

# DETECTIVE

# FICTION WEEKLY



# HURRICANE HEIST



**A**  
**MORTON and**  
**Mc GARVEY**  
*Caribbean Adventure*

**Sing a Song  
of Six Slugs**  
*A Sensational Short Story by*  
**RICHARD SALE**

**Martin Lehigh, Frank Gruber  
and others**



Let me help you give fine  
I'll trust you - I'll give you  
**10 MONTHS to Pay**

**GIFTS**

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Sales Mgr.

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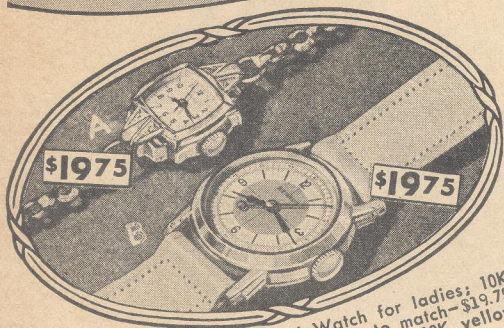


A84/C75-Bridal Set; 8 diamonds; both rings 14K yellow gold. \$3.15 a month

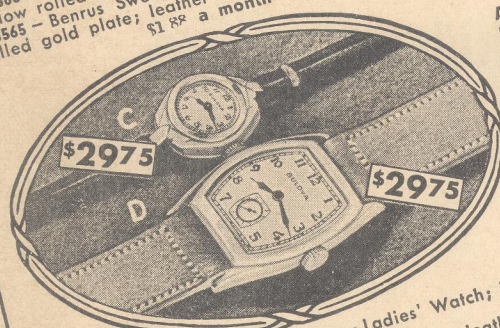
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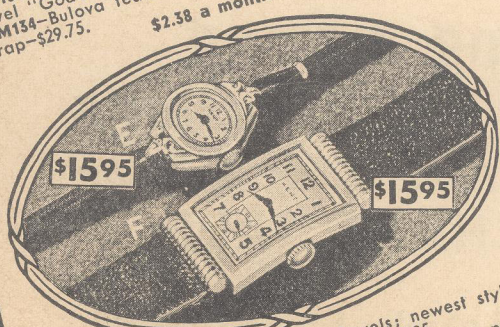
M154-Man's Initial Ring; diamond and 2 initials on Black Onyx; 10K yellow gold. \$1.60 a month



A-T566-Benrus Sweepsecond Watch for ladies; 10K yellow rolled gold plate; bracelet to match—\$19.75  
B-9565 - Benrus Sweepsecond for men; 10K yellow rolled gold plate; leather strap. \$1.88 a month



C-R154-Bulova's newest feature - Ladies' Watch; 17 jewel "Goddess of Time"—\$29.75.  
D-M154-Bulova feature for men; 17 jewels; leather strap—\$29.75.  
\$2.38 a month



E-P159-Ladies' Kent Watch; 7 jewels; newest style 10K yellow rolled gold plate case—\$15.95.  
F-K190 - Man's Kent Watch; 7 jewels; sturdy; new style; 10 yellow rolled gold plate case—\$15.95.  
\$1.50 a month

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# DETECTIVE

## FICTION WEEKLY



TITLE REGISTERED U. S. PATENT OFFICE

Formerly FLYNN'S

Volume 141

NOVEMBER 9, 1940

Number 2

### Serial

- THE TALKING CLOCK**—6 parts—5.....Frank Gruber 83  
*... loses, temporarily, its voice—a \$75,000-dollar voice!*

### Short Novel

- HURRICANE HEIST**.....Donald Barr Chidsey 6  
*When Sergeant Morton bucked a million-dollar parlay with a seidel of  
 pilsener ... death rode the winner!*

### Novelets and Short Stories

- FINGER MAN**.....Preston Grady 34  
*Ned Thompson snubbed a roll of hot money—to accept an invitation  
 to the morgue*

- MAKE MINE MURDER**—Novelet.....Martin Lehigh 55  
*... and serve it cold—cold-blooded!*

- SING A SONG OF SIX SLUGS**.....Richard Sale 73  
*... but the song that really delighted Tim Coffin was the solid smack  
 of a fist!*

- KILLER AT LARGE**.....Edward Ronns 100  
*They made their home in the shadow of a menace to free themselves  
 from fear*

### True Story

- SHADOW OF DOUBT**.....Francis V. Roberts 46  
*The killer was protected by an impenetrable wall of amnesia*

### Features

- SOLVING CIPHER SECRETS**.....M. E. Ohaver 109  
**YOU'RE THE JURY WINNERS**.....111

*Photographs used for cover illustration courtesy of Columbia Pictures Corp.; Monogram Pictures Corp.; Paramount Pictures, Inc.; United Artists Corp.*

### A RED STAR Magazine

**THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, Publisher, 280 Broadway, NEW YORK, N. Y.**  
**WILLIAM T. DEWART, President & Treasurer** **WILLIAM T. DEWART, JR., Secretary**

PARIS: HACHETTE & CIE, 111 Rue Réaumur

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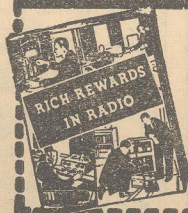
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**THE EMSTIRE COMPANY, Dept. 64**

1966 Broadway, New York, N. Y.



# Hurricane Heist

*An Exceptional  
Short Novel*



The holdup man got in three shots

*A Morton and McGarvey Story*

**By Donald Barr Chidsey**

MORTON settled himself in the stern, loosened his revolver in readiness for a cross-belly draw, placed his immaculately shod feet together, and frowned when the boat wobbled.

"Can't you even row?"

"I can row all right! I'm just not used to this thing."

The boat was very small while young McGarvey was very big, and his knees stuck up so high that he had difficulty guiding his fists past them. But he was

getting the hang of it. Presently the boat slid with speed and no sound through water on which splashes of light lay in rows like so many golden javelins.

"Maybe Limpus isn't going to like this?"

"Maybe he isn't," said Morton, and sighed. "Deliver me from millionaires! This wouldn't be such a bad town if it wasn't for them."

Wentworth L. Morton, given to grouching, got crabbier and crabbier in



*Sergeant Morton was beginning to feel his arteries . . . so he tried to crab a million-buck heisting act—with a glass of pilsener*



his old age; but it meant nothing. The truth is, he had many good friends among the millionaires who crowd Miami every winter. He was intimate with any number of czars of industry, captains of finance, scions of families which had given their names to nationally advertised products. And he was democratic. If they were good guys and bought their share of beers, they were all right by him. He treated them just as he would treat any other friends, whether fellow cops or bartenders or arsonists or what. It was only when he was in a notably grumpy mood, as he was tonight, that he spluttered about the harm they did and the work they gave to the police.

For Miami gendarmes suffer from the sins of all the country. Each winter the millionaires come, yes, in droves; and, *being* millionaires, they are welcomed. But each winter also on the heels of these millionaires come tinhorn sports and confidence men, horse players, crooked dice artists, touts, phony stock salesmen, criminal adventurers of every kind, male and female.

Few have any connections or associates in Miami, a mere hunting ground for them. They do not even splurge the take locally, as a hometown crook might do. They come, they plunder, and they scamper away with their spoils—or else are expelled by an exasperated police force. They don't belong. They're



strangers, unpredictable, unsociable, acquisitive, without conscience.

So that from time to time, when he was with old cronies who remembered the days-when, Sergeant Morton, that bored, tired, dapper astounding veteran, would moan like this about how nice his Miami—for he always considered it more or less his personal property—had been before it was invaded by the moguls of wealth. Which was just as sensible as saying that New York would be a fine town if you could only get rid of the skyscrapers.

"A little more to the right."

"It's called starboard."

"Never mind what it's called! Turn that way!"

The *Zuleika Dobson II* was a bit too big to snuggle into any of the berths just then available, so she remained at anchor a short distance out. Not that she was large, as private yachts go. She was 106 feet on the water line, though she had a lean overhang which made her look both longer and faster than she was. She was white, sleek, natty, a worldly and sophisticated boat, supercilious even, in this hangout of expensive and splendid craft.

She belonged to Wilkie Limpus, who was a *Character*. None of your modern, bland, quiet, faultlessly valeted businessmen of good family about Limpus. He was of the old school. He was loud-mouthed; he was fat, and sloppy; he loved to chew cigars. Well educated, he affected vulgarity. His sense of humor was admittedly mad. He loved to laugh. He laughed when he lost as when he won, for he was an inveterate gambler—and what's more, he called himself that, a gambler, and was honest about it, not pretending to be anything else. Wall Street to him was a green baize table.

He liked the lights and glitter, he en-

joyed applause, he was a born showman and would do anything for a gasp. More than once he'd been wiped out; but he had borrowed money somehow, from somewhere, and had come back into the game more boisterous and reckless than ever. The newer nabobs, who were emphatically well-bred, and who attended a lot of conferences and spoke earnestly and often, especially in public, about ethics—these men preferred not to discuss Wilkie Limpus. He didn't care.

"O.K. Now hold it steady while I climb up."

The deck was deserted. They crossed to the main cabin, and on the way Morton, who was sore enough already, stumbled over a sack of sand or something—anyway, whatever it was, it shouldn't have been there. He cursed it, and went on.

They entered the cabin unannounced.

"Excuse the interruption. We're after a man with a gun."

THE Limpuses were entertaining.

Both Morton and his young sidekick knew well the two politicians. In addition Morton had on some previous occasion met Limpus himself, a fact which Limpus now recalled loudly.

"Come in, Captain! Come in!"

"Sergeant," Morton corrected. "Have you seen a man who—"

"My dear, this is Captain Morton, the smartest detective in Florida. Why, he's done more to put this town on the map than anybody else since Carl Fisher! Lots of the tourists really come down here just to catch a glimpse of Captain Morton."

"Sergeant," Morton corrected again. He bobbed his head. "Pleased to meet you, Mrs. Limpus. This is my partner, McGarvey."

The wife of the plunger was small, dark, and something to see. Young Mc-



Garvey at least gave her a great deal of attention. But ordinarily her famous husband put her in the shade. You seldom looked at anybody else when you were in the same room with Wilkie Limpus.

He was all shirt front and face. His cheeks and chins joggled when he laughed. Seated, he seemed a big man; but when he rose you saw that his legs were absurdly short; he suggested a frog standing up. Moreover he had a funny way of walking. Not only did he waddle, for he was preposterously fat, but he always walked as though he were going downhill and felt the need to dig his heels in carefully lest he be pitched forward.

His dinner coat tonight fitted him abominably. His eyes, tiny, merry, light blue, were almost lost from sight in the great gobs of fat which went to make up his face. What hair he had was yellow and lank. He needed a shave.

"Of course you know—uh—Mr. Blahblah and Commissioner—uh—Wahlala." The owner, laughing, slurred the names. Morton and, behind him, McGarvey bobbed their heads without much respect.

"And this is my friend Mr. Valentine, the art dealer."

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Valentine," the two detectives said politely, and shook hands with a small dark spiderlike man.

"Valentine'd just love to buy my wife's emeralds for some client of his. Been after me for months. Offering all sorts of fancy money. But of course he hasn't got a chance."

Morton glanced swiftly at Mrs. Limpus. No, she was not wearing them. She wore pearls in her ears, a short string of small pearls about her neck, a diamond ring, but not emeralds.

The Limpus emeralds were as famous

as their owner, who in fact was the person who had made them so. For they were not originally a celebrated collection; they had no colorful history. Not that they weren't good emeralds! They were—the very finest the old Inca mine at Muso had ever yielded. Set in platinum and generously besprinkled with diamonds, they flashed in two rings, two bangles, a stunning necklace, a pair of tear-drop pendants, and a girdle clasp containing one enormous stone cut *en cabochon*.

These emeralds had been assembled for Limpus prosaically, in a business-like manner, over a period of several years. There was no Sancy among them, not any Koh-i-noor, Matan, Hope Blue, Great Mogul, Pitt, Braganza, Rio des Velhas. None, not even the one that formed the girdle catch, and which was sometimes, though erroneously, reputed to be the biggest emerald in the world, had ever been involved in any scene of violence; nor had one ever been owned by a royal personage, stolen from an idol's forehead, hidden in a self-inflicted wound, or presented to a courtesan who had moulded history.

Nevertheless, they constituted what was perhaps the most talked-about collection of emeralds in existence, always excepting that which formerly belonged to the Russian Imperial family. The reason lay in Wilkie Limpus's ability to sensationalize everything he touched. He liked to have reporters cluster around him, he loved to see his wife's picture in the papers, and he could have taught P. T. Barnum tricks in Barnum's own game. Where there were no stories, he made 'em up, and he made 'em so vivid that the reporters, whether or not they believed them, were obliged to use them in their stories. The actual handing-over to Limpus of the completed collection and his handing-



over of the final payment check was an event photographed and described as copiously as though it were a heavy-weight championship or the signing of an epochal international treaty.

About the price itself he had maintained, and had seen that everybody else connected with it maintained, an elaborate silence. Guesses soared. There were scoffers who declared that the whole caboodle couldn't have cost more than a couple of hundred thousand dollars; but the majority confidently quoted sums ranging from half a million to three and a half. Meanwhile of course Limpus kept his mouth shut, while his wife looked lovely in the pictures and drew a crowd wherever she went.

MORTON frowned.

"I hope you didn't bring *them* with you, Mr. Limpus?"

"There they are, right over on the table there. I've just been showing them to—uh—to these gentlemen. Why? Certainly there aren't any *crooks* in a town where you work, Captain?"

"Likely to be crooks anywhere. Garv and I walked aboard this yacht easy enough, just now. Not a soul in sight."

"You should have been challenged. A forecastle hand named Jackson's supposed to be on watch. The rest of the boys are ashore. We only arrived this afternoon, and tomorrow we sail for the West Indies, so I thought I'd let them enjoy themselves."

Morton said, "The point is, somebody's loose in town. Somebody who's pretty careless about the way he yanks triggers. He was sitting in a bar in South Miami Avenue, just sitting there alone, smoking muggles. We know they were muggles because we got the butts. Three of them. That is, he was practically through with the third—smoked 'em right down to the bitter end, too,

like a real weeder—and then somebody passing happened to jog his elbow. Absolutely an accident. The guy snapped at him, and the other guy snapped back."

"Ordinarily," put in McGarvey, "it would have been a simple barroom brawl, and the bouncer'd taken care of them both."

"Ordinarily, yeah," said Morton. "But our Mary Warner man's flitting and he hauls out a roscoe and lets fly in all directions."

"Busted a mirror," McGarvey supplemented, "and clipped two innocent bystanders, one of them pretty bad in the groin."

"We got the shells," added Morton, "and our ballistics man says they came out of a Colt .38 hammerless automatic. He can tell by the mark of the ejector." He relighted his cigar. "Well, I'm coming to the point. The guy was seen running in this direction. He was last spotted not far from here. We figure he must have ducked into one of the boats in the yacht basin, and we're going around trying them all. You being not alongside, there's less chance of it being your boat, but naturally we don't want to overlook any possibility. You're certainly not keeping much of a watch, if you don't mind me saying so."

"I see," said Limpus. "As for the watch—as I told you, Jackson should be out there. He must have gone to sleep." He had picked up the jewel case as though about to open it, but now, thoughtfully, he put it down again. "Well, we haven't seen or heard anything unusual here. What sort of looking man was this?"

McGarvey answered in a voice thick with disgust.

"Oh, he was tall and short and kind of medium height at the same time, and he was blond and dark, and except for



the fact that he was clean-shaven he had a mustache and maybe a beard, and he must have weighed about ninety-five pounds, or maybe one-fifty, or two-eighty. He was a middle-aged youngster who was pretty old, and he was thickset and skinny as a rail. You know how it is. Eyewitnesses."

"I see," Limpus said again, very slowly. His face no longer jounced here and there; it had stiffened and was bright now with sweat. He was staring at something beyond McGarvey, beyond Morton. "So what you're really looking for is—is—"

"A man with a Colt .38 automatic," McGarvey finished.

"I see," Limpus said yet again. "If you— If—" His voice tightened to a whisper. They could scarcely hear him. But the fear in his eyes was loud. "My God! *Look behind you!*"

McGarvey spun on his heel. Morton turned rapidly but deliberately. Mrs. Limpus gave a thin dry screech which dribbled off in midair. Valentine the art dealer sat erect with wild-staring eyes and lips that blubbered soundlessly. The politicians were frozen.

In the doorway stood a man. There was a handkerchief tied around his face. There was a Colt .38 hammerless automatic in his hand.

"Up!" he said.

**M**CGARVEY was the fool. He was only a kid, after all, not half Morton's age, and he was hot-headed, blustering, a fighter from the word go. He didn't know how to count costs, not having that much education. He had a talent for sticking his neck out. To be sure, it was a very tough neck and could withstand a lot of hacking, but as Morton used to tell him: Why commit suicide without stopping to think it over first?

The holdup man was by this time probably higher than a kite on his marijuana, and he had already proved that his gun was no toy. Morton, having lots of common sense, would have let him go ahead and steal the emeralds or whatever it was he wanted. The time to catch him was later, when that Colt had been safely holstered.

But not McGarvey.

McGarvey went for his gun. It was a very big gun, an S. and W. Magnum .357 revolver with an 8¾-inch barrel. It appeared like a beam of light and almost instantly thundered. A long, jagged splinter fell sideways out of the door jamb and hung at a crazy angle as though not sure what it was expected to do next.

The holdup man got in three shots that ran together almost like one. Wilkie Limpus sat suddenly on the floor. Something clanged against the brass rim of a porthole. Where the third slug went nobody ever learned. Where the holdup man went, however, was clear to everybody except one of the politicians, who had fainted dead away. The holdup man went backward through the door.

An instant later, as McGarvey and Morton dashed toward that door, they heard a loud splash.

They went through the door sideways, one on each side, crouching, holding their cocked revolvers high.

The deck was deserted except for a sailor who came running aft.

"What happened? Who jumped overboard just now?"

McGarvey snapped, "You Jackson?"

"Yes, sir. I was forward. I—I'm afraid I fell asleep."

"You saw somebody jump overboard?"

"Yes, sir. I woke up hearing shooting, and I was just in time to see this



man back out of the cabin and jump right over the rail."

"What'd he look like?"

"I didn't see him very well. He had something black over his face and he was holding something shiny in his right hand."

While throwing questions, McGarvey was not wasting time. He scrambled down into the smallboat, unpainted it, unshipped the oars. He kept his revolver in his lap.

"Come on, Mort!"

But Wentworth L. Morton, looking at his cigar in disapproval—it was out again—had wandered into the cabin. Deliberate though he was, he was the first to reach the side of the prone Wilkie Limpus.

Limpus was conscious. Morton felt his shoulder.

"You're all right. Must have just missed the bone. We'll get a doc and have him give you a shot of tetanus antitoxin."

Limpus fought, and found a grin.

"Don't you think I've been shot enough already tonight?"

Morton helped him into a chair. Then Morton picked up a brass cartridge case and compared it with one taken from his pocket.

"They're from the same gat, all right. Even I can tell that."

He put them into separate pockets.

"Excuse me, sir. Is there anything I can do?"

Jackson, an anxious young blond with brownish freckles all over his face, stood in the doorway. Morton nodded.

"Yes. Go call that wild man who's rowing that boat around in circles out there, and tell him to fetch a doctor."

"He— He's looking for the holdup man, sir. The man who jumped overboard."

"You tell him to do as I say."

## II

WHEN the *Zuleika Dobson II* pulled out of Havana harbor, Morton sat in a wicker chair and drank beer. They passed breathlessly close to the Malecón. Those aboard could make out the color of the neckties the men in automobiles there wore. It seemed as though they could even sniff the panetelas these men smoked.

McGarvey came along and whammed into a chair.

"Hell of a lot of use you were! Out doing the town!"

Morton watched Morro Castle from over the top of a stein. He put the stein down, wiped foam from his upper lip.

"I don't see what you wanted to go sightseeing for here anyway. We've both been here before."

"Oh, I like to get around."

"As a matter of fact, I don't see why you agreed to come on this trip in the first place!"

"You've mentioned that already."

McGarvey had. He had mentioned it many times in the forty-eight hours since they'd left Miami. He had been outraged when Wilkie Limpus, immediately after the attempted holdup, proposed to the two detectives that he "borrow" them for this West Indian cruise, in order to be sure that the emeralds were properly guarded. Brazen publicity hound, McGarvey had called him. Trying to cash in on Morton's reputation. What did he think Mort was anyway? A lousy keyhole peeker ready to do dirty work for anybody who planked down a few dollars? A cop so old that he was reduced to taking a job as practically a common watchman?

Oh, yes, McGarvey was indignant. And when he had learned that the proper civic authorities, always glad to accommodate a Wall Street power, had



consented to "lend" the city's star detectives, provided of course that Limpus paid properly for their services, McGarvey only sneered. It was still up to him and Morton to give their consent, he pointed out. They weren't slaves. They couldn't be peddled around like professional baseball players. If they didn't want to go, they didn't have to go. He'd do what Mort did, of course. But he knew his Mort—or thought he did.

Morton had always been possessed of dignity. Quiet and grave in manner, in appearance he resembled a retired businessman rather than a sleuth. He seldom hurried, and never appeared to do so. He was middle-aged, no matter how amiably you defined that expression. His clothes were always precise and spotless. He was devoted to Miami, where he had lived all his life, and seldom left the city; his vacations, when he consented to take a vacation, were usually those of the motorman.

What was most important, he was, despite his deceptively mild appearance, every inch a cop. He abhorred private detectives. He was not ashamed of his profession; he was proud of it; and he resented, not infrequently with bitterness that stung, the sort of people who treat investigators as though they were evils not at all necessary, to be swept aside like door-to-door salesmen.

"I'll do what Mort does, of course. But he'll refuse, don't worry. Limpus is just making a show. It's like he tried to engage Henry Ford to be his chauffeur. Mort won't let himself be used for any sensational stunt like that."

It came as a shock when Morton accepted.

"I don't know," he said, puffing a cigar. "I'm getting kind of tired of being shot at. A change of scenery might do me good."

"But Mort! This guy with the gun! Are we going to sail off on a yacht while he runs around all reefered up?"

"Why not? We can't be personally responsible for every junk hog who gets hold of a cannon. Let somebody else chase him."

McGarvey looked at him, and McGarvey shook a heavy head.

"That's not like you, Mort."

"Maybe I'm getting old."

**H**E HAD certainly not done much work. He and McGarvey had been shown the emeralds and the safe in Limpus's stateroom where they were kept, and after that, until Havana was reached, Morton seemed to lose all interest in his job. McGarvey at least had made a show of earning his keep, going over the ship from stem to stern, interrogating members of the crew in an effort to learn something about their backgrounds, and, in Havana, sitting grimly at the end of the gangplank scrutinizing everybody who passed.

Morton, on the other hand, had simply sat on deck drinking beer. Wilkie Limpus himself sat with the veteran for hours on end, and they talked about everything under the sun. They were friends from the beginning. Morton of course had known many gamblers—Miami is a heaven for gamblers—but until now he had always thought of them as what they were, harsh, stern-faced men, relentless, hard-working, tough, incalculably patient—men with eyes of steel, mouths of flint, hearts of cold, cold stone.

It was difficult to remember that this bouncy mass of loquacity at his side, this uproarious, jellylike clown who swapped cigars and drank beer with him, smacking his lips loudly, was one of the biggest financial operators in history. This man had gone through more



millions than all the professionals who visited Miami put together—and he was still laughing.

When they got into Havana, Morton had suddenly come to life. He had refused an invitation to drive out to the casino with the Limpuses and Valentine. He said he wished to amble around by himself.

"But listen, Mort, you can't do that!" his partner had spluttered. "If there's ever going to be a time when the yacht needs guarding it's now, isn't it? When she's in dock?"

"O.K. You guard her then," Morton had replied, walking off.

Now they sat watching Morro Castle fade into a smoke-hazy horizon. McGarvey stretched his legs.

"You know, there's something funny about this boat, after all."

"You just learning that?"

"When we were tied up today, and I was keeping a pretty close eye on the gangplank, along about an hour before we were to sail, Captain Hudson comes aboard in a big hurry, holding a package under his arm. When he got to the top of the gangplank he happened to trip and fall. Went down hard, right smack on his face. Well, I ran to him and started to help him up, and damned if he wasn't out cold! Absolutely cold! I figured he must have banged his forehead on the deck, but I couldn't see any sign of a bruise. And he doesn't look like the kind of guy it'd be easy to knock out."

McGarvey glanced forward to where Captain Elias Hudson stood spread-legged next to the wheelhouse—there was, properly speaking, no bridge on the *Zuleika Dobson II*. The skipper was a short man and stocky, with enormous spreading shoulders. His hair was gray, but his cheeks were red, his blue eyes clear and hard. Possibly fifty, he could

have whipped most lads of twenty-five.

Morton asked, "What was the matter with him?"

"I never did find out. Heart attack, I suppose, though when he came to, he said he never suffered from them. The only other thing I could figure was that he must have really fainted. I got the impression, when he came to, that he was scared to death. There wasn't a speck of color in his face, not even in his lips. And the back of his hands were covered with sweat. The first thing he did was grab the stuff he'd had wrapped up in the package. The package had got busted when he fell, and some of the stuff had spilled out. He put this back, all but a little bit that he missed, and he handled it as if he was afraid of it. His hands actually trembled. Then he thanked me and said no, there wasn't anything I could do. Said he'd lie down a while. A touch of sun, he said it probably was."

Morton observed, "The sun's hardly been out, all day."

"I know."

THEY were silent for some time. Harrison, the table and deck steward, came near enough to ascertain discreetly that Morton did not need any more beer right now; then he disappeared.

"I don't like that guy's looks," McGarvey said. "Sneaky."

"Smokes marijuana," Morton said negligently.

"Speaking of not liking guys, I can't get as crazy about our host as you seem to be. But I feel sorry for that wife of his. Poor kid, she's got to put up with all his clowning. She's hardly got any existence of her own, you might say. She's practically *crushed* under his personality."

Strong words, these, for McGarvey,



and big. Morton looked at him sideways, wondering. But all Morton said was: "What sort of stuff was this, I mean in the package?"

"Kind of reddish brown or brownish red. Like drying clay."

"You said there was some left on the deck?"

"Yeah, and I saved it." He produced a paper containing a small amount of what might have been a reddish and slightly damp dust. "I don't suppose it means a thing, but I thought you might want a look."

"Garv, you're going to turn into a good detective yet, some day."

Morton sniffed the stuff, poked it with his little finger. He deliberately spilled some on the deck and touched a lighted match to it.

It burned rapidly with a dull yellowish smoky flame.

"Well, well, well."

"What is it, Mort?"

"Dynamite, Garv me boy. A gelatin dynamite, and I'd say from the way it burns a mighty fine grade of it."

"No wonder the skipper fainted, falling with that stuff!"

Morton shook his head.

"If he didn't know anything about dynamite, he shouldn't be walking around with a lot of it, and if he *did* know anything about it, he'd know it'd withstand a lot bigger shock than that."

Morton took out a small envelope, and from this he dumped onto his palm a pinch of what looked like a bright green powder or very tiny bright green crystals.

"Something else I found that's interesting. The room steward had all the stateroom rugs out in the corridor this morning when everybody was on deck watching us enter the harbor. I got this stuff out of the rug from Valentine's room."

"What is it?"

Morton poured the stuff back, pocketed the envelope.

"Pulverized silicate of beryllium. Let's go below and take a look at that safe of Limpus's."

"Limpus is up on deck here."

"I know. That's why I want to go now."

"What's the matter? Think there's something wrong?"

"With you on duty"

"Listen, I sat here all morning and most of the afternoon, while you were out sousing yourself with pilsener, and I tell you right now that nobody who didn't belong here so much as put foot on this boat!"

"The emeralds are all right down there then, eh?"

"Of course they're all right!"

"Come along. I want to show you something."

THEY went not to Limpus's cabin but to their own, which was next to Limpus's. The *Zuleika Dobson II* had been built for cruising in tropical waters, and her staterooms were insulated against heat. The outside walls were not in fact the sides of the ship. There was an air space between. The detectives got into that space by taking a section of the heatproofing material out of the back of their clothes closet.

"Take it easy. There's not much room."

There wasn't. McGarvey had all he could do to squeeze into it.

"What's the idea anyway, Mort?"

"Now you take that thing down at your feet." Morton switched on a flashlight. "What do you figure that is?"

"Well . . . Some part of the ship's supplies, I suppose."

"Pretty funny bit of ship's supplies. A brand new solid copper cable two



inches in diameter and seventeen or eighteen feet long. What would they ever use that for? Why would they keep it here?"

"I give up. Why?"

"I don't know either. Wish I did. Come on."

When they had reached a point between Limpus's stateroom wall and the plates, getting at his wall safe from behind was ludicrously easy. Morton explained that he had noticed this space when they were shown the safe by Limpus himself.

Between them they turned the safe around in its little house. It was a small, square thing, new and sturdy, but no bank vault.

"I watched Limpus when he opened it for us, and I scratched down the numbers of the combination with my thumbnail on a card in my pocket. It wasn't as hard as it sounds. Look—"

A moment later he swung open the door of the safe.

The inside was divided into pigeon-holes, most of them containing papers, and at the bottom was a well in which reposed the house of the Limpus emerald set—a large, square, shallow box of tooled leather, lined with black satin and black velvet.

"So the stones are all right, eh?"

"Why, of course they're all right!" McGarvey took up the box, and opened it. "Here they are, aren't they?"

"Where?"

The jewel case was empty.

McGarvey was already wedged in so tight that he could scarcely breathe. Now he looked downright sick. His face got greenish. He tried several times to swallow, and couldn't. Over the column of light from the flash he stared wildly at his partner.

"Do you suppose— How can we ever tell Limpus?"

"Let's not tell him at all. He'll never know the difference. That's what I really came down here for, to put these back."

Morton was fingerhooking things out of his coat pocket. Even in that dim place they glittered and sparkled. Green stones and white, snuggled into the black velvet, they seemed afire. There were a necklace, two rings, two bangles, a pair of earrings, and a girdle clasp consisting of one enormous stone cut *en cabochon*.

"Pretty, aren't they?" Morton closed and replaced the case, the trinkets being inside of it now. With McGarvey's help he turned the safe around. Then, directing the flashlight down, he studied again the thick copper cable at their feet. "Yes, as you say, Garv, there's something funny about this boat."

"But what— What in the world—"

"Later. Let's go up on deck now. I want another beer. Gives you a real thirst, crawling through places like this."

THE drums started at night, the third night after they left Havana. Until then Cap Haitien had seemed only another West Indian town, hot, consisting of corrugated iron and slow-moving Negroes, malodorous, appallingly dirty. If you looked close you could see a curious smoldering light in the eyes of these natives—there seemed to be no white people in all Cap Haitien—and a certain unexpected lift of their chins. But ordinarily you did not look close. It was not until darkness had slid in from the mountains, smearing itself across the vast Plaine du Nord, and the distant drums began to pound, that you realized with a start where you were.

Haiti has always been a turbulent place, and her troubles, again and again, since Dessalines and Petion and the im-



mortal Toussaint l'Ouverture himself defied Napoleon in all his might, have started in the north. Henri Christophe, who never had anything to say about the south, ruled the north once as emperor. Leconte got started there with his boisterous *cacos*, and Vilbrun Guillaume Sam, and Dr. Bobo. The U. S. Marines found it by far the most difficult part of the nation to subdue. And today, now that the Marines are gone, the northern Haitian glowers at visitors, whether white men or tan, whether they come by ship or over the Marmelade Mountains from Port au Prince, a city the residents of Cap Haitien esteem effete.

The sooner you get out of Cap Haitien the better; and it's just as well not to hang around at night. There have been many attempts to stuff civilization willy-nilly down the throats of these great dark unpleasant men, but somehow civilization always came up again. It isn't wanted. It just won't take.

When the drums started, the party was at dinner. They looked at one another, scared, saying nothing for a moment. It was odd. It sort of took the breath out of them. Mrs. Limpus's hands went by instinct to her neck, her ears, the clasp of her girdle, for she was wearing the emeralds. Her eyes were bright with fear. The others, paling, seemed to lose interest in their food.

"I always supposed that was tourist stuff, if it was done at all any more," Valentine muttered.

Limpus tried, "Well, they sound far away, anyway."

They did. They sounded, sometimes, as though they were 'way back in the mountains; but then again, unexpectedly, mysteriously, they would sound very close, just outside of town perhaps. *Thrum-thrum-thrum* . . . aimless, pauseless. Then another would answer it,

*thrum-thrum-thrum-thrum*, from very far off. And still another would take up the talk with the same toneless dogged persistence, *thrum-thrum-thrum*.

The woman shivered.

"Gives me the creeps. I don't think this place is altogether safe. I'd be really worried," she added, smiling at young McGarvey beside her, "if it wasn't for our guards."

He swallowed his soup so hastily that he started to cough.

"Anyway it was enough to go out to Milot today and ride up to the Citadel. It was very wonderful," she conceded, "but it tired me out. I don't think I want to go to this *bomboche* tonight."

Her husband nodded.

"Perhaps it's just as well," he said. "This place must be more primitive than the interior of Africa. Extraordinary."

McGarvey was looking at Mrs. Limpus. Morton was looking at McGarvey.

"What is this business tonight?" asked Morton. "I missed the Citadel because it was Garv's turn to sightsee, but now I'm all set."

"I understand it's some sort of voodoo ceremony, back in the hills. The fellow I talked to today said for us to stick close to him. He's going to hire three cars for us."

Valentine put in, "But naturally we'll keep as quiet as possible and stay on the outside of the crowd?"

"Oh, naturally! I understand they get pretty well worked up. And I'm just as well pleased Della isn't coming. There's likely to be some roughhouse."

Morton napkinned his mouth.

"I hope not," he muttered. "I'm getting tired of roughhouse."

Through it all the drums beat on and on, sending strange messages back and forth over the miles. They talked a language those in the dining saloon would never be able to understand.



"I see you're wearing the greenery again tonight, my dear?" Limpus said to his wife, in an attempt to change the conversation. "You'll tempt poor Valentine into bidding for it again."

"Just for the variety," she replied.

"I'm sure you'll be perfectly safe on board. Captain Hudson's only leaving one deckhand and Harrisson here, who's waiting on us, but of course you'll have Mr. McGarvey."

She gave that youngster a full warm smile.

"I'm sure I couldn't find anybody better," she said.

McGarvey choked over a fishbone.

And the drums throbbed on.

WHEN you got right in among the drums they were, except in appearance, not less terrible. Certainly they could never be called picturesque. They were uncarved, many were rotten. They were struck by the flat palm, not by sticks. Most of them were far from being old tribal instruments passed down from generation to generation, but on the contrary were obviously improvised for this occasion, including in fact not a few ordinary empty keresene tins. Nevertheless, one and all throbbed out a rhythm of menace. One and all kept hideous, unfailing time.

