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DETECTIVE MYSTERY

A THRILLING
PUBLICATION

NOVEL MAGAZINE

A
BOOK
LENGTH
MYSTERY
NOVEL
Complete in
every issue!

Murder
FOR WHAT?

A Book-Length Hank Hyer Novel
By KURT STEEL

*Bustling
Bulldog*

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"Thanks to the Spot Reducer, I lost four inches around the hips and three inches around the waistline. It's amazing." Mary Martin, Long Island City, N. Y.

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where it shows most

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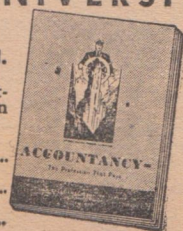
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DETECTIVE MYSTERY

NOVEL MAGAZINE

Vol. XXVIII, No. 3

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

Fall, 1948

FEATURED BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL SELECTION



MURDER FOR WHAT?

By KURT STEEL

When blackmail, kidnaping and murder all enter a case, something big must be afoot—and Hank Hyer, who has some axes to grind on his own, sets out to learn what it is! 11

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SHORT STORIES

KEEP ME FROM MURDER

Norman A. Daniels 122

"Stay with me every moment, because if you don't I'll kill—"

CLUE IN TRIPLICATE

Ray Cummings 126

It was a strange case of murder committed for the sake of art

FEATURES

THE LINE-UP

The Editor 6

An interesting get-together for readers, writers and the editor

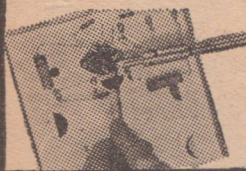
WRONG MESSAGE

Jackson Hite 130

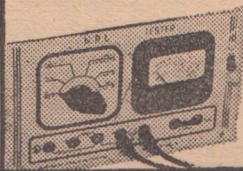
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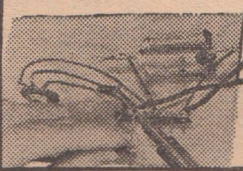
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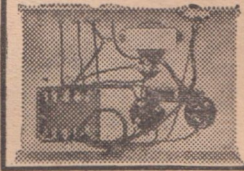
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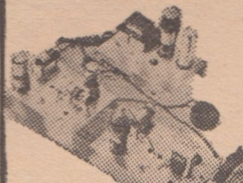
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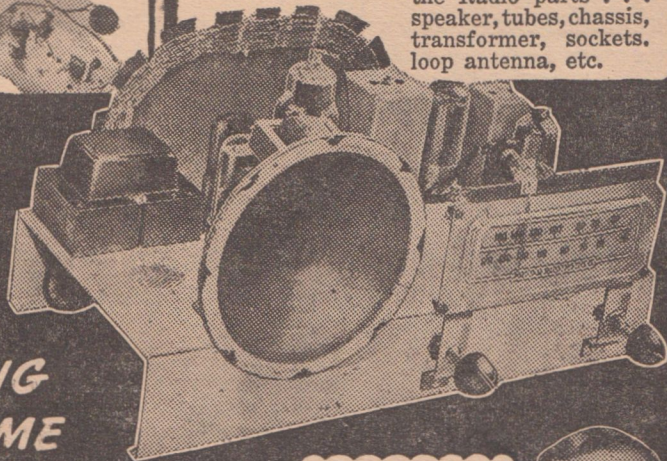


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The LINE-UP

A DEPARTMENT WHERE READERS
AND THE EDITOR MEET



HAVE you ever ridden in the back of a speeding ambulance, your wrists shackled by handcuffs, knowing you were headed for a lush private sanatorium which was nothing more than an elaborate rich man's loony bin?

Well, that's the position Bill Crane, private investigator, found himself in one evening—all for the love of duty and a lucrative fee. He wasn't really crazy, but before that wild ride was over he looked the part he was supposed to play—because the driver and his guard were a couple of misplaced cowboys who thought they were driving a souped up "hot rod" and were entitled to the whole road.

Yet, bad as that ride was, it was nothing when compared with the events that followed his arrival at Dr. Livermore's sanatorium, where even the doctors and the nurses were queer and anything went—including and especially murder!

A Merry-Go-Round of Intrigue

Crane had barely gone through his preliminary screening by the sanitarium staff and eaten dinner among as bizarre an assortment of affluent mental cases as had ever been gathered under one roof, when a male patient was found strangled with a bathrobe cord and the madcap merry-go-round of intrigue and violence got underway.

From this point Crane's unorthodox adventures swing into high gear in the hard-boiled, two-fisted mystery novel which will be featured in the next issue of DETECTIVE MYSTERY NOVEL MAGAZINE. It's called MURDER IN THE MADHOUSE, and it's by Jonathan Latimer.

This thrilling novel, originally published at \$2.00 by Doubleday & Company, is one of a series of well-known and universally popular Bill Crane stories which helped to establish Jonathan Latimer as one of the outstanding exponents of the tough school

of detective story writing.

Other Bill Crane successes include "Lady in the Morgue", "The Dead Don't Care" and "Red Gardenias". But you can take it from us that "Murder in the Madhouse" stands all by itself for swift dramatic action, crisp dialogue, grotesque situations, weird characters. And over it all there is a sinister and macabre atmosphere that will leave the reader with a creepy, uncomfortable, hair-raising sensation he will long remember.

Crazy—Like a Fox!

Bill Crane got his start in this bizarre case by trying to direct traffic on Fifth Avenue. He was arrested, and by dint of numerous zany acts had himself committed to Dr. Livermore's sanitarium for the wealthy insane so he could investigate the disappearance of a strong box belonging to wealthy Miss Van Kamp—a strong box containing \$400,000 in bonds.

Miss Van Kamp, one of the gentler inmates of Dr. Livermore's institution, was a queer customer but Crane didn't mind taking the assignment. At first, it sounded like a lark—pretending to be loony and insisting he was the great C. Auguste Dupin.

But Crane changed his tune a few hours after his arrival. He was impressed at once by Dr. Livermore and his assistant Dr. Eastman, two of the strangest doctors he had ever met and by their unorthodox method of running their institution.

Country Club Service

The place was run like a country club. The meals were excellent, the service was ditto and the nurses were out of this world. And Miss Evans, the head nurse, was a nifty little number who obviously had Livermore and Eastman hanging on the ropes.

In fact, Crane got himself cordially hated at once by exercising his deductive powers in Livermore's office to the extent of reveal-

(Continued on page 8)

To those who think LEARNING MUSIC is hard...

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THE LINE-UP

(Continued from page 6)

ing from a few faint clues that the lush Miss Evans had been doing some genteel necking with Livermore. All of which made Eastman boiling mad, since he didn't like anyone cutting into his territory.

The wind-up was a delightful free-for-all during which Crane kicked Eastman in the jaw, tossed a Chinese lamp at Livermore and got himself thrown in the detention ward. And that was where he wanted to be—for Miss Van Kamp had been temporarily quar-tered there.

Crane awaited his opportunity and re-vealed his true identity to the elderly lady and stated that he had taken the case at the request of her brother. Her momentary fears allayed, she told him that the strong box had been stolen from the trunk in her room. The box contained, in addition, to the \$400,000 in bonds, one of the two keys neces-sary to open her safe-deposit vault in New York which contained \$800,000.

High Stakes

Accordingly, whoever filched the box was after high stakes. The old lady could offer no clue to the culprit. She did admit inform-ing Livermore about the existence of the box—whereupon Crane stated that the doctor was the thief.

"No," said Miss Van Kamp. "If he took it, I'd have been dead long ago. I think he is searching for it, too."

Then she went on to state calmly that whoever had the box could easily get his hands on the \$800,000 in New York by kill-ing her and getting hold of the second key.

After meeting the other inmates at dinner, Crane was informed it was movie night. Everyone repaired to a small room and took chairs. The movie was nothing more than a colorama played to the tune of soft, soporific music designed to induce complete relaxa-tion.

The Signal for Action

Except for the colors floating on the screen, the room was in total darkness. Crane was actually getting sleepy when he heard a faint noise and saw a shadow slip through the doorway. A second later, a smaller shadow followed the first.

(Continued on page 143)



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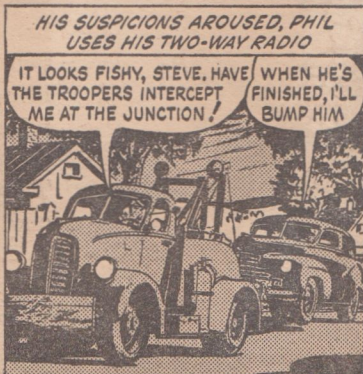
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How Phil Outwitted The Kidnappers

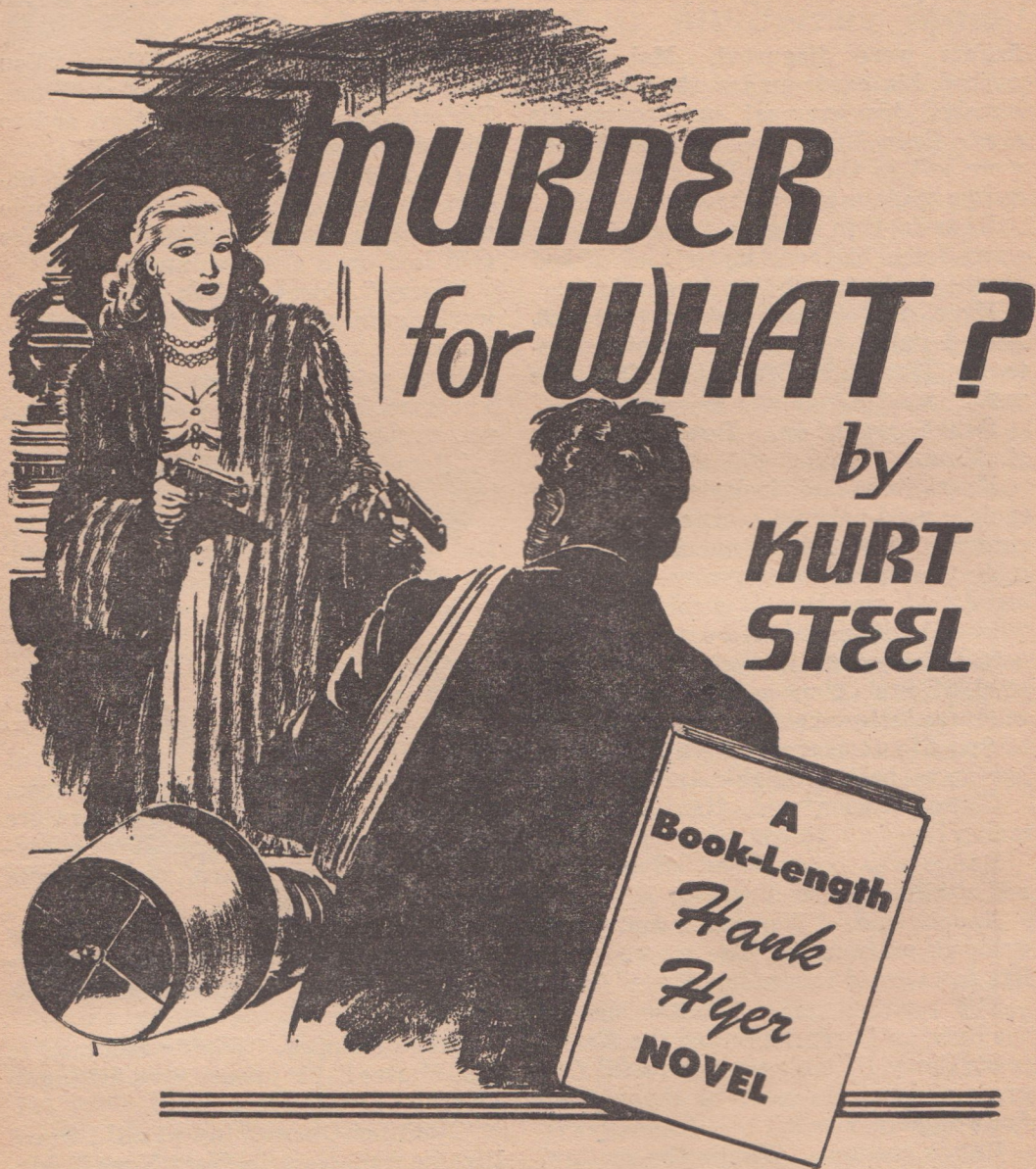


HOMeward bound after a long night of road service calls, Phil Mills has been flagged down and asked to fix a flat...



4-10¢
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New ten-blade package has compartment for used blades.



When blackmailing, kidnaping and murder all enter a case, something big must be afoot—and Hyer, with a couple of axes to grind on his own, sets out to learn what it is!

1

YELLOW GLOVES

AT TWENTY-SEVEN minutes past five, Henry Hyer showed a straight flush, and that Wednesday afternoon's game was over.

McRae turned up a straight. His doughy face grinned, but even his puffy

Walk in Danger with a Manhunter as He Works

fingers were disgusted. Mal Range pushed his cards under the deck and hunched his overcoat up around his ears. Only Hyer, McRae, and Range were left in the pot. The chips in the center made a rough three hundred.

Range's thin fidgety fingers jerked away from his coat lapels and picked up the deck, pretending to shuffle it.

Hyer said, "Don't bother to count, Mal. I pulled that queen from an eye-tooth. There'll be fifty-three. One'll be wet."

Range went on. He was really shuffling.

Hyer rose and looked around the table, good-natured, expectant. His compact frame, tapering cleanly from wide shoulders to narrow hips and small feet, was that of a middleweight whose challenge might be serious. His round face was undistinguished and mild at first glance. But behind the mildness lurked cunning and a tendency to find life (especially the life of a fellow man) both profitable and amusing.

Chase Remsen said, "Oh. Owe you money?"

Range was heavy loser. Hyer grinned at him.

Range said, "You rat," and Hyer grinned, murmured, "The way columnists *can* spread misinformation!"

The doorbell rang. McRae opened the door on Corey Hilton of the *Examiner*. Corey Hilton's pink youthful face grew pinker. He said, "I thought I'd find you here, Hank."

Range sneered, "What's the matter? Is Urquart afraid of another miscarriage of justice before he—"

Corey Hilton said, "To hell with Urquart," who was the editor of the *Examiner* and by that taken his boss.

Hyer noted that McRae had sat down again at the table, that the gambler's puffy fingers were pretending to count chips.

McRae said to Corey Hilton, "You should have come earlier, Mr. Hilton. Perhaps you could have put an end to our friend Hyer's depredations."

(McRae cultivated an English accent for business hours, for the people who lost to him at bridge. It was like gold leaf on a slot machine.)

"Sorry," Corey Hilton said, "I'm a working man. Are you ready to go, Hank?"

Hyer said he was, watching McRae. The gambler's fat hand counting chips was unsteady.

"Have you seen Shannon lately, Hit-ton?" McRae asked.

Before the reporter could answer, Mal Range jerked his overcoat and said, "Is Kip in town?"

Corey Hilton said no to both of them "Kip is in Woodstock," he told Range, "writing. You knew that." His chubby face was pink.

RANGE shrugged. "I knew he went up there when he came back from Hollywood." His fluttering fingers were still an instant as he caught Hyer studying McRae. His sharp, restless eyes fixed on the gambler.

McRae said, "Raa-ly," and Hyer's attention tightened on something more than the dialect issuing from his fat face.

Range snapped, "What's Shannon to you, McRae?" his uneasy eyes flitting to Hyer.

"Nothing. Oh, nothing at all. I heard that he had been in New York." McRae said. "You are a very good friend of his, Hilton?"

"We were roommates at Yale."

"Corey," Hyer observed, "is careless about some things. Corey and Lilith. Corey picked Shannon for a roommate at Yale and Lilith picked Shannon for a husband. Neither of 'em took a sanity test."

His Way into the Heart of a Murderous Maze!

Chase Remsen looked down his knife-edged nose, first at Hyer, then at McRae. He said nothing as usual. The others did not know Shannon.

Conversation switched back to matters concerning the bank. Bills and chits changed hands.

They were standing in McRae's foyer when the bell rang. Hyer, his hand al-

vator. "You don't know her? On the Coast she and Kip were—" The car stopped at the seventh floor and a man and woman got on.

In the street the subject was not reopened, Range making bitter complaint about the November cold and settling his overcoat endlessly. He hailed a cab and left them with a peevish good-by.

Chase Remsen, Hyer, and Corey Hilton walked through Abingdon Square to Bank Street and turned east. When they reached Remsen's house he said something rapidly about a lecture in thermodynamics to finish. This Hyer and Corey Hilton rightly construed an apology for not inviting them in. They crossed the street toward Hyer's apartment and Corey Hilton said, "Kip Shannon is here in town, Hank."

"I thought the air smelled bad," Hyer agreed, and looked at the man ringing the bell. A young man wearing white spats and yellow gloves. He mounted the steps and said to Yellow Gloves, "You looking for me?"

"Are you Mr. Hyer?"

"I am."

Yellow Gloves looked at Corey Hilton. "I wonder if I could see you a few minutes, Mr. Hyer, alone."

Corey Hilton's pink face flushed and he said, "I'll run back and see Chase. Give me a ring, Hank."

Yellow Gloves, relieved, followed Hyer upstairs. When they were in the apartment Hyer noted that the youth was about twenty-one or two, that the smell of open country lay about him, that something suggested an exposure to Harvard. Or Princeton, Hyer conceded, though he was not in the habit of slander.

The boy handed him a card. The card, one of those you pick up in Grand Central for a few cents a hundred, said *Rufus Cole*.

Hyer said, "This goes with your duds



Hank Hyer

ready outstretched, turned the knob and opened the door. He blinked.

In the hallway stood a fabulous mink coat, surmounted by a girl's face. The face not only repaid a second glance, but made this an investment at compound interest. It was the face you would see on a magazine cover once in a blue moon, should the artist remember that after all he is a remote descendant of Leonardo da Vinci.

McRae said, "Ah, Venice—" and broke off. He said in a more careful tone, "Come in. My guests are just leaving."

There were no introductions.

"Venice Malinov," Range answered Corey Hilton's awed question in the ele-

like a nice shiny fire hat," holding out the card.

"I beg your pardon."

"What's your name?"

Yellow Gloves flushed.

Hyer said, "All right. This'll do as well as any."

The boy sat down and Hyer offered him a Camel. While he lighted it Hyer sized him up. He decided the Harvard or Princeton had been applied as a lacquer and mentally apologized to them both. He saw that the boy was younger than he had thought, that his mouth was weak.

"We have come to you, Hyer," Yellow Gloves said, "because we have been told that you are a good man and that we can trust you to act—circumspectly."

HYER looked pleased and waited.

"This is a rather unusual case, you see."

Hyer said, "They all are. It keeps me from taking up library work."

"I mean this is a case that may require a great deal of—tact."

"You don't want to wise the cops?"

Yellow Gloves' mouth twisted. "It is not that serious, no. I trust it won't become that serious."

"O. K."

"I believe you once knew Kip Shannon, Hyer?"

Hyer grinned and said irrelevantly, "Old home week. Unh-hunh, I once knew him. Why?"

Yellow Gloves tapped ashes off his Camel and said, "We wish to have Shannon studied by a man who can see everything, a competent man."

"Maybe that's not a job for spare time."

"Yes. We appreciate that."

"Who sent you to me?"

"Mr. Mulroy. In San Francisco."

"You go to good places for good advice."

"Mr. Hyer, we want to know everything about Shannon. We want to know whom he sees, what his habits are, whether or not he has aliases and if so

what they are. We want him followed if he should go to the Coast or abroad."

Hyer said, "I thought he was *on* the Coast."

"Shannon has been in the East since early in September."

"Dear me, and he hasn't looked me up once," Hyer mourned and Yellow Gloves looked at him quickly. "O. K." the detective continued, brusque. "You want somebody to keep tab on Kip. For how long?"

"That will depend."

"On what?"

"On your reports, Mr. Hyer."

"You want a biography?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I—I really can't tell you that, Mr. Hyer."

Hyer got up. "Nice of you to stop in on your way by, Mister Cole," he said.

"Just a minute. I can tell you—enough, of course."

Hyer blew smoke at him and grinned.

"I represent someone who is very interested in Shannon's welfare, Mr. Hyer," the boy rushed on. "We are afraid that he is in danger. To be frank, Mr. Hyer, we think Shannon has been made the innocent tool of a ring of international swindlers, that they are on the point either of making him their scapegoat or blackmailing him. We want Shannon saved from this without publicity. We have been told that you can do things without their getting in to the newspapers."

Hyer recognized it as competent extemporaneous fibbing. Kip Shannon a swindler! That was a laugh. Still you never could tell. Hollywood turned out screwy products Hyer knew from experience.

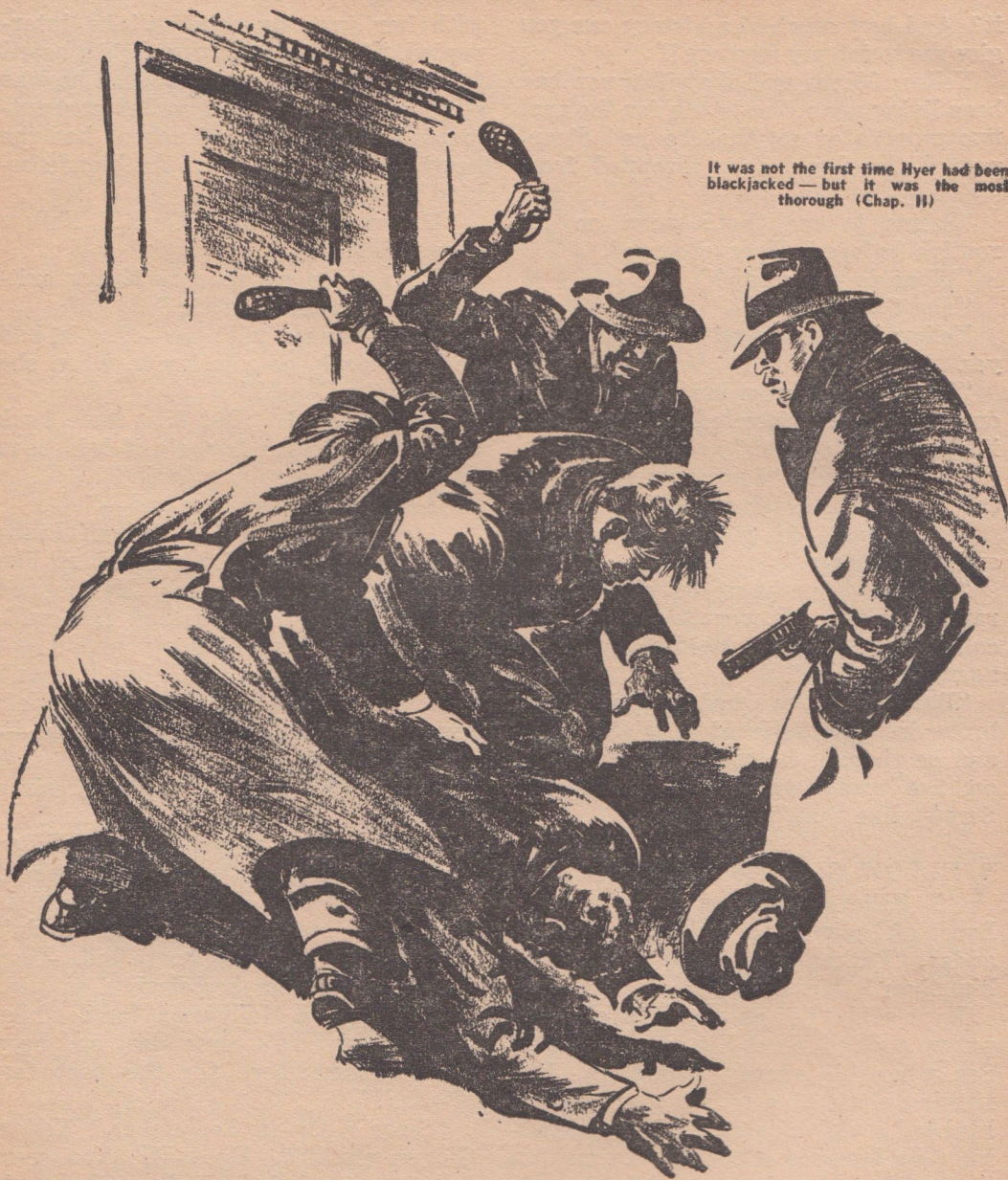
"Do I make myself clear, Mr. Hyer?"

"As cellophane. But so far you haven't said a word in a language I understand."

Yellow Gloves flushed. He fumbled beneath his expensive coat.

"How much will you need to begin with, Mr. Hyer?"

It was not the first time Hyer had been blackjacked—but it was the most thorough (Chap. II)



"That depends on *what* I begin with."
"We are willing to pay you."

He was, too, Hyer saw. He had two hundred-dollar bills in his hand.

Hyer reached and said, "O. K. Where's Shannon now?"

"That is the first thing we want you to find out."

Hyer grinned and handed the bills

back. "That wouldn't pay wire tolls."

There was a brief period of bargaining and Hyer did not quite break his arm taking the seven hundred and fifty that Yellow Gloves offered.

"This is quite confidential, of course, Mr. Hyer."

"You're telling me. Well, where was Shannon last time anybody knew about

it? And how much of a history can you give me to job my memory?"

Yellow Gloves said that Shannon had been living near Woodstock for the past two months or so, that he had disappeared the day before, dropped from sight.

"Seems to me that's been on his routine before," Hyer observed.

"What do you mean?"

"The thin-air act."

Yellow Gloves looked away. He said yes.

"Suppose you give me all you know on him," Hyer suggested. "I'll see how it checks with mine."

The youth said, "I presume you might call Shannon a black sheep."

"Unh-hunh. If you're color blind and a cattleman."

"He was brought up on his father's ranch in Utah. He went to Yale. After college his father financed a brokerage agency for him."

"But he had two bad habits," Hyer broke in. "He believed in Wallingford and he thought he could set the world on fire same way Shakespeare did. Screwy like that."

YELLOW GLOVES smiled. He said, "I believe Shannon does cherish hopes of becoming a writer." Then he added, "Perhaps you know more about him than I, Mr. Hyer."

Hyer said, "Let me try. His old man put up enough to get Kip out of the Red Sea when his agency folded up. But nothing short of a major operation on his head could've cured that second failing. He bounced a couple of times on the family wad and managed to struggle along for several months in an over-stuffed attic in Greenwich Village. Writing his play. Wearing a slouch hat and a cape. Right?"

Yellow Gloves smiled again. "I never saw the slouch hat and cape. But I believe your description is correct. Just about that time he married Lilith Dean and—"

Hyer's mouth hardened. "And stayed

with her just six months," he interrupted. "And the next time Lilith heard from him he was in Taos. Said he was steeping himself in the veiled enchantments of the desert and nobody had the heart to tell Lilith about the blonde behind that veil."

"Do you know Miss Dean?" Yellow Gloves asked.

"Ever since we used to throw spitballs in the second grade."

"Was Shannon with her—that is, had he come back, do you know, when she went to the Coast?"

Hyer sneered. "Did Kip come *back* to her? Not much faster'n if he'd been on the end of a rubber band."

"I suppose her success and—"

"Listen," Hyer said. "When Lilith went to the Coast Kip showed up like he'd been shot out of a gun. He sponged off her for a while, making free with her salary. Maybe his old man'd got tired of supporting him. But it didn't last. When Lilith wrote me Kip had left her again I didn't even suggest she divorce him."

"Have you seen Miss Dean since then?"

"Unh-hunh. I talked to her in L. A. about eighteen months ago and she said Kip was in Tahiti. I told her to keep his remittance low enough so he couldn't save passage over his booze bill. Then he came back on somebody's sailboat and worked in Hollywood for a while. Now you say he's come East and been upstate somewhere for the past few months?"

"Since early in September," Yellow Gloves specified. He said, "You seem to be very well informed on Shannon's background."

"After he married Lilith," Hyer said, "I kept track of him. Well, what do I do when I've grounded Shannon besides making myself into court plaster?"

"You can reach someone at this number," Yellow Gloves said, writing it on the back of one of his cards. "Anyone who answers will be all right to talk to."

"I can't deliver a biography over the

phone," Hyer objected.

Yellow Gloves hesitated.

"Then you can address your reports to Rufus Cole, general delivery, substation K."

Hyer said, "I'll let you know," and opened the door.

AS SOON as his caller was gone, the detective went to the phone and dialed a number.

He said, "Hello, sister. You people give out information this late at night? . . . Unh-hunh, I want a street name to pin to a telephone number. Butterfield 2-3435," he said, reading the number which Yellow Gloves had written in pencil on the back of his card. "O. K. I'll wait."

He made himself comfortable. He took the seven hundred and fifty dollars from his pocket. With a gesture like a purr he smoothed the seven hundred-dollar bills and the fifty out on the telephone stand.

After a short wait he said, "Unh-hunh," and took a pencil. Having no scratch pad, he turned one of the bills and wrote across the corner, 49 East Eighty-sixth Street. "Know the apartment, sugar?" he inquired. "O. K. . . . Thanks a lot, yeah."

He replaced the phone. Then he picked it up again. He started to dial *Watkins* and checked his finger. He swung the dial on the *Operator* tab and waited.

"This," he said confidentially, when central answered, "is going to be the most expensive short telephone call since the Prodigal Son was a sophomore. I think it's only fair to give you a break routing it. . . . O. K. O. K. Skip it."

He hung up, then dialed a number, waited.

"Hello, Chase? Is Corey there? . . . Unh-hunh, thanks. . . . Corey," Hyer asked, his fingers caressing the crisp hundred-dollar bills which were on the telephone stand, "where'd you say Kip was?"

LOCAL COLOR



HYER asked into the telephone, "Chase wants to see me? . . . Sure, be right over."

He hung up and put the seven hundred and fifty dollars away in a buttoned flap of his bill-fold. Then he went out and across the street to Chase Remsen's.

Corey Hilton opened the door. He said, "Why this sudden interest in Kip?"

Hyer said lightly, "Maybe he owes me money." He grinned, added, "Maybe I owe Kip money," and went into the study where Chase Remsen sat at a desk under a green-shaded light. An eyeshade cast shadows over the upper part of his thin hawklike face. The desk was littered with sheets bearing curves, equations, formulae.

Hyer said, "Corey says you want to see me."

Chase motioned to three bills lying on the desk. Hyer picked them up. They were twenties.

"My birthday—" Hyer began.

Corey Hilton's face peered over his shoulder. The reporter said, "Look at them."

Hyer looked at them.

"Chase noticed something funny when he got home," Corey Hilton said.

"The binomial theorem's the bunk?"

"Take a good look at those bills, Hank."

Hyer looked at them again.

"Left," Chase suggested tersely.

"Don't you see anything funny about it, Hank?" Corey Hilton asked.

Hyer admitted he did not.

"Look at the curly lines in the lower left-hand corner," the reporter said.

Hyer squinted. Then he looked quizzically at Chase. He studied the other two twenties.

His eyes widened in alarm. He took

out his own billfold and hastily studied its contents, all except the seven hundred and fifty buttoned under the flap. He sighed with relief and put his billfold back in his pocket.

"You're out sixty bucks, Chase," he observed. "Where'd you get the queer?" Then he grinned. "I know. You mathematicians never call a shot unless you've got diamond-edged proof. Well, maybe I can guess."

Corey Hilton asked, "How much did Chase win, Hank? At McRae's?"

"Maybe that depends on what they're paying for scrap paper. Right?" he asked Chase.

Chase shrugged. He said, "Possible."

"Well," Hyer told him, "I don't exactly feel like trading you good ones for these. But I'll take 'em off your hands at a discount, especially since you and I split the winnings. A couple of government friends of mine may be interested to know Uncle Sam's got some competition."

Hyer took out three tens and laid them on the desk. He folded the counterfeit twenties away in a vest pocket.

Chase, not a muscle stirring in his sharp face, took the money. He said, "Thanks. Robbing you."

"No," Hyer corrected. "It's an investment. You ready to go, Corey?"

They went out together, leaving Chase deep in his equations.

"So Kip's over at your place?" Hyer remarked when they reached the street.

"Yes. What made you call up and ask like that?"

Hyer said curiosity.

"That chap to see you," Corey Hilton said suspiciously. "Did he—?"

"Unh-hunh. Wanted me to find Kip Shannon."

COREY HILTON grew pink. He frowned. "Why?"

"Say Kip's been peddling phony gilt-edge. He was making it up."

"Who was he?"

"Mister Rufus Cole," Hyer answered.

"And I'm Emperor Haile Selassie."

"Hank," Corey Hilton said, "Kip acts scared." When Hyer failed to respond to this, he continued, "Kip came in about three o'clock this morning. He looked like hell. He looked like he had been through a war, Hank."

Hyer perked up. "Kip Shannon can go through a personal massacre and I'll not have enough gray hairs to lasso a gnat. What kind of a war?" he asked.

"He was muddy. His clothes were torn."

"Probably tripped over a match in a gutter."

"Listen, Hank. Something's happened to Kip."

"Unh-hunh. He's been up in the woods. Maybe a garter snake jumped him."

"Be serious, Hank."

"What's he been doing? Up at Woodstock?"

"He went there when he came from the Coast in September. He didn't even stay in town overnight. He said he wanted to write a novel, a serious novel. He said he was fed up on all the tinsel and—"

"Skip it. You mean he came back from Hollywood a sleeper jump ahead of a deputy sheriff. For being absent-minded about a check and forgetting to put in the date or something."

Corey Hilton blinked and said, "The hell he did," without conviction.

"Ever since Kip got back from Oceania and began sponging off Lilith again," Hyer said, "I've had a man on the Coast keeping an eye on him. Mulroy," he said and grinned. "Mulroy must've got a kick out of some advice he gave away recently."

"Anyway, Hank, Kip's in a jam, no fooling."

Hyer waved to a taxi and said, "Let's go somewhere and get some hot food in us. This wind makes me feel like Mal Range looks and that's a hell of a way to feel."

In the taxi Corey Hilton said earnestly, "Come around and see him, Hank."



The first thing Hyer did
was to untie his ankles
(Chap. IV)

"After dinner. I don't take well to weakfish on an empty stomach."

"We've got to help him, Hank."

Hyer said, "Get this through your head. Kip Shannon may be God's gift to the House of Lords to you, Corey, but he's just a pain in the pants to me. I'd be tickled to help Kip *into* a jam as long as it wouldn't hurt Lilith. But nothing'd give my conscience more rheumatism than to have to lift him out of one." He snorted. "The way you and Lilith can go for that pink tea bell-ringer! God knows *you* can do screwy things, Corey, but when Lilith came down with the same slow fever I damn near gave up."

"You never got well acquainted with Kip, Hank. He's got good—"

"Thank God I can pick my friends."

"Yeah," Corey Hilton returned with some bitterness, "to shreds."

"Listen, Corey, I'm not blaming Lilith for the way she's made."

"Lilith's in love with Kip, Hank. Did I ever show you the letter she wrote me when they were married? She said you were acting very silly and they were going to be happy. She believes it, Hank. She still believes in Kip in spite of everything."

"She's got that kind of blind stubbornness in her," Hyer agreed, thinking about the time Lilith, a thin red-headed Valkyrie of seven, had been kept in after school for two weeks for admitting she knew who placed the garter snake in teacher's desk and refusing to tell that it was little Henry. He said, "She took a hell of a licking from her old man once when she wouldn't snitch that I took the kingbolt out of his surrey."

"Lilith's been in love with Kip from the first time she saw him," Corey Hilton said.

"O. K. O. K. Kip tell you why he high-tailed back from the Coast?"

"No. Except that he wanted to get away from all—"

"Well, he say why he took that powder up at Woodstock?"

"No. He just stays in the apartment

today and gets nervous when the doorbell rings."

"Have any trouble up there you know about?"

Corey Hilton said no without looking directly at Hyer.

"Maybe he forgot he wasn't in Samoa," Hyer suggested, "and made a pass at some local femme."

Corey Hilton ignored this. "I want you to find out what has happened to Kip, Hank."

Hyer said, "With pleasure."

THEY ate at Luchow's and throughout the meal Hyer refused to discuss Kip Shannon or anything pertaining to him. After several rebuffs Corey Hilton gave up and followed Hyer half-heartedly through on analysis of American and Canadian hockey teams, heavyweight contenders and prospects for the Rose Bowl game.

Nor would the detective be hurried. It was nearly nine-thirty when they finally arrived at Corey Hilton's house near Second Avenue. The reporter slapped his pocket and said, "I left my keys in my desk at the office." He rang the bell twice, but the latch failed to click.

"Maybe Nemesis beat us to it," Hyer said hopefully.

"We can get in the back way."

They went around the corner and through a gate into an area way. The house was an old one, with stoops up the back. They mounted to the top floor and Corey Hilton opened a window.

"Kip'd be tickled if he knew how easy this is," Hyer chuckled.

They climbed into the kitchen and Corey Hilton found the light switch.

"Kip," he called, "it's me. Corey."

"Tactful," Hyer murmured, "not mentioning me."

Kip Shannon was peering out of the bedroom when the came from the kitchen. He wore a bathrobe of Corey Hilton's which was too short. His uncertain chin was covered with stubble and

his little eyes were bloodshot. Built not unlike Hyer, he could have had a passably good figure had he taken the pains to train it.

Shannon said, "Oh, hello, Hyer." He rubbed a hand through his hair and blinked his bloodshot eyes. "What do you want?" he asked the detective, ignoring Corey Hilton.

"Amusement," Hyer answered.

There was a noise in the hall and Shannon grew pale under his stubble. He drew back into the bedroom.

"What's the matter?" Hyer asked. "Your sins catching up with you, Kip?"

Shannon flushed and looked at Hyer with distaste. "Why did you have to bring this fellow here, Corey?" he demanded.

"Kip," Corey Hilton pleaded, "what is the matter?"

Shannon looked surprised. "Nothing. Why?"

"The way you're acting," Corey Hilton said.

"How am I acting?"

"Like the kid put the Deacon's horse in the church attic," Hyer answered.

"Kip, if you're in a jam of any kind, for God's sake let us help you."

Shannon looked scornfully at Hyer and said, "Us?"

"Thanks," Hyer told him. "Don't mind me. I'm just with a friend."

"Did anything happen up at Woodstock, Kip?"

"What makes you think something may have happened?"

"Corey's got second sight," Hyer explained. "All tabloid men have it."

"What right have you butting in here, Hyer?" Shannon demanded, angry, coming into the living room.

"Me? Oh, Corey wanted company. He hates to come home to an empty flat."

"Kip," Corey Hilton said, "why did you come back?"

Shannon's expression changed. He grew languid and smoothed his hair. He smiled. "I just grew tired. That's all."

"Tired writing?" Hyer asked. "Or

tired running?"

Shannon ignored him. "If you cannot get rid of this person, Corey," he said, "I shan't talk to you."

LIKE a spoiled brat, Hyer thought. He reflected that Shannon needed the same thing a spoiled brat needs.

"The way you've been acting today, Kip, I couldn't help—"

"If you resent my being here, Corey," Shannon broke in, "I can easily find more congenial—"

"Now, Kip, you know you're welcome as the flowers in Spring."

"Nightshade, for instance," Hyer murmured and Corey Hilton glanced at him.

"Don't mind Hank," he told Shannon. "He's only fooling."

This was too much for Hyer.

"Unh-hunh," he said, "fooling. If this is an act I'm fed up on it. Maybe I'm fooling, Shannon, but get this straight. You ever get into a spot that makes trouble for Lilith and I'll take my fooling so seriously that— Oh, well," Hyer concluded, looking at Corey Hilton's pink face, "skip it."

"You have never liked me, have you, Hyer?" Shannon asked.

"You know what I've got against you. Only one thing."

Shannon studied the detective. He smoothed his hair and looked patronizing.

"Hyer," he said, "doesn't it seem as if you are showing yourself a small-souled—?"

"My soul can be a three-triple-A," Hyer snapped, "and that won't alter the way you've treated Lilith."

Shannon smiled at this, as he might have smiled at a schoolboy floundering out of his depth in an advanced subject.

"I am afraid you have rather insular ideas about marriage, Hyer."

"If you mean old-fashioned, say it," Hyer answered testily. "You can't hurt my feelings. But I've got a certain attitude toward Lilith Dean. I've been

waiting several years to tell you all about that, Shannon."

"There are some men, you know," Shannon observed, still smiling, "who cannot be cabined in the trite confines of matrimony."

"Uuh-hunh. The alimony jails're full of 'em."

Shannon grimaced. "I have nothing at all against Lilith," he said, and Hyer took a threatening step toward him. "But I have my career to think about and—"

There was another noise in the hall outside and Shannon broke off, fright in his little eyes again. He backed into the bedroom.

"The way you act," Hyer observed ironically, "most of your career's already behind you."

Shannon said, "Are you insinuating that—?"

"Kip," Corey Hilton said, "what in the world is the matter with you?"

Shannon resumed his pose of patronizing languor. He smiled.

"If you *must* know, Corey, I am getting material for my new novel." He shot a quick look at Hyer. "You see, Corey, I want to have a tramp, a homeless wanderer, in my book. I want him to be a fugitive from justice and so I have been pretending that—"

Hyer broke in, grinning. "In that case you've probably got all the material you need by this time. So let's go up to the Oyster Bar in Grand Central. You look like you need a bowl of stew."

Shannon's reaction was swift, natural, and negative.

"Corey," he said stiffly, "you simply must take this fellow away. I want to be alone."

"With your conscience," Hyer amended.

Shannon brushed his hand over his hair and stalked into the bedroom, closing the door. They heard a key turn.

Hyer lighted a Camel and flicked the match at the bedroom door. His eyebrows rose when he saw the anxious look on Corey Hilton's face.

The detective said, "Sorry, Corey. I don't seem to be as adaptable as I once was. I got to have something to take that taste out of my mouth."

"You'll find a bottle of Scotch on the shelf over the icebox," Corey Hilton told him absently. He said, "I'm going in and talk to Kip."

From the kitchen Hyer heard Corey Hilton speaking low and earnestly at the bedroom door. Then he heard it unlock and he judged that Corey Hilton had broken down Shannon's defenses.

He poured himself a drink, found a siphon, and explored cupboards until he turned up a box of pretzels. By the time Corey Hilton rejoined him Hyer's foraging had yielded a glass of caviar, a square of Liederkrantz cheese, olives, pickles and a loaf of stale pumpernickel.

Corey Hilton asked, "Have I got to put a lock on my icebox?"

HYER grinned. "Just looking around. Funny what a square meal can do to your appetite. I can't eat a thing. Kip say where he hid the body?"

The reporter started slightly and flushed. "He wouldn't say anything."

"Well," Hyer said, spreading a slice of pumpernickel with Liederkrantz and handing it to Corey Hilton, "you've got a hunch what *did* or you wouldn't've hotfooted up to McRae's looking for me."

Corey Hilton took the slice of pumpernickel. He started to bite and held his nose suddenly, leaning over to place the bread and cheese in front of Hyer. He poured a drink, looking at the bottle, his chubby face red. He raised the glass and stopped. He fished a yellow paper out of his pocket and handed it to Hyer.

The detective took the paper, carbon copy of a news dispatch from an automatic receiver, read it, grinned at Corey Hilton. He said, "You been writing gags for the scandal sheets too long. Made you melodramatic."

"This came in on the A. P. printer down at the *Examiner*, Hank. I went

down about four-thirty. I took an extra copy off the telegraph desk. Then I looked for you. Maybe I'm melodramatic. Maybe I'm not."

Hyer's mouth moved sardonically. "You think just because this place's near where Kip was staying—"

"Something happened to Kip in Woodstock," Corey Hilton insisted dogged. His pink face flushed.

"And if Kip'd been in France at the right time you'd blame the Battle of the Marne on him," Hyer continued. "You're a sweet friend."

"Hank," Corey Hilton said earnestly, "you can see Kip's in a jam of some kind. He's scared. He came back to town about three o'clock this morning looking like the wrath of God. The place that story mentions is only a little way from where he was staying in Woodstock. I don't like the looks of—"

Hyer snorted. But he was rereading the dispatch in his hand.

"A207

New Lead Slaying
Kingston, N. Y., Nov 13.—(AP)—Ulster county authorities revealed shortly after noon today they were holding a 'mystery man' in connection with the murder last night of Special Officer William Tatham.

They declined to give out the suspect's name, saying only that he had a record as a poacher and was armed with a rifle when apprehended.

Tatham's body was discovered at 6 A.M. in a clearing near Overlook Mountain. The spot was two miles from Woodstock and three-quarters of a mile off the Woodstock-Bearsville road.

Authorities said that Tatham, regarded as an implacable foe of poachers, had been shot once through the head. He was unarmed.

Ulster county, etc., picking up fourth paragraph previous.
J233 pes"

"Well," Hyer observed, his mouth still ironical but with a trace of interest in his voice, "Kip's taking it on the lam the way he did'll look funny to the state cops, maybe."

Corey Hilton's brow wrinkled. "That's what I'm afraid of, Hank." He reached for the dispatch.

Hyer handed it to him grinning. The detective said, "If Kip didn't do it, he's

putting on a good act, Corey. It'll go big with the local lads when they begin checking up on who took run-out powders last night."

Hyer could see this bothered the reporter considerably more than it bothered him. But he remembered that he too had an interest in Kip Shannon's environment, a professional interest.

He said, "We don't stand much chance to shake Kip loose and maybe there's another angle on that Tatham shooting by now. Maybe we better go down to the *Examiner* and see."

"It's probably just a coincidence," Corey Hilton said.

"Well, as long as Kip thinks somebody's got something on him, it might as well be this as anything," Hyer said. "Anyway, my time's valuable."

They had another drink and went back into the living room. Corey Hilton opened the bedroom door and told Shannon he was leaving, that Hyer was leaving with him. In order, Hyer reflected, that Kip could sleep.

The reporter snapped off the light and opened the hall door. The hall light was off and they groped their way blindly out of the apartment.

Out, indeed!

It was not the first time that Hyer had been blackjacked. But it was the most thorough.

3

RANGE HAS A TIP



COREY HILTON groaned, put a hand to his head and opened his eyes. He closed them, groaned once more and moved his cramped legs. Then he opened his eyes and blinked. Even Second Avenue was hushed and through the stillness floated a quatrian of chimes from the Metropolitan clock, counting some anonymous quarter hour.

Corey Hilton sat up slowly against the wall. Then, supporting himself by the wall, he felt along to his own door and tried the knob. He rattled the knob and rapped on the panel.

"Kip," he called and rapped again. There was no sound from within. His chubby face now thoroughly alarmed, he turned and walked weaving toward the stairs. Clinging to the handrail he stumbled down to the foyer and hurried to the street door.

At the corner stood Murphy, the roundsman, talking to a taxi-driver. Corey Hilton ran toward them.

"Murphy," he said, breathless, "did you see anybody come out of my house?" He looked at his watch. "In the last two hours?" It was now a quarter past twelve.

"Siveral," Murphy told him. "Three singles and a parrrty of dhrunks."

"How many in the party?"

"Maybe four of thim. Wan was that tight he had to be carried. 'Twas that friend of yours he looked loike, that Hyer, Misther Hilton. An' could it have been 'im?"

Corey Hilton started to speak, changed his mind.

"Oh no," he said. "They weren't from my place. The outfit downstairs was making a lot of racket a while ago. I went to sleep. I woke up just now and wondered if they'd gone. They go away in a car, Murphy?"

The officer said yes, but what kind of a car he had no idea, and was there anything wrong? Corey Hilton said no. Until he knew what might have happened to Kip he hesitated to give a general alarm.

He let himself in through the door and hastened up to his apartment. He was just on the point of hammering again when the telephone rang inside. He waited a moment, holding his breath. Then the bell sounded a second time and pressing his ear to the door he heard steps shuffle across the room. Someone collided with a chair. Then Kip's voice sounded.

Corey Hilton waited until he heard the receiver replaced, then rapped loudly. He called, "Kip. It's Corey. Let me in."

The footsteps shuffled to the door.

"How do I know it is?" Shannon asked doubtfully.

"My God. Let me in, Kip. Hank's been kidnaped."

The lock clicked. Corey stumbled into the room.

"Where have you been?" Shannon demanded. "What about Hyer?"

"Snatched. We were both slugged just outside the door. I only came to now. Hank's gone. Murphy said he saw them carry him out the front door. Murphy thought they were drunks."

"It serves Hyer right, no doubt. He was always a busybody, prying into people's private affairs. But it doesn't explain that telephone call," Shannon added, frowning.

