing when drunk and when sober is marked. Chalk up another use for graphology.

Dear Miss King:

I think it would be interesting to know a few facts about some of the writers of detective stories. How do their minds work? Do they work subjectively or objectively? Do they become involved in their yarns and find it difficult to extricate their heroes? Let's see what our writers are like. What say you?

E. S.

Dear E. S.:

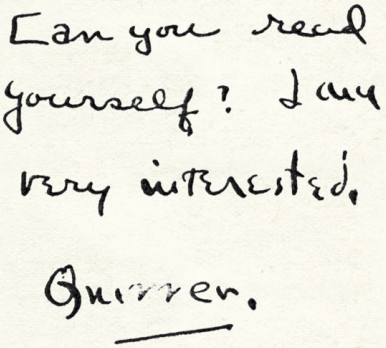
I say okay, if the writers have no objections. You name 'em and I'll read 'em.

H. K.

Dear Reader:

Does an analyst analyze herself? Or does someone else do that? Can you read yourself? Can any analyst of any type read himself? If so, I'm going to take up these "ologies" as a hobby. Do you think I'd be good at it? Why?

Quizzer




Dear Quizzer:

Anyone who questions throughout an entire letter is thirsting for knowledge. Such a person usually makes good in any scientific work—you included. An analyst dislikes working on himself just as much as a doctor will not treat himself, if he can possibly avoid it. We live with ourselves so much we become blind to our own flaws and thus do not have an unbiased opinion. It is always best to have the critical opinion of someone who is impersonally interested.

We can all read ourselves a little—but the outside opinion is better. For example: your writing shows stubbornness in small things. Knowing this, you can point out a reason and excuse yourself. But you would condemn that same trait in the other fellow, because you don't know his reason for the same trait. Thus you show favoritism.

H. K.

And here is still another letter from the Mail Bag.

Dear Miss King:

What are the commercial possibilities of a handwriting feature, such as yours? I have studied this as a hobby, and would like to start earning a little now and then. To date I have not attempted such a thing, just because I didn't know where to start. Please give a beginner some advice.

Peter Maul

Dear Mr. Maul:

Start with your own local people. Go to church bazaars and fraternal organizations. Work out some financial arrangement —a percentage basis perhaps. This will get you in practice for answering all sorts of questions and will break you in easily. Then approach your local paper for permission to run a weekly column. And if you have gone that far, you will yourself recognize the possibilities of public, personnel, police and publication work. Ask the police if you can study writings. Ask your doctor to let you study at an asylum. Don't be afraid to do a little work in exchange for these favors. Remember, you are building up a reputation, and these local people will be of great assistance to that end. Best wishes.

H. K.

Once again requests have come for a rapid method of learning specified traits. In order to find the trait mentioned, look for the accompanying signs.

*Personality:* look for rhythm, underscore, unusual letter formations and an outstanding signature.

*Persistence:* hooks; *f* and *t* tied in little bows.

*Patience:* lack of shading, a rounded even style of writing.

*Originality:* look for Greek and cultured formations, especially in *e, d* and *g*; new formations and cryptic styles.

*Obstinacy:* hooks, and downward flung *t*-bar.

*Observation:* careful and neat formations throughout; the *i*-dots carefully placed; *t*-crossing correct.

*Bigotry:* cramped letters; closed *a* and *o*.

*Modesty:* small capital *I;* simplified strokes and capitals.

*Refinement* is found in the use of Greek formations; in fine, clear writing, and in lack of vulgarity.

*Repressions* show up in cramped, squeezed letters, and in the small, squeezed, capital *I*.

*Reserved* feelings may be found in a tightly closed capital *D* and general restraint throughout.

*Resistance* to ideas, is shown in the tightly closed *a* and *o*, plus a firm, strong *t*-bar.

*Sarcasm* shows up in angular formations of letters, plus a tent-shaped *i* dot.