Even without the drums, if it was impossible to think of it without them, the scene would have been imprisoned by a pounding pulsation. The clearing was small; shadows swooped and leapt and swung furiously in the light of torches. The Negroes, glittering with sweat, shrieking, stamped the soft earth, beat themselves on the breast, fell to the ground and rolled.

They jumped into the air. They tore their clothes. They threw up their arms. From time to time, too, as it was passed around, they took long draws from a

bottle of clear white rum called *clarin*. Morton tried some of the stuff; and for all the fact that he had a cast-iron stomach, he almost had to let it up again. There is nothing mild about *clarin*. An acquired taste, it is not recommended for sissies or invalids.

The noise was deafening. Members of the party from the yacht, when they wished to speak to one another, had to cup their hands and yell. For the most part they were silent anyway, dazzled and a bit stunned by the strange scene.

The drums yammered unceasingly. Men and women six, seven, eight generations removed from Africa, but to whom that continent was as yesterday in their more-than-memories, screamed unintelligibly to a lowering sky. As they squirmed and rent their clothes, their shadows, black in the red torchlight, as black as the dancers themselves, leapt and split and twisted madly.

"They can call it a mystic voodoo ceremony," Morton muttered to himself, "but as far as I'm concerned, it's no different from any drunken brawl the other side of the railroad tracks. I've seen it before."

He looked around. They were far back among the shadows, not having dared to venture close to the dance, where their presence might be resented, and it was some time before Morton, his eyes sore from the torchlight, could count the others.

The crew of the *Zuleika Dobson II* consisted of a captain, first and second officers, six hands and a bosun; a chief engineer and two assistants, and an ordinary oiler; a radio operator, a cook, a table steward and a room steward, the last-named being on land Limpus's valet. All were here excepting the table steward, Harrisson, and one of the deckhands. Captain Hudson, perhaps at the owner's suggestion, was mighty liberal



with his shore leave. Suspiciously liberal.

Morton slipped away. In the excitement, in the darkness, he was not missed.

A native, naked to the waist, his eyes bloodshot, staggered up to him. He was drunk alike with religion and *clarin*, though rather more with the latter than the former. He mumbled something in Creole, the degenerate French the Haitians speak. Even a person who knew French—and Morton didn't—would not have been able to understand this man's words. Yet his meaning was clear. He wanted to fight.

Morton shook his head and stepped to one side. A fight here might mean, probably would mean, a race riot. It might result in the massacre of the entire party. Stranger things had happened in these parts. These drink-crazed natives were unpredictable.

However, the drunk, more nimble than he had at first appeared, side-stepped also. He was again directly in front of Morton.

"Well, I'm not going to use my fists," Morton said quietly, "because they might not have an effect fast enough. Hold tight, sweetheart. You're going bye-bye."

He whipped out his blackjack and let the man have it across the left side of the jaw. He heard the sound of the slap even above the uproar in the nearby clearing; but it was a sound instantly swallowed.

The man swayed. He was probably unconscious even then, and about to collapse. Morton, however, felt he could not take any chances. Morton hit him again, in the same place. The man went down.

Not with a thump. Morton caught him under the armpits and eased him gently to earth.

HE STRAIGHTENED, looking around. Thank God nobody had witnessed this little scene. And if anybody later stumbled upon the Negro's limp form, as somebody was almost sure to do, nothing would be thought of it. The woods indeed were full of just such figures. Morton stumbled over three of them, dead drunk, so drunk that they were gruntless, on his way back to where the cars had been left.

This was several hundred yards from the clearing. The place was dark except for the glow of cigarettes where the three drivers stood.

"I'm going back," Morton called. "I want the last car."

"O. K."

The drivers were English-speaking, more or less. One climbed into the last car and the beams of headlamps slashed the darkness. In the jungle behind Morton, red flickers of torchlight still could be seen, a hundred times reflected, and the thrumming of drums and the screams of the dancers were as loud here, or seemed as loud, as in the clearing.

Morton got into the back seat. Somebody got into the front next to the driver, who said over a shoulder, "My friend, he go back with us. O. K. by you, Boss?"

"Well, I guess it's all right, if he behaves himself."

They slid and slithered and jounced down to the Enery "highway," *corvée*-built under the U. S. Marines but now scarcely more than a couple of wheel ruts, and turned toward Cap Haitien. The man in front pivoted in his seat. Morton could not see his face.

"You got match, Boss?"

Another English speaker. Morton, not stopping to think, fished a pad of matches from his pocket and reached forward with them.



Instantly his wrist was grabbed and he was yanked halfway into the front seat. The driver, at the same moment, drove the car far over on the right of the road and snapped off the lights.

Morton pulled his head in, turtle-fashion. Something that might have been an old-fashioned sandbag jolted that head, carrying away the Panama hat. Then Morton got his gun out and fired once straight up, through the roof of the car, a sedan.

Once was enough. He was instantly released, and his assailant and the driver were blabbering for mercy. A gun, it would appear, was the last thing in the world they had expected. They were scared stiff.

"You may not know it, but I'm getting tired of guys like you. Get out! I'll go back the rest of the way alone."

He did, too. He left them by the side of the "highway" and drove the car, an American car of course, into silent Cap Haitien.

There was one wan yellow fly-specked electric bulb backed by a wan yellow reflector to cast disheartening light upon the dock. The air was heavy with the odor of molasses. Four or five natives were strewn about, all snoring. Nothing moved.

He was not accosted when he went aboard the yacht. Indeed, he saw nobody. He walked directly to one of the portholes opening from the main cabin, which was lighted.

McGarvey, six feet three, weighing some two hundred and forty pounds, looked like a huge schoolboy calling on a girl for the first time. There was something pre-war, something Tarkingtonian, in his attitude. He sat on the edge of a divan, his great hands resting uneasily on his knees, his toes a little turned in, and stared with puppylike eyes at Mrs. Wilkie Limpus. From time

to time he nodded. He looked too scared to talk; but there was no need for this, since his companion knew how to keep things going.

"... treats me as though I was just some work of art he had bought, a picture or something, an ornament he liked to show off." She sighed. "You understand, don't you? Yes, I'm sure you do."

SHE turned, looking right at McGarvey, who swallowed and nodded. She was very serious, very brave, a woman who had suffered.

"But I mustn't bore you with all this personal business, Mr. McGarvey. You're out to have a good time, and I know you're not interested in my poor little troubles."

McGarvey managed, "I—I don't mind."

"No, I've been selfish. I've been boring you. I wonder if you'd be good enough to reach down that large yellow book up there and I'll show you something— No, not that one, the one next to it— No . . . no . . . Ah, that's the one! Thank you."

McGarvey was all fumbling eagerness, and while his back was turned to her, Mrs Limpus was busy. Morton, seeing what she did, smiled grimly. Her name, he reflected, was Della, but it ought to have been Delilah. She took the book McGarvey handed down. She turned a page or two, tossed it aside, rose, walked to the door.

"Ah, no! I simply can't be interested!"

She threw open the door and stood there, one shapely arm raised, a hand resting on the jamb. Her back was to McGarvey.

"Such a beautiful night! I'm glad they're not coming right back. I'm glad we can be alone for a little while."



Morton crouched below the porthole not three feet from where she stood. She did not look down at him, yet she must have been aware of his presence. He must have been a black lump of shadow to her.

"Look at those stars!" Then in a low voice which reached Morton clearly: "All right. Now don't mess it up this time!" She turned back into the cabin, leaving the door open.

"What—uh— What was it you said just now?" asked the Samson from Miami.

"I was just reciting a snatch of poetry under my breath. The stars, those lovely stars, they made me think of it. I adore poetry. Don't you, Mr. McGarvey?"

She sat next to him again on the divan and placed a hand on his arm. She must have been reflecting that he was almost too easy to be true, the sap. His face was brick red. He nodded uncertainly.

"Yes, I—I guess I like poetry all right."

Morton scurried ashore. As he went he took his coat off and twisted his natty orange tie around back of his neck. On the dock he went to a sleeping negro, scooped up a battered filthy straw hat, left a gourd.\* As he went back, he put his coat on again, inside out. He turned up the collar. He hid his Panama and slapped the disgraceful straw upon his head, pulled it low.

"... if only you knew how it was, Mr. McGarvey, to *seem* to have everything a woman could want, jewels, a yacht, all that, and yet really be poorer than the poorest woman in the streets, because—"

Morton muttered a word, a brief one that has been in the language since the

days before the Norman Conquest. He tied his handkerchief across his face. He drew his revolver. He walked into the cabin.

"Up!"

### III

McGARVEY'S face at first was a study in dumfounding. He looked as though he had been socked on the head with a pipe. Never a quick thinker, he was absolutely flabbergasted.

Then across that face amazement and rage began to sweep, and there were even, for a little while, flashes of disbelief.

By the time McGarvey became really convinced that he was not having a nightmare, Morton had almost completed the job. Not that this took long! Nobody knew better than Morton of Miami that the essence of a good hold-up was speed. Snatch the stuff and scam before anybody gets over the first shock of seeing your gun—that's the way to do it.

The lady cooperated. Morton only had to say, "Put 'em on the table," and she started to unfasten her pendants, slip off her rings and bangles, and otherwise divest herself of jewels. She didn't scream. She didn't blanch. Morton never even had to look at her.

That incurable romantic McGarvey was getting ready to reach for his gun, as Morton saw. He was slower to act than he had been at the previous holdup. Then he had not been so astounded by the appearance of a bandit who was nervous at best and who had no less than five men to cover. Now, his mind yanked back into reality from a dream which had lulled it half to sleep, he faced a gunman whose hand did not shake, whose voice was cold and low,

\* A Haitian piece, now stabilized at twenty cents U. S.



and who with an awful intensity concentrated on him alone. An ordinary cop in these circumstances would get his hands up and keep them there.

But not McGarvey.

Morton could see that young McGarvey's mind, as soon as it cleared, raced with thoughts of fight. His eyes were measuring distances, his ears weighing the determination in that carefully disguised voice. His heart knew no fear—Morton always said McGarvey was too dumb to be scared of anything—and his strength was, if not as the strength of ten, at least as that of two or three. For all his size, he could be lightning fast. Moreover he wouldn't topple readily. It would take a large slug striking exactly the right spot to knock him over.

Morton scooped the gauds up in his left hand, started to thrust them into a coat pocket, and then remembered that he was wearing his coat inside out so that McGarvey wouldn't recognize it. So he just held them as he backed toward the door.

McGarvey was staring over his partner's shoulder, and McGarvey's eyes grew very big. Presently he began to grin.

"O. K.," he said quietly, apparently to somebody in the doorway behind Morton. "He won't shoot while you've got him covered."

Behind the handkerchief Morton smiled. It was so like young McGarvey to try an outworn trick like that. A great kid, Garv, but somewhat naive. Morton had difficulty keeping the affection out of his voice when he gruffed, "Anybody leaves this cabin in the next five minutes gets shot!"

It did no good. He could fairly feel McGarvey's muscles grow taut. And when, backing, he slid ever so slightly on the corner of a rug, he knew that the

youngster was going to let fly at him.

The Magnum's long barrel sprayed light as it rose. Morton, with his own revolver aimed—for the slip on the rug had not cost him his balance for an instant—could have shot the thing out of McGarvey's hand. He didn't. Instead he sprang backward through the doorway.

The Magnum's trigger fell, and nothing happened. It rose and fell again, the chamber turning dutifully, and still nothing happened.

Then the door was slammed.

Morton, wheeling, collided with another man who had handkerchief tied across his face and a revolver in his hand.

"You're late, my friend," Morton said, lifting the butt of his gun, backed by the heel of his hand, to this man's jaw.

THE man went over as though he'd been kicked by a horse. Morton scaled the stevedore's straw into the water, and when the cabin door burst open and McGarvey came streaming out, Morton was standing there bareheaded, hands on hips, shaking his head and clucking his tongue.

"Mort! What in the world are you doing here?"

"I got kind of tired of the party, so I came away."

The man on the deck stirred, and moaned a little. McGarvey kicked the revolver out of his hand.

"But how in the world—What—" McGarvey seemed suddenly to remember his own gun. He pointed it over the rail and pulled the trigger again and again. The hammer rose and fell, clicking, and the chamber turned, but there was no explosion. "Can you beat this, Mort? Just when I need it most, I get a gat stuffed with defectives!"



"So that's the way you figure it? Look at the gun."

McGarvey looked, and gasped. Morton turned to Mrs. Wilkie Limpus, who had just stepped out of the cabin.

"She didn't want to see you hurt anybody, Garv. So when you reached down that book, she did a little job of work on your artillery."

"I don't believe it!"

"No? What *did* happen to the cart-ridges then?" He took Mrs. Limpus's evening bag out of her hand before she had a chance to protest. He opened it, spilled the contents out into his palm. "And what do you think these six things are—lipsticks?"

McGarvey was silent. He did not look at Mrs. Limpus. He turned instead to the figure on the deck. It was better not to think of personal matters just now. He tore the handkerchief from the man's face.

"*Jackson!*"

Morton said wearily, "I could have told you that long ago. I suspected it from the begining. Why would a holdup man, even if he was geed up, dive overboard with a fortune in emeralds—when there was a rowboat right there? For that matter, where was his own boat?"

"We heard the splash!"

"Sure. Remember that bag of sand I stumbled against when we first came aboard? What was that doing there where anybody might bump into it the way I did? And where was it after the holdup?"

"But if Jackson came—"

"He was the quick-triggered marijuana fiend, all right. That wasn't part of the program. He was just ashore inhaling a few to get up courage to do the job, and he got excited when somebody jostled him. There was a jollyboat forward that had just been hauled

aboard. Its bottom was still wet, still dripping."

"Are you sure of this?"

"I telephoned headquarters from Havana. I'd left orders to have the yacht basin dragged, especially near where this boat had been anchored. That was supposed to be to find the gun, which as a matter of fact they did find, they told me over the telephone. But I also instructed them to look for a bag of sand—and they found that too."

"Getting Jackson's fingerprints wasn't hard. I was sitting on the after-deck the first day out and Jackson was around and Harrison, the steward, wasn't, so I called to Jackson. Said I wanted to move my chair because the sun was getting on me. I had two glasses then—not steins, glasses—and they were nicely wiped and ready. He took one in each hand, the way I figured he would, and left a perfect set of prints. I powdered them right there, while the rest of you thought I was just guzzling pilsener, and lifted them off with celluloid foils smeared with paste. I took the foils ashore at Havana and put through a long-distance call to New York police headquarters."

"To arrange a television transfer would have taken too long. Of course I could only give the classification and describe the different characteristics, and it can't be final until the prints are actually compared side by side, but you can count it as good as certain that Jackson has done two terms in Sing Sing on assault and robbery convictions. Yes," added Morton, and lighted a cigar, "I was really very busy in Havana."

"So that's the way it was," McGarvey said. He knelt beside Jackson and began to go through the sailor's pockets. "Well, that explains everything."

"Does it?"



McGarvey straightened, frowning. He stared hard at his partner. He knew Morton to be the most secretive man in the world, always keeping his thoughts and his plans to himself.

"No, I guess it doesn't, at that. For one thing, it doesn't explain what you're doing here with your coat on inside out!"

Morton smiled. He had forgotten about the coat.

"It also doesn't explain," McGarvey went on, "what happened to the rocks. They're not in Jackson's pockets."

"Oh, as to them—" Morton opened Mrs. Limpus's evening bag again. "The lady's a sleight-of-hand artist, you see?"

McGarvey did not blink in any greater bewilderment than Mrs. Wilkie Limpus herself when they saw the green and white gleam of a necklace, two bangles, two rings, a pair of earrings, and a magnificent one-stone girdle clasp.

Morton handed the bag back.

"I'm going below and catch a little sleep. I need it. Let me know when the rest of the gang comes back. We'll have lots to talk about."

#### IV

MORTON awoke to the rocking of the yacht. This was not according to plans, which called for a two-day stay in Cap Haitien. Also, he saw through the porthole—Haiti was not even visible—that it was morning. He shook McGarvey.

"What's the idea? I told you to wake me up last night when the rest of the crowd got back!"

McGarvey yawned.

"I was going to, but you were sleeping so soundly and Mr. Limpus himself said not to wake you."

"Limpus said that, eh?"

"Yeah. He said the investigation could be held just the same today. What's the matter?" McGarvey, getting fully awake, sat up in alarm. "I do anything wrong?"

"I don't know—yet."

He went above. Wilkie Limpus, in a pair of green gabardine slacks, a red silk polo shirt, tennis sneakers and a yacht cap, was on the afterdeck. He was all geniality.

"Hi! Had some doin's last night, I hear?"

"Sort of." Morton sat down. "Nasty sea we're running."

"Oh, I guess it'll quiet down."

"Suppose I could have coffee and rolls up here? I don't feel like going inside. And also, I want to talk with you."

"Sure thing. Harrison! Fetch Captain Morton some breakfast!"

"Sergeant," said Morton. "Why did we pull out last night?"

"Some of the natives got nasty. They said you'd been seen smacking down a dancer. It would have been all right if we'd just taken it easy, but Valentine had to lose his head and pull a gun."

"Oh," said Morton, "so he's got a gun too?"

Limpus sat down, looking at him sideways.

"What do you mean, 'too'?"

"Was there any real trouble?"

"Well, no. But we were pretty close to it. Guns are prohibited in this republic, and it looked as if a flock of cops might swarm aboard this morning. So I cleared out right way. Thought it was better."

Morton grunted.

"And now we're heading for Jamaica, I suppose?"

"Now we're heading for Jamaica. We ought to pick up Navassa Island in a little while. Now as to that man Jackson—"



Captain Hudson came along, walking bowlegged, head down, muttering something to himself, and Limpus broke off to accost him.

"Everything goes well, Captain?"

"I don't exactly like it." He looked at Morton as though Morton was responsible. "Radio last night had a warning of a tropical disturbance—not a hurricane, just a disturbance—but that ought to have passed to the north of us long ago."

"She's blowing from the northeast, isn't she?"

"North-northeast. And she's blowing ten on the Beaufort scale, which is a lot. And what's more, the glass dropped from 29.58 to 29.38 in the past half hour. I don't like it."

He walked on, shaking his head, bracing himself instinctively against the roll of the boat.

"About Jackson—"

McGarvey lumped along the deck and fell into a chair.

"Say, I call this a real gale! Just passed Valentine's room, and he was in there swearing a blue streak and turning everything upside down looking for something. He must have—"

**H**IS words were cut short by a sea which caught *Zuleika Dobson's* starboard bow full and fair, with terrific force. The boat shuddered. The air was suddenly filled with spray; it was as though an overcharge of flashlight powder had been set off in a small room. Afterwards their faces tingled, their eyes stung, and rivulets raced crazily across the deck striving to find a way to the scuppers.

"Let's go up to the wheelhouse," Limpus shouted. "We can get air there and still be protected. Get Harrison to bring your coffee."

"I'm through with it anyway. I want

beer now. This is no time for coffee!"

"Harrison! Bring Captain Morton a stein of beer."

In the wheelhouse, facing a screen of thick glass, they could hear one another without shouting. A sailor was at the wheel, which, being electrically powered, turned as lightly as though the *Zuleika Dobson II* were a canoe. The second officer, looking worried, was on watch. Presently Captain Hudson joined him, and they talked together in low voices.

"Now getting back to Jackson—"

"You know all about Jackson," Morton said. "Why ask me about him? You knew his prison record when you hired him. In fact, that's *why* you hired him." He took a drink of beer, and made a face. "Damn warm, this stuff." He drank a little more. "I assume Captain Hudson's in on the thing too. He'd have to be. And probably most of the others."

"Say, listen here—"

This time it was Valentine who made the interruption. He ran forward along the deck, lurching from side to side, so excited that he failed to care when he was slammed against the deck house.

"Somebody's been in my cabin! Somebody's stolen something! I—I want to talk to you alone, Limpus."

"Doesn't make any difference," Morton drawled. "I know what it is you're missing anyway."

"Oh, you do, do you?"

"Sure. It's the emeralds. You bought them from Mr. Limpus, but he didn't want it known that he was reduced to selling them, and also he wanted to gyp the insurance company, so he staged a phony holdup. In fact, he staged two of them. And neither worked. Meanwhile you got the emeralds anyway, as agreed. Only you haven't got them, because"—Morton drew a mass of brilliants from his pocket—"I've got them right here."



Even for McGarvey, accustomed as he was to see his partner perform miracles, this was too much.

"Why, I saw them locked in Mr. Limpus's safe last night, after you'd gone to bed!"

MORTON shook his head.

"You saw the dummies. I took them ashore in Havana—I was really busy as hell in Havana—and had them examined by an expert, and he told me they were peridots from Zebriquet. What they sometimes call 'evening emeralds,' except that these were the finest the expert had ever seen. They were less olive than most peridots, and more grassy green, like real emeralds. He showed me how you could tell the difference. You squint through the table facet and you can see what looks like two images of each edge between the back facets.

"That's because of the strong double refraction peridots have. And it was white gold they were mounted on, he said, not platinum, like in the real set. And those were white zircons, not diamonds. But what I've got here now is the real thing. Notice how this big clasp is different? That was too distinctive. Valentine wouldn't dare sell that to his client after the theft of the Limpus emeralds had been reported.

"So he was changing the cutting. Doing it himself, right here on board. Didn't you hear those funny zirring sounds coming from his stateroom sometimes when you passed, Garv? He has the apparatus right there, the dop and tongs and skeep and so, forth, and he was disguising this stone by changing it from a *cabochon* to an American brilliant cut. It would decrease the weight, but it would make the thing salable, which was all Valentine cared about. I beat some of the emerald dust out of his rug the other day. That's

what set me on the track of that."

Valentine probably wasn't his real name, at least not his original one. He was a little man, dark, taut, fierce in everything he did. He was of some vague south European stock, and had an unreliable temper. Now he flared, leaning forward.

"You give me those jewels back!"

Morton pocketed them.

"I may need them as evidence."

"They're mine now! I paid for them!"

What Limpus wants to do about cheating the insurance company is his own business. I consented to back up a robbery story, because those were the only conditions under which he'd sell."

"It was an ambitious thought, getting the two most famous cops south of the Mason-Dixon line to come along on this cruise," Morton drawled. "It would go over big, afterward, when he wanted to collect." He turned to his friend Limpus. "How much is this insurance, by the way?"

"Three hundred thousand," Limpus replied. "That's no chicken feed. But in my position I have to treat it as if it was. If I seemed to take three hundred thousand very seriously, a lot of guys would begin to wonder about my credit—and that would be bad, very bad."

"You give me those jewels! I don't care about Limpus! I paid for them and they're mine! Give them to me!"

Morton asked sweetly, "Would you care to come and get them?"

## V

VALENTINE reached for a hip pocket. He was not very adroit. Morton, comfortably seated, moved only one leg. He did not even put down his beer. With the heel of a heavy shoe he kicked one of Valentine's shinbones—and Valentine, forgetting all about



what was in his pocket, doubled up with pain. McGarvey sprang behind him, fastened his arms with one huge arm, took the pistol away.

"What'll I do with him, Mort?"

"Take him down to his stateroom and lock him up for a while. I want to talk to Mr. Limpus and I don't want to be disturbed."

So they sat there alone—or practically alone, since the sailor and the captain and second officer were too busy to pay them any attention—and they talked about things, understanding one another, these two middle-aged men. They got along well together.

"I could pretty well guess that something was up when I saw those two cheap politicians, that first night. They weren't guys you'd invite aboard ordinarily. You wanted witnesses for something, and I got to wondering what. Then the stickup. It wasn't hard to see that that was a phony. But I still didn't really get the point. And I had no evidence to arrest anybody. So when you suggested that Garv and I come along on the cruise, I accepted."

Limpus smiled ruefully and even gave a little laugh.

"I wish you hadn't. Not that I haven't enjoyed your company, Captain—I mean Sergeant."

"I'm glad you're getting that straight at last."

*Zuleika Dobson II* was pointed right into the blow, and she didn't like it. She was rearing and tossing frantically. Spray slashed the glass barrier. The air was filled with it. Now and then a sea came over and went sloshing its boisterous way aft.

"Keep her on her course, you fool!"

"Can't seem to, sir. She's handling looser'n hell!"

Hudson pounced on a speaking tube and yelled for power, demanding to

know what was the matter with them down there. He cocked his head and cried, "You haven't any lights, eh? That's a great big shame! You'd better find some juice for us here, because if we can't steer this vessel you're never going to have any lights again!"

Limpus chuckled.

"Truth is, I never dreamt you'd accept."

"Neither did anybody else."

"I just wanted to get it on the record that I'd given the invitation. But you fooled me. You've been fooling me ever since. How you can get so much work done, while all you ever seem to do is sit drinking beer—"

"Speaking of beer—" said Morton.

"Why not? I'll have one with you! Harrisson!"

The steward somehow reached them, nodded, staggered away.

"A hundred to fifty he doesn't get back with it."

"I'm not a betting man," Morton said.

A little later he said thoughtfully, "Hell, if this is what they only call a disturbance, I wonder what a real hurricane is like?"

THE sea, as they occasionally glimpsed it, was not the sea they knew. It was a welter of mountains gone mad, black mountains rushing this way and that, swallowing their own foam. It carried rage, but not senseless blind rage. It carried malice too. Its was a killing fury.

"Here you are, sir. Afraid I spilled a little."

Wilkie Limpus threw back his head and laughed, and his face and neck and all his chins wobbled in delight.

"So you made it, eh? Good boy, Harrisson! This is going to taste swell! Looking at you, Morton."



"Mud in your eye."

Each swallowed, bracing himself. Then each turned to stare balefully at the steward.

"I'm sorry, sir," Harrisson said. "I know it's warm. But so is everything else. Something seems to be wrong with the refrigerator."

Morton lifted his chin, made an "O" of his mouth, and very carefully put his stein on the table, from where a roll of the ship lifted it neatly, beer and all, into Wilkie Limpus's lap. Morton didn't apologize, didn't even notice. He rose.

"So *that's* the way it is? *Now* I get the idea!"

He raced aft, reeling, and dived down the midships stairway.

Limpus handed a half-empty stein to the steward. "Hold this for me, please, Harrisson. I'll be right back."

Then he too was gone.

Morton collided with McGarvey in the companionway. The giant had just finishing locking Valentine in his cabin.

"What's up?"

Morton dashed past him, into the stateroom they shared. He picked up a flashlight, went to the clothes closet, took out a section of the heatproofing material in back. He thrust his head and the torch through this hole.

"Just like I thought. It's gone!"

"What's gone?"

"Garv, you've been around the tub. What kind of batteries does she carry?"

"Batteries? Why, a special yachting battery. Ten of them. Twelve volters."

"They mounted on a rack?"

"Yes, naturally. Extend the beam of the boat."

"Um-m. That's about eighteen feet, isn't it?"

"Eighteen or nineteen, yeah. Why?"

"Take me to them. And make it fast!"

However, when they pelted into the

battery room it was to find Wilkie Limpus screwing shut a porthole. He was having a hard time of it, what with the battering seas. Morton and McGarvey helped him. Then Morton remarked glumly that he supposed they were too late.

"It's overboard by this time, eh?"

"Captain—I mean Sergeant—you're positively uncanny."

"I'd seen the thing and wondered what it was meant for. I got the idea only now." He examined the batteries. "Yeah, clamped down over every one of them, eh? Not such a hard job, at that."

McGarvey cried, "Will somebody please tell me what all this is about?"

MORTON gloomily reached up and yanked the chain dangling from an electric light. There was no response, not even the dulllest glow.

"That two-inch copper cable, remember? Well, it's at the bottom of the deep blue sea now. But until a few minutes ago, it was stretched across every one of these batteries for—" He turned to Limpus. "For how long?"

"Almost two hours," Limpus cheerfully answered.

"What does that mean?" McGarvey wanted to know.

"It means the batteries are thoroughly shorted and they can't be charged again until we reach land—if we ever do."

"There aren't any auxiliaries either," Limpus put in.

"It means," growled Morton, "that we have to drink our beer warm from now on."

"All this fuss about that?"

"You don't get it," said Limpus. "It also means that the radio won't work, either sending or receiving."

"Nor the lights."



"Nor the windlass, nor the range in the galley, nor the refrigerator, nor the connections for electric razors. Not," added Limpus, "that anybody's likely to want to shave in this weather."

"Let's go upstairs again," suggested Morton.

The wheelhouse was as good a place as any. They could brace themselves in wicker chairs there, out of the way of the sailors. The anemometer was wobbling like all-get-out and the shriek of the wind was such that they could scarcely even feel the thump of the seas against poor *Zuleika Dobson II*.

For she had broached to, this exquisite lean yacht. Helpless as a log she was. Her twin 500-horsepower Diesels continued to operate, but what good were they when the steering apparatus didn't work? *Zuleika Dobson II* tipped to incredible angles—the clinometer seldom read less than 35°, often 46° or 47°. Had she been beamier, as her makers recommended to Limpus, she would be better equipped to withstand this pounding. But Limpus had sacrificed everything to appearance. He had wanted a greyhound yacht; and he'd got it.

"It's a real hurricane," Captain Hudson shouted. "Must have turned south again. Not the way they should do, this time of the year!" He seemed resentful. "If we'd been able to get radio warnings, we could have run away from it—hurricanes travel slow—but it's too late now!"

"What're you going to do?"

"Ride it out. That's all we can do. But something's gone wrong with the batteries—"

"I know."

"... and that knocks the steering apparatus out."

Limpus said aside to Morton, "Just like me. Here it's my own boat, and I

forget that it steers by electricity. Of course I never anticipated a hurricane. I was just going to take it to some place off an island and sink it in quiet, gentlemanly fashion."

Hudson shouted, "I'm rigging the hand steering apparatus, of course, but it's never been used before and it'll take some time to get set up. Another half hour of this and we'll be ripped to pieces. If she doesn't steer soon, we won't have a chance in the world."

"Lifeboats?"

"How could you launch lifeboats in a sea like this?"

He staggered back to help the sailors who were rigging the hand steering device. *Zuleika Dobson II*, pounced upon by wave after savage wave, was a sad, helpless thing. The very wind, much less the seas, was almost enough to capsize her. She seemed indeed to be riding on her side. The anemometer didn't register anything now. It was outclassed. It had never been built to record a blow like this.

Limpus leaned close to Morton, shouting, "I just remembered something! With those batteries shorted, the fans won't work either! What'll we ever do without them?"

He threw himself back in his chair and roared with laughter.

"It's great to have a sense of humor," Morton mumbled.

## VI

SO THEY sat there, Limpus and Morton and McGarvey. There was nothing they could do. If she heeled over completely—well, that would be the end. Just as well to take it up here on deck as to hide below and meet death the way a rat would.

They didn't know where they stood with this hurricane. They didn't know



whether they were being whirled around its outer edge, whether they might be thrown off with centrifugal violence to waters comparatively calm, or whether they were being sucked into the very vortex. The detectives, being Floridians, were not unacquainted with hurricanes; but they did not have experience with them at sea. Usually you're safer at sea. Usually you can get your radio'd warning and run away. But *Zuleika Dobson II* could not run.

"Now we've got it!" Captain Hudson shouted. "Now we can steer!"

It was his mistake, though a natural one. They could not steer. He had two men on the wheel rigged for hand power, but the yacht did not answer her helm. He roared down the speaking tube to the engine room, but there was no answer there either.

Not until the chief engineer and one of his assistants appeared in the wheelhouse did they realize what had happened. The chief and his assistant wore lifebelts.

"Not a chance," he shouted. "Me, I'm going to stick near the rail and be ready to jump when she goes under. Suit yourselves!"

"No power?"

"No nothing! It's a swimming pool down there!" He glared at Wilkie Limpus. "It was a swell idea!" he snarled.

"But it didn't work out," Limpus agreed.

So they just sat there. A lull came, permitting them to talk. The core of the hurricane? That false finish, that deceptive center which marks only the halfway point? They sat and wondered, while *Zuleika Dobson II* lolled groggily.

Morton looked around for a stein, and found none.

"Do you suppose Harrison—"

"Sorry, sir, but it's impossible to get to the pantry."

McGarvey lurched to his feet.

"I'd better let Valentine out. Jackson, too. No sense leaving them trapped like that."

Morton turned to Limpus and said, "What's she insured for?"

"Eight hundred thousand."

"And three hundred thousand for the emeralds, and added to that whatever Valentine paid you for them. Not so much over a million dollars, when all your bribe expenses are counted out. You know, I'd always supposed that a million dollars didn't mean a thing to a man like you?"

"Didn't used to," Limpus acknowledged. "Things are different now."

"I can understand the business of shorting the batteries. If they ever dropped divers to the wreck, it could be proved that you weren't able to send out an SOS. And nobody would ever be able to say how the short happened—once that copper cable's overboard. But the dynamite? Divers know about dynamite, and they could testify."

"I guess you haven't got it quite straight yet, Morton. We were never going to use the dynamite except in an emergency. No, it wasn't going to be an explosion. It was going to be a fire. I've got a lot of thermite hidden below. Then we'd take to the boats, within sight of land, assuming it was calm of course, and the flames would destroy all evidence."

"Assuming it was calm."

"I certainly made a mess of it, didn't I?"

"Didn't you!"

McGARVEY came back. He slumped into a chair. He had to sit on the inside of an arm, such was the angle at which the yacht wallowed.

"Mrs. Limpus is in the cabin. So's Valentine. So's practically everybody



else. Either in it or just outside, ready to duck in if the blow starts again. Skipper says we won't stay up much longer. Two plates gone. We're taking in Niagaras every minute."

"How 'bout the pumps?"

"They work by electricity."

"Oh."

Captain Hudson appeared. He was quieter now. The ends of his mouth were drawn down, and his eyes were hard. He spoke only to Limpus.

"Whatever your plans are, sir, I'm the captain of this ship and it's my duty to recommend that we abandon her. We can launch the lifeboats right now. Pretty soon maybe we won't be able to. Navassa's still in sight. We might make it. But if we stay here, whether it starts again or not, we sink."

Limpus looked up at him.

"Go ahead, Captain. I'm sorry about this whole business. But your record is clear. In actual fact you've done everything you could do, and nobody's going to know you had any arrangements with me at all." He looked at the detectives. "These gentlemen, I'm sure, will be decent about it. The thing's not your fault, it's mine."

Morton said cautiously, "We've got to report what we saw and what we know."

"Of course. But nothing you saw or know can possibly involve Captain Hudson, as far as an admiralty court is concerned?"

"No," said Morton, "I don't suppose it can."

"All right, Captain," said Limpus.

"You're coming, sir?"

"You get the boat ready."

Hudson left them. Morton stretched himself, and rose.

"Well, we'd better be moving."

Limpus said merrily, "I'm staying here."

Morton looked at McGarvey, and McGarvey got up and said, "Sorry, but you're not."

He was strong enough to carry Wilkie Limpus. They all knew that.