"What call?"

"It awakened me and I didn't know how long it would go on ringing like that. So I answered it. Someone said, 'Keep your shirt on. Shannon is safe. Don't give an alarm. This is for his own good.' Then they hung up. Now what—?"

"They said, 'Shannon is safe'?"

"Yes." Shannon's eyes were uneasy. "Someone must know I am here. I disguised my voice."

"You fool! They don't know you're here. They think you're somewhere else. They've got Hank and think it's you."

"But why—?" Shannon began.

"You and Hank are about the same build. In the dark he could be taken for you. They saw Hank and me come out and they grabbed him, thinking they were getting you."

SHANNON gave a thin sardonic smile.

"Then what an unpleasant shock they have in store for them," he said. "What are you going to do about it?"

"Kip," Corey Hilton pleaded, "for God's sake tell me what's back of your

running in here like this and hiding. What happened at Woodstock? Why should anybody want to kidnap you?"

"I told you, Corey. Nothing happened at Woodstock. And I have not the remotest idea why anyone should wish to kidnap me. Certainly not for money. I haven't a cent."

"Lilith has."

Shannon made a face. "Would she spend any for my sake?"

"Hasn't she always?"

"Now, Corey, if we are going to go into—"

"Kip," Corey Hilton said slowly, "you're a fool. If anything happens to Hank Hyer on your account, we're washed up, you and me."

Shannon sneered, "That—"

"Never mind, Kip. You can call Hank names to his face. Right now he may be saving your life."

"How magnanimous of him."

"Exactly the word, Kip."

Corey Hilton got to his feet, his hand against the side of his head. He picked up his hat.

"Where are you going?"

"Out to talk to somebody with some feeling," Corey Hilton answered. "First, though, give me your key to the apartment. I left all mine hanging in my desk."

Shannon was loath to part with the key. "How will I get back in?"

"You won't go out if you've got good sense. They may be on their way back for you by now."

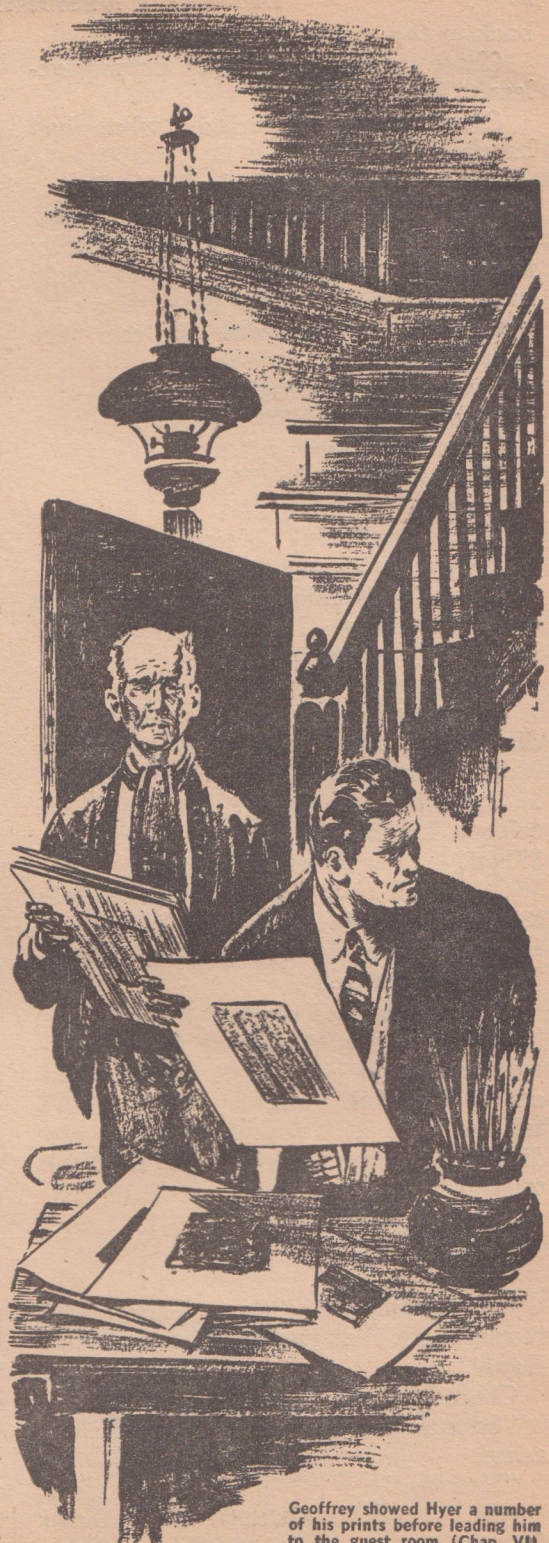
"But what will I do if they come here again?"

"Tell them," Corey Hilton answered shortly, "that nobody's home."

As his cab stopped in front of Chase Remsen's Corey Hilton looked up at Hyer's dark windows, his chubby face worried.

Chase let him in. He wore a faded dressing robe and the green eyeshade. His sunken eyes peered at the reporter sharply.

Corey Hilton said, "Listen Chase, Hank's been kidnaped!" He followed



Geoffrey showed Hyer a number of his prints before leading him to the guest room (Chap. VI)

back to the study.

Chase's sharp face was expressionless. "Kidnaped?"

Corey Hilton described what had happened.

"Police?" Chase asked elliptically.

Corey Hilton shook his head. "They couldn't do anything yet." His chubby face wore a wry smile. "And it would hurt Hank's vanity to know the cops were out to rescue him. He can take care of himself."

Chase said, "Lilith."

"What about her?"

"Coming tomorrow."

"How do you know?"

"Range."

"He phoned you? When?"

"Ten minutes ago."

"She's in the middle of a picture. She can't get away. How does he know? Did he say where he was?"

"Hanophy's."

Corey Hilton grasped the phone and dialed a number hastily. He said, "Is Mal Range there? . . . Yes, Range. . . . Hello, Mal, Corey. Listen, Chase tell me Lilith's on her way East. . . . When? . . . Who called you? . . . Well, wait'll I get there. I want to talk to you. . . . No, he's not here. . . . Haven't seen him. . . . All right. Twenty minutes."

He hung up and stared at Chase.

"Somebody called him up from Hollywood and told him Lilith took a plane out of Burbank tonight. Mal wouldn't tell me who. Not that that makes any difference. But he asked me if Hank were with me. I wonder—"

Chase said, "No."

"Why not?"

"Why?"

"No reason at all," Corey Hilton said, "except that that guy once tangled with Hank."

Chase nodded.

"Once is enough, eh?" Corey Hilton asked.

"Exactly."

"Well, think it over and see if you can fit any of the edges together. I'll be

back. How long'll you be up?"

"Late."

Corey Hilton found the columnist at a table in the far corner of the busy restaurant staring with dyspeptic gloom at a bowl of bran. Across the table sat a fat red-faced man who looked over Corey Hilton's head and said, "Hi, Hilton," in a flat hopeless voice.

Corey Hilton said, "Hello, Perkins. Mal, what—?"

Range hunched his overcoat and rose. "Anything you say is wrong," he told Corey Hilton. "Bottle it until we get out of here."

"Always bighearted, Mal," Perkins observed in the tone of one commenting on the inevitableness of death and decay. "Don't mind me, Hilton," he added, looking at a far corner of the ceiling. "Mal and I are just like that. One for each and each for one." He sighed.

Corey Hilton grinned. "For two people who hate each other's guts the way you do, you manage to spend a lot of time together."

"Come on, Hilton," Range put in, "if you want to hear what I've got to say. Or don't you want to hear it?"

COREY HILTON said, "See you later, Perkins," and followed Range. At the desk where Range signed his chit he asked, "Who phoned you?"

"What difference does that make?"

"None. You can trust it?"

"They've never given me a bum lead yet. Do I ever have a Hollywood howler in my—?"

"No," Corey Hilton agreed. "You're usually right."

"Lilith Dean," Range said as they walked down Sixth Avenue, "got into a New York plane at six o'clock Pacific time tonight. She's on her way here now."

"Why?"

Range's long fingers flickered at his coat lapels. Instead of answering directly, he asked, "You haven't seen Kip Shannon?"

"What about Lilith?"

Range's mouth tightened. He said, "Have you?"

Corey Hilton shrugged. "O. K. I've seen him."

"Where?" Range's little eyes were bright.

"He stopped in at my place early this morning for a little while."

"Where was he going?" Range demanded. His eyes glittered.

"How do I know? He didn't say."

"He wasn't going back to Woodstock?"

"Not that I know of. He was headed south. Now, what about Lilith?"

"Headed south?" Range probed.

"What made you call up Chase?"

Range's mouth twitched. He said, "I thought she might have wired Chase. I wanted to check as many angles as I could."

"You're printing it?" Corey Hilton asked.

"You think I'm going to scribble it on a card and drop it down a sewer? Hell yes, I'm printing it."

"What makes you think Kip's in trouble, Mal?"

Range hesitated. He looked sidewise at Corey Hilton. "She got a wire from him."

"Well, what's funny about that?"

"After she opened the wire," Range said in a brittle voice, "she left it lying around for a minute and—well, never mind."

"Yeah?"

"Somebody took a gander at the telegram."

Corey Hilton said, "For Christ's sake. Have I got to use forceps—"

"You haven't been so open yourself, Hilton."

"What about that telegram?" Corey Hilton demanded harshly.

"Kip was asking Lilith for twenty-five thousand dollars," Range said.

Corey Hilton whistled.

Range said, "Now that doesn't sound like much of a jam, does it? Just a little scrape, probably. Just a little twenty-

five-grand joke."

"When did Lilith get this wire?"

"Sometime today, I guess. Yesterday, I mean."

"Are you printing that, too, Range?"

The columnist looked arch. "Wouldn't you like to know?"

"Are you?" Corey Hilton grasped Range's thin arm. "Because if you've got that in type you'd better call your make-up man and tell him to jerk it."

The columnist pulled away. "Hell no, I'm saving that. Let go my arm. You think I'd waste a piece as hot as that?" he asked, settling his overcoat.

"Have you got anything else?" Corey Hilton asked. "Anything else on Kip?"

"Only what you gave me. That he scrambled through here, running away from Woodstock."

"I didn't say he was running away."

"Didn't you? My error. Listen, Hilton, what did he say? I won't spill it."

"Damn right you won't spill it. He didn't say anything. He woke me up and said he was going through town. Said he'd be back in a couple of weeks."

"Where was he going?"

"Aiken maybe. Miami. I don't know."

Range smiled with half his thin mouth.

"You're a bum liar, Hilton."

Corey Hilton shrugged. "O. K. How did you know it?"

"I called your place. Shannon answered the phone. I recognized his—"

"And if I repeated to a Grand Jury what you said, Mal, maybe it might—"

"Grand jury?"

"When did you call up?"

"Just after we left McRae's. About six."

"That's the only time you phoned?"

"The only time. What was that about a Grand Jury?"

"It turned out to be a compliment," Corey Hilton muttered. "I gave you too much credit."

They walked for a minute in silence.

Then Range said softly, "With this purity campaign still in the air, it might

be just too bad for Lilith right now if Shannon got himself in a nasty spot."

"With people like you to stink it up, yeah," Corey Hilton said.

"Don't be sore, Hilton."

"You've given me everything you've got?" Corey Hilton asked.

"Everything."

"Fine," Corey Hilton said and took a deep breath. "Now I'm going to give *you* something."

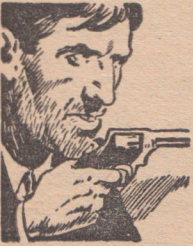
They were passing a dark doorway. Corey Hilton swung quickly and caught the columnist with an efficient hook. Range toppled sidewise into the doorway.

Corey Hilton looked quickly over his shoulder along the deserted street. Then he walked to the corner and turned, his chubby face pink and happy.

"I've wanted to do that for years," he murmured. "Officer," he said, accosting a policeman who was trying doors, "where's the nearest Western Union?"

4

KINGSTON



HYER began to wake up on the back seat of a small coach. The coach was going hell-bent and this did not help his headache. Nor did the sweet smell in his nose. But he functioned well enough not to open his

eyes or move and he grew conscious rapidly. He could not have moved far anyway, for he was trussed like a pig whose family are already orphans.

There was a man on each side of him. As the coach bounced along, Hyer rolled against each of them in turn without learning anything.

When the chloroform had cleared a little, he attacked the situation with the scalpel of logic. He came to the conclusion, a not unreasonable one, that someone had been lying in wait for Kip Shannon outside the apartment.

That when he and Corey Hilton stepped out together into the dark hall he had been mistaken for Shannon by the ambuscade.

Hyer wondered what had happened to Corey Hilton. He inclined to think the reporter safe. Hyer kept his eyes closed and listened.

At last one of the men beside him said with a lilting Italian accent, "Ain' thatta th' road?" and the man in front called back in what could only be rich Bronxese, "Hell no, whassa matta witcha?"

Ten minutes later Hyer was just on the point of throwing caution to the winds and taking a quick look around when Bronx called over his shoulder, "Youse guys know what kinda gripe Buckle's got against t'is boid?"

The guard on Hyer's right said, "This here's some movie star's husband."

"T' hell! Witta map like hisn? What t'ell movie star?"

"That Lilith Dean. You know, one was in that pitcher we seen in Pough-keepsie."

"Lilith Dean? Jeese, yuh mean she's t'is baby's frau?"

"Sure."

"Well, ferta luvva—" Bronx marveled.

"And what Buckle ain't going to do to her bankroll!"

"Maybe shesa won' come across," Italy suggested.

"Buckle says she's nuts about 'im."

"Shesa nots, all ri—"

The rode for a few minutes in silence.

"Say," Bronx said tentatively. "Somepin makes me wonder if Buckle ain't playin' a hand somebody dealt 'im outta t' pack."

"Whatta make you think that?" Italy asked.

"Somepin he said. I gotta hunch."

"You mean he's wholesalin'?" the man on Hyer's right asked.

"Well, we're takin' it across t' counter, ain't we? Buckle didn' come along. Juss said t' pick up t'is load an delivert, diddent'e? Didn't say nuttin

'bout bein'ere hisself, did'e?"

Italy said, "Thassa ri'," and the other asked, "Who you figure Buckle's workin' for?"

"Who's Buckle woikin' for? My guess'd be t'is Jeejee t'at t' dame's always talkin'—"

"Say, who in hell is he?"

"Shuddup. Want t'at guy sh'd hear us?"

"Hell," Italy announced comfortably, "hesa be cold this time nexta week."

"So longuzee ain't croaked."

"Don'ta wor'. Oakie Doak. Thatta stuff, shesa help."

"Maybe you better give 'im another dose."

THE smell flooded Hyer's head and made him dizzy. Bronx called, "Jeese. Put t' cork backinat bottle. You want us all ina ditch?"

"You know," the guard on Hyer's right began, "I got a hunch, too. Maybe—"

Hyer decided afterward that Bronx, being a halfwit, turned to look over his shoulder at this. Perhaps it was a bee sting, but bees are rare in November.

There was a noise like a cannery collapsing in installments and Hyer was unconscious again.

This time he did not come to so easily. Nor did he know at first whether the groans in his ears were his own or those of someone else.

He knew it must have been just in and out with him, though, for he could look up and see a wheel still turning slowly. Up, because he was on his back in several inches of icy ditch water, with the wrecked coach leaning eagerly over him on the bank above.

He skittered out from under the car like a crab and hoisted himself out of the ditch to road level.

They looked like the last act of Hamlet in the high school auditorium. Hyer even got a grin out of the picture. Three of them spread casually in the ditch.

Then Hyer realized he had slipped his clothesline bonds. He was certain,

until he looked, that one hand had been pulled off at the wrist. Only his ankles were bound. His left arm was useless and he explored his right leg tenderly. There was a cut over his eye. But he found he was in comparatively fresh condition when he looked at the others.

The first thing he did was to untie his ankles and edge toward an automatic that lay between him and the nearest wreckee. When he had it in his good hand he felt a little like a hero of a thriller. But it was in the way.

So he put the gun in a coat pocket and crawled to the first of the three for a routine frisking. Only one was conscious, and this one seemed to care little whether Hyer took out his gun or his appendix. The detective made something of a haul in the way of armament but absolutely nothing else.

"You're going to croak anyway," Hyer told the conscious one, "so you might as well tell me what I got bull-rung for."

The man, a short Italian, merely looked at him with tired black eyes, blood oozing from a corner of his mouth.

Then Hyer, remembering the interest the fat gambler had taken in Kip Shannon and his surroundings, asked at random, "McRae put this package up?" But he could tell from the Italian's eyes that the man was unlikely to answer another mortal question. It looked as if the car had rolled over him. He was not pretty.

Hyer saw his watch was still running. Seven-thirty. He edged back up on the pavement and sat beside the bashed coach while he lighted a cigaret with one hand in the wind.

Hyer wondered how far they had come and in what direction. His wrist screamed with pain, his leg ached, his head throbbed, but he set himself doggedly to recall what he had heard before the wreck.

"Buckle" was new to him, as was "Jeejee." This last was a nickname he had encountered only once before. It

was applied then to a freckled female urchin who sat behind him in a one-room school in Iowa.

After a quarter of an hour of nothing at all, including Hyer's brilliant skull practice, there was a noise up the road and a station wagon came toward them. It stopped behind the wreck and a chubby youth in overalls came running up with his mouth open.

"I don't know," Hyer replied to the obvious question about mortality. "But there's one guy down there just about and two other birds who ought to be."

He nursed his leg and wrist and tried to plan a campaign, while Overalls scrambled down into the ditch. From the station wagon Hyer saw that they were still in New York State. This reminded him and he got out his notebook painfully to write the license number of the smashed coach.

BETWEEN them, he and Overalls loaded the casualties into the station wagon. In the first two miles Hyer assured himself that Overalls, whatever his other talents, was not exactly bright.

"My poor mama," Hyer said ruefully.

"What's the matter of *her*?"

"Arteriosomaticpectoralis," Hyer answered.

"Gee."

A mendacious tear stood in Hyer's right eye. "Don't know what I'll do when mama's gone. They wired me she might not last till night. So I kissed the wife and kids and started up from Hoboken right away."

Overalls asked, "How was you aimin' t'git there?"

Hyer shrugged and his face wore a wan desperate expression. "Hitchhike. They picked me up a little ways back."

The station wagon was loping through the outskirts of a town. Hyer saw it was Kingston. He suddenly turned to his rustic rescuer, an eager look in his eyes.

"Buddy," he said, his voice unsteady,

"I wouldn't ask this of another guy in the world, but—" He broke off, a catch in his voice.

"What, mister?"

"I can't ask you to do that" Hyer said, staring ahead forlornly. In reality he was looking for a corner drugstore. "Not with those guys in back there—"

"Now," Overalls soothed. "If your mama's sick and th' wife and kids are hungry, why I reckon you got a right to ask fer a favor."

Hyer clenched his usable hand and bit his lip. He saw the corner drugstore.

"Could you let me stop and phone from that drug-store, buddy?" he asked, his tone pleading, reckless.

Overalls said, "Sure." Then he blinked. "But them fellers in back. They ought to maybe—"

"Hospital," Hyer broke in. "I know. But it'll only take a minute or two, buddy. Buddy," he asked earnestly, "have you got a mama?"

Overalls welled up. He stopped the station wagon in front of the drugstore and fumbled in his pocket. "Here," he said unsteadily, producing a crumpled one-dollar bill, "if you're so hard up, mister, you take this and use it to telephone your mama. I'll wait right here."

Hyer waved the money away and climbed down.

"I can't take it from you, buddy. I got enough to phone with. If I need it afterwards I'll let you know."

Hyer limped into the drugstore and twelve seconds later emerged from the back door around the corner. He hobbled as fast as he could for a block and turned another corner.

A doctor set his wrist (which he had broken, trying to crank a Ford), patched the cut over his eye and only overcharged him three hundred percent. Hyer was agreeably surprised to find he still had his wallet and that, in addition to its other contents, the seven hundred and fifty dollars in the buttoned pocket was intact.

When he left the doctor's, nausea

smote him and for a moment he staggered. He saw a hotel sign and made for it.

But before going to his room for the rest which he needed sorely, he forced himself to a telephone booth where he called Corey Hilton's number.

After waiting several minutes, Hyer said, "Hello, Cor—Oh, hello, Kip. Seen Corey? . . . He is? . . . No, don't wake him up. Just tell him Hank phoned in to—... What?... No, just a pleasure jaunt. Hope you enjoyed it. . . . I said I hope *you* enjoyed it."

He hung up.

Hyer started out of the booth and turned once more to the phone. He called the New York number which Yellow Gloves had given him. Again there was a long wait.

He said, "Hello, Hyer. . . . Hyer, Henry Hyer. . . . Unh-hunh, I just called in to—... What?... The hell you say. Ransom note?..." He grinned. "No, it's a fake. . . . Sure, I know where he is. . . . Unh-hunh, they *thought* they *had*. Apparently jumped the gun with that ransom note. . . . Hell no, ignore it. . . . Unh-hunh, but not over the phone. . . . Sure . . . Sure. . . . O. K."

He hung up and stumbled out of the booth.

When he awoke in his hotel room it was late afternoon. His wrist throbbed, and his eyes smarted. But sleep had cleared his head. He went to the desk, settled his bill, and took a taxi to the

station. Here he found he had just missed a train to New York and would have to wait until eight-thirty for another.

When he came out of the station, it had begun to snow, lazy flakes out of a cottony sky presaging a long and earnest storm. Hyer walked until he came to a barber shop.

Hyer picked up a copy of the morning *Express*, scanned the pictures on page one and looked over the headlines. Then he turned to Mal Range's gossip column, *Range Reveals*.

A name caught his eye toward the end of the column.

"Lilith Dean is reliably reported to have boarded a Manhattan-bound plane at Burbank yesterday p.m. Hollywood papers please copy. Your scribe will constitute himself a welcoming committee of one in the cold gray Newark dawn."

Hyer looked about him for an evening paper that would have come out since noon, found none, collected his hat and coat, and hastened out into the snow.

5

LONNIE BINCH



AT A newsstand Hyer found an *Examiner*. Paying no attention to the clerk who tried halfheartedly to force Hyer's change on him, he searched through the paper. He found it.

[Turn page]

HEADACHE

UPSET
STOMACH

JUMPY
NERVES



RELIEF!

THANKS TO FAMOUS
BROMO-SELTZER

Millions turn to Bromo-Seltzer to relieve ordinary headache three ways. It's famous for giving fast, pleasant help. Caution: Use only as directed. Get Bromo-Seltzer at your drugstore fountain or counter today. A product of Emerson Drug Co. since 1887.



"Miss Lilith Dean arrived by plane from Hollywood this morning. She refused to talk to reporters at the airport and sped to the city where she registered at the Biltmore.

"Rumors concerning her hasty, unheralded visit are rife."

In a phone booth at the back of the store Hyer called the Biltmore.

He said, "Hello. I want to speak to Miss Lilith Dean.... Sure she is.... Well, give me the roomclerk, then.... Listen," Hyer said, "Lilith Dean registered with you people this morning. I'm an old friend. I want to talk to her.... You don't have to stall me. Just tell her Hank Hyer. She'll answer.... Nuts, I know she's there.... O. K. O. K. I'll write her a letter. Or do you censor guests' mail, too?"

He hung up, disgusted. Then his eyes narrowed. He went to the counter and changed a ten-dollar bill into silver. Laden with quarters and dimes he returned to the booth and lined little piles of money up on the shelf before him.

He started calling numbers at which Corey Hilton might be located. His apartment, five bars, two restaurants and four friends yielded nothing. Hyer mopped his forehead and looked sadly on the diminishing piles of silver.

Then he had an inspiration.

He said into the phone, "I want Han-ophy's restaurant, Sixth Avenue and Forty-eighth Street.... O. K. Give me information, then." He got the number, called it, depositing his coins with a grimace and wincing as the gong and bells rang in his ear for the fourteenth time.

"Hello, is Mal Range there? ... Thanks...." He waited two minutes, rubbing his short nose. "Hello, Mal. This is Hank Hyer.... Hyer.... Unh-hunh. Listen, have you seen Lilith?... Unh-hunh.... Wouldn't talk to anybody? Meaning yourself? You can't blame her. Where'd she go from the plane?... Nuts. For publication purposes, maybe. They just told me she wasn't there.... For God's sake stop clowning. Where is she?... All right, Tailwind, if you followed her there why

isn't she— O. K., sister, keep your rouge on. Here." He deposited another set of coins, and when the reverberation set up by the barrage of bells and gongs had subsided he said, "What? ..." A cautious look came into his eyes. "Oh, in Philly... Unh-hunh, ran down this morning. Listen, Mal, if you followed Lilith to the Biltmore, why isn't she there?... She never *was* there? What in—?... You went up to see her and she wasn't in her suite? Probably out shopping in the five and ten.... Nuts. Go soak your head in alanol."

Hyer hung up. He gathered the remnants of his arsenal of coins off the shelf, left the newsstand and returned to the barber shop. He settled himself to read his *Examiner* while he waited.

There was a short story on the shooting of the peace officer near Woodstock. It told how a local mountaineer, named Lonnie Binch, had been arrested by state police and was being held in jail in Kingston.

When he had been shaved Hyer phoned for a taxi and drove through silent, whitened streets to the jail. A desk sergeant with a round perennially surprised countenance was on duty.

HYER said, "I'm from New York," and showed his card. He said, "This Tatham got shot night before last, he's got some wealthy relatives in New York. They sent me up here to smell around a little bit. You boys mind?"

The sergeant said that was all right, that they didn't have anything to do with county matters anyway.

Hyer said, "O. K."

"Who did you say hired you, Mister Hyer?"

Hyer said, "I can't tell you; but he's a half brother of Tatham's that I guess nobody up here knew anything about."

"And he sent you up to Kingston? From New York?"

Hyer said, "That's right."

"You want to see the prisoner?" the sergeant asked.

"Any special objection?"

"I guess not. It's not my funeral. He belongs up to the county jail. They wished him on me here because the county jail's full up till after Grand Jury. I'm just doing the sheriff a favor."

"He do it?" Hyer asked. "This Binch?"

The sergeant shook his head.

"Don't nobody know. He won't talk."

Lonnie Binch was definitely not talking to anyone.

There was a light in his cell and he sat on a cot, hunched forward, long bony arms hanging down between his knees, his light brown curly beard and hair untrimmed, his eyes big and hound-like.

He wore overalls that had done service in swamp and thicket for a long time. His bony arms were covered with the sleeves of an old striped silk shirt which came barely to his gaunt red wrists. The overall bib just failed to hide a torn pocket on the silk shirt bearing a monogram, K. S. The inside of the cell was like an icebox, but Hyer could see that the gaunt mountaineer was sweating.

When the sergeant had gone, Hyer leaned against the bars outside Lonnie's cell and lighted a cigaret. Hyer smoked the cigaret leisurely, letting the smoke filter through the chill cell and curl around Lonnie's head. When he was halfway down the cigaret, Lonnie looked up at him quickly and down at the floor.

The tip of his tongue licked along his bearded lips.

Hyer said, "Have one," and held out the package. Lonnie paid no heed. Hyer let the half-burned cigaret drop to the cell floor just inside the bars and lighted another. Lonnie's eyes were drawn and held by the smouldering butt on the floor as by a magnet.

Hyer smoked the second cigaret halfway down and dropped it on the cell floor, an inch or two nearer Lonnie. The first was by now almost out. Lonnie

looked up and sheer physical suffering stood in his soft eyes. Hyer held out the package again, shaking its white cylinders up in a neat array. He said, "Have one."

Lonnie moved, restrained himself. But while Hyer was lighting his third cigaret the big mountaineer made a swift, catlike pounce and seized both smouldering stubs. He pressed his beard in with trembling thumb and forefinger.

He exhaled slowly, his lids drooping. "Ah."

"Taste good?" Hyer said. "Here, have a whole one."

Tantalized, Lonnie reached for the cigaret Hyer offered him through the bars, his eyes wide and frightened. Hyer handed him a packet of matches.

"Taste pretty good, don't they?" Hyer observed.

Lonnie drew long on the cigaret. The glowing tip crept halfway down.

"Ent no call fer them t'do this t'me," he said in a slow, uncomplaining voice.

Hyer asked, "What have they got on you, Lonnie?"

"We ent done nothin'."

"Ever been in trouble before?"

Lonnie shook his head, puzzled and childlike. The cigaret bit his fingers and he dropped it. Hyer tossed the package to him.

"You see it happen, Lonnie?"

The mountaineer shook his head in negation.

"How come they got you locked up here?" Hyer asked.

"Th' found me ther."

"With Tatham's body?"

Lonnie nodded.

"How'd you happen to be there, Lonnie?"

The mountaineer thought this over. By this time he was not smoking so fast.

Hyer said, "Mr. Shannon wants you to tell me what you know about it, Lonnie," holding his breath, his eyes on the monogrammed K. S. on the silk shirt under the torn overall bib.

Lonnie looked up, startled. "Mister Shannon?"

Hyer nodded. "Friend of yours, isn't he?"

"Mister Shannon, *he* sent yuh here?"

"He did. He wants to have the right thing done by you, Lonnie. How'd you happen to find Tatham's body, Lonnie?"

The man's soft trusting gaze moved over Hyer and dropped to the floor.

"I was follerin them ther tracks."

Hyer said, "Unh-hunh?"

"Th' come down wher I'd set—" He stopped and his big hand fumbled at his beard.

"You set some traps, Lonnie? Woodchuck?" Hyer asked, wondering if woodchucks grew in Ulster County.

Lonnie shook his head. "Rabbit. Yuh won't tell on me, mister?" he pleaded.

Hyer said, "Not if you tell me about finding that dead man." Then he asked, "What kind of tracks?"

"Woman tracks."

"You followed them. They went to Tatham's body?"

"In that ther clearin," Lonnie answered. "I seen 'im alaying ther in th' moonlight."

Hyer said, "Moonlight? When?"

"Long time 'fore sunup," Lonnie answered, his brown eyes frightened at the slip he had made about the traps.

"After midnight?" Hyer asked.

Lonnie nodded.

"See anybody else around?"

The mountaineer looked up at him and a frown creased his forehead. His hand fumbled at his beard.

Hyer said, "O. K. What then?"

"I seen he been shot in th' head," Lonnie said slowly. "I couldn't figger why the warn't more blood."

"What did you do then?"

"I went rabbit shootin'."

"Get anything?"

"Nary one."

"Then you came back to where the corpse was?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why?"

"I couldn't figger out why ther warn't more blood."

"So you sat down and looked at Tatham?"

"Yes sir."

"How long?"

"Twell about sunup."

"And they came along and arrested you?"

"Them ther state fellers," Lonnie agreed without animus.

"When had you see Tatham last?" Hyer asked. "Before you found him there?"

Lonnie looked at Hyer again and once more his hand fumbled at his mouth.

"I don't recollect, mister."

Hyer smiled at him. "That's all right, Lonnie. Don't let 'em make you talk if you don't want to. You'll be all right. Cold?"

The mountaineer shook his head.

"Anything you want me to tell Mr. Shannon?" Hyer asked lightly.

Lonnie shook his head. Then his mouth moved unsteadily. "Mebbe if he's got a mite more o' that ther tobacco—" he began humbly.

"Eating tobacco?"

Lonnie nodded eagerly.

Hyer said, "I'll bring you some myself. Need a coat?"

Lonnie said no, that he did not much mind the cold. He was no longer sweating.

HYER went to the end of the corridor and called. The sergeant unlocked the door.

"Not a thing," Hyer said ruefully when asked what he had learned.

"Folks up her don't react to city technique," the sergeant said.

"You don't mind my butting in this way?" Hyer asked, and the sergeant repeated that it was not his funeral.

"The papers said something about there maybe being a feud between Tatham and this Binch family, over moonshining or something," Hyer suggested, and the sergeant answered that he knew nothing about that, but that

the Binchies were not what you'd exactly call statute-conscious.

"Folks say they've lived up that way ever since the country was wild," he offered.

"Seems to me I've heard tell Woodstock was full of artists and other things besides mountaineers."

"Summers," the sergeant answered. "Some of 'em stay all year round."

They talked for a few minutes longer but Hyer learned nothing. Not that the sergeant was averse to telling what he knew, but he knew nothing. "Johnnie Dollargold, he can probably tell you more about Lonnie and his folks than anybody else," the sergeant suggested. "He runs the store where they get their truck."

"Dollargold?"

"What he calls himself. Seems like he had some outlandish foreign name that nobody'd pronounce right when he come. He made it English and Dollargold's what he called it. Thirty-forty years ago, I guess.

Hyer looked out at the snow and inquired what his chances were of getting to Woodstock that night. The sergeant studied the snowy window and said in astonishment, "Pretty good maybe. If you start pretty soon and don't aim to come back tomorrow."

But before he made arrangements for the trip, Hyer bought two plugs of chewing tobacco for Lonnie and took them back to the jail, explaining to the sergeant that this might loosen Lonnie's tongue.

The detective was able after some search to find a taxi driver who doubtfully agreed to attempt the trip to Woodstock. They slid off the road once just outside of Kingston and again before they reached the turn to leave the main highway. On the lesser county road they found the going difficult indeed and before they had progressed far the car lost traction entirely and slid smoothly into the ditch.

"Can you get this toboggan back into the channel?" Hyer demanded.

The man said he was afraid not. "It's only a couple miles to Woodstock, though," he said as if that settled the problem. "Oughn't take you more'n half an hour maybe."

Hyer got out of the cab, said testily that a walk would probably do him good.

6

ROAD TO WOODSTOCK



WALKING into the blinding snow had a salutary effect on Hyer's circulation but tended to depress his spirits to their very nadir. He thought of his warm, dry apartment on Bank Street.

Added to this normal organic unhappiness was the throbbing of his splinted wrist and the strained ligaments in his leg. His head began to ache again. On each side of him floated impish visions of St. Bernards from the monastery, pacing sedately just out of reach, every one bearing in a sling about his sturdy neck a flask of Vat 69.

And then, when he was ready to flounder to the drifts at the side of the road and drop down for a brief refreshing nap, he saw a light flicker through the mantle of driven snow. Gritting his teeth and trying vainly to rub feeling into his smitten nose, he slogged from the highway, forced his way through knee-deep drifts and floundered up on the porch of a small house.

At first he was afraid no one would answer his knock and debated wildly the seductive thought of housebreaking. Then a bolt was shot back and the door swung open. Hyer stumbled across the threshold, winded, reserving explanations until he should be safely inside.

He panted, "My God. I thought I was a goner." He took off his hat and a sizable drift fell at his feet. Hyer essayed a feeble grin at his host and said,

"I'll sweep it up when I get my breath."

The little man looked at Hyer with polite interest and concern.

"You were walking?" he asked. "In this blizzard?"

Hyer nodded and as another drift broke from his shoulders and fell to the floor with a soft plunk he remembered his manners.

"Open the door and let me excavate," he said, "and I'll tell you all about it."

The little man smiled and assured him he need have no fear. Hyer saw the floor was covered with linoleum. The room was of the plainest and simply furnished. A kitchen table stood against one wall with a patent vapor lamp hissing cheerily. Two straight-backed chairs flanked the table. In one corner was an easel with a paint-smeared smock thrown over it and in another a piano. A chest stood near the easel with a telephone on it. A pot-bellied stove, red-hot, made the room snug and warm.

"Sorry to disturb you," Hyer said, shaking his coat, "but I had to stop and thaw out."

"Take off your things," the little man said, suddenly solicitous. "You must be frozen. Sit up to the fire. Perhaps you'd like a drink."

Hyer sighed. "And ten minutes ago," he said, "I was at the north pole."

His host disappeared in the kitchen and returned almost immediately to say in deprecating tones, "Now maybe you don't like hot punch."

"Even if I didn't," Hyer grinned, "I'd make myself take it."

"I use applejack in mine," the little man said doubtfully.

"Never drink a drop of anything else," Hyer assured him. "I even wash in hard cider."

THE little man smiled and popped back into the kitchen whence came presently the pungent stimulating aroma of that stout, typically Yankee product of press and still that does yeoman service in countless farm-

houses. Hyer took the steaming glass which was brought to him and wrinkled his nose happily in its fumes. He tilted the glass and drank. Blinking his eyes he lowered the glass and swallowed several times, licking his lips.

"I'm on my way to see an old friend," he said. "Shannon. Kip Shannon. He lives up this way somewhere."

The little man said, "Oh, Mr. Shannon. I know him. Yes. Oh, yes."

Hyer frowned. "What's the matter?" "Why, Mr. Shannon—I think he is gone. What a pity."

Hyer looked disappointed. "Gone? He was here last week."

"Yes, Mr.—"

"Hamilton," Hyer said.

"Yes, Mr. Hamilton. I'm sure he is gone. By the way, my name is Geoffrey."

He smiled and put out his hand. He wore a heavy blue sweater and an orange muffler out of which his Adam's apple peeked when he talked.

"But, Mr. Hamilton," Geoffrey went on, "I am only too glad to offer you the hospitality of my own humble house here. You had best spend the night here, since Mr. Shannon is gone."

"If you're just being polite, Geoffrey," he said, "you're getting in a jam. Because I might take you up."

"Do, Mr. Hamilton. Do. I'll fry up some eggs for you, Mr. Hamilton. Delighted to do it."

When Hyer was seated at the table, attacking bacon and eggs and thick fried potatoes, he brought the subject back to his chief interest.

"When did Shannon leave?" he asked Geoffrey.

"Some time Tuesday, I believe. No, now wait a minute. I saw him at the store Tuesday evening."

"Maybe he left yesterday," Hyer suggested.

The little man shook his head, his sharp eyes anxious.

"I don't think so, Mr. Hamilton. I— Well, I walked over to his house yesterday morning rather early to see if

he might like to take dinner with me. He was gone then."

"Look like he went for good?"

"I couldn't say. It is too bad you didn't know. I am afraid you have had your long cold journey for nothing."

Hyer waved his fork, shifted the food in his mouth, and grinned. "I wouldn't call it nothing."

Geoffrey was flattered.

The detective explained that he had met Kip Shannon on the Coast and that Shannon had written inviting him to pay a visit when he came East.

"Funny," he concluded. "He didn't say anything about leaving when I talked to him last week. Friday it was. And you say he cleared out Tuesday night?"

"Yes sir. Tuesday night or early Wednesday morning."

"Know him well?" Hyer inquired, chewing.

"I wouldn't exactly say I knew him well," the little man answered. "I knew him to speak to, and to visit with, you might say. He had some things in common and I enjoyed to talk to Mr. Shannon."

"Screwy," Hyer opined and washed down the last of the bacon with coffee. "Always doing screwy things," he explained, wiping his mouth.

"Look how he invited me up here and then ran out on me. I might've foundered in that blizzard. Great practical joker Kip is."

GEOFFREY looked anxious again. "Perhaps it is something serious this time," he suggested.

Hyer shook his head. "Not a chance. He never had a serious thought. Always the playboy." He lighted a match, held it to the tip of the cigaret in his cupped hand, stared hard at Geoffrey and lowered the match without lighting the cigaret. "What makes you think that?"

Geoffrey swallowed and his Adam's apple moved. "Frankly, Mr. Hamilton, there is some unpleasant talk going

around Woodstock today."

Hyer frowned and dropped the match as it burnt his fingers. "Unh-hunh? What kind of talk?"

"Why, a regrettable thing happened Tuesday night sometime. A man was killed. His body was found early Wednesday morning."

"And people're saying Kip might've had something to do with it?" Hyer asked, point-blank.

"Now I wouldn't say that, Mr. Hamilton. As a matter of fact a man was found near the body and arrested. He had a gun. Mr. Shannon probably had nothing—"

"But his leaving suddenly makes talk?"

"Since you are a friend of Mr. Shannon, I hate—"

"But it's true anyway?"

"The talk, yes. You know, Mr. Hamilton, it would be doing Mr. Shannon a great service if you could find him, if you could persuade him to come back to Woodstock right away," the little man said earnestly.

Hyer thought the problem over, lighting his cigaret.

"Well, there's nothing I can do about it," he said. "The way that wind howls I'm due to accept your kind invitation, Mr. Geoffrey. You an artist?" he inquired, looking at the easel and the pictures on the bare walls.

"Dry points," Geoffrey responded quickly, his sharp eyes brightening. "If you would like to see some of my work, Mr. Hamilton—I do dry points mostly." He caught his enthusiasm with a gesture of embarrassment. "But you are probably not interested."

Hyer grinned. "Bring out the whole album."

While Geoffrey was taking his prints from the case next to the easel, the wind died suddenly and Hyer heard a sound. Overhead. A woman's cough. Either Geoffrey did not hear it or wished to appear oblivious. He paid no heed. Then the wind came up again with a rush and Hyer heard nothing more

from overhead.

But he was puzzled. He studied the room where he sat. There was no more evidence of feminine occupancy than one would expect to find in a Y. M. C. A.

But the sound of a woman's cough was only the first shock Hyer was to receive that night.

After Geoffrey had showed him a number of prints and talked enthusiastically about shading effects and cross-hatching and proofing, Hyer owned that he was sleepy and his host showed him into a little room where there was a cot and washstand.

"Me," Hyer said grinning, "I could sleep in the bridal suite of the *Normandie* tonight. Don't worry about me. I'll drop off the minute I hit that inviting pillow."

But his prophecy was not flawless.

The first thing that gave him pause was what he found on the floor in the little closet where he went to hang up his coat. He stepped inside the closet, feeling for a hanger, and his foot caught lightly in fabric. Hyer leaned down and picked up a brassiere. The closet was empty otherwise. Cocking his eye toward the ceiling he hung the brassiere on a hook and removed the rest of his clothes.

Then, shivering, he blew out the candle and crawled between the blankets on the cot. For a moment he lay and shivered. Then he moved uncomfortably. There was something hard under his shoulder blades. He twisted to one side but the hard object was still there.

His teeth chattering, Hyer sat up and fished under the blanket.

His fingers came in contact with cold metal and he drew out a thirty-two automatic.

Squint-eyed in the darkness, he laid the automatic on the floor, too tired even to see if it were loaded.

Then he drew the blankets up around his neck and knew nothing else until, while it was still dark, the telephone rang in the next room.

7

RED TO BLACK



HYER awoke instantly at the sound of the telephone ringing in the next room. It rang again, then a third time. He was on the point of rising to answer it when a chair scraped and Geoffrey's

voice came to him. The little man talked briefly and Hyer could not hear what he said. The slippers shuffled across the linoleum and the door opened a crack.

Hyer said, "Hello."

"I was afraid the telephone might have disturbed you, Mr. Hamilton. It is still very early."

"What time is it?"

"Only a little after six. A friend has just been taken very ill and I must go into Woodstock at once. I regret I cannot stay and prepare your breakfast."

Hyer's mind leaped to the woman he had heard coughing overhead. Evidently she was not stopping with Geoffrey as cook. Hyer thought of the storm and asked, "How you planning to travel?"

"I have a horse, a horse and sleigh. It is very useful here in the hills."

Hyer threw the blankets back and shivered.

"I'll go to Woodstock with you," he offered. "Haven't ridden behind a horse since I left Iowa."

He dressed while his teeth chattered. Geoffrey clumped down the stairs into the kitchen wrapping a muffler around his neck. He said, "I've put coffee on. We'll have a bite of breakfast after I've fed the mare and harnessed up."

"How much snow?"

"Not a great deal. The storm blew itself out early. There are some deep drifts."

After Geoffrey had left the house Hyer looked longingly up the stairs to the story above. The mystery of the

unannounced woman piqued him.

But instead of snooping, he turned to more practical matters and, hindered considerably by his useless left arm, he put a skillet on the crackling range, lined it with a border of thick strips of bacon and broke eggs into the grease. A few moments later Geoffrey came into the kitchen, his sharp eyes watering, his pointed nose white.

"Six below," he announced. He saw the skillet. "Now, that's kind of you."

He brought out thick cups and plates, served them, and assisted by Hyer carried them to the table in the other room.

"I've been thinking," Hyer said as they ate, "about what you told me last night. About Shannon's leaving so suddenly. Look to you as if he'd gone for some time or just a couple of days?"

"He had not packed his luggage." Geoffrey hesitated.

"What else?" Hyer asked.

"The man they arrested is a friend of Mr. Shannon's."

"From the Coast?"

"No, Mr. Hamilton. He is a local product, all that is left of some old pioneer stock. They live in a wretched shack not far from Mr. Shannon's house. I believe Mr. Shannon planned to use the family in a novel he was writing."

Hyer grinned. "Unh-hunh. Kip's got some funny ideas about getting local color."

"Mr. Shannon kept Lonnie in tobacco," Geoffrey said. "That was enough to make Lonnie his devoted slave."

"Lonnie?"

"Lonnie Binch." Geoffrey accepted the cigaret which Hyer offered. "The Binches have lived hereabouts for generations. Lonnie is the last, I believe. He has a family of six, however."

Hyer said, "Uuh-hunh," thinking. "You say this Lonnie Binch was found near Tatham's corpse?"

name, Mr. Hamilton?"

"Read about it on the train coming up. I remembered after I went to bed. It checked with what you said. Am I right?"

"Yes. So it has been in the New York papers?"

"Only thing doesn't get into 'em," Hyer said, "is the weather. His rifle the gun that did it?"

Geoffrey shook his head. "No. It had been a pistol."

"And you think the fact this Lonnie was a good friend of Shannon's and Shannon clearing out like this can maybe be put together? Like two and two?"

"There are small-minded people everywhere, Mr. Hamilton, people capable of any manner of petty malice."

Hyer said, "I wouldn't call suspicion of murder petty."

They finished breakfast and piled the dishes in the sink. Hyer thought again of the woman upstairs. But he heard no sound from overhead, and he did not once think of the thirty-two automatic on the floor in the dark bedroom until they were gliding along musically behind the mare between drifted hedge-rows.

As they rode Geoffrey talked about the country and about the people in it.

"Unfortunately, Mr. Hamilton," he said, "Woodstock has attracted a less desirable element in the past few years." Hyer thought of Kip Shannon and agreed with him silently. "Those of us who have a genuine interest in art—oh, if it be only the interest of the devoted amateur—resent the encroachment of dabblers and demireps—" He stopped suddenly and when he went on again he was talking about something else.

Hyer wondered if the comment on demireps could be connected in any way with the woman he had heard in the house. Geoffrey did not resume the subject, however, and Hyer could think of no way to reopen it skillfully.

Geoffrey spoke again of his work and described the various steps of dry

GEOFFREY looked at him sharply. "Tatham? How did you know his

point making with restrained enthusiasm.

"Perhaps you think I am queer, running on this way, but every man should be allowed some latitude of enthusiasm on the subject he does best. I trust I don't bore you."

Hyer said, "Not at all," thinking of the defensive note he had detected in Geoffrey's last comment. He had a growing desire to know more about this sharp little unobstrusive countryman with his cultured vocabulary and passionate zeal for copper plates.

"By the way," he said, "Kip mentioned a country storekeeper by the name of Dollargold. You acquainted with him?"

"Johnnie Dollargold? Yes, indeed."

"What's he like?"

"He possesses the finest pair of handle-bar mustaches in the world, Mr. Hamilton. The very finest. But make no mistake," Geoffrey went on seriously, "they bristle over a mouth from which nothing but the kindest words ever issue."

"To the Binches especially," Geoffrey said, slapping the reins on the mare's back, "Johnnie Dollargold has been guardian, counsellor, godfather, midwife and friend. Yes, I presume he would have known Mr. Shannon. Although—" He stopped.

"Although he didn't have a lot of use for Kip?"

"Perhaps Johnnie Dollargold does not understand him." A moment later Geoffrey said, pointing up a snow-bound lane, leading toward the woods, "Mr. Shannon's house is up there, back in the trees."

Hyer looked at the untracked lane and said, "Nobody home, all right."

Geoffrey let him out in front of the inn, Hyer having expressed a desire for a shave and a warm bath before attempting his return to Kingston.

"You will come back and have luncheon with me, Mr. Hamilton?" he asked, and Hyer said he hoped he might. "At any rate," the little man said, "I shall

come back here on my way home. Perhaps you will even allow me to take you in the sleigh to Kingston if the roads are impassable to cars."

"Geoffrey," Hyer told him, "you almost restore my childish faith in the great American illusion of hospitality."

TO forestall the innkeeper's suspicions, Hyer told the truth.