## PURELY PERSONAL

*Mark D.*—No.

*Leona D.*—You aren't playing fair, either. Is anger and pride going to break

MISS HELEN KING,
DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY
280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

This coupon is not good after June 29, 1940

I enclose handwriting specimen for advice and analysis.

Name..... Age.....

Address .....

.....

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up a marriage? Give yourself a mental kicking. Mark is too nice a fellow to lose.

*Paul G.*—Farming today is on a scientific scale, and help in the form of literature is available merely for the asking from your Uncle Sam. Study up a bit before going in, even though you aren't exactly the student type!

*Kenna.*—Many lawyers today also have a small insurance business on the side. It started as a convenience for the client, but developed into a nice little income for the lawyer—so again a profession has added a business.

*Edward*—There is more to life than just earning a living. Once you have learned to care for someone other than yourself you will see that. Misers learn to love money—that is their life. Natural people have a normal love—that of human nature.

## Cipher Solvers' Club

(*Continued from page* 86)

Bill Renwick, Detroit, Mich. Silver, Hermiston, Oreg. Vag, Harrisburg, Pa.

*Three*—Bob III, Platteville, Wis. Reddy Kilowatt, Charleston, S. C. †Wear, Brookhaven, N. Y.

*Two*—Louis E. Krieg, Allentown, Pa.

*One*—J. C. Casamianc, Savannah, Ga. Pearlie Glen, Baltimore, Md. H. E. Henriques, Salt Lake City, Utah. Dorothy Johnson, Niles, Mich. Tyro X, College Park, Md. Fred A. Yin, Quincy, Fla.

*Corrections*—†Envy El, Minneapolis, Minn., 24 answers for Jan., instead of 18. †Mystic Mac, Miami, Fla. 24 answers for Jan., instead of 18. °Dick Tate, Battle Creek, Mich., 24 answers for Jan., instead of 18. °C. F., Baltimore, Md., 11 for Jan., instead of 6. †Wear, Brookhaven, N. Y., 8 answers for Jan., instead of 4. Reshockl Mesloh, Milwaukee, Wis., 6 answers for Jan., not previously credited. †Ian, Glace Bay, Nova Scotia, 12 answers for Oct., '39, not previously credited.


# Heroes of the Sword

## Zorro . . . *The Robin Hood*

## Tizzo . . . *The Firebrand*

## Dougall . . . *The Pirate*

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# Solving Cipher Secrets

M. E. OHAVER
"Sunyam"

**A CIPHER is secret writing. The way to solve ciphers is to experiment with substitute letters until real words begin to appear. In solving, notice the frequency of certain letters. For instance, the letters e, t, a, o, n, i, are the most used in our language. So if the puzzle maker has used X to represent e, X will probably appear very frequently. Combinations of letters will also give you clues. Thus, the affixes -ing, -ion, -ally are frequent. Helpful hints appear in this department each week. The first cryptogram is the easiest.**

No. 139—Famous Dates. By †Chemystic.

OS LALUED UJ VEATF AZASFM, FROM DATE PA ITS IAHAG-ETFA FRA MANIASFASTED UJ *IRTKIAE'M GOEFR, FRA IAS-FASTED UJ FRA JOEMF YUMFTVA MFTLY TSC (TYYEUNOLT-FAHD) UJ FRA JOEMF YETIFOITH YRUFUVETYRD.

No. 140—For Reel and Creel. By †K. Aaba.

ER AUGHT NYEA BOX VYCC EC DUZRP, LOXAX BOX CLEANERS XPPT PEKC; ERGO DUA ERGO YRP FUZRP DUA FUZRP, BOX SYKXCB DECO BOYB CLEKC!

No. 141—Taking a Short Cut. By †Mono Verde.

CFDBAEKBG HDTLFG, NDBHEGO DAAEPFH, DAAFTRAL VPUL-LESN LXDTR DKUUA. LGERRFPO TULL-VUZFPFH GUN LBPR-PELFL NDG. NDPELQ KESFPO GEYBEHDAFH.