"I dislike the idea of suicide," Morton apologized.

"You started it," said McGarvey, "so you've got to finish it." Then he added bitterly, "If you'd only thought of your wife—"

Wilkie Limpus started to laugh. There was nothing hysterical about his laughter. It was genuine.

"So you're still dreaming of Della's green eyes and lovely white shoulders, eh?"

"Now listen here—"

"Hell, man, don't be silly! It was Della did the whole thing! Bring her along? I couldn't help but bring her along! She bossed the job! It was her idea from the beginning!"

THEY stared at him. He was somber now, chin on chest.

"She wanted to divorce me, and she could. She had the goods on me. But naturally she wanted a settlement. A big settlement. You should know Della the way I know her! Well, I had nothing to spare. I'm more broke right now than you two are. I really am. I'm living on sheer credit, and have been for some time. How could I give Della anything anywhere near what she wanted? But if I didn't, she'd bring suit—and she'd win it. What's more, she'd get a court order to investigate my affairs and see how much alimony I was able to pay.

"Well, they'd find out it was just about nothing. But when they found that out—and don't think it wouldn't be made public—because everything I do is public—then I would be sunk. Once they investigated me, good night!



Della knew that, and she simply blackmailed me. If I didn't raise some cash by a phony jewel robbery and a deliberate wreck for insurance, both of which she proposed, then she'd start suit. And what would happen to me? She's absolutely merciless, that woman! I know! She'd go through with it!"

He sat there, not moving, the clown. But a look at his face would break your heart.

"Well, I've done things I shouldn't have done. Lots of us have. The only thing is, we don't all get caught. I'd been lucky. But this time I wasn't. Della wanted a million, and this was the only way I could get it for her. So I tried. And I flopped." He raised his head, managing a grin. "So go on, you two. I'm staying here."

McGarvey swallowed, shook his head, said, "The hell you are."

Wilkie Limpus rose slowly. He was an old man. Very abruptly he had become an old man.

They walked aft. The yacht rose and fell in long weary rolls, very low in the water. The sea seemed tired, exhausted after all that effort. But *Zuleika Dobson II* was exhausted, too. *Zuleika Dobson II* was sinking. The sky was disagreeably gray, though noncommittal. The hurricane might come again; but probably it was gone. Probably they were free of it. Anyway, they couldn't stay here.

There were two lifeboats. One had been stove in, having been launched too early while the seas were still running high. In the other sat the entire crew, eighteen men, besides Valentine and Mrs. Wilkie Limpus. This boat was being pulled away.

Mrs. Limpus sat in the bow, an automatic in her hand. Captain Hudson in the stern cupped his hands to his mouth.

"She says we've got to go without

you! I can't help myself! She says she'll shoot us all if we don't!"

Wilkie Limpus slapped his palms upon his vast belly, and threw his head back, and bellowed with laughter.

"She would, too! I know her!"

McGarvey whispered, "I simply can't believe it. Leaving us here."

"You don't know how that woman can hate!"

They were standing not on the deck, which was nearly vertical, but on the rail. The sea lapped their ankles, reached for their knees.

"There's the jollyboat," said practical Morton. "They forgot it."

Limpus jerked to attention.

"I'm glad of that. I'm glad you two aren't stuck. But I'll stay here. I'm too old to go through another bankruptcy. Especially after—after Della. I can't take it any more."

"Don't be an Eskimo all your life!" McGarvey was sore. "The ship's going down!"

"And I'm sticking around. Let's not be heroic. You boys scam."

Another man would have been abashed. But not McGarvey. He shook his head. He faced the plunger.

"You're coming!"

**W**ILKIE LIMPUS smiled a little.

He had a foolish face, a funny face, all fat and wrinkles. He should have been doing cartwheels in a circus ring, and slapping somebody with a bladder, while kids applauded. He reached for his right hip pocket.

It fooled both of them this time. They weren't ready for it. They saw the revolver come into sight, they saw the hammer rise—and they saw that hammer fall. The end of the barrel was in Limpus's mouth by the time the hammer fell. The result was damned messy.

They stood there a while, feeling



terrible. There was nothing to be done about Wilkie Limpus. The best thing was to try not to look at him.

"Come on," Morton said at last.

In the jollyboat he was crabby.

"Can't you even *row*?"

"I can row all right. I'm just not used to this—"

McGarvey's legs were very long and his oar-gripping fists bumped his knees. Nevertheless, they got closer and closer to the bare splotch that was Navassa.

McGarvey only stopped rowing long enough to watch the *Zuleika Dobson II* go under. Morton turned to watch this too. The mass seemed to heave itself up-

ward, and then it went suddenly out of sight, steaming, hissing, leaving a sea peppered with bursting bubbles. A few minutes later everything was calm. There had never been a boat.

"It was better to leave him aboard like that. I think that was what he wanted. He was a good guy, Limpus was."

"He was," McGarvey admitted. "I was wrong about him. He was a good guy."

"Oh, well . . . Little to the left."

"It's called port."

"Never mind what it's called, you dimwit! *Go* that way!"

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## KNOW YOUR MONEY!

An Article of *Vital* Importance to Everyone

### THE DANGERS OF COUNTERFEIT MONEY

Told in an official communique from the  
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**Don't Fail to Read This Article Next Week**

IN THE YELLOW BAND ISSUE OF

**DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY**

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## Kidneys Must Remove Excess Acids

### Help 15 Miles of Kidney Tubes Flush Out Poisonous Waste

If you have an excess of acids in your blood, your 15 miles of kidney tubes may be overworked. These tiny filters and tubes are working day and night to help Nature rid your system of excess acids and poisonous waste.

When disorder of kidney function permits poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, head-

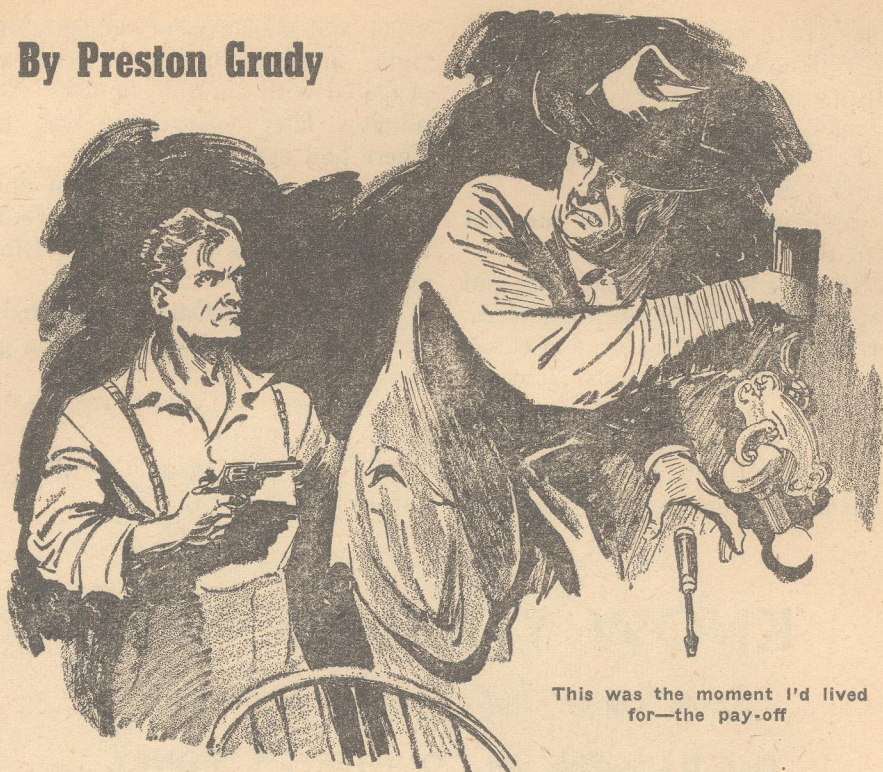
aches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

Kidneys may need help the same as bowels, so 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 your blood. Get Doan's Pills.

(ADV.)



By Preston Grady



This was the moment I'd lived  
for—the pay-off

## Finger Man

*Ned Thompson had his choice between a legacy of hot money . . . or the stellar role in a San Quentin gas-chamber tableau*

THE bungalows were of peeling stucco. I went down past the rusty fountain that didn't work and knocked on Alice's door. It must have been slightly off the latch. Anyway, it went open, and Charlton was in there, using a screw driver on an ornamental light fixture on the wall.

Alice's arm was linked in his, and they both started, turning. Her blue eyes were wide; for a minute the expression in them had me worried.

"Hello, honey," I said uncomfortably.

She introduced him. He was her uncle, she said. I felt a lot better. I hadn't even known she had an uncle. He was about forty, heavy-set, with lowering brows and a mouth whose smile seemed somehow out of order.

He laughed. "So you two are going to get married?"

"Yes," said Alice, smiling possessively at me. "Sit down, Ned. The light here wouldn't work, so George has been looking into it for me."

"Just a bad connection," he said. "It's okay now." He gave a screw a



couple of turns and the fixture was in place.

When Alice and I got back from the movie he was still there, playing solitaire. I noticed he'd been cheating himself but I didn't say anything. After that we talked a while and I told him about how my folks had come out from the midwest when I was a kid, that my mother, the last of my family, had died a couple of years back, that Alice and I thought we could get along on what I made in my present job, which was in Slater's Garage on Sunset, and that we were ready to make the plunge on the five hundred dollars I'd saved. I realize now that he told me practically nothing about himself, except that he was stopping at a hotel on Seventh.

"We'll get some wine to celebrate your engagement," he said as he and I left and got in the expensive car at the curb. "Why don't you drive? There's a funny little knock when it gets up around fifty and maybe you can tell me what it is."

His voice was affable, brotherly, but his small, close-set eyes regarded me shrewdly.

I sat in the car, under the wheel, and listened to the radio while Charlton went in the liquor store on the boulevard. My thoughts were on Alice, naturally. Charlton didn't seem the kind of guy he might have been, but if he was Alice's uncle he was okay by me.

The next thing I knew, Charlton came backing out of the liquor store sort of hunched over, and the clerk ran from inside the store straight at him with a big paring knife glinting. The little clerk was just crazy, I guess. He had a wife and two kids at home and he wasn't going to stand for being robbed.

He didn't.

The report was flat, final, like two boards spanking together, and the little fellow folded up in his doorway with his hands clutching at the red opening under his belt. He crumpled over and fell on his face, in the glare of light between the show windows of the store.

"Step on it, kid!" Charlton's voice crackled as he swung onto the running board, the stubby gun still in his hand with smoke wisping from its muzzle.

If I'd obeyed, I thought later, everything might have turned out all right. But I was numb with shock. After all, I was no wise guy. I was a young punk who'd never done anything worse than the kind of petty larceny most kids get into at one time or another. And now I'd seen a harmless little coot of a bald-headed clerk blasted right in front of me.

Murder!

Before I could do anything, before I could adjust myself to what had happened, a white-bodied police car came tearing around the corner, its tires squealing, and there were shouts from across the street, and a window went up somewhere and a woman stuck her head out and began to scream at the top of her lungs.

A cop leaned out of the prowler car with his Police Positive bulking in his paw, and the revolver bucked and flamed, and Charlton ducked behind our car and into the dark mouth of the alley. At least I think he went in the alley. There wasn't any place else he could have gone so quick. And that was the last I saw of him. Would you believe it? Well, no, I guess you wouldn't. But I sat there behind the steering wheel with my hands stuck up in plain sight beside my ears until the cop got to me.



IT MUST have sounded phony at the police station. I can see that now. I told it over and over until I didn't know what I was saying. They didn't beat me, though. Their bellowed questions hammered at me until I was blue in the face, but they didn't take any foot-lengths of rubber hose to me, like you sometimes hear about them doing.

"Where'd you steal the car?"

"I didn't steal it, I tell you. I thought it was his." The big lamp was beating down on me.

"Where'd *he* steal it, then?"

"I don't know. Wasn't the owner's papers on the steering wheel?"

"Don't give us that stuff, Thompson. You was his getaway driver, wasn't you?"

I put my hands over my eyes and somebody pulled them away. I was groggy, half-blind with helpless fury, by this time. "Listen," I said. "Honest to God, he offered to give me a lift home. He seemed like a nice guy. I got in the car and then on the way we stopped at this liquor store, and that's all I know about it."

They kept yelling at me for hours. I never told them about the guy being Alice's uncle. They must have found that out somewhere else.

I guess I could have stood everything a lot better if she'd come to see me in jail. But nobody came but Benny Nolan, and Benny can't talk, except on his fingers. He's a mute. That was a laugh, all right. The only visitor I had and he couldn't talk.

Hanging around his newsstand, I'd picked up a little of the finger language, and the guards let us have pencil and paper in the visiting room, so we were able to get a few ideas back and forth. He understood why I wasn't blabbing about Charlton being Alice's uncle, but he told me I was a fool to protect her.

He said she'd disappeared, the day after I was pinched. The cops went around there and she was gone. Probably lammed with Charlton. Maybe she had a criminal record too. She'd only been in town a few months, working as a car-hop at that new place on Hollywood Boulevard.

"Those dames are all alike," Benny told me in his sign language. "All they do is wait for a movie break and cultivate the wrong people. Forget her, Ned."

"No," I said, out loud. Benny can hear, all right. He can hear more than any ten other guys. He came out here from New York a few years before my trouble and he can still spot red-hots that came from the east side where he grew up, the kind of hooligans that are now trying to muscle in on the race track and movie money.

He hired me a lawyer but it was no use.

I didn't mind the trip up. There were lots of young fellows like me, and the guards let us play cards on the train after supper. It was a funny thing. Most of those youngsters claimed they wasn't guilty—said they'd been framed. I didn't believe half of them. But hearing all that taught me to keep my mouth shut. When we got to Richmond we were handcuffed again in sets of fours and we went through the depot to a special bus that took us to the ferryboat, then we went across the bay to San Quentin.

I spent two years in San Quentin. It took plenty out of me, and I guess it put something in, too. Alice never wrote. The only one who wrote was Benny, and whenever I asked him about her, he said she'd gone and I'd best forget her. But don't think I didn't spend many a night in my cell wondering about her. I guess I still



believed in her, sort of. You understand how those things can be. My hate for Charlton grew and grew until it was eating my insides out, but still I kept some sort of faith in Alice.

The best news I heard while I was there was from Benny, too. Charlton had got picked up on another job in San Diego. They sent him to Folsom because he was a second offender. The Feds wanted him on other charges, but the holdup rap took precedence. I could picture him in prison clothes the same as me, with maybe tougher screws to bear down on him and slap some of the oiliness out of his swarthy puss.

About the most important thing I learned in San Quentin, I guess, was this—I learned to hate cops.

"You're wrong about that," Benny told me, talking on his fingers, when I got back to L. A. But then Benny hadn't done two years.

**H**E HAD a job for me, though, and that was what I wanted. I tried to get a job at my trade but it was no soap. Ex-con mechanics weren't in demand. Benny got me a paper route, and a jalopy to do it in, and he'd even fixed it up about the driver's license. Well, it was something. A guy like me has to get his teeth into something, otherwise he'd go nuts.

I worked like hell on that paper route. Up at three in the morning, out till around eight o'clock, and then collecting two or three days a week. I had a room over a grocery store not far from Benny's newsstand.

The third day I was back, I went over to the bungalow court where Alice had lived. It was only about six blocks from Benny's.

At first the frowsy-headed woman who lived in the first cottage on the

right as you went in the court, and had charge of rentals, seemed to have trouble remembering who I was talking about. I told her Alice Pell, and described her, and finally the woman remembered.

"That twirp?" she said. "Well, no—and if you want the truth I hope I never see her again. She skipped out of here owing a month's rent. Claimed her uncle was going to pay it, but he never did."

"Is the bungalow vacant now?" I asked.

It was. She let me in and I said I was interested in renting it. I wasn't, though. Not then. I just wanted to get the feel of the place once more. Luckily some other people wanted her outside and she let me stay there a few minutes alone.

Sitting in the wicker chair, one of the same ones that had been there when I used to call on Alice, hot tears came into my eyes and a lump started pushing up in my throat. Oh, I was tough now. Being in stir had put a coat of iron on me. But inside—well, you know how it can be with a man who's been in love.

Maybe she'd played me for a sucker. Maybe she'd only been after the five hundred dollars. But there was the door to her bedroom, and she used to come out of there looking prettier than any queen in Hollywood, and she'd smile at me and we'd laugh and go out for supper and take in a show afterward, and the world was a rosy apple that we were going to polish and carry around in our pockets. Or at least that was the way she made me feel.

It was only an accident that I found what I did. I'm no detective. And the place had probably had dozens of occupants since Alice. The walls had been



replastered or at least repainted. But in the bedroom was the same wooden bedstead, on the windows were the same dusty curtains, or maybe only the same kind of curtains, and in the tight little bathroom the cabinet over the lavatory hadn't even been repainted, as far as I could tell; there were rusty razor blades somebody had left on the bottom of the cabinet.

I came back to the living room, squeezing my eyes shut trying for an impression, something I remembered, that was so vague in my mind I couldn't quite bring it to the surface, and then I opened my eyes and there it was right in front of me. The ornamental light fixture on the wall. A face of false bronze holding a little metal saucer with an imitation candle, into which the bulb fitted.

Charlton had been doing something to it. *"The light here wouldn't work so George has been looking into it for me."* But why had he unscrewed the fixture? The wires behind a fixture would be the least likely, anywhere about a room like this, to become shorted, no matter how old the installation was. Why had he been tampering with the wires behind the fixture?

**C**ALL it a hunch. Call it anything you like. But my remembrance of the last time I was there, more than two years before, was so vivid that hairs were rising along the back of my neck and suddenly I had to look into that light fixture. I got out my pocket knife and used the blunt edge of a blade to turn the screws, and pulled the fixture away just enough to see behind it, into the hole in the plaster, where the wires ran back into the lathing.

I didn't tamper with the wiring. After I saw what was hidden there in

the hole, I wasn't interested in the wiring any more. My heart was beating wildly and my hands were sweaty, but I had enough presence of mind to disturb nothing and to screw the fixture back in place. I went out into the court.

If I looked like I'd seen a ghost, the frowsy Mrs. Filomeo didn't comment on it.

"Twenty-five a month," she said, "or eight dollars a week—in advance."

"Was that what you were getting two years ago?" I asked.

Her eyes narrowed and her pale mouth twisted. "I was getting more than that," she said "I got thirty a month then. You beginning to wonder how your girl friend paid it?"

I felt like hitting her. But I nodded and asked, "Her uncle? When it *was* paid, I mean?"

"That's right," she told me. "And if the police hadn't chased them out when they did, I wouldn't have got stuck for the last month."

"I thought they left before the cops came around."

"Look, buddy. The twirp took you for a ride. So what? So forget it."

"You don't have to answer my questions if you don't want to. I'm curious, that's all. I don't give a damn what became of her."

"You're lying," she said, "but I'll tell you about it. Your girl friend and her uncle, if he was her uncle"—she sneered—"beat the cops out of here by about two minutes. They ran out the back way, through that opening in the fence, when the cops stopped to see me up front. I saw 'em out of the corner of my eye. I ought to've told the cops but I didn't. I hadn't been here long enough to know what was good for me."

I gave her eight bucks to be applied



on the monthly rate if I decided to stay, and moved in that afternoon. I told Benny nothing about it.

But he found out a few days later and wanted to know what I was up to. He found out because I had my mailing address switched to his newsstand instead of the bungalow court, and he wanted to know why. I stalled. The truth was that I didn't care about anybody knowing where I lived. Because I had decided I was going to kill a man.

That summer I avoided Benny as much as possible. He came to see me once at the dingy cottage, not intruding, just asking if he could help and letting me know that he wondered about my paying more than I could afford for rent. But he must have suspected that whatever it was I was up to, it was something nobody could settle for me, that I would never rest until I settled it myself. I didn't feel guilty when I was around him. That would come later. I just felt an uneasiness whenever he looked up at me—he's only five four, and I'm nearly six feet—warning me but not questioning me, and what exchanges we had grew to be strictly business.

Soon I found that I was talking only with Jarnegan, the fifteen-year-old kid who helped Benny because the stand was doing so well. Then the store next door was vacated and Benny rented it, putting in a line of novelties and installing a telephone. He was approached, I know, about adding a little bookmaking on the horses, but he resisted and nobody had the guts to put pressure on him; he had too many friends in power, official and unofficial, by now.

I went to the public library files and found the newspaper notices about the holdup in San Diego, the one where

they'd got Charlton—also the mention, a month or so later, about his being sent to Folsom for five years. Well, I thought, he may get paroled. But then I remembered that the Feds wanted him too, and that they'd probably grab him on a more serious rap as soon as he was released.

"What's wrong with you, Mr. Thompson?" Jarnegan asked me one day. "You're thin as a rail. Don't you ever sleep or eat? I never seen you at it."

**B**ENNY'S too-wise eyes were watching. "What I do is my own business," I snarled, and left. But the boy was telling the truth. A fever was consuming me and it wasn't the kind of fever a doctor could treat. I spent most of my spare time haunting Skid Row, around Main and Fifth, and the Hollywood call houses, and the Long Beach and San Pedro joints that were worse, hoping and dreading to find some trace of Alice.

The monstrous fear that she might be in a Latin-American dive, forever beyond my reach, was slowly driving me insane.

When I tried to sleep I only lay on the bed in cold sweat, with ice in my bones, staring through the doorway, through whatever feeble shafts of light came through the windows, at the false candle on the living-room wall, letting my hate for Charlton run through my body like a sustaining drug. I think I would have waited a lifetime, though God knows my lifetime wouldn't have been much.

But one morning I got up at two-thirty, as usual, and when I reached Benny's and saw the headlines on the papers the truck dumped off, a bomb exploded in my mind and I knew that I was ready for murder.



You remember the break? Two screws were killed, and there's still some mystery as to how the gats were smuggled in. Everything had been going peacefully too long. It was like Alcatraz. They claimed it was impossible to break out of Folsom; and as soon as newspaper articles began playing up how impregnable it was, the break came. Charlton was one of the three that got clean away.

"You sick, Mr. Thompson?" young Jarnegan asked, as he saw me reading the paper.

"Yes," I said. "I'm not working today. Get somebody to take my route."

He stared after me. He knew I was an ex-con and I guess he thought I was altogether insane at last. I went by the Greek's and got sandwiches and cartons of coffee, and I didn't care if the coffee got cold. I went back to the bungalow court. In the bureau drawer was a nicked .32 revolver, that I'd paid eight bucks for on Skid Row.

There was a moon that night, so I turned out all the lights. It would soon be day anyway.

No matter how long it took, I would wait. I had murder on my mind. Nothing could quench the fires in me but to kill or be killed. And I didn't aim to be killed.

The dawn came up and found me sitting on a straight-backed chair just inside the bathroom, with the door cracked open an inch, giving me a line through the bedroom to the trap on the living-room wall. The cheap gun was in my hand; I never put it down. It wasn't going to have to fire but one shot, the way I figured it, and I knew it was good for that. I'd tested it, down at the beach the night after I bought it. No, I didn't mean to shoot him in the back. I meant to get up and go in and tell him to turn around and see

me and know what was coming and then shoot him in the face.

That would be the extent of my warning. I wouldn't give him a chance to go for his own gun, if he had one. I wouldn't give him any more chance than a mad dog.

No doubt exists in me now that I was what the doctors call a homicidal maniac. The sandwiches and coffee sat on the tile floor beside me during the morning, while the slantwise window-pattern of sun appeared on the bedroom floor and traveled slowly across a wall and receded. I never thought to eat.

At one o'clock by my strapwatch there was a knock on the outer door. I didn't move. The knock came again, a timid tap-tap-tap. It sounded like Benny Nolan. But was it?

The door was not locked. If it was Benny, he would come in, I thought. I waited. The knocking came once more, furtively now, or so I thought, and still I didn't move.

**D**URING the afternoon I must have munched on a sandwich and taken some cold coffee. I don't remember it, but afterward part of a sandwich was found there on the floor beside its oil-paper wrapping, and one of the cartons of coffee was open and nearly empty, so I must have.

All I remember is sitting motionless except for occasional wriggling of my gun hand to keep the trigger finger limber, and listening to the dim noises from the street and unidentifiable voices and footsteps that went by without pausing on the cement walk of the court, and inside, the ticking of the alarm clock on the little table by the bed.

At dusk I thought I might have to turn on a light somewhere in the



bungalow, but as it grew darker I saw this wouldn't be necessary. Enough pale glow came in the windows so I could make out the wall trap well enough, and that was all I needed.

It was a little after nine o'clock when he came. I was surprised. I thought he would wait until the wee hours and then come sneaking like the scavenger he was. But his entrance was so matter-of-fact and abrupt that it was like in a dream that you know you're dreaming, and that there's something wrong about it, but you can't wake yourself up.

The footsteps came briskly and the next sound was that of a key being inserted in the cylinder lock. A key! He must have left it somewhere and remembered and gone back for it, knowing it was not likely the lock would have been changed. Then his other hand must have been on the knob, because the door came open and he walked boldly in and stood there, and I still couldn't see him. My hand was rigid on the gun and I felt like there was a tight band around my chest.

He couldn't have any way of knowing if the place was occupied, I told myself. He was taking the chance because he had to.

Ages went by in the ticking of the clock and there was no further sound. *It's got to be him*, I was praying. *Oh, God, it's got to be him.*

It was him. He must have satisfied himself that he was alone because he walked to the bedroom door and his eyes were blobs of white in his dark, predatory face as he sniffed as warily as a hunting cat. *If he comes toward the bathroom, I thought, I'll open the door and let him have it now.* And he took three steps toward me.

He turned and in the darkness my

grip relaxed on the knob of the door I'd been about to swing open. He went to the living-room wall, drawing a small screw driver from the pocket of his tweed coat.

I did it exactly as I'd planned. I let him get the fixture hanging loose on its wires, let him get the greedy, hairy fingers of his right hand on the thick roll of twenties; and then I opened the bathroom door wide on its oiled hinges and entered silently in the shadows.

"Hello, Charlton."

**T**HIS was the moment I'd lived for —the pay-off, for which I'd suffered all the agonies of Hell. I should have felt a surge of sadistic animal joy. But in me there was only a cold remorseless hatred that would make me do what needed to be done, and after that I wouldn't care what happened; my whole reason for living would be gone.

"Any idea who I am?" I asked. I wanted him to cringe, to get down on his knees and beg for his life. He only froze, with his hand still on the roll of blood money.

Still his head didn't turn. I was a good six feet from him.

"The first thing an ex-con needs is dough. We both know that," I went on. "Maybe you better than me, with all the crush-out heat. That right, Charlton?"

His head turned a little then, enough for his ghost-lit eyes to bear on me, and his dark jaw was clamped so hard there were ugly lines from the corners of his red mouth.

"Well, punk?" he said. "What's the play?"

I fought back the mad impulse to fire and asked, "What did you do with Alice?"

He laughed, a low slaty rasp. "So



that's what's eating you." He let his hand come out of the hole, away from the money, but kept it up, and slowly raised his left hand to the same level.

"Talk, you rat, talk!" It couldn't have been my voice; it was too shaky. But the gun in my hand was steady enough, and it was lined between his eyes. And while he watched, I cocked it, making a quiet click in the dimness.

"Take it easy, kid," he whispered hoarsely.

"Either you killed her," I said, "or you shipped her off somewhere. She must have known about this money. She must have seen you cache it. I don't care where you got it. I don't care who you heisted for it. All I know is that she must have known it was here, and she'd probably have been broke. She'd have come back for it at some time. She didn't—and you know why. What became of her?"

He laughed again. "She's waiting outside now," he told me.

On the instant of my involuntary start he came for my knees in a head-long plunge. I stepped back just far enough for a good shot at his spine, and as coolly and steadily as if he had been a moving target in a gallery, I pulled the trigger.

He crashed into me, smashing me backwards, and in the midst of falling I put the muzzle into his face and frantically pulled the trigger again and again, and still the gun didn't go off. He twisted the useless weapon out of my hand. It skittered out of his grasp. He swung at my face, and then his fingers were gouging at my eyes.

With a strength I never knew I possessed, I twisted and got him off me with my knees. I lashed out furiously. One of his legs tripped me. We crashed to the floor together. The back of my head hit first. In the flashing

moment when I was stunned, he produced a gun of his own and slashed with its barrel.

The sight of the automatic ripped my cheek. His left hand was clenching my shirt, and grunting he raised the gun to slash again. Thank God he was afraid to shoot me, afraid to make an alarm. If he hadn't been trying to keep quiet, neither of us would have heard the imperious knocking on the door.

ONLY the labored husks of our breathing fell into the silence. Then the knocking was repeated, louder.

He let go my shirt and stood up, keeping the automatic trained on me. His leering evil eyes pinned me down.

"Who the hell could that be?" he asked.

"I—don't—know," I said.

"Where were you when I came in?"

I raised up on an elbow. "In the bathroom."

"Okay," he said. "I'm going there now." He scooped up the revolver which had failed me. "And listen, chump"—waggling the big automatic—"stay in range of this! Always in sight of me—and it. Turn on a light if you want to."

He was taking the roll of bills from behind the fixture, and he lodged it back in place and stuck in a screw, not bothering to turn it, just sticking it in so the fixture wouldn't fall. He pocketed the roll and backed toward the bedroom.

The knocking came again. I stood up.

"Careful," he said. "I'll stay here while you see who it is. Keep 'em out if you can. If you can't—if it's somebody you have to let in—watch what you say and do. I killed two guys in the break and they can't gas me any more if I have to blast you too."



While he stood just inside the darkened bedroom, I switched on a floor lamp. I started toward the door.

"Wait a minute!"

I stopped. I could feel his eyes in my back.

"If it's Benny Nolan," he said, "keep your hands still all the time. I'm onto that gag."

Maybe it's Alice, I thought. But the knock wasn't like a woman's. I went to the door, smoothing my hair and adjusting my shirt and dabbing blood from my cut cheek with a handkerchief.

"Who is it?"

No answer. I called again. Still no answer. I opened the door. Benny's worried countenance peered up at me.

"What do you want?" I said.

He sidled past me, his sharp eyes probing me and the room. I followed. What else could I do? I watched his hands, keeping mine hanging limp. He stood near the floor lamp and let his gaze roam, passing over the dark maw of the bedroom, and return to me. And then his fingers moved.

"I told the kid I was sick," I said. I kept away from the lamp.

His sign language asked me another question.

"It's none of your business," I said. "Besides, I don't need a doctor. All I need is rest. Just leave me be." And, as he started in again, "*What?*"

The tension was straining every nerve in my body. Charlton hadn't been bluffing, he'd kill a dozen men now before he'd be caught. For a fleeting moment the idea struck me that he might have lammed out a window with the roll, but I couldn't bank on that possibility.

"Suppose Charlton *has* escaped?" I told Benny. "I don't see why he'd come here. He'd have no reason. He'd probably head for Mexico."

Benny's hands moved swiftly again, fingers flashing from one position to another.

"All right," I said. "I'll be careful. But I think you're screwy. There's no attraction here for him."

He made a shrugging motion, then an outward gesture.

"I'll go to bed," I said. "If I don't show up, the kid will know what to do. But let me be the judge about whether I need a doctor."

The door closed behind him. Charlton came out. The automatic bulked in his fist.

"I don't like it," he said.

"What else could I do?" I asked him.

"It's damned funny he didn't notice the bruises and the cut on your cheek."

"I kept away from the light."

"Just the same, it's funny. I don't like it."

"Maybe he thought I'd been drunk and in a brawl. I've been drinking a lot lately."

"I don't believe that, either, wise guy." Charlton hefted the gun reflectively, and I stepped back one short step.

He thought it over while minutes went by.

"Turn around," he said. "Face the other way."

MY BRAIN was on fire. Everything had gone wrong. He'd kill me now. But I wasn't going to take it the way he wanted me to. "No," I said. "If you're going to break my skull with that cannon, you'll have to do it while I'm looking."

He must have seen that I wasn't bluffing this time. Sure, he could have got a wet towel or maybe used a drape from the window to wrap around the gun and muffle the explosion, but in



the meantime I was on the alert and it would be dangerous. *He* couldn't take any chances now.

"You're getting an awful lot of guts all of a sudden," he told me. I hardly heard him; all I cared about was that more time was passing.

"Take it any way you like," I said finally.

He had me—and yet he hesitated. He was yellow. If he hadn't been, I often thought afterward, he might yet have won, but he hesitated and he was lost. As a suspicion of that began to seep into him, he lunged, swinging the gun barrel at my head.

My elbow came up, the cold steel thudded on my forearm and something cracked. But at the same instant my right fist sank with every ounce of desperate strength in me behind it, into his midriff. Air whooshed out of him and he leaned over me and I butted his chin with the top of my head. I think he would have shot me then, not caring if he raised the roof, if I hadn't sunk my teeth into his gun wrist. I was using one arm around him, you see, and the other was broken.

His knuckles were making pulp of my face and his knee was ramming my midriff, but I was hanging onto that gun wrist with my teeth for dear life when we heard the bedlam of the sirens.

Then his left hand came over for the gun. I sank my teeth in the harder. My mouth was full of sickening sweet blood; it was flowing all over my chest. The gun dropped.

And that was when he got in the haymaker with the bookend he grabbed off the table we'd struggled against.

I woke up and the room was full of cops from the radio cars and Benny was kneeling beside me like a benign imp of paradise. The cops had Charl-

ton. They'd caught him on the lam. He was shot in the leg.

"But that dummy—" one of the cops said later.

"Don't call Benny Nolan a dummy," I said. "He's a mute. He came over here to tell me there was a phone call for me from a girl in Colorado. Of course Charlton can't read sign language. So I pretended Benny was telling me about him, and Benny caught on and got out and called you. Give the reward to him, not me."

You guessed it. The call was from Alice. Charlton, — you see, was her uncle. The reason she'd never told me about him was that she was ashamed. After the trouble he got me into, she'd tried to follow him and finger him for the cops, but he ditched her. She was afraid because he'd said he'd kill her if she caused him trouble. She did see a lawyer and he told her she had no proof which would save me; I could have teamed up with her uncle to rob the liquor store. When Charlton went to Folsom, she admitted to herself she was licked and she went home and got a job in a beauty parlor.

But when she read in the papers about Charlton's escape, she succeeded in getting through a call to Benny trying to locate me and tell me about the cache to which she'd never returned. She'd had an idea he'd head for it, and we could trap him and make him confess about me. Of course she hadn't told Benny's clerk that on the phone. She'd only made it urgent about getting in touch with me.

So Charlton finally spilled, and there's talk in the State legislature about compensation for the debt society owes me. But I'm not banking on that. I don't even like to think about the fact that Alice's uncle goes to the execution chamber next week.



For a while I was a little sore about Benny having cased the cottage and found my gun and filed down the firing pin so I wouldn't kill anybody. The best of intentions—he was worried about me—but looking back, wouldn't you have been a little sore about that

too? I got over it, though, and he got the reward as I insisted.