"I spent the night with a cheerful codger down the road a piece," he said, leaning over the desk and looking at the register, "after my hack ran off in a ditch last night. He had to go see a sick friend and brought me into town in a sled."

The innkeeper said, "Mr. Geoffrey?" and Hyer nodded. A signature on the register had caught his eye even upside down. The host slid the book around and Hyer read the name his eyes had fastened on. "Lillian Vernon, New York City," the signature read, and the sheet indicated that Miss Vernon had registered the day before.

Hyer had seen but one capital *L* like the *L* in the "Lillian" before him. And that capital *L* he had seen intermittently ever since he had first written notes across the aisle in the third grade in Fort Scott, Iowa.

While his host went to borrow a razor for him, Hyer sat in his overcoat, smoked squint-eyed, and thought about Lilith Dean. It was still dark outside.

His thoughts went back to the time when his worried, debt-ridden father had hitched his scrawny team to the spring wagon, loaded their meager goods on it and driven half across the state of Iowa with six-year-old Henry dangling his bare legs over the tail-board, to unload the wagon in the barnyard of a little place next to the Dean farm.

Before the urchin Henry had been in his new abode three days he had a fight with Lilith Dean. It was the first and last they ever had.

Beyond the Dean farm, at the crossroads, was the big brick house where

Chase Remsen lived, Chase who, before he was out of short trousers, was racing motorcycles the way other boys shot craps or played shinny-on-your-own-side.

After high school, Lilith and Chase went to college, where she played the lead in most of the dramatic performances and Chase developed his penchant for fast automobiles and trigonometric functions.

Chase drove five laps for De Palma at Altoona once when the king had a broken wrist. He was in Thirty-nine the day of the Kalamazoo crackup when seven cars piled into the wall. He came out of that with a weak shoulder, a healthy disrespect for dirt tracks and a determination to become the world's foremost authority on probability theory.

When Hyer finally convinced himself that Horace Greeley had been joking and came to New York from Chicago, he found Lilith living in a hall bedroom on Ninety-seventh Street, eating soup and crackers for dinner and studying seventeen hours a day in a dramatic school in the Fifties.

Chase, whose gods were still De Palma and Einstein, was becoming a brilliant Ph.D. at Columbia.

AT first when Lilith introduced him to Kip Shannon, Hyer had a moment's experience of the sort of thing which keeps homicide squads from wearing out chair bottoms. But Lilith, blindly in love with Kip and never doubting for an instant his genius and hidden virtues, talked to Hyer long and convincingly and Hyer restrained himself because he was fond of her.

Six months after she and Kip Shannon were married, Shannon deserted her and did not appear again until she was being headlined on Broadway in her first hit show. He disappeared again just before she went to Hollywood and Hyer talked to Lilith like a Dutch uncle but with no success.

The ballyhoo in Hollywood was al-

most too much for Lilith at first. But Kip turned up when he learned about her salary and for a time Hyer sensed that she was happy again. Then Shannon left her again, going this time to the South Seas on a yacht party and she was unhappy and discouraged to begin with.

It occurred to Hyer that Shannon must have let Lilith know he was in trouble in Woodstock. Perhaps serious trouble if she had considered it necessary to fly East.

Then it also occurred to him that if Shannon had sent for Lilith the day before, he would have told her he was in New York. Unless he had come back to Woodstock meanwhile.

The host came back apologizing for his long absence.

"You see I use a straight-edge razor, myself, Mr. Hamilton, and it took me some time to find a safety. I brought them both. You may have your choice."

Hyer was assigned to Room 22. But when he reached the second floor he paused, listened over the stair rail a moment, and tiptoed up another flight.

It was too dark for him to read the room numbers and he was compelled to click his lighter into flame. Holding the lighter like a candle, he stole along until he came to Room 37. When the lighter went out it was dark again.

Hyer rapped on the door.

Lilith Dean called, "Who is it?" as if she were wide awake.

Hyer tried the door. It was unlocked.

"If you'll get over your opéra bouffe," he said to the figure standing against the shadowy dresser, "I'll kiss you."

An incomparable voice said, "Hank!" and choked. The dresser light came on.

"Face to face," Hyer murmured.

He studied the girl who braced herself against the dresser. The same broad forehead and wide cheekbones. The same face tapering down slightly hollow cheeks to a hard chin beneath Lilith's wide serious mouth. The same candid tawny eyes.

But there was a difference.

The red hair Hyer had pulled as a boy, the red hair that ecstatic publicity men had called, "a soft ethereal aureole of brilliance" was jet black, smoothed down madonna-like to a knot low in back.

Hyer noticed the gun for the first time when it clattered to the floor from her nerveless fingers.

He blinked.

"My God, and I walked in here like Abel's twin. What's the artillery for, Lilith?"

8

BACKGROUND



LILITH asked in amazement, "How did you know I was here?"

"Intuition," Hyer answered. "And intuition tells me you're looking for Kip and intuition further tells me that Kip isn't here."

She asked, her mouth quizzical, "Are you being a little more crazy than usual, Hank?"

"Why didn't you try to get in touch with Corey instead of making a nine days wonder out of yourself?"

"I tried to telephone *you*, Hank. No one knew where you were."

"Including myself," Hyer agreed. "Well, sit down and tell Uncle Henry all about it. Kip called you up and said he was in some kind of a jam."

"Telegraphed, Hank." Then she laughed. "My knees are weak. Seeing you come in like that was like seeing a ghost."

Hyer grimaced and picked up the gun she had dropped. "Unh-hunh, wasn't it? Lucky I had sense enough to introduce myself. Why the rod?"

"Someone followed me in New York." Hyer grinned.

"Somebody smarter than Mal Range. You carrying Government secrets?"

"Perhaps if you got out and let me

dress, some breakfast might sharpen your wits."

"I've had breakfast."

"Then it would sharpen mine. I'll meet you down in the dining room in twenty minutes."

As he watched her descend the stairs exactly twenty minutes later Hyer reflected that never in his life had he known Lilith Dean to be unpunctual or at the mercy of circumstances.

They sat at a small square table with yellow doilies and after a moment of silent appraisal Lilith leaned over quickly to pat his hand.

"Good old Hank," she said, "just like the United States Marines. I feel as if the whole situation were already in—" Her eyes widened. "I told you. The very smell of breakfast whets my perception. How did you get that?" She pointed at the black sling supporting his left arm.

Hyer grinned. "Looking for you."

"You *will* walk into strange hotel rooms."

"No kidding, honey. What's the matter with Kip?"

The waitress took their orders, disappeared kitchenward.

"I got a telegram from him early Wednesday morning—day before yesterday. He said he was in trouble, Hank."

"How early?"

"About four o'clock."

"Coast time?"

"Yes."

"When had it been sent?"

"Eleven o'clock."

"Where'd it been sent from?"

"From Kingston. He asked me to send him money—a cashier's draft by airmail at once."

"How much?"

"Twenty-five thousand dollars."

Hyer whistled. "Never the piker, Kip."

"What do *you* know about it, Hank?"

"Just about as much as you do, honey. Kip's gone. You found that out, didn't you?"

SHE nodded. "They told me when I got here yesterday afternoon. I tried to phone Kip and the clerk overheard me. He said Kip had left."

"Probably just a small-minded person," Hyer opined.

"I wanted to go out to his house, but it was snowing so hard I couldn't. I decided to stay here all night. It was the only thing I could do."

"Kip specify Woodstock in the telegram?"

"Yes. And I was afraid that if he were in trouble and I came up here and was recognized it might make things harder for him. So I had the taxi-driver take me to a little hairdressing establishment away over on the East Side and had my hair dyed."

"Serve you right if it all falls out by the roots. Well, somebody follow you to the barber shop?"

"Yes. I saw a man loitering near the door when I came out. I remembered seeing him when I left the Biltmore. A short swarthy man with horrendous eyebrows and long arms. My taxi was waiting and took me straight to the station. I didn't see the man again."

Hyer shook his head and grinned. "You been in the pictures too long, honey. What were you doing with a rod?" he asked, curious.

"I bought it in Kingston," she answered steadily. "In a pawn shop. After I had seen that man trailing me I was afraid Kip might be in real danger."

Hyer murmured something. Then he squinted at her and rubbed his chin.

"You have been struck by a random thought," Lilith commented. "The signs are infallible."

"A couple of 'em," he admitted. "You know a guy name of McRae?"

She nodded. "Kip introduced him to me last summer. What is the other?"

"Other what?"

"The other random thought. Or were you bragging?"

Hyer squinted at her thoughtfully. "It look funny to you, Kip's *wiring* you

for money when he could've telephoned?"

She stared across the table at him, her brows rising. "Why do you say that?"

"The wire come collect?"

Lilith nodded.

"It's just as easy to reverse charges on a phone call," Hyer commented.

Lilith nodded. "I hadn't thought of that."

"And if that's the way it is," Hyer went on, "how much good do you think it's going to do Kip, your running around here like a mama hen?"

She tightened her lips.

Hyer relented. "It's a good hunch, honey. It just came to me. And there may be something in it. But as a matter of fact, Kip's down in New York, holed up in Corey Hilton's flat. If you'd called Corey when you went through New York scattering newshounds like a paper chase, you've found out."

Her face alight, she seized his hand. "You're not fooling, Hank?"

Hyer sneered. "Take a look at this arm and this hole in my head if you think I'm fooling."

He told her how he and Corey Hilton had interviewed Kip Wednesday evening, omitting the details of Kip's appearance and fright. He recounted his experience in the hall and the wreck in which his wrist had been broken.

"I went to a hotel and slept some of it out of me," he concluded. "Say, what time you get here yestreday?"

"About four o'clock."

"Before the snow?"

"It was already snowing hard here."

"When you found Kip was gone why didn't you get out before you got blizzarded in?"

"I thought Kip might come back. I really didn't know what to do, Hank."

"O. K. Well, I spent the night with a guy down the road that draws pictures and he brought me on this morning. I recognized your fine Italian hand on the register."

"Is Kip safe in New York, Hank?"

"How should I know?" Hyer asked, nettled.

"Call up and find out for me, Hank."

HYER made a face.

"Please, Hank."

Together they went to the desk and Hyer picked up the phone. He called Corey Hilton's apartment in New York. Lilith watched him anxiously.

"Hello Corey? . . . Sure, I'm all right. . . . Oh, in a hospital waiting for them to take my other leg off. . . . Hell, Corey, can't you take a joke? What happened to you? . . . Unh-hunh. . . . *Hunh-unh.* . . . No, I'll tell you all about it when I get back to town. Listen, is the boy friend still there? . . . Well, go look again. Lilith won't believe me if—Sure, she's here. . . . O. K. He wants to talk to you," Hyer said, handing her the phone.

Lilith said, "Corey. I tried to call you yesterday. . . . Hank told me. . . . Some time today, I think. I'll phone you before we leave. Kip is all right? . . . No, please don't tell him I called. . . . Yes, he's safe and sound. He has a broken arm, I think. . . . Yes. . . . Yes, I will. Before we leave. . . . Good-by."

She said, "He was considerably worried about you, Hank."

Hyer grunted. "He ought to be. He got me into this."

Lilith looked at his damaged arm and head and smiled in sympathy. Then she studied his face. "Who is paying you, Hank?"

Hyer blinked. "Paying me? Why?"

"Don't be heroic, Hank."

Hyer said lamely, "I was looking for you," and grinned.

"You had no idea I was here. And fond of me as you are, I don't believe you would have come on Kip's account."

Hyer said, "You win. Come over here."

They sat in two chairs before the fireplace and he told of his conversation with Yellow Gloves and the fee offered him to locate Shannon.

"Now," he said, "you might as well get the whole picture. Just before Kip

cleared out of Woodstock Wednesday morning a constable was shot and killed. There's nothing yet to tie Kip up with it, but people around here are talking."

Lilith was pale. "Do you believe—?"

"Hell," Hyer said testily, "I don't believe anything I'm not paid to. But I'm going out and do some snooping around."

"I'm going with you."

"Yes, you are."

"I am."

"Listen, sister. Even with that fire on your head put out, you're likely to be spotted by every high school girl within three thousand miles of Times Square. You're going to stay holed up here until I get back with whatever information I get my hands on."

Lilith was on her feet. She said, "I'll be with you as soon as I get my coat."

"Nix, kid, nix. You park right here in the lobby. No kidding. Somebody's got the Indian sign on you and—"

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"See a guy named Cash and Carry or something. Runs a store a couple of miles out of town."

"Do you expect to walk?"

He wrinkled his nose. "Don't rub it in. I'll hire a car."

"You know you can't drive a car."

"Hire a driver, too."

"I'm going along and drive for you," she said with decision. "From your looks I think you need protection about as much as I do."

9

JOHNNIE DOLLARGOLD



AT length Hyer found himself climbing stiffly out of the car at a neat, shoveled path leading from the road to Johnnie Dollargold's small neat roadside enterprise.

"Maybe I ought to've gone over the routine with you a couple

of times," he said doubtfully to Lilith as he assisted her out. "You called yourself Lilith over the phone back there. Better get on to your lines if—"

"I did nothing of the kind, Hank Hyer. You were the one that said Lilith to Corey."

"O. K. Just watch yourself from now on, that's all. You meant all right." He opened the door and held it for her.

They entered a tiny tidy room, pungent with spices and the clean crisp odors of commerce. In a rocking chair by the stove sat a plump jolly old lady with white hair, a face round and smooth as a ripe pippin and absolutely no teeth. Beside her stood a small fierce man, his bowed legs encased in gleaming boots and spotless riding breeches.

But no visitor would have noticed Johnnie Dollargold's boots. His fascinated gaze would never have dropped below the little man's fierce-eyed face with its stiffly projecting mustaches which sprang straight out from his upper lip only to curve sharply up at their incredible points as if they were supported by some invisible framework.

Hyer, always alert to the temper of an interview, came to the point without badinage or subterfuge. He said, "You're friends of Lonnie Binch. You want to help him. So do we."

Johnnie Dollargold glared at them, his head lowered slightly like that of a hesitant longhorn.

"Iss the name Hamilton?" he asked.

"The name," Hyer said smoothly, "is Hyer." He removed his hat and smiled ingratiatingly at Mama Dollargold whose pink pippin face dimpled. "Allow me to present Miss Vernon."

The mustaches still bristled.

"Your name iss not Hamilton?"

Mama Dollargold said, "Papa."

"What gave you the idea my name was Hamilton?" Hyer asked.

Again the toothless pippin said, "Papa," warningly. She smiled at them. "Lonnie didn't done it," Mama Dollargold offered.

"I'm sure of that," Lilith agreed warmly. "But unless we can do something for him, perhaps they can make it look as though he did."

"Where does Lonnie live?" Hyer asked, and Johnnie Dollargold jerked a thumb over his shoulder. "How far?" Hyer asked.

"Two mile. You vant you should get t'rough t'at snow, ha?"

Hyer grinned and said, "You'd be surprised how I can get through snow," and unaccountably Johnnie Dollargold's fierce-eyed face was suddenly wreathed in smiles.

"T'ey look all right, ha, Mama?" he asked. "Maybe you should get a cup hot tea for t' lady. And for t' shentleman—"

Hyer said, "I'll take whatever you do."

MAMA DOLLARGOLD bustled out through the back door into the little cottage adjoining the store.

"Did you see Lonnie Tuesday night?" Hyer asked, and Johnnie Dollargold answered, "Yess."

"When?"

"Nine o'clock."

Johnnie Dollargold's face tightened. His mustaches bristled once more. "I t'ink he vas go to zee a frient."

"He didn't say anything about Tat-ham, the guy that got shot?"

"Not t'at time."

"He did say something later?"

"Yess. Lonnie, he come back here 'bout ten-t'irty. He tell me he zeen Tat-ham t'en."

"Where?"

Johnnie Dollargold hesitated. "At t'at frient's," he answered.

"Who was the friend?"

Johnnie Dollargold shrugged. "Oh, I t'ink his name iss Shannon."

Hyer threw a quick glance at Lilith. She had flushed and her tawny eyes were anxious. But she made no move.

"When did he come back?" Hyer asked.

"Shust a liddle while."

Lilith asked, "Did you know Mr. Shannon?"

"I know him. Not so well."

"He a friend of Tatham's?" Hyer inquired.

"T'at may be."

Mama Dollargold came into the store bearing a bright steaming teapot and an earthen jug. "Ach," she said, "iss so kalt oudt."

She took fragile cups from a shelf below the counter, poured a sample from the teapot into one and said, "So?" to Lilith. When Lilith nodded, smiling, she filled it with fragrant brew. Two others she poured from the jug, a clear golden liquor, and handed to Hyer and his host. Then she poured herself a cup of tea, settled in her rocking chair and sighed happily. "Iss so nice, visitors," she told them.

"When Lonnie came back the second time," Hyer asked, "what did he say? About seeing Tatham at Shannon's?"

"T'e zecond time, vy he say t'ey vas trinking. He vas liddle bit scared, I t'ink."

"Scared of what?"

Johnnie Dollargold shrugged. "May-be t'at girl, she scare Lonnie."

Lilith asked, "What girl? Was there a girl at Mr. Shannon's?"

"I t'ink maybe t'ere vas," Johnnie Dollargold answered and his wife cautioned, "Papa."

"There was a girl there a good deal of the time?" Hyer suggested.

"Maybe," the little man hazarded. "Lonnie, he ditn' like t' girl. Me, I nefer zeen her."

"So Tatham and Shannon and a girl were drinking at Mr. Shannon's, and Lonnie came back here and acted scared about something?" Hyer said.

"He ditn' zay vy."

Hyer asked, "What sort of a guy was Tatham?"

This loosed the little man's tongue. He had had no use for Tatham. That worthy had been in addition to a special officer several other things, none of them admirable. He had taken especial

interest in tormenting the Binch clan. It appeared that from a starkly legal aspect they were squatters.

"T'en Tatham got interested in t'em counterfeiters undt I guess he let Lonnie alone after t'at."

Hyer said, "Counterfeiters?"

Johnnie Dollargold grunted. "Zo he zay."

Hyer asked, "Anybody else mention anything about counterfeiters?"

"Nah. He vas crazy."

HYER and Lilith graciously declined Mama Dollargold's invitation to stay to dinner in the little cottage behind the store, and after a few more queries, chiefly about geography, the detective led the way back to their waiting car.

As they slipped and slid over the snowy roads on their way back to town, some hidden excitement replaced Hyer's nervousness at the car's behavior. He stared squint-eyed into the distance, his good hand tapping thoughtfully now and then on his knee.

"Hank," Lilith said, "you don't believe that Kip—"

Hyer said, "Sure," absently, and then jerked his attention back to her. "Don't be silly. Kip didn't do it. But if I told why I thought so you wouldn't like it any better."

"You think Kip is a coward, don't you, Hank?"

"If you want the truth, unh-hunh, I do. Sometimes I make mistakes."

She was silent a moment.

"Funny," he observed, "how news gets around."

"Yes?"

"Dollargold calling me Hamilton."

"It was the name you used at the inn."

Hyer said, "Maybe I was a sap. Slow down," he directed. "That place is right along here somewhere."

Lilith drove a hundred yards in second gear until Hyer said, "There it is. Can you pull over and stop?"

"What next?" she asked, leaning on

the wheel and looking up the lane to where a corner of roof and a dead chimney showed through the trees.

"Little snowshoe practice."

"And after that?"

"Housebreaking," Hyer answered comfortably. "That's Kip's place."

She gasped. "This is where he lived?"

"So I was told this morning. Come on," he said, climbing out and eying the drifts for a possible trail. "Maybe Kip left enough grub in the house for dinner."

Silently she followed as he ploughed a way through the snow along the curving lane leading to the house in the trees. In a few minutes the road was hidden from them and the house showed more clearly.

It was a small cottage, snugly built for year-round occupancy. There was a screened-in porch whitened solidly by driven snow. A shutter, blown to by the blizzard the night before, gave the house a desolate, one-eyed appearance. Untracked drifts lay all about it.

Hyer floundered to the porch and Lilith followed him.

"What do you expect to find here, Hank?" she asked.

"Nothing," Hyer answered. "Then we won't be disappointed."

He glanced at her and saw that she was pale, her tawny eyes suffering. "Cheer up, honey," he added, "you're not going to see any ghosts."

"Oh, but I am," she whispered, and Hyer shut his lips hard as he fumbled with a skelton key at the door.

They entered a cold cheerless room, littered with untidy bachelor debris. Ashes from the dead fire had blown outward over the hearth and the bare floor during the night's furious wind. On a table stood unwashed dishes, the remains of a meal for two. Under a window was a desk bearing a portable typewriter and scattered sheets of yellow paper. To the right of it on the wall hung a box telephone.

Lilith sat on a corner of the desk, her

fingers loath at first to touch the scattered papers, then picking them up one by one and arranging them in order. Hyer walked about the room.

UNDER a chair at one side of the fireplace he found a highball glass. On the buffet stood two similar glasses, a pinch bottle with an inch of whiskey in it and an empty siphon. He went into the bedroom and looked at the unmade bed. Except for the bed, a straight chair, a washstand bearing a pitcher and a small carpet in the middle of floor, the room was bare. Hyer opened a door and peered into a large closet. Five suits hung from a rod and shirts and underclothing from hooks about the walls. On the floor were several pairs of shoes and a pile of laundry. Behind the suits stood a trunk with a suitcase balanced on it. Hyer leaned in and juggled the trunk. It was empty. So was the suitcase.

He went back into the front room and threw a glance at Lilith, who was reading Kip's interrupted manuscript, started to say something, checked himself and walked into the kitchen. This too was barren and untidy and he found nothing to engage his attention until he reached the door leading to the back porch. Here he stopped, stared at the floor, knelt.

Just in front of the door were three spots the size and color of pennies. Hyer looked back across the floor. In the center was another spot and near the door to the front room still another.

He rose and went quickly back to the room where Lilith sat reading. Here he scrutinized the floor with greater care than before. Near the fireplace where the blown ashes had scattered thickest he knelt and blew. The light ashes rose in a cloud and floated into the fireplace, disclosing a section of hearth and floor which had been obviously scrubbed.

Lilith, watching him, came across the room, a sheaf of typewritten pages in her hand. She looked at the freshly cleaned floor and bit her lip.

"Hank," she said, her voice unsteady, "could there have been blood there?"

"Not only could but was," Hyer answered. "What's in that stuff?" he asked, indicating the pages in her hand.

"It seems to be the beginning of a novel."

"We'll take it back to town," Hyer said. He grinned. "With all the local color he's picked up since Tuesday night, he'll be wanting to work on it."

Before they left the house Hyer returned to the fireplace and poked with a stick among the ashes. Far in one corner, in the soft white drift of ash, Hyer's probing stick encountered something hard. He drew the object out. It was a small phial bearing a Los Angeles druggist's label but unmarked as to contents. There were a few drops of some colorless liquid in the bottom. Hyer took out the cork and sniffed. His eyes were puzzled.

Lilith asked, "What did you find?"

Hyer hesitated an instant before he answered. "Oh, some kind of eye-drops." She did not press him.

Carrying the phial with great care by the tips of his fingers, Hyer went to the buffet and got the whiskey bottle. Both of these he wrapped loosely in paper from the desk and snapped rubber bands about them. He dropped the two packages into his overcoat pockets on the guns he had taken from the wrecked gangsters the morning before.

Then, just as he was opening the door to leave, Hyer's eyes fell on the wall phone. He left the door and crossed to it. The mouthpiece was bent down slightly and one side of the rim was edged with white.

Hyer took out his knife and an unopened package of cigarets. Holding the packet awkwardly with his slung arm he slit it lengthwise, dumped the cigarets into his pocket and flattened out the wrapping. Then he carefully stripped the tin foil from its printed paper cover and wadded the cover up, dropping it in the pocket after the cigarets.

Calling Lilith, he instructed her to hold the tin foil in the palm of her hand under the mouthpiece while he scraped the whitened rim with his knife. Tiny particles of white, mixed with black rubber parings, dropped into the tin foil. When he had finished, Hyer folded the edges of the tin foil toward the middle so that they overlapped, folded the ends in and compressed it into a small flat square which he put in his vest pocket.

Lilith asked, frowning, "What in the world are you doing?"

"Maybe," Hyer answered shortly, "I'm doing your husband a favor in spite of myself. Got the masterpiece? O. K. Let's go."

10

McRAE'S BLONDE



AS Hyer and Lilith floundered back toward the road a jingle of sleighbells, distant at first, rapidly grew louder until, as they emerged at the parked car, the jingling was right upon them. The driver of the sleigh caught sight of them and a smile of recognition lighted his sharp features. He reined in the smoking mare.

Hyer said, "Not that I didn't believe you, Geoffrey, but somebody said they thought Shannon came back yesterday some time. Miss Vernon," he said, "allow me to present Mr. Geoffrey. Mr. Geoffrey's got the doubtful honor of having saved my life from the maw of Boreas."

Lilith smiled and the little man's Adam's apple moved.

"Did you find Mr. Shannon, Mr. Hamilton?"

Hyer said no, it had been a wild goose chase.

"I stopped at the inn," Geoffrey told them. "I was afraid you had started

back for Kingston. Would you and Miss—?”

“Vernon,” Hyer said.

“Of course. Would you and Miss Vernon consider honoring me at luncheon, Mr. Hamilton?”

“As a matter of fact,” Hyer said, “we would. I was going to stop by anyway. I must’ve left my cigaret case somewhere in the bedroom.

They followed the sleigh along the snowy ruts and turned in at the gate through which Hyer had stumbled to sanctuary the night before.

When they entered the kitchen Hyer noted that the coffeepot stood on the stove in a different position from the one it had occupied when they left that morning. There was also a cup and saucer in the sink which had not been there when he last looked.

And when he went into the bedroom the gun which he had laid on the floor beneath the cot was gone.

“Did you find the cigaret case, Mr. Hamilton?”

Hyer said he had. “By the way,” he added, “you didn’t make a special trip into the village just now for me, did you?”

“Oh, no. I was only returning from my friend’s when you met me.”

“Pretty sick?” Hyer asked.

The little man looked worried. “They are afraid of pneumonia.”

While the little man prepared luncheon and the crisp appetizing odor of frying ham floated through the house, Lilith drew him out on the subject of his art.

“It is a great pleasure, Miss Vernon,” he told her, “to be able to converse with a woman of your insight and appreciation.”

“Perhaps you knew George Bellows?”

THE little man shook his head. “That pleasure was denied me,” he confessed. “I came to Woodstock much later.”

“How long’ve you lived around here?” Hyer put in.

“About five years. In the eyes of the older residents I presume I still have the status of an interloper.”

“You live here the year around, do you?” Lilith asked.

“Summer and winter.”

“Next time you’re down in the city,” Hyer suggested, “you better call on me and let me return some of this hospitality.”

“I shall be glad to, Mr. Hamilton. Where do you live in the city?”

“Oh, I’ve been living at the Park Central this winter,” Hyer answered, mindful suddenly of his *nom-de-chasse*. “I’m going to move next week. I’ll drop you a card when I do. You have many tramps drop in on you the way I did last night?”

“No, Mr. Hamilton. You are the first caller I have had in some time. With Mr. Shannon gone I shall be lonely. If you get in touch with him, you will deliver my message, won’t you?” he said meaningfully.

“You knew Mr. Shannon well?” Lilith asked before Hyer could reply.

“Rather well. We had been neighbors now for more than two months. I saw him perhaps twice a week.”

They were at the table now, Hyer sitting not where he had that morning, but facing Lilith, at right angles to Geoffrey. In this position he could see the flat surface of an oblong box propped against the chest, a box perhaps three feet long and eighteen inches wide. On it was pasted an express label. It bore a name that caught the detective’s attention, “R. Harvey, care of Grant Geoffrey, R. F. D., Woodstock, N. Y.”

Hyer said, “Excuse me for being curious, but I couldn’t help seeing the name on that box. Seems to me Shannon mentioned a Harvey in a letter. Said—” He hesitated, rubbing his chin.

Geoffrey raised his eyebrows. “I’m afraid you must be mistaken, Mr. Hamilton. Mr. Harvey has been gone since August. He stays with me now and then.”

"An etcher, too?" Lilith asked.

Geoffrey smiled. "No. Mr. Harvey's talents run in slightly different channels. Quite a character, too."

Hyer tried to read the return address on the box, but could not make out the smaller printing. When they rose from the table and Lilith was helping the little man clear away the dishes, he loitered to the package and deciphered the return label. The box had been sent from a hardware and sporting goods store in Scranton.

Apologizing for their haste in leaving so soon after the meal, Lilith put on her coat and hat at Hyer's bidding and the three of them walked out to the rented car.

"I am sorry to see you folks go," the little man said, his Adam's apple working. "It has been a real pleasure to have you."

"If I locate Shannon, I'll come back with him," Hyer promised. "Anyway you're going to drop in and see me when you get back to New York."

Lilith backed cautiously out of the snowy yard and maneuvered the car into the ruts of the road. The little man stood and watched them as long as they were in sight and Lilith waved back to him once.

"Why were you so interested in that package, Hank?" she asked.

Hyer grinned. "It was the name took my eye."

"Do you know the man?"

"Maybe I know him," Hyer answered evasively. "But if I don't, something tells me we've got some friends in common. I'm going to hightail back to New York and check up, anyway."

They settled their account at the inn, the clerk sending a boy to Lilith's room for her bag. She explained to Hyer that she had left the rest of her luggage at the Biltmore. Learning they could get a train out of Kingston in less than an hour, they went by the garage, picked up a driver to bring the rented car back and set out over the snowy hills.

They paid for the car at the railroad

station in Kingston and went inside only to learn that the express for New York had been delayed by the snow and would be late.

A ring from the telephone interrupted the agent while he was talking to them.

He hung up and confided to Hyer, "It's enough to drive you nuts, questions people can ask. There's a dame wants to know if she can get here with a horse and sleigh in time to catch Number Nine."

Hyer observed, "You can catch a lot of things with a horse and sleigh," and walked back to Lilith.

"You did a lousy job of putting the fritz on your famous identity," he told her. "Maybe you ought to take the veil and go back like an Arab squaw."

"I don't care so much now if people recognize me, Hank—now I know that Kip isn't in immediate danger."

Hyer grunted. "Can you take care of yourself here if I scout around town a little bit?" he asked. "Got any reading matter?"

"I'll go with you."

"Nix," Hyer said with finality. "Not this time. You're likely to cramp my style. Buy a magazine and stay put right here where Tickets in there can keep his eye on you through the window. Maybe," he squinted, "I ought to check you in there with him."

"I'm perfectly able to take care of myself. After all," wickedly, "I haven't any broken bones to show for my—"

"O. K. O. K. I'll be back before they run the snowplows through."

HE was fortunate enough to find the same sergeant on duty, gazing on the world with his round-eyed expression of perennial amazement.

"You git there all right?" the sergeant inquired, staring at Hyer in surprise.

"I did," Hyer agreed, "but the guy that started with me's still trying to dig his huskies out of a drift."

"You wantta see Binch again, Mr.

Hyer?" asked the sergeant.

"He loosened up any?"

"Not so's you can notice it, he ain't. Maybe you found out something up there?"

"Snow's too deep," Hyer confessed. "Covers up tracks. Have to wait for a January thaw. But I thought I'd like another whack at Lonnie before I went back home."

"Maybe that eatin' tobacco you give him'll make him kinda friendly up with you," the sergeant suggested.

Lonnie sat as Hyer had left him seventeen hours before. The sole change from his motionless dejection the night before could be discerned in the slow rhythmic cycle of his jaws.

"Lonnie," Hyer said, "I want you to tell me two things." When the mountaineer paid no heed to this, Hyer added, "You remember me?"

"I mind who yuh be," Lonnie answered slowly without looking up.

Hyer said, "O. K. Now listen. Were those tracks, those woman tracks you were following, heading toward that dead man or away from him?"

Lonnie chewed for a moment in deep thought. He said, "They was acomin' away from it."

"And they went away, up over the hill?" Hyer probed.

Lonnie thought this over. He nodded.

"Now," Hyer said, "the tracks had to come up to the corpse somehow in order to go away from it. That right?"

Lonnie studied his face a long mo-

ment. "I reckon that ther's right, mister."

"O. K. What direction did they come from?"

This time Lonnie swallowed twice slowly, a long interval between, before he replied.

"I don't rightly recollect, mister."

Hyer said, "Be a shame for me to tell about those traps, now, wouldn't it, Lonnie?" and the frightened doglike glance leaped up again. "Were they coming from Mr. Shannon's house?" Hyer asked point-blank.

Lonnie's jaws stopped. One gaunt hand fumbled in his curling beard. But his eyes remained on Hyer.

"They were?" Hyer demanded, and Lonnie nodded.

Hyer said, "O. K. Now were those woman tracks on top of the other tracks or underneath?"

Lonnie's mouth dropped. "You knowed about them ther other tracks, too?" he asked in panic.

Hyer said, "Sure. Were the woman tracks on top of 'em?"

Lonnie nodded. He whispered, "Yes—sir. They was."

"After you covered those other tracks up," Hyer went on, "what did you do then?"

"Arter I kivered—?" Lonnie quavered.

"Unh-hunh. You covered up the other tracks, didn't you, Lonnie?"

[Turn page]

CAN YOUR SCALP PASS THE
**FINGER-NAIL
TEST?**



TRY IT! Scratch your head! If you find signs of dryness, loose ugly dandruff, you need Wildroot Cream-Oil hair tonic. Grooms hair...relieves dryness...removes loose dandruff!

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Slowly the mountaineer's fright left him. His eyes fixed wonderingly on Hyer's face, he nodded.

"What'd you do next?" Hyer asked.

"I looked in the winders. Then I clumb back to wher he was layin'. I thought it mought help some to figger out if I looked at it."

"What did you see through the windows?"

"Nothin', mister."

"Shannon was gone?"

Lonnie noded.

"His car was gone, too?"

Another nod.

"But you didn't cover up the *woman* tracks leading *away* from the corpse, the tracks that went up over the hill."

A sudden glint of spirit showed in Lonnie's sorrowful eyes. He said, "I never done that."

Hyer asked, "When you were at Mr. Shannon's earlier that night, before you went back to Johnnie Dollargold's, what did you see then, Lonnie?"

"Didn't see nothin'."

Hyer said, "Sure you did. You saw Mr. Shannon. Who else?"

Lonnie thought long and earnestly. His fingers combed through the curly beard on his cheeks. "Never saw nobody," he protested.

"Did you see the woman, too?"

"She warn't ther," Lonnie answered, looking at Hyer.

"But Mr Shannon was? And Tatham?"

Lonnie's eyes grew sullen. His long arms dropped between his knees again.

Hyer stayed a few minutes longer, but found it impossible to get another word out of the hulking mountaineer.

When Hyer returned to the station he told Lilith of his interview with Lonnie.

"This guy," he observed ironically, "makes you and Corey look like a couple of Boy Scouts. *He's* willing to take a chance on the hot seat for Kip."

Tears sprang to Lilith's tawny eyes. "Why didn't you let me go with you, Hank?"

"You'd've queered it. He's skirt-shy."

"Hank," Lilith said intently, "there was a woman in that house where we had lunch."

Hyer raised his eyebrows. "Intuition?"

"Partly. I sensed it the moment I went in. A woman usually can. But I wasn't sure until I was carrying the dishes out. Then I saw a cigaret butt in the sink."

Hyer nodded. "Geoffrey doesn't keep 'em."

"The butt," Lilith said, "had a ring of lip rouge on it."

They heard a whistle and Hyer picked up her traveling bag.

The train rolled deliberately into the station, its clatter muffled by deep drifts piled high on the front of the engine, frozen rime coating tender and cars. A harried flagman pounded open a door and threw up the hinged floor. Hyer and Lilith were the only passengers to board.

As they walked back along the corridor into the Pullman, Hyer suddenly stooped and peered through the window. A chime of sleighbells had come to him over the panting of the engine and the shouts of the train crew.

At the edge of the platform stood Geoffrey's mare and sleigh. From the sleigh there descended a fabulous mink coat, its high collar framing the exquisite face of Venice Malinov.

The girl called something to Geoffrey as she ran toward the train and Hyer heard the little man shout, "Glad to do it." Craning his neck, he saw the mink coat disappear up the steps. There were voices in the vestibule and the the door to the car ahead slammed.

Hyer went back to Lilith grinning.

"Hank," she said, "I've been thinking about what you said back there at lunch. Why won't you tell me what interested you so in that name Harvey?" She frowned at him. "I've as much of a stake in this as you have, Hank."

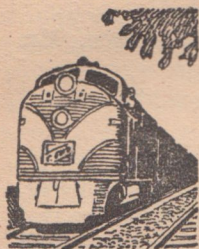
Hyer raised his eyebrows.

"As much of a stake? That's what you think," he said. "Look at this." He took out his wallet and unbuttoned the flap under which he had stowed Yellow Gloves' seven hundred and fifty dollars.

The pocket contained eight strips of newspaper, cut and folded to simulate bills.

11

JOLI SOURIRE



"I AM looking," Lilith said. "They're not very impressive."

For five minutes Hyer swore softly with a passion and artistry approaching genius.

"I suspect," Lilith said, "that this has something to do with finances. The only other time I remember you so angry was when the little Mexican dancer picked your pocket in Caliente."

Hyer interrupted his muted profanity. He glowered at her. "Then paste this on the same page of your memory book," he snarled. "Only unless I'm something out of the Wizard of Oz this muchacha's got yellow hair."

"To be exact, someone rifled your purse?"

"To be exact," Hyer said, his tone suppressed, furious, "somebody lifted my wad."

"How much were you carrying?"

"In that pocket," Hyer grumbled, "I had seven hundred and fifty bucks. Just three-quarters of one grand."

Lilith's tawny eyes widened. Then she said with a wry smile, "And you wanted protection for *me*."

Hyer, oblivious of her thrust, sat hunched down, nursing his slung arm, glaring ahead through narrowed eyes. Twice the tip of his tongue ran over his lips. His mouth hard, he rose.

"If I don't get back by the time we hit Weehawken," he said, "you grab a

cab and hike over to the Barnham Hotel on East Forty-ninth. Be sure you take a cab out of the line. Maybe you better wire Corey to meet you. And don't sign it—sign my name," he said.

Lilith put a hand to her mouth. "Oh, I forgot to phone Corey. I promised him I would when we started.

"Send that wire, then."

"Where are *you* going?"

"Mashing," Hyer said viciously. His eyes glinted. "I'm going to make myself into the swellest lady-killer this side of Clark Gable. And you can put the emphasis on either one of those words," he added.

Lilith stared after him with puzzled eyes as he lurched down the aisle and disappeared in the corridor leading to the vestibule.

Hyer crossed the swaying platform between their car and the one ahead. He noted with a lift of his lip that the latter bore the euphonious name, *Lucretzia*.

He opened the door, stepped inside out of the freezing spume and the snow-softened clatter of the trucks. From a vantage point just beyond the woman's lavatory he surveyed the occupants. He could see the fabulous mink coat and the swirl of Venice Malinov's yellow hair over a chair back, but the seats on either side of her were occupied. So was the one directly across the aisle.

Hyer glanced at the end place nearest him, noted that its number was odd, did a rapid bit of calculation, and withdrew to await the passage of the porter. In a few moments this worthy came into the corridor.

"George," Hyer accosted him, "how would ten bucks look to you?"

The porter's eyes and cheeks bulged. "Cash money?"

"Cash money." Hyer took a bill from his pocket.

The porter contemplated the bill, his eyes popping. He grinned slowly. "Look lak you wants suhvice on disyere train, mistuh, sho do." He cackled.

"All I want you to do is tell the lady

in seat eleven that there's been a mistake and she should really be in number twenty-seven."

"Fo' ten buckaroos, mistah, Ah shuffles disyere cah lak a deck o' playin' cahds," the porter said, beaming.

"I don't want it shuffled. I just want a queen cut out."

The porter cackled and slapped his thigh. "Queen o' hahts, boss?"

"Queen of jacks," Hyer snapped. "Scram."

FOUR minutes later he stepped from his concealment, lurched heavily and, hindered by his useless arm, collapsed into the chair next to Venice, tripping over her trim ankles. He raised his hat, started to apologize and caught himself.

"Well, well," Hyer said, "we do run into each other in the most unexpected places."

Venice Malinov looked up from her magazine. Her enameled perfection was untouched. Her modeled lips and delicately arched brows moved. The crystalline cobalt of her eyes hardened minutely.

"I beg your pardon."

"McRae didn't take time to introduce us," Hyer explained, still grinning. "In his place Wednesday evening."

"I am afraid I—"

"For a little girl that gets around the way you do," Hyer observed, "you're slow on the uptake."

"Shall I call the conductor?"

"Suit yourself, sister. I can be pretty entertaining without a stooge."

He waited a moment, grinning into her cobalt eyes. They did not flinch. Two tiny lines appeared at the corners of her mouth and her dainty lips tightened.

"From what Kip said," Hyer remarked easily, "I sort of didn't expect to see you in this neck of the woods, Venice."

Her deftly shaded lids drooped. "You seem to have considerably the advantage of me in this—encounter, Mr.—"

"Hyer, Henry Hyer. As for that advantage, I don't know. It depends on how you look at it."

"You mentioned a stooge, Mr. Hyer. I am inclined to believe that if your riddles are no more ingenious than that you had better call—"

"Skip it. Where's Kip?"

"Kip?"

"Kip Shannon. Mal Range dropped a hint you and Kip were something or other. Mal gets his dates mixed once a year. He filled this year's quota in August. He's safe until New Year's. Where's Kip?"

"When you go to a horse race, Mr. Hyer, do you just pull numbers out of a hat, or do you always back the longest odds?"

"I made thirty-five grand on a sixty-to-one shot once," Hyer answered. "Runs in the family, I guess. Like if I were to tell you right now that you haven't the slightest idea where Kip Shannon is and would gladly take out your right eye and hand it to me if I told you."

The shaded lids drooped again and her mouth drew tight in a smile.

"You overestimate my curiosity, highly."

Hyer shrugged.

"Folks have been known to do screwy things for twenty-five grand, Venice."

"Just what do you expect out of this?"

"Information."

"You flatter me."

"I couldn't," Hyer confessed. "And if I tried they'd probably throw me off the train."

"For trying to make—"

"Never mind," Hyer interrupted. "You needed be specific. What's it worth to you to know where Shannon is?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing but every stitch on your back, including that flossy pussycat."

"You are insulting."

"I'm trying to be. What sort of a line'd you give Geoffrey?"

She smiled lazily. "Mr. Geoffrey is a very kind gentleman."

Hyer returned to the tack he had first adopted. "Kip doesn't talk an awful lot, but when he gets on women he's likely to exaggerate."

"If you are trying to threaten me, you might as well know that my reputation is not my most vulnerable point."

"You wear your reputation in your neck?"

"No. Nor any other place you are likely to get at it easily, Mr. Hyer."

Hyer said, "Maybe." He studied her a moment and shrugged. "Well," he confessed, "I did the best I could to give you a steer. Don't expect Kip to run up to you in Times Square and throw his arms around your neck. As a matter of fact maybe you better not expect to run into him anywhere. He's kind of gunshy since Tuesday night."

He had been waiting for the train to strike a curve. Now, as the car leaned slightly on the bank, he rose, lurched and fell forward, landing almost in Venice's lap.

He said, "Whoops, sorry. That wasn't in the rehearsal. Well, I'll be seeing you, honey."

AS soon as he was back in his own Pullman, he dodged into the smoking room, went into the toilet, locked the door behind him and took Venice's neat fashionable purse from the black silk sling supporting his broken wrist.

Inside the purse he found a smaller one closed with a zipper. He pulled the zipper open and took out seven hundred-dollars bills.

"Seven hundred," Hyer murmured. "Not a bad discount, considering everything." Then, grinning, he took the strips of newspaper from his own billfold, wrote "cancelled" boldly across all but one of them and slipped them into the small purse, which he closed and replaced in the larger one.

"Where did you go?" Lilith asked when he returned.

"To the end of the rainbow," Hyer

answered. "Well," he qualified, "fourteen-fifteenths of the way."

When they debarked in Weehawken Hyer gave the purse to a redcap, pointed out the mink coat and said its wearer had left her bag on the car. From the window of their cab he saw Venice take the purse, saw her look sharply about for him and then step into a taxi. There was no immediate sequel to his raid.

Corey Hilton met them.

While they rode to Manhattan and uptown to the quiet hotel Hyer had picked for Lilith, the detective outlined what had happened since he and Corey Hilton had been parted violently the Wednesday night before.

"Never mind," he said, when the reporter would have questioned him, "it'll keep. You can stick around and pump Lilith while I get down to business. What's happened on the home front?"

Corey Hilton said, "Range got a poke in the jaw," and his chubby face reddened.

"Do tell. Specific or just on general principles?"

"Both." Corey Hilton told them of his interview with Range and lingered happily over its outcome.

Hyer turned to Lilith, squinting. "That true?" he inquired.

"What, Hank?"

"That about a mess maybe queering you on the Coast?"

She said, "I really don't care. I'd be almost happy if they broke my contract. I'm sick of it. I want to come back to Broadway."

Hyer said, "Unh-hunh," without conviction. "Well," to Corey Hilton, "they're sixty-seven legitimate ways to put the Indian sign on Mal Range. And," he added, "if I had to use one of those ways I'd think I was slipping. He won't bother you, honey. Kip still hiding under the bed, Corey?"

"He hasn't been out of the house since he came."

Hyer said, "That's one guy knows when he's well off. Now if some of the checkermen on this board'll just stay

put as well—"

"What are you going to do, Hank?"

"Stick you away in a dresser drawer and try to find out what all the shooting's about."

Corey Hilton observed that it was about time and drew a pointed admonition from Hyer.

He was as good as his word.

Leaving Lilith and Corey in the taxi he went into the Barnham and reserved a room in the name of Lillian Vernon, telling the management, which was deeply in his debt on a number of scores, that Miss Vernon was on no account to be disturbed.

"Now," he told her, when they were in the room, "you stay put like Kip for a little while until I pick up some of the reins. I'll give you a report by eight o'clock. You going to stay here?" he asked Corey Hilton.

"I am if Lilith doesn't object. For a little while."

"Fine," Hyer agreed. "Maybe you can find out— By the way, honey, I'd like to have that telegram you got from Kip."

Lilith said, "Of course, Hank." She opened the bag and felt down inside. She took out several articles, searched deeper. She said, "That's odd," and took out a bottle of perfume. "Here it is. It fell down beneath—*Hank!*"

HYER, reaching for the telegram, caught the bottle with his sleeve. It fell from the dresser, struck sharply on the corner of the writing desk and shattered. The liquid it contained splashed to the floor, sprinkling over Hyer's shoe and trouser cuff. An odor that would have been delicate and haunting in stray wisps flooded the room.

"Fifty dollars' worth," Lilith mourned. "Blended especially for me. Why, Hank, must you shatter my one gesture to notoriety?"

Hyer sniffed. He raised the trouser cuff nearer his nose with distasteful results.

He said, "Notoriety! You? My God, Lilith, think of me."

"Comment at this point," Corey Hilton chuckled, "If my wife—"

"And I know the answer," Hyer snorted. "And any more cracks out of either of you and I'll walk out and—"

"Be stopped five times between here and Lexington Avenue," the reporter chortled.

Hyer made another acid observation on the quality of Corey Hilton's wit and opened the telegram.

"AM DESPERATE STOP MUST HAVE TWENTY-FIVE THOUSAND DOLLARS AT ONCE STOP CAN YOU SEND CASHIERS DRAFT BY AIR MAIL WEDNESDAY MORNING QUESTION MARK"

"Whoever sent this," Hyer grunted, "was pretty familiar with Kip's mental processes. He *would* stick in four words of punctuation in a collect message."

Telling Lilith to remain at the Barnham until she heard from him and commenting caustically again on Corey Hilton's comedy, Hyer sallied forth with his nose—literally—in the air.

The detective suffered fancied insults from the elevator operator, the clerk on duty, five pedestrians he encountered before he could hail a taxi, and came perilously close to a physical outburst when the chauffeur of his cab, sniffing the cloud in which Hyer was enveloped, raised a discreet eyebrow.

"Forty-fourth, out of Times Square," the detective growled, "*and honi soit qui mal y pense.*"

"Whazzat, chief?"

"French," Hyer snapped.

In Forty-fourth Street he entered a small shop with *Percey Allbright, Chemist* over the door.

From the swinging half-doors at the back of the shop there came a short, hunchbacked man who peered up at Hyer over spectacles, wrinkling his high forehead as he turned his head to one side to get a better view of his caller.