No. 142—Missing Men. By †Jaybee.

NFRELXFN LKSVHPL NRNSZTZHRN LNTDSDEL, LERTL LGZE-LXTL, LXNXDPL LNSZHXDYL NRNSLTFN. LVRNZGL NTHRX-EPLVN LKSHNFRVDFL, LKTHPZDFL NTBHVDPN, LGHVGL LVDOHPDFL NTBLALN, LUULTFRDFL LNTDSL.

No. 143—Injustice Avenged. By F. H. D.

YBGQRT ZGBVXGGK YSKPAHO OBSKPHXGDO ISBOHEGGPO SKHKV OTBZEAKH OTLGZESKV. SYOVHFAGDO NBSPASVGX ZGKPHXGDOBT AKUSBAPSVHO LSBDFAKGDO IANFHKVO. ZDOABBSKAFGDO XHLXHSKV SLLHBHXSVHO PHZSXVDXH.

FROM the standpoint of providing clues, a zero occurring in an "inside" position in the devisor of a cryptic division puzzle is in some ways practically the same as having an extra "unit position" symbol inserted in the divisor. And the solution of a given problem is usually much simplified when it is possible to identify a zero in such a position, due to the larger number of multiplications and subtractions, without "carries," that can thus be singled out for examination.

The first step in such a solution, of course, is to find the symbol for *zero*. To illustrate, take this week's No. 144, by Vedette, where zero may be quickly narrowed down to N through elimination, by rejecting the impossible symbols A, L, and P in the quotient; left-hand symbols O, P, W, A, and E in the divisor, dividend, products, etc.; and unit symbols W and A, C and D, K and D, in the subtractions, duly noting the three different symbols (as L — W = A) in each.

| | |
|---|---|
| O x A = C | P x A = W |
| O x L = W | P x L = C |
| O x P = E | P x P = K |

Now, with N established as zero, and with a zero thus allocated to an inside position in the divisor ONP, it is plain that there can be no "carries" to the hundreds position in any of the products. The present problem thus yields, altogether, six multiplications of O and P, all without "carries," as given in the table herewith. (Further, for use if needed, three more *subtractions* without "carries," W — C = A, A — W = W, and W — E = E, are also indicated in the hundreds positions.)

However, suppose we employ the above multiplications in finding *5*, as probably the readiest mode of entry in this particular puzzle. In doing this, merely remember that all single-digit multiplications of *5*, must contain either two *5*'s, or a *5* and a *0*, with one of the latter in the product. Upon inspection, (since N is already known as *zero*), none of the present multiplications have the necessary repeated symbol for digit *5*. Hence, eliminating these, the only symbol left for that value is D. The key to No. 144 is numbered thus: *012 3456789*.

Turning to this week's crypts, guess FRA and FROM, noting -'M, in †Chemystic's message. Then get OS, TSC, and AZASFM. In †K. Aaba's contribution, guess BOX, BOYB, and LOXAX, also ER and -ERS, for entry, and then try for CLEANERS, noting EC and NYEA. The ending -LFL will help with VPULLESN (note the double) and LGERRFPO, in †Mono Verde's contribution.

Only two initial and final symbols are used in †Jaybee's construction! Some of the words begin and end in symbol N, and others in symbol L. Ending -LXTL affords an entering wedge. Lastly, spot your own leads in F. H. D.'s Inner Circle cipher! Answers to Nos. 139-44 will be published next week. Asterisks indicate capitalization.

No. 144—Cryptic Division. By Vedette.

```
O N P ) P W D L P A ( A L P
        W C E W
        ---------
          A A A P
          A W E C
          -------
            W W D A
            W E N K
            -------
              E A D
```

## LAST WEEK'S ANSWERS

133—"They say that fish should swim thrice. First, in the sea (do you mind me?); then, in butter; and last of all, sirrah, in good claret."—Swift.