You know what the little fool did with the dough? The day Alice arrived he made us a wedding present of the down payment on this garage in Glendale. Sure, we're doing all right.

**BEGINNING NEXT WEEK!**

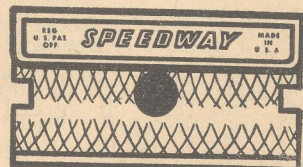
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## **DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY**

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"Something awful has happened in the Rosen place!"

*The only witness Detective Hilborn had in that slaying was a girl who filled in memory gaps with dreams and fancies*

## Shadow of Doubt

*A DFW Feature True Crime Story*

**By Francis V. Roberts**

**T**HE balance would be a very thin one—between a life of penal servitude and freedom—when the only eyewitness to a murder was a victim of amnesia. Could the law ever be sure?

Amnesia, that curtain that separates the memory from the reality of the past, was admittedly open to much contention among psychiatrists. Some of them said a patient remembers some things; others, that a patient remembers nothing; but they all agreed there was a tendency to fill in the awful void with fantasy and dreams.

Of course, there was the possibility of complete recovery, that memory returned and the horror of that night was recaptured and relived by the victim.

At eleven-thirty in the evening, Patrolman Joseph Znocko, of the Bryant Avenue Station, made his usual call to the precinct from the box at Grand and West Streets. Then he turned to survey the crowds.

West Street was a strange thoroughfare. It twisted through an old part of Minneapolis, Minn., and at the intersection of Grand Street, it was a blaze of light and color.



Here were crowds of people and they always seemed to be in carnival spirits. The babble of hucksters and barkers vied with the music from dance halls and the incessant gunfire from the shooting galleries.

A fall of dry snow lay on the streets. It was several days old. The air was chill and crisp. This was the evening of January 18, 1938.

Suddenly, as the policeman stared at the throng, he saw a young man dart out of a doorway and start up the street in the opposite direction. He was a hatless young man with short, black, bristling hair. The patrolman hailed him. The youth paused, saw the officer, then ran to him.

"Something awful has happened in the Rosen place," he yelled. "I think it's murder!"

The officer knew the young man. He knew it was Harry Mellum and that he had roomed with the Rosen family for the past six months.

The Rosen flat was a two-storied brick affair, fairly new, and stood at 227 West Street. There, on the second floor, Mrs. Goldie Rosen lived with her fourteen-year-old daughter, Bernice. Mellum also had a room on the second floor. Mrs. Rosen was considered in that part of the city a wealthy woman. Her fortune was invested in real estate.

Something "awful" had indeed happened. The officer found the body of Mrs. Rosen lying face up near the foot of the basement stairs. She had been brutally murdered by many blows to the head with some heavy weapon.

WHILE the officer remained in the basement, Mellum went upstairs and phoned headquarters. The call was answered by Detective Supervisor John Hilborn and Detectives Charles Witherrille and Arthur Olson. They des-

cended immediately to the clean, well-lighted cellar.

Mrs. Rosen's body lay near a pile of ashes. There were ashes on her shoes and more ashes spread over the floor. This, together with the fact she had suffered wounds on her arms and hands, seemed to show that a prolonged scuffle had taken place in the basement before death.

The motive was apparent almost at once. Hilborn found that an attempt had been made by the killer to remove a ring from the dead woman's finger. In this he had been frustrated.

The weapon used in the murder was found on the scene. It was the crooked, rough-edge piece of iron used to shake down the furnace grates. There were blood stains on it. Because of its uneven surface, there was no hope of getting fingerprints.

The next step in the investigation was to find the dead woman's daughter, Bernice. Mellum told the officers that, when he had returned home, he had gone upstairs to the living quarters and found no one; then on coming downstairs he had noticed the stairway door open and found the body. But he had not seen Bernice at all!

The supervisor decided to have a look upstairs anyway and the group started up the steps. On the way up Hilborn noticed the presence of ashes on the stairs and at the landing of the second floor, he discovered a stain of blood on the wall. He could distinguish the imprint of a small hand. It was as though some one had stretched out a bloody hand to sustain himself.

At the top of the stairs there was a railinged balcony that overlooked the first-floor hallway. Doors to the flat led from the balcony. One of them stood open.

The flat itself, Hilborn noticed, as



he went inside and looked around, was comprised of six rooms running from one end of the building to the other. The lights were on in all rooms. It was immediately obvious that an attempt had been made to ransack the place, and that in the living room a woman's pocketbook, identified as Mrs. Rosen's by Mellum, had been opened and dropped to the floor. There were several bills of sizeable denominations scattered about. This would indicate the killer-thief had been surprised in his work.

The bedroom at the back was also well lighted. Here, in twin beds placed flush against the walls at either side of the room, the Rosens, mother and daughter, slept and Hilborn noticed that the covers of one of the beds were pulled all the way to the top. There seemed to be some object beneath them.

The supervisor stepped forward quickly and pulled the covers down. A gasp of surprise went around the room. Even the supervisor was not prepared for the shock.

Frightfully battered about the head, face and hands, a young girl in white pajamas lay there staring at the officers with wide, expressionless eyes. It was Bernice! Hilborn felt her pulse. It was faint. But she was still alive.

THE supervisor snapped out orders for an ambulance. His men moved instantly to obey. And then suddenly, Bernice sat up in bed. How she did so, it would be impossible to tell. There was still that blank, uncomprehending stare in her eyes.

Hilborn ordered some water and when he received it, he held the girl and put the glass to her lips. She took a sip, withdrew her lips and looked at him oddly.

"Who did it, Bernice?" Hilborn asked quietly.

Bernice stared a moment longer, then her eyes closed and her body grew limp and the detective slowly lowered her to the bed. She had lost consciousness. A short time later Bernice was removed to Minneapolis General Hospital. Physicians gave her little chance to survive. They said the beating she had received had been almost as severe as that given her mother. It was a miracle she had lived at all.

In the meantime the detectives discovered a few items at the scene of the crime that only served to deepen the mystery. Hilborn found that a door leading from the second floor hallway was ajar. Mellum assured him it had never been used. It was always securely bolted from the inside.

Exploring further, the officer found that the door opened upon a platform and a flight of stairs that led to the back yard. The unroofed steps were covered by three inches of snow. And on these steps the officer found a single set of footprints, obviously made by a man, that led down the stairs, across the yard and disappeared through an alley gate. That was the end of them.

These were freshly made prints, made that night. What was important about them was the fact they led away from and not to the flat. In other words the killer had left by the back door but had not come in that way.

How, then, did the killer get in? Since there was only one other possible entrance to the flat—the front entrance from West Street—it was obvious that he had come through that way. However, Hilborn found that recently a new, stout lock had been installed on that door and that only four persons had keys. Two of them were held by Mrs. Rosen and Bernice, a third by Mellum and a fourth by the caretaker—a man named Philip Zimmerscheid. The care-



taker worked days. On questioning, both Mellum and Zimmerscheid were completely absolved from any suspicion in the murder.

The next step in Hilborn's logic then was this: The killer must have been let into the house by Mrs. Rosen herself. In other words, the killer was not only known to her but trusted by her. He probably lived in the neighborhood.

The mechanics of the crime were fairly clear now to the officers. After letting the killer in, Mrs. Rosen had, falling for some pretense or other, gone with him to the basement, and there fell a victim to his blows. Her screams may have aroused Bernice. The child came downstairs in her pajamas. She probably met the killer on the basement stairs or in the hallway and was struck several times and left for dead.

THE killer had then gone on upstairs and tried to rob the flat. But Bernice had come to and crawled up slowly, leaving ashes and blood behind her and also leaving the imprint of her hand on the wall at the landing near the second floor. Her appearance, probably something unearthly, must have petrified the killer and he dropped the purse he was rifling and fled at the nearest exit—the back stairs that were never used.

Meanwhile Bernice had instinctively groped about until she found her bed and had covered herself completely with the covers in her terror. Thus the officers had found her.

One other point Hilborn made that evening—the approximate time of the murder. He learned from a relative of the Rosens that Bernice had telephoned at about five minutes before ten o'clock and was then in good health and spirits. The crime had been discovered at eleven-thirty.

It was three weeks later, to the day,

that Bernice regained consciousness and even this was not a complete awakening. She merely opened an eye and stared out from under a huge head dress of bandages. She moaned.

A policewoman, Carrie Bystrom, who was garbed in a nurse's uniform and had orders to stand by during the emergency, was sitting at the bedside. She leaned forward and touched Bernice's hand. She spoke her name. Bernice squeezed the policewoman's hand to signify she understood. That was all.

But the chances were brighter now. A more thorough examination later showed that Bernice had suffered both contusion and concussion of the brain. She had lost the power of speech and the entire left side of her body was paralyzed.

In a discussion of the case with Hilborn, the hospital's acting superintendent said Bernice might never recover from her paralysis and that her memory might always be a total blank.

"In other words," the physician added, "amnesia!"

Still, miracles have happened. A few weeks later Bernice contracted a contagious fever and had to be removed to an isolation ward. There, naturally, the policewoman could not follow.

It was at the very height of this raging fever that Bernice recovered her voice and the use of her left side and the incident was rather dramatic. She suddenly cried out that there was a man in the hall who "looks like the man that hurt me!"

As far as hospital authorities could check, there was no one in the hall at the time, or if there had been, it would necessarily have been a doctor, intern or orderly. No one else was allowed in the ward.

And apparently, if Bernice had any sort of vision of the murderer, it was



only a flash. She spoke no more of it, and when she recovered from the fever, she didn't recall the incident at all.

Now, outwardly, Bernice was well on the way to recovery. The injuries were healing as expected. But her memory was at fault.

AS GENTLY as possible Supervisor Hilborn tried to take her over the details of the crime. He asked her how or by whom she had been hurt. The look that came into her eyes was pitiful to see. She was frightened and at the same time ashamed. She wanted to help. She seemed to be reaching out, through impenetrable darkness, for something, trying with all her might to push aside the heavy curtain that divided the past, and finally she burst into tears:

"I don't know!" she moaned. "I don't know!"

Later a state psychiatrist told Hilborn he would have to be very careful how he questioned the witness.

"You know, in these cases, the patient has a sense of inferiority and may fill in the gap in memory with fancies or dreams. Your case would then be worthless."

"Do you think she'll ever recover?"

"I don't know that."

"How am I to know when she has recovered and is telling me the real story—if she does?" Hilborn asked.

"You'll know. Her story will check with the material facts you have already gathered in the case."

Meanwhile, while he waited for Bernice to get well and hoped for the recovery of her memory too, he thought about the puzzle on West Street from a purely circumstantial point of view. There was one point that gave him some food for thought. Why had Mrs. Rosen gone to the basement with the killer?

Finally he got the nucleus of an idea.

It came to him as he paced his office one afternoon in April. It was a dull day, a day characterized by a steady, tedious rain. He put himself in the killer's place and tried to think of a number of reasons he would be able to give Mrs. Rosen to get her to accompany him to her basement at about ten o'clock on the evening of January 18.

He could tell her he was an electrician and that he had orders from his company to check on the wiring in the basement. That might not hold water. She might be suspicious. Then how about pretending he was a plumber. There was a leak in the main. Might he have a look at the pipes downstairs?

And yet Hilborn believed that the killer was not just any tradesman. The officer believed he was some one known to Mrs. Rosen. Then he remembered that the instrument of death had been a grate shaker. Perhaps it was on the pretense of shaking down the furnace fire that he lured Mrs. Rosen to her death. Perhaps the killer was a furnace mender!

That was easily checked. The officer talked to the caretaker and asked if, at any time prior to the murder, anyone had been mending the furnace. The answer was, "Yes!"

A few days before the murder a man had been sent over by the Harris Brothers Company, on West Street, to mend the grates in the furnace. Although he had made several trips, he hadn't done a very good job of it. The repairman's name was Kenneth Palmer.

Hilborn was elated at the success of his logic. He sent out a large number of his men to cover the suspect and find out all the information they could about him. They were not to arrest him—just report on him.

This is what they found: A few days before the killing, Palmer had left the



employ of the Harris Brothers establishment, where he had worked part time at a small wage, and took a full-time job with the WPA.

**H**E LIVED in the neighborhood. He occupied an apartment in a ten-family apartment house at 215 West Lake Street, only a few doors distant from the Rosen flat. Palmer lived there with his wife, Leila, and a two-year-old child.

Palmer's life was a peculiar one. Once his family had been fairly wealthy. His father had been state highway engineer and he had had a good schooling. Now he was reduced to extreme poverty. Although he lived quietly, didn't drink, gamble, or spend money in any foolish manner, he never seemed able to make ends meet and both he and his family were often the objects of charity.

Would this sort of man prove a criminal? The police were only concerned with getting factual evidence. Was he near the scene of the crime when it was committed? He certainly was not far away. Did he show any sudden wealth afterward? That could not be used conclusively because it was not known whether the killer actually had time to steal anything of value from the flat.

Thus for a time the police toyed with the man, unknown to himself, until a lively young officer dug up a record on Palmer. It showed the ex-plumber had been arrested in 1935 for stealing an automobile and a number of expensive furs from a street corner. Although he had been convicted of this crime his youth had saved him—he was twenty-two—from a prison sentence and he was put on probation.

On the discovery of this record, Palmer was arrested. That was the evening of April 12. Palmer made no pro-

test. He went along quietly with the detectives. He was a thin, good-looking man. There was a hurt, patient look in his eyes. He didn't look like a killer.

At headquarters Palmer gave the officers an alibi for his movements on the night of January 18, 1938. He said he had prepared the alibi because he had an idea he might be questioned.

"After all, I lived near the Rosen house," he said, "and since I had a record of theft, I figured I might be brought in as a suspect. I recalled where I was at the time of the murder and what I did. Here it is."

Thereupon he said that during the afternoon he had spent a number of hours with his mother who gave him fifty cents when he left for home. He arrived home for supper at six o'clock. During the supper hour, he received a call to be on hand for WPA work the next day at a new location.

The supper his wife had prepared didn't suit his tastes and later when he went out for groceries he had the clerk add a fictitious item to the relief order and give him the cash for it. This way he obtained an extra twenty-five cents. With his fifty cents he had enough to buy a good meal outside.

**A**T NINE-THIRTY he returned home with the groceries. When he entered the apartment he found some visitors—Mr. and Mrs. Ron Richards. They were friends of his wife's.

"About fifteen minutes later—"

The officers leaned forward. It was now getting close to the fatal ten o'clock. The officers knew the murder had been committed between ten and eleven-thirty.

"I ran out for some cigarettes. I went to a little confectionery store at 30 West Lake Street. Mrs. Lyle Runyon has the shop."



"How far was that from your house?"

"About ten minutes walk."

"What time did you get back?"

"I got home at ten-thirty exactly. I remember because the movie was just getting out and several friends of mine were going into the apartment. They had been to the movie. They will verify my story."

"But you had been away from the house forty-five minutes," Hilborn said. "What did you do between ten and ten-thirty?"

"I took my time going back," Palmer said. "I just strolled along smoking and looking into windows. I stopped at a shooting gallery for a few minutes. Surely you don't think there was time to commit murder?"

Hilborn said the murder may have been committed in fifteen minutes.

However, there was nothing in the alibi that proved one thing or another, despite its thorough checking by a swarm of officers, with the possible exception that it was not exactly an airtight one. No matter how small the margin of time, Palmer still was in the vicinity and had just the sufficient time to commit the murder.

On the other hand the officers could find no one who saw him going into the Rosen flat or leaving it. They found no blood-stained clothes. They found no definite incriminating evidence.

There was this to consider, though. During his grilling Palmer kept his left hand covered with his right. Hilborn noticed it, forcibly examined it and found evidence of an old break in the left index finger. Palmer explained he got it cranking a car. However, Palmer's wife said he had told her he had received the break while running for a street car.

And Palmer had given still another

reason for the fracture to the physician who repaired it. He had said that a piece of pipe had fallen on it during work on a WPA job.

What was more important than all these varied stories was the fact that the fracture had come to light the day following the crime. Coincidence—or circumstantial evidence?

These things were not enough to convict Palmer, naturally. The evidence could hold him as a suspect. But in a court of law there was evidence much stronger needed—the evidence of a witness—Bernice.

Little Bernice had been getting along very well under the expert care of staff doctors and psychiatrists and by the end of April, she had recovered her bodily health almost completely. Rather suddenly she announced that she now also remembered what happened the night her mother was killed.

HILBORN listened to her story. He gave her no help, no prodding of any kind. He listened carefully but silently. It was important that he should check details of her story with known facts.

"I remember it was about ten o'clock when I went to bed," she said in a clear voice. "I had just called my aunt on the phone and she told me it was bedtime. My mother was writing in the study and she told me it was bedtime too."

"I put on my pajamas. I remember they were white pajamas. I rolled down my mother's covers and my own and got into bed and then I heard the doorbell ring downstairs. I heard mother get up and go down."

"I crawled out of bed and went to the balcony and looked over. I saw mother push back the cloth curtain on the front door and look out. Then she opened the door. A man stepped inside."



He had on a zipper jacket and a cap with a shiny visor. They talked for a moment and then went downstairs to the basement.

"A little later I heard mother scream and I ran downstairs to see what had happened. I saw mother's body lying on the basement floor. The man with the cap was coming upstairs. He stopped and looked at me. He stared with burning eyes. He had something in his hand—an iron.

"I remember he hit me with the iron and then threw me to the cellar floor beside my mother. Then he went on up stairs.

"I recall getting up and going up the steps. It was not painful. I had no feeling, really. I hardly knew what I was doing. All I knew was that I wanted to get to bed—and hide from that awful man with the iron.

"He was there in the apartment. He had something in his hand. He looked at me and it dropped from his hand. I walked on in. I could hardly see. I had my hands out before me. I got into bed and fainted."

With the narration finished Hilborn breathed easier. As far as he was concerned he was satisfied that Bernice had recovered her memory. What she had told him of the crime had fitted perfectly with his own reconstruction of the affair from the clues. Furthermore, Bernice had said she had put on a pair of white pajamas. That was true. The officers had found her thus dressed on the night of the crime. Her memory had obviously returned.

The Detective Supervisor then asked Bernice if she had ever before seen the killer. She said she had not. Would she recognize him if she saw him again? Oh, yes indeed.

"In fact, he looks much like our laundryman," she added.

Checking this statement, Hilborn found that the laundry and dry-cleaning man who serviced the Rosens bore a striking resemblance to Kenneth Palmer!

The last step in the case was a most elaborate one. Hilborn wanted it thus. On a sunlit morning in May the supervisor brought Bernice from the hospital to police headquarters and took her to the line-up room. Flanked by detectives to whom she had now become accustomed, she showed a minimum of nervousness.

When the lights were turned out and only the spot lights left to illuminate the platform at the front, ten men were paraded in front of the assembly. They were all sorts of men and dressed in all sorts of clothes. Some appeared as vagrants, others as businessmen, others as workmen.

There was even one man dressed in a zipper jacket and visored cap.

OF THE ten men several were detectives, three or four convicts and one was Palmer. The purpose of the elaborate precaution was obvious. In a case so filled with doubt, Hilborn could not take chances. Bernice, if she were to recognize Palmer as her mother's murderer, must recognize him under the most adverse circumstances.

One of the last of the ten men to take the platform, dressed as never before in his life, Kenneth Palmer stepped up and faced the audience behind the blinding lights. Hilborn felt Bernice stiffen. There was a brief silence—then an ear-splitting scream. It came from Bernice. Hilborn felt her cringe and felt her face buried against his coat.

Finally he managed to reassure her. She said:

"That's the one! That's the man that struck me with the iron!"



She identified Kenneth Palmer as her assailant.

Once more that morning Bernice identified Palmer. This time it was in a close-up. Through a screen, through which she could see but not be seen, she stared at him not three feet away and tremblingly said it was he who had murdered her mother. The identification was then complete.

But the trial was a long one. The State presented Hilborn's carefully gathered evidence. It was impressive but not conclusive. It remained for Bernice to take the stand. Again she said that Kenneth Palmer was the killer.

Defense attorneys attacked her testimony with great vigor. They brought forth psychiatrists to show that one with amnesia might unconsciously fill

in the vacuum with dreams. Doubt was thrown on her story.

Although the psychologists fought bitterly over her testimony, the jury believed her and it was the jury that had the final arbitration in the case. Palmer was found guilty of first-degree murder and sentenced to life imprisonment.

But the case was not entirely closed. Although denying a new trial at the time, District Judge Paul Carroll said, "The case should never be considered closed until there is evidence more convincing than we have yet seen against Palmer. For one who has heard the testimony from beginning to end, there is a natural desire to know the truth beyond the shadow of a doubt."

Appeals to higher courts by Palmer's attorneys are still pending.

That super police car, the Monitor V-8, with Skipper Bond at the wheel, rolls into another town next week! We don't need to remind you that means fast action and clever sleuthing ahead. Don't miss the November 16th YELLOW BAND issue, with

## BOTTLED BY BOND

By Dale Clark

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Karen ran until her  
heart threatened to  
burst



## Make Mine Murder

*A Sensational Novelet*

**By Martin Lehigh**

*A girl who gets in that kind of trouble NEEDS a couple of G-men in the family!*

SHE lay there in the bed, buried alive in the dark room, stiff with fright, trying to gather her wits. A moment before, she had been fast asleep—she'd put in a hard day—and something had snapped her to trembling wakefulness; something had broken her sleep so that she lay there in the bed, staring into the opaque blackness, her heart pounding, her mouth cottony, cold . . . .

She listened with all her mind, and

she couldn't hear a sound. It was more than quiet; it was suspiciously quiet. And then her heart began to hammer even harder, and she was sure that there was someone in the room there with her!

Perhaps you have roused in the black of the night, suddenly alarmed by some unusual sound, to lie abed, listening over the hoarse rasping of your own breathing, for some threatening noise?



That was the way it was with her.

It seemed as if, within the walls of the bedroom, she could hear another person's breathing, and she tried to tell herself that her imagination was working overtime; that she was too tired, and that her nerves were playing tricks on her.

"Be sensible!" she lectured herself sternly. "It was only a car backfiring on the street, or one of the neighbors slamming a door."

"Be sensible, you goon!" she thought, laughing at herself. "You're safe in your own bed in your own apartment, in the very center of a great city. No one would have any reason for breaking in here."

"Be sensible," she insisted to herself. "Turn over and go back to sleep!"

But it wasn't that easy. For that fugitive whispering, so much like the breathing of another person, was still in the room, and louder, now.

A sudden surge of panic came over her, and she knew she couldn't just lie there, wondering if someone were in the apartment. She'd have to find out. Perhaps she'd left the door unlatched. Perhaps one of the windows on the fire escape was open.

She was frightened, now, and still, she had to find out. She wasn't the kind of girl who can be frightened without trying to do something constructive about it.

She flapped the covers back, legged out of the bed, stood on the carpet, peering vainly into the Stygian murk. The autumn damp came in the window, touched her warm body with a chill caress, and she shuddered.

She began walking toward the doorway—toward the light switch—and she wondered if this was the way her great-grandmother felt when she got the old horse-pistol and chased the

painted Indians out of the pantry of her log-cabin home.

The fugitive breathing seemed louder now, so clear she was almost sure that this was no longer a trick of her imagination. Her knees felt water, and she sensed a scream welling up in her throat.

That made her peeved. That was the sort of silly femininity of which she didn't approve. Screaming and fainting and peeking over the top of a fan were mid-Victorian luxuries in which a modern business woman couldn't afford to indulge.

Her fingers went exploring for the trip-switch of the light, found it after a trying moment of search. She drew a quick, short breath, and she snapped it.

There were two of them, clean-shaven, hard-eyed, young—about her own age. Each held a shining pistol in his hand, and each pistol was yawning ominously at her . . . .

THE taller of them—the handsome blond—grated: "Don't scream. If you know what's good for you, don't scream!" He waved the gun a little for emphasis.

"I have no intention of screaming," she said boldly, although a deep-seated instinct in her was clamoring mightily for her to scream. "May I ask what you two are doing here?"

She thought: "I must still be asleep. Things like this don't happen outside of fiction. I'm a poor, hard-working girl—important to no one, really, but myself. What are these men doing here?"

"Where's your father—or is it your brother or husband?" the shorter, swart fellow asked.

"Father? Brother? Husband?" For some reason, it was as if she'd never



heard the words before. They didn't make sense. "What do you mean?" she asked. "I live here all alone."

"I mean: the doctor. There's a sign outside. K. Cooper, M. D. We're looking for the doctor. Where is he?"

She managed a smile at that. "He isn't here," she explained. "He never has been here."

The swart chap glared at her. "What kind of a gag are you pulling? What you mean?"

"I mean, I'm K. Cooper, M. D. K is for Karen."

"For cripe sake!" the shorter of the two exclaimed. "A she-doctor!" He turned to his blond companion with a bitter, quizzical expression. "Say, Jim, I thought you said—I"

"I said I'd heard that K. Cooper was a good doctor. But I didn't know she was a woman. I didn't know she was a girl."

The swart fellow chewed on his lip a couple of seconds. "Damn it all, Jake won't like that. Wasting all this time coming to the middle of town to get a female *médico*. Jake will be sore."

"Not if we don't hurry," the tall blond chap contradicted. "If we don't hurry, he won't be sore at all; he'll be dead, that's what!"

"I guess you're right."

"You know darned well I'm right. That Boy Scout bandage I stuck on his leg is okay, if we get a regular doctor to him soon enough," Jim said. "But we ought to hurry it up, Sam."

Sam ran his hand along the side of his blue-black jaw. "Yeah, that's true."

He turned to Karen Cooper again. "Personally, I don't like female doctors, but we're in a hurry now. We haven't got time to go shagging around looking for someone else. Let's go!"

It made her mad—good and mad. "Let's go, nothing!" she flared. "You

can't come in here at—" she glanced at the tiny clock on the table beside the bed—"at ten minutes after three in the morning and order me around!"

"Now listen, lady," Sam snarled, glaring at her with his black, beady eyes. "Now just listen: don't get tough with me, or—"

"Or what?" she snapped, her lips thin and her nostrils flaring. "Perhaps you gentlemen"—and she underscored the word—"have made a mistake. Perhaps you'd better find yourselves another doctor. That is, unless you want to explain to the police how you happened to break in here, armed."

"Look," Sam began again, drawing his words out like beads on a string, the way you talk to an idiot child. "Jake's my pal. Jake Logan, a hell of a fine guy. He's been hurt. He needs a doctor right away. You're it, even if I have to carry you out of here in your nightgown."

"Just a minute," the tall man interposed. "Wait just a minute, Sam." He turned to Karen, and he turned on his best personality smile. "Sam is pretty upset, Doctor Cooper. You know how it is when your best friend has been hurt. He didn't mean to threaten you."

"Like hell I didn't," Sam growled.

"No, he didn't really mean that tough stuff. But this is a case of life or death. Won't you please hurry into some clothes and come with us?"

She thought: This is silly. Don't listen to the handsome blond devil. You'll be a darned ninny, Karen Cooper, if you don't get them out of here some way. Get them out—they're just a couple of hoodlums—and go back to bed. You're not the kind of a girl who goes traipsing around all over the countryside at night with two strange gunmen.

That was good sense. Get rid of



them. Talk them into getting a man doctor.

But her mouth said: "Wait for me in the living room. I'll be ready in a few moments!"

"She'll call the cops!" Sam snarled.

"The telephone is in the living room, too," Karen countered. "I'll hurry."

And all the time she was dressing, she wondered why she was doing it. She could have chased them away. She could have yelled bloody murder and made them run. Maybe, she told herself, it was because of the way the big fellow smiled. In any case, she told herself, she was nuts . . .

## II

THE open-topped roadster was maroon and low and rakish. Karen Cooper sat between her captors—she couldn't help thinking that she was more or less a prisoner—and watched the miles of pavement glide beneath the car.

Through the city streets, Sam, crouched behind the wheel like a gnome, had maintained a cautious and exemplary speed. But now the houses had thinned out, and the glow of the city was a long way behind them, and the needle of the speedometer was poised nervously on seventy.

If Karen Cooper, M. D., thought before that she was a fool, her mental comments now were neither ladylike nor printable.

"I've seen a dozen doctors' shingles along the way," she shouted over the whistling of the slipstream. "Why wouldn't one of them have done just as well?"

"Jim said he'd heard about you—the liar!" Sam answered in a loud voice. "He said he'd heard you are a mighty good sawbones."

"I'm not that good," Karen commented. "And if it was a question of speed . . . ?"

"We'll be there in a couple of minutes more," Jim said. "It's not far."

"Where are we, anyway?" the girl asked. "I'm completely lost."

"Just as well," Sam yelled bluntly. "Don't ask so many questions. The less you know, the better it will be for you."

"That sounds like another threat," Karen observed loudly.

"You mustn't mind Sam," Jim leaned a little closer to say. "He's worried sick about his pal Jake, and he doesn't mean all he says."

The car headed into a curve to the left, and she let herself slip a little toward Jim. "His pal? Sam's?" she asked. "Isn't Jake your pal, too?"

The question seemed to startle him, to catch him off guard a bit. "Well, sure he is. Sure! But I haven't known him very long. I'm—well—I'm what you might call a new partner in the business."

"I see," she said. She stiffened her spine again, sat primly and impartially between them. And she rolled his words over the tongue of her mind. She wasn't expecting any trouble, but if trouble developed, it might be just as well to know if there was any chance of splitting them up—of getting somebody on her side . . .

The roadster swerved, with a screeching of brakes, off the pavement, dipped into an archway of trees over a rutted, dirt road. The lights bounded ahead like a startled cottontail rabbit; the branches of the trees seemed to reach out with greedy green tentacles, and the car slowed, as if the hand of terror had been laid on it, too, and as if it dared not adventure deeper into the gloomy woods.



For eight or ten minutes, they jolted forward, too shaken to speak to one another, and then the auto nosed up a steep, washed driveway, rolled bumpily across a weedy front yard to come to a protesting halt in front of a ramshackle, unpainted oversized farm building.

A feeling of horror clamped down on Karen Cooper. She had ventured into some pretty awful places in her time, but this gaunt, ominous wreck of a house . . .

Sam snapped off the lights and as if in sympathy, the pale moon edged from behind a black cloud to cast a feeble and eerie moonshine.

"Come on!" Sam yelled, opening the door on his side. "Jake's inside."

Karen's heart was in her mouth. In spite of all her efforts to be calm and logical, she was suddenly fearfully afraid.

She was grateful for Jim's firm, gentle grip on her elbow as she stumbled across the pockmarked lawn toward the sulking, shadowed house . . .

**D**OCTOR KAREN COOPER straightened up, walked to the table in the dim-lit kitchen, rinsed the blood from her hands in the water in the wash basin. "That's a good tourniquet," she commented professionally. "It saved Jake's life."

Jake, hollow-eyed, face washed white with pain, glared at her. "She-doctor!" he spat.

Sam, the swart one, lighted a cigarette for Jake, stuck it in the sandy man's slit of a mouth, fired another for himself. At the stove, Jim was pumping air into the kerosene burners, putting more water on to boil.

"How bad is it, doctor?" Sam queried. "How bad is that leg?"

"Plenty bad," Karen said. "How

far was he from the shotgun when it went off? Ten feet? Twelve?"

Sam coughed on his smoke. "Shotgun?"

"Certainly!" Karen snapped. "Please don't think me a fool. He was shot with a shotgun, at very close range. This man is Jake Reimer, who escaped from Hungerford Penitentiary at eleven o'clock tonight—last night, I mean."

Jake glared at her even more fiercely from those pain-rimmed, sunken eyes. Sam said: "And what else do you know, Doctor Cooper?"

"It was on the radio this evening," Karen explained. "Jake Reimer, notorious international agent, imprisoned on charges of sabotage and espionage, escaped from Hungerford tonight at eleven o'clock. Guards, after firing on him vainly in an attempt to frustrate his prison break, agreed that one of them, at least, had hit the fugitive as he went over the wall in a well-planned break."

She poked at her hair. "Well, they were right about hitting him. Take a look at that leg!"

"How bad is it?" Sam croaked. "What you going to do, doctor?"

She opened her bag of instruments, handed some of them to Jim. "You put on a good tourniquet; can you sterilize these?"

He nodded, and she began taking out bandages, bottles, rubber gloves, pads.

"What you going to do, doc?" Sam croaked again. "What's all that stuff for?"

"You'd better go outside and smoke a pack of cigarettes, Sam," Karen said. "You're liable to get sick if you stay in here. Jim will have to pitch in and act as my nurse. Because that leg has to come off."

Sam stared at her with bugged,



horrified eyes. "Come—off? You mean—amputate it?"

"That's right," Karen said firmly. "I'm going to amputate it!"

Beads of sweat were breaking out on Sam's face; the cords of his neck had grown thick and taut. "But you can't do that!" he yelled.

"Don't tell me what I can or can't do!" Karen countered savagely. "Any doctor would have told you the same thing. The knee joint is smashed beyond any possible chance or hope of repair. The rest of the leg is simply hanging there on threads of flesh. The wound is full of shot, and it's only a question of hours before gangrene sets in."

She stared straight into Sam's fiery, black eyes. "If you want Jake to live, that leg has to come off."

"But—but it's impossible, I tell you!" Sam screamed. "Jake won't be any good without that leg. He won't be able to work. And what will Mr. Greegg say?"

"Shut up, you fool!" Jake rasped from between his strained, thinned lips. "You talk too much. Besides, you're not the doctor, and she is. And one thing more—it's my leg."

"Yeah, but—"

"Shut up!" Jake Reimer repeated. "Go on outside and let them get to work on it. If I can stand it, I guess you can!"

Sam slumped out of the room, muttering profanely to himself. Jim brought over the surgical instruments, boiling in a saucepan of water.

"I haven't nearly enough anasthetic," Karen said to Reimer, sorrowfully. "Surely not enough for this job. I'm afraid we'll have to strap you down."

"Probably that would be wise," the most infamous saboteur in America

agreed gamely. He even managed a death's-head grimace which was meant to be a reassuring smile . . . .

IT WAS over, and Karen Cooper stood at the wash basin, scrubbing the blood from her small, nervous hands. She rinsed a big blot of it from one elbow, glanced with distaste at the trickle of it which marched down the front of her dress, where, in spite of the improvised operating apron she had worn, it had soaked through.

Jim, white-faced, with open admiration in his blue eyes, stood waiting his turn to wash. On the bed, where he had been put after the gory business, Jake Reimer stared at the ceiling with agonized, half-mad eyes.

Karen wiped her instruments, began packing them back into her kit. "You were a big help, Jim," she said frankly. "I couldn't have done it without your help."

"You did the job," Jim said huskily. "You were—you were great!"

She laughed, almost nervously. "Well, I will say that we couldn't have done a lot better in the best and newest operating room in the country. It's a good clean job, and I feel pretty sure that it will be all right. Lucky for Jake that you put that tourniquet on so well."