He said, his voice coming in asthmatic wheezes, "Oh, hel—lo, Hyer."

Hyer said, "Here's a job for you, Percey. Get a couple of saucers or bot-

tles or something." He took the two paper-wrapped bottles from his pocket and carefully unwrapped them.

"You wish — an — analysis?" Allbright panted, his head on one side like a stoop-shouldered bird, peering at what Hyer had deposited on the counter.

"I do. But I also want to take these bottles with me. Pour out the stuff that's in 'em."

When Hyer had emptied the contents of the two bottles into test tubes which the chemist labeled, he wrapped the paper and rubber bands about them once more and was on the point of starting out of the shop when he stopped, grinned and plucked the flat tin foil packet out of his vest pocket.

"Here's something else," he said. "You once told me you could give me a formula that'd put a name on anything I brought you. Well, I'm calling your bluff, Perce. Make what you can out of what's in that tin foil."

Allbright took the flat packet, peering over his glasses at Hyer. Then he wrinkled his nose. "You smell—as if—you—"

Hyer interrupted him quickly. "Pants leg. You got something'll take it out?"

"I—think so. If you—will remove—"

"How long'll it take?"

"Perhaps—half—an hour. To dry."

Hyer debated. But, sorely tempted as he was, time meant more than olfactory immaculateness. He shook his head regretfully.

"I'll air out in a cab," he said.

"And—freeze," the hunchback predicted.

FROM Allbright's he was driven to police headquarters where he found Schultz, that fingerprint expert of the homicide squad, sitting at his roll-top desk.

Hyer unwrapped the bottles again and asked, "How long'll prints stand kicking about on glass, Schultz?"

"Depends, Hank," Schultz answered with professional caution. "You take good care of 'em?"

"I did my best to keep 'em from smearing. May be some interesting ones on these bottles. I want to know."

"Hank," Schultz complained, "you think the city of N'Yawk pays my salary just to run errands for guys like you?"

Hyer said, "I'm asking a favor. Do it on your own time."

Schultz sighed. "What kinda job you woikin' on, Hank?"

"Movie setup," Hyer answered, grinning. "Straight out of *Alice in Wonderland*. When can I get a check on these?"

"Seein' it's you, Hank, I guess I can look 'em over tonight."

Hyer said, "Thanks," and left.

To his driver he said, "Abingdon Square," and sniffed. The perfume hung in the cab like a captive cloud.

In the elevator on his way up to McRae's apartment, Hyer held a dollar bill in his hand and asked the operator, "Know whether Mr. McRae was home last Tuesday night, buddy?"

The boy looked at the bill. He looked at Hyer. He said, "He went out Tuesday noon. He came back Wednesday noon."

"How sure are you?"

"I seen him go out Tuesday. The night man give me a message to give 'im when I came on Wednesday noon. He hadn't been in Tuesday night."

Hyer rang McRae's bell with what might have been described as pious hope.

McRae's puffy face expanded in amazement at his appearance. He said, "Gad, Hyer, what have you been doing to yourself?"

"I had co-operation," Hyer answered. "Been out of town since Wednesday night. I left my gloves here," he continued, making sure they did not bulge in his overcoat pocket. "Gray gloves. Thought I'd stop in and pick 'em up."

McRae showed cultured concern over their failure to find the gloves. He insisted that Hyer must have a drink with him.

"Is Lilith Dean in New York, Hyer?"

McRae asked casually, setting his glass down.

Hyer watched his pudgy manicured fingers.

"Not that I know of," he answered, surprised.

"Range said in his column yesterday morning that she was on her way. That she was flying. There was a story that she got here. But nobody knows what happened to her then."

"Sounds screwy," Hyer commented. "She's working on a picture."

"Range said she got here."

"Range says a lot of things." Hyer struck a match and drew fire into the end of a cigaret. (He felt that something was wrong.)

"She is not at the Plaza," McRae said, casually.

"Then Range is a so-and-so liar. If Lilith's not at the Plaza, how could she be in New York?"

(He knew definitely that something was amiss. He could not say what. Then he got it.)

He swore at himself mentally and grinned.

McRae said, "Yes. I smelled you the moment you stepped from the elevator. She calls it *joli sourire*, I believe. It is blended especially for her."

"Believe it or not," Hyer said. "I was waiting for a street car and a gallon jug fell off a truck. You ought to smell Fourteenth Street."

"Where is Lilith?"

Hyer said, "At the Alamac," trying to think of a hotel farther uptown and failing at the moment.

McRAE reached for the phone. When he got the Alamac he made a scene but the clerk naturally insisted that Lilith was not stopping with them. Hyer waited until McRae had hung up.

"She's probably using another name," he said before the gambler could vent his suspicion. "I just know the room number."

"What number?"

"I forget."

"That is too bad. I was anxious to see Lilith."

Hyer said, "I didn't know you knew her that well," and blew smoke.

"Oh yes, very well, indeed."

"You know her before she went to the Coast?"

"Long before," McRae answered, waving his fat hand.

"Funny I never saw you around her place in Washington Square."

"Oh, I was there very often—usually late at night," McRae answered, smirking. "By the way what was that room number, Hyer?"

Hyer, fuming, said, "Five oh four."

McRae took up the phone again and Hyer put out his cigaret. But his luck held. The occupant of the room was out.

"Will you ask the lady to call Watkins six-one-seven-oh-eight?" McRae said, and Hyer held his breath. But McRae said thank you and hung up. (Hyer pledged a dozen roses to the unknown woman in 504.)

"That was awfully decent of you, Hyer. I don't mind telling you that I am exceedingly anxious to get in touch with Miss Dean as soon as possible."

"Why?"

McRae's eyes narrowed. "I think Shannon is in trouble," he said.

"That's good news."

"Serious trouble," McRae protested. "I'm afraid—well, frankly, Hyer, I am afraid Shannon has gotten into a bad situation that may cause difficulty for Lilith. Scandal right now would be very unfortunate for her. But—by the way, you've no idea where Shannon is, have you, Hyer?"

"Woodstock."

"Oh yes. Mr. Hilton said Wednesday that—"

Hyer rose and looked down at the fat gambler, his nostrils moving.

"You're a sap, McRae. And a cock-eyed liar in the bargain. You make any more cracks about Lilith Dean and I'll railroad you." He grew furious as he talked. "Lilith Dean never lived any nearer to Washington Square than

Fifty-sixth Street," he said.

"Furthermore, McRae, there was a cop shot up in Woodstock Tuesday night and some of the busybodies in that neck of the woods're trying to tie it on Kip Shannon. They don't like fat boys up in Ulster County and I happen to know you were out of your place from Tuesday noon to Wednesday noon. Then," he went on, sneering, "somebody killed Arnold Rothstein."

McRae hunched back in his chair away from Hyer's poking finger. His puffy face was red, his small eyes malevolent.

Hyer said scornfully, "You never laid eyes on Lilith Dean until you were on the Coast in June when Kip introduced you to her."

"How do you know?" McRae blustered, finding his voice.

"Thanks. For one thing she told me so herself."

McRae attempted to look wrathful, stern, and sadly wronged. The mixture was an unhappy one and succeeded only in making his face fatly ridiculous.

"There must be some mistake," he said, still blustering. "She was speaking of someone else. And anyway what difference does it make to you, Hyer?"

"Don't tell anybody I told you," Hyer said, "but Santy Claus left me a note last Christmas and told me to look out for fourflushers like you."

McRae leaped to his feet, his face apoplectic.

"Never mind running up to the Alamac," Hyer said as he walked to the door. "You'd just waste your nickels."

CALLING HANK HYER FANS!

MURDER IN G-SHARP

Another Hank Hyer Mystery Novel

By KURT STEEL

in the Fall issue of our
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DETECTIVE NOVEL MAGAZINE

20c AT ALL STANDS

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SOLITAIRE AND PATCH



HYER glanced up at his windows as he crossed the street and saw they were dark. What he could not see was that the windows were dark not because the lights were out but because the shades were drawn tight, even pinned down to the frame.

He limped up to the stoop, his ankle aching once more, let himself in and climbed to the second floor. Here he turned a key in his door and walked in to stare down two gun barrels converging on him at a wide angle.

That was not the only thing he looked at, however. Kip Shannon was standing in the middle of the room clad in a suit and shirt which Hyer recognized as his own and, for the first and only time in their mutual experience, ecstatically glad to see the detective.

Hyer recognized neither of his business callers. One of them was a short dark man with a pinched belly and the look of the chronic dyspeptic. The black patch covered one eye. On the sleeve of his overcoat was a black mourning band.

They were standing against opposite corners and Hyer said, "Hello," waving his good hand shoulder high. He said, "Put up the rods, I'm harmless. Hi, Kip."

Patch's companion was a friendly appearing individual, taller than Hyer and heavier, with a frank squarish face and innocent blue eyes. He wore a winking solitaire on the little finger of his professional hand.

Solitaire waggled the gun and shook his head at Shannon. He said, "Set down."

Hyer said, "Sit down, Kip. We'll gang 'em when they aren't looking." Shannon sat down. "Come on," Hyer per-

sisted, "unlimber the guns." He grinned at Solitaire. "I'll keep our friend here from jumping your stooge."

Solitaire said, "Suppose you set us a good example."

Amused, Hyer let Patch go over his clothes and remove the two automatics he had picked up after the wreck the morning of the day before.

Solitaire observed, "You go in for a fancy line, yourself, friend."

Hyer shook his head. "Presents. I'm keeping 'em for a couple of other guys. How about a drink?"

Patch removed the clips from the automatics, emptied them into his pocket and laid the two guns on the mantel. Kip watched, hypnotized, his china eyes glazing and his chin unsteady.

"Don't get any for us," Solitaire said. "We got our own," and Hyer went into the kitchen, grinning at the icebox.

"You boys're awful touchy," he said when he returned, carrying a bottle and two glasses.

Patch looked evil. Solitaire grinned.

He said, "Taking no chances. You Hyer?"

"No," Hyer said, pouring out a stiff jolt for Shannon whose china eyes followed his hand. "I'm Keenan Wynn. What's your name?"

"Red Riding Hood. I guess you're the guy. They said you was a wise guy."

"Did they?"

"Yeah."

Shannon took his drink like an obedient child and watched Hyer pour his own.

"You boys sure you won't join us? I got ginger ale, White Rock."

Patch gave him another evil look.

"Don't put yourself out," Solitaire said. "We'll take ours straight like you."

Hyer urged, "Better have just a spot of Belladonna," and went to the kitchen for two more glasses. He passed the drinks around and raised his glass. "Here's to larceny." When he had

tossed down his Scotch he said, "How'd you get here, Kip?"

Shannon gulped twice, remembered what he held in his hand and lubricated his voice. "I took Corey's key to your apartment. I—"

"Don't you know better than to clutter my place up with strangers?"

SOLITAIRE grinned. "I guess he wasn't expectin' visitors to see *him* and we kinda surprised him. You see how he fixed them shades so nobody could peek in at him. We didn't aim to bother you, Hyer."

Hyer said, "Thanks."

"Yeah, we aimed to be gone when you got back. But we'd just got here. He let us in."

Hyer searched his memory of dialects. "How'd you leave the folks in Arizona?" he said.

Solitaire said, "Wrong. But if you like guessing games, go on have your fun."

"What you boys expect to get out of this little experiment?"

Solitaire jerked his head at Shannon.

"We kinda thought Mr. Shannon'd like a little company."

Hyer shrugged. "I can name a dozen people might've sent you here to look the joint over, but you don't look like a fall guy, too intelligent—not you, dearie," he added to Patch. "Who's your principal? Maybe we can come to terms. If you want to buy this stuffed fish here," jerking his thumb at Shannon, "we probably can."

Shannon squirmed and went pale.

Solitaire held out his glass and asked, "What's your price?"

"I'll give you fifty bucks to take him off my hands," Hyer answered, and Shannon wet his lips.

"Hyer," he stammered, "you won't—you're not—"

"And on your way out," Hyer went on to Solitaire, "you might stop at the corner and tell the roundsman your friend with the evil eye here's wanted for housebreaking." Patch repeated a

remark he had made twice. His vocabulary was limited.

"It's all in the business," Solitaire observed easily. "I guess you know what the inside of the Rawlings place looks like in Reno."

Hyer said, "Thanks. I'd been trying to tie up with you on some details. You've worked the alimony racket."

"It's a good game, Hyer. You might guess my weight, too. You might have better luck. Now, if you'll just stand still and watch the birdie, I'll see if there's anything on you might be useful."

Patch held both guns, looking like something just off the boat from Sicily, and Solitaire went through Hyer's clothes. He examined the wallet, whistled at the seven hundred dollars but left it in the buttoned pocket, patted Hyer's pockets, wadded his coat to see if there was anything in the lining, and made Hyer take off his shoes. He looked at the card Yellow Gloves had left Hyer without recognition or interest. At the telegram to Lilith he pursed his lips at Shannon and said, "Well, well, well. You planning to finance a transatlantic hop, Shannon?"

Hyer complained, "If you'd give me a hint what you're after I might cooperate. I'm more familiar with my duds than you are."

Solitaire was studying the counterfeit twenties Chase had given Hyer.

"Souvenirs," Hyer told him. "They're hot."

Solitaire put the bills back in Hyer's pockets. "Now," he said to Shannon, "you ready to go with us?"

Shannon dropped his glass and his mouth fell open.

"If he doesn't want to," Hyer put in, "I can't see any reason why you boys ought to insist. A snatching's sort of a screwy thing to have eyewitnesses to."

Solitaire nodded. "If you hadn't come in just when you did," he said, holding his glass out, "we wouldn't a put that responsibility on you."

"But since I *did* come in—"

"There ain't much we can do about it but turn down that offer of fifty bucks, I guess."

"What do you want Shannon for? He'd make a lousy pet to have around the house all day."

Solitaire said never mind, that what Hyer didn't know wouldn't hurt him and he guessed Shannon knew.

HYER said, "Maybe it's got something to do with that constable got shot up in Ulster County," and looked at Shannon. Shannon ducked, his china eyes wide.

Solitaire failed to rise. "Maybe it has, maybe it ain't," he said. "You keep playing that game and you'll make a big name for yourself." He jerked his head at Patch. "Come on, Wig."

Hyer said, "Just a minute. You two train with a Chevvy-ful of mugs got smeared over the landscape up near Kingston yesterday?"

Solitaire said good naturedly, "Go on. It's good for your appetite. Let's go, Wig."

"One of us," Hyer said, "has got an apology coming."

Solitaire pocketed his automatic and grinned. "We didn't really think you was keeping Shannon here out of choice," he protested. "Don't get us wrong."

Hyer watched them go out. He crossed to the window, pulled the pins from the shade and drew it aside. Solitaire grinned up at him as they walked to a car parked in front of the next house. Hyer tried to read the license but could not.

"What did that pair want with you?" he demanded of Shannon. "And what in hell possessed you to come over here and track my place up with strange mugs?"

"Hyer," Shannon faltered, "can't we let bygones be bygones?"

"Unh-hunh, just's long as we don't forget 'em. Corey give you the key to my flat?"

"I took it off his ring."

"What made you let that pair in?"

Shannon looked dazed.

"I had no idea I had been followed. I thought it was someone to see you."

"You're a sap, Kip. Well, if you were conscious when you picked this for a hide-out, you must've expected to run into *me* sometime. What sort of a yarn you cook up to spill me this time?"

Since the departure of Patch and Solitaire, Shannon's composure had been returning slowly. He had ceased to look on Hyer as his one bulwark against a predatory world. Suddenly Hyer could see that he caught it, as McRae had.

Hyer said, "Sure, I've seen her. I tipped over a bottle of the stuff." He took out the telegram which Solitaire had replaced and handed it to Shannon. "Now," he said, "what's the McCoy on this, Kip?"

Shannon's mouth opened, his china eyes grew round in amazement. "Hyer," he said, excited. "I didn't send this."

"Keep your shirt on. I know it. Who did? And why?"

Shannon clutched his throat. "It was sent Tuesday night," he said and the amazement on his face gave place to fright.

"Unh-hunh. Just a little while," Hyer specified, "after that Tatham got an acute attack of lead poisoning in your shack."

The effect was tragic. Shannon's face grew ashen, his china eyes bulged, his throat worked. He seemed to wilt under Hyer's ironic stare.

"Well," Hyer asked, "am I right, Kip, or am I right?"

The frightened man tried three times to speak. He groped blindly on the floor for his fallen glass, his eyes never leaving Hyer's face. When he had recovered the glass he held it trembling for Hyer to fill. Some of the whiskey spilled over his chin and down the front of his suit when he drank.

Hyer said, "Take it easy. You think if I thought I had enough to burn your tail, Kip, I'd be sitting here talking to you?"

Shannon licked his white lips. "You—you mean—?" he gasped.

"Unh-hunh. You didn't do it. You haven't got what it takes. Anyway, Tatham was dead when he was shot." He let this sink in. "Now," he said, "just what *did* happen up there in your love nest Tuesday night? Tatham called on you and then what?"

"How do you know about that?" Shannon whispered.

Hyer's lip curled. "I'm asking, Kip. What happened?"

It required another stiff charge to give Shannon back his voice. Then he stammered, "When I came to, he was—he was lying there. The gun was in my hand. *In my hand*," he repeated, his eyes unwavering from Hyer's sardonic expression.

Hyer asked, "What kind of a 'gun'?" with some interest.

"An automatic. Hyer, I didn't—I couldn't have—"

Hyer said with feeling, "I'll say you couldn't have. But don't stop now for modesty. What did you do with the gun?"

Shannon shook his head. "I—I don't know. I can't remember."

"But you picked Tatham up and carted him off in the woods and left him?"

Shannon leaped up, trembling. "Hyer, for God's sake—"

"Well, you didn't croak Tatham, so don't pull a Uriah Heep on me. Although," Hyer added speculatively, "if we can't dig up a witness or two, it may be hard to convince a county judge you didn't. What time'd you come to?"

"It was about ten minutes after eleven," Shannon whispered.

"Who else was there?"

"No-no one." Shannon sank back into his chair and held out his glass mechanically. Hyer filled it, watching him.

"Nuts. Who else was there?"

Shannon gulped the liquor down and shook his head. "No one."

Hyer eyed him. "Maybe you're right at that. Who *had* been there?"

Shannon blinked and held out his glass, supplicating.

Hyer shook his head. "You're likely to drown in it," he said, "and they'd hold me for a mercy killing. When'd Venice leave?" he asked point-blank.

Shannon's spasm was less serious this time. He threw it off almost at once and leaned forward.

"How did you know that?"

"Partly intuition. Partly what they do in detective stories. What time'd she leave?"

"Soon after Tatham came," Kip answered, lapsing into hypnotic acquiescence once more.

"Tatham call on you often?"

Shannon nodded.

"What for?"

"Drinks."

"He confide in you much about his business?"

"You mean—?"

"He say anything about what he might be up to Tuesday night?"

"He said—I believe he said he had stumbled on something that would make his reputation. He was in high spirits."

"He had," Hyer agreed. "Only he couldn't've got much satisfaction out of that reputation when it was made. Venice there with you when he arrived?" At Shannon's nod he added, "She been staying with you?"

"No. She was somewhere in the neighborhood. She dropped in now and then."

"Now and then?"

"Too often," Shannon said.

"How long'd she been up there?"

"About two weeks, I should judge."

"Just walk in on you like a stray kitten?"

Shannon flushed.

"I knew her on the Coast."

"Pictures?"

"No. I don't think so."

Hyer squinted suddenly. "Say," he asked, "Venice tip you off to Woodstock as a nice quiet place to write books?

Before you left the Coast?"

Shannon flushed again. He nodded.

"And then," Hyer probed, "she shows up about six weeks after you've got there?"

"Tuesday night," Hyer said, returning to the major issue, "Tatham didn't say exactly what he had up his sleeve?"

"No. He was in high spirits. He was joking. He hinted at—"

"What?"

"I don't know, Hyer. He said something was ahead of him. That was all."

Hyer murmured, "Unh-hunh, a big six-foot box. How long'd Venice stay after Tatham got there?"

Shannon reddened. "See here, Hyer, I don't like your tone." Then his manner collapsed. He held out his glass in a pleading gesture. Hyer could see the liquor was telling on him. He spashed half a drink into Shannon's glass.

"How long?" he repeated.

"Ten minutes. Quar'r of an hour maybe."

"She say where she was going when she left?"

"Home. Where she was staying."

"Where was that?"

"I don' know. She ne'r told me."

"And how long before you passed out?"

Shannon blinked, making a great effort to concentrate on mathematics. He gave it up.

"An hour?" Hyer asked. "Two hours?"

"Not—not that long."

Hyer asked, "Seen McRae since you got East?"

"M'Rae?"

"Yes. He seems to think you're in a jam of some kind. Barratry or arson or something."

M'Rae's a bas'rd," Shannon said.

Then a rapid transformation came over him. His loose lips tightened and drew down at the corners. He rose and took two uncertain steps to the mantel where he leaned, turning to face Hyer, his hand outstretched in a dramatic gesture.

"I went up to Woo'stock, Hyer," he said, his glazed eyes vague, but his voice artificially steady, "in or'r to seek strength from the hills and the realities of life. I star'd my great work, the work I would leave af'r me. I drew inspiration from the hills and the fores's and the hill people, the good hones' farmers, and I drew hope from them. I was being reborn, Hyer. I was being reborn a new and ber'r man.

"But, Hyer," he insisted with sudden vehemence, "I am not going back. I am not going back. I am not going back." Like a victrola record with the needle stuck in a groove.

He reached for the bottle unsteadily and Hyer had just time to catch him before he crumpled, unconscious, on the hearth.

With the handicap of his slung arm the detective had some difficulty putting Shannon to bed. He had just stretched the reborn but helpless form on the coverlet when the buzzer to the front door sounded.

Hyer murmured, "Surprise," ironically, switched off the bed lamp and left the bedroom, closing the door.

He pushed the button releasing the downstairs latch and carried the four glasses to the kitchen.

A tap sounded as he returned from the kitchen.

Hyer opened the door and said, "Hello." Then in honest surprise he exclaimed, "Well, for God's sake. Little Miss Marker herself."

Venice Malinov came into the room.

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FIFTY DOLLARS



VENICE MALINOV stopped just inside the door. She looked at Hyer without smiling.

Hyer said, "Fancy seeing you—"

"I did not come to talk to you," she told him in her lovely voice.

"We'll turn on the radio."

"I want to see Mr. Shannon."

"Now isn't that interesting," Hyer said, "that you should want to see Kip. I'm sure Kip wants to see you, Venice."

Her cobalt eyes studied him. They hardened. "That means *you* do not want him to see me."

"Work it out that way if you want to, Blue Eyes."

"And if I insist on seeing him?"

"Try it," Hyer suggested. "You ought to be a pretty fair insister." He grinned and her cheeks flushed.

She said in a taut voice, "You have a reputation for being a man who will listen to any reasonable offer."

"A little while ago," Hyer answered, thinking of Solitaire and Patch, "I turned down the sanest offer a man ever heard. Have a chair and make me a better one."

She shook her head slightly and her blue eyes were vitreous.

"How much do you want to let me talk to him?"

"For how long?" Hyer asked.

"Five minutes."

"Alone or chaperoned?"

"Alone."

Hyer said, "Well, let's see—"

"How much?"

"Five minutes. Well, now that ought to be worth—" He sucked in his cheeks.

"Don't be odious, please."

Hyer said, "I'm thinking it over. How about fifty bucks?" he asked brightly.

She gasped. "Fifty dollars?"

"Kip for fifty or me for nothing. Sure you want to see him when you can stay right here and—?"

She said quickly, "All right."

Hyer shrugged. "O. K. Only you got lousy tastes to go with that swanky fur coat."

"Where is he?"

Hyer jerked his thumb toward the bedroom. "In there. We had some callers he didn't take a shine to."

Venice took a step toward the bedroom door.

Hyer said, "Wait a minute, Goldi-

locks. Don't forget the box office."

"How do I know you're not lying to me?"

"You don't. But you can go in there and find out—for fifty bucks."

"When I come out."

"When you come out, Firefly, momentum might carry you right on through and down the stairs. And wouldn't I look crazy chasing that mink coat up Bank Street yelling for a cop to collect my price of admission? Mighty few people'd think this side show was worth that much."

"I'll give you twenty-five now and the other twenty-five when I come out."

Hyer shook his head. "Show business is so uncertain, Venice. Ever see a barker take it on the cuff?"

"If you *are* lying to me—"

Hyer said, "Kip Shannon's in that other room. He won't come out—and he particularly won't come out to see *you*. Let on like he had some reason for not speaking to you, Venice. But I'll let you go in there and talk to him for five minutes—"

"Alone."

"—alone, for fifty bucks. You O. K.'d the price, sister," he said grinning.

Her cobalt eyes hard and vindictive, she stared at him a moment. Then she took the money from her purse and handed it to him.

Hyer took the bills, grinned, waved toward the bedroom. Her eyes were furious, but without a word she crossed the room. Then, her hand on the knob, she turned and faced him again.

"If he is not in here," she said, her lovely voice taut as a harp string, "you—"

"Unh-hunh, I'll drop through the floor in surprise. I'll time you," he said, taking out his watch. "We'll figure a discount for the second five minutes."

SHE whirled and disappeared through the door.

Hyer's round face grew interested and he put his watch away. The bills he folded small and wedged into the

window frame behind the drapes. Then the interest in his eyes deepened as he watched the bedroom door.

He had not long to wait.

Venice Malinov came out of the door, her exquisite face contorted.

She said, "You cheap fourflusher." Her voice was a whiplash.

Hyer raised his eyebrows. "My, my. Don't tell me Kip's gone."

"He's dead drunk."

"Unh-hunh."

"You knew it!"

"Sure I knew it."

Her mouth a maddened slash, she asked, "Where is that money?"

"Welshing, Bright Eyes?"

"I gave you fifty dollars to—"

"To let you talk to Shannon for five minutes. Unh-hunh. Well, it's not my fault you didn't specify what condition he had to be in."

With the speed and fury of a cobra striking she sprang. Hyer grappled with his one arm and brought his chin down hard against her temple as her fingers bit into his throat. He coughed, gasped as the fingers sank deeper. He whirled, lifting her off her feet, the mink coat flying loose. But the fingers clamped into his windpipe relaxed not a whit. He caught at her wrist and she sank her teeth into the back of his hand.

Hyer yelped and brought his forearm up in a slashing arc under the chin. Her yellow hair loosened and streamed over the shimmering fur collar as her head jerked back and her hat fell to the floor. Hyer put his open hand over her face and shoved. The fingers at his throat were torn loose. Venice staggered backward, dazed.

For a moment Hyer could only gasp and rub his throat. Two scarlet semi-circles showed on the back of his hand where her teeth had sunk in. The soft white fingers had been spring steel on his neck.

He said, "Try that again, Beautiful, and I'll kill you."

She seemed ready to spring, panting, her cobalt eyes sullen and clouded, her

flawless face a mask of hatred. Mechanically she raised her hands to her hair and smoothed the shining cascade into her high fur collar. She turned to the mirror over the mantel, took a step toward it and stood adjusting the mink collar at her white throat.

When she whirled on him she had both automatics in her hands.

"Give me that money!"

Hyer grinned and took out his cigaret case. "They're paperweights," he told her. "Get over your grouch and maybe we can take a load off each other's shoulders."

Maddened, she squeezed both triggers and when neither gun responded she hurled them across the room at him. Hyer ducked and lighted his cigaret.

He said, "Whoever brought you up, Tiger Lily, knocked off before he finished the job."

"Give me that money."

Hyer said, "Skip it. You got exactly what you asked for. Anyway," he added, "you owed me that fifty."

Venice started to speak, shut her lips tight. Then she caught up her fallen hat with the grace of a cheetah and sped out of the room. Hyer heard the hall door slam downstairs.

He sat down and mopped his face. He fingered his bruised throat, murmured sundry observations indicating his inventiveness and his feeling for Venice Malinov.

THIRTY minutes later Hyer and Corey Hilton sat opposite each other at a table in the Athens Chop House. The detective was exploring the talents of a thick steak, fried potatoes, asparagus, stewed tomatoes and a foaming glass of beer.

He said, "Country cooking doesn't agree with me. Had too much when I was a kid."

"You look," Corey Hilton commented, "like a guy who hasn't had a square meal for four years. If you don't get through with that mess pretty soon and cool my curiosity, I'll burn up."

"You can afford to wait, Corey. When I *do* get around to it, all I can do is give out the assignment for tomorrow's homework. And so far as teacher can tell," Hyer added, forking the last morsel of steak, "the answers got left out of the back of the book."

Corey Hilton asked, a worried pink flooding his chubby face, "What did you find out about Kip?"

Hyer wiped his mouth. "You think you can keep all of these angles straight?" he asked.

Corey Hilton nodded, anxious.

"To begin with, that special cop up there got shot in Kip Shannon's front room Tuesday night, right in front of the fireplace."

Corey Hilton swallowed hard. He said, "Then Kip—"

"Kip," Hyer said, "swears he was out cold when it happened. He and Tatham were celebrating a job Tatham was about to tip over or something. Kip passed out. Kip's good at that. When he came to, Tatham was lying there dead with a slug in his head. Kip had a gun in his hand."

"How do you know he—?"

"So he says."

"Did Kip kill him?"

"Hunh-unh."

"How do you know, Hank?"

"From a couple of other angles. You got that much straight?"

"Was anybody else there when Kip passed out?" Corey Hilton asked.

Hyer said, "Bull's-eye. You remember that doll breezed into McRae's Wednesday evening just as we were leaving? One Mal called Venice Malinov? Well, Venice was part of Kip Shannon's scenery on the Coast. She's the one tipped him off to the salubrious atmosphere and inspiring contours of Ulster County. She tagged along a couple of weeks or so ago and seems to have been boarding in the vicinity."

"Was she there when Tatham was killed?"

Hyer shrugged. "Well, she was there when Tatham got there. Kip remem-

bers that. He seems to have the idea she scrambled out and left 'em a little while later. At least she wasn't on the premises when Kip came to with the stiff."

"That," Hyer went on, "is part of the second angle. Here's some more. I told you I holed up with a guy outside of Woodstock when I got stuck in the snow last night. I didn't tell you there was a female staying the night there, a female this Geoffrey didn't seem to feel like dragging out and giving me a knock-down to."

"First I heard her, then I ran across some of her underwear where she'd skipped out and run upstairs when I showed up probably. Then the next morning Geoffrey got on the subject of undesirable aliens and let drop a remark about Woodstock seeming to attract demireps. So I figured this unknown femme didn't have too good a name, maybe, and he'd put her up because he's that kind of a guy, the way he took me in."

"She was still there when Lilith and I went back to eat lunch with him this noon. But her rod has disappeared. She'd left it in the downstairs bedroom and I put it on the floor. Unless Geoffrey was lying, which I greatly doubt, and had been back to the place himself, she'd come down and got it after we left this morning early. Maybe," Hyer said, remembering suddenly, "she got it last night. At least she was in my room long enough to lift seven hundred and fifty bucks out of my duds."

"Seven hundred and—?"

"I got 'em back. Well, when Lilith and I got on the train to come back to town this afternoon, this Geoffrey shows up in his sled and out of it pops Miss Venice Malinov herself in person, giving him a big hand of gratitude, and Geoffrey saying it wasn't anything and he was glad to do it."

"So," Hyer continued, omitting his highway robbery on the train, "about half an hour ago Venice knocks at my door with a terrific yen to say something to Kip in private. Being a shrewd

judge of character she doesn't try any stalls but comes out cold and offers me fifty bucks for the privilege of talking to my guest for five minutes."

"Unfortunately Kip was in another of his Scotch colics and couldn't hear what she had to say. She seemed kind of sore when she came out and hinted I ought to've specified Kip's degree of consciousness. But she finally agreed I'd fulfilled my part of the bargain by letting her in where *she* could talk to *him*."

COREY HILTON asked, "She gave you fifty dollars just to talk to Kip?"

"Screwy isn't it? I'd only got through offering another guy the same amount just to *avoid* talking to Kip."

"You what?"

"That's the next angle, Corey. When I blew into my place after I'd left you and Lilith at the Barnham, there were a couple of torpedos there scaring the living daylights out of Kip. One of 'em a big johnny with a flock of wisecracks and the other one a little Joe with crape over one eye and on his arm. They'd apparently come to persuade Kip to go for a ride, Kip having lifted your key to my apartment from your ring and been tailed over there. Well, when I showed up they changed their minds."

"Then it wasn't more than twenty minutes after they left that Venice came around pretty sure Kip was there, so it oughtn't be too hard to hook those two angles together."

"But what in the world did she want to tell Kip," Corey Hilton asked puzzled, "that she was willing to pay fifty dollars for?"

"It was my fifty, anyway," Hyer put in. "Well, here's another angle you already know. Somebody sent Lilith a wire Tuesday night just after Tatham got crocked and signed Kip's name to it. That wire begged Lilith to send him a cashier's draft for twenty-five grand pronto."

"Lilith told me. But what could that

have to do with Tatham's murder?"

Hyer squinted.

"You don't see any possible tieup?"

Corey Hilton thought intently, and shook his head.

"Remember what happened outside your flat Wednesday night?"

"Am I likely to forget it?"

"O. K. Somebody wanted Kip bad enough to take a chance on a snatch rap, didn't they? Now, there's one more possible angle."

"Those fake twenties Chase found?"

"Either you run naturally to melodrama, Corey, or you're improving. Exactly. But that queer shows here only because it calls to mind the stalwart figure of Honest Jim McRae. McRae was plenty interested in Kip Shannon's whereabouts Wednesday evening while we were there—before it could have got out very far that Kip was playing the Three Little Pigs up in your flat. Now Venice Malinov, who has a tremendous interest herself in Kip and who hangs out up in the hills part of the time, breezed into McRae's like she was right at home.

"Well, I stopped in tonight to have a heart-to-heart with McRae, but I made the mistake—or something—of carrying that trouserlegful of Lilith's toilet water with me. McRae's got a nose for screwy smells and he sniffed me right away and got excited like a fox terrier. Wanted to know where Lilith was, said he was afraid somebody was fixing to scare up some scandal and queer her with Will Hays and the Methodist Board of Prohibition and Morals. Let on like he was the best friend Lilith ever had. When I found out I couldn't get anything out of him in words of one syllable, I stirred him up a little more and went home.

"But McRae—oh yes," Hyer interrupted himself. "Then there's this kid with spats and yellow gloves that offered coin of the realm for Kip's turning dead or alive. He's another angle, he and his mysterious principal who won't be anything more to me than a coy

phone number.

"There's the picture," Hyer concluded. "Six angles and a bughouseful of boys and girls playin' 'em.

"One: Shannon wakes up Tuesday night with a gun in his hand and a cop lying dead. Two: Venice Malinov plays him for a meal-ticket and would give fifty bucks right now, Friday, to say something to him if he could hear. Three: Two guys locate Kip in my place this evening and try to finish up the act I understudied in Wednesday night. Four: Somebody sends Lilith a fake wire Tuesday night asking for twenty-five grand in Kip's name. Five: McRae, at whose honest table Chase picks up three hot bills, gets awfully excited about both Lilith and Kip and seems to be on pretty good terms with the Blonde Blizzard. Six: Who's the guy hired me to locate Kip Wednesday?"

"You may call those six *angles*," Corey Hilton said frowning. "They sound like six separate yarns to me. More or less."

"More or less," Hyer agreed. "A guy once wrote a play called Six Guys in Search of a Scenarist or something—and it was a hit. Well, these all focus on Kip some way or other, don't they?"

"All but those counterfeit bills."

"They—" Hyer stopped, his mouth open, his lids slowly drooping until he was squinting at Corey Hilton out of slits.

"Well," the reporter asked, "do they?"

HYER said, "Corey, your aid's as invaluable as it is unconscious."

"If you mean—"

"What I mean is that you may have turned a ham act into a three-ring circus with sound effects."

Corey Hilton said, "Thanks."

"That's right," Hyer reminded himself, "if you don't see it, it's not entirely your fault, Corey. I guess I held out one of the corner pieces on you. But, just in case I'm as wrong as an owner at Saratoga, I'll not wish that missing

piece on you just yet. No use leading two of us up an alley."

"Henry Hyer," the reporter observed bitterly, "the original Above-Board Boy. What's my place in this puzzle, scenery?"

Hyer grinned. "Don't take it so hard, Corey. I'll let you in on it when there's enough plot to make a yarn out of."

"Yeah. After the shooting's all over."

"Corey," Hyer said, unaware of the prophetic force with which he spoke, "The shooting's not over yet, or I'm a Zulu's aunt."

"So what?"

Hyer lighted a cigaret, squinting over the flame at Corey Hilton's pink chubby face. "Every newspaperman has got a suppressed desire to be a dick or a novelist. Which way your hormones point, Corey?"

"As a psychoanalyst you make Freud look like a second-string crystal gazer."

"Unh-hunh. I thought so. You'd make a bum novelist anyway, Corey. Too much imagination. Well, how'd you like to start your apprenticeship under the master tonight?"

"You speak in riddles."

"As a crack, Corey, that's not up to your usual high standard. You think you can run down ownership on a car if I give you the license?" He took out the slip on which he had noted the number of the wrecked coach Thursday morning, the day before.

Corey Hilton grinned impishly. He said, "I haven't watched the master for nothing. Lesson number one begins, 'Is this a charity assignment?'"

"It is. I've got no use for the kick-back. I never charge my apprentices a cent. Can you do it?"

"This time of night?"

"What're you a newspaperman for?"

"If I do, remember I've got a vested interest in whatever happens."

"And," Hyer added, "you may wish that vested interest was bullet-proof before you write your exclusive."

Corey Hilton shook his head gloomily. "If that crack of mine missed fire,

Hank, yours don't even have percussion caps."

"Inaction," Hyer answered. "We both need a jolt. Come on."

14

HYER HAS HIS JOLT



AFTER leaving Corey Hilton, Hyer started up the steps to the elevated, hesitated, looked at his watch. It was a quarter past eight. He went into the drugstore on the corner and shut himself in a telephone

booth. He thought a moment, his nickel ready at the slot, dropped the nickel, dialed a number.

"Hello. You know where Ed Wheeler is this time of night? . . . Swell. . . . Hello, Ed, Hank Hyer. . . . Why the overtime? . . . Going to be in a little while longer? . . . Unh-hunh, as soon as I can get down from Eighth Street. . . . O. K."

Going out of the drugstore he started to the elevated stairs again, shivered in the damp chill and rubbed his splinted arm. He waited on the corner for several minutes, vainly trying to summon a taxi. Then he gave up and limped up the stairway to the L station.

At the Federal building he greeted the guard and signed in at the desk. He ascended to the seventh floor and walked down a dimly lighted corridor to a door whose frosted glass showed brightly in the gloom.

A young man in shirt sleeves with weary bloodshot eyes looked up from a mass of balance sheets spread before him and said, "Hi, Hyer. What happened to you?"

"Fell off a barn," Hyer answered. "Ed in there?"

The young man jerked a thumb over his shoulder toward a door, took a long breath and bent again to his battle with the balance sheets.

Hyer opened the door without knocking and entered a small private office where a tall man reclined in a swivel chair, hands clasped behind his head, feet cocked up on a battered desk. He looked at Hyer from beneath shaggy brows and his lantern jaw protruded as his wide mouth smiled.

Hyer said, "Your idea of working?"

"With my head, Henry," the tall man answered, his bass voice rumbling in the small office. "You oughta try it some time."

"I'm usually too busy. Doing spade-work for you brain trusters."

"Sit down, Henry," Wheeler invited, lowering his long legs from the desk and waving his hand at a chair. "What's on your mind?"

Hyer asked, "You boys been having any special trouble with queer recently?"

"Special trouble? Why, no," Wheeler rumbled. "Why?"

"Some trouble, though?"

"Some. Always some of that sort of thing going on."

"Here in town?"

Wheeler nodded. "This is one of the places. Some of it's been showing up on the Coast. Why?"

Hyer took the counterfeit twenty-dollar bills from his wallet. "These orphans out of any family you people're interested in?" he asked, handing the money to Wheeler.

The tall man's shaggy brows knit as he studied the bills, turning them over, comparing them with each other. He rumbled, "Mike."

The young man in shirt sleeves came in.

"Mike," Wheeler rumbled, "tell Henry what you can about these bills."

Mike took the bogus notes, looked at them a moment, went into the other office and returned with a magnifying glass. He sat on the corner of Wheeler's desk and examined the bills one by one, blinking his bloodshot eyes.

"Where'd you get these, Hyer?" he asked.

Hyer said in a poker game.

"Who was in the game, Henry?" Wheeler rumbled.

"Nobody," Hyer answered, "that I couldn't put my finger on if I wanted to. You recognize the watermarks on those, Mike?"

"Yeah. This guy's got a peculiar technique. He's good. This fuzzy corner's probably an error in printing. He'd never allow that lousy spot on one of his plates. A lot of 'em get careless on the shading sometimes, but Charley never does. He's a careful worker."

"These some of Charley's, are they, Mike?" Wheeler asked.

"Yeah. See that swell line-work there under Andy Jackson's chin? Charley's the only man in the profession can turn it out that fine."

HYER said, "Charley?"

"We call him that," Mike explained. "The department's been after him off and on for years. We pick up some of his mob every once in a while, but he's smart. We jug a handful of passers and smash up a press and then six months or a year later Charley's at it again. We can bust his front, but he's too cagey to give us a smell of him."

"Maybe if you'll give us a list of the guys in that poker game, Henry," Wheeler rumbled.

"I will," Hyer answered, "but not just now. They tie in with another job I'm working on and I don't want my act queered by a bunch of government acrobats. But," he went on, "I'll let you have something else may be helpful. You got a man in Ulster County, Ed?"

"I don't believe so, Henry. Why?"

"Because I just got back from up there and I tripped over something might be worth your while to look into."

Mike perched on the desk and lighted a cigaret, squinting his red weary eyes at Hyer. Wheeler's bushy brows and lantern jaw indicated interest.

"There was a hayseed flatfoot name of Tatham got pushed over up near Woodstock Tuesday night," Hyer said. "Now

one or two things make me wonder if he didn't have some sort of a line on queer under his hat. He was dumb enough not to keep it entirely under his hat and it may've gotten around.

"There's a couple of other things that make me wonder the same thing. If I had time I'd go up there and scout around myself, but I'm a working man."

"What do you suggest, Henry?" Wheeler rumbled. Mike squinted at Hyer and rubbed his chin with an ink-stained forefinger.

"I suggest," Hyer answered, "that you pick out one of your boys who can maybe handle snowshoes and a dog-team if he has to and ship him up to Woodstock tonight or in the morning before this Tatham's memory begins to tarnish. Have 'im pick up all the leads on Tatham he can get, who he trained with, what kind of hints he may have dropped when he got tight, what he's been doing with his spare time for the last few weeks. One thing more. You got a map of that region?"

Mike slipped off the desk, went into the outer office, returned with a binder containing maps. He opened it on the desk and found the one Hyer wanted.

"Have this guy look over real estate conditions and check on how many places home folks live in around—oh, say in a five-mile radius from here." He put his finger roughly on where he remembered Kip Shannon's cottage to be. "Have him make a list of the rest of the places, ones that have renters, and any that may be empty."

Wheeler thrust out his lantern jaw in a smile and sucked in his cheeks. His shaggy brows rose in irony. "Henry, what you say is mighty interesting. But it strikes me you're giving a government bureau a lot of ordering around. Sounds to me like you might be fixing for some free assistance on your own part, maybe."

"Me," Hyer retorted, "I'll be working my own angle, Ed. I ever give you people any screwy leads yet?"

"No, Henry."

"O. K. I'm telling you to look over this Tatham business and I'm not talking through my hair. Hell," Hyer added, "I may be fixing up a mess of headaches for myself, for all I know. I got a client may be willing to pay plenty to have Tatham's put-out chalked up on the right guy's card. If you boys get too smart up there I stand a chance of losing that fee. I'm willing to take the chance just to do you a favor, Ed. You ought to be, too."

Hyer rode uptown in the subway and went to his apartment.

Shannon was still dead to the world, unresponsive to suasion, verbal or physical. Disgusted, Hyer left him and took up the phone, dialing the number which Yellow Gloves had given him Wednesday evening.

"Hello. Hyer. I want to see you. . . . No, I don't want to spill it over the phone. We better get together somewhere. . . . Yes, I've got something. . . . O. K. Where?" He grinned as he heard the man at the other end repeat to him confidentially the address which he had ascertained by phone the Wednesday before, 49 East Eighty-sixth Street. "I'll drop in in about half an hour," he promised and hung up.

NEXT he called long distance and asked for police headquarters in Kingston. He said, "Hello, this is Henry Hyer in New York. . . . You the sergeant was on duty last night when I stopped in there? . . . Unh-hunh. How's Binch? . . . Still won't talk? The county boys give him another going-over yet? . . . And he wouldn't say anything? Well, I wonder if you're in the mood to do me another favor? . . . No, not that serious. There was a wreck outside of town yesterday morning. You hear anything about that? . . . Unh-hunh, have any idea what hospital they're in? . . . Hell, you needn't do that. I can call 'em from here. . . . Sure, if you don't mind. . . . Thanks. . . . Unh-hunh, Chelsea four-two-six-two-six. . . . O. K."

He hung up and shook his head.

"Hospitality in the provinces," he murmured and shook his head again. Then he went to the kitchen and mixed himself a drink. He set the drink on the telephone stand and made circles on a pad until the telephone rang.

Hyer tucked the receiver against his left shoulder, took up his pencil and said, "You work fast. . . . Unh-hunh. Dead when they got 'im to the hospital? What'd they do with the body?" He wrote Antonio Pellegrino, 3457 Avenue T, Brooklyn. "That's his brother, you say? . . . O. K. What about the other two?" He wrote two more names, Louis Carnato, 732 West 128th Street, and Manuel Koskitz, 5524 East 158th Street, Bronx.

He asked, "What's the autopsy on Tatham? . . . Unh-hunh, what'd they find? . . . Bright's disease, eh? Do a chemical on 'im, too. . . . Well, what's the chance of that? . . . Buried already? Rush 'em a little bit up in your neck of the woods, don't they? . . . Possible to dig up some of him? I'd maybe like Doc Gettler to take a look at it? . . . O. K. I'll come up if it looks worth while. . . . Hunh-unh, thanks a lot. . . . O. K."

When he arrived at the Eighty-sixth Street address Hyer said "Eleven B."

The elevator boy asked, "Is Mr. Shannon expecting you?"

Hyer, caught offguard, asked, "Shannon?"

"You said Eleven B," the boy answered. "That's Mr. Shannon's."

Hyer said, "Sure. I was thinking about something else. Unh-hunh. I just talked to him on the phone."

The boy stared at him with that cool insolence bred in Manhattan youth, his unabashed eyes traveling leisurely over Hyer's form all the way to the eleventh floor.

As he left the car Hyer handed the boy a dime.

"What's that for?"

"Way you studied me," Hyer answered, "I thought you must've recognized me. I'm John D. Rockefeller."

The boy shook his head. "He don't

deal in that kind o' oil," he said and slammed the door.

The door at 11B was opened by a well built man of fifty or fifty-five with grizzled hair, a clipped gray mustache, tan weatherbeaten face. He looked at Hyer with gray eyes, transparent and hard. He had the air of a man who trains hard and sleeps on a board, a man of spring steel. Hyer liked him.

He said, "You are Mr. Hyer? Come in."

When they were inside the room Hyer remarked, "Your name's not Cole, then?" He could see that the gray eyes, despite their brilliance, were hard. The man's mouth, too, was tight, like that of one who fights against odds.

"If you like that you may use it, Mr. Hyer."

Hyer said, "I don't."

"Why?" The sharp eyes bored into Hyer's face.

"If I'm going to do useful work for you, I've got to know more about the scenery. I like to know what I'm doing, even if I do get plenty jack for it."

The other man hesitated a moment. Then he said, "You may call me Shannon. I am Leslie's father."

Leslie, Hyer remembered suddenly, was Kip Shannon's baptismal name. He had never heard of Kip's father either, and in fact on more than one occasion had gone so far as to suggest that such an individual might have an anomalous status.

"Who's Rufus?" he inquired.

"Rufus?"

"Rufus Cole? Guy with the fancy gloves you sent down to see me Wednesday."