134—Two kinds of rocks are found in the earth's crust: those poured out from the furnace within, by the action of fire; and those spread over the surface above, by the action of water.

135—Hysterical women phoned fire company after noting slight olfactory disturbance. Chief adjudicated conflagration purely psychological!

136—Cryptogrammic communique: Axis actors allay Allies. Boot boots Haille highly. Francisco Franco spans Spain. Naughty Nazis polish Polish. Rushin' Russians finish Finnish.

137—Rhythmic melody, vaguely familiar strain, disturbs halcyon daydream, poetic soliloquy. Fanciful sonnet, unwritten, suffers sharp setback; promptly follows music into oblivion.

138—Key:

| | |
|---|---|
| 0 1 2 3 4 5 | 6 7 8 9 |
| T R I C K Y | G A M E |

All answers to Nos. 139-44 will be duly listed in our *Cipher Solvers' Club* for June. Address: M. E. Ohaver, DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

# Prize Letter Contest

Use the coupon below to vote on the stories in this issue, and don't forget that the reader who writes the best letter, of 50 words or more, on the reasons for his (or her) first choice will receive a cash award of $10.00.

DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

*In my opinion the stories in the June 15th issue of Detective Fiction Weekly rank as follows:*

| | No. Here |
|---|---|
| MAN OF VENGEANCE by Lawrence Treat | ..... |
| A SIMPLE CASE OF MURDER by Philip Ketchum | ..... |
| YOU CAN'T HANG A DEAD MAN by Eric Howard | ..... |
| DANGER IN NUMBERS by Martin Labas | ..... |
| THE SOUTH AMERICAN WAY by James A. Kirch | ..... |
| IN THE BAG by Paul Allenby | ..... |
| INVISIBLE CRIMINALS by Robert Sneddon | ..... |
| THE CALIPH'S CURSE by Charles Ingerman | ..... |

Attached is my letter of 50 words or more giving my reasons for selecting ..... ..... as the best story in this issue of DFW. I understand that all letters are to become the property of The Frank A. Munsey Company.

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

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*(This coupon is not good after June 22, 1940)*

*(Address all letters to the Prize Letter Editor)*

## *Coming Next Week*

Here's a story you'll never forget: the story of a man who waited downstairs while his girl went up in an apartment house to deliver a package for her employer. When she failed to return he went looking for her—only to find that no one had seen her and the apartment had been empty for six months.

## THE FINGER OF DOOM

By CORNELL WOOLRICH

**DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY**

***(On sale next Wednesday, June 12)***

# FLASHES from READERS

THE second letter contest has closed and already the casualties are mounting. The mailman complains of getting bowlegged from carrying so many letters; one of the editors has developed a permanent squint in his left eye from reading them; a secretary just had a nervous breakdown; and as for the guy that signs the checks—on a quiet day it's possible to hear his groans all the way in here. In other words, the contest is a howling success and everybody's happy except the people who have more work to do.

We'd like to mention again that we're sorry as hell that we can't answer every letter. We'd like to sit down and write each one a chatty letter, asking all about the kids, grandma's chilblains, and Uncle Henry's system for betting on the horses—as well as talking about one of the men at the next desk who has just taken a somewhat sickly potted geranium to his bosom and spends hours watering it and taking it to the window for a breath of fresh air. But we're afraid if we tried that nothing else would be done.

The rating for the first three stories in the April 20th issue is as follows:

| STORY | AUTHOR | VOTES |
|---|---|---|
| Murder Holds the Reins | Donald Barr Chidsey | 14,300 |
| Troubled Waters | B. B. Fowler | 11,275 |
| Once to Every Cop | G.T.Fleming-Roberts | 10,950 |

Congratulations are due Mr. W. W. Wheeler, of Houston, Texas, who gets a check for ten bucks.