She put the last of her equipment back into the bag. "Well, that's all I can do now. If he hasn't bled too much, and if he's tough enough, he'll pull through all right. I guess I'll be going along."

"Sure," Jim said. "Sam'll drive you back."

He held the door open for her, and they both stepped out onto the shadowy porch. Moonlight played over the weedy lawn, and Karen exclaimed:

"But where's the car?"



For that low, rakish, maroon roadster wasn't there.

Jim seemed every bit as surprised as she was. "Maybe he pulled it around to the side of the house." He climbed down the steps, ploughed his way through the waves of tall grass to the corner of the building, peered into the weird halfflight, came back.

"He's not there," he reported.

"Well, this is a fine thing," Karen said, exasperated. "How am I going to get back?"

Jim had no answer for this.

"What kind of monkey business is this, anyway?" the girl demanded. "What the dickens—"

"Look!" Jim interrupted. He pointed, and she turned to see the twin lights of a car picking their way toward the farmhouse.

They watched as the roadster swished to a stop in the front yard, watched as Sam legged out and climbed up on the porch beside them.

"How's Jake?" Sam asked. "All through?"

"Yes," Karen said. "He'll be all right, I think. And now, if you please, you can take me back home."

"And have you report this to the police?"

"What do you mean? Naturally I have to make a report of the treatment of a gunshot wound."

"It's a good thing I got back when I did. It's a good thing I talked on the telephone to Mr. Greegg. He says you're to stay here until he arrives."

"What?" Karen queried icily.

"Mr. Greegg says that you're not to leave here until he gets here."

"And who is this highhanded Mr. Greegg?" the girl asked fiercely. "Who is he, to tell people what I may or may not do?"

"He's the man I work for," Sam

said in a sharp tone of finality.

"And what if I do not choose to stay here until the high and mighty Mr. Greegg comes?"

"I'm afraid you haven't any choice in the matter," Sam said, with a low laugh. "I'll see to it that you stay, anyway. Tied up and gagged, if necessary!"

He took a firm grip on her arm. "Let's go back inside, Dr. Cooper. We're not going to do any more joy-riding tonight."

She had half-expected that Jim would speak up for her. But he didn't. He held the door open again, and weak-kneed, thoroughly frightened, she allowed Sam to escort her back into that oppressive room. . . .

### III

**B**UT she didn't stay subdued like that for very long. Not Karen Cooper, the girl who had fought her way through medical school and who had fought her way into a nice little practice in a very tough town for new doctors.

The more she thought about it, the madder she got. So for a while she sat there in the chair beside Jake Reimer's bed, listening with half a mind to his pained breathing, watching, with one eye, the sweat of reaction to the operation breaking out on his forehead.

Then she got up, walked over to the table, helped herself to one of Sam's cigarettes. She stood there, fired it, blew out a lungful of smoke.

"Now look, boys," she began. "Let's be reasonable about this. Naturally, I have to report this operation. It would cook my goose if I didn't. But I don't have to hurry about that report. You two and Jake can be long-gone before I pick up the telephone."



"No," Sam growled.

"Why not?" she went on, trying to reason with him. "It's nothing to me, personally, if you're on the wrong side of the law. I don't care if you break open half a dozen prisons. As a matter of fact, I'll have to admit that I have a certain admiration for your loyalty to Jake. But my feeling is this: I'd like to get home and get to bed. I've got a big day ahead of me tomorrow."

"No!" Sam roared.

"She'd give us a break, Sam," Jim offered. "She's a square-shooter."

"No!" Sam repeated venomously. "She can't leave until Mr. Greegg gets here."

Jim walked toward the bed where Jake Reimer was lying. "What do you think, Jake. Don't you think Sam ought to take her back? She's been a mighty good skate. Isn't that true?"

"I don't know," Jake croaked. "It's up to Sam. I just hope you won't jabber away all night. I don't feel so good."

"She's staying here until the big boss comes," Sam reiterated savagely.

Karen could hold herself in no longer. "Listen, you wall-eyed monkey," she flared, "I've done my job. I've been damned decent. And now I want to know if you're going to take me back home or not?"

"No," Sam answered adamantly. "I'm not!"

"Then this is a kidnapping?" she queried.

"You can call it that. What difference does it make?"

"It'll make some difference when the G-men come into the picture."

"G-men?" Sam pulled himself out of his slouch, and there was a cold, reptilian look in his eyes. "What do you know about the G-men?"

"Plenty," Karen said. "I've got a brother who's a G-man, and when

he telephones me tomorrow, and there's no answer, sparks are going to fly."

Sam got up from the chair, and suddenly, there was a click, and there was a vicious, razor-edged knife in his hand. "So your brother is a G-man, eh?"

She stood her ground. "Yes, and he eats little punks like you for breakfast!"

Sam turned his basilisk eyes toward Jim. "So what the hell is this, Jim? How is it that you were so insistent about getting a doctor who has a G-man for a brother?"

Jim snapped up from where he was sitting. "Don't be a droop, Sam! How in thunder could I know that she had a G-man brother?"

"I don't know," Sam admitted. "But it sounds kind of funny. Besides, I still don't know a hell of a lot about you. I just hired you on this job because you were down on your luck and desperate and big and strong and kind of dumb." He looked bitterly at Karen, and then back at Jim again. "But if I thought there was some connection between you two—"

Karen laughed scornfully. "That pretty-faced hoodlum?" she sneered. "I wouldn't give him a glass of water in hell!"

"Hell, Sam!" Jim said earnestly. "You know I'm honest. You know what Fatso Fredericks and the other boys said?"

Sam looked at him a little dubiously still, but his thumb pressed a button and the knife snapped shut again. "I guess it's all right," he said begrudgingly. "We'll see when Mr. Greegg gets here."

He turned to Karen and his eyes squinted dangerously. "Sit down over there and shut up. Don't try to make a sneak or I'll whittle you into tooth-picks."



He reached into his coat pocket, pulled out a pack of cards. "How about some more rummy at a dollar a game, Jim?"

"Sure," Jim agreed.

"I've got some money. Can I play, too?" Karen asked cheerfully.

"Damn!" Sam growled. "You would get a woman in on this job. Oh, well, come on!"

MR. GREEGG had not come. They had played rummy for hours, and Sam had won sixteen dollars. In the east, the first light of morning was edging over the horizon to tint the low-hanging clouds with pink and gold. But still, Mr. Greegg had not arrived.

And to Karen, during those hours of waiting the time away, the man's very name had grown more and more ominous. What kind of man would have a name like Greegg. What kind of man would hire Sam to help a criminal and a traitor like Jake Reimer to escape from the penitentiary?

"Isn't it time for breakfast, maybe?" Jim asked finally, when Sam laid down another hand and collected another dollar from each of them.

Sam glanced at his watch on his hairy wrist. "Yes, I guess it is," he admitted. "Go ahead and wrestle some grub together, will you, Jim?"

Jim smiled. "How'd you like to have some real, good home cooking?"

"What do you mean?"

Jim turned his head so he was looking at Karen. "She ought to be able to cook."

"That's right," Sam said, enthusiastically. "That's a good idea. Go put her to work. Have her whip up a big breakfast with plenty of strong, black coffee." He yawned. "Got any cigarettes?"

"You smoked the last of mine," Jim answered.

"Mine too," Karen said.

"Well, don't let her get away, Jim. I'm going to run down to the village for some more smokes. I won't be more than ten or fifteen minutes."

"Hey!" Karen exclaimed. "Don't I have anything to say about this, either?"

"Not a thing," Jim replied amiably.

She got up from the table, went over and laid a cool hand on Jake Reimer's feverish wrist. His heart was all right, and he was still sleeping. She felt more than a little proud of herself. It had been, under very trying circumstances, a mighty handsome operation, even if she said so herself!

Sam rose from the table, stepped out on the porch, where the dawn light inched across the warped floorboards.

"Come on," Jim called to Karen.

"What?"

"Come on and start breakfast."

She could feel an angry blush creeping up her neck. "You didn't really mean that, did you?" she asked, furious.

"Certainly I did. A girl ought to know how to cook, even if she is a doctor."

"You've got another think coming," she flared. "I'm not your wife!"

She felt her fingers trembling with her ire.

"No," Jim answered, laughing at her, "but maybe you may be before I'm through with you!"

She couldn't trust herself to speak. One of those female instincts she had tried desperately to overcome was tugging at her. She wanted to cry with her anger, and at the same time, she wanted to rake her fingernails down his smiling face.

Outside, she could hear the door of the roadster slam, could hear the roar



of the motor as Sam stepped on the starter. Gears meshed, not too silently, and the exhaust coughed, and the grass swished against the moving tires.

Jim crossed the room swiftly, silently, to Jake, peered down at the saboteur. The man was obviously deep in sleep. The blond giant turned swiftly to Karen. "All right, make it snappy. Spill some stuff around as if you had been busy getting breakfast. I can say, then, that you escaped the second my back was turned."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm giving you a break, you ninny!" he whispered hoarsely. "Now's your chance to get away. But in order to make it good, you'll have to set the stage a little. Hurry up! Get the coffee on, and some bacon frying. And then you get over to that little clump of woods and start making tracks for the highway as fast as ever you can!"

SHE was running. She was running with all her might and main. Behind her, in the house, on the stove, it looked as if she had been stirring up some biscuits. A pot of coffee was boiling. Bacon was sizzling in a frying pan.

She didn't understand what this was all about, and she wasn't wasting any time trying to understand. For some unknown reason, Jim was giving her a break—giving her a chance to escape, and that was the important thing.

Her heart was pounding like mad, her pulse throbbing wildly in her temples. Her legs ached from the sudden, and unaccustomed exercise, and she thanked her lucky stars that she was wearing sensible, low-heeled shoes.

She came to the edge of the woods, plunged into the tangle of brush and thickets. For just a moment, she turned, saw that Jim was standing on the

rickety porch of the ramshackle house. She thought he was waving to her.

Then she went on, hot, damp, panting. Get to the highway, he had said. Thumb a ride.

The thorns and the briars had cut her stockings to ribbons, had lashed her legs and bare arms until they were streaked with blood.

She tried to pick her way through the tangle, and the progress she made while being cautious was agonizingly slow. But when she tried to hurry, she kept hurting herself.

Keep away from that road, Jim had warned. Don't go to the highway by the road. It's too dangerous. Go cross-country.

But she wasn't sure that she could ever make it, going cross-country. She wasn't sure of her directions, and the struggle against the underbrush was taking a terrific toll of her strength.

And then, suddenly, she fought her way through an especially clinging mass of thicket, and found herself on the road. For a moment, she was lost. Which way should she go? And then she took a few steps forward, and the going was so much better . . . the temptation was so great that she yielded.

After all, she could hear a car coming. If Sam came back before she got to the highway, she could leap off into the cover of the bushes. And she simply couldn't battle her way across any more of the rough country.

She began running again, as fast as she could go. She had to hurry. She would send police. Or something.

So it happened that the car was upon her before she could hide as she had intended. It came over a quick hump in the road, only seventy or eighty yards away. Not Sam's car—a big black limousine, with lots of chrome trim and white-walled tires.



Like a frightened rabbit, Karen leaped from the rutted dirt road, plunged headlong into the labyrinth of the small growth.

But she was too late. She had been seen. The car came to a stop with a shrill squealing of brakes, and the doors swung open, and the three men were after her like three bloodhounds.

She ran until she thought her heart would explode. She ran until her stomach churned with nausea. And finally, she could run no more, and she fell to the spongy earth, tried to crawl under a thorny briar.

That is when they caught her. Hard, cruel hands closed on her shoulders and arms, dragged her out like the hounds pull a fox from a hollow log.

She knew she was on the verge of hysteria, but she fought it down. She bit her lips, but she'd be damned if she would cry for them.

They pulled her back toward the car, not too gently. An older man, dressed like a rural banker—with a rural banker's round stomach and pince-nez glasses—was standing beside the car.

"So you got her?" he said, in a soft, musical voice. "That's good. That's very good, indeed."

He turned to Karen, and he spoke in a tone which was almost a caress: "What a silly, silly girl you've been! What a childish way to act!"

"Who—who are you?" she gasped, for her breath was still tight and painful. "Who are you?"

"Why!" the little fat man said amiably. "I thought you knew, my dear. I thought perhaps that was why you were running. I'm Mr. Greegg!"

#### IV

ONCE again Karen Cooper sat, a prisoner, in the car as it drove up the slope toward that forlorn farm-

house. This time, she was sitting on the backseat of the swank black limousine, between Mr. Greegg and one of his strong-arm boys.

The car came to a stop, and they got out, went up to the house. The biscuit dough was still standing on the stove. The coffee was boiling aromatically. The bacon was smoking furiously. Jake lay on his bed, still snoring lightly. Jim was not there.

"Hello!" called Mr. Greegg melodiously. "Where is everyone?"

One of the henchmen, still out on the porch, said: "Here comes someone now. He's running out of the woods over there."

Karen turned with Mr. Greegg, looked through the door. Jim was running up the slope. His clothes were in rags, and he was slashed and bleeding from the briars.

He came running across the overgrown lawn, bounded up the steps to the porch, shoved past the three henchmen into the room.

"So there you are, you hell-cat!" he snarled at Karen. He raised his hand as if he were going to slap her face. "So you tried to get away, did you?"

For a moment, Karen was speechless. She was having an awful time choking down the tears. And then she flared: "Yes, you low-down, pretty-faced stumblebum!"

"Now, now!" Mr. Greegg said softly. "Let's have no unpleasantness, please. Let's remember that we're ladies and gentlemen." He turned to Jim. "You must be the man Sam was talking about? You must be Jim Riley?"

"That's right," Jim answered. "And you're Mr. Greegg?"

"I am," the fat little man replied with great dignity. "And now, would you mind telling me just what has been happening here? Where's Sam?"



"Sam went to town to get some cigarettes," Jim explained. "She—" he pointed to Karen—"was getting us some breakfast. I went outside, just for a minute, and when I came back, she had taken it on the lam."

Mr. Greegg nodded. "I see. And what happened then?"

"Well, I burst right out, trying to catch her. And when I was down there, trying to follow her trail, I saw your car flash past on the road, so I came back."

"Very commendable," Mr. Greegg said jovially. "And she, I suppose, is the doctor Sam telephoned me about?"

"That's right."

"Well, my dear," the tubby little man said to Karen. "It still strikes me that breakfast is a good idea. Would you mind resuming where you left off. An omelet would be splendid. If you haven't many eggs, you might try adding a little flour, and beating it well. You'll find that does wonders."

Karen was speechless at the man's aplomb. She walked over to the stove, began cooking in earnest now, where she had only been setting the stage before.

She was just putting the biscuits into the oven when another car drew up outside, and a moment later, Sam came into the room.

"Hello, there, Sam!" Mr. Greegg said. "Too bad you were late for the excitement."

"Excitement?" Sam queried.

"Yes," Mr. Greegg said. "Quite thrilling!" He pointed to Jim, in his tattered clothes, and he pointed to Karen, who knew that she must be looking a fright.

"What happened to them?" Sam growled.

"Nothing much," Mr. Greegg explained. "Simply that the charming

young lady was rude enough to try to avoid us—as a matter of fact, she was running away from this idyllic, rustic spot. And the handsome young man, filled with chivalry, no doubt, was trying desperately to bring her back."

"The hell you say!"

"I wouldn't have put it exactly that way," Mr. Greegg said mildly, "but those are my general sentiments." He turned to Karen. "Is the breakfast ready, my dear?" And when she nodded: "Very well, then, let's feast. For if the sweet damosel can cook as she sprints, this will be indeed a fine repast."

"NOW," said Mr. Greegg, finishing his hearty breakfast and wiping his lips delicately on a paper napkin, "let's see what's what. Something was said, I believe, about an amputation? One of Jake Reimer's pedal extremities, I understand, was badly injured and had to come off?"

"That's right," Sam agreed.

"And this slip of a girl actually cut off his leg?"

"Yes," Jim answered. "She did, Mr. Greegg. I watched her, and it was sort of wonderful to see her work."

"Is that so? Astonishing!" the fat little man exclaimed, beaming around at the company. "Simply astonishing!"

He tamped a cigarette very precisely on an ultra-expensive gold cigarette case. "And by now, I trust, the operation is finished. Poor Jake is actually minus one of his legs?"

"Yes," Karen replied. "With care, he should have no complications at all."

Mr. Greegg smiled benignly. "And you're positive, Dr. Cooper, that you did the proper thing? There was no hope of saving the leg. Another doctor, perhaps . . . ?"



"When I arrived," Karen answered, "there was nothing else to do. As a matter of fact, it was imperative that the operation be done as quickly as possible. As it is, I can say safely that after he recuperates, Jake will be just as good as new."

Mr. Greegg exhaled a lungful of blue smoke. "I hope you won't think me rude," he said sweetly to Karen, "if I make up my own mind on that point?"

He turned to Sam. "May I ask how you happened to procure the service of such an amazingly skillful and beautiful surgeon?"

"Well," Sam replied, "Jim here had heard of her. He didn't know she was a woman—I mean, a lady—and he didn't know about her brother being a G-man."

"Ah!" breathed Mr. Greegg. "So her brother is a G-man? Isn't that interesting? What a curious thing!"

Karen felt a chill run through her. By now, she perceived that Mr. Greegg, in spite of his elegant manners and rather extravagant language, was really an ominous character.

"No," Sam went on. "It was just one of those things, I guess."

"Yes," Mr. Greegg agreed suavely. "I'm afraid it's just an unfortunate set of circumstances."

"What do you mean?" Sam questioned.

"As you might have surmised," Mr. Greegg explained patiently, "I commissioned you to get Jake Reimer out of prison for a purpose."

"Sure," Sam said. "You wanted him to throw a monkey-wrench into the TVA in order to tie up the rearmament program, wasn't it?"

"Your memory is better than your discretion," Mr. Greegg chided mildly. "That was the general idea. And

now—" he sighed profoundly—"and now, I'm afraid that it was trouble to no avail. Now I'm afraid that Jake has outlived his usefulness to me."

He snuffed the cigarette elaborately. "Yes, Jake has outlived his usefulness. More than that, he has become, unfortunately, a serious danger to me. Sick, a fugitive from prison, helpless, he might imperil my whole plan of operation."

Mr. Greegg glanced idly about the room, and finally locked gazes with Sam.

"What do you mean?" Sam asked hoarsely.

"It's very simple," Mr. Greegg returned calmly. "Elementary! The time has come to put poor Jake out of his misery. The time has come for poor Jake to die."

**M**R. GREEGG didn't raise his voice on those last words. As an electric shock coursed through Karen, and a feeling of panic and horror seized upon her, she noticed that Mr. Greegg showed no emotion whatsoever on his fat, bland face. It was exactly as if he were saying: "It would be pleasant to have broiled lamb chops for lunch."

A frightening change had come over Sam, though. His black, beady eyes seemed glazed; his Adam's-apple was working furiously as he tried to make his dry throat swallow; his fingers splayed and unsplayed nervously.

"You can't kill Jake!" Sam yelled. "You can't kill him. He's my pal."

"He's in the way; he's dangerous to us and the Cause," Mr. Greegg repeated, almost meekly.

"But you can't kill him like a—like a horse with a broken leg."

"What a poetic comparison!" Mr. Greegg exclaimed. "I would never had suspected it of you, Sam."



He fixed his gaze on the swart little man, and the soft warm expression in his eyes turned cold and hard and cruel. "This is a fine chance to test your loyalty to me, Sam," Mr. Greegg said in an ominously low voice. "We'll see if you are willing to put the Cause ahead of everything else."

Sam looked at him, hypnotized by the evil aura exuding from the man. "What—what do you mean?"

"I mean: I'm certainly not going to kill poor Jake. Not that I have any scruples, understand. Life is cheap in this world, and given the choice between a man's life and a great ideal, I'll make mine murder every time."

"Oh!" Sam sighed. "So you've changed your mind. You're not going to kill him after all."

"No," Mr. Greegg said. "I haven't changed my mind. I am not going to kill Jake—you are!"

The blood drained out of Sam's face, leaving it a pale, sick green. He opened his mouth to speak, but it was nearly a full minute before any words would come out. "Me?" he mumbled. "Me kill Jake?"

"That's right," Mr. Greegg answered cheerily. "You!"

"No!" bleated Sam. "I—I can't. Jake's my pal. I—won't!"

"You refuse?" Mr. Greegg asked, as if this were a particularly appetizing morsel of gossip. "You reject my orders? You refuse?"

"Yes," Sam declared stoutly. "I can't do it. I won't!"

Karen was watching Mr. Greegg, fascinated by the utter cruelty and black evil of the sinister man. And yet, even watching him, she never knew where that stubby gun came from. One moment, Mr. Greegg's puffy, manicured fingers were playing with the heavy, gold chain which dangled importantly

across his rotund stomach. The next moment, those same fingers were wrapped snugly around the metal butt of an ugly, snub-nosed automatic—the index finger was curled eagerly around the trigger—and the gun was barking.

No warning. No display of anger. Mr. Greegg's chubby face still wore an expression of amused indifference as the bullets tore viciously into Sam's belly.

Sam's mouth opened to cry out, but Death stole his last breath away. He coughed, once, bloodily. He swayed a moment from the awful impact of the slugs. And then he sagged, like a cube of sugar dropped in a cup of hot coffee. He spilled to the floor, dead, even as Karen watched, thunderstruck and horrified. Even as her mind quickly summarized, professionally, the sickening damage which those bullets must have done.

Mr. Greegg thrust the still-smoking automatic back into his side coat pocket. He was still wearing his good-humored expression. "Too bad!" he commented in a voice with no trace of sorrow. "Evidently I was wrong. I'll have to do that little job on Jake myself."

He turned to Karen and Jim with a cherubic smile on his amiable, round face. "Now, I know you won't object if I lock you two up in a couple of the upstairs rooms?"

"Why?" Jim asked.

"That should be obvious," Mr. Greegg commented smoothly. "I have to settle the little affair with Jake, and then I have to determine what to do with you two." His eyes twinkled merrily as he looked at Karen. "I assure you, it won't take me very long to make up my mind about you, my dear. Not the sister of a G-man. Oh, goodness, no!"



## V

SHE thought she was going to faint.

Mr. Greegg nodded to his three henchmen, grinned. Their faces were characterless blurs to her, but she felt the hard fingers close on her arm, felt herself pushed, weak-kneed, into the hallway and up the creaking, sagging stairs. Behind her, the other two came with Jim.

Her captor thrust her roughly into a room, locked the door decisively behind her. She could hear the three of them tramp loudly back downstairs again, knew that Jim was locked in his room, too.

The sunlight which streamed through the paneless window acted only to make that dingy room seem more unreal. A ghastly floral wallpaper hung in ribbons on the walls. In the corner stood a sagging brass bedstead with a lumpy, mouldy mattress. A rickety chair and a disheartened, antique bureau filled the complement of furniture.

And as she stood there in the shambles, a sharp, brutal note sounded from the floorboards. It was a moment before she really understood what it was. Then an uncontrollable shudder shook her body, and she slumped into the woebegone chair, while her nerves jangled and her stomach knotted with a dreadful nausea.

For it had been a shot. Obviously, Mr. Greegg had calmly pumped a bullet into helpless Jake Reimer's brain.

She was still sitting there, exhausted, sick, fearful, when she heard her name whispered: "Karen! Karen girl, quick! There's no time to lose!"

The words seemed to come, mysteriously, from the cracked plaster of the wall. Her head snapped up. "Who is it? What?"

"Jim!" came the tense whisper. "I've found a tiny hole through the wall. Here, I'll stick a straw through it."

She watched, saw a straw peak through a crack in the wall. She got up, peered into the crack. One of Jim's blue eyes shone on the other side.

"Don't talk: whisper!" Jim cautioned.

"Why?" she whispered back.

"We've still got a good chance. We don't want Mr. Greegg and the others to hear."

"What can I do to help?" Karen asked.

The strength was flowing back into her again. If there was a fighting chance, she was ready to take it. It was the abject hopelessness of her situation which had snapped her energies before.

"Have you got a mirror?" Jim breathed. I can't find one in here."

"Why in heaven's name do you want a mirror?" she asked.

"Don't start a lot of questions. Have you got one?"

"No," she replied. "My compact is downstairs in my coat pocket. The only other mirror is the dental reflector in my kit. That's downstairs, too."

"How about in the room there. No mirror? Not even anything shiny?"

She glanced around, saw the small shard of mirror still stuck in its frame above the bureau. "Wait a minute!" she whispered urgently.

She crossed to the antique piece of furniture, tried to slip the fragment of glass loose. It was stuck. She got a bobbypin out of her hair, prized it loose. Holding it in her hand, she went back to the crack in the wall.

"I've got a little piece," she said triumphantly. "But I can't push it through the wall to you. Shall I throw it from my window to yours?"



"No," Jim answered hastily. "Too dangerous. I might not catch it. Here, tie a string around it, so you can swing it to my window without the chance of its being lost."

"Where am I going to get a piece of string?" she demanded pettishly. "I thought I did pretty well to get the mirror in the first place!"

"Rip off a long strip of your dress. Make a string out of your stockings. Anything, only make it quick!"

She began ripping a narrow band from the bottom of her skirt. "I paid seventeen dollars for this," she said, laughing.

"I'll buy you another if we get out," Jim promised. "If you don't hurry, you'll be wearing a shroud next. Me, too!"

She tied the strip of cloth to the shard of mirror, went to the paneless window, swung it gently toward Jim's window.

His brown, strong hand reached out, plucked it from the air.

"Now watch!" Jim breathed to her.

By craning her head awkwardly out the window, she could see the mirror fragment in one of his hands. He held it in the bright sunlight, and the reflection flashed across the clearing to that dense patch of woodland where Jim had told Mr. Greegg he was hunting for Karen after her escape.

His other hand moved quickly in front of the glass. A signal! Morse code!

And even as she watched, there was an answering series of flashes from somewhere on the fringe of the woods.

Karen could have shrieked with joy. Whoever Jim was, he had friends out there. And whoever they were, they couldn't be worse than Mr. Greegg and his surly henchmen.

But at that very moment, when

things were looking brighter again, Karen heard the clumping of footsteps on the protesting stairs. In spite of herself—in spite of the effort she had always made not to be weakly feminine, Karen Cooper screamed. "Jim, they're coming!"

At that very instant, while she was gasping for more breath, men began to break from the cover of that woodland, started racing pellmell toward the house.

On the heels of that, Mr. Greegg began to shout: "Tony! George! Harry! We're trapped! We'll have to fight for it!"

**I**N LESS than a minute, the battle was on. There was the staccato chattering of machine guns. There was the sharp, angry spitting of pistol shots.

The men from the woods deployed like soldiers, taking advantage of every speck of cover. They kept crowding in relentlessly.

It seemed to Karen that she could feel the house tremble under that furious hail of lead. Downstairs, there was savage shouting, wild cursing, as the besieged men broke out windows and prepared to sell their lives as dearly as possible.

Karen drew back from the window as a stray bullet thudded into the wall too close for comfort. She sat down in the chair again, close to the door, and for some strange reason, she was amazingly calm.

She realized, with the age-old wisdom of woman, that there wasn't anything she could do, one way or another, until the battle was over.

Then she heard a loud splintering noise, quite near. And a moment later, there was another, as the door of her room was battered in.



Jim stood there in the frame of the doorway. His hair was as wild as that of a Fuzzywuzzy. He had a bad scratch across his jaw and on his chin.

He started to laugh. "I'll be damned," he exclaimed. "You look as cool as a cucumber."

"I am," Karen Cooper replied.

"And I nearly broke my neck, getting in here to comfort you, if you were frightened!"

"I've run out of fright," she said. "I used it all up with Mr. Greegg."

"Haven't you any normal, decent womanly weaknesses?"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, at a time like this, most girls would be begging to be held in my arms and to be protected from harm."

"Well, you might try it," Karen suggested archly. "Maybe it would make you feel better!"

And he did! With hell popping all around them—with bullets singing through the window and knocking chunks of plaster from the ceiling—he pulled her up roughly from the chair, and he kissed her hard.

To tell the truth, she didn't mind. To tell the truth, she rather liked it . . . !

**T**HE fury of the gun-fighting abated.

There was a rending crash as the attackers beat down the front door of the farmhouse, and the building echoed with the tramping of many feet.

"Hey, Jim!" a voice called up the stairs. "We've got the big shot; he's surrendered. The rest of them are dead. Come on down!"

An electric thrill surged through Karen Cooper. She knew that voice. She ought to; it belonged to a man named Bill Cooper, and he was her brother!

Karen looked at Jim quizzically.

"That's right," he said, nodding. "I'm a G-man, too. I have been working undercover to get to this Mr. Greegg, who's the leader of the most dangerous group of saboteurs in America—fifth columnists of the worst kind."

"And you knew about Bill all the time?"

"Sure. From the moment I first saw you, I knew we were going to be just like brothers!"

He laughed. "As a matter of fact, it was knowing Bill that made me insist on getting you when we needed a doctor. I knew you'd be bound to come through in a pinch."

"Hey, Jim! Jim Riley!" Bill Cooper yelled. "Are you hurt?"

"No," Jim answered. "I'm on top of the world."

"Well, come on down and tell us about it."

Together, they went down the stairs. Karen gave a kiss to her surprised brother—even she would have to admit that it wasn't as good a kiss as the ones she'd been giving Jim Riley!—and listened while Jim told the details of the business to Divisional Chief Wright.

"As you know, Chief," Jim said, "after trying vainly to get to the top of this ring for four or five months, we decided this was the only way to turn the trick."

He pointed to Mr. Greegg, who was sitting on a chair by the stove, nursing a battered hand, crying and blubbing like a three-year-old.

"He's the big shot. This turned out better than I had hoped. Especially at the windup, when it looked as if you'd be too late to save our necks."

"But have we got him cold?" Chief Wright queried. "With all the money and influence he has, he can beat this



charge of resisting arrest. He can claim he didn't know we were G-men."

"We've got him cold," Jim asserted firmly. "He killed Sam"—Jim motioned to the sprawled body—"and there are two eye-witnesses to that cold-blooded murder."

"That seems to clean it up," Chief Wright agreed. "It's a good job. Americans will live safer because of this day's work."

Jim Riley took Karen's arm, led her out of the room onto the cool porch. "Listen," he said earnestly. "I've got

one more thing I want to ask you."

"What's that?"

"You're a hard-boiled professional woman, aren't you? No lace or frill or stuff like that?"

"That's right."

"Well, how does a fellow go about proposing to a hard-boiled professional woman?"

"You're doing all right," Karen laughed. "You start by breaking into her bedroom in the middle of the night, and you end up by kissing her again—now!"

## A TRIP TO PERDITION

Vance Collings had the choice of breaking a murder frame . . . or seeing \$100,000 of his money go up in Sing Sing smoke.

BY RICHARD SALE

(In the next issue of DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY)



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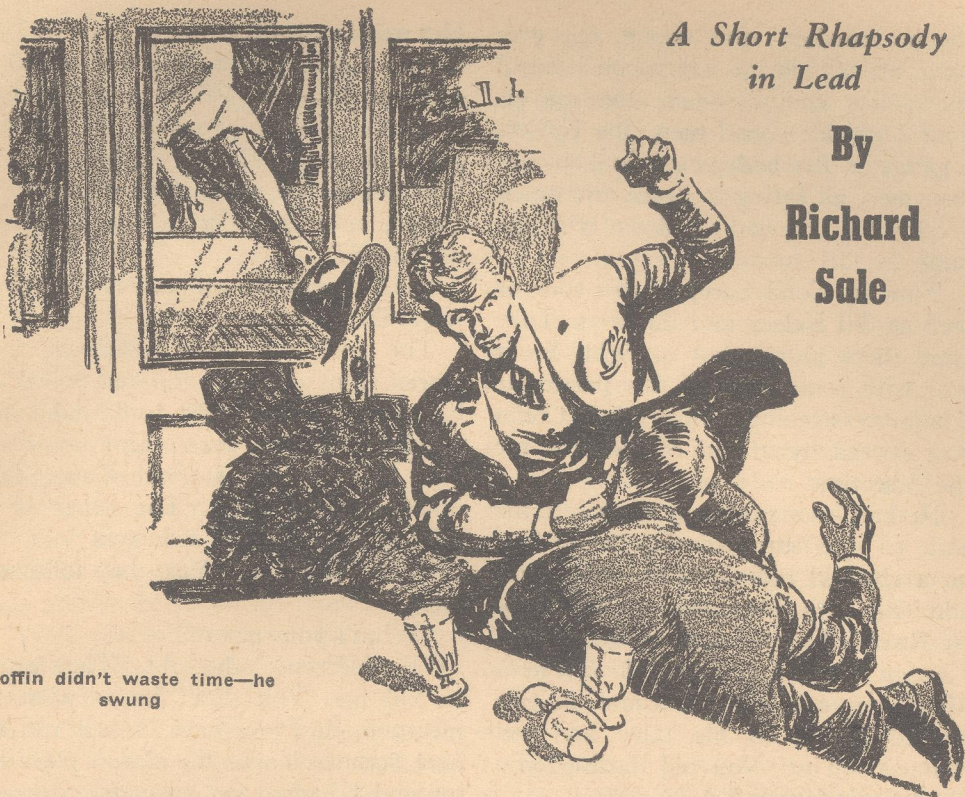
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*A Short Rhapsody  
in Lead*

**By  
Richard  
Sale**

## Sing a Song of Six Slugs

*Everything was quiet, as usual, at Pappa Ravelli's until the girl walked in*

**I**T WAS not a hash house of the first order, by any means, but Pappa Ravelli was a marvel at spaghetti with tomato sauce, and when he made a special of it on Thursday nights, you could always count on seeing Timothy Coffin at his usual table, improving his dexterity with the fork. Even the food columnists, to say nothing of the Broadway boys, had plugged Pappa Ravelli's spot, always adding the warning.

"It ain't elegant, mind you, and you may find yourself rubbing elbows with a plug-ugly who leans to starboard, weighted down with a Colt .45, but the fact remains none the less that

Pappa Ravelli makes the spaghet' as no one else can make it, and it is worth a trip down there for his Thursday night special. Indeed, brethren, an armed truce exists on the premises, where Park Avenue, the Law and the Underworld sup of the nectar in peace and quiet. As far as we know there has never been a hint of violence in the jernt. Try it once and see."

Timothy Coffin did not go to Ravelli's for trouble, and the lugs packing firearms knew it. Coffin liked Pappa's spaghetti. So did the lugs. And it was a sort of armed truce.

One scribe had called Pappa Ravelli



the peacemaker, after seeing, one evening, an assemblage which consisted of the police commissioner, the mayor, four homicide squad men, Joe Kelsey, a gangster, five bodyguards and strong-arm men, all eating in peace and quiet. Verily, the lion had sat down with the lamb.