A smile softened Shannon's tight mouth for an instant. "My nephew," he said. "Harry Vanness. Harry has a tendency toward melodrama."

Hyer nodded. "I had a sample of it. He says you want Kip cornered because he ran off with the U. S. mint or something." Suddenly he felt uncomfortable and waved his hand. "Sorry. Well, I've located him."

"Where is Leslie?"

"Downtown in my flat. What do I do next?"

THE father's cheeks sagged. He swallowed. He said, "Sit down, Mr. Hyer," in a lifeless voice. "I was a little worried when you did not call again after yesterday morning.

Hyer said, "I've been in Woodstock." And at the quick light that leaped into Shannon's gray eyes, he added, "You read about what happened up there?"

"Yes. Did you find—?"

"Kip didn't do it, no. But what made you think he might?"

"Harry went up last week to see Leslie. He told me that Leslie knew Tatham."

"The kid up there Tuesday night?" Hyer asked.

"On Tuesday, yes. He came back Tuesday evening."

"What time?"

"He was here in time for dinner."

"He mentioned something about you having hired Mulroy on the Coast," Hyer said. "Mulroy ever mention a woman name of Venice Malinov buzzing around Kip?"

"I believe he did. He sent reports to me in Utah. Wait. I have some of them with me. Will you have a drink, Mr. Hyer?"

Hyer tested his drink and gazed about the room while the rancher searched in another room for the reports. The apartment had obviously been rented furnished. And there was nothing to indicate that the present occupants had lived there long.

"Harry live here with you?" Hyer asked when Shannon returned.

"Yes. His parents are both dead. He has lived with me for ten years. He has often begged to come to New York and when I got worried about Leslie I decided to come East and spend at least part of the winter. Here is a paragraph about Miss Malinov."

Hyer took the sheet of flimsy. He recognized Mulroy's meticulous, some-

what literary style.

"Also seen," the paper read, "with one Venice Malinov, alias Adrienne Martin, whose escapades have ranged from the less recondite confidence games to an international scandal involving royalty. Malinov is thirty-two, five feet six inches tall, weight one hundred and twenty pounds, blue eyes, yellow hair, retroussé nose, eyes have a slight Kirghiz slant. Malinov has been in Hollywood at intervals for three years. Has the distinction of being the only natural blonde in California who never applied for a screen test. This on unimpeachable testimony. Has been offered a position with two studios, but declined both. Would be an addition to any company's décor, at that: slim enough to be called tall without the hack writer's standby, willowy; dresses quietly and expensively to complement her birthright of yellow hair, which she combs back and close, and the suspicion of mongol in her eyes. Repertoire is varied: she can play a number of roles from the brisk business woman to the languid countess and seductive demimondaine. No obvious professional connections at present. Will watch her efforts in direction of S closely."

Hyer handed back the flimsy. "You get that just a little while before Kip left California?"

"Only two weeks. Why?"

"Because it looks as if she might've had something to do with engineering his trip here."

"She is in New York?"

Hyer grinned. "She's here all right."

"I have something else you should be interested in, Mr. Hyer. The note which I received Wednesday night. I told you over the phone yesterday morning."

Hyer said, "Oh yes, that snatch message. I tell you I was pinch-hitting for Kip on that?" Shannon frowned and Hyer went on, "Guy that sent that note thought he was telling the truth, but he was talking about me."

"I don't understand."

HYER explained how he had been mistaken for Kip in Corey Hilton's hallway, telling of the wreck and his escape.

"I owe you a great debt, Mr. Hyer."

Hyer said easily. "We can talk about that later. Let's see this billet-doux."

The brief message, typewritten on cheap paper, read:

"Your son is in our hands. He will be released upon payment of one hundred thou-

sand dollars (\$100,000.00). If you are ready to deal with us, insert the following personal advertisement in Friday's *Examiner*: 'GG. You are right. S.' It will be useless for you to notify the police. When we see the advertisement we will communicate with you.'

Hyer whistled. "Your ante's a lot steeper than Lilith's," he said.

Shannon's mouth hardened. "That woman," he said, his tone unmistakable.

Hyer looked up. "You don't like Lilith?"

"She ruined my son."

Hyer's mouth opened twice before he could use his vocal chords. Then he said, "Listen, mister, I want to finish your education for you."

He talked steadily for ten minutes.

At the end of his monologue, the rancher's eyes were inscrutable. He said, "You seem to know her well."

"I've know her," Hyer answered with heat, "since we were both barefoot. And if you think Lilith Dean's responsible for anything in Kip Shannon's temperament except one or two traits that make him almost human, you're crazy." He stopped, and the muscles in his cheeks worked. "I'm sorry to be running Kip down to his old man, but I happen to know more about this situation than you do, brother. How long since you've seen Kip?" he asked.

The other man said in a low tone, "Five years."

"Since before he married her?"

"Yes."

"And for five years you've kept tab on him and sort of hung around to get him out of scrapes? Even though he's acted as if you weren't on earth?"

The older man, quietly, "He is my son."

Hyer shook his head and murmured, "The three of you—" without completing the reference. His eyes fell again to the letter in his hand. "You have any idea who this guy with the double initial could be?"

"Well," Hyer observed, "it looks as if he picked sappy helpers, anyway." As he was leaving he asked, "Where's Yellow Glove Harry tonight?"

"At the theater, I believe. He will be sorry to have missed you, Mr. Hyer."

Hyer grinned. "I'll bet he'll be broken hearted."

The old rancher coughed. His stiff control suddenly left him. Embarrassment showed in the leathery face that had been stern the moment before, embarrassment and something else, something akin to contrition.

"And, Mr. Hyer, if—if Miss Dean will allow me, I should like to—to talk to her. I know—a father knows his son's failings, Mr. Hyer, and—"

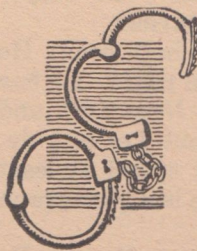
Hyer said heartily, "She'll be glad to. I'll bring her around tomorrow. You two ought to be acquainted."

The satisfied glow on his round face persisted as he rode downstairs under the cool insolent stare of the elevator boy. His sense of warm pleasure at the thought of bringing Lilith and her father-in-law together was untouched by the youth's comment as he opened the door at the ground floor. "And Mr. Rockefeller's bay windows is all in his house."

In fact for seventeen minutes and thirty-two seconds nothing happened which could even jostle Hyer's feeling of personal well-being. It took him that long to ride down from Eighty-sixth Street to Bank in the subway, to let himself into the house, limp up the single flight, open the door to his apartment, snap on the light—and stare at the murdered form of Kip Shannon sprawled over his living room rug.

15

"THE SCREWY PART IS —"



BEFORE he reached the phone, Hyer's eyes took in three crucial details. The shirt—his shirt which Kip had been wearing—was darkly powder-marked where blood had seeped out near the heart and sopped down to the floor. There was a

gun, one of the empty automatics off the mantel, in Kip's hand. And on the rug was a white splotch as if someone had dropped a pinch of flour.

When he had called police headquarters and reported the murder tersely, he swung about and gazed at the dead man for a long moment. Then his eyes suddenly narrowed and he got up from the telephone hastily.

He knelt and with his good hand searched Shannon's pockets (the pockets of Hyer's own suit) disturbing the body as little as possible. Finding nothing but a receipt from Macy's and a crumpled match packet, he rose and went into the bedroom.

He searched the bedroom, pulling out drawers, stooping to peer under furniture with a flashlight, turning back the rug, shaking the wastebasket out on a newspaper and going through its contents, feeling through the pockets of all the garments in the closet, taking the shoes from the floor one by one and shaking them, rummaging through the bed, even lifting two pictures on the wall to make sure what he sought was not behind them.

In the few minutes which remained before the arrival of the police he made a more hurried but almost as thorough search of the living room.

Then as if he suddenly remembered something, he ran to the kitchen, returned with a sheet of waxed paper and knelt by the white splotch on the floor, brushing it carefully into the sheet of waxed paper until the rug showed only the faintest light discoloration. The paper he folded carefully into a small packet and thrust into a crack at the back of the marble mantel piece.

He had just finished this when the doorbell rang.

Schultz of the homicide squad was first into the room, his round bullet head with its clipped hair lowered as if for a charge. Behind him came another plain-clothes man and two officers in uniform.

"Things has come to a pretty pass," Schultz observed, "when a private op

has to call in the lawr to crack a killing in his own flat."

"Only fair to give you boys a shot at it," Hyer answered, far cooler than he felt.

"You pretty the stiff up any, Hank?" Schultz asked, kneeling with one of the men in uniform beside Kip's body.

Hyer said, "I haven't touched him."

"Who done it?" the other uniform inquired and Hyer checked a witticism.

"I came in and found him like that," he answered. "I phoned before I had my hat off."

"What's his name?" Schultz asked, examining the wound.

"Shannon."

Schultz and the plain-clothes man both looked at Hyer quickly.

"Funny," Schultz said. "We got a general tonight to pick up a guy name of Shannon on a homicide up-state."

"What was this guy doing in your place, Hank?" his companion asked.

"If he's who you're looking for," Hyer answered, "maybe he was dodging cops. Friend of Corey Hilton's," he went on. "He dropped in on Corey some time Wednesday. Seems he got tired of Corey's company and Corey left his key ring lying around, so Shannon swiped Corey's key to my place, knowing I was out of town."

"Out of town, Hank. You just got back to town maybe?"

Hyer grinned. "Even if I had, I wouldn't be sap enough to say so. No, I got in about five. He was here when I came home, making free with my liquor and drinking himself pie-eyed."

"Friend of yours too, Hank?"

Hyer said easily, "I knew him off and on. Not well enough to invite in as a weekend guest."

ONE of the uniformed policemen said thoughtfully, "Shannon, Kip Shannon? Wasn't he married to this Lilith Dean, this movie actress?"

Hyer nodded, his lips tight.

"And didn't I read in the paper where she just come to New York the other

day?" the fountain of gossip continued.

"She's uptown," Hyer said, "incog. I saw her this afternoon."

"You sawr Miss Dean, Hank? This guy's wife?" Schultz asked.

Hyer sighed. "You boys lay off her until I can break it?" he asked. "I'll call her up. Bring her down to headquarters if you want me to."

"That'd be a favor, Hank."

Hyer picked up the phone and dialed. "Room seven-four-eight," he said. "Lilith? Hank... I'm coming up to get you, honey. . . . Unh-hunh, some news. . . . Be ready to go with me? . . . O. K." He put the phone down, turned to Schultz. "You trust me?" he asked, "Or you want to send one of your mob along with me?"

Schultz said, "Now, Hank," sadly. "The doc'll be along in a little while. We'll get 'im outta here. Meet you down at headquarters with Miss Dean? O. K., Hank?"

Hyer made a wry grin. "You can turn the place wrongside out, Schultz. Don't be so damn' polite."

By the time he and Lilith had ridden the six miles to headquarters she was fully herself once more.

Hyer had told her at once when they got in the cab, brutally, directly, considering that the best course. She had responded as he knew she would. After a moment's wild unbelief she had wept. Hyer made no move to console her, knowing it futile. But when her sobs ceased he talked to her, calmly, matter-of-fact, coaching her against the interview that awaited them.

He had also telephoned Kip's father from the Barnham, fearing that the older man might only learn of his son's death in the newspapers. He preferred (through some obscure mixture of motives he could not define) to tell the rancher himself, though he found the duty perhaps the most unpleasant he had ever faced.

"Lilith and I," he said into the phone, his voice cautious, "are going down to headquarters. Maybe you feel like

coming too? . . . All right, but do one thing for me, please. Don't say anything about hiring me. As a personal favor. I'll tell you more about it later." Hyer wet his lips and, conquered by a sentiment wholly novel in his cynical, realistic soul, said, "Sorry, buddy." Then he hung up the phone, squinted, frowned at himself, and said, "Nuts."

Schultz, a captain of detectives named Turner, and a minor satellite from the District Attorney's galaxy, were waiting for them. Two of the men rose and looked faintly embarrassed, as even public officials must in the presence of celluloid fame in this land of the free. Schultz chewed a dead cigar, his thumbs hooked in his belt, his bullet head sunk into his shoulders.

Hyer introduced Lilith and the young man from the District Attorney's office blushed.

"We regret very much this unpleasant summons, Miss Dean," Turner, the captain of detectives, began. "But you understand that we must have the fullest information we can as soon as possible."

Lilith answered, "I understand," in a low voice. Hyer, looking at her sharply, saw that her tawny eyes, though shadowed with grief, were steady. The strong firm lines of her face had not altered after that spasm in the cab.

"Are you aware, Miss Dean, why your husband should have come to the city suddenly on Wednesday from Woodstock?"

"I have no idea."

There was a moment's silence. Then the young man from the District Attorney's office cleared his throat, said, "Is your trip to New York connected in any way with—? That is, you were expecting to meet him in New York, Miss Dean?" He cleared his throat again.

"No. It was not until today that I learned he was in New York."

Schultz shifted his cigar and pounced on her evasion. "But you come East because you thought something was wrong?"

LILITH hesitated.

"Did Mr. Shannon send for you, Miss Dean?" Turner inquired.

"I received a telegram from him. He said he was in need of money," Lilith answered steadily.

"Much money?" the District Attorney's youth asked.

Hyer said disgustedly, "If you want to know what her favorite flower is and whether she sleeps in pyjamas or—"

Lilith raised her hand slightly and glanced at him. "Twenty-five thousand dollars."

Schultz's bullet head jerked up.

He said, "Twenty-five grand?" and took the cigar out of his mouth.

"Did the telegram specify why he needed the money, Miss Dean?"

"It did not."

"How long have you been in New York, Miss Dean?"

Lilith hesitated again. "Since five o'clock this afternoon."

Schultz replaced his cigar and chewed it. "Papers said something about somebody sawr you get in Thursday morning," he observed, "yesterday."

"I did. I was in the city only a few hours. I went up to Woodstock immediately and only came back this evening."

Hyer caught the glance which Schultz and Turner exchanged.

"Why did you go up to Woodstock, Miss Dean?"

"Because I expected to see my husband there."

"He didn't say nothing about coming to N'Yawk?" Schultz asked.

"No."

"Did you find out in Woodstock why he might have left suddenly?"

"No. No one know where he had gone."

"And you came right back to the city, Miss Dean?"

Hyer moved. "I met her there," he said. "We came back together this afternoon."

The three men eyed him a moment.

"What was *you* doing in Woodstock,

Hank?" Schultz inquired mildly.

Hyer said, "I was on a case and when you subpoena my client I'll tell you about it."

"What's your client's name, Hyer?" Turner asked.

"I'll tell you that," Hyer returned, "when you subpoena me."

"Hank," Schultz said sadly, "you ain't doing right by us."

"I may be doing you a favor."

Schultz shook his head. "You always was stuck on yourself, Hank."

Hyer said, "If you haven't got any more intimate questions to ask Miss Dean, we'll be—"

"Why, Miss Dean," the District Attorney's apprentice spoke up, "have you any idea whether Mr. Shannon had enemies in New York?"

"No."

"He had no enemies?"

Hyer caught a caustic observation on the tip of his tongue.

"I do not know."

"How long since you had seen Mr. Shannon, Miss Dean?"

"Five months," Lilith answered, her tawny eyes clouding.

"When you last saw him, you were —? That is, you parted on good terms?" the youth probed awkwardly and cleared his throat.

Hyer said, "You pup," and Schultz observed, "Now, Hank."

Lilith's chin rose. "We did."

"I guess that will be all, Miss Dean," Turner put in. "You will remain in the city, of course, for a few days?" Hyer rose with Lilith, but Turner put out his hand. "Oh, Hyer, if you don't mind we'd like to speak to you a little more."

Hyer squinted at them, his pose tense. Then he relaxed and said easily to Lilith, "O. K., honey. I'll take you home if you'll wait."

"We may be some time in conference with Mr. Hyer," Turner suggested. "Perhaps you had better not wait, Miss Dean."

Again Hyer tensed and the muscles of his jaw hardened. He said, "See you

in the morning, Lilith."

She looked at him and the corners of her mouth twitched. "All right, Hank."

The men, with the exception of Schultz, were standing. Turner bowed her out the door. But before he could step back into the room an attendant came up and said something to him. Turner gave a low direction. He turned to the men.

"We're going to have another visitor. Shannon's father. Did you know he was in town?" he asked Hyer.

Hyer said yes.

KIP'S father came into the room. His tanned face was set in furrowed grief, his brilliant gray eyes showed tragic struggle, his shoulders drooped with fatigue. He looked around the circle, nodded at Hyer and asked, "Where is my son?"

"You may see him shortly, Mr. Shannon," Turner answered. "There are certain things, of course, which—"

The Westerner's mouth tightened in quick pain. His eyelids dropped. He said, "Yes, I know," in a flat voice.

"Sit down, Mr. Shannon," the civic youth urged, and moved a chair. Shannon sat in it wearily.

"You know Mr. Hyer, I believe?" Turner asked.

"Slightly."

Hyer said, "We've met," his tone giving Shannon a cue.

"Might I ask, Mr. Shannon," Turner went on, "how you learned so quickly of—of the tragedy?"

"Someone telephoned to me at my apartment."

"Mr. Hyer?"

Shannon shook his head and Hyer who had unobtrusively held his breath exhaled. He said, "Hell no. I had my hands full with Lilith."

"Have you any idea, Mr. Shannon, who could have killed your son?"

Again the Westerner shook his head, and his rugged mouth moved.

"You had seen him recently?"

"Not for five years."

"You knew he was in New York, though?"

"Yes."

"How did you know that, Mr. Shannon?"

"Mr. Hyer told me."

Turner said, "Um. And how did you come to do that, Hyer?"

Hyer, feeling his way, answered, "Kip asked me to get in touch with his old man."

"When?"

"When I got back to town this afternoon. He wanted to borrow some money from—"

"He tell you where Mr. Shannon was staying?"

"Unh-hunh."

"If he knew where, then why didn't he try to get in touch with his father himself?"

Hyer said, "Ask *him*."

"Perhaps I can answer that," Shannon interposed. "He may have doubted that I would respond. We had—not been close for a number of years."

Turner said, "Um," and looked from Hyer to the young man of the District Attorney's staff.

This youth, as if at a signal, cleared his throat and said, "Mr. Hyer, you are rather a good friend of Miss Dean's? Am I right?"

Hyer nodded.

"And am I also right when I hazard the guess that you had occasionally suggested divorce to Miss Dean?"

Hyer's nostrils moved. He said, "What's that got to do with—?"

"You used an endearing term to her just now, did you not, Mr. Hyer?"

Hyer said yes.

"And I believe that Mr. Schultz tells me you insisted on going up yourself to inform Miss Dean of her husband's death and to bring her here. Am I right?"

Hyer said yes again. His face was set. White showed at the corners of his twitching nostrils.

Before the legal youth could follow up his advantage, Shannon suddenly spoke.

"If you will excuse me, I— May I see my son? The interview is—more painful than I had anticipated."

No man in the room failed to note and interpret the look he bent on Hyer. Turner accompanied him to the door, a hand on the older man's shoulder.

"By the way, Hank," Schultz said in a low, hurried tone, "I went right to work on them bottles of yours. Here's the prints." He handed Hyer several negatives. "Mostly a dame's," he added quickly.

Hyer thanked the bullet-headed Dutchman with his eyes. Turner came back into the room.

When the four of them were seated again, a long moment of silence intervened before Schultz asked directly, "Hank, I hate to say this, but *was* there anything between you and this Miss Dean?"

Hyer said, "No." His eyes were trapped, wary.

Schultz asked, "You don't ordinarily pack a rod, do you, Hank?"

Hyer said no.

"There was a lot of artillery in that flat of yours, though, Hank."

"I took 'em off a couple of punks," Hyer said steadily. "They were empty."

Turner and the youthful prosecutor looked at each other guardedly for a moment.

"We *know* they was empty, Hank," Schultz continued in a regretful tone. He added, "Shannon had one of 'em in his hand."

"What the hell are you driving at, Schultz?"

"Shannon never had a chanct with that empty rod," Schultz asked sorrowfully, "did he, Hank?"

Hyer said, "Get it over with."

"We found the gat that killed Shannon, Hank."

"Outside," the youth from the District Attorney's office added. "In the ash can."

"And Hank," Schultz concluded softly, "the screwy part is, it's got your prints on it."

16

CHLORAL HYDRATE



HYER and Corey Hilton returned to the detective's apartment on Bank Sreet a little after midnight. Kip Shannon's body had been removed, but there was a stain the size of a man's hand on the rug. The

rooms gave evidence of a search.

Hyer's usually placid round face was marked with worry lines and his eyes still wore the wary, harassed expression that had leaped into them at the beginning of Schultz's gentle questioning two hours before. Frank alarm sat in Corey Hilton's pink chubby features.

The reporter dropped into a chair, loosening his overcoat and pushing his hat back from his damp forehead. Hyer went to the kitchen and returned with a bottle and glasses. He set these down and went back after a siphon and ice. When he returned he put the bowl of ice cubes and the siphon on a stool beside Corey Hilton, removed his hat and coat, sat down, splashed whiskey into a glass, squirted soda water and observed, "There's two guys down there believe in Santy Claus tonight." When Corey Hilton morosely ignored this pallid witticism, Hyer took a swallow from his glass and continued, "Turner and Morrisey's been waiting to pin something on yours truly ever since the *Titanic* went down."

"Schultz hates to believe it," Corey Hilton said.

"Schultz," Hyer agreed with feeling, "is smart."

"If it hadn't been for him you'd be locked up, Hank."

"Him and Al Joselyn's twenty-five grand bail," Hyer snapped. "Anyway something tells me I might as well be."

"Why?" Corey Hilton blinked over his glass.

"Old man Shannon thinks I'm Cain's

long-lost son."

"Well, what if—?"

"Hell," Hyer said testily, "who's going to foot the bill now that he's off me?"

"You're worrying about *money*?" Corey Hilton demanded, his eyes wide. "Now?"

"I'd say now was as good a time as any."

Corey Hilton said aghast, "You're likely to be indicted for murder."

"And maybe you think Jake Rosen's my mouthpiece just because he's fond of my map," Hyer retorted. He lighted a cigaret with nervous fingers.

Corey Hilton took his drink absently and stared at Hyer, frowning. "How did Schultz happen to find your fingerprints on that gun, Hank?"

"Because," Hyer said savagely, "they were there."

"You know they were?"

"I knew it, Corey," Hyer replied, his voice weary, "the minute I saw Kip on the floor here."

The reporter shook his head at this admission, and contemplated his drink.

"Corey," Hyer said at length, "I may be overplayed my hand this time."

"It's too bad you haven't got a better alibi," the reporter agreed.

"Alibi, hell!" Hyer grinned. "That's one of the lucky breaks. That throws 'em off. If I had a shark-tooth alibi, I'd still be down there with the rest of the felons. They expected me to have one and the fact that I admitted without any fuss that I can't account for the time I was on the L and the subway throws 'em off."

"A cop's mind," Hyer mused, "is a funny thing. They dope me to be smart and when I act dumb, it stops 'em temporarily. This time tomorrow they'll probably figure out that acting dumb was the smartest thing I could do. Then watch 'em!" He sighed. "Well, that gives me until tomorrow this time, anyway. How about some shut-eye?"

"You're going to *sleep*?"

Hyer said promptly, "I'm not going

to sit up and play *solitaire* just because Turner gave me a dirty look."

Corey Hilton remembered something. "I forgot to tell you. I checked that license number, Hank. It's made out to Antonio Pellegrino, 3457 Avenue T, Brooklyn. You already knew?" he asked at Hyer's grin.

"The name's familiar," Hyer admitted.

Corey Hilton studied him. "I hope," he observed "you're not as dumb as you act."

"And I hope," Hyer retorted, "that if it comes to a showdown I can act a hell of a lot dumber than I am."

"Why?"

"Because," Hyer snapped, "if I showed how smart I am, some writer'd put me in a book along with those fancy dicks that always know the answers." He sighed. "Maybe that wouldn't be so bad, after all. Except," he added, "that all the killers those fancy dicks run down are in books, too, and they do what they're supposed to do."

BUT he did not go immediately to bed. After Corey Hilton left, Hyer remembered the fifty dollars in bills which he had thrust up in the window when Venice Malinov went in to talk to Kip. This in turn reminded him of the folded waxed paper in the crack behind the mantel piece. Hyer blinked. He retrieved the waxed paper, put on his hat and coat, and left the house.

Five minutes later he was ringing a bell on Twelfth Street three blocks away. A card above the push bell read, "Percey Allbright."

The hunchbacked chemist came to the door in a nightgown, a peaked nightcap bobbing grotesquely on his head.

He wheezed, "This is—a—fine time —of—"

Hyer wasted no apologies. He said, "You've got a laboratory in the cellar here, haven't you, Perce?"

The winded chemist nodded.

"How'd you come out with that stuff in the tin foil I gave you?" Hyer asked.

"I—can—even tell—you the color—and—the texture of—the skin—from which—"

Hyer grinned. "Just like the alchemists," he said. "Well, you take this and see if you can get as far with it. Rush order," he added, his face falling again into the lines of fatigue and worry. "Now that I've got you up you won't sleep any more anyway. Take it downstairs and work on it tonight."

The little hunchback began to protest this invasion of his privacy.

"Listen," Hyer said tensely, "this maybe's going to help keep me out where I can still be a profitable customer of yours. Give me a break, Perce. I'll see you first thing in the morning uptown."

His tone carried conviction and the stooped chemist closed the door, grumbling, but promising to get immediately at his analysis.

Henry Hyer slept soundly until seven-thirty the next morning.

When he awakened, he showered, carefully renewed the outer dressing on his splintered left arm, dressed, mixed a pick-me-up, and drank it with a pre-occupied glint in his eyes, while he read the copy of the *Express* which had been left at his door.

Kip Shannon's murder had given the picture editor a Roman holiday. Page one bore a picture of Lilith, one of Kip and a snapshot of them together. The double page spread of pictures in the middle of the paper was devoted chiefly to Lilith, with a layout made up as a motion picture film showing scenes of her rise from amateur theatricals to stardom running across the bottom. Here again were poses of Kip, in polo togs, on the beach at Malibu, fishing off Key West.

The story itself, screamingly headlined on page three, was a masterpiece of tabloid style, but contained mercifully few facts. The place of the shooting was given as Hyer's Greenwich Village apartment, and he was reported as having found the body. The really dam-

aging evidence, however, was not mentioned. There was a reference to Kip Shannon's father, and Lilith's incognita had been shattered.

Hyer turned to Mal Range's column. He was relieved to find that the columnist had apparently not heard of Hyer's predicament in time to revamp his paragraphs for the late edition. This last he regarded as a boon.

At eight o'clock he phoned Chase Remsen and suggested that they breakfast together. He asked, "Seen the paper? . . . Unh-hunh, but it happened that way. Don't believe everything you read."

THE two men were silent as they walked toward Seventh Avenue, Hyer moody and thoughtful, the mathematician as always taciturn. Not until they sat at a table waiting for their wheatcakes did Chase's knife-edged face show concern. Then his gimlet eyes bored at Hyer and he said, "Well?"

"Kip took Corey's key to my place and came in yesterday. Dodging something."

"What?"

"That," Hyer confessed, "is what I'm trying to piece together. When Lilith and I got in from Woodstock yesterday evening I left her uptown and came down to see McRae. McRae smelled some of Lilith's perfume on me and got suspicious."

"Of what?"

"Of something," Hyer answered tartly, "that's buzzing around about two jumps ahead of me on this merry-go-round. You remember how he acted Wednesday?"

Chase nodded.

"He was interested in Kip Shannon's whereabouts like a hound in a cane brake. But he didn't let on he was. Then when he got the idea Lilith was somewhere I could name in less than three guesses, he damn' near went nuts. Lilith," Hyer went on, "got an S. O. S. from Kip Wednesday morning to the tune of twenty-five grand. Wanted a

cashier's draft by return mail. And to make things screwier yet, Kip never sent that wire."

"Cashier's draft?"

"You get it," Hyer said, admiring.

"A cashier's draft's as good as cash, given one thing."

"Endorsement."

"Endorsement. Now Kip was in Woodstock when that wire was sent. And he should've been in Woodstock when the answer to it came back. But meanwhile a guy'd got shot up there in Kip's house."

Hyer squinted a moment. He said slowly, "If you were offered your choice of counterfeiting or compounding a felony against a county prosecutor, which'd look more attractive to you, Chase?"

"Compounding," Chase said at once.

"Why?"

"F. B. I."

"Meaning," Hyer said, "Federal Bureau of Identification. When you turn to crime, Chase, you'll at least have good judgment. Counterfeiting's not as profitable as it once was."

"No."

"No," Hyer agreed, and continued on another tack without exploring further this line. "Now after this guy gets crooked in Kip's house, Kip takes French leave of all his little playmates up in the hills and scrams the hell back to New York to bunk with Corey. Corey told you the painful sequel of that, how I got slugged and played sub for Kip."

"Well, when I got to my place last night I found him there, and there were a couple of mugs trying to coax him out for a ride. They left pretty soon, not liking me as a chaperon. But about twenty minutes after they left, in blew a blonde cyclone—you remember this doll we met as we left McRae's Wednesday evening, one Range called Venice Malinov?" Chase nodded. "Well, she wanted to talk to Kip. I let her, but I forgot to tell her Kip was out cold with a bad case of Scotch jitters and this made her mad."

"That's four—seven counting the torpedos that snatched me—that've showed a dizzy interest in Kip Shannon since Lilith got her phony wire: McRae, Solitaire and Patch (the two I found with Kip) and the Malinov."

"Well," he went on after the waitress had brought their orders, "I leave Kip sleeping it off and toddle downtown to see some friends of mine in the Federal building, then I ride back home on the subway and make a phone call and then I go up to see Lilith's papain-law."

Chase looked up quickly.

"Unh-hunh, she's got one, whatever you think. He's a nice guy, Kip's old man, with a square tan face and a pair of gray eyes that're used to picking out cattle brands. But they don't miss much, I'll bet, on asphalt streets. Old Shannon's been on edge about Kip for quite a while and had an op trailing Kip on the Coast, Mulroy, who reported that Kip and Venice were pretty thick out there. He's here in New York with a nephew who had a yen for the bright lights and when Kip checked out so suddenly at Woodstock, Shannon sent the nephew to look me up and put me on Kip's trail, Mulroy having told him I was O. K."

"The old man and I hit it off pretty well, and I'm just wondering what kind of a yacht I'll buy with the fee he'll put up to get his son out of the Woodstock jam, when I toddle back home suffused with good will toward mankind—and stumble over said son messing up my living room carpet with the last of the Shannon blood."

HYER'S eyes grew wary again and he attacked his griddle cakes with a nervous energy not all born of hunger.

Chase said, "The gun?"

Hyer made a grimace. "I had a dizzy hunch about that gat the minute I saw Kip," he confessed. "And I turned the place upside down looking for it, it and something else—something else," he added savagely, "that, if I'm the luck-

iest sap since Jonah, 'll tie Kip's corpse around somebody's neck." He shrugged. "But I don't find the gun. And I don't find this other dingus. And when the boys from the station house show up I'm ready to break down and tell why I did it."

"But I wanted to get to Lilith and fix up the edges with her, so I put on a Frank the Boy Scout with Schultz and get him to let me go break the news to Lilith she's a happy widow. So what do the cops do but get a streak of business pride while I'm gone and go over the place inside and out, picking up the rod that did it—with," Hyer moistened his lips, "my digit monnikers on it."

"Kip had an empty gun in his hand when he got pushed over—a gat he'd picked off the mantel. The gun that did the job had my prints. Kip was married to Lilith. I'm fond of Lilith and plenty people know I hated Kip's guts."

He spread his hands. "To a mob of headquarters Hannahs who've got nothing to do but sit around and read newspaper love stories, it's plain as the nose on your face. And just about the time they get around to casting me as Doc Crippen with reverse English, in walks old man Shannon and falls for the gag so hard he bounces—bounces straight out of the room and, unless I can tie up a lot of loose ends before tonight when they jug me on a spring-proof murder rap, straight out of little Henry's life." Hyer sighed. "With half the state of Utah in his bank account."

After a moment during which Hyer gloomed, his fork arrested in mid career, Chase said four consecutive words, his longest speech that morning, "What do I do?"

"Temporarily," Hyer answered, "you go up and take care of Lilith. I thought I might have some brainwork for you in that mess, but it turns out to be just a mess."

Chase's gimlet eyes bored at him from their deep sockets. "Shannon's heir?" he asked.

Hyer's mouth tightened. "Your brain

finds a job even when I don't give it one," he said. "I thought of that. It's asking for a pretty heavy dose of coincidences."

Hyer told him how to reach Lilith's hotel.

"She'll be tickled to death to see you. Keep her company until you hear from me and don't let her do anything that'll give the newshounds a worse attack of rabies than they're got already."

He, himself, seeing it was well after eight-thirty, hailed a cab—prejudiced heartily against the subway after his last night's experiences—and rode to Percy Allbright's chemist shop off Times Square.

The little hunchbacked apothecary was just opening up as Hyer paid for his fare and crossed the sidewalk. He turned stiffly around at Hyer's greeting and looked up at the detective over his gold spectacles, wrinkling his high boney forehead.

"Finish it?" Hyer asked.

"I—did." As if the statement left him breathless, the little stooped chemist reserved further explanation until he had unlocked the heavy door and shuffled into the dim, aridly aromatic shop.

Hyer followed him in. "What was it?"

"Chloral—hydrate."

Allbright limped to the back of the shop and disappeared through the swinging doors. Hyer heard him wheezing and fumbling among glassware. When he returned he bore the two test tubes which had been labeled in Hyer's presence the evening before. In his mouth he carried several loose sheets of paper, covered with small precise symbols. Going behind the low counter he set the test tubes in a rack, took the sheets of notepaper from between his lips, and panted for a moment, his elbows braced on the counter.

"There," he wheezed, and handed Hyer the papers.

Hyer looked at their cabalistic notations and shook his head. He said, "I

never cared much for Paracelsus."

"Solution—in the whiskey—twenty per cent."

"Chloral hydrate," Hyer mused. He brightened. "Knockout drops?"

"Vulgarly called—that."

"Acts fast then. Probably only two drinks poured from that bottle," he suggested. "How much would that be likely to give each of 'em?"

ALLBRIGHT thought, wrinkling his forehead, looking up at Hyer over his spectacles. "Possible — twenty grams."

"Lethal?"

Allbright's bony shoulders jerked in a shrug. "Long habitu—ation might give—a certain tolerance."

"But it *could* be fatal?"

"Easily."

"What's the stuff used for? Medically?"

"Coronary sclerosis."

Hyer grinned. "Sure."

"Overactive heart."

"It habit-forming?"

"Quite."

"Symptoms?"

"Easily excited—talkative. Fatigues easily—subject to—cyncope."

"Passes out?"

Allbright nodded, wheezing.

Hyer said, "Swell. What could make a guy specially liable to *croak* from the stuff?"

Allbright thought a moment, panting. "Kidney—trouble," he hazarded.

"And a user could stand a jolt that might wipe out a guy, say with Bright's disease?"

The little hunchback nodded.

"Oh yes, those other two samples," the detective inquired eagerly. "The tin foil and that wax paper I brought you last night."

Allbright nodded again, gathering himself for speech. "They are—identical—specimens. The second—has not—been applied—"

Hyer said, "Swell," his eyes brightening. "Maybe I'll bring you Exhibit A

tomorrow or next day and have you apply it, just to make sure."

From a telephone in the nearest drug-store Hyer phoned Lilith's hotel.

He said, "Room seven hundred forty-eight . . . Hello, Chase. Lilith O. K.? . . . Good. . . . Unh-hunh. Ask her if Kip had any heart trouble. . . . He take anything for it? . . . Unh-hunh. Thanks. . . . No, just keep an eye on her."

His eyes were less wary, his step springier, when he walked into Times Square. He stopped and took from his pocket the list of three names given him over the phone by the Kingston sergeant the night before.

He squinted at the list and read, Antonio Pellegrino, 3457 Avenue T, Brooklyn. This, according to the sergeant, was the brother of the Italian killed in the wreck. The body had been sent to this address for burial.

Hyer flagged a cab and gave the Avenue T number. During the long ride, his nervousness returned and he glanced often at his watch, urging the driver three times to hurry. By the time they reached Avenue T, Hyer's round face was drawn and his eyes were slits of anxiety.

He tapped on the pane and had the cab stop some distance down the street from the number he sought.

Hyer got out, was on the point of directing the driver to wait for him, and suddenly thought of the lavish fees commanded by Jake Rosen in murder defenses. He sighed, paid the meter reading and dismissed the cab.

He walked along toward number 3457, his eyes having already picked out the elaborate mourning motif of white tulle and roses affixed to the door.

When he was still several houses away, a man came out of the door of number 3457.

Hyer's eyes narrowed and without hesitating he turned and walked up to the stoop of the house he was just passing. He took care to conceal his slung arm from the man who had left the bereaved house and was approaching him.

Hyer pushed the bell button, keeping his back to the sidewalk.

"Good morning, Madame," he said to the button-eyed woman who opened the door a crack, "I am representing the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, repository of the world's greatest—"

Slam!

Hyer turned cautiously toward the street.

Patch was now thirty yards past, walking rapidly in the direction from which Hyer had come.

17

GRIMALKIN IN FOREST HILLS



HYER followed Patch for three blocks and saw him turn in at an old red brick house, descend to the basement and enter a grille above which hung a weathered sign, *S. Scarnuti, Italian Restaurant*. The

detective loitered up to the red brick house, cast a quick appraising eye over its front and walked down the steps to the grille. Inside a latticed entryway he found a door, its glass steamed over from the warm cooking fumes within. Hyer opened the door and stepped into a long bare hallway running back to the kitchen at the rear.

Along the hallway were hooks for customers' hats and coats and hanging from one Hyer recognized Patch's overcoat with the mourning band sewn to the sleeve. He strolled down the hall, his eyes on the kitchen at its end where voices and the sound of rattling dishes proclaimed the presence of the worthy Scarnuti or his minions.

When he came to Patch's overcoat, he stopped and removed his own deliberately, his eyes never leaving the kitchen door. But not even the proprietary glance of Signor Scarnuti, who came into the hallway just as he was finishing, could have followed the rapid skilled

movements with which Hyer searched the pockets of the hanging coat. His fingers flicked in and out with an address that would have brought green envy to the eyes of Fagin himself.

The short rotund Scarnuti bowed from his creased middle, balancing a steaming bowl of spaghetti with one hand and waving Hyer into the dining room with the other.

Hyer grinned and followed the hospitable host, casting a quick look at what his marauding fingers had found. It was a laundry slip from a Chinese laundry in Forest Hills. Below the printed lines was brushed a Chinese character. Hyer thrust the slip into a vest pocket and walked into the dining room.

There were only two other diners besides Patch. It was not until the detective was close enough to his table to place a hand on the chair opposite him that Patch started and his one eye widened with honest astonishment.

Hyer pulled out the chair, sat down, said, "Hi, Cyclops, what they got that's fit to eat?"

Patch repeated, in a tone that failed to do justice to the remark, a suggestion he had made three times to Hyer the night before.

Hyer asked, "Jeejee eat here, too?" and picked up the menu.

"Whoosa you looka for?" Patch inquired, this being the first even faintly impersonal comment Hyer had heard him make.

"You," Hyer answered. "Your chief's got the Indian sign on you and your flashy pal." Patch glowered, his one eye quite venomous enough for its eclipsed twin. "For the way you muffed that Shannon job" Hyer specified. "You're likely to be in a spot, Pellegrino, for that little mistake."

Patch's monoptic glare became a sneer. His mouth curled. "You no fin' out," he decided sagely.

"I found *you*, didn't I?" Hyer asked, and Patch repeated once more the cryptic advice of whose English he was

certain. But his one eye was uneasy.

Hyer said, "Listen. How tickled would you be, Handsome, if I told you I could hang Shannon's stiff around that thick neck of yours? Maybe you've been framed. Maybe it was an accident. But every cop in Greater New York's got his eye peeled for your map and if you'll take my advice, you'll crawl into one of Scarnuti's ovens back there and stay put even if you—even if they have to fix you up with parsley when you come out."

Hyer squinted and when he went on, his voice was cajoling. "Listen, Musso-lini. You play ball with me and I'll give you a break. I don't hold that little housebreaking act against you. I'm not a cop. I'm a business man just like you are. I'm making you an offer."

"W'at you wan' witha me?"

Hyer stared into Patch's one eye. "Who's Jeejee?"

THE expressive shrug which greeted this was honest enough. "You don't know?" Hyer asked. "Ever see him?"

"Me," Patch answered, his mouth drawing down and his shoulders hunching, "I no see thisa Jeejee. Ever."

"Maybe you're going to," Hyer answered. "Letting Shannon get sand-bagged right under your nose like that." The shot told again. "Look what happened to your brother," Hyer added with magnanimous illogic.

Patch frowned and hunched forward. "Whatta you know about my broth'?"

"Only that he's a large item of expense right now."

Patch pondered this. Then he shrugged. "You bigga bloff," he concluded. "Scram."

Hyer saw that the interview was unlikely to be fruitful. He said, "What did you think I was? A coffin salesman? O. K., pal, you're too smart for me. See you in the line-up."

He rose deliberately, grinned at the doubting Italian and walked out of the room, not looking back. He put on his

coat in the hall under the baleful black glance of Scarnuti and sauntered to the street.

He walked to the corner turned, bought a package of cigarets at a newsstand and strolled back, crossing the street and taking his stand in a doorway diagonally across from Scarnuti's. He smoked three cigarets slowly before he saw Patch come out of the restaurant, glance cautiously up and down the street and hurry away in the direction of Avenue T.

Hyer dropped his cigaret stub, stepped on it, and moved out of the doorway, an expression of satisfaction on his round face. Patch no longer wore the black blinder over his left eye. Without it, his swarthy face was strikingly different. Hyer noted for the first time the bunching black eyebrows meeting over the bridge of Patch's nose and, recalling swiftly something he had heard Thursday, he also noticed that Patch's arms were abnormally long. Lilith's nemesis.

Hyer, his cautious soul again haunted by the thought of Jake Rosen's defense fees, overcame his aversion to rail transport. By a combination of elevated and trolley lines he worked his way across Brooklyn to Metropolitan Avenue and forty-five minutes later stepped shivering off a streetcar in Forest Hills. He found the Chinese laundry whose address appeared on the slip from Patch's pocket.

There were two ageless Orientals in the small shop pushing flatirons. Festoons of shirts hung from an intricate rack arrangement on the ceiling. Hyer walked in and closed the door composing his patter.

He slammed the pink slip down on the counter, pushed his hat back, looked the very cartoon of righteous rage and snapped, "No catch shirt."

Without saying a word, without even looking at Hyer, one of the featureless partners shuffled over to the counter, picked up the slip, gave it a careful inspection, and pushed his straw slip-

pers back to where the other was ironing. There was an excited palaver in singsong and both came to the counter.

"What's matter?" Hyer asked, fire in his eye. "No catch shirt. My friend plenty mad."

"Wha's mallah?" the second Chinese answered toothlessly, being quite matter of fact about it. "Flien' son bitch, tha's wha's mallah."

Hyer pretended to fly into a rage. He shouted, "What?"

"Flien'," the laundryman repeated in the same casual tone, being a trifle more explicit as to prepositions, "son of bitch."

Hyer demanded hotly, "What do you mean? You can't call a friend of mine—"

"No pay."

"What?"

"Flien' no pay."

"Sure he pays. Prove it."

FINDING Hyer amenable to statistics, the assistant returned to his ironing while his toothless superior took down a greasy dog-eared cashbook from a shelf and began turning through it. This was better than Hyer had bargained for. The Chinese finally came to the page he sought. It had a brush character at the top and a column of what to Hyer's eyes might as well have been the roster of the nineteenth Route Army as figures.

"Not my friend," Hyer protested, shaking his head and getting angry again. What the laundryman was showing him was useless for his purposes. Hyer had consistently neglected the Oriental languages in high school.

"No?" the Chinese asked.

"How I know?" Hyer inquired reasonably.

"Wai'."

The man went down on his heels and rummaged beneath the counter. He came up with a handful of pink slips similar to the one Hyer had slammed down on the counter. One after the other, deliberately, slowly, he laid them

out and smoothed them down. Hyer grew nervous after the first thirty-odd. At last the Chinese found one that satisfied him.

"He said, 'Rook,'" and pointed to a character at the top of the page in the cashbook that matched the one on the pink slip. Stolidly he went back to the pile and began searching for another.

But Hyer was uninterested in pagan brushmarks. He was staring at the name and address scrawled across the face of the pink slip, "Rex Harvey, 78-14 Loubet Street."

Hyer pretended to be convinced. He said, "You win. How much?"

The Chinese shuffled back through the steamy shop, whisked an abacus out of thin air, returned to the counter where he began playing the abacus like a pair of castanets.

"Ni' sebmty."

Hyer, delighted with the result of his strategy, was unmindful for the moment of Jake Rosen's figuratively outstretched palm. He took out a bill.

Then, growing doubtful, he said, "Maybe mistake. You remember what my friend look like?"

The Chinese thought a moment, his eyes fixed on the bill.

"Ha' ling," he said suddenly, remembering, looking up at Hyer placidly. He jabbed at the little finger of his right hand and said something Cantonese over his shoulder. The other answered, "Dim'n," and the toothless proprietor grunted, making motions with his left hand as if he were representing sparks flying off the little finger he had indicated.

Hyer said, "Big?" cupping his hands around his jowls.

"Ye'."

"How he act?"

Hyer almost collapsed when the parchment face of his informer contorted into what might have passed current in Shanghai for a copy of Solitaire's grin.

He said, "Fine," and pushed the bill across the counter.

"I take?" he asked, picking up the pink slip with the name and address written on it. The Chinese shrugged and warped his straw slippers around while the ten-dollar bill vanished.

Hyer found the Loubet Street address to be a smallish brick apartment house, product of the fecund late twenties, squat and undistinguished. In the entrance was a bank of twelve buttons, one of them bearing the name on the laundry slip, Harvey, and indicating an apartment on the third floor, 3C.

Hyer pushed the button without high illusion and waited. He pushed it again. When there was no response, he selected another button bearing the name of a first floor dweller. The door-latch buzzed and Hyer stepped into the quasi-colonial lobby.

From a door at one side of the lobby a woman's head thrust out. She eyed Hyer with hostile distaste, and said, "Well?"

"Madame," Hyer asked, taking off his hat, "do you own your own radio?"

"We do," she snapped and slammed the door.

He ascended quietly to the third floor and found the door to 3C. He touched the button here and heard a bell ring inside. Once more he rang. Then, taking out his chamois kit of picks and hampered seriously by his useless left arm, he worked for a few moments on the lock, ears cocked for the slightest sound from the hallway or the stairs. The lock gave and the door moved open.

IT WAS a simply furnished three-room flat whose occupancy was dominantly if not exclusively male. Hyer walked through the living room on the balls of his feet, casting a glance into the kitchen where he noted an open window giving on the fire escape. He went cautiously into the bedroom and looked at the unmade bed, the littered dresser, the gray overlay of dust on the floor.

He opened a closet door, glanced at the sparse masculine wardrobe hang-

ing there—and jumped straight into the air.

Behind him there had risen a strident "Mr-r-r-r-r-gna-a-a-a-aow!" rising from deep bass to high C.

Hyer struck the floor in a quarter turn. He faced the largest blackest thing in fur his awed eyes had ever encountered.

At first he took it for a puma. Then he remembered that pumas are yellow. Being unversed in feline psychology, he was at a loss for a moment. He could think of no appropriate greeting. One does not say, "Nice pussy," to a cat the size of a housebroken leopard.

The cat seemed inclined to friendship and came toward Hyer, arching its back, its sable plume of tail waving erect. The detective sidled by and moved his hand in tempered amity, debating ways of coaxing the black newcomer to the kitchen and the open window through which it had come. He disliked the thought of setting off that feral firewhistle again however, and decided to leave well enough alone, continuing his search of the rooms while he kept the cat in range out of the corner of his eye.

The dresser drawers yielded nothing of particular interest, nor did the pockets of the clothing in the closet. From these latter he collected a miscellany of theater stubs, match packets, some small change and a receipt for the month's rent made out to R. Harvey. In the wastebasket was an envelope which Hyer picked out, being careful to hold it by the corner. It was addressed to Grant Golightly, 207 East Twenty-first Street, New York City, and it was empty. Hyer squinted at the name a moment, holding the envelope by its edges between his fingertips. Then he took a clean handkerchief from the dresser and folded the envelope in it lightly, putting the folded handkerchief in his wallet.