**W. W. WHEELER**

DEAR SIR:

"Once to Every Cop" is very human, "Rough Stuff" has swell action, "Certainly, Sister" has sinister suspense and "Comical Copper" has welcome humor. But "Murder Holds the Reins" contains all of these qualities—and more!

I read the novelet last, but it certainly ranks first, in my opinion. The opening promised a splendid story, and it never let me down. It's hard action gives a clearer picture by contrast with the soft Southern setting. The style helps enormously, too; so easy to read and sprinkled with humor. The sanitarium scenes are superior stuff; the sparring match between Brady and Morton alone was worth my ten cents. Characterization of the macabre, cowardly Lassa, the shadowy, secretive Claessens and big, brutal Brady is excellent. And, of course, Morton and McGarvey are simply swell sleuths!

Hoping you give us more of these good short stories and novelets instead of serials, I remain,

HOUSTON, TEXAS

Following is a letter from a gentleman who thinks our recent editorial was out of place, since it's his opinion that we have too much drinking and swearing. We disagree. We feel that the only comment necessary is that Mr. Williams only mentions two stories (or characters). As it happens neither of these characters have appeared in DFW since 1938. In fact, the authors have both been with their ancestors for two years. We must check with the newsdealers in Canada to see if they're a couple of years behind on their sales.

**GEORGE WILLIAMS**

DEAR EDITOR:

Enclosed find page 112 from one of your recent mags. My attention was drawn to this page by a bit on another page of the same mag. After reading this thru I think it about time some one told you that people who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones. I don't think the horror mags you talk about are as demoralizing to the young people as DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY drunken reporters and detectives and the swearing that has crept into this (fine mag). It is a wonder the reporters and detectives don't sue you for defaming their reputations.

I have been a reader of your mag. since June, 1929 and I like most of the stories. Your Fluffy McGoffs and Johnny Dolans are the bunk to me but then some one else might like them so that's O. K. with me. I just don't like more than one serial either and those gun cranks to me are just some who like to show their superiority. I read to be entertained and I don't care how far fetched a story is so long as they get it here.

I have a growing family and I cannot leave your magazine around the house any more because my kiddies will get hold of it. I don't want them to think they have to be steeped in booze and have to hell and dam when they grow up to be a man. (All into one man?—Editor). I have cussed a bit but I never do it when there are ladies or children around. I don't mind anyone taking a drink once in a while but when the heroes of your stories have to get half boiled and cuss all the time in order to work properly I begin to wonder if you and some of your writers are not on the payroll of some of the booze foundries over there.

I used to hand your mag. to some of my friends but they don't want it any more because of the drunken swearing (heroes?) that have crept into it. If this is to continue I guess I will have to get something else to read myself.

LONDON, ONT., CANADA

Another gentleman with a complaint. We think it is enough to say that Mr. Beyer's story was bought long before the play opened on Broadway and that the basic crime idea (which is the only thing similar) was not particularly new with the play.

**R. E. P.**

DEAR SIR:

William Gray Beyer must be quite a theatre addict, in fact such a good one that his contribution "Three Times Murder" could have been called "Margin for Error."

It is too bad with all the good writers turning out original work you have to buy second hand plots. The author of "Margin for Error" should receive the fee for his own stories, don't you think?

I still think you have a fine magazine and I am not stopping my subscription but for heaven's sake let's leave the "copying" up to others.

WINCHESTER, MASS.

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**RICHARD SALE**

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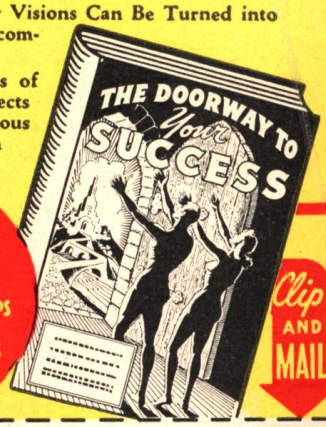


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