Timothy Coffin accepted this state as well as did Kelsey and the boys. They were there to eat, not to fight. So it was with some surprise this particular Thursday evening, when Tim Coffin was stirred by a hint of violence for the first time.

He had been sitting in his booth, his plate of spaghetti steaming before him on a checked red-and-white tablecloth, admiring with amusement the sign Pappa Ravelli had hoisted on the wall—*I am an American citizen. The hell with Mussolini*—when a girl came in. She walked across to his table and exclaimed; "Tim! You old darling, you didn't wait for me!"

Tim Coffin's first inclination was to say, "On your way, lady. You've got the wrong guy." But he always stifled first inclinations because he was a good detective. Ten years on the larceny squad, two on the bomb squad, and four in the narcotic division as a captain, had mellowed Tim Coffin into the kind of cop a city cries for.

He noticed instantly, before he even saw her face, that her hands were shaking, even though she tried to clench her hand bag to stop them. She was fairly well-dressed, and her voice was pleasant enough, and when he saw her face, he was quite taken with her. She was a nice-looking girl, her features refined, her mouth rather sad. He could see in the dark depths of her expressive eyes that she was terrified, even though she smiled pleasantly at him.

Her eyes begged him for recognition.

Her pale face lent her eyes a desperation.

Tim Coffin rose to his feet, a faint smile on his face. When he spoke, his normally quiet voice was loud. "Hello, kid," he said. "I had to go ahead. Couldn't wait for you. Have a seat . . . Pappa, another order of spaghetti for my friend!"

"Si!" Pappa Ravelli waved. "I bring it queek."

The girl sat down, smiling and scared. Tim sat down too and pulled at his chin. "Don't talk too loud," he cautioned. "Two men came in after you. One of them is Peke Kane. The other I don't know. The other is a thin stringbean with fish eyes."

"Yes," she said. "Yes, they followed me."

"What's your name?"

"Kitty Frane," she said. "They want to kill me. You don't know what it meant to find you here. I just ran in here because it was the closest place to me and I had to get away from them. Then I saw you—"

"How did you know who I was?" Tim Coffin said.

"That white hair and the hooked nose," she said. "You have a nose like Sherlock Holmes had. I've always thought so, even when I saw your picture in the papers. I recognized you in an instant. I'm afraid to talk too long. I'm going to drop my bag and when you pick it up, you'll see a baggage check under the catch. Take it and keep it until we can talk."

SHE dropped her bag without another word, and Tim Coffin picked it up, scowling at the awkwardness of the ruse. He saw the stub and palmed it and gave her back the bag.

"You shouldn't have done that," Coffin said evenly. "And I think you'd better spill while you're healthy. You



won't get out of here without them. The Peke and Fish Eyes are covering this joint. The Peke has the front door. Fish Eyes disappeared back."

"Can't you get me out?" Kitty Frane pleaded. "They'll kill me."

"I can get you out," Coffin said. "But I don't like making a fool of myself. What's it all about? I don't think you're kidding. If you are, you're a damn good actress. But then again, I've met damned good actresses in my time, and I have been taken before. It's kind of coincidental that you should have walked into this spot and recognized me off the bat. I admit I'm no lily, and I'd be easy to identify, but I don't go for this stuff about seeing my pan in a newspaper."

"It's the truth," she said desperately.

"Maybe it is," said Tim Coffin. "All I want to know is, what is this baggage check for, and why do those two muggs want you?"

Pappa Ravelli brought the spaghetti for the girl. She made no attempt to touch it. Pappa said, "Tim, they's a guy in back, he say he got to see you right off."

"With fish eyes?"

"What kin' eyes? I dunno, Tim. He say he got to see you."

"Send him out," Coffin said. "And tell him that one is old." He handed Pappa Ravelli a bill, and stood up. "Maybe you were right, kid," he murmured to the girl. "This place isn't healthy any more when they try a stale gag like that. Fish Eyes wants to konk me while the Peke grabs you and makes a break for it . . . There's dough tied up in this and it's big."

"Yes," Kitty Frane breathed. "A lot of money."

"Get up," said Coffin. "We're leaving. Walk by my side but don't take my arm. I want my hands free. When

we get outside, skip the first cab that comes along and take the second one, and don't mind what I do. If anything happens, run for Centre Street and I'll meet you there. Here we go."

The girl got up and followed Tim Coffin across the room toward the door. The Peke was sitting at the bar near the door, watching them in the mirror. He was a short man, around thirty-five and he got his nickname from the fact that his face was bashed together as if some sledge hammer had hit him on the skull and upwards from his chin at the same time.

When Tim Coffin was close enough to the bar to see the Peke more plainly in the mirror, he frowned. The Peke's eyes were stary, the pupils highly dilated so that there was little of the irises showing. There was sweat on the Peke's sallow skin, and the man was nervous.

"Coke," Coffin thought. "Plenty of it, and I don't mean Cola."

Kitty Frane reached the door and opened it. Tim Coffin was behind her. The Peke suddenly turned from the bar, after hastily putting down his drink, and then staggered headlong into Tim Coffin's legs, as if he were drunk. Tim went down. It was as if he had been blocked out by the interference of a ball runner.

Kitty Frane screamed and ran up the stairs to the street.

The Peke tried to keep playing the game by clinging to Tim's legs and muttering thickly, "Shorry ole boy, shorry as hell . . ."

Coffin didn't waste time. He clipped the Peke once, behind the ear, and when the man screamed in pain, Coffin yanked his legs away, went to his knees, solidly punched the Peke's jaw as the man tried to rise, quickly sober. The force of the punch drove the Peke against the bar, rattling glasses on its top.



Tim Coffin stepped past, leaped out the door and went into the street. A cab was shooting up the street toward the East side. Not the first cab that had drawn up at the curb. True to his instructions, the girl had managed to run past it. But the second cab was as much of a death trap for the reason that Fish Eyes had come around in front after leaving by the back door, and had leaped into the cab with her.

There was just a glimpse of that face with those expressionless eyes as the second cab flashed by. Coffin stepped into the first one where the driver regarded him with intermingled caution and hostility. "Follow that cab," Tim said quietly.

"Sorry, mac," said the driver. "This cab is taken."

"This is the law," Coffin snapped. "Get into it."

"Sorry, mac," said the driver. "This cab is taken." And Tim Coffin made no reply this time because the driver backed it up with the muzzle of a belly gun. It was only a thirty-two and it looked like a popgun without any length of barrel. But at that point-blank range, it was death.

The Peke came up the steps; when he saw Tim Coffin he pulled out a Colt automatic that dwarfed the revolver in the cab driver's hand. He covered Tim who made no pass at his own gun. Tim frowned.

"Peke," said the driver, "you okay?"

"Yeah," Peke said. "This gumshoe lammed me. You shouldna done that to me, Tim. You're gonna be sorry about that." His mouth was twitching and his eyes were blazing. He was terribly excited.

"Get in," said the driver. "Burn him down and get in."

"After him," said the Peke. "Go on, Timothy, get in the crate or I'll blow

your liver outa you right here. You shouldna made me mad, Timothy. Get in the cab. Sid, plug him if he passes at me."

**T**IM COFFIN got into the cab. The Peke climbed in after him. Sid, the driver, put the car in gear, and hurried toward the East Side. He said, "I don't like this, Peke. There's something wrong here. The chief didn't want no run-in with the law."

"Shut up," said the Peke. "This guy is poison. You're new here, you don't know him. Just do like I say. We're taking him to the boss."

"All right," Sid said. "But it's your doing." He was a little nervous. "And keep that rod still and don't wave it. I don't want anymore fancy shooting around here tonight, get me? You're hopped up, Peke, and I don't like to work with a hoppy. It's too dangerous."

"I'm full of courage," Peke whispered, smiling hard. "I've got lots of it. I turned a gun on Timothy Coffin. There ain't many guys have done that."

Sid watched him in the mirror and whistled quietly.

Tim Coffin was uneasy. He had never felt real physical fear, and he did not feel it now. It had always been easy for Tim Coffin to act bravely because he had never, as far as he knew, been afraid. Only careful. He didn't like guns. He carried one himself with reluctance, but he had seldom used it. He had always found that straight-forward action, enforced by the fist, was a more formidable weapon. Guns, he felt, were dangerous because they often killed the wrong person.

He knew, of course, that the Peke had no intention of shooting him in the cab, if at all. The Peke was sounding off because he was "full of courage." The courage would wear off soon



enough, and the Peke would breathe in horror at his own audacity. But the gun in Peke's hand was cocked, and Peke was excited, his finger trembling.

There was too much chance of an accident.

"There's blood on the floor," Tim Coffin said. His voice was quiet and controlled, and the words had a sepulchral sound.

The Peke looked down at the stain and shuddered.

"Put your gun away," Coffin said. "You can take mine. Just put your own gun away. I'm coming quietly."

Sid looked in the mirror at him. "You're a funny guy, Law."

"I don't like guns," Tim said.

"I don't either," Sid said. "You're a sensible flatfoot. Take his rod away and stop waving yours, Peke. You'll shoot me in the neck before you're through."

Peke took Coffin's thirty-eight and slipped it into his pocket. Then he slid the hammer of his pistol forward ever so gently and thrust the gun back into the holster under his armpit. He looked down at the stain on the floor again.

"Sid," he called. "Sid!"

Sid looked at him in the mirror.

"How is he?" asked the Peke. "How is Al?"

"Al is dead," Sid said. "Al is dead as a pickled herring . . . we had to dump him in the street. He should never have started shooting. It was his own fault."

Timothy Coffin was no longer mystified. He had been a detective long enough to see the answers. Sid was the man on the car; Peke, Fish Eyes and Al had been the stickups. There had been a heist for a lot of money, and Al had lost his head and started shooting, and the guy they had heisted was scared into grabbing a gun. So Al was dead.

Tim thought of the baggage check. He had no idea how the girl had got

it in the first place, for it signified a bag in hiding at Pennsylvania Station. And in the bag was the loot. That was the only answer to the whole thing.

Sid turned a corner and began to cut his speed so that a traffic cop at York and 48th would not slow him or tag him.

Tim Coffin decided to get off the wagon. He did not want to, particularly. He wanted to play along and let these ginzos take him to their headquarters, to meet the boss, and then rope the bunch. Such a task had its difficulties, but Tim Coffin never bothered with such details until their solution became imperative, and then he had always found that lightning action when none was expected sufficed.

But he had to get off. There was no good sense in taking a chance on that bag. Later on, he would learn where the stickup had taken place. Right now, the bag was valuable. In it was a loot that had caused one death, could cause two more—his own and Kitty Frane's. The men were in deadly earnest. It meant the stakes were high. . . .

**T**IM reached over suddenly and slapped the Peke across the face.

The Peke almost cried in astonishment. His face went white and he stayed frozen for a moment. Tim was afraid the Peke might get scared, so he slapped him again, harder, to make him furious.

It worked. The Peke reached for the automatic he had lately put away, turning the back of his hand toward Coffin as he did so. Tim leaned forward slowly and placed both his thumbs against the back of that hand and went to work. He pressed home. The hand curved in against its own wrist and the Peke could not even scream at the intense agony of the action.



Tim Coffin then held his left thumb in position and gently took the forty-five from the holster. He turned it in his lap, grabbed it by the barrel and arched it down in a short hard throw. It hit the Peke high above the right eye. He grunted, "Uh!" and then sat back in the seat, out.

"Sid," said Tim Coffin.

Sid glanced in the mirror. Tim held up the gun for him to see it. They were going down York, and Sid instantly stepped up on the gas and the cab began to roll.

Tim Coffin pressed the barrel against Sid's head. "Sid," he said. "Stop and pull up at the curb."

"You won't shoot me, brother," Sid said. "I'm at the wheel and this car is traveling. You'll kill yourself if you shoot me."

"Last chance," said Coffin quietly. "Pull up and stop or I'll put one in your skull."

"You can't bluff this Detroit boy, copper, not this boy."

The speedometer read forty. Coffin shot him through the head.

Sid fell forward onto the floor. The speedometer dropped to thirty. Coffin reached through the opening between the front and back seats and caught the wheel and held it. There was no traffic. He did not need the brake. When the needle finally hung down at fifteen, en route to ten miles an hour, Tim let go the wheel, opened the door and climbed out on the running board. At ten miles an hour, he waited for a stone wall, found one and turned the car into it. It did not make much of a noise when it hit and only bashed the front right fender.

Nobody seemed to see it. Tim Coffin crossed the street and went down the block. He turned toward Fifth and found a patrolman. "Officer," he said,

"there's been an accident on York. Car just ran into a wall. I'm going to call for a doctor."

"Tell 'im to hurry," said the patrolman. "I'll be waiting at the scene."

So when he went crosstown in a red bus, Timothy Coffin felt much more at ease. The patrolman would have the Peke in charge, suspecting him of the death of Sid. It was a temporary measure but Tim could not waste time explaining what had happened to patrolmen, waiting for homicide squad cars, and generally being delayed.

From Fifth, Tim Coffin switched to a cab and went down to Pennsylvania Station.

The Peke, he was thinking, will probably talk. All they had to do was isolate him from coke for three days, and he would talk his head off. Tim Coffin guessed that he knew the mind behind the heist already. Sid was new to him, Fish Eyes was new to him, but the Peke and a hood named Al Fern worked for the Dude, Mr. Benny Swink.

Mr. Benny Swink was not as funny as his name. He was not, in fact, funny at all.

You would not have picked a fight with him. There were plenty of cops who were afraid of him. There were Broadway columnists who did not dare mention his name jocularly, under threat of death. There was talk of a punk who had once coined an unfortunate rhyme, using the name Swink, and there were only rumors as to his fate, the best being that he had not been wet at all when dumped in the East River for he had an overcoat of cement.

Benny Swink was large, swarthy and sinister; he was sinister because he understood only one law: force. He was not bright, he did not talk smartly, he seldom opened his mouth, he could not think well. But he could act.



And that is why he was afraid of Timothy Coffin.

Benny Swink never admitted that he was afraid of anyone, but they all knew that Tim Coffin was the nemesis. No one knew the real story behind it either, for there had been no witnesses, and Coffin had never talked about it. But it appeared that Swink, unwittingly, had made a pass at a young girl singer in a Broadway musical whose name was Jane Hope. The Hope had been fictitious because Coffin is not a good name for a musical comedy, but she had, in fact, been Tim's own daughter. She told him.

The next night when Benny Swink arrived in the lobby for the show, Tim Coffin met him and advised him to skip it.

"You pass that ticket taker, Benny," he'd said quietly, "and I won't be responsible for your doctor bills."

Benny knew Coffin, and knew his reputation. But there were three hoods with him, and he felt anyhow that he was pretty hot stuff. He passed the ticket taker, and he did not get out of the hospital for three weeks. They called a riot squad on that one, and those who saw it admitted that Coffin had stopped just short of murder, and all with his fists. Those three hoods never remembered they had guns, and if they did, they never had the strength to pull them. Nobody could locate them ten minutes later.

Mr. Benny Swink never saw that show or that girl again.

"YES," Tim thought, a little tired, "it was Benny Swink." He rubbed his knuckles and smiled grimly, remembering the past. He was nearly fifty when that Swink episode had happened. He was past fifty now, but you could see that he was still young in heart.

He went up the steps and into Pennsylvania Station, liking its vastness and feeling alone in the crowd. His back did not crawl, there was no gnawing thought in his mind to turn and meet eyes which watched his back. He was alone. Tim Coffin knew it. He hummed a tune, certain of it, as he crossed the main waiting room toward the baggage check department.

He couldn't help thinking how odd it was. Not in all his years, had violence ever stirred out of the spaghetti of Pappa Ravelli. "There I was," he would tell Jane, his daughter, "sitting and eating enough spaghetti to shame a normal man, when in walked this dame. . . ."

He went to the baggage check sill and stood there for a moment. No one watched him, and yet, for the first time, Tim Coffin felt eyes on him. You cannot be a detective for that many years and not feel eyes.

He hastily handed the check to the man. There was a fee to pay which he instantly paid. The bag he accepted was small and black and fairly heavy. He could feel movement within it, as if it held packages. He knew at once it did not contain money.

Tim Coffin turned from the baggage department and went over to the phone booths. He stepped inside, dropped a nickel in the slot, put the bag on the floor between his legs, and dialed Centre Street.

"Radio 67," said a voice.

"McCarthy, this is Tim Coffin. I want a radio car at Pennsy Station right away. Two minutes flat. I'm in a phone booth by the baggage check department near the main waiting room and I'm being followed. I've got something hot and I need help."

"Right, Tim. On the ball."

Tim Coffin hung up. From the glass



panel of the booth, he saw a woman running toward him. He stared at her hard. It was Kitty Frane.

This was it. This was the pay-off.

He had no intention of dying in a telephone booth where every bullet would take its toll, even blindly. He threw open the door and stepped out, carrying the bag.

"Coffin!" she cried. "Coffin!"

"Yeah?" Tim Coffin said. "Hello, Kitty. To tell you the truth, I never expected to see you alive again. Life is full of surprises." But he did not watch her at all, his eyes flickering around at the passing people.

She was almost sobbing with excitement; she was out of breath. "They let me go," she said. "Benny Swink and that fish-eyed man he called Vitorio. They let me go. I talked them out of it, they were going to kill me."

"Oh hell," Tim Coffin grunted. "You're a babe in the woods. And you came right here."

"I told them I didn't know anything about it and they let me go, and then I came here to find you. I've been waiting for you to pick up the bag."

"So I see," Tim Coffin said. "And what do you think Benny Swink and Vitorio have been doing all this time? Why do you think they let you go? They've followed you here—that was the point. They wanted you to lead them to the bag. . . ."

Kitty Frane shook her head. "No, really, no one followed me. I'm sure they didn't. I was so careful . . . I've got to tell you what happened."

"Stickups," Tim Coffin said. "And with Benny Swink at the helm it was probably narcotics. In this bag."

"They held up the wholesale division of a big drug firm," she cried. "I was going by on the street when they ran out. I jumped into a cab to get out of the

way, and some one named Al, who was carrying the bag, threw it in my cab and tried to get in, but he was shot and he fell in the street.

"I told my driver to drive off quickly. These other men put Al in a cab that seemed to be waiting and they chased me. I saw them dump him out as we went along, so I knew he was dead. I lost them for a few seconds on 34th and ran to Pennsylvania Station, but they must have found my cab driver and asked him where I went. They picked me up coming out on the other side of the station and followed me, and I managed to reach Pappa Ravelli's and found you there, by luck."

"No," said Tim Coffin.

She stared at him. "What do you mean?" Her face was bloodless and she was gripping her purse.

"Just no," said Tim Coffin. "That's a good story, but it's too good. I've got white hair, Kitty, and I'm getting old—but my brain hasn't softened yet, and I can still manage a good thought now and then."

"Have you gone crazy?" Kitty said. "Let's get out of here. Let's get that bag out of here. It's full of dope."

"I know it is," said Tim Coffin.

"There's a hundred thousand dollars worth of dope in that bag," she cried. "I opened it and saw it. I know there is. It's worth all of that. You don't understand. The war has stopped the ships from reaching New York, and dope smuggling is at a standstill. The prices of snow have sky-rocketed and the addicts will do or pay anything for the stuff. They're going crazy!"

"Did you say your name was Kitty Frane or Kitty Fern?"

**K**ITTY could not get any more pallid. She was white as a ghost already. But her eyes were beginning to pop with



excitement, and she was shaking as if a fit would grasp her.

"For instance," said Tim Coffin, "a girl named Kitty Fern happened to be married to a guy named Al Fern who happened to be a first class hood with the Benny Swink mob."

"All right," she gasped. "You're right. Al was my husband. But he's dead. You don't understand. They double-crossed him. I didn't have anything to do with it. I just went there to make sure he was all right. . . ."

Tim Coffin's eyes stopped searching the corridors outside. They had found a mark. They had seen the face of Benny Swink behind the edge of a newspaper where a big man was sitting on a bench, waiting. Everybody was waiting. Even Tim Coffin realized that he was waiting.

"Kitty," he said, "you're washed up."

Kitty stopped trembling and sighed.

"You and Al pulled this one between you," Tim said. "You and Al were going to double-cross the field. Al was going to toss the bag of stuff in the wrong cab by mistake and you were going to lam with it and then the two of you would get the pay-off and cut the nose of Benny Swink and his gang."

"You couldn't know . . ." she whispered. "No one knew . . . no one even knew we were married. Benny never even saw me before . . ."

Tim Coffin smiled. "Sometimes a man can guess, Kitty, and you just substantiated my guess. You were a little too shaken, you still are shaken. But not only from the excitement. You saw your husband killed before your eyes. That's why you're shot, Kitty. You're all gone inside."

She dabbed into her purse as if to pluck a handkerchief from it, but instead she brought out a gun. Tim Coffin grunted and swung on her wrist, but there was a shot.

She didn't fire it. It came from the corridor. The bullet hit her with terrible force and knocked her away from Tim Coffin. She hit the marble floor hard. The thud was unpleasant.

Tim Coffin had pulled out the forty-five for he himself was in range and that seemed to be the idea. Benny Swink had not gunned the girl. It was Fish Eyes, standing at the line of the booths, searching for a bead on Tim Coffin. But Tim Coffin had leaped for cover into the narrow alley between the booths, still carrying the bag. Fish Eyes started to run, and his gun spoke. The bullets crashed through the intervening booths as if they were paper. A man in one of the booths was shot in the leg and yelled bloody murder. Tim Coffin fired one bullet into Fish Eyes' head, scarcely aiming. He was a little surprised at his own good shooting, for the Colt automatic, a big gun, was not familiar to him; he was used to his own thirty-eight which he had left, in his hurry, in the cab on the Peke.

**T**IM COFFIN ran past the booth and stepped over Fish Eyes on the way. He carried the bag in his left hand and the gun in his right. He made no attempt to reach an exit. Instead he headed for the bulk of Benny Swink behind the newspaper. Here he made a mistake.

What the hell, he thought as he saw the mistake, a man can't see everything at a time like this!

Benny had plugged a hole through the center fold of the newspaper, figuring it safer to peer through the aperture rather than risk his face around the edge. He saw Tim Coffin coming for him when Tim had wanted to surprise him.

And as Tim moved forward, he saw the black muzzle of a gun fill up the



aperture, then stab a brief ragged flame at him.

It felt as if a horse had kicked him high in the chest, and he knew his collar bone on the right side was smashed by the slug.

His right arm went useless, his fingers did not even have the strength to hold onto the pistol. But even if they had had, his arm would never have been able to raise the gun for a shot. His wrist muscles had turned into cold water.

Tim had halted, momentarily twisted by the impact of the bullet. But he did not go down.

He stood still, dazed. He had been shot before, but never at this close range, and the terrific impact of the slug took his breath away. There was no pain yet, only a lifelessness as if his whole right side had gone to sleep.

He dropped the bag and sprang at Benny Swink, ducking to the left, and kicking up with his left foot when he got within range. He broke through the paper and caught Benny Swink's wrist with the point of his shoe, so that Benny's second shot ricocheted off the ceiling.

The gun went sailing through the air, and Benny Swink leaped to his feet, yelling with pain. His right wrist hung brokenly and he had grabbed it with his free hand.

"Hello, Benny," Tim Coffin said. "Your right hand gone too?"

Benny Swink got the import and stopped yelling. There was no place to

back away. His piggy eyes filled with terror. He recalled the past.

"That boils it down to left hooks," said Tim Coffin through his teeth, as he hunched over slightly as the pain crept in. He moved forward lithely and went to work. It was something to see. When a couple of intelligent men finally separated the two of them, and the police from a radio car arrived, Benny Swink had forgotten about his wrist entirely. There were those who wondered if Mr. Swink would ever see out of that right eye again, for unfortunately Tim Coffin had a ring on his left hand which his nerveless right hand did not have the strength to turn under as a gentleman fighter would have done. But that was Mr. Swink's own fault.

So, some two hours later, as he was getting sleepy from the shot of morphine they had given him at the hospital, after they extracted the bullet, set the collar bone, and bandaged him up tightly in gauze and plaster, Timothy Coffin gazed upon the face of his worried daughter, who patted his cheek fondly and somewhat sadly. She was crying a little.

"Dad, dad, how did you ever get in this terrible mess?"

Tim Coffin sighed. It was just as he had seen it. "It was the simplest thing, honey," he said. "There I was in Pappa Ravelli's. There I was, sitting and eating enough spaghetti to shame a normal man, when in walked this dame. . . ."

And that is the way it shall be handed down.

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**Next Week!**

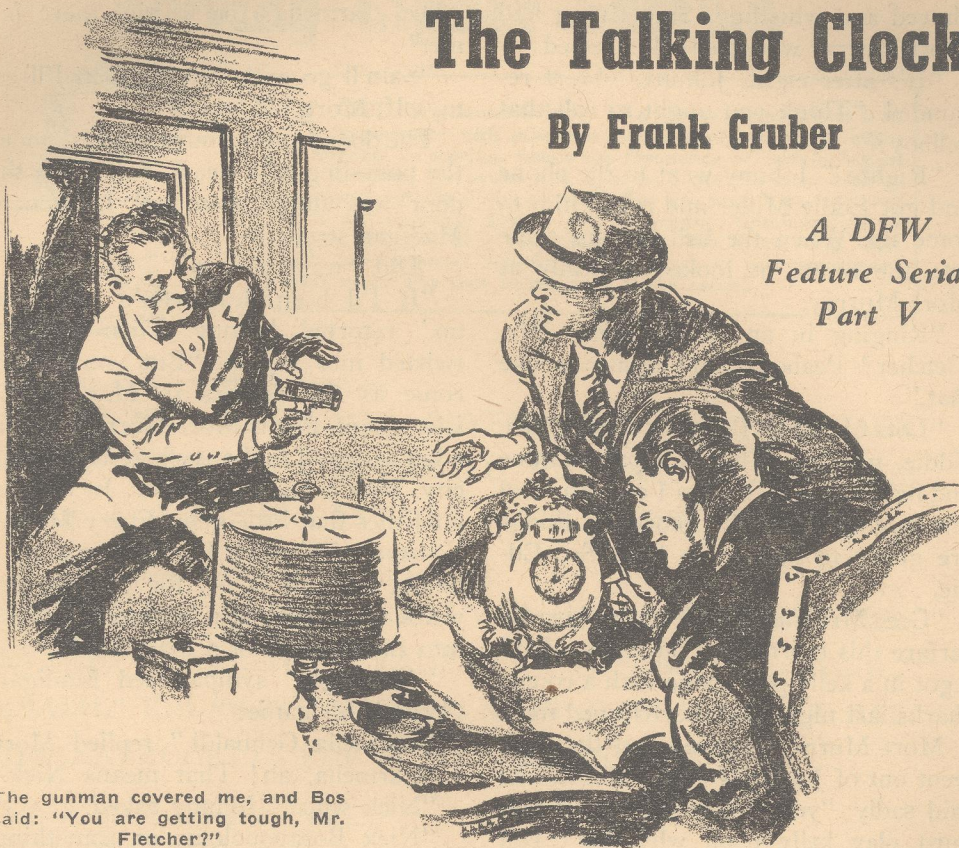
**Another Fascinating Case by Peter Paige for  
YOU'RE THE JURY**



# The Talking Clock

By Frank Gruber

A DFW  
Feature Serial  
Part V



The gunman covered me, and Bos said: "You are getting tough, Mr. Fletcher?"

SINCE the night before TOM QUISENBERRY's strange death, when he had entrusted JOHNNY FLETCHER and SAM CRAGG with a pawn ticket, the Talking Clock had been constantly on their minds. Others shared their interest, especially since the collector, NICHOLAS BOS, made a cash offer of \$75,000 for it. Actually the clock belonged to DIANA RUSK, the daughter of ELLEN RUSK, because of her secret marriage to Tom just before his death, but there were plenty of people who could have used that clock. Among them were: ERIC QUISENBERRY, Tom's father, who was within an inch of being strapped; and his wife, BONITA, who apparently valued money beyond most other things in life. Bonita's ex-husband, JIM PARTRIDGE, a private detective, also was in on the play. And so was their daughter, VIVIAN DALTON, a singer.

It was at a night club that the latest bombshell of the case burst in on Johnny and Sam. LIEUTENANT MADIGAN, of the Homicide Squad, informed them that JOE

CORNISH, the Quisenberry Estate manager, had been murdered. Johnny got the Chief of Police of Hillcrest on the phone.

"Did Cornish have a strip of plaster on his face?" he asked.

"Yes," the cop replied, "and there wasn't anything under it—not even a scratch—which is funny because he was supposed to have been beaten up the night before by robbers who stole the Talking Clock!"

Johnny thought it funny, too.

## XXII

THE sun shining on his face woke Johnny Fletcher in the morning. He lay for a moment, looking at the two mounds on the bed beyond, then he whistled and sat up.

"Up, boys! It's morning."

He sprang out of bed and headed for



the bathroom. When he came out later, shaved and whistling, Sam Cragg and Mort Murray were partially dressed.

"It's after eight, Johnny," Mort reminded. "Think you ought to call that bellboy?"

"Righto!" Johnny went to the phone and got Eddie Miller and asked him to come up. When the bell captain came into the room, he looked cynically at Mort Murray.

"Ringing in an extra sleeper, Mr. Fletcher? Peabody ain't going to like that."

"Lots of things Peabody doesn't like, Eddie, my boy. This is a pal of mine and he's in a jam. Unless I can, uh, lend him twenty bucks this morning, things are going to happen to him. So, Eddie. . . ."

"Gee, Mr. Fletcher, I had to borrow carfare this morning. You know what? I got in a kelly pool game with a couple sharks last night and they cleaned me."

Mort Murray groaned and the light went out of Johnny's eyes. "Eddie," he said sadly, "you disappoint me. If you must play kelly pool, why don't you play it with Sam here, some time? He was the three-cushion champ of Bremer County, Iowa once. Well, when do you think you can get twenty bucks?"

"Not before night, and maybe not then if things is slow today. You know, Mr. Fletcher, I'd give it to you if I had it. The shirt off of my back!"

"That goes for me, too, Eddie."

Eddie moved regretfully to the door. There he paused. "Say, Mr. Fletcher, how'd you and Sam get the new suits, if you was broke?"

Johnny waggled a finger at the bellboy. "That's a secret, Eddie. A secret I hope no one'll ever know."

Eddie nodded, but speculation gleamed in his eyes as he went out.

There was a film of perspiration on

Mort's face. "Geez, I can't go to the office. Carmella'll be waitin' there for me."

"Sam'll go with you. In fact, I'll go myself, Mort, old boy."

The door panels almost cracked under the pounding of a heavy fist. Then the door was flung open and Lieutenant Madigan strode in.

"Did I wake you up?"

"If I'd been dead you'd woke me up," retorted Johnny. Then his face twisted into a grin. "But you're welcome as the flowers in May. Look, Lieutenant, this is Mort Murray, as fine a lad as you'd find anywhere in this big city. He's a book publisher. In fact, he publishes that little gem, *Every Man A Samson* with which I've been making a living, such as it be, for the last ten years. And now, he's in Dutch. He got into the clutches of a loan shark."

"'S tough," sympathized Madigan. "What's his name?"

"Carmella Genualdi," replied Mort.

"Carmella, ah! That means Nick."

"Nick who?" Johnny asked.

"Nick Bosapopolous, or something. He calls himself Nick Bos for short."

"Nick Bos, did you say?" Johnny howled.

"Yeah, he controls half the loan shark business in this burg. Everybody knows that, for all the good it does us . . ."

"Nick Bos, the sponge man, down on West Avenue?"

Lieutenant Madigan shrugged. "I guess he's got a sponge business or something as a blind."

"Holy Donald Duck!" cried Sam Cragg.

Johnny sat down heavily on his bed. "So that's how he can afford seventy-five thousand dollars for a clock!"

"Huh?" said Lieutenant Madigan.

"Didn't the Partridges question him



when you questioned them? Hell, Bos is knee-deep in the Quisenberry business."

Lieutenant Madigan turned red in the face. "They didn't say a word about him. They didn't say much of anything. Partridge stuck to his alibi and the Quisenberry dame kept hollering for a lawyer. I finally turned them loose. Now you talk, Fletcher. How's Bos in this?"

"Let's," said Johnny, "go down and talk to him. Right now."

"Suits me, we can have a chin on the way down. I got the limousine out front."

SAM and Mort finished dressing and then they all left the room. In the lobby, Mr. Peabody was running his fingers over the seams of the furniture to see if the cleaners had missed any dust. He exclaimed when he saw Lieutenant Madigan.

"I knew it, Fletcher! You're in trouble again."

"You hope, Peabody! This isn't a pinch. And I'll thank you not to make slanderous remarks in hotel lobbies." Johnny headed for the door, muttering to himself: "Only two days to the first. Will *he* be surprised!"

Detective Fox sat behind the wheel of the limousine. He knew Johnny and Sam from other days, but did not greet them with any great enthusiasm. Mort climbed in beside Detective Fox and the others got in back.

Madigan gave Fox the address of Bos' office. As the car headed westward toward the express highway, he said:

"My friend, Merryman in Hillcrest, called me this morning. Some bird claiming to be from the department called him last night . . . right after you left the Lucky Seven. What's the angle, Fletcher?"

"Joe Cornish claimed he had a fight the night before with some burglars—when the Talking Clock was swiped. When I saw him yesterday he had some adhesive tape stuck on his face. Merryman said it was a dummy. Catch on?"

"Yeah! Cornish didn't fight with burglars? So he swiped the clock himself?"

"I'd figured Bonita for it, at first. She wanted to sell it to Bos for seventy-five G's on account of Old Simple Simon died broke and didn't leave her husband any dough."

"Why should she swipe the clock, when her husband was getting it anyway?"

"That's it; he wasn't. The clock went to the Rusk kid. It seems the old man had given it outright to his grandson, Tom Quisenberry, who was killed up in—I mean who died before the old man. The kid was married to Diana, so the clock belongs to her."

"Why don't people tell me these things?" exclaimed Madigan.

"Why don't you ask around, like me? So, since I'm asking, how was this Cornish killed?"

"The popular way; a bullet. A thirty-two. Right behind the ear."

"A small gun," grunted Johnny. "And behind the ear. Mmm."

"It *could* be the dame. Well, I got a couple of men on her. She's checked in at the Sorenson."

"Partridge lives there himself."

"I know; but they're on different floors. I got a couple of men on Partridge, too. And . . . uh, Merryman's talking to the girl out in Hillcrest. Which reminds me, that was a dirty trick of yours letting her slip by me last night. I got the fella though . . . Tamarack."

"Where?"

"Oh, I was laying for him when he



got to his apartment on East 57th. That's how come I didn't get around to you. He didn't show up until two A.M. Drove the girl all the way out to Hillcrest. What do you make of Tamarack?"

Johnny shrugged. "He's got a crush on the girl. With the Kid out of the way, he may win out, now."