Followed by the attentive sable Persian, he went into the living room and

began rummaging there, casting an uneasy glance now and then at Grimalkin who watched every move with yellow speculative eyes.

On an end table by the couch were several copies of mystery magazines and a novel exploiting the adventures of the federal secret service operatives. A pint whiskey flask, empty, a soiled glass and an ashtray heaped with cigaret butts stood on a small stool beside the couch and at its end was a rumpled pile of Sunday newspapers. Lint and ashes spotted the rug. On the wall hung an illuminated calendar.

Being careful to leave no marks from his fingers, he lowered the lid of the desk and looked inside. A telephone rested in front of the pigeonholes, its cord running out through a groove where the lid came down. Hyer made a note of the telephone number. Then his eyes lighted on a scribbled message on a pad beside the telephone and he grinned. The pad bore his own name, address and phone number.

The pigeonholes were empty. He was on the point of closing the lid once more when he squinted and stooped to look up under the flat top above the top pier of pigeonholes. He felt behind the scrollwork dado ornamenting the top of the upper pigeonholes and verified his suspicion.

There was a false top in the desk. The scrollwork ornament was no mere strip across the tier of pigeonholes. It was the front of what appeared to be a solid section. Squinting, Hyer decided that, unless the manufacturer had inserted a slab of mahogany two inches thick in the desk-top where the lip of the hinged lid was accustomed to lie, there was a roomy compartment there. Oblivious for the moment to the prints his prying fingers were leaving, he felt along the under edge of the desk-top, at the sides, at the back, searching for a catch that might release the false top.

So sure was he that his bizarre suspicions were correct and so intent on

his search, that he forgot the satanic Persian who was eying him yellowly from the center of the rug.

There was a loud "Mr-r-r-r-r-r-gna-a-a-aow!" like a caged police siren and Hyer jumped again.

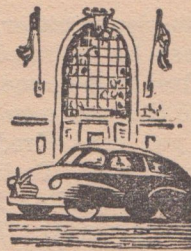
He swore viciously in annoyance and pain, for as he jumped his wounded left arm flew up. The splints struck solidly against a corner of the desk-top and he was sure he had broken the remaining little bones.

But his hearty profanity broke off. The hell in his wrist was forgotten as he gazed at the desk-top. It had moved, a crack showing along the whole length just above the scroll dado. The top was a lid, hinged at the back, which opened wide when he lifted it.

Under it was a tray an inch and a half deep, some three feet long and a foot or so wide. And the whole space was packed with what would appear to any normal grocery clerk or filling station attendant to be good United States banknotes. Packets of bills in ten-, twenty-, and fifty dollar denominations. Crisp and new.

18

"WARRANT"



HYER perched on the corner of Ed Wheeler's desk and returned the big man's stare, eye for eye. He talked earnestly for three minutes, staring at Wheeler with concentrated earnestness. The big man wrinkled his bushing brows and his massive chin thrust forward slowly.

"Henry," he rumbled, "for a man who's got as good sense as you, you manage to get into some of the craziest—"

Hyer said quickly, "Who you been talking to?"

"Some of the boys," Wheeler went on,

his ursine grumble not untouched with solicitude, "came in this forenoon and said Turner was on the war path. Said he kind of let on he'd got you behind the eight ball, Henry."

Hyer's round face hardened. "Maybe Turner's not so far wrong. Failing a couple of nice quiet miracles."

"What happened, Henry?"

"After I left here last night I walked into my own place and tripped over a stiff," Hyer answered, his tone casual, inconsistent with the concern that now showed in his eyes.

Wheeler said, "Um. Picked sort of an unhandy place to bump himself off, didn't he, Henry? Friend of yours?"

Hyer said no. "And it wasn't suicide. Somebody plugged him in the pump. The guns got my prints on it."

"Happen while you were down here, Henry?"

Hyer said no shortly.

"You was somewhere you can depend on, I suppose? With somebody?"

Hyer grinned, but there was no abundance of humor in his grimace. "Sure I was in a car with about fifty other guys."

"Fifty other guys, Henry?"

"Subway," Hyer specified.

Wheeler shook his head, "The subway," he rumbled, "is a kind of a poor place to lay an alibi."

Hyer said, his voice suddenly bitter, "You're telling me." Then he resumed the earnest tone of his first monologue. "I busted in when I got to that place out in Forest Hills, where you sent Fred out to watch for this guy Harvey. Took Fred long enough to get there after I phoned in to you," he complained. "I must've waited forty-five minutes."

"I sent Fred right out," Wheeler rumbled, "as soon's you phoned, Henry. But it strikes me you're getting a lotta use—"

Hyer said, "Listen, Ed. I got something'll knock your eye out."

He took out his wallet and removed the specimens of banknotes which he had purloined from the false top of the

desk on Loubet Street.

Wheeler examined them and his ponderous jaw jutted slowly. He rumbled, "Mike," and the lean youth from the outer office entered. Mike glanced sharply at Hyer and said, "What?"

"Take a look at what Henry just brought us, Mike. See if you recognize 'em."

The lean youth took the crisp new banknotes, looked at them, glanced sharply at Hyer and went for his magnifying glass. He returned, holding the glass to the back of one of the bills, studying it minutely.

"Been in another poker game, Hyer?" he asked. The question was ironical.

Hyer said to Wheeler, "If I *do* have to do the dirty work for your outfit, your punks don't have to insult me." His round face was flushed and his eyes bright.

Ed Wheeler rumbled, "Now, Henry. Take it easy. These're samples Henry picked up at that place out in Queens," he went on to Mike. "That place we sent Fred out to keep an eye on when Henry phoned in. Henry brought these in just to check up."

Hyer, mollified, asked Mike, "These some more of your pal Charley's work?"

Mike nodded. He gave the detective a sharp, suspicious glance.

Hyer said testily, "If you've been listening to Centre street scandal, maybe you better go wash your ears out with lye."

"Henry," Wheeler said, "I thought you had some pretty good friends among the boys at headquarters."

"Well, I'm not talking to you through chicken wire, am I?" Hyer retorted.

"They kinda nasty to you last night?"

Hyer said no.

"Fred's got orders to pick up anybody trying to go in or out of this apartment out in Queens," Wheeler told Mike. "You didn't tell the cops out in the hundred and twelfth precinct about this, Henry?"

Hyer said, "Think I wanted to spoil your pinch for you? Don't waste your

time studying my map for criminal tendencies," he snapped to Mike, who gave him another sharp look and went out of the office.

"Now," Hyer said to Ed Wheeler, "what's your man found out up there in Ulster County?"

THE big man took a sheet of notes from a folder and rumbled, "Seems to me you're taking an all-fired interest in us all at once, Henry. You ain't hardly been near us for six months."

"Unh-hunh and if your hired help can't quit making snotty remarks maybe I'll stop even dropping in for tea."

"Don't you mind Mike. He's just got a natcherally suspicious make-up. Um. You really think Turner's got something on you, Henry?"

"No, Ed. Hell no. Nothing but my grease spots all over the rod that killed Shannon. Little thing like that, you know——" Hyer waved his hand.

Wheeler gave him a long look, his chin thrusting out. Then he pushed a pair of tortoise-shell spectacles over his ears and picked up the sheet of notes he had taken from the folder.

"Bates went up last night. He worked the whole district this morning and phoned in. There's eleven rented places in that section you specified, Henry. Six of 'em just summer cottages that nobody's been near since Labor Day. We got names and a little dope on the other five. First one," he glanced up over the loosely fitting spectacles, "um—first one's got Kip Shannon's name on the lease. I expect you knew that, Henry?" Hyer nodded, his lips tight. "It's a cottage, too, but fixed up so's it can be lived in all year round. Bates reports it looks like somebody's went in there and pried around since the big snow Thursday night." Again he shot a glance at Hyer who moved not an eyelash.

"Um. Well, there's a place down the road from Shannon's a piece rented to a Miss Jane Scroboddy from Boston. Little house and nobody living in it. Then

up the mountain a little ways is a shack like some squatter was living in it, Binch, his name is. Bates says Binch don't look any too bright."

"Binch?"

"Yeah. Lonnie Binch. Kind of a backwoods guy, Bates says." (So Lonnie had been released from the Kingston jail.) "Then there's a hundred-acre farm—seems like this Binch's shack is on the farm—rented by a family name of Hackett that moved in last fall from up near Troy. Hackett used to work in the shirt factories, but he lost his job and decided to go back to farming. Next there's an old place, sort of a run-down mansion, sounds like anyway, up the mountain a ways farther, set back off the road a piece. Used to be a kind of a show place, I guess, but the folks that owned it moved West and it kind of fell to pieces more or less. It's been rented since spring to a guy from the city here. He uses it for a kind of a weekend place and keeps two three caretakers there all the time. Name of Golightly, Grant Golightly. Then there's another farm, rented by an old batch, Sam Johnson and a sixty-acre piece leased by a family called Whittaker."

Wheeler laid the paper down and looked up at Hyer, pulling off his spectacles. "Any of that sound interesting, Henry?" he rumbled.

Hyer took out his wallet and removed the folded handkerchief, unwrapping the envelope he had taken from Harvey's wastebasket. Holding this gingerly by the edges, he presented it to Ed Wheeler.

The big man replaced his glasses, peered, and said, "Um. Golightly." He reached for the envelope and Hyer withdrew it.

Hyer said, "The scientific johnnies in your outfit're always talking about latent fingerprints. Well, my guess is that there's a regular festoon of 'em on this. If you'll do a little fancywork, maybe it'll make this Forest Hills job that much easier. This came from the same place as that queer I gave you."

Twenty minutes later Hyer got out of a cab in front of 207 East Twenty-first Street. It was an imposing house on Gramercy Square. Hyer walked into the lobby and inquired for Mr. Golightly at the desk.

"Mr. Golightly is away for several months."

Hyer said, "That's funny. I understood he was here. Gets his mail here, doesn't he?"

"Oh yes. Mr. Golightly's secretary calls for his mail regularly."

"Every day?"

"Nearly every day. She telephoned a little while ago that she would be in early this afternoon. If you would care to wait and see——"

Hyer said, "Not important. My business is with Golightly."

He went out to his cab, rode all the way around Gramercy Park and stopped at the curb a little distance down Twenty-first Street.

HE HAD to wait nearly half an hour. As the meter ticked its lavish intervals away and he reviewed the situation in which his current destiny was enmeshed, Hyer grew gloomy and nervous once more. In spite of the chill of the cab's interior, little drops of sweat stood on his lined brow as he went over the events leading up to and away from that crucial moment when he entered his apartment to stumble upon Kip Shannon's lifeless form. Frustration and a sense of helplessness that he had rarely known before gripped him and communicated the chill of the outer air deep into his candid soul.

Simple as his innocence was and easy as it should have been to establish it, Hyer knew he faced an issue complicated by a number of damning trifles: his trip to Woodstock; the rifling of Shannon's cottage; his flippant and ambiguous interview with McRae; his fondness for Lilith and his never concealed antipathy to her husband; the fact that, with Shannon under suspicion of murder in Ulster County, he had

apparently concealed the fugitive in his apartment; and last and most unpromising of all, the suspicion and anger which had bitten deep into the elder Shannon's tough fibers when he overheard the assistant prosecutor's barbed implication at headquarters the night before.

Hyer took out his handkerchief absently and put it to his forehead. Then his eyes narrowed and he leaned forward.

Venice Malinov had just stepped from a cab and hurried into the doorway at number 207. The tip of his tongue licked over his lips. He lowered the handkerchief and held it in his tightening fist as he waited for her to reappear. In less than a minute she was back, entering the cab.

Hyer tapped on the glass and told his driver to follow the other cab. They moved westward, halted for a light at Fourth Avenue, and then crossed continuing west. The car ahead turned right into Broadway and stopped in front of a drugstore. Venice jumped out. But she did not pay the driver and Hyer settled himself to another wait.

When she returned, her cab started with a spurt up Broadway and for a block or two Hyer's chauffeur was hard put to it to keep them in sight. Then suddenly in a swirl of traffic the leading cab was gone.

Hyer swore with deep feeling. He vented his rage in a long commentary on the ancestry of his driver, until this individual, rightfully piqued by the abuse, suggested if Hyer felt that way about him their further association could scarcely be pleasurable to either of them and invited Hyer to descend and remove himself from such unworthy company.

With the Lacedaemonian terseness of his kind, he put all this into the simple observation, "Getta hell outta my hack."

This cooled Hyer and he broke off. He looked at his watch, saw it was a quarter past two and knew suddenly that he had eaten nothing since break-

fast. He told the driver to take him to Hanophy's

He was just finishing his meal when he looked up and encountered the sharp greenish glance of Mal Range.

Hyer said, "Hello, Soundproof," without enthusiasm.

The columnist had just come in from the wintry street. His long nose and sallow cheeks were bluish, his teeth chattered. He drew his overcoat closely about his narrow shoulders and sat down opposite Hyer.

"Hyer," he said when he could control his chattering teeth, "who got Kip?"

Hyer said, "I did," disgustedly. "Don't you read your competitors?"

"You did like hell."

Hyer looked interested. "Old Magnanimous Mal. He can't bring himself to believe that little Hank—"

"I got a tip who did," Range broke in, leaning forward. "Or at least who knows a lot about it."

"Hitler?" Hyer suggested.

Range's nervous fingers tugged at his coat collar. "When did you see McRae last?" he asked.

Hyer thought. "Just a little while before I walked into my place and erased Kip."

"Quit clowning, Hyer. I'm serious. You saw McRae last night?"

"Or his double," Hyer agreed. "Why?"

FOR a moment the columnist hesitated. Then he said, leaning toward Hyer. "I got a phone call that said McRae knew more about the Shannon killing than anybody else."

Hyer asked, "When'd you get this phone call? Last night?"

"At a quarter past two this afternoon."

"Man or woman?"

"Man."

"What color hair?" Hyer asked.

Range said bitterly, "I try to do you a favor and you kid me."

Hyer said, "Favor?" quizzically. "What's the payoff?" he asked.

"Why did Kip come back from Woodstock?" Range asked directly.

Hyer grinned. "Because he'd been reborn or something."

"If you're going to—"

"No kidding, Mal. Exactly what he told me."

Range studied the detective a moment and his long nervous fingers flickered at his lapels.

"Where was Lilith?" he asked.

Hyer raised his eyebrows. "You leave your business ethics at home, Mal. You only gave me *one* item. I traded you for that. Your turn again."

"You didn't answer me on Shannon."

"Sure I did. His very words."

"Where was Lilith?" the columnist repeated, his eyes sharp.

"Probably looking for you, Mal. She was all broken up over the way she missed you at the plane."

Range's thin mouth moved in a sneer. "You don't *know* where she was," he announced. "She's off you for what happened last night."

"You print that," Hyer promised softly, "and I'll frame you for the *Morro Castle* fire, so help me."

Range glared at the detective, his fingers clawing nervously at his coat collar. "Kip had just come back from Woodstock," he observed.

"So the papers say, Mal."

"What were *you* doing up there?" the columnist snapped.

Hyer said, "Me?"

"You phoned me Thursday night all steamed up about Lilith Dean. You said you were phoning from Philadelphia and because somebody else had answered the phone first I didn't know the difference. But I checked back when you hung up."

"If they told you I was phoning from Woodstock, then they're—"

"The girl said Kingston."

Hyer grinned. "That's right, Mal. Looked just like Philly from that phone booth. Snowing, you know."

"What were you doing up there?"

Hyer said, "Winter sports."

The columnist sneered. "Maybe I can give you some help, Hyer."

"And maybe someday I can give you a drink of cold water," Hyer answered. "But I don't think either of us'll break his neck over either of those possibilities, Mal."

Nevertheless, when he left Hanophy's the detective proceeded as straight and rapidly as possible to Abingdon Square. He asked the elevator operator if McRae were in and learning that the pudgy gambler was at home went directly up without calling from the lobby.

At McRae's door Hyer rang twice and then, when no one answered, he turned the knob. The door was unlocked.

McRae's door opened on a small hall with the door to the kitchenette straight ahead some twelve feet. A low iron railing edged the hall on the left, and halfway between door and kitchenette was a break in the railing with three shallow steps descending to the sunken living room. Beyond was the door to the bedroom and bath. At the edge of the steps two ornamental pedestals terminated the low railings. Hyer noticed that a brass vase which had always stood on one of these pedestals was gone.

BUT he noticed that it was gone because he saw it on the floor of the living room. And he was looking at the floor of the living room because there was McRae lying in the middle of the blue Chinese rug with a lump on his forehead.

McRae was not dead.

The first thing Hyer did was to go through the drawers of a desk which stood in one corner of the room, making a quick heap of whatever looked as if it bore on McRae's business habits. It was rough work because of the constraint for speed which Hyer was under.

Then, when the unconscious gambler had not moved, Hyer took a long breath, knelt and frisked him with a practised

hand, transferring McRae's wallet to his overcoat pocket, but leaving a roll of bills in McRae's trousers.

The victim's breathing changed and Hyer sprang up. He walked swiftly out of the apartment, snapped the button on the door so that it would lock after him and rang at once for the elevator.

"Funny," he said to the boy, "I've been ringing at Mister McRae's door and he doesn't answer. Sure he's in?"

The boy said he was fairly sure and to satisfy himself went and pushed the button. Then he tried the door.

"Guess he went out," he said.

Hyer grinned. "Unh-hunh, he seems to be out, all right."

He checked himself halfway down the block in Bank Street, his eyes narrowing. In front of his own house stood a police car, two officers sitting idly at the wheel gazing up at Hyer's stoop. Hyer ran up the steps to Chase Remsen's door.

Chase admitted him.

"When'd you get back from Lilith's?" Hyer demanded. "And how is she?"

"Noon. Lecture at twelve. Quiet."

Hyer said, "That's good. Now listen. McRae's just had an accident that may've changed his mind about some things, including me. You drop around there and let on you're interested in a poker session tonight. He'll be pretty excited. If he blows off to you about his tough luck, you suggest that he let you send around for me, that sort of thing being more or less in my county. Try and talk him into it."

Chase's knife-edged face did not quiver. He removed his eyeshade and put on his coat.

In the doorway he stopped. "Back door," he said.

Hyer frowned. "What back door?"

"Garden opens on Twelfth Street."

"I know it. What—?" Hyer blinked.

"Police," Chase told him. "Your house. See you."

Hyer said, "I noticed 'em. What's so—?"

Chase said, "Warrant," and went out

the door.

Hyer sank down at the desk. He wet his lips. Again his forehead was damp. It was two minutes before he began to unload his pockets of the booty he had collected at McRae's. Then his gestures were slow, uninspired, as if thoughts were far away and none too happily employed.

19

McRAE CHANGES HIS MIND



THE preoccupied expression hovered in Hyer's eyes while he laid on Chase's desk—spreading the litter over sheets of formulae, intricate curves, complicated masses of symbols and figures—

what he had brought from McRae's.

The wallet which he had flicked out of McRae's breast pocket contained twenty dollars in bills, all genuine, a snapshot of a ballooning blonde in a minimal bathing suit, an assemblage of business cards, two pawn tickets, an address books with certain cryptic signs entered opposite names with Park Avenue and Central Park West addresses (principally masculine names) and a sheaf of I. O. U.'s. One of the I. O. U.'s was for thirty-seven hundred dollars and signed by Harry Vanness.

There was a slim leather bound book which Hyer had taken from the desk drawer, not unlike a bank passbook in general appearance and containing entries which might be records of gambling transactions, but which Hyer suspected were something more noxious.

The papers he had collected from McRae's desk were chiefly concerned with records of debts, skillful computations of bridge-play, several personal letters and a telegram. The telegram appeared to have been on the floor or possibly have been dropped into a wastebasket

and then retrieved as McRae changed his mind. There was a smudge of ash across its folded surface and when Hyer unfolded it ashes nested in the line of the fold.

Hyer read the telegram: "GG expects everyone Friday night imperative. V." It had been dispatched from Kingston at noon of the day before.

Light of dawning comprehension displaced a measure of the worry in Hyer's eyes. His mouth tightened, became grim, and then relaxed in the ghost of a grin.

The telephone rang.

Hyer said, "Hello. . . . Oh, hello, Chase. . . . He has? Now isn't that too bad? . . . Wants me to come over? . . . Sure. . . . Right away."

He replaced the phone, found a large envelope and dumped his loot into it. The envelope he dropped into a drawer.

Then he rose from the deck—he had removed neither his hat nor his coat—and started out. In the hall he looked toward the front door and then, moved by sudden and disturbing curiosity, went to peer out through the curtains. The green roadster still sat placidly in front of his own house, diagonally across the street, its uniformed occupants waiting without rancor or impatience for his return.

Again anxiety wiped across his round face and when he retraced his steps through the hall to the garden door he was thoughtful, his manner wary. He let himself out into the bare frozen garden and hastened back along a flagstone path bordered with the rustling ghosts of last summer's trumpet vines. In the wall at the rear was a gate with a spring lock allowing egress but preventing anyone from entering the garden.

Hyer went through the gate and found himself in the small paved yard behind a bake-shop. He entered the warm spicy kitchen, greeted the little French baker, fortunately an old acquaintance, and proceeded through the

front of the shop to Twelfth Street.

In spite of himself he gave a quick glance up and down the street before he stepped out on the sidewalk, and frowned with annoyance at his involuntary timidity.

McRAE, Hyer commented to himself, was not anything to look at with sore eyes. Chase had put a towel around his head and the effect was something that of a bowling ball with the sleeve of an old shirt wrapped around the crown, McRae's little close-set eyes doing duty for the finger-grips in the bowling ball.

"Nonchalant," Hyer remarked, grinning at the gambler, "but not nifty. What happened to you?"

McRae's expression did not improve the general effect. It was plain to see that he still looked on Hyer as some species of water moccasin, but it was also plain that he had had a scare and that Hyer's appearance was, despite his better judgment, something of a relief to McRae.

"Someone hit him," Chase explained innocently. "Called you."

"He did," McRae growled. "I told him not to."

"Chase beaned you?" Hyer asked, his eyes wide.

"He *called* you," McRae rasped. He was doing his best, impelled by deeper fright, to overcome his distrust of Hyer, to accept the detective as a bona fide member of the human race. He added in a surly tone, "I've been robbed."

Hyer said in surprise, "Robbed? Anything valuable?"

"About five hundred dollars in cash," McRae mourned.

Hyer echoed, "Five hundred bucks!" and McRae failed to perceive the sarcasm in his voice. "Who did it?" the detective asked.

"I do not know," McRae answered, reviving some of his Oxonian accent. "I had never seen him before."

Hyer doubted this as seriously as the

face value McRae had placed on his financial loss.

He asked, "Got any suggestions?"

McRae was staring at him, staring at him hard with a squint in his little eyes. Thinking. Hyer brought his greatest efforts to bear on whatever might lie in mental telepathy and waited. McRae glanced sidewise at Chase.

"Chase," Hyer said, "you mind running around to my place and telling my housekeeper I won't be back to finish tea?"

Relief and anxiety struggled for mastery in McRae's puffy face. He made a move to stop Chase and then sank back in his chair, his eyes nervously flicking from one to the other.

When Chase had gone Hyer lighted a cigaret. "Can you describe the guy?"

McRae's expression grew cautious. He hesitated. Then his face changed and he said, "Yes," firmly.

"Good."

But Hyer had no faith in McRae's power to put words together.

"He was taller than you are," the pudgy gambler began, hesitantly, still not wholly convinced of Hyer's good intentions, but motivated by a more compelling unease. "He had light brown hair and heavy face. He—he wore a diamond on his left hand."

Hyer grinned. "Probably Jim Brady's ghost," he suggested. "You think he had a motive, or he just disliked the look of your map?"

McRae scowled. "Is robbery not a sufficient motive?" he demanded.

"Not," Hyer answered, "to bring a guy up ten floors in a big apartment house where he's bound to be noticed by half a dozen people and stand a good change of walking straight into the belly of a cop on the corner."

(Hyer did not add that neither was twenty dollars sufficient inducement or reward.)

He asked casually, "Anything else gone?"

McRae suddenly put a puffy hand to

his head and staggered out of his chair. He hurried to the desk and rummaged in its drawers.

"My gawd," he exclaimed in anguish, his Oxford accent discarded. "My gawd!"

Hyer decided he must have chosen wisely even though he had worked at random. McRae was upsetting the drawer on the desk, pawing through the debris from the drawer. He turned to Hyer and he looked sick, sicker than a blow on the head should have left him.

Hyer said, "Guy that slugged you apparently knew what drawer you kept the family silver in," and looked at McRae calmly through cigaret smoke.

THE frantic gambler murmured, "My gawd," once more.

"Prayers," Hyer observed, "tend to get dissipated unless they're backed up with information. Suppose you confide in deity—and me—just what you lost."

"Records," McRae said in a frightened whisper. "Business records."

Hyer grinned. "Chances are it's a rival's work. Better call up and see if the Count of Monte Carlo's home."

McRae started to speak, checked himself, made little chewing motions with his pouting lips, started to speak again and stopped. Hyer guessed what was going on under his puffy exterior, shrewdly suspected the struggle as McRae came reluctantly to the belief that his associates had turned against him, that he was now playing a lone hand and tragically in need of help. On Hyer he wasted no affection, but Hyer represented cunning and resourcefulness.

The detective saw this as the proper moment to play what might be his ace of trumps that hand.

"Range says he got a tip a little while ago you're spotted for the Shannon business," he observed casually. "I told him he was screwy. Ran into him in Hanophy's and he told me somebody called up and said you knew something

about Kip."

If McRae's face had been ashen, it now went stark white. His little eyes popped. He gulped.

"Got any idea who'd be spreading slander like that around?" Hyer inquired.

"Hyer," McRae said hoarsely, "I—I'm in a bad spot. I need some help."

Hyer could see what effort it cost him to say it, what impelling force there was behind the words.

Hyer said, "Unh-hunh," and waited.

McRae moistened his lips and put a hand to the bandage on his head. "About a month ago," he said, his bulging eyes not leaving Hyer's face as if by sheer ocular magnetism he could wean Hyer from his earlier dislike and enlist his aid, "about a month ago I began to suspect that someone wished to—to double-cross me. Now I am sure of it." Decision restored some of the cultured veneer to his voice. "There are very high stakes, Hyer, and if you—if you are willing to help me, there is no reason why you should not have a share."

Hyer said pleasantly, "For a big enough cut I'd throw in with anybody. You know that."

McRae beamed. "I knew you would, Hyer. I felt sure you would. A large cut—a very large cut indeed."

Hyer wondered fleetingly whether the reference was to finances or knife work and leaned heavily to the latter hypothesis.

"There may be some rather heavy —" McRae continued, pointing to Hyer's slung arm.

"I got it cranking a Ford. But my gun hand's still in condition if that's what you mean."

"And I suppose you know where you can pick up a few extra men in case there is a little trouble?"

Hyer thought of Ed Wheeler and grinned. "I guess I do."

"You see," McRae went on, eagerness making him suddenly breathless, "after

what has happened here, I do not know whom I can trust. This has made me suspicious of—of everyone.”

“Everybody but me,” Hyer reminded him.

McRae panted gratefully and Hyer thought for a moment the pudgy gambler would leap up to embrace him. “I believe I can trust you, Hyer. I do believe I can trust you.”

“O. K. What do we do first?”

McRae looked cunning. Then he looked doubtful. “I must think things over first. I must make some plans.”

“Suppose that johnny with the yen for brass vases comes back,” Hyer said, folding his hand around a match and staring at McRae over the flame. He added thoughtfully, “What I can’t understand is how you’d let in a guy you’d never laid eyes on and then give him first chance at the bat when you saw what he was up to.” He shook the match out and flipped it at the wastebasket.

“I thought—I was expecting someone else,” McRae explained, flushing.

Hyer said negligently, “Oh, well, that explains it then.” He was thinking that the color of McRae’s fat face explained several things. The person who had come in was someone McRae was expecting. Only his errand was unexpected.

Hyer rose. “Well, I’ll be blowing until you get a scheme worked out.”

McRae said fervently, “I believe I can trust you, Hyer.”

“There’s a pretty good way to make sure,” Hyer said coolly.

The gambler dug into his pocket and brought out the bills which Hyer had left untouched. He took out one and handed it to the detective, his gesture placating, eager.

HYER took the bill. It was a fifty. He looked at it. Then he looked up at McRae. “Have any idea where you got this?” he inquired casually.

McRae blinked. “I—I don’t know. I get—”

Hyer held the bill out so that McRae could see. Across one end something had been written. An effort had been made to erase the writing, but there still showed “49 . . . ast. . . .”

“Seems to me I’ve seen this before,” Hyer went on. “I just wondered.”

McRae nodded. “It was given to me last night,” he said, remembering. “I noticed the writing when I took it.”

“Remember who gave it to you?”

“Yes I do. A young man by the name of Vanness. Harry Vanness. We were playing bridge last night.”

Hyer scribbled a note in the lobby at 49 East Eighty-sixth Street and sent it up to Mr. Shannon by the elevator boy. The note said, “Forget whatever you’ve got in your head and let me see you for five minutes. Absolutely necessary.”

The elevator boy came down and said he might go up.

Shannon was waiting for him. Again he was alone. His strong weatherbeaten face had aged visibly since Hyer had last seen him the night before. The keen eyes were shadowed and suffering, the mouth beneath his clipped mustache was a hard tight line. He gazed at Hyer and in his gray eyes anger and suspicion mingled with stoically controlled grief.

Hyer felt again the quick pang of sympathy he had known earlier and stifled it brusquely.

He said, “I know what you’re thinking and I don’t blame you. But listen to what I’ve got to say. I didn’t give you the whole lay-out last night, but I don’t have to tell you I’m in a spot now and if you’re as honest a guy as I give you credit for being, you can help me out.”

The gray-haired man’s expression did not relax but he gestured Hyer to a chair and sat down himself without speaking.

Hyer told rapidly all that had happened since his interview with Yellow Gloves three days before. He told of Lilith’s forged telegram which he had

just mentioned during their earlier conference, told of seeing Venice Malinov in Woodstock, at McRae's and at the Gramercy Park address, told of Patch and Solitaire and their attempt to seize Kip in his apartment, of his linking Patch with the gang that had kidnaped him in lieu of Kip, and then of finding the counterfeit money cached in a flat rented by Solitaire, of his conversation with Range and the discovery of McRae unconscious, of McRae's description of his assailant which could only be Solitaire himself, and finally of receiving the marked fifty-dollar bill from McRae.

"I marked that bill myself Wednesday evening," he concluded. "I've got a pretty good idea of its general course from the time it left my pocket until it got back there. The next to the last lap was through the hands of your nephew. I want to talk to him." He stopped and looked his host squarely in the eye. "Is he your heir?" he asked.

Shannon, the tight lines of his face unmoving, nodded.

Hyer said, "You say Harry went up to see Kip at Woodstock a couple of times?"

"Yes. Did you say this Malinov woman was—was staying with Leslie?"

"More or less."

The men were silent a moment. Shannon suddenly rose and came toward Hyer with his hand out. He said gruffly, "My apologies. I acted very—"

Hyer shook his head. "You did what any normal man would've done." He looked uncomfortable and said in a strained voice, "I'm sorry for what happened. I mean—"

The other man made a gesture. His mouth was grim again and his eyes pierced Hyer. "Do you think you can establish proof of my son's murderer?" he asked, and his voice was vibrant with passion.

Hyer said, "If I can't, there's a couple of guys down at headquarters who're pretty sure *they* can."

"How much will you require?"

FOR a brief instant Hyer's leathery realistic soul locked in mortal combat with the unaccustomed softness which attacked him in the presence of this loyal, bereaved rancher. The struggle was fierce—but brief. The habit of a lifetime is not easily vanquished.

He said, "Ten thousand dollars," and drew a long breath.

"For a conviction?"

"For proof. I can't be responsible for courts."

"Very well."

Hyer said, "Where's Harry?"

A new light of worry leaped into Shannon's gray eyes. "I think you will find him at the bar in the St. Julian. After yesterday afternoon I—"

Hyer said, "Yesterday afternoon?"

As if relieved at turning from the major problem to lesser difficulties, the rancher said, "I bought him a new car. A Duesenberg. The maker said it would go one hundred and twenty miles an hour. He was arrested yesterday afternoon. He was driving it ninety-two miles an hour then. They fined him a hundred dollars."

"Have to put up that much for him often?"

"He paid it out of his spending money," Shannon said grimly. Then his mouth softened suddenly, became unsteady. "Do you suppose, Mr. Hyer, that Miss Dean—would care to see me?" he asked hesitantly, and his keen gray eyes pleaded with Hyer. The detective could see that they were moist.

As they rode from Eighty-sixth Street down to the Barnham neither man said much. Glancing now and then at the square tanned face beside him, a face now eager and half fearful, showing the ravages of grief and passion which had wracked it in the past sixteen hours, Hyer was assailed once more by the alien sentiment he had banished.

It was an effort for him to throw his feeling off, so close was he to the old man's suffering and anxious hope. But Hyer accomplished this by picturing in his mind's eye the grasping palm of

Jake Rosen, a crowded courtroom and the wickedly bright eyes of a succession of official gentlemen beginning with one Francis Xavier Turner, whose eyes Hyer had no difficulty at all in picturing.

Before he took Kip's father up to see Lilith, Hyer went alone. He found her pale, calm, her tawny eyes darkened but no longer tortured as they had been the night before.

"Kip's old man is downstairs, honey," he said softly. "Give 'im a break."

"Oh, Hank—I can't."

"You've got to," Hyer said grimly. "Only thing that'll keep his heart from cracking wide open." He moved closer to her. "Listen," he said rapidly, "you thought *you* thought a lot Kip. Well, this old cowman hadn't anything but Kip in the world and right now he's pinned everything on you. You'll make a good team. Give him a break. You can't throw him down." He swallowed and wet his lips. "For Kip's sake," he said and looked startled.

Lilith's tawny eyes softened. She put her hand on his sleeve. She asked quietly, anxiously, "Do you think I'll—do, Hank?"

"He'll take to you like you'll take to him, honey."

With a quick and oddly tender gesture Hyer kissed her and then started hastily out of the room.

"Where are you going, Hank?"

"To send 'im up."

"You're coming back too, aren't you?" She took a step toward him.

Hyer's nostrils flared. "Maybe."

Misunderstanding his tone she said, "Hank, you're not going to be—jealous of—even of—?"

Hyer's breath whistled. He said, "Jealous? Don't forget I got a date to save a guy from the chair."

"Hank! Who?"

"Me," Hyer said vindictively.

In the elevator going down to the lobby he touched his forehead and was annoyed to find it damp.

"When we get down," he said to the

boy, "give me a kick in the pants as I get out of this buggy, will you son?"

"What for, chief?"

"If I swing on you and knock your teeth through the back of your neck, it'll prove I'm not everybody's fall guy," Hyer answered morosely.

20

STRATEGY



THERE had been other times in Henry Hyer's active career when he had found it expedient for an hour or a day or even several days to be chary of uniforms and to avoid friendly intercourse with those worthies who, because they invariably have about them some sign unmistakable to the initiate, are termed plain-clothes men.

Henry Hyer had been wanted by the police before.

But never in the candid pursuit of his calling had he known such teasing anxiety, such remorseless concern as weighed on him now. Chase's single word of warning in explanation of the squad car parked in front of Hyer's door had struck him to the marrow with a chill of foreboding. This he had rapidly dispelled during his comic and profitable interview with McRae. And the discovery of the fifty-dollar bill bearing his own penciled notation had so excited him as to leave, on the surface at any rate, no trace of his gnawing worry.

But his brief interview with Shannon's shockingly affected father, his silent ride with the grief-stricken rancher and his sight of Lilith's shadowed tawny eyes, had stripped the brusque shell away, had left him tormented once more by the vague fear evoked the night before when Schultz made his ominous announcement.

When he left the Barnham his brow

was furrowed and the glance which he threw up the twilit street was wary, anxious. At a newsstand just beyond the hotel entrance he bought an evening paper and tucked it into his left arm to conceal as much of the sling as possible. Then he ducked across the sidewalk and into a cab. He ordered the driver to take him to the St. Julian and shivered not alone from the wintry chill.

As a release from the spiraling sense of being hunted and from some impelling sentiment which, had he been slightly more honest with himself Hyer would have been shocked to recognize, he opened the paper and snatched glimpses of page one as marching street lights raked the interior of the cab.

His mouth sardonic, he read the amplified account of Kip Shannon's murder. Several paragraphs were devoted to a veiled description of the part possibly played in the affair by a well-known private detective and, though Hyer was not mentioned by name, the reference was direct enough to reinforce his clammy feeling. The story concluded by saying that the man in question had been interrogated by the police immediately after murder, that he had been released on bail, but that during the day a new warrant had been issued and the police expected him to be in their hands before night.

"The old song-and-dance," Hyer muttered. But his comment lacked the conviction it was wont to have when headquarters released the shopworn statement about some or other of Hyer's clients.

They stopped in front of the Hotel St. Julian.

Hyer's round face assumed an even more careworn expression. Contrary to his habit, he paid before dismounting from the cab, reaching through to the front with his bill and carefully counting his change before bestowing a marginal tip on the driver.

He walked into the hotel, the news-

paper concealing his wounded arm, and went straight to the cocktail lounge. Here he sought a secluded table in a corner. He sat down, turning partly away from the group of men at the bar, and opened his paper.

From its inadequate camouflage he stole quick glances at the other occupants of the room and his eyes in the shadowless indirect light were hatched with tiny red lines.

AT FIRST he did not recognize Yellow Gloves. The youth was with a small politely hilarious party across the room and without his expensive ulster he looked much slimmer, younger, so youthful indeed that for an instant Hyer was moved to reconsider his inferences and his plans. But he recalled the story of the Duesenberg and his eyes narrowed. And he reminded himself that this youth was Kip Shannon's cousin.

When he had located Yellow Gloves he turned his back on the room and wrote a message on the back of a wine card. He instructed the waiter to take the card to Vanness and say that he wished to talk to him. While Hyer waited he read here and there in his newspaper, but his nerves were too taut to allow him peace and his bloodshot eyes flitted from one story to another without rest.

At his elbow young Vanness said, "I beg your par'n. You wished——" He recognized Hyer. "Oh."

Hyer said, "Sit down." He even grinned.

Vanness sat down, uneasily, unwillingly, poised for flight.

"So your uncle buys you fancy buggies," Hyer asked, "and then won't pay the upkeep?" His tone was not unkind—to a stranger's ears.

"What's that to you?"

"Does he," Hyer asked, "also square your gambling bills?"

Vanness flushed. He said, "See here. I'm not going to be insulted by any——"

"Take it easy, sonny," Hyer advised.

"If I get ready to insult you, it'll be good, a hell of a lot better than that."

"Wha' do you mean?" The youth was frightened.

"When did a blonde name of Venice Malinov slip you half a century?" Hyer asked slowly, his bloodshot eyes boring at Vanness.

"When did——?" Vanness echoed, color draining from his flushed face.

Hyer said, "Unh-hunh," comfortably. "I just wanted to make sure."

"I never heard of her."

"Maybe," Hyer agreed. "Before you went up to Woodstock, that is."

"Wha' you mean?" The boy's chin was trembling.

"Know your precious cousin, Kip, kept a diary?" Hyer lied. "You ought've taken that possibility into account, kid. You knew Kip was trying out for posterity."

The expression in Vanness' eyes told Hyer his shot had gone hime.

"Maybe you need a drink," he said and signaled to a waiter. Until the man returned with the whiskey the youth stared at Hyer, his face flushing and paling, his eyes young and frightened. He coughed and Hyer handed him the glass. "Throw it down. Loosen your chest. Loosen your tongue."

The boy drank the whiskey at a gulp and sputtered as the alcohol bit into his larynx. He wiped his mouth with a handkerchief and tried all at once to be offhand. "What do you want, Hyer?"

"When did the Malinov slip you that fifty?"

"How do you know——?"

Hyer said, "I've got it right here. McRae gave it to me. He marked it. McRae thought it might turn out to be queer coming from——"

Vanness laughed shrilly. "That's a Hyer said, "Unh-hunh?" and raised hot one."

his eyebrows.

"McRae saying that. McRae saying that." He laughed again.

"Talk sense," Hyer ordered.

"Ever ge' any lousy paper from McRae?" the youth asked and tried hard to keep Hyer's round face in focus. Shock and Hyer's whiskey were trebling the effects of his earlier cocktails.

"Once," Hyer admitted. "I thought it was an accident."

Vanness laughed shrilly again. He waved unsteadily to the waiter and ordered two more whiskeys. He went into a paroxysm of laughter.

"'Nacciden'," he chortled. "'Nacciden'?"

Hyer said, "McRae in the business?"

"Lis'n," the youth said, frowning hard at Hyer, "'sa way he makes his roll."

Hyer said, "Well, I'll be——"

"An' th' li'l' shrimp got you t' try an' bla'mail me?" Vanness went on.

Hyer, switching cues, said, "That seems to be the idea with those I. O. U.'s of yours he's got. So you got something on McRae, too, have you?"

VANNESS grew coy. "Don' you wish you knew?"

Hyer said dryly, "Don't forget what I *do* know. Maybe your uncle'd be a little sore to find out how much he's been kitting up for expensive bridge games."

Vanness scowled. "J's you try," he warned.

Hyer said, "O. K. Excuse me while I go phone."

The boy put up a frightened hand as Hyer started to rise. His bravado collapsed. He blinked and stammered, "How d'you know about m'uncle?"

"There're a lot of things I know, sonny. So McRae's running competition with the U. S. mint?"

Vanness studied him, tossed down a drink, choked, and said, "He's a bas'rd."

Hyer said, "The very idea. How-come you got all this information about him, Peter Pan?"

Vanness leaned forward. He lowered

his voice confidentially. "Hear' 'im talkin' to Venice," he said. "Venice ha'es 'is guts."

Hyer said, "Venice sort of had a mad on Kip, too, I guess."

"She ha'ed Kip's guts."

Hyer asked, "Why?"

"Kip tol' 'er get th'ell out."

"When?"

"Las' Tuesday."

Hyer said, "Well, well. And you brought her down to New York?"

The boy's eyes widened. He said intently, "I wasn' there. She tol' me."

"Last night?"

Vanness nodded.

"When you went to see Kip?"

"We couldn' fin' Kip," Vanness said quickly, too quickly.

"And when you couldn't find Kip last night, she slipped you fifty bucks because you were broke after paying that fine and McRae was squawking for the room rent? And then you went and sat in a bridge game with McRae and lost the fifty?"

Vanness looked at him, his youthful chin unsteady. He nodded.

Hyer asked, "What else you hear Venice and McRae say?"

"She said he was ma'in' things too hot. Said he better watch 'is step'r he'd ge' cool' off."

"This up at Kip's place at Woodstock?"

He nodded energetically.

"When?"

"'Bou' three weeks ago."

"Kip in on it?"

"Nope."

"But they propositioned you?"

Vanness shook his head. "Tho' I was 'sleep," he explained. "Shut up when they saw I wasn'."

Hyer said, "You had a chance to see things, apparently. Got any idea who else was playing on their side?"

Vanness shut his lips, hiccupped and looked cunning. "Woul'n' you like t' know?"

Hyer said, "Wouldn't your uncle like

to know about that loose change he's been dropping down a hole in McRae's pocket?"

Vanness looked frightened again. Then he said, "You can't prove it."

Hyer answered easily, "The hell I can't. I've got a fistful of those I. O. U.'s in my vault. One at a time, they'd last quite a while."

The youth wilted. He pleaded, "Don' do it. F'r God's sake, don' do it."

"O. K. Sit up and answer questions, then."

"Wha' ques'ions?"

"Who's working with McRae and Venice?"

"Guy name' Harvey, Buckle Harvey, some hoods."

"You see 'em all up there at Woodstock?"

Vanness nodded.

Hyer said, "You sit here. I'll be right back."

THE youth blanched. "You're no' going up to m'uncle's?"

"Not unless you beat it before I come back."

Hyer went rapidly across the room, into a corridor leading to the lobby, and to a phone booth. Here he dialed Ed Wheeler's number at the Federal building.

He said, "Ed, Hank," in a guarded tone. "Listen, you can give your gang the office on that Woodstock—. . . What? . . . The hell he did! . . . Unh-hunh. . . Unh-hunh. . . You what?" he said, startled. "How long ago? . . . My God. Listen, Ed, I got to get up there before they do. . . My God, Ed, I mean it. . . You know what a spot I'm in. It's the only out I've got. I didn't know you'd jump the gun on me that way. . . Hell no, I'm not blaming you. But—wait a minute, Ed. Hold the line. I got an idea."

Oblivious to the danger he ran, Hyer hastened back to the cocktail lounge, leaned over Vanness, asked rapidly and intensely, "You got that flying machine

of yours here?"

Vanness blinked, uncomprehending.

"The Duesenberg, it here?"

"Yes."

"Got the registration card on you?"

Again the boy looked at him dumbly.

"Car license, you sap."

Vanness took out his wallet and opened it with unsteady fingers.

"Where's the car?"

"Ou'n front."

Hyer rushed back to the phone.

"Hello, Ed. Listen, I got a hack here that'll get us to Woodstock by the time your squad does. For God's sake, Ed, come with me. It's big enough you ought to be there anyway. . . . I'm not kidding you. Your guys'll muff it. They haven't got enough dope. . . . Hell, have I ever given you a bum steer yet? . . . O. K. You'll go? . . . St. Julian—wait a minute, I got a better idea. Hang up. I'll call you right back."

Hyer's eyes were glazed. He mopped his forehead and fumbled, the handkerchief still in his hand, for another nickel. He dropped it in and dialed Chase Remsen's number feverishly.

"Chase," he said, his voice shaking with relief. "Listen, will you drive a Duesenberg? . . . Hell, how should I know what model? . . . I know you haven't. . . . Christ, I don't care if it's ten years or a millennium. You don't forget that sort of thing. . . . You want to see me burn?" Hyer asked viciously. He breathed again, said, "You're swell. . . . In front of the St. Julian. Fast as you can. . . . Unh-hunh, the car's here. Scram."

He hung up and with a sigh put away his handkerchief. He called McRae, told the gambler he had some important news and would be with him inside of half an hour, hung up once more and dialed Ed Wheeler. He instructed Wheeler to meet him in the drugstore in Abingdon Square in twenty minutes.

"And, Ed," he said, "better bring along an extra set of bracelets. We're likely to have company on the way up

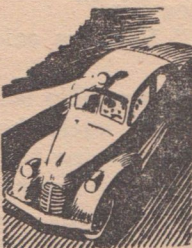
that'll need some jewelry. . . . Atta-boy," he concluded, his tone once more that of a happy man, and turned away from the phone grinning.

His grin slowly congealed.

Lounging against the wall ten feet away, grinning at him through the glass of the booth door, was an individual known on the civic payroll by the forthright name of Francis Xavier Turner, captain of detectives.

21

THE DUESENBERG



HYER opened the door of the telephone booth, the grin on his round face a fixed smile. Sweat flowed in the channels of his palms.

He said, "Hi, F. X. Give me another minute and I'll break that date I just made." Turner waved his hand. He could afford to be generous. He said, "Take your time, Hyer," and lounged against the wall grinning.

Hyer shut the door, fumbled in his pocket and dropped another nickel in the slot. He dialed a number.

Into the phone he said cautiously, "Six torpedos, all armed, are sticking up a diamond salesman on the seventh floor of the St. Julian Hotel." He hung up at once and left the booth.

"Hyer," Turner observed, "for a smart private dick, you've got a lousy imagination."

Hyer blinked. A chill gripped him. But the captain's next words reassured him. The reference was not to the dramatic alarm he had just issued over the phone.

"We stuck a man on post outside Miss Dean's hotel," Turner explained as they fell into step and approached the cock-tail lounge for Hyer's hat and coat. "We figured you'd look her up sometime. You got a bum imagination, Hyer, if you couldn't dope out we'd do that."

Hyer said, amazed, "Don't tell me, F. X., that *you* been riding herd on me yourself ever since I left that hotel."

"Oh no. Only I told the boys to phone in if they spotted you and I'd come up and make the pinch. You know, Hyer, you got a reputation for gags. I thought maybe you might try some funny stuff on one of the youngsters."

Hyer's straining ears caught the distant whine of a siren. He said brightly, "Well, F. X., you know I wouldn't pull any gags on you."

The captain's ears had also heard the siren. There was a second now, nearer, pitched in a higher key. He said absently, "Sure, you'd be a sap to."

The wintry dusk outside hummed with the teasing dying wail of converging squad cars.

Hyer said, alarmed, "You send out a riot call just for *me*?"

Turner's face was anxious. Still the screaming sirens came. Still their shrilling voices subsided one by one like weary bandsaws outside.

There was a commotion in the lobby out of sight of Hyer and his captor.

Hyer said, "My God, maybe somebody else saw me and—"

"Wait here, Hyer, will you?" Turner said swiftly.

"Sure," Hyer agreed. "Fat chance I'd have to do anything else."

But Turner was already running to where he could see the excited lobby. He turned the corner of the corridor. He was gone perhaps thirty seconds. When he came running back to where he had left Hyer he found he must elbow his way through a chattering throng streaming from the bar to investigate the clamor in the front of the hotel. Some were rushing out of the bar through the side entrance, to run hatless through the chill around the corner where the squad cars were congregated. In this group was a youth in spats who pulled on a pair of yellow gloves as he ran, stumbling a little, a wild haggard expression in his clouded eyes.

WHEN young Vanness came stumbling up to the Duesenberg there was seated at the wheel what might have been an eccentric sportsman or possibly a droshky driver, strayed far and fallen into sinful surroundings. A massive fur gauntlet running nearly to the elbow encased the hand which lay idly on the wheel. Muffled about the apparition's throat was a gaudy woollen scarf which almost hid his chin. And on his head there rested, giving an odd elongated lift to his round expressionless face, a bushy coonskin cap. From under the furry top-piece the man at the wheel watched the crowds eddying about the parked squad cars with bored uninterested eyes.

The eyes turned on Vanness as the youth fumbled at the door and Hyer said, "I never thought you'd make it with so many of 'em looking for you."

"Let's ge out of here," the youth chattered.

Hyer soothed. "Now, now, take it easy. They'll never think of trying to find you here in plain sight." He settled the fur cap and added, "You keep some classy duds in this cruiser."

Vanness was in no mood for compliments. His dazed, frightened eyes stared at the blocked street ahead of them, the curious crowds milling around the police cars. He made a move to get out of the car and flee on foot. Hyer grasped his arm.

He hissed, "You sap! You want to run right into a detail? Scrunch down here beside me. We'll have a pilot along pretty soon that can take this flying Dutchman and do an Immelmann turn over that jam. Sit tight."

The youth crouched in the seat, his coat collar up around his ears, his hat pulled down.

"You say they foun' him dead?" he chattered scarcely above a whisper, "M' uncle?"

"Unh-hunh," Hyer said comfortably, elaborating the lie by which he had decoyed Vanness out of the hotel. "And the elevator boy says you were the last

to leave him. Lucky for you I called up there. Somebody must've known you were coming here," he added, suppressing a grin at the thought of five squad cars and a police cruiser hunting the frightened boy beside him.

An urchin ran past them toward the jostling crowd in front of the entrance. Hyer called to him.

"Listen, sonny," he said when the lad hopped on the running board, "I'm waiting for a friend and I don't want to have to fight my way into that mob. You stay here until he shows up and call him for me and I'll give you two bits."

The boy was not averse. To be perched on the regal car was in itself an experience, and it gave him a better view of the melee. From Hyer's point of view the situation had its merits, too, for the gaping lad partially shielded him from passers-by.

They waited for twenty minutes, Hyer and the lad exchanging dubious hypotheses about the turmoil in the street, Vanness cowering beside the detective, wordless, afraid to remain, terrified at the thought of helpless flight. One by one the green radio cars unsnarled themselves from the halted traffic and rolled away in disgust. Hyer caught sight of Turner standing in a group of officers at the entrance and interest awoke in his round placid face. But none molested him.

Finally Hyer nudged the lad clinging to the door. "There, sonny," he said, "that thin guy getting out of the cab." The boy sped dodging through the loiterers. Hyer saw another figure debark from the taxi after Chase and grinned.

Chase Remsen's cavernous eyes flashed when he followed the urchin and caught sight of the sleek lines of the Duesenberg. Corey Hilton took one look at the long black car, trim as a racing yacht, and murmured reverently, "Holy Moses." He said, "Lucky I was there when you called Chase. You'd've run off without me."

Hyer climbed out of the driver's seat and motioned Vanness into the tonneau

with him. He said, "Unless you got your parka with you, I was doing you a favor, Corey. This ride's going to be cold."

"And something tells me," Corey Hilton answered, getting in beside Chase who was lovingly caressing the instrument board, "that things may be hot enough when we get where we're going. Right?"

"If you're not," Hyer commented shortly, "then a guy name of Turner's got an apology coming."

HYER decided afterward that it was intuition told Chase Remsen when the motor was running. He himself could hear or feel nothing. But the black phaeton moved, swept grandly into traffic, gathered speed with a polite thunder. Chase turned to look over his shoulder. His knife-like face was transfixed, his dark eyes glowing. He asked volubly, "Where?" and Hyer said "Abingdon Square."

The youth beside him, who up to this time had acted like one in a daze, exclaimed, "Abingdon Square?"

Hyer said, "Sure. Pick up a friend of yours," and grinned.

Vanness stared at him, uncomprehending. He shook his head slowly and made motions with his mouth. But he said nothing and at the sound of a police whistle from a crossing he gulped and cowered down again.

Ed Wheeler was waiting for them in the drugstore.

"Henry," he rumbled, "if this turns out to be just a mess o' wild geese, I'm going to have a piece out o' your hide."

Hyer answered, "You are if there's any left."

"What?"

"Ed," Hyer said, suddenly morose, "in that case you'll be just one of a long line." He presented Wheeler to the three men in the Duesenberg and bade them wait in front of McRae's house. "Got to pick up one more passenger," he said and hurried away as Wheeler climbed in beside young Vanness who

turned frightened, sullen eyes on him.

McRae was overjoyed at Hyer's appearance. Whatever doubts of Hyer's intentions had lingered in his mind were dissipated by more urgent worry.

"You are right, Hyer," he said hoarsely. "They're after me. Range called up just now. He acted as if he knew—knew—"

Hyer said, "Mal always does."

McRae fingered his unsteady mouth. "Do you know a safe place I can go, Hyer?"

Hyer said, "I'd suggest Hong Kong. But a good hotel in the Fifties ought to do for a while. I brought a heap along. Get your coat. We can talk as we go."

Relief wiped across McRae's puffy face. He said, "I'll be with you in a minute." He hurried into the bedroom and emerged a moment later struggling into his overcoat. "I was afraid you might throw me down after all, Hyer—after the way you acted last night. I swear to God I didn't have anything to do with—"

Hyer said, "O. K. O. K. I never threw anybody down yet that treated me right." He put his hand under McRae's arm in a friendly gesture and as they got to the door let it slip up, learning in one brief accidental gesture that the gambler was unarmed.

McRae recognized Corey Hilton and Chase, but not until he was stepping into the tonneau did he get a clear view of the lad in the corner with the turned-down hat. He stopped. Hyer, who was climbing in after him, gave him a twist that bounced him into the cushion beside Ed Wheeler. The big man rumbled something into McRae's ear and McRae stopped trying to climb out.

Vanness' youthful face was a mask of amazement, fright and kindred emotions. He, too, started to get out, but Ed Wheeler, who was between McRae and the youth, grasped him by the forearm and said, "Now son, I reckon if Mr. Hyer thought this was the place for you to beat it he'd a said something about it."

There was room for four comfortably, a fact that had impressed Hyer when first he entered the huge car.

Like a condemned man who cannot bring himself to accept the inexorable sights and sounds that point his doom, McRae maintained slipping shreds of his faith in Hyer until Chase nosed the long car into the express highway ramp at Twenty-third Street.

"Up," Hyer said, grinning, "to a place near Woodstock to that family conference you thought you'd been froze out of this afternoon."

AS Wheeler came down on the gambler's right arm, Hyer grasped his left. McRae sank back into the seat. At Hyer's suggestion he and Vanness changed places so that the youth and McRae were shoulder to shoulder between him and Ed Wheeler. The big man brought out his handcuffs and looked inquiringly at Hyer.

"Wouldn't hurt anything," the detective agreed. "Help keep you warm," he said to Vanness.

"What do you mean, doing a thing like this to me in my own car?" the youth sputtered in sudden spirit.

Hyer, still grinning, said, "Want me to tell?" and Vanness, doubtful, but too shaky to maintain his pose, subsided.

"By the way, Henry," Ed Wheeler said in his basso profundo, "you sounded so sort of excited over the phone that I phoned up to Woodstock and told Bates to hold the boys up when they reported to him. Give us a chance to catch up with 'em and all sort of go in together."

Hyer said, "Thanks, Ed," with deep conviction.

Corey Hilton turned to say over his shoulder, hunched against the arctic hurricane of the car's thrumming pace, "It's cold up here."

"O. K." Hyer shouted. "First time we land to refuel I'll change places with you."

Corey Hilton's eye roved over the four faces in the rear, already pinched

and bluish in the piercing wind. He shook his head, shuddered and turned around, pulling his hat over his ears.

"Th-there's a w-windshield under the c-cowl," Vanness stammered sullenly through stiff lips, and Hyer and Ed Wheeler raised the cowl to loosen the flap and uncover the tonneau shield. It unfolded and locked into position in front of them. A heavy windproof robe hung from it and they tucked this about their knees. Vanness broke his sulky silence once more to direct Hyer to the switch controlling an electric heating unit in the floor.

By that time they were flying across the bridge to Jersey, and a few moments later Chase gave the engine its head and the Duesenberg leaped forward in a thundering roar like a racehorse when the barrier goes up.

Neither McRae nor Vanness were disposed to conversation.

Ed Wheeler leaned forward and spoke across the two unwilling passengers, telling Hyer what had happened to send his men kiting into the hills even before Hyer could be reached for an amplifying of his brief information. For obvious reasons the big man cloaked his account in vagueness as to names and places. But Hyer gathered that Solitaire (Harvey) had driven up to the Forest Hills apartment house in a taxi, had seen the watcher and sped away suspicious. Later they found the driver of the cab, who reported that his fare had been driven all the way to New York, had picked up a short swarthy Italian with long arms and black brows, and then been deposited at the ferry to Weehawken.

"Everything squared up so well with what you let on to us, Henry, and finding that stuff out there in the desk and all, I told the boys they might as well go on up to Woodstock and push that place over, figuring those two was probably on their way up there since there was a West Shore train in ten minutes after they left the cab at the ferry. Kind of looked like a department job."

HYER saw the gambler's pasty face wince at the last phrase. He said, "That's right, McRae. I never did introduce you two, did I? This's Ed Wheeler, one of Uncle Sam's right hand bird dogs with a strong streak of retriever."

McRae blinked and asked, his lips chilled and stiff, "What is he doing—here?"

"Chaperon for the party. You're going back with him, when you get through identifying stiffies after we bust open Golightly's place in Woodstock."

"I haven't any idea what you—"

Hyer said, "That's all right. It'll come to you. Mr. Wheeler's got some samples you shoved on Chase Wednesday night and Mister Vanness's got a few souvenirs of his own and—"

McRae sneered at the youth and Hyer. "Perhaps Mr. Vanness would like for his uncle to know—"

Hyer asked, "What?" brightly.

"That Mr. Vanness owes me some seventeen thousand dollars in legitimate—"

"He might want you to prove that," Hyer observed.

"I have the proof."

Hyer said, "That's what *you* think," and bent to light a cigaret. He heard the gambler's gasp and the moan which followed it. He blew out his lighter and looked at McRae. When his eyes had become accustomed to the dark again he saw that McRae was struggling against a mighty suspicion. His puffy face was working, disbelief and fright in his eyes. By the same token Vanness' expression was changing.

The youth faltered to Hyer, "Do you mean—"

"Unh-hunh. Simon Legree won't pester you any more."

Surprise and relief bred another suspicion in the youth's mind. "Were you telling me the truth—about—about my uncle?"

Hyer said, "Hell no. But it took that much dynamite to blast you out of that bar without too many questions. Only

we need you too bad to let you out here to walk back," he added.

The youth stared at him while color flooded his face. Then he drew a deep breath and slumped back, weak and wordless in the reaction from his successive shocks.

McRae, on the other hand, recovering from immediate fright, asked, "He—the fellow that robbed me turned over to you what he took?"

Hyer said, "Sure," grinning.

"Double-crossing," the gambler said viciously. "They think they can freeze me out and make me whipping boy, do they? They think they can——?"

While McRae rushed violently on, interest awoke in Ed Wheeler's long face. Hyer winked. They let McRae spew maledictions on his former associates for a few minutes. Then Ed Wheeler rumbled, "If you feel that way about it, maybe you can sort of square things a little bit and do yourself a good turn by loosening up a little bit on *them*."

McRae's mouth writhed. A cunning glint came into his little eyes.

"Unh-hunh," Hyer seconded. "You're due for a trip anyway, since they framed you. Maybe you can get a stop-over for yourself and make sure you get company that far if you speak up. The government kind of takes an interest in guys that'll play ball."

McRae turned to Wheeler. "C-can I depend on that?" he demanded, his teeth chattering from cold.

"It's a pretty good bet," Wheeler told him.

"It's a ring," McRae plunged in, his cultured accent flung aside in his wrath and eagerness to make a good impression. "They roped me in just last summer while I was on the Coast. That Malinov woman." He interpolated certain violent observations on Venice's origin, sex habits, and probable future.

When McRae could again restrict himself to simple declarative sentences, he told them how Venice had carefully sounded him out in California and per-

suaded him to join the group, becoming a minor but active distributor, his profession giving him considerable opportunity to switch bogus bills for genuine in sizable lots. He was supplied with the commodity by Harvey (whom Hyer knew as Solitaire). The headquarters was, as Hyer and Wheeler already felt certain, in the old mansion rented in the name of Golightly.

The ring had been in operation a little more than a year and had fairly wide ramifications, but so careful was its administration that until recently the Woodstock headquarters had not been under the least suspicion. Something however had happened to disturb the central executive committee and a summons had been issued to the field representatives for a conference which was to take place on the morrow, perhaps was even then in progress. There might be a dozen or more in the house. Then that afternoon he, McRae, had been attacked and warned not to come.

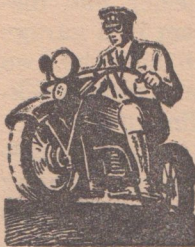
Hyer asked, "Kip Shannon mixed up in this?"

McRae shrugged. His volubility left him, and he sat with his mouth open, aghast at the revelations he had been led to make in the heat of his wrath.

"But Venice had a mad on him?" Hyer demanded, and McRae nodded.

22

CARNAGE



TWICE they were pursued by patrol cars. But the highway had been cleared of snow, and the hatchet-faced man driving the Duesenberg might have been Wild Bill Cummings himself for all the pursuing officers knew. The long black phaeton flashed through the snowy countryside like something out of a mechanized *Walpurgisnacht*, and once Corey Hilton,

holding his hat with both hands, turned to shout a comment which was lost in the roar of their progress. It was an ecstatic, "Hundred and two," but those in back could only see the awestricken expression on his chubby face.

Then, only a few miles from their destination, there was a roar and a whine and Hyer thought a shooting star had been aimed at them from a side road. The trooper had what it takes to be a trooper. The big black car snorted and seemed to rear up on its haunches as he edged it off the road. The motorcycle described a fast circle and came up beside them.

Gauntlets put his foot out to steady his mount, leaned on the handlebars and said, "Well, they've got you boys on the teletype in three states. The number of tickets you get in tomorrow's mail will make Christmas look like an off season. What's the matter? Another 'Frisco fire?"

Hyer grinned at him and said, "Buddy, if you've got as much nerve off that iron bronc as you have on it, you're one of the guys we're looking for."

Ed Wheeler produced credentials which gave them standing in Gauntlet's eyes. Vanness satisfied him as to the ownership of the Duesenberg, and Hyer outlined their errand briefly. With the quickness of his kind the trooper sized up the situation and a moment later was leading the way as the black car snored into Woodstock.

The squad which Wheeler had dispatched was awaiting them in a garage on the outskirts of town and the two groups, including Gauntlets, were quickly organized into a raiding party.

The government car leading, Chase and the powerful Duesenberg chafing in its wake, and Gauntlets bringing up the rear, they moved out of the village. Bates, the Federal man who had done the investigating that morning, directed the car in front, which presently turned off the comparatively clear highway and began climbing a steep grade along snow

rutts that taxed it to the utmost. The Duesenberg raced now and then as the wheels lost traction and Hyer's admiration for State Troopers rose as steadily as the grade they were climbing, for the put-put-put from behind missed not so much as a beat.

"You might've been able to tell us exactly how to get here," Hyer said to McRae, "but we weren't taking chances, so we got some advance information."

But McRae, after his voluble indictment of the ring, had lapsed into sullen silence and the only words he could think of in reply to this were ancient ones which had little bearing on the current situation.

Then the car ahead swung off the road where the wind had left a wide space clear of snow, Chase followed it and Gauntlets came up beside them.

Hyer and Ed Wheeler helped their manacled charges out and Hyer reminded McRae that his legs had been amputated at the hips. In the sudden darkness as the brilliant lights of the Duesenberg went out, Hyer found himself in what was for visual purposes at the moment as useful as the bottom of a lake of ink during an eclipse.

GAUNTLETS started to make an observation when there was a flash through the ink not far enough away to be uninteresting and Hyer heard the sleek finish of the Duesenberg irremediably spoiled just beyond his elbow.

The government man and Gauntlets sensibly held their fire until their eyes could become accustomed to the half-light of the snowy landscape. Hyer suspected that whoever fired the shot was more interested in warning someone than in scoring a direct hit on the raiders, anyway.

Then Gauntlets suddenly called, "Halt." An instant later he fired over the head of a figure fleeing across the snow toward a clump of trees a short distance from the bare space where they

stood. The figure stopped.

Ed Wheeler rumbled commandingly, "Stick your hands in the air and come here."

When the shuffling figure was almost to them, Hyer burst out, "Well, I'll be — Hi, Lonnie."

One of the government men flashed his light and in its beam the mountaineer's pleading doglike eyes blinked at them blindly. He wore the same ragged overalls, their torn bib revealing the monogram, K. S., on the silk shirt beneath. In one upraised hand he clutched an ancient shotgun.

"I ent done nothin'," Lonnie pleaded.

"Did you fire that shot?" Ed Wheeler demanded, and one of his men said, "Hell no. That was a rifle."

Hyer said, "Haul in the white flag, Lonnie. You're in good company. I'll vouch for this guy," he told Wheeler. "He maybe can give us a hand, too."

There was a brief flicker in Lonnie's eyes as he recognized Hyer's voice, but his stolid face did not change. He lowered his long arms slowly. The light went out.

Wheeler had been conferring with Bates, his scout, who had already reconnoitered the place. Now he rumbled an order. "Mike, you swing your car across the road. You turn yours around, Remsen, and have it pointing out. That'll stop 'em and it'll give us something to use in case they get by. There's only this one way out. We better get going. The guy that shot at us'll be there with the news by this time."

Hyer suggested to Chase that he stay with the Duesenberg and the party moved forward along the shadowy roadway leaving the drivers to rearrange their cars.

McRae and Vanness stumbled along in front of Hyer, who carried a gun supplied from the Federal arsenal. Two of the government men, he noted with some satisfaction, carried sub-machine-guns. Lonnie plodded at his elbow.

"How long you been hanging around

here?" Hyer asked.

"Sence come dark."

"How many went in?"

"'Bout ten'r 'leven I reckon."

"What made you come up here, anyway?"

For a moment Lonnie did not answer. Hyer looked at him. He could not see Lonnie's bearded face. Then the mountaineer said slowly, "I seen her."

Hyer's mouth tensed grimly.

They advanced cautiously through a clump of woods, until when they were just about to emerge Bates halted them. "The house is on there about a hundred yards," he told Ed Wheeler. "It's a big square house with a cupola. There's a barn behind the house and an orchard runs back on this side. It's all open between here and the house."

Hyer moved forward a step or two out of the sheltering trees to look. There was a crack from the house and he jumped back. He felt a hand on his elbow.

"If they've got rifles," Gauntlets said sorrowfully in his ear, "it isn't smart to take too many chances. You can aim a rifle."

"Windows all the way around the house?" Wheeler asked.

Bates said, "Yes. Some of 'em on this side toward the orchard are boarded up, though."

"Back?"

"Lots of windows."

Hyer asked, "How close together're the trees in the orchard?"

"Pretty close."

"Well," Hyer said to Wheeler, "if your guys handling the typewriters can get up in front of the place we can enfilade both sides of the house. Then the rest of us can duck around through the orchard to cover the back door. You want to direct that back door job?" he inquired of Gauntlets.

Mike who had blocked the road with his car joined them now. Corey Hilton and Hyer had both been supplied with guns and extra rounds. With Gaunt-

lets and Lonnie, this brought the raiding party to the respectable number of ten.

ED WHEELER detailed the two men with machine guns to make a wide detour and come up where they could rake the two sides of the house. The group also possessed two rifles, which were set to work watching the front of the house for direct shots which would be impossible for pistols at that range.

McRae and Vanness were left shackled to a sapling in a sheltered space and provided with two robes which Corey Hilton had thoughtfully brought from the cars.

Hyer, Gauntlets, Lonnie, the reporter, Ed Wheeler and the rest of his men slipped back along the trail to deploy through the orchard toward the back of the house.

Hyer was fond of saying afterward that it was not as hard as it sounded.

There was considerable brush in the orchard and, although they could see the square outline of the old house off to their left, it remained dark and to all appearances deserted. About halfway through the orchard Ed Wheeler began detailing men to fixed posts in order to insure a more even barrage if such was needed.

By the time the advancing party reached the far corner of the open lot surrounding the house, where cover made possible an advance toward its rear, only Hyer, Gauntlets, Wheeler and Corey Hilton were left. They turned at right angles and approached the corner of the house.

A long porch stretched all the way across the back. Above the slanting roof of the porch they could see four windows in line. The roof of the house itself rose to a single peak from all four sides ending in an ornamental cupola.

"There'll be a lookout in that dingus on top," Hyer opined. "Makes it a tough job to rush the place. Do any good,"

he asked hopefully, "to drop a slug in that cupola just for luck?"

"No," Wheeler rumbled. "Let them fire first."

"They already have," Corey Hilton protested. But the Federal man was firm.

"Don't you guys ever forget the ethics of your trade?" Hyer asked, regret in his voice.

Gauntlets said slowly, "Maybe there's some way to get to the house from that barn without crossing white ground."

"You been reading too many detective stories," Hyer accused. "Well, your hunch good for a try? There's fifty feet of snow between here and the barn. A man'll be just about as invisible as a crow on a whitewashed——"

A gun flashed and cracked in the cupola and reinforced Hyer's opinion about crossing open ground. It was apparently aimed at an outhouse on the other side in back.

"You send anybody out that way?" Hyer asked Wheeler.

"No. They're scary and firing blind."

Gauntlets said, "Who's going with me into that barn? I've seen outfits like this in prohibition days and they sometimes have tunnels."

"All right," Hyer agreed. "Have it your way. Make it a dime novel." He watched the trooper remove his heavy gauntlets and fold them into his belt. There was admiration in Hyer's eyes. "You stay here, Corey, with Ed, so you'll still have a right hand to hold the receiver when you phone your yarn in. If you hear shooting in that barn, ring up a mortician."

Corey Hilton said, "When you get to the house wave a white handkerchief out of that third window." He said, "Good luck, Hank."

Ed Wheeler rumbled, "You're both damn fools."

The gun in the crow's nest cracked again, this time in their direction. But again it had apparently been fired blind without direction.

HYER and Gauntlets dropped in the snow and began wriggling forward. There was a certain amount of cover from snow-laden bushes, but Hyer could not remember having Daniel Boone for an ancestor and he spent several of the worst moments of his life as they edged forward, snow sifting down his neck, up his sleeve and into the sling. He was compelled to use his broken wrist, which outraged member retaliated with glee.

But they got up fairly close to the barn, close enough to see that there was a door on their side—and to run against a tight woven wire fence.

"They probably keep the Great Danes on the other side of this," Hyer muttered to Gauntlets, and tried to decide what a woodsman like Boone would do in the same situation.

At that moment the rifle in the cupola flashed and a fusillade broke out from the house windows toward the orchard. But this time the fire was answered. Both machineguns in front broke loose with their tat-tat-tat-tat-tat, the Savages guarding the front of the house joined in and pistol shots sounded from the orchard.

Gauntlets shouted, "Come on," and Hyer, using his one good arm and both feet like a born fenceclimber, scrambled up and over the wire. The firing ceased and after a breathless interval they began wriggling their way to the barn once more.

They halted three yards from the door they had spied.

Hyer said, "Listen, Davy Crockett, you do this act a hell of a lot better than I could even with three good arms. You crawl around and see if you can find a window where the horses look out. Throw a flash in it with this." He handed Gauntlets his flashlight. "The safest way," he added, "would be to take off your arm first, but you proposed this excursion. I'll sneak up to the door and watch where the gunfire you draw comes from. Maybe I can

throw heat into whoever's guarding this outpost."

Inch by inch Hyer wriggled toward the door. Fortunately it was standing lightly ajar, opening out. Flat on his belly, shielding his body as much as possible from the house, he edged his eyes past the jamb and eased his gun into the blackness.

Suddenly there was more light than when God made the world. Gauntlets had thrown the beam of his light through a chink in the back. The beam struck squarely in the eyes of a man whose head and shoulders were just emerging from a trapdoor. A change of less than ten degrees brought Hyer's gun directly in line. His shot and Trapdoor's sounded like one. When Gauntlet's flashed his light again the trapdoor had fallen forward, pinning the corpse's head on its chin.

Hyer slid into the blackness of the barn and felt his way to the dead head pinned down by the trapdoor. A moment later Gauntlets joined him, having climbed in a rear window out of sight of the house.

Between them they lifted the dead man up out of the hole under the trapdoor. Gauntlets with his two good arms dropped into the hole first. An instant later Hyer felt the trooper's two bare hands lifting his own and holding it. That meant that the bottom was not deeper than a man's height. Hyer crooked his elbow on the edge, winced as he caught his broken wrist on the door, and dropped.

They edged forward along a low tunnel whose darkness made the barn they had left look like Madison Square Garden on circus night. The only consolation they had, Hyer reflected, was that if they ran into anyone they could not, short of fouled guns, miss. Neither could he, of course.

Suddenly the tunnel came to an abrupt end, and feeling overhead Hyer could tell that there was another trapdoor. That posed a problem. Then Hyer

jabbed Gauntlets excitedly with his splints. He guided the trooper's finger to a knothole in the board above them. Pushed through, the finger wiggled free.

"If there was a firefly in a tin can full of soot up there," Hyer whispered, "it'd blind us. Barring a million kinds of accidents we can push this up and climb out."

They pushed it up. They climbed out.

AS nearly as Hyer's exploring hand could tell, they were in a storeroom of some sort, possibly just inside the back porch, since the distance they had covered in the tunnel seemed about right. There were a lot of odds and ends and a smell of leather, smoked ham, corn mash and machine oil.

But Hyer's hand encountered one object that the average farm rarely boasts of. A Thompson sub-machinegun. And, he decided from the feel, about a thousand clips. Gauntlets touched it, too, and Hyer could hear his suppressed grunt.

"Unless this ticker's out here because it's jammed," Hyer whispered, "we've bumped square into Santy Claus."

Gauntlets took the gun and Hyer loaded his sling painfully with spare clips. They moved slowly across the floor and felt along the wall until they came to a door. Twice while they were maneuvering, shots sounded in the house and in the world outside.

"If this door opens into the kitchen," Hyer whispered, "there ought to be a big iron range somewhere."

To his delight the detective found the door unlatched, apparently as the dead man in the barn had left it when he went to the tunnel. They could see two windows overlooking the orchard. A man was silhouetted against one of the windows.

Noiselessly, an inch at a time, Hyer moved the door wider and slid his body forward. He craned his neck around and saw the expected stove, a mammoth shadowy affair, just to the right. This fact he communicated to Gauntlets with

his fingers and had an answering squeeze.

There was another burst of gunfire in which the man at the window participated and Hyer seized the opportunity to duck into the kitchen and skitter behind the stove. Gauntlets was right after him, but his machinegun nicked the corner of the stove and the man in the window turned.

Being afraid that he might drop and be lost in the shadows and hoping that a shot inside the house would not disturb the other defenders, Hyer squeezed his automatic. The man against the window dropped.

Gauntlets rebuked, "You hadn't ought to've done that," and Hyer answered grimly, "O. K. You got *that* on record."

His shot woke the slumbering guerrillas and for the moment there was another war. A door opened in the end of the kitchen, showing up against a window in the front room. The window was blotted out and a man stood in the opening.

"Pete," a voice said. The voice repeated the call, sharply. Then it called, "Louie, give a light in here." Another figure appeared in the door and Louie gave a light. The light splashed over the dead man beneath the window, but unfortunately the edge of the beam caught Gauntlets' heel.

Both men saw this at once.

Without prearrangement, Hyer and Gauntlets picked separate targets. One shot did for Hyer's man, but Gauntlets, with a bad firing angle, was compelled to use three. His quarry dropped and crawled away from the door into the front room.

Gauntlets whispered to Hyer, something like relief in his voice, "They know we're here now. I might as well try out this ticker we found and give 'em something to think about."

The machinegun worked. It worked so well Hyer was deaf for three minutes.

"Well," Gauntlets said into Hyer's ear when the detective could hear again, "Let's mosey out and clean up this

joint." There was a new jaunty note in his voice.

Then came a terrific fusillade outside and a smaller edition broke loose from the door at the end of the kitchen. The iron stove turned into a boiler factory and then a locomotive works. Hyer could see that Gauntlets was swinging the machinegun in a short arc and the detective hoped desperately that it could saw through oak. His slung arm burned as a bullet creased it.

Apparently the attackers fired only one clip, for after a brief salvo quiet descended again.

"Ed'll know by this time that we got in," Hyer whispered, "and maybe that last Vimy Ridge out there was his men covering up another run on that barn and the tunnel."

Gauntlets grunted and hell burst once more from the door to the front room. But the iron stove was perfect cover and ringing away like a Chinese Fourth of July it deflected everything hurled at them.

23

HOMECOMING



NOR did Hyer misjudge the astuteness of the government man in charge of operations outside. Three minutes later while sporadic firing was still going on, there was a noise in the storeroom and Hyer squirmed across the floor and through the door to welcome Ed Wheeler, two of his aides and Corey Hilton.

Plans were laid in the storeroom and strategy adopted for the finale. Gauntlets was to play his stream of lead directly into the door at the other end of the kitchen, while the rest of the force crept around the walls and converged on the door from opposite sides. This scheme presupposed a certain restraint and accuracy on the part of the

trooper operating the machinegun and Hyer commented caustically on this fact.

But, once decided upon, the plan was put into operation immediately. For any one of the house defenders to appear in the kitchen door while Gauntlets sprayed his tat-tat-ta-ta-tat at it would have been suicidal and when he ceased firing the five men had already crept to the splintered door frame.

Ed Wheeler's cavernous voice rumbled into the front room during the lull. "You guys give up or do we have to fill the rest of you full—?"

There was a spurt of flame and a bullet crashed into the heavy door frame. But Hyer had marked the spot where the flame had come from and fired rapidly two shots one on each side of it, low. A man cursed. Then someone else shouted, "For God's sake, stop. We're out of ammunition."

"Prove it," Wheeler roared in the voice of an enraged auctioneer.

"Jeese, how?"

"Make a light."

"Wait."

A match scratched into flame and a steady light illuminated the room. But at that instant there was a fresh racket from outside, a din of guns and the roar of a motor that accelerated and began to die away. A moment later something terrific happened down the road, but after a brief interval of ripping metal the roar kept on, growing fainter.

While Hyer's mouth hung open and Ed Wheeler rumbled profanely, there was another noise, a sputtering put-put-put that thickened into a hum and also receded.

Hyer grinned at Gauntlets in the reflected light from the lamp in the front room. "There goes your pony. But it's in loving hands."

The six from the kitchen moved into the lighted front room and as they did so there was a hammering at the outside door. Three men stood in the light of the lamp, their hands in the air. Two others lay still, one by the kitchen door,

one in the middle of the floor.

"Open that door," Ed Wheeler roared and one of the quaking three sprang to throw back the bolt on the front door. The two government men with machine-guns rushed in, followed by the rifles.

"Practise a roll up those stairs with your trapdrum," Hyer suggested, and both of the quickfiring guns went happily into action up a flight of steps to the second story.

"All right," a voice shouted. "For God's sake, we'll come down."

"With your hands on the ceiling," Ed Wheeler called so that the lamp vibrated.

Down the stairs came Solitaire and Patch and two strangers. Hyer watched them grinning. But his grin faded.

He said, "Where's the Malinov?"

Solitaire looked at him and grinned back. "Wouldn't you like to know?" he asked, and Hyer lunged at him. "She scrambled," Solitaire amended, drawing back.

"Scrammed?" Hyer shouted. He said, "The car we heard—"

"Yeah," one of the machinegunners put in. "They came tearing down the road with the lights out and got by us. I think I plugged the tires and the gas tank maybe, but that baby sure could drive."

"She parked the car up the road a piece," Solitaire said to Hyer, enjoying it. "Maybe you'll see that doll. Maybe you won't."

SEVERAL of the government men had ascended the stairs. Now one of them shouted down, "Here's the plant. They tried to wreck it and burn the paper."

McRae and Vanness came in under guard. Hyer hunched his shoulders, pushed back his hat and watched them. Bitter humor diluted the acid in his expression. He rose and limped over to where Ed Wheeler was marshalling the two newcomers into the group captured inside the house.

"You can untie the kid, Ed," he said,

and when Vanness, who had been manacled to McRae, stood chafing his wrist from which the handcuff had been removed, Hyer went on to McRae. "When the Federal government gets through going over those business records you got lifted off you, maybe they'll find 'em good for a nice stiff tax rap."

The fat gambler turned on Solitaire and hissed, "You double-crossing—"

Solitaire said, "Wait a minute, Mac."

Hyer interpolated, "That's right, McRae. Don't throw things around you can't back up."

"You robbed me of my wallet this afternoon, and stole—"

Solitaire's square face hardened, "If I didn't have these bracelets on, I'd smash your fat face. I never lifted a thing off you."

"That's right," Hyer supported.

McRae's mouth dropped. He whirled on Hyer. "You? You took—?"

"Unh-hunh. I was doing my best to get that murder indictment reduced to illegal entry. What'd you have against this mess of blubber?" Hyer asked Solitaire. "That'd make you smack him down with a brass vase?"

"Ain't his face enough?" Solitaire asked.

"You look like a guy can control his baser impulses."

Solitaire shrugged. "He had it coming to him. Malinov's had the finger on him for quite a while. When he crooked Shannon last night she boiled over. She—"

Hyer said, "Wait a minute. You two guys can throw insinuations around like a couple of cabinet members. What makes you think Fatty here pushed over Shannon?"

"She said she could prove it."

"And you took a skirt's word?" Hyer said, disgusted, "and called up Range this afternoon and told him that?"

"What if I did?"

McRae was looking from one to the other, his flabby mouth open.

"On the level?" Solitaire asked.

"Sure. Say," Hyer said, "Venice fix

up that slugging in Hilton's apartment house Wednesday night?"

"It was her idea, yeah."

"And she sent you and Boris Karloff here after him at my place yesterday evening?"

"She said she wanted him," Solitaire answered. "We was just going to try to persuade Shannon to come see her."

"So *she* was bossing this outfit?"

"You think she was the cook maybe, or the—?"

"Unh-hunh," Hyer answered. "Then this GG's just sort of a pair of initials under which she did business?"

Solitaire grinned, "Just a sort of a kind of a pair of initials," he agreed. "How'd you pick that up?"

Hyer said, "Oh, out of a personal ad in the *Examiner*."

The other man looked puzzled. "I don't get you."

HYER asked, "Who wrote that ransom note?"

"Ransome note?"

"Nuts. The one old man Shannon got after you'd slugged me in the hall outside Hilton's apartment."

Solitaire blanched. "My God. Ransome note?" He turned, excited, to Ed Wheeler. "Don't get me wrong, chief. I ain't had nothing to do with no snatching. On the level. Jeese, kidnaping! Why, I'd as lief lift rocks off the neck of the President's wife. Jeese, I ain't no kidnaper. Do I look like a guy'd do a snatching, chief? I got my principles."

"What in hell you think you were doing?" Hyer demanded.

"Honest to God, chief," Solitaire hastened on to Wheeler, who was checking over material brought down from the workshop on the second floor, "I thought I was doing Shannon a favor. She told us Shannon'd pushed over that country cop and was running around kind of hysterical and'd get himself picked up if we didn't get him stuck away out of sight. She practically begged me to help her. She busted down and liked to cried, she said she was so

worried about Shannon."

"Lucky none of those tears dripped on you, buddy," Hyer put in grimly. "Hydrochloric acid eats your skin away. Sure she was worried about him. She'd fixed the swellest variation of the badger game since Noah's daughters. She'd fixed Kip Shannon up with a nice murder on his hands that'd make him grateful as all hell to her and you for keeping him hid while the bloodhounds bayed. And then he walked out on her before she could put him away in a drawer.

"At that," he said, "maybe you didn't have the straight on it. When you went through my duds you cracked wise about that fake telegram to Kip's wife asking for twenty-five grand and you kept a dead pan when you lamped Charley's handiwork on that queer. That told me then you didn't know what was back of the wire, but *did* recognize the bills since you didn't gag about 'em."

Hyer sneered and went on, "Just to make it profitable, she was standing Shannon's old man up for one hundred grand in—"

Solitaire gasped, "One hundred grand! The bitch!"

"Sure she is. And you were doing the dirty work, you and your pals."

Lonnie Binch had approached Hyer as the detective talked, drawn, it seemed, by an awful fascination. Now he was impelled to speech.

"Warn't that ther his woman?" Lonnie asked, his brown eyes wide.

Hyer said, "Hell no. He was trying to shake her." Then he added ironically. "There are some men who cannot be cabined in the trite confines of matrimony or anything else but a six-foot box. You been laying off her, Lonnie, because you thought Shannon had a brand on her?"

It was clear that Hyer's idiom had a velocity beyond Lonnie. But the mountaineer had gathered enough of what had preceded that he could answer this elliptical question.

He said slowly, "I warn't tellin' on Mister Shannon's woman."

Hyer's eyes brightened. "You saw it, Lonnie?"

"I seen her," the big mountaineer said slowly, "I seen her through th' winder. I seen her shroot that ther feller."

"Tatham?"

Lonnie nodded.

"You weren't telling on her, but you were willing to leave her tracks and chance the cops finding out?"

LONNIE said sullenly, "I wouldn't akeered."

"And you couldn't figure out why there wasn't more blood, Lonnie, because she'd already done for Tatham with a charge of chloral hydrate she dosed him and Kip with. Kip'd been hitting the stuff for a long time and he could stand it. But Tatham had Bright's disease and conked.

"Tatham," Hyer continued to Solitaire, "breezed in and shot off his mouth how he was going to tip over a big shindig of some kind and because he'd been talking about counterfeiters, Venice got panicky and doped the liquor to slow 'im up. Maybe she saw the whole play right from the start, I don't know. Anyway, when they were both out cold, Kip and Tatham, she came back and plugged Tatham, putting the gun in Kip's hand.

"It was smart," Hyer agreed. "She planned to be around when Kip waked up and accused himself of homicide, pretend she'd seen them quarrel and Kip shoot Tatham and then promise Kip she'd hide him until the chase was over.

"That'd give her a big leverage on Kip for playing angel to him while she collected one hundred and twenty-five grand in angel fees. You see she sent a wire to Kip's wife in Hollywood asking for a cashier's draft for twenty-five, signing Kip's name to it. Then she was shaking down his old man for another hundred. Meanwhile, if anything went

wrong with the setup, the worst she could be rapped for, she figured, would be harboring a homicide suspect. And Kip wasn't likely to make trouble with that hanging over him.

"It was a honey of a scheme. But Kip wouldn't play by the rules and came to too soon. She'd had to go to Kingston and send the wire, while Shannon was out cold. She didn't dare phone it from Woodstock. And when she came back from Kingston Kip had sneaked the corpse out, scrubbed the floor and scrambled back to New York. She hiked up in the clearing to see for sure. That's why her tracks were on top of Shannon's, Lonnie, the ones you covered up to keep Shannon out of trouble.

"So," Hyer continued to Solitaire, "you and the boys had to turn stooges and try to sandbag Kip up at Hilton's apartment Wednesday night. That fell through because you picked the wrong guy, namely me. Next she sent you torpedos around to my place yesterday when you'd located Kip there. And when *that* was a fizzle, too, she got sore and tried to finish the job herself, thinking if she could just tell Kip she'd seen him plug Tatham, he'd come along like Mary's little lamb.

"That little sashay," Hyer said, "cost her fifty bucks and a sore jaw." He shrugged. "Well, I saved you two guys from the Lindbergh Law, anyway. I ought to get credit for that."

"Who scratched Shannon?" Solitaire asked, as if he were ready to believe anything. "She do that, too?"

"Hell no," Hyer said viciously. "I did that. Didn't I tell you I—?"

He whirled toward the door.

Gauntlets had heard the sound, too. Hyer was a jump behind him when the trooper rushed through the door. Together they floundered through the snow toward the road.

They could see the headlight jouncing along through the trees. The motorcycle was running slowly, racing in low gear. When it came out of the trees they could see why.

Walking in front, their hands in the air, their backs perfect targets in the pitiless wash of the headlight, were Venice Malinov and Hyer's erstwhile host, Grant Geoffrey.

Hyer stopped long enough to make two observations to the pair on foot. Gauntlets was already congratulating Chase when the detective reached the motorcycle.

Hyer suddenly gasped. "Where's your rod?" he demanded.

"Have none."

"No gun? How'd you kid those two into—?"

Chase said, "Backfire," and the ghost of a grin touched his hatched face.

Gauntlets swung with a snort. "*My* engine backfired?"

"Make *any* engine backfire," Chase said elaborately.

Hyer grinned, the happiest grin which had moved his round face in twenty-four hours. "Buddy," he said to the trooper, "if this guy says he can make your tin horse eat sawdust with green spectacles on, you can quit buying gasoline."

THEY entered the room where judgment day was in progress. A low growl came from one corner of the room. Lonnie Binch, his eyes gleaming, crouched as if to spring at Venice. Through his curling beard his teeth showed.

Hyer said, "O. K., Lonnie."

"I seen her do it," Lonnie said, leveling his finger at Venice, "I seen her shoot that ther feller."

Venice gasped and the enameled perfection of her face shattered.

"Unh-hunh," Hyer said, "through the window. But that needn't bother you, Lady Macbeth, because after all, you didn't kill Tatham with a gun. He was dead already.

Her cobalt eyes swept to Hyer. "How do you—?"

"And," Hyer went on, "that might be good for a second-degree, Vitriol, if it wasn't for another act that's a lot

snappier. Allow me to present Mister Rufus Cole Harry Vanness, who—"

Venice, catching her first sight of Vanness, gasped. She said, "You punk!"

"Why you always want to take witnesses along to your homicides, Venice, is—" Hyer began when the girl interrupted him, her eyes blazing.

"He was down in the car—out in front—waiting. He—"

For five hours the youth had been taut, on the verge of hysteria. Now his control snapped. He screamed, lunged toward Venice.

"That's what *you* think," he shouted. One of Wheeler's men caught him, pinned him, while the boy struggled, sobbing, screaming epithets. "*You* think I was down in the car. You think I didn't follow you into the house. I heard you. I was outside the door. I heard you. You said he had to come along with you. You said if he didn't you'd kill him. And I heard what he called you. And I heard the shot. Oh God," he sobbed, "what a yellow bastard I was! Lock me up. Kill me. Burn me."

He fell sobbing into a chair, his face in his hands.

Hyer said, "Well, Queen Kong, I guess that does it." He squinted at her. "The way you business girls can lose your heads. That gun Kip grabbed wasn't loaded. You should've remembered that. Tch, tch."

Then Hyer's manner brightened. "But if you thought *my* prints all over the gat you used were going to tie a sash weight around *my* neck, how about all those curlycues *you* left stamped on the bottles in Kip's cottage? You put so much faith in those fingerprints of mine," the detective concluded, "that I got a lot of trust in yours. And I got a couple of samples of identical face powder, Wildflower," he added, "that're going to fasten both those killings together pretty tight even if Sonny-boy here forgets his lines in court. One of 'em," he said, grinning as the cobalt eyes dropped unconsciously to the purse which she still clasped, "from my rug

where you dropped your powderpuff when you pulled the gun on Kip after he grabbed that empty automatic, and the other from the telephone mouthpiece in Kip's cottage where you leaned your lovely cheek watching the two guys on the floor while you phoned to— She phone you about that?" he asked Geoffrey, who was standing a dejected little figure, under the ministrations of the government men.

"She phoned *me*," McRae put in shrilly. "She asked me to locate Shannon. She said he—"

Geoffrey, oblivious to McRae's outburst, gulped. "Yes sir, she telephoned me that she had just seen Mr. Shannon shoot Tatham and wished that we could do something to help Mr. Shannon. She said she was coming over and would I go back with her."

"And did you?"

"No sir," the little man answered promptly. "I told her I didn't choose to get mixed up in anything like that."

Hyer grinned. "Like hell. You went back with her all right. I knew that the minute I went through that cottage of his yesterday. You told me Thursday night," he went on, still grinning, "that Kip had not packed his things. Now, every piece of baggage he had was in a closet behind a door. And that door wasn't even visible from a window."

"Anyway," he concluded, "you got mixed up in something a lot like it, it seems to me."

The dispirited little man's shoulders sagged. His Adam's apple worked. His expression was pitiable. "She approached me last spring and—well, I shouldn't've given in, of course. I didn't like her kind. But what with the mortgage and all, and she offering me so much money just to make a couple of plates for them, me being an etcher, you see—"

MIKE, Ed Wheeler's assistant, who was making notes at a table, raised bloodshot eyes. "Nuts," he said feelingly. "You've been turning 'em out

for years, Charley."

The little man started. He gulped. Then he drew himself up with pride. "And my work has been irreproachable," he said in a strong voice. "You would never have—" He faltered and gulped again, turning sharp angry eyes on Venice Malinov. "If I had not allowed myself to get mixed up with people of *her* caliber, you never would have found me."

"Thanks for small favors," Mike murmured, continuing his notes.

Corey Hilton came away from the phone.

"I first tied you up with the rest of 'em," Hyer told Geoffrey, "from the address on that box in your dining room I saw yesterday noon. They've been making kind of loose with your initials, Geoffrey, fixing to make you the goat if the balloon got punctured." He grinned at Corey Hilton. "That's the corner piece of the puzzle I said I was holding out on you, Corey. When I saw your front name began with a G, too, Geoffrey, and remembered that you were an etcher and then found a note telling old man Shannon to put an ad in the paper addressed to G. G.—"

"Addressed to G. G.?" the little man cried. "What do you mean?"

Hyer waved his hand. "We've been through that routine for another doubting Thomas already," he said, grinning at Solitaire. "You're both just babes in the wood on that. By the way," he asked Solitaire, "what about that place on Gramercy Park? That Golightly place? That belong to Geoffrey, too?"

The little man blinked, thoroughly bewildered.

Solitaire shook his head. "Lay off him," he said. "That's another one of *her* screwy ideas. Using them initials for a kind of a motive, you know. She liked 'em."

Venice made a comment that was not ladylike.

Patch, now no longer distinguished by that article, of course, interjected, "That littla shrimp! He no thisa Jee-

jee?" His scornful tone showed clearly that his unbelief was genuine. His lip curled at Venice. "You tella me thisa Jeejee—"

Solitaire observed, "Well, I'll be a monkey's uncle. So this guy with a paint box is *him*? She said Jeejee was a big shot out in Chicago," he explained, apologetic, to Hyer. "Christ, it never occurred to me she was settin' up this little appleknocker. It was Jeejee this and Jeejee that, and the dough kept comin' in so I never bothered checkin' up on her." He shook his head, gazed at the dejected little etcher and said, "I'll be a monkey's uncle."

The phone rang and Corey Hilton leaped to it. He listened and turned, cupping his hand over the mouthpiece. "Hank," he called, "how do you spell Malinov?"