"He told me he's practically run the clock factory the last two years. But Eric gave him his notice yesterday."

"Eric? I'll be damned. The mouse has become a tomcat. First he told off his wife, then he fired his old man's pet. Looks like he's going to take hold of things."

Detective Fox said, over his shoulder, "Here we are, Lieutenant, but—gee, you know what place this is?"

"I know, Fox. Stop the car behind the big Cadillac."

Fox obeyed and they climbed out of the limousine. Johnny walked forward to the Cadillac and looked at the monogram on the door. "N.B." he commented.

"So what's it to you?" snapped the heavy-jowled man sitting behind the wheel.

**L**IEUTENANT MADIGAN looked at Detective Fox and jerked his head in the direction of the tough chauffeur. As Detective Fox walked forward, Madigan and the others entered the office of the sponge company.

The receptionist regarded the group uneasily. Her hands fluttered and went under her desk.

"Go ahead," grunted Madigan. "Give him the signal. We'll just breeze in."

They did and when they entered Nicholas Bos' office, the sponge man was leaning back comfortably in his upholstered chair.

"Good morning, Lieutenant Madi-

gan," he said pleasantly. "And my friends, the private detectives. You have find the Clock for me?"

"We'll talk about that in a minute, Bos," said Johnny, heading off the detective. "There's another little matter I want to clear up. You got a punk named Carmella working for you?"

"Carmella? I don't know the name."

"He's one of your collectors. He made a small loan to my pal here and he's been bothering him since."

"Collector?" said Bos. "Loan? What is this Carmella?"

"You know what he is," Madigan cut in. "One of your strong-arm punks."

A sad look came over Bos' face. "Mr. Lieutenant, you thinking to that old trouble. Ah! The Deestric Attorney he say nothing, because he can prove nothing. I am sponge importer. That's all. I make a leetle money and I buy the clock, for hobby, because I am liking clock very much. That's all. I don't bother nobody and I have good friend all over . . ."

"You've got friends," said Madigan, ominously. "Don't I know you've got friends. In the right places. But there's some things about which your friends can't help you. And murder's one of them. . . ."

"Wait a minute!" snapped Johnny. "One thing at a time. Mort's getting cold chills by the minute, thinking about that punk Carmella. Look, Bos, Mort Murray borrowed a hundred and twenty bucks from Carmella. I want you to call off Carmella. You can take the dough out of my retainer. 'Member?"

Bos shrugged expressively. "All right, I don't know this Carmella man, but if I do I telling him, hokay, lay off Mor' Murray. Now, what's this murder business?"



Johnny tapped Mort on the arm. "Okay, pal, you can run along now. You're squared off. I'll see you later."

Sighing heavily, Mort took his departure.

Then Johnny turned again to Nicholas Bos. "You've read the morning papers . . . and you know about Joe Cornish!"

"Is sad. Why somebody killing watchman?"

"I was going to ask that," snapped Lieutenant Madigan. "I understand you're in this up to your neck. You've made a fancy offer for a certain Talking Clock."

"Sure, I telling you. I like clock and this is very good, old clock. I wanting have him for my hobby. I also buying many other clock." Bos waved a manicured hand around his office, to indicate the clocks.

"This isn't getting us anywhere," said Madigan, angrily. "If you won't talk here, Bos, we'll go down to Headquarters."

"Sure. You got warrant? I'm thinking all this happen in Westchester County."

"I'm working with the Westchester police and I can get a warrant easily enough. You know I can. Where were you yesterday afternoon, Bos?"

"Right here in my office, I am working . . ."

Madigan's forehead creased. "I was a chump to even ask that question. You wouldn't soil your hands, anyway. And you've got so many thugs working for you it'd take me a month to round them all up. I'll start over . . . why do you want this particular Talking Clock?"

"I'll ask a question," Johnny Fletcher cut in. He leaned forward. "What does the Talking Clock say at three o'clock?"

That was the first time Johnny saw

any emotion on Nicholas Bos' face. The olive complexion of the importer loan-shark actually became two shades lighter.

"I—I don't knowing what she say," he stammered.

Johnny nodded quietly and half turned to the door. "Guess we're wasting our time, Lieutenant."

Madigan backed away reluctantly. He sighed, wearily. "Okay. I'll be seeing you later, Bos."

OUTSIDE the chauffeur of the Cadillac was dabbing a handkerchief at his nose. Detective Fox was leaning against the police limousine, rubbing the knuckles of his right fist.

Madigan headed for the car, but Johnny held back. "Guess I'll be leaving you here, Lieutenant."

"What for?"

"I still have to make a living, you know. Thought I'd go and sell a few books."

"You've got something up your sleeve. It's about that clock. I saw Bos' face when you asked him what the clock said at three o'clock. . . ."

The police radio in the limousine barked suddenly: "Lieutenant Madigan, call in. Lieutenant Madigan, call in."

Madigan opened the door of the limousine and reaching in, flicked a switch. "Madigan talking, what is it?"

"Merryman of Hillcrest telephoned," replied the radio voice. "The Talking Clock has been returned."

"What?" exclaimed Madigan, then he switched off the radio and pulled out of the car. "Okay, Fletcher, run along."

Johnny Fletcher scowled, then signaled to Sam Cragg. They walked leisurely to the corner, then rounding it, Johnny broke into a run for a cigar store across the street. When Sam



caught up to him, Johnny was already inside a telephone booth, stuffing nickels into the slot.

A moment later he was speaking to a servant in the Quisenberry home. "I want to talk to Eric Quisenberry. Tell him it's Johnny Fletcher calling."

It was a long moment before Eric Quisenberry's voice came over the telephone. "Yes, Mr. Fletcher?"

"I just learned from the New York police that the Talking Clock has been returned. How was it returned, Mr. Quisenberry?"

"Why, that's the surprising thing, Mr. Fletcher. I don't know. It most certainly was gone yesterday . . . from the safe. But this morning when I went into the clock room, there it was, standing amidst all the other clocks. I notified the police immediately. They—well, they're here now."

"Oh!" Johnny bit his lip. Then, "Mr. Quisenberry, do you plan on going down to your office today?"

"Why, yes. In fact, I'm going to leave as soon as I finish with the police."

"Good. I'll drop in at your office sometime during the afternoon. I think I'll have something important to tell you at the time."

"What? I mean, why are you taking such an interest in this? You're not—"

"I'm an old friend of Tom's, that's why. I'll see you later, Mr. Quisenberry."

He hung up abruptly. As they left the store, Sam Cragg groused, "That's screwy—the crook returning the clock after killing a man for it."

"You're telling me, Sam? It's not only screwy, it's impossible. I don't believe it. Unless . . . the clock was never swiped at all."

"Huh? You think Quisenberry's the

guy? Say—why couldn't he be?"

"He could. Eric's gotten a grip on himself. He tossed out his wife yesterday and gave the grand bounce to the Tamarack lad at the factory. Two things he never had nerve enough to do before. I wonder . . . if the clock stealing stuff wasn't just some business to bring things to a head with Bonita. I've underestimated the guy."

"He's been sweet on the Rusk kid's mother. She looks like a dame who's got some steel in her backbone."

"Maybe she stuck a ramrod down his back. Still . . . taxi!"

"Taxis again?" exclaimed Sam. "With the bankroll the way she is?"

"There's more where this came from. Driver, take us to Lexington and Sixtieth."

### XXIII

TWENTY minutes later, Johnny paid the cabby a dollar and forty cents to Sam Cragg's disgust.

"What's up here that's worth a buck-forty?" he griped.

"The clock shop across the street. You wait here. I'm going in alone."

Johnny crossed the street and entered the antique clock dealer's shop. The proprietor exclaimed when he recognized Johnny.

"You have come back, eh? What do you want today?"

"Why, I thought I'd get some additional information on clocks. For that article, you know."

"What article? What newspaper? Yesterday, after you left I thought about something interesting to tell you for that story and I called *The Blade*. You know what they told me?"

Johnny grimaced. "That I wasn't working for them. Okay, I'll come clean. I'm a detective, working on the Quisenberry case."



"Why didn't you say so yesterday? The other man did."

"What other man?"

"The detective who was here in the afternoon. He didn't give his name."

"What'd he look like?"

The clock dealer shrugged. "How does a detective look? He didn't wear a uniform."

"What'd he want to know?"

"Don't you know? Ain't he from your office?"

"There're a half dozen of us working on the case. It was probably Snodgrass who was here. Look, you told me yesterday you'd seen this clock on exhibition. I suppose you heard it talk, too?"

"Of course. It wasn't a very good voice. Too tinny."

"I've heard it once. I'm interested in knowing *what* the clock said, not how it said it. Would you remember any of the things it said, at the different hours? Three o'clock for example?"

The clock dealer screwed up his face. "I don't remember anything particular. I heard it talk several different times. It wasn't anything unusual. Platitudes."

Johnny sighed. "Maybe I can refresh your memory. At five o'clock, the little man comes out and says: 'Five o'clock and the day is nearly done.'"

"Yes, that's the kind of stuff it says. Right after that, at six o'clock, it says something about 'When day is done and night begins to fall.'"

"And at three o'clock?" Johnny leaned forward, eagerly. "Try and remember that hour, will you?"

"I can't. I never paid any particular attention. . . . But . . ."

"Yes?"

The dealer snapped his fingers. "I may have it here! Yes! I remember now, the convention special reported it the last time Simon exhibited the clock,

two years ago. I've got the magazines around here. . . ."

He headed for the back of the room and opened a closet. "Yes, here they are. Copies of the *American Hobbyist*, for the last two years."

Johnny flanked the counter. "Can I help you look?"

"Yes. Let's see, the convention two years ago was in summer. July, I think. The report would be in the August issue. Look for August, 1938."

The dealer scooped out a stack of the magazines and they began to rummage through them. It was Johnny who found the August, 1938, issue.

"Here it is!"

THEY spread the magazine out on the counter, their eager fingers turning the pages.

"Clock Exhibit!" read the dealer. "Here it is. Yes, 'Simon Quisenberry's Talking Clock.' At twelve o'clock it says: 'Twelve o'clock. High noon and midnight. Rest ye weary—'"

"Three o'clock!" exclaimed Johnny. Then he began to read: "'Three o'clock. There's a divinity that shapes our ends, rough hew them as we may.'"

Johnny exclaimed in consternation. "Shakespeare! I remember now," the dealer said.

"But it's meaningless!" Johnny cried.

"Most of it is. I told you it didn't say anything important."

Johnny groaned. His eyes fell once more to the page. And then he exclaimed again. "Look—five o'clock! 'I am the master of my fate. I am the captain of my soul.'"

"Henley," the clock dealer prompted. "Mmm, I didn't have six o'clock quite right. It says: 'When night falls and the morning comes' . . . !"

"This is wrong," Johnny said. "The clock doesn't say that at five o'clock."



"How do you know it doesn't?"

"Because I heard it. It said: 'Five o'clock and the day is nearly done.'"

"You made a mistake. I heard the clock several times and I couldn't remember exactly."

"But I do remember. There's no mistake. When I heard that clock talk, a week ago, it said: 'Five o'clock and the day is nearly done.' I remember."

The clock dealer shrugged. "So what's the difference? Maybe Simon had a couple of talking discs. Each different. The detective who was here yesterday asked about that."

"Just what did he ask?"

"If it was possible to change the talking records in the clock. I told him, yes, although it'd be pretty hard to get the records made. They were metal discs, made of a gold alloy, if I remember right. The detective asked if I could make such a disc and I told him, no."

"And then?"

"I suggested he try some of the phonograph recording places."

Johnny straightened. "Look, sir, you have no use for this old magazine. How about loaning it to me?"

"You can have it, on one condition. That you tell me the inside story of the Talking Clock when the case is all settled."

"That's a deal, Mister."

Johnny rolled up the magazine, thanked the clock dealer for his help and left the store. Heading across the street, Sam Cragg came to meet him.

"Don't look now, Johnny, but in the doorway of the cigar store behind me—to the right—there's a bird been following us."

"Following?" Johnny, despite Sam's caution, shot a look at the cigar store.

A man stepped out. Johnny cried: "Old Timer!"

"Old Timer?" Sam blinked.

"The tramp from Minnesota! Come on!"

It was the tramp, no question about that. He was as ragged and filthy as ever. And like in Minnesota, he suddenly took to his heels with amazing swiftness, when he saw Johnny and Sam descending upon him.

He reached the nearby corner of Sixieth Street, sixty feet ahead of them and when they rounded it, he had increased the distance to eighty or ninety feet.

"Hell!" Johnny panted. "He's getting away again. . . ."

He looked wildly over his shoulder for a taxi, but none was in sight. He gritted his teeth and put everything he had into running. But it was no use.

Old Timer reached Third Avenue, a hundred and twenty feet ahead of them. He turned south and when Johnny reached the corner he had disappeared.

JOHNNY stopped and waited for Sam Cragg to catch up. "He's gone again," he said, disgustedly. "We ought to be ashamed of ourselves. An old guy . . . hell!"

"He must be an Olympic champion the way he ran!" puffed Sam.

"We've solved one thing, though. Old Timer did kill the Kid up in Minnesota. It's no coincidence that he's here in New York. But . . . how the devil did he pick us up this morning?"

"The hotel. He probably followed us all the way to Bos'."

"But only a few people know where we're staying in New York. Let's see, aside from Madigan, there's Partridge, Eric Quisenberry, the Rusks, and Wilbur Tamarack probably."

"What about the Greek?"



"Could be. Mort could have been followed by Carmella or one of Bos' other gorillas. That applies to Partridge, too. Any employee of his would know where we lived. And we don't know them by sight. Mmm, could be one of Partridge's men went up to Minnesota to throw in with the kid. Damn it all, anyway. I've a good notion to chuck the whole thing."

"Swell," said Sam Cragg. "I'm all for that. Let's get back to work and earn a few bucks. The season will be opening in Florida soon and I'd like to go there this winter."

Johnny shrugged, gloomily. "Who wouldn't?"

"It's a deal, then?"

"Maybe." Johnny took a nickel from his pocket and tossed it into the air. He caught it expertly. "Guess, I'll make a phone call."

Sam Cragg groaned. "But I thought you just said—"

"It isn't winter yet. Florida won't run away." He went into a drugstore, leaving Sam outside. Looking up the number of the Quisenberry Clock Company he went into a booth and dialed.

"Has Mr. Eric Quisenberry got into the office yet?" he asked the operator.

"He has, but he's unable to come to the phone at present. Some important matters in the plant. . . ."

"All right, then let me talk to Mr. Wilbur Tamarack."

"I'm sorry," was the reply, "but Mr. Tamarack is no longer with us."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Johnny. "Mr. Tamarack's your sales manager, isn't he?"

"He was. He severed his connections with this firm yesterday."

Johnny pretended astonishment. "Well, can you give me his home address? It's important that I get in touch with him."

"Just a moment. Yes, here it is. He lives at the Chanticleer, on East Fifty-seventh Street."

"Thanks," snapped Johnny, banging the receiver on the hook. He glowered at the phone. "That's loyalty for you. How did she know I wasn't a process server looking for him? They ought to know better than to give out a man's home address."

He left the drugstore and picked up Sam. "Just for the fun of it, let's run over and talk to Tamarack. He lives nearby. He'll be plenty sore at Quisenberry and may give us the real dirt on him, that we mightn't be able to get at any other time."

"Lead on," sighed Sam. "Who am I to make any protest? I'm only your stooge, you know."

Johnny grinned. "Feeling sorry for yourself?"

They walked briskly to the Chanticleer. Johnny was impressed when he saw it. "They must have paid this guy a good salary. Either that, or he was tapping the till."

A doorman opened the door for them, and in the richly furnished lobby a uniformed attendant took their names and telephoned Tamarack's apartment.

"Mr. Tamarack will see you, Suite 1104."

ON THE eleventh floor Tamarack had the door of his apartment open and nodded curtly to them. "Who gave you my address?" was the first thing he asked.

"Your office. I telephoned—"

"They would. Well, come in. I was just packing."

They entered the apartment. It was furnished in even better taste than the lobby downstairs. "Nice diggings," Johnny remarked. "You moving?"

"Why not? I've lost my job. I sup-



pose they told you that at the office, too?"

"They said you'd severed your connections."

"Severed, hell! Quisenberry came down and fired me without notice. Well, he'll be sorry for that."

"I imagine he will. From what I've heard he doesn't know much about the business."

Tamarack looked sharply at Johnny. "He's going to learn . . . quick!"

Johnny looked inquiringly at Tamarack, but the latter did not amplify his comment. Instead he went to a liquor cabinet and opened it. "Drink?"

"Yeah, sure," said Sam.

"No, thanks," said Johnny. "We haven't had breakfast yet."

"You must have got out early." Tamarack cleared his throat. "Look, Fletcher, maybe I've had you all wrong. I was pretty sarcastic last night, but the Kid—Diana, I mean—got to talking to me and she just about convinced me."

"That I was just a nosey dope?"

Tamarack almost grinned. "Your friend, the detective, talked to me, too."

"Oh, Madigan? I solve his cases for him. What'd he talk to you about?"

"Usual things they ask suspects. Where was I on the night of June 12th."

Johnny coughed. "Where were you?"

"The night of June 12th?"

"I'll start all over. When did Eric Quisenberry leave for Minnesota?"

"The same day the sheriff of that place telephoned. I got the message at the office and delivered it to him. He left inside of an hour. He was gone three days."

"And you were in New York during those three days?"

Tamarack laughed outright. "I thought you were getting around to

that. No, Fletcher, I wasn't in New York those three days. I was in St. Louis and Kansas City. And Omaha, too. I was gone five days altogether."

"I see," said Johnny, thoughtfully.

"Do you? It so happens that I was the sales manager of the Quisenberry Clock Company. In that capacity I spent an average of ten days of every month on the road, calling on the bigger accounts."

"Well," said Johnny, "you can't blame me for trying. Just one more question. How long did you work for the clock company?"

A bitter look crossed Tamarack's face. "Fourteen years. It was the only job I ever had. I went there right from college."

"I worked in a place once," said Johnny. "The boss' son came into the place and worked his way up to be vice-president. In six months. I haven't worked a day since."

Tamarack almost grinned. "I heard what you pulled in Hillcrest the other day. Don't you call that work?"

"Sam does the work. I just talk. I like to talk."

"So I've gathered," said Tamarack, drily. "But if you don't mind, I've got a lot of packing to do. It happens that my month is up today and since I'm now unemployed, I've got to move to a cheaper place."

"The 45th Street Hotel is a cheap place," said Johnny. "But if you go there, don't give my name as a reference. They'd make you pay in advance! Well, be seeing you, Tamarack."

LEAVING the Chanticleer Johnny and Sam walked back to Lexington Avenue. There they descended to the subway and rode to Grand Central and then shuttled across town to Times Square. Coming up to the street they



went to their hotel, where they had a belated breakfast in the dining room.

Finishing, they went to their room and Johnny took the copy of the *American Hobbyist* from his pocket.

"Sam, I want you to think carefully. When we were in that hock shop in Columbus—Uncle Joe's place—and the Talking Clock went off, what did it say?"

Sam rubbed his chin with the back of his hand. "Something about this is five o'clock and it's the end of the day."

"Well, that's close enough. It said: 'Five o'clock and the day is nearly done.' Now, look, here's an article in this magazine about the clock, with a list of the things it's supposed to say at the different hours. For five o'clock it recites a line of poetry, 'I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul.'"

"I read that in a book once," said Sam.

"So did I. Now, for three o'clock it says: 'There's a divinity that shapes our ends, rough hew them as we may.' Is that statement worthy twenty-five grand?"

"Huh?"

"It was three o'clock the day before yesterday when we were in the Quisenberry shack. Remember? The clocks all went off right after Nick Bos had offered fifty thousand for the Talking Clock. When the noise started he put his ear down to the clock and listened. Then, as soon as there was quiet he raised his ante to seventy-five thousand."

"Because of what he heard the clock say?" cried Sam.

Johnny threw himself down on the bed. "I wish I knew. I wish I was a cop, too. I could get the answers to a lot of questions that I can't get now."

"Such as what?"

"Well, for one thing, I could send a dozen men around to all the phonograph recording places in the city and find out who had a miniature recording disc, made of a gold alloy. And then I could find out a lot of things about the Quisenberrys. Jim Partridge has the edge on us there. He's got five-six operators working for him."

Sam sniffed. "Awhile ago you said you felt like chucking the thing."

"How the hell can I quit? I know more about this business right now than anyone else, but I don't know enough. I don't know the murderer's name . . . or what the Talking Clock said at three o'clock the day before yesterday."

"Nick Bos knows that."

"But Nick, like the daisies, won't tell."

"For my money," said Sam, "he's the guy who did it."

"What? Swiped the clock and returned it? That'd be the same fellow who killed Cornish . . . and . . . No, he couldn't be Old Timer who was in Minnesota."

"Why not? Nick's in pretty good physical shape. He isn't as much of a sissy as he lets on to be. And he's got that gang of monkeys working for him."

"It could be one of them. Or, it could be Jim Partridge, or one of his operators. It could even be Eric Quisenberry. The Rusk girl beat him to Minnesota by auto. . . . But suppose he didn't go by train, but took a plane? He'd been there in time to get tossed into the clink before we were."

"But he was the Kid's old man, Johnny!"

"Fathers have killed their sons, and vice versa. For a lot less sometimes than seventy-five grand. For that mat-



ter, I don't even know if Joe Cornish was away from the estate for a couple of days last week. I guess I could find that out."

"Why don't you?"

"What for? Cornish is dead now. He wouldn't make a good witness. Mmm, it could have been Bonita who sent Cornish up to Minnesota. And then she knocked him off yesterday because she didn't want to split with him."

The telephone on the stand beside Johnny tinkled and he leaned over and picked it up. He said, casually, "Hello," and then stiffened.

"A Miss Rusk to see you, Mr. Fletcher," said the voice of the operator.

"Send her up!"

He hung up the receiver and looked at Sam Cragg, a gleam in his eye. "The Rusk kid. This may be interesting."

#### XXIV

DIANA RUSK tapped on the door a moment later and Johnny let her in. Her face was drawn and there was a rather frightened look in her eyes.

She was carrying a large object wrapped in brown wrapping paper and tied with a stout cord. It seemed heavy.

She set the package on the dresser.

"How do you do, Miss Rusk," Johnny said. "Won't you have a seat?"

She shook her head. "I can't stay. I just stopped in to—to talk to you. First of all, I want to thank you for sparing me the embarrassment of being questioned in public by the detective."

Johnny waved magnanimously and waited for her to go on. His eyes went to the package. It was just about large enough to contain the Talking Clock.

Her sharp, white teeth worried her lower lip. Then she took a deep breath.

"It's about Mr. Quisenberry. The police—seem to suspect him of . . ."

"Of killing Joe Cornish? That's natural. But they haven't arrested him. And they won't . . . for awhile."

"N-no, but they questioned him for hours last night and again this morning. Mother is . . . worried."

"I know." He looked thoughtfully at her. It was apparent that she was having a difficult time of it. He focused his eyes again on the package and then she plunged.

"Mother is greatly impressed with you. She said you were the only one to guess about—me and Tom. And then, she heard you the other day when you were selling books. She thinks you're a wonderful salesman and since we haven't any money to help Mr. Quisenberry, she thought . . ."

She turned to the package. "Mr. Quisenberry gave me the Talking Clock. He said it was mine and there was no use holding it from me and we thought, Mother and I, that since that man, Mr. Bos . . ."

"Ah! You want to sell him the clock?" Johnny's lips twisted. Her approach was naïve, to say the least. The plea for sympathy first, then flattery. "You want *me* to sell the clock for you?"

She bobbed her head up and down. "Yes. Mr. Bos offered a very large sum, but we're not sure he really meant it. It didn't seem possible."

Johnny walked to the dresser. "The clock is yours. If you want to sell it, that's your business. Come, I'll go down with you to see this Mr. Bos. You wait here, Sam."

Outside, Johnny hailed a taxicab. They were in it, rolling southward before Diana Rusk finally came out with it. "The clock doesn't . . . talk, any more!"

Johnny wasn't too surprised. It had been too much trouble for the thief to



have a new record made, so he'd returned the clock without any record.

"It's broken," Diana went on, "I mean, it's not really broken, but that voice disc is missing from it. Will it . . . make much difference?"

"Oh, no," said Johnny. "It won't make any difference. Hardly any at all. He can buy a new disc for a dollar. What time is it? I've got a watch, but it's in a pawnshop in Denver, Colorado."

She looked at her wrist watch. "Ten minutes to twelve."

Johnny called to the driver. "Take it easy. We don't want to get there before twelve."

He grinned at Diana. "So he'll have to wait until one o'clock to discover the clock don't talk. Just as well. He's heard it talk before, anyway."

THEY got to Nicholas Bos' office at two minutes after twelve. "I'm back," said Johnny brightly to the girl in the reception office. "I bring a gift to a Greek."

"The quotation," the girl said, severely, "is, 'beware of Greeks bringing gifts.' I'll see if Mr. Bos is free."

He was and when his eyes took in the big package, they began to glow. "What do you having here?" he asked, eagerly.

Johnny set the clock on Bos' desk, picked up a pair of shears and deliberately snipped the cord. Then he peeled off the wrapping paper.

"Behold," he said, "the Talking Clock. She's yours, Mr. Nicholas Bos, the greatest treasure in the entire clock collecting world. All yours for a mere seventy-five thousand dollars, plus, ten thousand."

Bos gave a start. "What you meaning? Seventy-five thousand plus—how much?"

"Plus ten thousand. The little bonus you said you'd give me when I found the clock. Remember? I'm knocking off the three hundred that's really due yet on our expense money."

"You are crazy!" gasped the clock collector. "You don't finding the clock. She is not lost."

"Hey!" protested Sam Cragg.

Johnny smiled at the Greek, but there was a glint in his eyes. "So, you're going to renege, are you? Very well. . . ." He reached for the wrapping paper and began pulling it up over the clock. He took his time about it, expecting that Bos would stop him.

Bos remained absolutely quiet. Johnny got the pieces of cord together, knotted them into one piece.

"Sorry, old man," he said, tightly. "We were giving you first chance at it. We've got two other offers. . . ."

Nicholas Bos laughed softly. "How much? Three thousand dollars? Five?"

"Ha-ha," Johnny laughed, without humor. "Always the kidder, aren't you? I can get eighty thousand for this little old clock, any day, any time."

"In that case, my friend, I withdraw. You may sell to other party."

Johnny's bluff almost collapsed, but he drew a deep breath and prepared to play it a little farther. He twisted the cord about the package. And then, Diana Rusk could stand it no longer.

"How much will you pay, Mr. Bos?"

Johnny groaned. She had lost him the game. Bos wanted that clock and he would have paid for it. He *had* to pay.

"I give you twenty-five thousand dollar," Bos said.

"The gold in it's worth more," Johnny said, caustically.

"You make joke," Bos said, sharply. "Whole clock don't weighing ten pound. Gold don't worth five hundred dollar



pound. . . . I give t'irty thousand."

"The other day you talked about seventy-five thousand."

"Sure, but then we only talking. Now, money. . . ."

"Fifty thousand!" Johnny cried.

"Thirty-five."

Diana Rusk started to open her mouth and Johnny roared.

"Forty thousand and not a nickel less!"

Bos pulled open the drawer of his desk and took out a check book. Johnny leaned over. "Make it out to cash, then let Miss Rusk endorse it and you okay her signature."

"Sure," said Bos, smiling thinly. "And I calling bank, too? You don't think I got the money?"

"Forty thousand isn't sponges. We'll make this all nice and legal. Here—I'll write out a bill of sale. 'One clock, know as the Quisenberry Talking Clock, a rare antique . . . \$40,000.' You sign this, Miss Rusk."

The details finished, Johnny picked up the check and handed it to Miss Rusk. "Why don't you run over to the bank with this, Miss Rusk? I've got another matter I want to talk to Mr. Bos about."

"Of course. And—thank you, very much."

She departed and Nicholas Bos shook his head cynically. "You are too soft, Mr. Fletcher. You don't getting commission. And—you are poor bluffer. Don't you know I would not have let you walk out of here with that clock?"

"I knew it, but she didn't," Johnny said. "Now about that bonus."

The sponge man touched a button under his desk. A door at the side of the office opened and in came Carmella Genualdi, the loan shark.

Bos said: "Carmella, this is the man who squawk to the police."

Carmella took a gun out of his pocket. "The wise guy, eh? I got a good notion to . . ."

Bos shook his head. "You were getting tough, Mr. Fletcher?"

"No," said Johnny. "I was getting out of here. As soon as you made that call to the bank."

"I make him now." Bos picked up the phone. "The bank, Miss Dimitrios."

JOHNNY waited only long enough to hear the conversation between the bank manager and Bos, then he took his departure. He was glad to get away. Bos might have become impatient and pushed ahead the hands of the clock to make it talk.

Back at the 45th Street Hotel, Johnny encountered Vivian Dalton stepping into the elevator. She had just come from the beauty parlor and looked like money from home.

"Hi, Johnny Fletcher!" she greeted him. "I was just going to stop in and see you and your pal."

"The latch string's always out to you, Vivian. How's your old man?"

"Jim? He's ripping. But then he's always that way. He and Bonita aren't talking—again. They've always been that way. So everything's fine."

They reached the eighth floor and Johnny opened the door of Room 821. Sam Cragg bounced up from one of the beds.

"Vivian!" he cried. "I was just thinking about you." His grin stretched from ear to ear.

"I hope they were nice thoughts, Sammy."

"Pardon me," Johnny said, sarcastically. "You were talking about your parents, Vivian. Why aren't you broken up about the reconciliation falling through?"

"Reconciliation, hell!" exclaimed



Vivian. "Mom had an angle and it didn't work. She's a gold-digger, you know. Pop used to slap her ears down, but she's gotten out of hand and he can't do much with her these days. It's okay by me."

Johnny shook his head at the callous casualness of the Dalton girl. He said, "What's new, otherwise?"

"Why, it's lunch time and I thought I'd let you suckers buy it for me."

"We just had breakfast, but sit down a minute."

She sat on the bed, took a jeweled cigarette case from her purse and stuck a cigarette between her red lips. She lit it with an expensive lighter.

Blowing out smoke, she said: "Speaking of angles, what's yours in all this, Johnny Fletcher?"

"Same as you old man's. Dough."

"Uh-uh. Come clean, Fletcher. You two don't care any more about money than I do for cotton stockings. Jim's in it for money, yes. But not you two. You're just as slap-happy without money."

"Not me," protested Sam Cragg.

"No? What would you do with money? Buy some magic gimmicks, or blow it on an oat-burner?"

"Magic?" said Sam. "Say, I been practicing that cigarette trick. . . ."

"Later, Sam," Johnny said, quickly. "When you've bought a new handkerchief. Okay, Vivian, I'll talk if you will. Why did you decoy us yesterday?"

She laughed. "I like that word, 'decoy.' How much commission do you think I get on one bottle of beer, at the club?"

"Maybe none. I didn't mean it that way. You wanted us to come to the club last night for a particular reason. Was it because you wanted to make sure we didn't go out to Westchester County? Maybe to Hillcrest?"

She turned and flipped her cigarette stub through the open window, more than ten feet away. "Pop said he'd tried to soften up you two and hadn't made a dent. He still wants to play with you."

"Since last night?"

"Uh-huh. Bonita couldn't help him, because she didn't know anything."

Johnny looked at her reproachfully. "You wouldn't be covering up for your mother, would you?"

Vivian Dalton winked at him. "I would . . . if I wanted to cover up for her. But that's straight, about her and Dad being on the outs again."

She got up. "Well, if you won't buy me that lunch, I'll have to get it myself."

"We'll take a raincheck. Got to earn some money today."

She nodded. "You won't throw in with Jim? He says there'd be a nice split."

"I'll think about it. He's waiting downstairs?"

"No. Cops are following him around. But you can call him at his office. He's listed under the Partridge Detective Agency."

SHE went out and Johnny threw himself again on his bed. Sam walked up and down, clenching his big hands together and cracking his knuckles.

After a moment Johnny said, "Stop muttering about her. I know she's got under your skin, but she's got ice water in her veins."

"I like ice water," Sam snapped. "We couldda gone to lunch with her, anyway."

Johnny sighed. "I'll tell you what I'll do, Sam. I'll solve this case and collect a big, fat fee from somebody and then you can give the Vivian gal the grand rush. That make you happy? And



after she's gone through your roll, I'll buy you a nice, strong rope and you can do the old rope trick."

"A guy doesn't mind dying after a good time. It's the slow, starving to death that gets you."

Johnny got up from the bed. "Well, let's make the final assault. If this *blitzkrieg* fails, I'm licked."

"Where to, this time?"

"The clock factory. Eric's my last hope to find out what the Talking Clock said."

They left the room and rode down to the lobby in the elevator. As they stepped out, Eddie Miller grabbed Johnny's arm and whispered. "Duck quick, the boss just got some bad news."

"What do you mean, Eddie? It isn't the first of the month. . . ."

"What's the first got to do with it? Oh, oh, you're sunk!"

Mr. Peabody came storming out of his office. Over his arm was a pair of trousers—a pair of blue trousers with a white pin stripe.

"Mr. Fletcher!" he cried, in a hysterical voice. "Mr. Fletcher, I want to talk to you."

"Sorry, Peabody," Johnny said, hastily. "I'm rushing out to see a man about a big business deal. Talk to me later!"

"No you don't!" howled Peabody, springing in front of Johnny and blocking his retreat to the door. "Look at these trousers; they match your suit."

"So they do. That's a coincidence!"

"Coincidence! It's—it's robbery."

"You mean they're my pants and you swiped them?"

Mr. Peabody choked and sputtered. "Your trousers! You—you know what happened? Hagemann's sent this pair of trousers to me. This pair and another as big as a tent."

"I resent that," murmured Sam.

"And you know what Hagemann's man said?" Mr. Peabody went on. "He said in their hurry yesterday to deliver these suits to me, they forgot to include the extra pairs of trousers. *But I didn't order any suits from them.* Somebody else did that, using my charge account and giving *my* name." Mr. Peabody's voice rose to a righteous shriek.

"*You* did that, Fletcher. You ordered suits for yourself and that baboon friend of yours and you charged them to me. These trousers match your new suit. . . ."

"Tut-tut, Mr. Peabody," said Johnny loftily. "I'm sure a mistake has been made. It can easily be straightened out . . . later. Right now, I've got—"

"No, you don't! I've telephoned Hagemann's and they're sending their delivery boy right over to make the identification. And then—then, I'm going to have you arrested, for theft and fraud."

JOHNNY placed his hand upon Mr. Peabody's chest and shoved gently, but firmly. "Sorry, old man, but I'm in a frightful hurry."

He stepped around Peabody, to the door.

"Eddie!" screamed Mr. Peabody. "Stop him. Call the police!"

The last glimpse Johnny had of the lobby, as he looked over his shoulder, was the bell captain walking leisurely to the telephone.