Hyer grinned at the girl whose lovely face was drawn in maddened lines.

"R," he said, "a-t-t-l-e-s-n-a-k-e. Some day, sister," he went on to the girl, "I'm coming up to the big house and have you teach me that trick of carrying a rod for a whole day without smudging the guy's fingerprints that're on it."

He grinned. "Lying there in that bed at Geoffrey's Thursday night, it got all your lovely little spots rubbed off of it, of course. And when I took it out and laid it on the floor, my own had a nice shiny surface to work on. It was a good trick. It was damn near good enough."

A thought came to him. "By the way, Gorgeous, you still got that key on you?"

Her brittle, sullen eyes rested on him contemptuously. But when her purse was taken from her and examined, the key was found in a fold—the key to Hyer's apartment.

Hyer said, "I saw it was missing right after I found Kip laid out in my sitting room. Kip said he'd swiped it from Corey to get into my place, but it wasn't anywhere around then. That meant you'd lifted it when you went in there to talk to him. So it was a cinch for you to get back in when you drove up with Yellow-Glove Harry here while I was out." He shook his head. "You almost got your fifty bucks' worth, Bluebell."

WITH a cry the girl leaped at him. One of the government men seized her, pinioned her arms, stood clear of her flashing heels, yelped as she bit his wrist.

Hyer shook his finger at her. "You do things in such a hurry, Venice," he chided. "If you'd taken time to think out that scheme in Kip's shack you might've made it rap-proof. And if you'd given Kip time to get over his buck-fever, maybe you wouldn't've had to plug him in my sitting room last night. That's the trouble with little girls like you. Always in a hurry."

Corey Hilton came from the phone. He stared at Venice Malinov.

"Hank," Corey Hilton said, staring at Venice, "doesn't she remind you of something?"

Hyer nodded. "Unh-hunh," he said happily. "Ten—thousand—dollars."

COMING NEXT ISSUE

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Keep Me from Murder

By NORMAN A. DANIELS

AS the car turned onto the winding driveway, Al Duncan surveyed the house and whistled in awe. The man behind the wheel had seen the place too often to be impressed and anyway, he had things of far more urgent nature on his mind. In contrast to Duncan's bulky, efficient appearance, Floyd Hanford looked thin and rather pale. There were puffy circles beneath his eyes.

Duncan twisted around to face Hanford. "Now let me get this straight," he said. "You hired me as a bodyguard, not to ward off any danger which may come your way, but to keep you from killing Edwin Keller. That's the set up, isn't it?"

Hanford nodded. "You will stay beside me every moment. You will make certain I come near no lethal weapon and if I go for Keller, you are to drag

me away if you have to knock me cold."

Duncan shrugged. "Whatever you say, though this is an odd assignment for a private dick. I think some sort of an explanation is in order."

"There is nothing to explain," Hanford said. "Except that two months ago Keller and his chauffeur were involved in an accident and Keller was nearly killed. The chauffeur jumped in time to save himself. I found I was actually praying for Keller's death."

Duncan shoved his hat to the back of his head and liked all this less and less.

"I remember the accident," he said. "Somebody had tampered with the car."

Hanford eased up on the gas, applied the brakes and came to a stop in an ample parking circle beside the big house. He shut off the ignition as he spoke.

"I was questioned about it. That's

"Stay with Me Every Moment, Or I'll Kill—"

why I'm afraid. If Keller is killed I'll be suspected. And I may try to kill him. Tonight he is announcing that he is taking over my business and—gently brushing me off. It's supposed to be an unpleasant surprise. He hates me because I have bucked him for so long."

"And you're afraid you really might try to kill him," Duncan observed dryly. "Okay, I'll see that you don't."

The whole thing still made Duncan wince but his curiosity was aroused, and he wanted to see the thing through. They got out of the car and a burly, fat faced man in a chauffeur's uniform came over.

"Oh," he said, "it's you, Mr. Hanford. You can go right in."

IN the hallway, a servant took their hats and coats. They entered a large living room where a dozen men were drinking highballs and talking animatedly. Hanford took Duncan's elbow and piloted him to a corner of the room which had been decorated with flowers and shrubs.

"I couldn't possibly join them," he explained. "Everyone knows what is to happen. Keller ordered them to come here so my chagrin will be all the greater. I'll face it though, when the time comes."

Keller made a dramatic entrance, sweeping back heavy portiers and stepping out as if he expected all to bow humbly before him. He was a tall, heavy set man with jowls, the most determined expression on his face Duncan had ever seen, and for all his bulk and ferocity, he wore evening clothes as though he'd been born to them. Keller buttonholed one or two of his guests at a time and kept up a lively conversation.

Hanford drew himself very erect, pulled his coat closer about him and glanced at Duncan. "From here on, you start earning your fee. I'm ready to kill Keller right now. Let's go face it."

They took half a dozen steps further

into the room when a man appeared in the main door. He wasn't very big, but the gun in his fist made him better than the equal of anyone twice his size. Over his head was a crude burlap hood.

Keller shouted something, scattered the guests near him with his arms and moved forward. He headed straight for the hooded man. Duncan reached for his gun.

"Stay back," the hooded man ordered. "Back—all of you! This is a stickup!"

Keller either didn't hear him, didn't believe it, or didn't care. He started a wild lunge toward the man. The gun blazed twice. Keller stopped in his tracks, stood there swaying a bit and then he doubled up. As he rolled onto the floor, the gunman was streaking across the room.

Hanford moved out to intercept him. "Head him off," he shouted. "Head him off!"

The gunman was trying to reach the French doors. Other men were rushing forward, encouraged by Hanford's shouts. The gunman turned. Through the slits in the hood, Duncan saw small eyes glittering half madly. The killer backed toward the French doors now, with glances at Hanford. The gun came up to level and Duncan fired a single shot.

It was aimed to kill because only quick death would stop that murderer from taking other lives. The man in the hood fell backwards. The French doors opened. Through them Duncan could see the burly chauffeur just outside and he had a gun in his fist. The chauffeur put the gun away now and ran toward the window.

Duncan went over to where Keller lay, examined him briefly and found him beyond help. He knelt beside the hooded man next and ripped the burlap hood off his head. Beneath it was a wizened, cunning and familiar face now relaxed in lines of death.

Duncan arose slowly to face the assembled group. "I'm a private detective," he said. "I killed this man be-

cause he would have killed several of you. His name was Tabor, a hopped-up, brainless character who specialized in stickups."

"But why did he come here?" one of the guests asked. "There are no jewels."

Duncan said, "Tabor liked stag parties where there were no women to scream. Most of the time such parties turn into poker games and sometimes the victims never even report the crime. Everyone please sit down now, and wait until the police arrive. Hanford, I want to see you—alone."

He led Hanford into one of the adjoining rooms. When Duncan turned, there were handcuffs ready to be slapped on Hanford's wrists. Hanford stared at them, then at Duncan.

"What in the world are you doing?" he gasped.

Duncan said, "I need your help in performing a little act. The cuffs are part of it. I'll take you out to your car, handcuffed. You can balk a bit, call me a few names if you like and pretend I'm really taking you in."

"But why?" Hanford cried.

DUNCAN dropped his voice to a whisper. "That wasn't just murder performed by a half-baked stickup man. Tabor wouldn't have picked a gathering like this unless he was deliberately tipped there'd be a lot of dough. I think the whole thing was a scheme to get Keller killed off."

Hanford frowned. "Are you sure about this, Duncan?"

"No, it's only a hunch, but worth seeing through. Remember Keller was almost killed some weeks ago. That time his chauffeur seemed to know just when to jump and let Keller stay in the car. This time the chauffeur was on duty in front of the house and yet the stickup man came in that way."

"Do you mean the holdup man killed Keller because he'd been paid to do it?"

"No, not exactly. But I do believe Keller was told he'd be attacked by an

enemy who'd wear a burlap hood and pretend to be a robber. That's why Keller showed no hesitation in going after Tabor and why he shouted those curses at him. He didn't know the man under the hood was a cheap mugg who was bound to kill if cornered."

Hanford whistled softly. "That could be, Duncan. But what's my part of this?"

"I'm sure the chauffeur was in on it. Did you notice how the stickup man headed for the French windows? Did you see the chauffeur out there with a gun? To either cover Tabor's retreat or to kill him and end any investigation right there."

"All right, Duncan. It is logical. I admit it, but I still don't see why you put the handcuffs on me."

"If the chauffeur is in on it and sees me taking you out in cuffs, he'll think he got away with it. He'll be unwary, relaxed and not expecting any action against him."

Hanford didn't like the idea at all and said so several times but the arrival of the police interrupted him. Duncan told them exactly what happened. Then he came back to the room where Hanford waited.

"Let's get going," he said. "Put out your hands for the cuffs. The chauffeur will be around outside and he'll see you. The cops say it's a good idea."

"But I say it isn't," Hanford thundered, "and I won't go through with it."

Duncan stepped closer, secured Hanford's wrists and snapped the cuff in place. Then he dragged him outside. On the porch Hanford started fighting. Duncan curled one under his chin, briskly pushed him toward his car and shoved him inside.

Duncan started the car, backed it out and coasted down the driveway. In the rear view mirror he saw the burly chauffeur moving rapidly toward his quarters above the garage. Duncan stopped the car, signaled a couple of waiting detectives to take over and then rushed to the garage.

The chauffeur was prying away a foot square section of panelled wall in his bedroom when Duncan quietly reached the top of the stairs. From behind the panel, the chauffeur removed a tin box, unlocked it and stuffed currency into his pockets. He took out a piece of paper folded in oblong fashion, lit a match and held the corner of the paper in the flame.

Duncan closed in on the man and knocked the match aside, but the private detective didn't have things his own way this time. The chauffeur knew how to fight. Duncan took a punch to the cheek that rocked him badly. He ducked a wild roundhouse, clipped the chauffeur on the end of the nose and drew blood but took a terrific punch over the heart in return.

Duncan was knocked backward, hit a small chair and toppled over it. The chauffeur scooped up the piece of paper and headed for the door. Duncan curled both legs under him, braced them against the overturned chair and sent it catapulting at the chauffeur.

THE chauffeur was at the top of the stairs when the chair hit him and he tumbled down with wild yells. At the bottom he tried to get up but Duncan jumped from halfway up the steps and the fight was over.

Duncan read the contents of the paper and nodded in satisfaction. Then he brought the chauffeur down to where he'd left Hanford's car.

The two detectives were beside it. Duncan threw the chauffeur inside.

"They're yours," he said grimly. "Both of 'em. I figured they were in on it together. Hanford, because he hired men on a flimsy excuse to get an armed man on the premises and kill Tabor whom he had tipped to stick up the place. I expect the chauffeur told Keller that Hanford was going to try and get him tonight, while posing as a hooded bandit. Keller wasn't afraid of Hanford and went for the man he thought was a fake.

"My suspicions were further aroused when Tabor made no attempt to shoot Hanford as he moved to cut him off. Tabor thought Hanford was blocking for him. Then Hanford refused to co-operate with me in a plan to trick the chauffeur, because he knew if the chauffeur would really believe I'd arrested Hanford, he'd probably talk. That's what I wanted the chauffeur to think. He figured he had to get out fast but I also reasoned he couldn't possibly trust Hanford and therefore would have some sort of a confession hidden in case Hanford tried to get him. He'd have to destroy that. He knew if Hanford had been arrested, he'd probably start singing. To catch these so-called clever killers you have to think like them. But you don't have to work for them."

Duncan took two twenty-dollar bills from his pocket and dropped them in Hanford's lap.

He felt much better after that.

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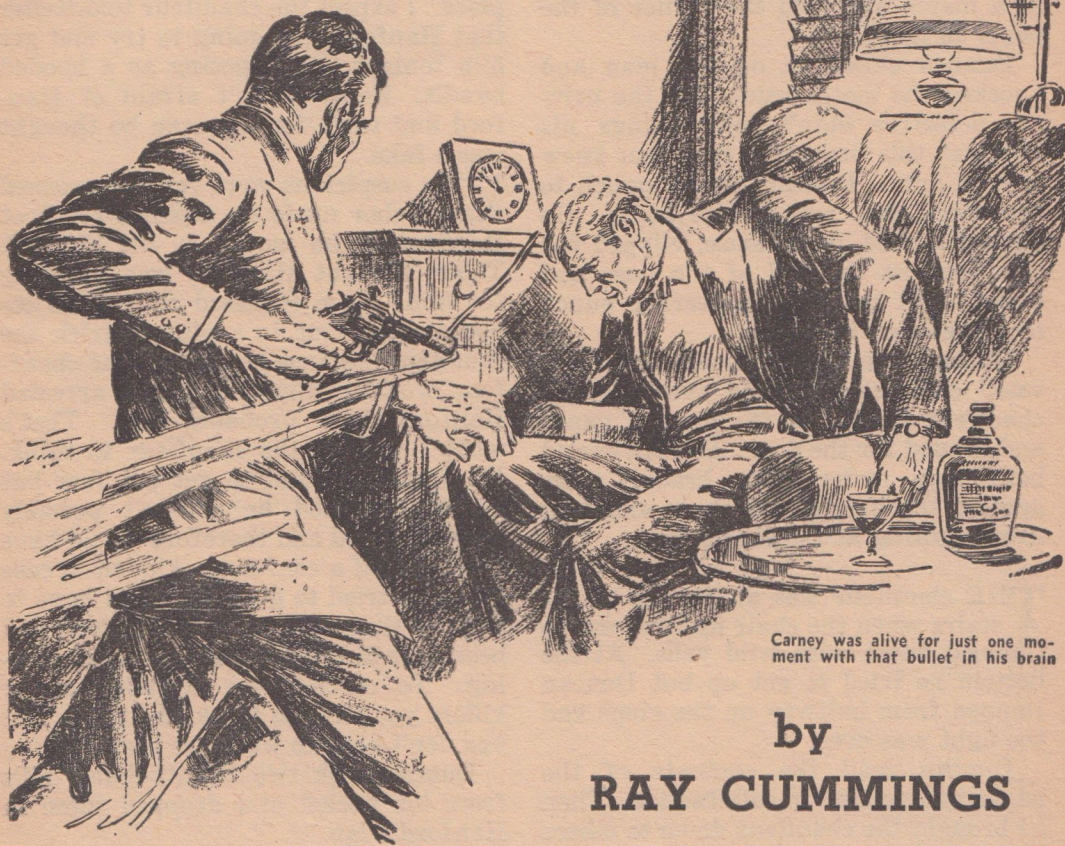
IN THE FALL ISSUE OF

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CLUE in triplicate



Carney was alive for just one moment with that bullet in his brain

by
RAY CUMMINGS

AS Randolph Hoag started for home, walking along the moonlit, palm-lined south Florida road, he had everything timed perfectly. He had left the millionaire Blaine, and his wife just a few minutes after ten-thirty. They would remember it. The big clock in their luxurious foyer had chimed the half-hour, and Hoag had mentioned the beauty of the clock. He would be home

just before eleven, walking normally. It was barely two miles to the bungalow where he lived with old George Karney.

Hoag was excited; not frightened, not even apprehensive. Just excited, with a tense, taut feeling inside him. One gets excited, on the brink of the culmination of ten years of planning and dreaming.

At twenty-five, when he had first

It was a case of murder for art's sake!

realized that he could never be a famous painter, he had decided to become a wealthy and successful art dealer. He would have his own galleries, perhaps on Fifty-seventh Street in New York City. His reputation would be international. Why not? He had begun dreaming of it, planning it. And now it surely would come true. Tonight, when old George Karney was dead, the road would be clear before him.

Hoag was Karney's secretary, and his agent in the buying and private selling of paintings, which was Karney's hobby. He was also Karney's companion, his valet, his chauffeur. Hoag was just about everything to the frail old man who was always in delicate health, and so shy that he was almost a recluse. For several years now, Hoag had made himself invaluable to his employer. Karney had been an important stepping-stone on the path of Hoag's planned career. Then suddenly the old man had become a stumbling block, a menace that had to be removed.

All his life Hoag had done everything with careful planning. Now, at thirty-five, with the calmest deliberation, he had decided that he could eliminate Karney without the least danger to himself. He reviewed his plan as he walked briskly along the edge of the white sand road.

It had shocked him, when first he had contemplated the idea of killing. He was not a man inclined to violence. Quite the reverse. He flattered himself that he looked like a wealthy art dealer. He was a smallish, dapper fellow, always impeccably dressed, suave, sophisticated, charming of manner. The idea of killing Karney was shocking. But it became less shocking as he pondered the necessity of it. He was reminded of Pope's lines,

Vice is a monster of so hideous mien,
As to be hated, needs but to be seen.
But seen too oft, familiar with her face,
We first endure, then pity, then embrace.

IT had been that way with him—that first time he had yielded to the temp-

tation of juggling the sale price of one of Karney's valuable canvases, and keeping a few hundred dollars out for himself. Then it was so easy to do it again; and to pad the purchase price of a Goya he had bought for Karney last year. A dozen little things like that; and Hoag had never thought that the fussy, shy, impractical old man whose mind mostly was on his health would ever suspect the secretary whom he seemed to trust so implicitly.

But suddenly now, without saying a thing, Karney was carefully checking all the records of his affairs which Hoag kept for him. It could be jail for Hoag—or at best, because the world of art is a small little circle, Hoag's reputation would be ruined, his career forever wrecked.

With Karney's death, there would be the reverse. A small legacy would come to him from the will. He understood it would be about eight thousand. He had another ten thousand saved up. And, with the old man out of the way, no one in the world would ever question the false inventory of his holdings which Hoag had prepared. He could easily purloin a Turner, two of the Goyas and several others, the purchase of which had had no publicity. They would yield thousands more when, in a few years, he sold them.

Randolf Hoag was all set to start off on his own in a fairly big way. There was just this thing to do tonight. He planned to keep it simple. He knew how he could plant a clue that would give him a perfect alibi. It was a clever conception—twin clues. Clue in duplicate. The police would find not one, but two clues. Evidence that of course could not be questioned.

It was ten fifty-five when Hoag arrived at the bungalow.

"That you, Randolph?" the old man called. "Come on in. Did you see the Blaines? Think you can sell 'em much?" "I'll be right in," Hoag called.

Karney was in his study down the wide dim hall. The little revolver with

its silencer, was in Hoag's bedroom, locked in a bureau drawer. He had been able to get it secretly so that its ownership could never be traced to him. It was loaded, ready.

He went quietly to his bedroom, put the little weapon into his jacket pocket. His mind was clicking with clear precision. He had planned every move of this so that there could be no possible fumbling.

George Karney was seated in a big easy chair, by the table in his study. He was a thin little man, with a pinched face and straggling gray hair. The lamp on the table shed its glow on him, on the book he was reading. The windows of the small room had Venetian blinds. Hoag's swift glance verified that they were down and closed.

Karney's big chair was close against one of the blinds, with the table at the side of him. A little bottle of wine stood on the table. He took a sip from his glass and smiled at Hoag.

"Sit down, Randolph," he said. "Tell me all about it. Did you describe the Goya nude to them? Are they interested at that price?"

"Yes," Hoag said. "I gave them a good pep talk. They're interested all right."

He didn't sit down. His mind was on the time. It was almost eleven o'clock now. Queer that he should be so breathless inside! His hand went to his jacket pocket for cigarettes. It bumped the little revolver. His fingers tightened convulsively on its handle, then relaxed.

"Well, go ahead—tell me all about it," Karney was saying.

This millionaire, Blaine, whom Hoag had just interviewed, was new to the South Florida colony. He had bought a tremendous home. He was a retired steel executive, and he and his wife had become patrons of the arts—a little boost to get Mrs. Blaine into the proper society. Karney had sent Hoag there to interest them in buying some paintings.

"They don't know much about art," Hoag said. He smiled ironically. "But

they're willing."

It occurred to Hoag how easily he could have been on that mission, representing himself, instead of being Karney's agent. That was the way it would be in a year or two now. People like these Blaines could be made to yield fifty thousand or more for a single painting.

"You concentrated on the Goya?" Karney asked. "That Goya nude of mine hasn't had the publicity of Goya's 'Nude Duchess', but it's a finer work. You told them that?"

"Yes. Sure I did."

HOAG'S mind was hardly on what he was saying. There was just a vague chance he had been wrong about Karney's suspicions. He must find out now, definitely. And suddenly it seemed to Hoag, now that he was faced with this thing, that desperately he wished he could avoid it! He pulled in his breath.

"Something I wanted to ask you, Mr. Karney," he said. "Aren't you satisfied with the way I keep your books?" He hadn't meant to say it like that. It had just slipped out.

Karney's eyebrows went up. He looked startled. He took another sip of his wine, as though to give a moment's thought before he answered. Then his eyes had narrowed. He seemed suddenly taut, wary.

"Why do you ask that?" he said.

"Well, I don't know," Hoag said. He knew he was blundering. It seemed impossible to say anything, without perhaps arousing Karney's suspicions if none as yet existed. "I—I just got that impression," he stammered. "I've seen you poring over the books, sort of—well, I mean—"

What difference did it make what he said? In his heart he knew that Karney was going to find it out. And if there had been any doubt, it was now suddenly dispelled.

"You mean checking on things, Randolph?" Karney said crisply.

"Why, I—"

"You've told me now what I want to know," Karney said with abrupt brusqueness. "That guilty look. I imagine you think you're clever, but you're not."

Hoag stood leaning against the door casement. The feeling of sudden confusion that swept him was frightening. His brain shouldn't be like that. It was always clear, precise. Those thoughts swept the background of his mind as he heard himself stammering:

"I don't know what you mean."

"That's the trouble! You do!" Karney's anger seemed rising with his words. He was sitting forward in his big padded chair. His little gray eyes were flashing. "I wasn't going to speak of it till I was dead sure! Well, I am now! I've trusted you, Randolph. That's what makes me so mad about it! I trusted you so absolutely. And all you were thinking was what a fussy, silly little old man I am. Well I'll show you quite a bit different!"

Why wait? He knew it now! Why wait?

Hoag's hand was in his jacket pocket. But still he stood there numbed, fascinated with horror. And then he knew that his hand was out of his pocket, leveling the gun. Karney saw it. His jaw dropped.

"Why—why, are you crazy?" he gasped. "Randolf! Put that—"

The *plup* of the little report through the silencer mingled with his gasp. He was trying to get out of his chair. Hoag knew that his outstretched hand was shaking. The shot had missed! The bottle of wine split and crashed.

"Don't let him attack you!"

The wild crazy thought, as though little Karney were some horrible, fearsome antagonist, leaped at Hoag as he aimed again. That did it! The second shot struck Karney in the head. He was partly out of the big chair and he wilted back, twitching. Then he slumped over the big padded chair arm with his arms hanging down and his head dangling.

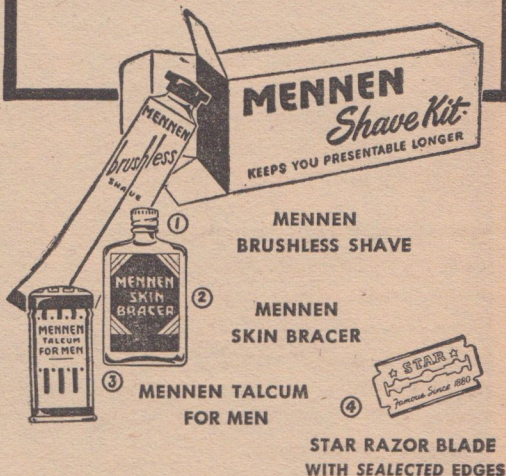
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**by
JACKSON
HITE**

THE work of the men of the Medical Examiner's office in New York City is little understood by the public and appears in print somewhat less often than that done by other departments. Because the doctors do not talk for publication, they may be overlooked by newspaper reporters, and their exploits in tracking down killers remain unsung.

In many instances they have been the detectives who did the actual solving of the murder and, what is equally important, they have prevented killers from getting away with cleverly planned murders. There are other cases on

record showing that they thwarted the plans of dying men.

The sharp crack of a .44 Winchester rifle echoed through a Washington Heights apartment house building in New York City at 2 o'clock on the morning of January 10, 1942. Within a minute the telegraph bureau at police headquarters was flooded with calls from startled residents who had been roused out of a sound sleep.

Shotgun Suicide?

When police arrived they found Louis Raines, an interior decorator, slumped on the floor of the living room in front

of a sofa, blood oozing from a bullet wound through his abdomen. The rifle was near his hand. His weeping fiancée was attempting to administer first aid.

Detectives bent over the critically wounded man and asked what had happened. "I shot myself," he said, coughing weakly. "I was holding the rifle in my hand, fooling around with it, when it suddenly went off: I should have known better."

The sleuths turned for confirmation to his sweetheart, Miss Virginia Van Wert, but she was unable to help them. She explained that she had been in the kitchen, preparing some food for a late snack, when she heard the shot. She had rushed out and Raines had told her the same story. She put in a call for a doctor. The only other person in the apartment was Miss Van Wert's mother who had been in her bedroom listening to the radio at the time of the shooting.

Miss Van Wert, an attractive statuesque redhead, accompanied Raines to the hospital where an emergency operation was performed. Despite a series of blood transfusions, the interior decorator died two days after the shooting.

The Body in the Morgue

Police conducted a more thorough investigation and suggested the possibility of suicide. They learned that Raines and the pretty redhead had quarreled during the evening, and at one point Miss Van Wert had pointed to the rifle and suggested to Raines that he shoot her. Instead, he laughed at her, told her not to be silly and they had kissed and made up.

The rifle belonged to the interior decorator but he kept it at Miss Van Wert's apartment for convenience since they frequently went hunting together. She said that Raines often stayed over at the apartment for the night when they had been out very late. The detectives closed their investigation.

In accordance with the law which re-

[Turn page]

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quires that the office of Chief Medical Examiner be notified in all cases of sudden death and an investigation made by that office, the hospital sent word of Raine's death. Dr. Thomas A. Gonzales, Chief Medical Examiner, ordered the body brought to the morgue for examination.

Dr. Gonzales read the police report of the shooting and then inspected the body, studying the wounds. The bullet had entered on the right side, emerged on the left and then had gone through the left arm. The clothing the dead man had been wearing at the time of the shooting was in a box, and Dr. Gonzales removed the jacket, fingering the bloodstained fabric.

He performed an autopsy which established definitely that death had been caused by the slug ripping through the stomach. Next Dr. Gonzales summoned his chemical assistants. They took the clothing to the fourth-floor laboratories and examined them under infrared rays and ultraviolet light. Some of the cloth about the bullet hole was burned in a spectrograph machine and the lines on the photographic plate were studied. When the tests were over the findings were presented to Dr. Gonzales. He read them and re-read the police report. Finally he strode to the telephone. His message was brief.

Raines had not committed suicide and the police could eliminate that theory. Nor had the interior decorator shot himself accidentally, as he had informed police. His death was a homicide.

Investigation Reopened

The Medical Examiner's report caused police hurriedly to reopen their investigation. It also brought Assistant District Attorney Anthony J. Liebler of the Homicide Bureau into action. Miss Van Wert and her mother were questioned. Both stated they were out of the room at the time of the shooting, Virginia in the kitchen and her mother

in her bedroom. All they knew about it was what Raines had said as he lay dying on the living room floor.

No intruders had entered the apartment so far as either knew; and it was inconceivable to police that if somebody had walked into the apartment, picked up a gun, shot Raines and then walked out the dying man would keep mum about it and claim it was an accident. He had been shielding somebody. Who was it?

The investigation turned to a thorough checking into the background of Louis Raines and Virginia Van Wert. The officers learned that the couple had been sweethearts, living together for ten years. Raines had not spent the evening at the apartment and Virginia, they learned, had gone to the apartment of another woman to look for him. She had smashed the panel of a door there in a futile attempt to batter her way in.

The detectives also uncovered a witness who said that when Miss Van Wert stormed into the house looking for Raines she had shouted, "If I find him there, I'll kill him."

Although Miss Van Wert still clung to her original story, Lieber ordered her arrested, charged with killing her sweetheart.

She was placed on trial one year later, still denying any knowledge of the shooting. Frankly admitting the quarrel, she clung to her statement that she had been in the kitchen when the shot was fired. If Raines had not shot himself, she offered the possibility that the gun had gone off accidentally. The rifle stood on the floor against a wall in the living room. Just before the shooting, she explained, she had slammed the kitchen refrigerator door shut with unusual force because of a faulty catch. She suggested that the jar might have caused the rifle to fall to the floor, causing the gun to discharge.

A ballistics expert refuted this claim. He picked up the rifle, cocked it, and

[Turn page]

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banged the gun many times on the floor and against various pieces of furniture in the courtroom while uneasy jurors ducked in their chairs. The gun did not go off. Finally, using very little force, he pressed the trigger, and a bullet sped into a wad of cotton. It was a practical and dramatic demonstration that the rifle had been fired only when somebody had pulled the trigger.

This set the stage for the appearance of Dr. Gonzales. He testified that Raines could not have shot himself for two reasons. One was the direction of the bullet wound, which precluded any possibility that the dead man had held the gun. The position of the entrance and exit wounds indicated that the rifle had been held up high and pointing downward at such an angle that the rifle could not have been fired by Raines. The second reason was of equal importance. The absence of any powder stains or burns on Raine's body and clothing he had worn showed that the barrel of the rifle had been at least several feet from him when fired. It would have been an impossible feat for Raines whose arms were of normal length.

Although Raines' dying words had sought to protect his sweetheart, his death had left a different message to the men of the Medical Examiner's office. Miss Van Wert was convicted of first degree manslaughter and sentenced to prison.

Central Park Tragedy

The Medical Examiner's office came up with a different message in the case of an elderly man who reeled out from behind some bushes in Central Park, blood streaming from a large number of wounds. The dying man told grim-faced detectives that he had been strolling along a dark path in the park when he was set upon by several thugs who drew weapons when he resisted them. He had been beaten over the head so savagely that a hole had been gouged

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in his skull and there were a dozen stab wounds in his chest. Death occurred shortly after he was taken to a hospital.

Central Park soon was swarming with uniformed men and detectives. Sleuths rowed out on the lake to scrutinize boaters, while others guarded the many park exits. Dozens of men were questioned and released. During the excitement the officers collected their usual quota of crackpot stories, including the tale of two sailors who said they had seen a man sitting alone on a bench banging himself on the head with a rock. Advised to drink strong black coffee and to avoid seeing pink elephants at the park zoo, they were sent on their way.

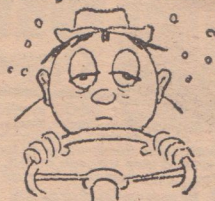
Dr. Gonzales took charge of the case for his office. Since detectives had not established just where the attack occurred, there was no scene for him to visit. Police furnished him with a report of the few known facts, and the victim wound up at the morgue. The Chief Medical Examiner was puzzled when he examined the corpse. He noted that almost all the stab wounds were at the same angle in the body and that the injuries to the skull were confined to one area. The latter fact indicated that the victim had remained in one position while being attacked.

Dr. Gonzales inspected the clothes the man had worn and noted that there were no cuts in the coat, shirt or undershirt to correspond with the stab wounds. Through years of experience he knew that suicides almost never stab themselves through their clothing, but prefer to press the blade in directly against the flesh. Reasoning that it was unlikely that thugs would have undressed the victim in order to stab him, the medical examiner suspected that the dead man had inflicted the horrible injuries on himself.

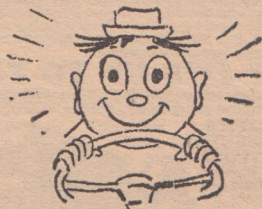
The problem was how to prove it. The medical sleuth observed a smear of fresh green paint on the instep of one of the man's shoes. He read the police

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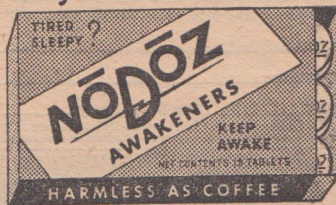
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report and interviewed the two sailors who took him to the place in the park where they claimed to have witnessed the strange head-beating incident. Nearby, leading over a gully, was a small footbridge, the iron railing of which had recently been painted green. Dr. Gonzales clambered over the railing; and underneath the bridge, hidden behind some shrubbery, he found a bloodstained rock and awl. These were taken to his laboratories along with a sample of green paint scraped from the railing.

The Case Is Closed

Experts in the M.E.'s office went to work on the samples. The serologists reported that the blood on the rock and on the awl matched that of the dead man. Dr. Benjamin Vance, deputy medical examiner, who is an authority on hair, said that the strands matted on the rock were similar in color and texture to the hair of the dead man. With both blood and hair checking there was little doubt that Dr. Gonzales had found the death weapons.

The staff physicist made a spectroscopic examination of the smear on the shoe and the sample of paint from the railing. They were identical in composition and so established the fact that the dead man had climbed over the bridge. All this, however, did not prove that the victim had hidden the weapons.

The awl, which was brand new, was the next clue to be followed up. Police traced it to the store where it had been purchased. The clerk remembered the sale very well because the customer had been so finicky and insistent upon getting the sharpest awl. He had tested several of them before making his purchase. The clerk viewed the body of the park victim and readily identified him as the man who had bought the awl.

The final phase of the investigation was a thorough sifting of the affairs of the dead man, and it was disclosed that he had recently lost his fortune in an

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ill-advised business venture, but had withheld the news from his wife and children. His lone asset was a large insurance policy containing an automatic cancellation clause in the event of suicide. The man had tried to mask his suicide as murder, but his death also had left another kind of message to the medical examiner.

CLUE IN TRIPLICATE

(Continued from Page 129)

He was alive for just a moment with that bullet in his brain. Then he was gone!

The end of it. Really so simple! So exactly as Hoag had planned. He stood panting, still gripping the weapon, with the room reeling, and with cold sweat breaking out all over him.

But there was nothing to be afraid of now. He told himself that, over and over, until in a moment, his logical triumph conquered his terror. He had had a bad panic, facing Karney, arguing with him. But that was over now, and the road was clear before him.

Hoag wiped off the handle of the gun and dropped it to the rug. Just two things to do now—arrange his duplicate clues.

Karney always wore an expensive wrist-watch. It was on the wrist which now was dangling over the chair arm. Hoag took out his penknife and, with the butt of it, smashed the watch crystal. Carefully he set the hands back, to exactly 10:30. He made sure that the watch was not running.

Now the duplicate clue. There was a radio near the chair and table. A small electric clock stood on the table. The cord dangled down one side to the floor, and then connected with a base socket in the wall by the floor a couple of feet away. It was a double socket. Both the radio and the clock were plugged in there. Carefully Hoag knelt down. He twitched out the clock cord. The clock stopped, and he set the hand back to exactly 10:30.

[Turn page]

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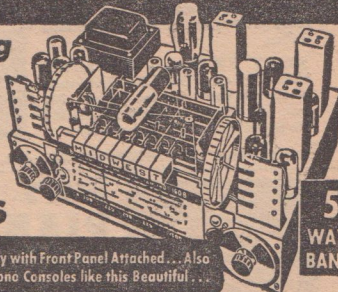
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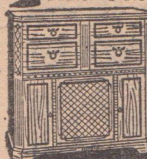
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THE murder time! The detectives would not be able to miss it. Karney's watch had been broken as he was killed, and the killer had stumbled over the clock cord, pulling out the plug. Two little things that had happened which would place the murder time clearly, incontestably at a time when Mr. and Mrs. Blaine would remember that Randolph Hoag had been with them, admiring their big clock in their foyer, nearly two miles from where George Karney had been killed.

There was nothing else to do here. With a last look around, Hoag went out the door, closing it after him. The door had a spring lock, which locked it when it closed. The upper half of the door was of glass, with neat little curtains. Hoag stopped to verify that the body lying in the chair could be seen through the slit of the curtains. Then he went to the telephone in the foyer and called the police.

His voice was shocked, breathless, as he told them he had been with Mr. and Mrs. Blaine, and had just come home, and found that George Karney was lying dead in his locked study.

Half an hour later he was telling the police his carefully rehearsed story.

"Well, Sergeant, as I told you on the phone, I left the Blaine's about half-past ten," he said quietly. "I happen to remember the time, because I had noticed it when I had been admiring an extraordinary beautiful big clock in their foyer. I—"

"Okay, I understand," the police sergeant interrupted.

He was a big fellow, this Sergeant Stevens. He seemed impatient, gruff, but he was friendly enough.

Hoag had waited in the foyer with his hat in hand after calling the police, and Stevens and a few other uniformed men had come in a few minutes. They had forced open the study door, taken a look around, and telephoned for the County Medical Examiner and for Stevens' superior. The study was a

blaze of light now, with policemen poking around.

They weren't dumb, these policemen. "Looks like it happened at ten-thirty," one of them said.

"And the electric clock stopped, same time," Stevens said. "Killer must have got his feet tangled in the cord."

They didn't comment on the fact that at that exact time, Hoag had been in the Blaines' foyer, two miles away. Why should they? He wasn't under suspicion.

Or was he? It startled Hoag to find that they didn't want him standing around in the study. He stood at the door, smoking, watching, listening. Stevens was over by the body, which still lay slumped in the big padded arm-chair. He and one of the men knelt down on the floor. They were partly behind the table, between it and the big window where the Venetian blind was pulled down. They seemed to be looking at something down there.

Looking at what? They didn't touch it, they just looked. Then they were whispering. It all sent a queer little pang of apprehension through Hoag. But he told himself that was foolish. His alibi was perfect. He had established it, and it was so obvious that no one had even mentioned it.

"Something — interesting over there?" Hoag suddenly heard himself asking.

Stevens shot him a look. "Yeah," he said in his laconic fashion. "Guess so. Tell you later."

They were whispering again. Stevens took out his watch. Two of them looked at it with him. Queer. They all seemed waiting. That was queer, too. Waiting for what?

The big sergeant seemed to be bending over looking at his watch for an eternity. Then he got up, began poking around the room again.

For a minute he stood by the radio. He looked at the little electric clock.

[Turn page]

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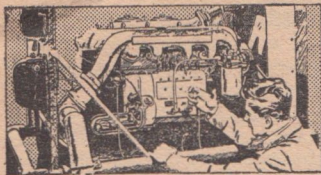
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Its hands marked 10:30. Nothing was wrong, yet somehow Hoag was frightened. Terribly frightened. It was suddenly as though all these tense waiting men were hostile, menacing.

Why didn't somebody say something? What in heaven's name were they stalling around for?

"Is there anything I can do to help, Sergeant?" Hoag asked.

"Not a thing," Stevens retorted.

That seemed to make one of the other policemen laugh, a short, ugly, ironic laugh.

Five minutes passed. Ten. An eternity more. Then at last Stevens was checking his watch again, and another policeman was down on the floor behind the table. They whispered.

"Yeah, that does it," Stevens said. "We sure got him!"

"You—you've got some ideas on the thing?" Hoag heard himself murmuring.

HE didn't want to say anything. He was trying to keep quiet. Above everything he must not look guilty! This could just be some bluff to frighten him. It was impossible that Randolph Hoag, who always had prided himself on having a calm, logical mind, should find himself just the reverse in an emergency.

Karney had told him he looked guilty! He was looking guilty now, and he knew it.

And then the grim Sergeant Stevens was confronting him.

"We've got you dead to rights," Stevens said gruffly. "You with your phony clues! One of those wise guys, huh?"

The room swayed around Hoag. "Phony clues?" he stammered.

"That ten-thirty business," Stevens said. "So you got a perfect alibi! Sure you were at the Blaines' at ten-thirty! Who said you weren't?"

"You—what you mean by that?" With a desperate effort, Hoag got his

wits to working. "Of course I was there. Are you trying to tell me that I'm suspected of killing Mr. Karney? Is that it?"

"That sure is," Stevens retorted. "Karney's wrist watch got broken when he was killed? *How* did it get broken? There was no struggle here. Karney was in the chair—a big, heavy, padded chair. The killer was over by the door and shot him in the head. He slumped in the chair, slumped over the big padded chair arm. So what did that handsome, shock-proof wrist-watch hit that stopped it and broke its crystal?" Stevens snorted vigorously. "I'll tell you what it hit! Not a blasted thing. The watch didn't stop till the killer smashed it himself for a phony time clue!"

But there were two clues! A duplicate clue.

"That little electric clock," Hoag murmured. "It also stopped at—"

Again one of the policemen laughed.

"Sure it did," Stevens said. "But did the killer stumble over the cord by accident? He did not! You say a Mrs. Blake is housekeeper here?"

"Why yes," Hoag stammered. "She goes home at suppertime each night. What has she got to do with it?"

"She doesn't dust the place often," Stevens said. "There's a lot of dust on the furniture here. You can just about write your name on the top of the radio. That clock is standin' there, and you can see by the dust it hasn't been moved. Nor the cord that dangles from it either. Now how can anybody stumble over an electric cord down on the floor, pull the plug out of the socket without moving the top end of the cord? It just can't be done! Want to try it and see? The clock would probably be pulled right off the radio! Or slued around anyway!"

The numbed Hoag could only stare blankly.

"So that's the second of your phony clues," Stevens added inexorably. "You

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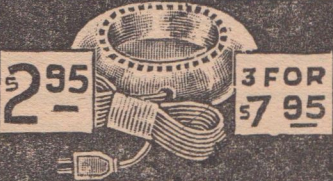
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gave a careful twitch of the cord, and pulled out the plug! Then you reset the clock, as you did the watch."

"That's a lie!" Hoag gasped. "Maybe somebody else did all that! I didn't!" He fought to steady himself.

None of this proved that he was guilty. It was all negative. Just the same as though no clue had been left at all.

"You don't know what time the killer was here!" he cried defiantly. "It could have been any time!"

"But we *do* know!" Stevens cut in. "As it happens, you left a real authentic timepiece! Take a look."

They were shoving him up to the window, behind the table and the body in the chair.

"Two shots were fired," Stevens was saying. "The first missed him, hit that bottle of wine, knocked it onto the floor here."

How well Hoag remembered it! And how little he had thought of it! The broken bottle of claret was lying now close under the window—a little crimson pool of wine into which the thin white cord of the Venetian blind was dangling.

"Any liquid is drawn up into a fabric by what they call capillary attraction," Stevens said. "See it there—nice red wine, climbing up into a white cord?"

Hoag saw it—the dangling white cord with its bottom segment stained red by the climbing moisture.

"Queer thing about capillary attraction," Stevens said conversationally. "It proceeds always at a uniform rate. You can't argue with a timepiece like that. And we've been timing its rate of climb. In the last fifteen minutes it's risen one-fifth of its total! And the correct time now is twelve-fifteen. Any kid in school could figure out when it started. Eleven o'clock! And that's when you phoned us that you'd just discovered the murder! Talk yourself out of that one, Hoag!"

But Hoag could only stand in mute

horror. Clue in triplicate! Two so obviously phony! One so obviously fatal! Randolph Hoag knew then that murder is a tricky thing to pull off with safety!

THE LINE-UP

(Continued from page 8)

That was the signal for Crane to go into action. He crept out of the room and rushed upstairs. He went from one room to the other without meeting anyone. When he came to Miss Van Kamp's room he made a careful examination of all the furniture, seeking some sign of how the theft of the strong box had been accomplished.

The only thing of interest he found was a series of tack holes on the edge of one of the windows. He was puzzling over their significance when he aimed the beam of his flashlight under Miss Van Kamp's bed and met the staring, protruding eyes of a dead man.

The man was a patient of the sanitarium. His skin was liver-blue and his swollen tongue still lolled from his mouth. The cord from a bathrobe had been tightly wound around his throat.

Crane ducked out of there fast and hurried back to the movie. He said nothing about his gruesome discovery. After everyone had retired for the night, he waited to see if Miss Van Kamp was accustomed to peering under her bed before getting under the sheets.

A piercing scream was all the answer he needed. He waited a few seconds, then joined the gathering in the corridor near Miss Van Kamp's room. Everyone was excited and half-hysterical. After the first confusion, Dr. Livermore herded everyone downstairs for questioning.

Grin of the Wolf-Man

It was while Livermore was questioning one of the male inmates regarding his whereabouts during the movie that another patient—Mrs. Heyworth, who thought Crane looked like her dead husband and had a yen for him—pointed to a window at the back of the room.

Everyone followed her startled, frightened glance. Framed in the lower pane of the window was a grinning, demented face with bared fangs and flecks of saliva on the lips. It was the wolf-man who spent most of his

[Turn page]



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time running around on all fours like an ani-
mal and had a mysterious faculty for escap-
ing from his locked room.

In the hectic confusion that followed Crane
decided to sneak out into the garden for a
breath of fresh air. As he reached a small
cluster of trees someone seized him from be-
hind. He struggled to get free but a blow on
the back of his head knocked him to the
ground.

Someone growled: "What did you do with
that box?"

Crane reached out an arm, got his hand
around a silk-clad leg. Then a pointed shoe
stepped on his wrist. There was a shout from
a distance and his assailants raced away.

If Crane needed any evidence that he was
playing with dynamite, the murder and the
attack upon himself was ample enough. But
more evidence came quickly. The murderer
struck again and this time the victim was a
woman—a woman who was very close to
Miss Van Kamp.

Action follows action in the weird halls of
Dr. Livermore's sanitarium as Bill Crane
fights a losing battle against time to keep the
killer from reaching Miss Van Kamp. At
every turn he encountered obstacles. Liver-
more and everyone else regarded him as a
lunatic. Besides, after the second murder, he
found himself under suspicion as the homi-
cidal maniac.

Then, too, he had to take stern measures
to bring the outside police into the case.
Livermore and Eastman were all for a hush-
hush treatment and it took a clever trick to
bring a local sheriff onto the grounds. But
even the sheriff and Crane's own side-kick
disguised as an electrician, couldn't prevent
another brace of killings as the murderer,
desperately trying to cover his tracks, ran
hog-wild.

"Murder in the Madhouse" is a must item
for every detective story reader. Jonathan
Latimer is at his best and when you finish
following Bill Crane through his bruising
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decade, along with a generous assortment of
short stories and features, in our next issue!

FROM OUR READERS

A NUMBER of our loyal fans have written
in during the last few weeks to comment
on the high quality of our short stories. We're

happy to have that kind of reaction because we try to pick the very best in new short fiction for you.

Bob Reynolds of Racine, Wisconsin, has this to say:

Dear Editor: I notice that most of your readers who write letters to the editor devote their comments to the lead novels. Well, I think your novels have been fine ever since you started reprinting \$2.00 books in the magazine. In fact, **THE SAINT SEES IT THROUGH** by Leslie Charteris was one of the best Saint mysteries I've ever read.

However, I also wish to tell you that I enjoy the short stories just as much. You manage to maintain a very high standard of excellence with the result that I find myself reading each issue of **DETECTIVE MYSTERY NOVEL MAGAZINE** from cover to cover. Robert Leslie Bellem's novelet **HANG MY KILLER HIGH** was an excellent job in your Spring issue, as were the stories of Sam Merwin, Jr., and Norman A. Daniels. Lots of luck and keep up the fine work.

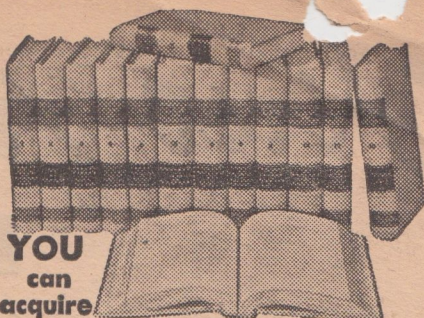
Thank you, Bob, for your very welcome expression of opinion. We'll be in there pitching hard in every issue. Now Al Carter of Boise, Idaho, also writes in to comment on our short stories:

Dear Editor: I am just dropping you a brief note to tell you how much I enjoyed the Spring issue of **DETECTIVE MYSTERY NOVEL MAGAZINE**. The novel by Charteris was a good one, but it was matched by the short stories. Everyone was good. That author list of Bellem, Merwin, Burks, Daniels and Rice was excellent. In fact, even your department, **THE LINE-UP**, was interesting. It makes me keep reading your magazine.

Well, Al, that's just what we want you to do. Keep reading **DETECTIVE MYSTERY NOVEL MAGAZINE**. And you won't go wrong if you stay with us. We've got some corking good novels coming up and they'll be backed by corking good short stories.

Thank you, one and all, for your letters. And keep writing. We like to hear from everyone. Kindly address all letters and postcards to The Editor, **DETECTIVE MYSTERY NOVEL MAGAZINE**, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. See you next issue—and happy reading, friends.

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