On the street, Sam Cragg trotted beside the swiftly walking Johnny. "Our goose is cooked now. Peabody's been waiting for something like that to happen. He'll press the charge against us so hard we'll be lucky to get off with life."

"It looks tough," Johnny admitted. "But I'll think of something. We've



never been tossed in jail yet, have we?"

"No? What about Minnesota?"

"That was different. Don't bother me now for a minute, Sam. I've got to think."

"Think of those extra pairs of pants."

"You should have thought of that. I can't keep track of minor details."

They crossed Times Square and headed toward Eighth Avenue. Johnny's brain raced furiously, as he strode swiftly along. He was in up to his neck and only a miracle could save him, he knew. The miracle was a large piece of money. It had to come from one of the principles in The Affair Of The Talking Clock, and the only way Johnny could get it was by solving the mystery.

The solution, Johnny was sure, would come only after he learned what it was

the Talking Clock had said at three o'clock.

They reached the building of the Quisenberry Clock Company and Johnny was surprised to find two pickets pacing up and down in front of the building, bearing sandwich signs, which declared the Quisenberry Clock Company to be unfair to Union Labor in general and specifically to Local 87 of the Clock Makers Union.

"Tough on the old boy," Johnny observed. "He's only got six months to put the business on a paying basis and this isn't going to make it easier for him. Well, let's go in."

The receptionist in the outer office sent their names in to Eric Quisenberry and a moment later they entered his door.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

## "The Enchanted Dagger"

**Out of the ages comes an ancient dagger. An antique prize to be sure—but why was it so valuable that murder was committed to gain its possession? Was it because it might be the only clue to the fabulous lost treasure of Alexander the Great? Was it because this blade could deal death without apparent human aid?**

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# Killer at Large

By Edward Ronns

**H**E SLOWED down as he came to the bend in the creek. The swift surge of the canoe fell off to a more leisurely and casual pace. He didn't want to alarm her unnecessarily. He wasn't sure there was anything to be alarmed about, really, but there was no sense taking chances.

Shirley's figure, in dim white linen, was standing on the bungalow porch when the canoe dug into the sandy beach with a sharp hiss. There seemed to be a

sense of tension in her slim, straight shoulders as she stood there in the evening gloom. She spoke before he could reach the steps.

"Alan, do you hear it?"

A lock of straw-colored hair looped over his sober, angular face. He kept his voice calm as he nodded.

"I hear it. It's from Green Hills."

The sound came from all around them, filling the air, echoing from the gray willows leaning over the wide creek



Crouching low, the trooper opened fire at the first blurred figure



to the long slope that led to the highway above them. Now low and mournful, moaning and bewailing a loss; now shrill, high and strident, frightening—a sense of terror in its whining shriek. The prison siren, miles away, blasted endlessly through the murky evening air. It drowned out the low rumble of thunder in the east, over the city.

Shirley said tightly: "Alan, that means somebody has escaped, doesn't it?"

"Sure." He was up on the porch beside her now. "They'll catch him, whoever he is."

He gave her an intentionally dutiful, husbandly kiss. She responded by clinging to him with a sudden frightening strength.

"Alan . . ."

"Easy, honey."

"He's loose! I know he's loose!"

There was terror in her voice, in her long fingers clutching desperately at his shoulders. She seemed to be trying to get inside him, to hide within his tall frame. The siren kept moaning over their heads and all around them in the hot little valley. Alan disengaged Shirley's tight arms and shook her gently. He grinned at her white face in the dusk.

"You're getting upset over nothing, honey. There are more than eight hundred convicts in Green Hills. It might be any one of them."

She was obstinate in her fear. "It's Zinzi," she whispered. "Zinzi Mattlock. He's loose."

"Nonsense."

"I'm sure of it," she insisted.

Alan, listening to the tightness of her voice, knew her old sense of terror had flooded back, engulfing her. He felt despair, because he had thought her cured of the endless, gnawing dread that hid inside her. This bungalow, almost

within sight of the penitentiary walls confining Zinzi Mattlock, had been an experiment to cure her. But now her fear had come back with even more force than before.

Thunder rumbled close overhead. It was almost dark now. Shirley's wide, blue eyes looked inky violet, seeking strength in Alan's brown, somewhat homely face. She thought, unreasonably, that she should never have married him and made him share her inevitable fate. Then the next moment she was overwhelmingly grateful for the strength of his arms around her.

Alan was saying: "Whoever it is, he can't be anywhere near here yet. The state cops will nab him, you'll see. But if it will make it any easier for you, I'll go up the hill and see what it's all about."

"I'll go with you," she said immediately.

"No. There's no danger here. This is the best possible test of our plan, angel. You've got to get rid of your fear of Zinzi Mattlock once and for all."

The girl's eyes were miserable. "I can't; I just can't."

"Stay here," he repeated.

He was gone before she could stop him, striding up the path to the hill and the highway restaurant up there. She thought, disjointedly, that he should have taken the flashlight. It would be pitch black in a matter of minutes; black and rainy.

*Somewhere in the gathering gloom ran a man at a curious crouching gait. He twisted and dodged like a hunted thing. There was a gun in his hand. He trotted across the highway, chuckling softly, and ferreted through the thick underbrush down a long wooded slope. Water glistened below him. He stumbled, fell headlong, and got up again. Nothing could stop him. Death was his*



*mount, and Death chuckled with him and sang a siren song in the air behind him.*

Shirley sat down slowly on a rocker on the bungalow porch and stared straight out over the dusk-shrouded creek. Her fingers clenched the rocker arm until the knuckles shone white through her tanned skin.

ALAN reached the top of the hill with the last of the fading daylight. He could glimpse the vast sweep of rolling Pennsylvania countryside reaching into the distance; then it was as if a curtain had been drawn over the peaceful green hills. Miles away a searchlight stabbed the sky in protest, and Alan knew it came from Green Hills Penitentiary. The siren wailed on unabated, echoing in waves of sound both loud and faint.

A little knot of men was gathered in the highway restaurant when Alan stepped in. He knew most of them as vacationers occupying other bungalows up and down the banks of the stream at this point. Three girls in bright yellow and blue play suits were sipping sodas at a corner table. A record player was thumping out a rhythmic tune.

The screen door banged behind him. He could hear snatches of conversation from the knot of men.

"Say he's got a gun somehow and killed a guard . . . Don't know where he's headed . . . Trooper barracks emptied up the road, spreading a cordon . . . Oughta warn people on the radio tonight . . ."

It was all very remote; the men's voices held a note of pleasurable excitement.

Alan stepped closer. "Who was it?" he asked. "Who got away?"

Somebody said: "Hello, Graham. We don't know. Ain't heard yet. A killer, though."

From outside came a *thrumming*, then a snorting sound as a trooper rode his motorcycle into the pool of bright light in front of the restaurant. Alan let the others crowd through the screen door before him. It was a young cop, very smart in his gray whipcord breeches and tunic. His Stetson was at a slant. Alan knew him. Corporal Hagan, assigned to the barracks a half mile up the highway.

The trooper swung off his cycle and ignored the battery of questions fired at him. His brown eyes jerked over the faces and settled on Alan.

"Graham. Want to talk to you," he said shortly.

Alan nodded mutely. He thought, with a sinking sensation, that he already knew what was coming. His shoes made gritting sounds on the gravel beside the highway as he walked with the trooper.

Hagan said: "I don't want to alarm you without reason."

"Was it Zinzi Mattlock who escaped?" Alan asked.

"Yes. We're putting an alarm out on the radio—it ought to be on any minute. He crushed out half an hour ago—with help, we think. He had a gun, anyway. He used it . . . murdered a guard. We don't know where he's headed for, but he hasn't got a car yet. He'll be beating his way across country, and on a night like this—" The corporal's rugged young face looked serious.

"I see," Alan said quietly.

"We know about your wife, of course. She testified against Mattlock and he swore he'd get her. That was last year. You weren't married to her then, were you?"

"No. We were married shortly after the trial. I helped the D. A. assemble the case and did some pinch-hitting once in a while. My wife's evidence was what we needed to convict Mattlock. We



promised to protect her. Now that she's my wife, I'm doing the job myself."

Hagan said uneasily: "Anyway, I thought I'd tell you it was Mattlock. Even though he's at large, there's hardly a chance in the world that he knows your wife is so close to the prison, here at the creek. But if he should find out—"

"Do you think we should go back to town?"

"It wouldn't be a bad idea."

Alan grimly shook his head. "That wouldn't help. If Mattlock gets away tonight and stays in the clear, there won't be any use trying to hide from him."

Hagan said again: "Well, I thought I'd tell you. Chances are he'll never get this far, anyway, even if he does head in this direction. We ought to pick him up inside of an hour. I'll let you know when we do." He sounded brisk and cheerful.

"All right," Alan said.

**H**E STOOD beside the road and watched Corporal Hagan return to the pool of light in front of the restaurant. The trooper paused beside his motorcycle and spoke a few words to the men waiting for information. Then he mounted and roared off down the highway.

It was utterly dark down in the creek valley now, except for a few bungalow lights on the opposite bank. Alan's place was lost in the inky blackness. Lightning rippled across the sky in a blue-white sheet of flame, then the thunder rolled in slow, ominous boomings. A sudden draft of cold air washed Alan's lean face, and he was surprised to find himself shivering. He moved down the slope, following the ruts formed by his car which was parked beside the bungalow. When his feet swished through tall grass he knew he was off the road, and

he kept direction that way.

He didn't know where the two men came from. They seemed to rise up out of the dark ground like noiseless ghosts and flank him. One moment he was walking alone toward the bungalow—the next moment they were there, pressing in toward him with menacing silence.

"Hold it," a voice growled.

Panic seized Alan for a second. He stopped dead, began to whirl backward toward the highway. Something hard was jabbed into his back. He went numb all over with the cold shock of a gun muzzle grating against his spine.

He stood frozen, said: "I'll hold it, What's up?" His voice was surprisingly calm.

The growling voice said: "Just take it easy. See has he got a gun, Lew."

Alan could make them out now. A big, fat man wearing a pale gray hat and a sloppy seersucker suit. The other was shorter and younger, with cold white slits for eyes. The younger man held the gun in Alan's back. He swallowed, tried to control the pounding of his heart as deft hands flitted over his shirt and patted the pockets of his old white flannels.

"He's clean. Sure he's Alan Graham?"

"Sure. His wife's in the bungalow, ain't she?"

A dry tongue of lightning flicked across the black sky. Thunder rolled and rumbled. In the blue-white glare Alan could make out the two with even more clarity. A large, lazy drop of rain spattered on his thin cheek.

He took a breath and said to the fat man: "You're Checker Moog. Your young pal is Lew Gramm. You used to be Zinzi's lieutenants."

The fat one chuckled, a sound like oil pouring from a narrow-necked bot-



tle. "Ain't it a fact! You're kinda clever. See can you guess some more."

Alan said softly: "You helped engineer Zinzi Mattlock's escape. You're waiting for him here."

"Check."

"Did you tell him my wife is here, too?"

The fat man, Checker Moog, nodded his big head ponderously. He made more oily sounds, then his voice hardened suddenly. "That's why we expect Zinzi to show up here. Take it easy, Graham. You and your wife won't get hurt—not if you behave."

Alan said: "What do you want me to do? I can't fight back; I haven't got a gun. Does my wife know you're here?"

"Nope. And she need never know. You see, chum, your wife is bait. Bait for Zinzi."

A cold dread clutched at Alan's throat.

"I don't understand."

"Then listen. Zinzi's free, where we want him. We got word to him that your wife was here, so after his escape he's sure to make a bee-line for this spot. He'll go after your wife—but he won't get her. We'll stop him." The fat man's face was shiny and blue in a lightning flash. Then it vanished into the murky darkness again. "We got Zinzi out so we could finish him. Understand?"

Alan moistened his lips. A few more drops of rain spattered lazily down.

"I think I get it," he said. "You helped Zinzi Mattlock crush out so you could spot him and rub him out. I don't know why, and I don't care, he probably knows too much about you for you to want him to live. So you mean to kill him and shut his mouth for good. You want him to walk into a trap here when he comes for my wife."

"You got it added up right," Moog

said. "And if you know what's good for you, you'll play ball. You can't get back to the highway; we won't let you. If you play it right, you can save your wife. Zinzi is fair game for anybody now; he's an escaped con. We can kill him and get away with it. It's up to you to string along with us and get him before he gets your wife."

Alan swallowed. "What do you want me to do?"

"Put a light on in the back room. Keep your wife in the living room, with the light on. Zinzi won't shoot through the window; he'll walk in on you and let you know it's him. He's that kind of a guy. He likes to let his victims know he's the one who's killing 'em. So at the first sign of trouble or any kind of visitor, you put *out* the light in the back room. Then we'll come in. You understand?"

"And suppose I don't play ball?" Alan asked.

"You will. You like your wife that much. You wouldn't want us to help Zinzi, would you? And you can't get back to the highway again, like I said. So go on in and sit with your wife. And wait."

The shorter man, Lew Gramm, removed his gun from Alan's back and shoved him toward the dark bulk of the bungalow. Alan walked up on the front porch without looking back. Shirley stood up with a little gasp as Alan came through the screen door into the dark living room. She clung to him with cold trembling hands.

"Was it—was it Zinzi who got away?"

"Yes. But they'll catch him, honey. I was talking to Corporal Hagan. He'll let us know the minute they round him up. There's nothing to worry about." His voice sounded false in his own ears. "All we've got to do is wait."



THEY waited. Alan put on the bridge lamp and went into the bedroom for a moment. When he came back he left the light on in there. Outside thunder pealed, and then rain came down in rushing, rattling torrents, shaking the windows and drumming on the roof. It was ten o'clock.

Shirley sat huddled in silence on the studio couch beside the radio. Alan snapped it on, his brown face lean and composed, and tried to get something through the local thunderstorm. Snatches of a Tchaikovsky program from Philadelphia's Robin Hood Dell filled the chilly room. It wasn't raining there, twenty miles away.

The blackness beyond the windows was thick, brooding, and impenetrable. Alan wondered what he could do. He had nothing to fight with. No gun. He picked up a heavy flashlight from the table and kept it beside him, but it was poor comfort against the knowledge of deadly guns waiting patiently outside.

The minutes dragged. Alan remembered a dream he had often had in childhood: an ancestral racial dream, filled with primitive terror. A wild, ravening beast had him trapped and defenseless. There was no further retreat. The lion, or tiger, or whatever his childish fancy had made it, paced back and forth before the last barricade, and he was helpless behind a thin wall, filled with a choking, paralyzing terror. . . .

The rain slackened to a steady drizzle and once there were flashlights dancing far down the opposite bank of the creek, near the bend. But nothing happened, and the jittery pinpoints disappeared without coming closer. A little later Alan thought he heard sirens on the highway two hundred yards up the hill. They came and they went. He sat down beside Shirley and kept his arm around her. Gradually, painfully, the shivering

within her died away and she rested comfortably within the circle of his arm.

*Somewhere in the darkness there was a man, rain-soaked and bloody, with a white mask for a face and bitter, venomous eyes. He staggered through water and mud, a gun in his hand. He was coming down the bank of the creek. The thought of Death filled his warped and twisted mind.*

Alan got up and went into the dark kitchen. Peering through the screened door, he could make out the dark bulk of Checker Moog's car, parked under the dripping trees. There was nothing else to see in the black shrubbery that surrounded the bungalow. He cursed softly, weighing the heavy flashlight in his hand, and considered its pitiful inadequacy as a weapon. But he couldn't let Shirley go on being bait for a blood-thirsty killer. There must be something he could do, some way to get her up to the road and back to the city.

He was on his way back to the living room when footsteps clattered heavily on the front porch.

SHIRLEY was on her feet, her hand at her throat, staring at the door and swallowing soundlessly. Her face was chalk white. Her lips moved as Alan came from the kitchen, but they formed no words. He grinned and said, "It's nothing, angel," and went to the front door as somebody hammered on it with his fist."

It was a big man, in the gray tunic and whipcord breeches of a state trooper. A flood of relief left Alan's legs feeling curiously weak. The man's Stetson was soggy with rain, and his uniform was smeared with mud and ripped by brambles. Light thrust from the doorway and shone on a strong official chin and a thin, grim mouth. The trooper didn't come in from the shadows on the



porch. His voice was a hasty growl.

"You folks'll have to get out of here. We've located that escaped con somewhere on this bank, within a mile of here. We've got him closed in."

"But—"

Alan felt Shirley come up and stand behind him, her hand on his shoulder.

"We'll be glad to go," she said. Her voice was thin over the drumming of rain on the porch roof. "We'll leave right now."

"I've got orders to escort you people to the city. We can go in your car."

"I'll get my raincoat," Alan said helplessly.

He went back into the living room and crossed to the lighted bedroom. His hands shook as he shrugged into the thin tan coat. He paused, slipped the flashlight into a side pocket, and glanced around the room where he and Shirley had spent the last week fighting demons of fear. He could hear Shirley's voice, full of relief, talking to the trooper on the porch. He picked up a coat for her and went back to the front door.

"All set," he said.

"Then let's go. It's too dangerous to let you folks stick around here tonight."

"I understand," Alan nodded. He wondered where Checker Moog and Lew Gramm were, and what they would do about this trooper.

His car, a battered little sedan, was parked a dozen feet from the front porch, under some gnarled and twisted elms. The blackness was absolute, save for the sharply defined beam of the cop's flashlight that guided their steps. Rain blinded them and formed a white, hissing wall around them.

The trooper said: "You and the missus can sit in front. I'll get in the back."

Alan nodded again. Shirley sat close beside him, and he could feel the shivers

wracking her body as she pressed against him. The sedan started without any trouble. He reversed, looked back through the window as he eased the car around. The trooper sat squarely in the middle of the seat behind him, his shoulders bulkily outlined against the rear window, his face a dim block beneath his Stetson. Alan thought the man was grinning, but he couldn't be sure.

The headlights cut a wide bright swath through the downpour and finally settled on the rutted road leading up through the wooded hill to the highway. Alan's fingers were tight on the wheel. There was pressure in his chest, and he could feel the blood pounding through every artery in his body.

It happened when they were a third of the way up the hill. The other car hurtled soundlessly out of the blackness, the roar of its motor hidden behind the *thrumming* of the sedan and the tattoo of rain on the metal roof. Its headlights weren't on. It appeared as a sudden black bulk, lurching straight toward them at a breakneck speed over the rough ground.

Shirley gasped.

"Alan, look out—"

ALAN twisted the wheel savagely. The trooper in the back seat straightened with a sudden curse. There came a rending crash of twisting metal and tinkling glass as the two cars collided head on. A split second before the impact Alan threw his weight sideways against Shirley. The door on her side was loosely closed, deliberately left unlatched when he had helped her in. It gave under the jolt and Shirley slipped sideways, fell from the car to the ground.

Something crashed deafeningly in Alan's ear and the windshield shattered before him. Reeking cordite filled the inside of the car. He heard the trooper



grunt and curse and thrust the back door of the car open. From somewhere came an answering shot, then another, followed by a high-pitched yell. It was Checker Moog's voice. In the twisting glare of the headlights Alan saw the fat gunman jump from his car and run toward them, gun in hand.

The trooper crouched on the running board, lips drawn back in a soundless snarl. His heavy gun crashed again, and Moog's advance was abruptly halted. There came a sudden repetitive burst of shots from the other side of the gunman's car as Lew Gramm, the younger hood, swung into action.

A bullet whined past Alan's head and smashed through a back window. He ducked low, slithering sidewise, and tumbled from the car onto the ground. He felt Shirley crouching behind the car. Her face was white and scared in the dimness.

"Alan, what is it? What happened?"

He held her hand tightly. "That trooper—he's Zinzi Mattlock." He felt her stiffen. "Easy does it, honey. Those other two are his former lieutenants—Checker Moog and Lew Gramm. You remember them. They're out to get him."

"But how did you know the trooper—"

"Never mind now. Come on."

He pulled her away from the car, keeping the solid bulk of the sedan between them and the gun battle raging in the rain. The wet muddy ground was slippery under their feet. Shirley stumbled and Alan caught her up and hurried her forward. He moved in a wide circle and in a matter of minutes came up behind the other car.

There was nobody in it. There was no sound but the hissing patter of rain in the darkness. Nothing was visible. Alan opened the back door of the strange

sedan and cautiously groped in the side pockets. His searching fingers found what they sought. A spare gun, a heavy thirty-eight. He pulled it free of the pocket and stepped back.

A man suddenly screamed in the bushes a few yards to his right. In the blackness Alan could see nothing. There came a flat, savage report, a moan, a crashing sound in the shrubbery, as if a body had fallen. Out of the darkness loomed a man's figure, lurching toward them.

Shirley whispered: "It's Zinzi Mattlock—in a trooper's uniform. He got both of them, Alan!"

Alan called out: "Hold it, Zinzi! I've got a gun!"

The other's voice was thick with savage satisfaction. "At least you know it's me. That's what I wanted. I want you should know who's gettin' you in the end. I said I'd finish off your wife, Graham. I'm doin' it now. Nothin' can stop me."

ALAN raised the thirty-eight and fired twice at the dim bulk moving toward them. The unfamiliar gun jumped and bucked in his hand. He heard Shirley gasp again in the echoing roar, and squinted through the blackness. Zinzi Mattlock was still coming on.

Alan whispered harshly: "Stay here, angel."

He stepped forward. With a sudden desperate movement he dove toward the hulking figure approaching them. His shoulders slammed against Mattlock's chest, drove the killer back with a grunt of surprise. The other's gun barrel smashed down on his shoulder, sent numbing pain through his left arm. Mattlock tripped, went down on the muddy ground. His gun exploded with a roar, slapping a bullet into the turf. Alan kicked at his wrist, felt his leg



suddenly yanked from under him, and piled down on top of the man. His fists drove smashing blows into the other's face. Mattlock cursed and writhed away like a snake. Alan scrambled after him, suddenly found himself free to swing, and uncorked a wild, looping left that caught the other's jaw. The blow cracked loudly in the darkness. He felt Zinzi Mattlock twitch under his weight, then lady still.

Alan rolled off him, panting, and stood up. Shirley's figure was running toward him. He stooped painfully and groped for Mattlock's gun, then became aware of crashing sounds in the underbrush and sharp, rapping commands.

The rutted road was suddenly filled with troopers. The first to reach him was a queer figure in a makeshift coat. It was Corporal Hagan, minus his uniform. The trooper's face was a dim anxious circle as he came up to Alan.

"You all right?"

Alan nodded and took a deep breath of rain-swept air into his aching lungs.

"We're both okay—Shirley and I. There should be two more men around here, dead or alive. Checker Moog and Lew Gramm. They're the ones that helped Zinzi crush out. They wanted to knock him off. They let him know my wife was here so that he'd make for this spot, and then they forced me to keep Shirley here as bait."

"But Alan," Shirley said, "how did you know the trooper was really Zinzi?"

"He was wearing Corporal Hagan's uniform." Alan managed a lopsided grin. "I recognized Hagan's badge number, although Zinzi was careful not to let us see his face very clearly. Moog and Gramm had told me to turn out the light in the back room if Zinzi showed up; so when I went after my raincoat I snapped it off. It was a gamble that Moog could keep Zinzi busy long enough for us to break away and get clear of the fight. It worked out fine."

Hagan said slowly: "The dirty killer jumped me down by the creek. I was hanging around just on a hunch. He knocked me out and took my uniform. I guess he was figuring on making you people drive him through our net and then he'd have the satisfaction of having forced you to help him escape before knocking you off."

Alan glanced quickly at Shirley's face. There was a lift to her chin, a proud look as she stood beside him and met his anxious glance. Her fingers holding his hands were warm and firm and steady.

Hagan said: "I guess you folks'll want to get back to town in earnest now, after this scare."

Shirley said: "Not at all. There's no more danger, is there?"

"Of course not."

"Then we'll stay. There's nothing more to be afraid of—ever. Isn't that right, Alan?"

"That's right," Alan said.

---

ANOTHER SMASH HIT FOR DFW

## BLUE GHOST BEWARE

*A High-powered Mystery Serial*

Beginning next week

In the issue with the **YELLOW BAND**



# Solving Cipher Secrets



M. E. OHAYER  
"Sunnyam"

**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. 265—Sky Dreadnought. By Londoner.

VBG EGP \*T. \*X. NLUNGY, PLYFH'X FOYCGXV, KOYYAGX  
GFGGRGE VBLTXOEH COFFLEX LD DTGF, NYAXVFGX PAVB  
KOELEE, KOE DFZ ELE-XVLS VL \*GTYLSG OEH YGVTYE.

No. 266—Rectangular Duplication. By †Eve Eden.

NPAD LUTXAF, HPA PETZ-FUVAD LOM-TAHHAB NUBFL,  
"QEYYAB," "EBAUTE," "YADFAB," "YUFOGA," "ATAGHL,"  
"BEBALH," KBUKABTS KTEGAF, NOTT ZUBR E LCIEBA BAE-  
FODW XABHOGETTS EDF PUBOVUDHETTS ETOJA.

No. 267—In Old Louisiana. By °Kate.

UNS \*EZULDEZK \*FLXS \*QSOULTZK, ZEERZK \*EDTSGYSF  
STSEU ZU \*XFDHKSA, \*KZ., \*FLXS \*XLUA DQ \*ZGSFLXZ, GSZ-  
URFSO FLXS PFZVLEP, LGBKSGSEU FDH, GROLDX ZEV VZEX-  
LEP, XDEUSOUO, OBSXUZXRKZF ZXUO, BZFZVSO!

No. 268—Transportation Problem. By °Envy El.

LABGAB, EARTH DINS OBBUNBT, YABYPBBOX PZNUB PCO-  
UKO. GABGPBBOX EPQAVPL. DNKUX BAIZ FKBBBAUB BAB-  
NZN. EFOH TUKBBZOX VZNTOI, BABBZAUB.

No. 269—A Song in the Night. By †M. E. Smith.

GHKGLNO PQHRGP EGSTPKNF HQSTPU YGZAOT XOTRO.  
LGRV GZRCOA, PGKN PDKPRCKTY, LOYKTU UQTQZQSU TQR-  
PSZTO, \*L-HKTQZ VOF. GNGZH RNQRVU, LQQPEGRVU, LZKR-  
VLGPU GLZSBPNF POZHKTGPO HSUKRGNO. HKGQD!



THIS week's No. X-100, novelty cipher by Samuel F. Walcott, is submitted with the comment that it "might take your solvers by surprise!" Hence, in order not to spoil the fun, it is being published without suggestions for solution. Of course, the solver could apply various tests, such as the vowel-count rule which would tentatively class the cipher as transposition if the vowels approximate 40% of the whole number of letters. But it must be remembered that a constructor can often dodge such rules in some types of substitution by merely using symbols having respectively about the same frequencies as the letters signified. However, S. F. W.'s puzzle is bound to arouse your interest! And the full explanation will be given in two weeks.

No. X-100. Thwarted Justice. By Samuel F. Walcott.

A RAGBEG GEMTINE HOTERAN,  
ADESK MHI: "THAW SAH COMBEE  
FO URO DOL DINERF \*MOT?"  
"SLAA, YM READ," DEPLIER HET  
THROE, "ROPO \*MOT SAW  
DENDEMCON OT EB GHANDE, TUB  
EH DEVAS SIH FILE YB GDNYI NI  
RIPSNO."

Charles Tharaldson's No. X-99, the "Word Division" published two weeks ago, used the arbitrary key series NVFETWSROU, numbered from 0 up to 9. And speaking of divisions, the current No. 270, by †Rain-in-the-Face, offers plenty of resistance to the usual methods of attack. However, the distinctive pattern of the second multiplication may be utilized to advantage by the solver. Thus, as shown in the accompanying table, where the hundreds digits are intentionally omitted, there are only eight possible multiplications to fit  $CO \times O = CN$ . And of these eight, all but one can be quickly eliminated!

$02 \times 2 = 04$	$17 \times 7 = 19$
$03 \times 3 = 09$	$67 \times 7 = 69$
$53 \times 3 = 59$	$28 \times 8 = 24$
$34 \times 4 = 36$	$49 \times 9 = 41$

Londoner contributes the first of this week's regular crypts. Note the digraph VB in common to VBG and PAVB. Then try for VBLTXOEH, with due attention to the terminal -X, VL, and OEH. †Eve Eden's message is pangrammatic, using all 26 letters. E and EDF, HPA and NPAD, will help with LOM-TAHHAB, NOTT, and BEBALH. In †Kate's cryptogram, guess ZEV by position, then continue with ZEERZK, noting \*KZ.

Patterns predominate in †Envy El's construction, symbol B occurring 6 times doubled, 25 times altogether! Note especially words 12 and

17. Dig up your own leads in †M. E. Smith's message, current Inner Circle cipher. †Rain-in-the-Face remarks that the ten letters in his division can be anagrammed to spell MARINE DOCK, suggesting where the real key, numbered 012345 6789, could have been found! Answers to Nos. 265-70 will appear next week.

No. 270—Cryptic Division. By †Rain-in-the-Face.

E C O )	A O E C D N	( K O E
	A E M A	
<hr/>		
	K E D D	
	K R C N	
<hr/>		
	A I C N	
	A I C I	
<hr/>		
	A	

### LAST WEEK'S ANSWERS

259—Now that I am returned from travels,  
I hope to be able to send in more answers  
each week until the dagger sign and then  
the degree show up.

260—"It was night in the lonesome October  
Of my most immemorial year;  
It was down by the dank tarn of  
Auber,  
In the misty mid region of Weir.  
In the ghoulish haunted woodland  
of Weir."—Poe.

261—Witches, sky-high, ride broomsticks;  
bats swish across open spaces; hobgoblins  
revel in the glen; mellow moonlight lends  
enchantment; black cats prowls; bonfires  
flicker—\*Hallowe'en!

262—Impulsive importer impugned, im-  
pudent impostor, imputed imprudent im-  
precatory implications, imprisoned impertinent  
impersonator impromptu.

263—Awe-struck Negro, taking short-cut  
past graveyard, grimly clutched rabbit-foot.  
Night wind rustled dry leaves, huge owl  
hooted. Darky broke mile record. Lost  
fetish, but saved skin.

264—Key:

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
G	H	O	S	T	D	A	N	C	E

All answers to Nos. 265-70 will be duly listed  
in our *Cipher Solvers' Club* for November.  
Address: M. E. Ohaver, DETECTIVE FICTION  
WEEKLY, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.



# The Winners!

in DFW's "You're The Jury" Contest  
The Case of the People vs. Pete Vella

**W**ELL, at long last we've dug our way through a pile of letters stretching from here to there and the final result of your jury balloting is at hand.

The response was truly terrific and the reasoning and logic behind your answers made it a very tough job to pick the final winners.

Mr. Jesse M. Jones  
Box 163  
Leavenworth, Kansas

led the list with a clear exposition of a juror's opinion in the case of the People vs. Pete Vella. Mr. Jones voted guilty and his reasoning was excellent. To him goes the First Prize, a new Univex 8 m.m. movie camera.

Mr. Robert H. Simpson  
72 Porter Road  
Waltham, Massachusetts

takes the Second Prize, a new Univex Iris Candid Camera, for his very worthwhile job of jurying in this case. Mr. Simpson presented his verdict of Not Guilty in first rate manner, and we are glad to send his prize on to him in time so that he can catch some of the beauty of a New England Autumn on his negatives.

The response being so great, we have added six additional prizes for Honorable Mention. These prizes consist of Six Months' Subscriptions to DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY. They go to the following entrants:

Miss Harriet Saladow  
P. O. Box 135  
Lake Peekskill, N. Y.

James A. Taylor  
38 Douglas Road  
Glen Ridge, N. J.

M. Katz  
1417 Avenue K  
Brooklyn, N. Y.

W. A. Meador  
Box 524  
Newport, Oregon

Brown Simms  
P. O. Box 404  
Lawrenceburg, Tennessee

Mrs. Edith Scharf  
620 S. Halsted Street  
Chicago, Illinois

We should like to have some award for the gentlemen who let their imaginations run, and with, undoubtedly, a fictional frame of mind conceived that Dr. James was the guilty party in this case. But, unfortunately, this was no fictional mystery.

The facts of the case are as follows:

The original jury found Vella guilty of first degree murder. But the Court of Appeals reversed the decision on the defense attorney's hypothesis that it was impossible to prove that a plan to kill entered Vella's head within . . . "a fraction of a minute."

Vella was set free.

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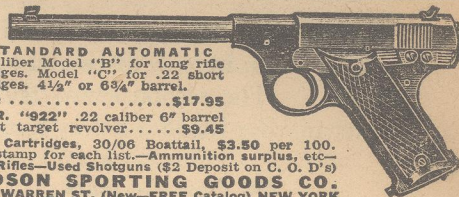


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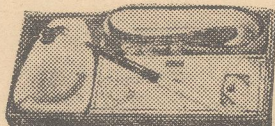


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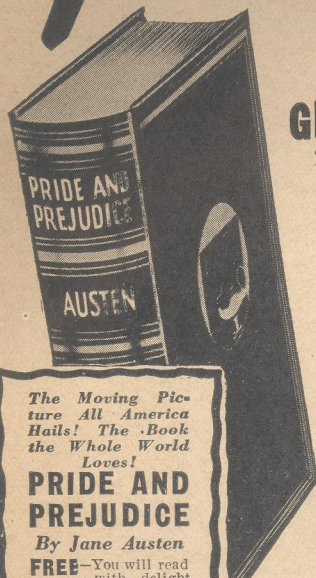
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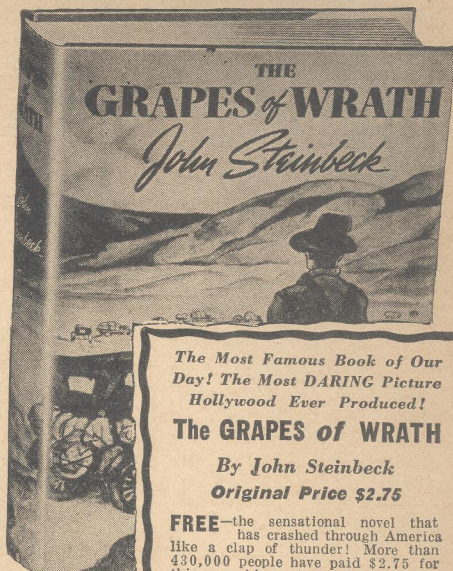
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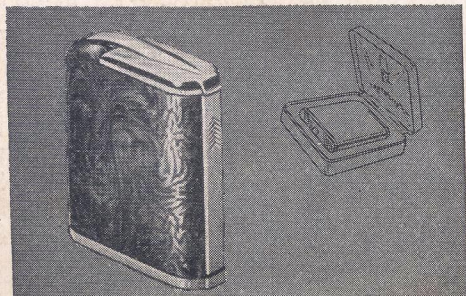


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