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FEATURING

THE LEAGUE OF SPECTERS

A Book-Length Novel of
Blackmail's Inner Circle
By BARRY PEROWNE

DEATH FROM DAMASCUS

A Baffling Book-Length Mystery
By G. T. FLEMING-ROBERTS



BEST NEW
MYSTERIES
of the
MONTH

DON'T BUY RINGS or REBORE IF CAR WASTES OIL and GAS



Miner's Amazing Mineral Discovery Saves Up to 95% of New Ring and Rebores Costs. If Worn Rings and Cylinders Are Wasting Oil and Gas Send Coupon Below for FREE SAMPLE!

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Nearly a half-million motorists have used this revolutionary method of cutting oil and gas waste caused by worn rings and cylinders. Savings up to 50% reported. Give your car new power, pep, speed and quiet with this amazing mineral discovered in the Rocky Mountains. Awarded A.T.T. Seal of Approval.

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Quickly placed through spark plug openings and at a fraction of the cost of new rings and rebores, this amazing mineral fills in and plates worn rings and cylinder walls. Overhaul gives your motor increased compression. Cuts oil consumption, increases gas mileage, adds new power and speed, with other substantial benefits of new rings and rebores. Overhaul has been thoroughly tested and proved by impartial laboratories and great Universities in the United States and abroad. Proved harmless to finest motors.

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SAMPLE FREE!

If your car is wasting oil and gas, before you spend up to \$150.00 for new rings and rebores—send your name and address on the coupon below for a free sample of this amazing mineral which expands up to 30 times when heated, and full details of a real money-making opportunity. Air mail reaches us overnight from the East.

Why Pay Up to \$151.37 for New Rings and Reboring?

If worn rings and cylinders cause your car to be an oil and gas eater—before you spend a lot of money, try Overhaul. Give it an opportunity to do for you what it has done for thousands of others. Here are costs of new rings and rebores on a few 1935 models: Chevrolet \$50.00; DeSoto, \$62.50; Dodge, \$59.20; Ford, \$50.00 to \$55.00; Cadillac, \$151.37; Packard, \$112.50.

ENDORSED

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Let us send you L. H. Smith's complete report which shows that the compression of a badly worn 6-cylinder motor was increased 32.4% and brought back to within .09 points of its original new car efficiency. Such tests conclusively prove the sensational merits of Overhaul.

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Let us send you free sample which every salesman is furnished for demonstration. Let us show you, with their permission, ACTUAL earnings of our distributors. Let us show you how you can start in this business NOW—before all territories are assigned. The market is there—we have the product—are you the man? Let's find out. Write, phone or wire today.—B. L. Mellinger, Pres.

OVERHAUL CO.,
C-912, Los Angeles, Calif.



"You don't have to TELL IT TO THE MARINES *they KNOW!*"



...WRITES HARRY E. REECE, FROM THE U. S.
VETERANS HOSPITAL AT MEMPHIS, TENN.

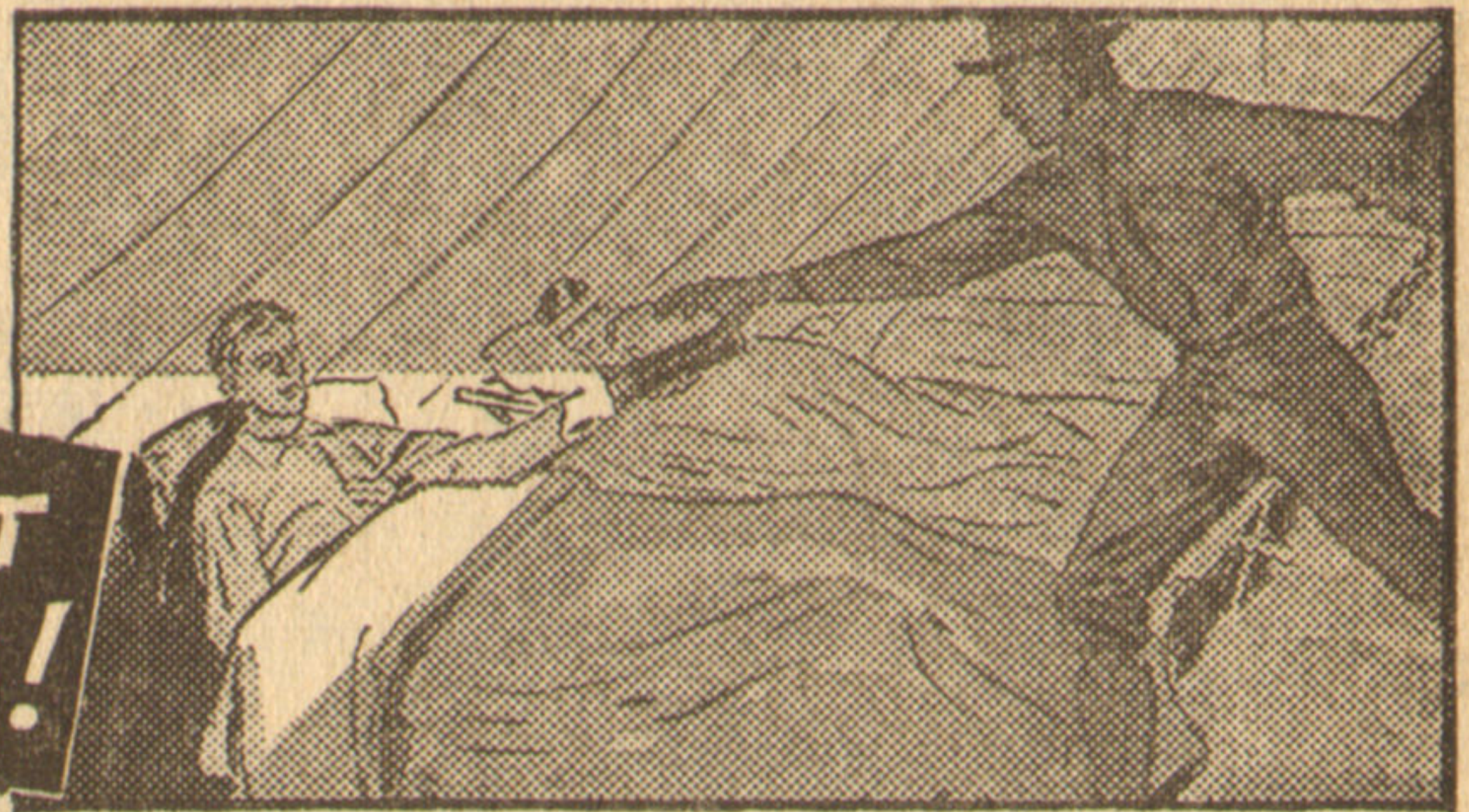
"On active duty with the Fifth Marines in the Nicaraguan jungles, I went to our field hospital with fever. One day a badly injured Marine was flown in...it was my buddy!



"His head had been bashed in by a machete. To save him, surgeons must remove fragments of skull pressing on the brain...a delicate operation anywhere, it was extra tough in a field hospital. I guess they didn't have much hope. Just when they started operating...



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THE LIGHTS!**



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(Signed) *Harry E. Reece*"



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DETECTIVE NOVELS MAGAZINE

Vol. 1, No. 2

April, 1938

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Two Book-Length Novels

THE LEAGUE OF SPECTERS

By BARRY PEROWNE

A Criminal Organization, Controlled by an Evil Eight, Pits Itself Against Blackmailers—while Mystery Shrouds a Grim Succession of Baffling, Sudden Deaths!..... 12

DEATH FROM DAMASCUS

By G. T. FLEMING-ROBERTS

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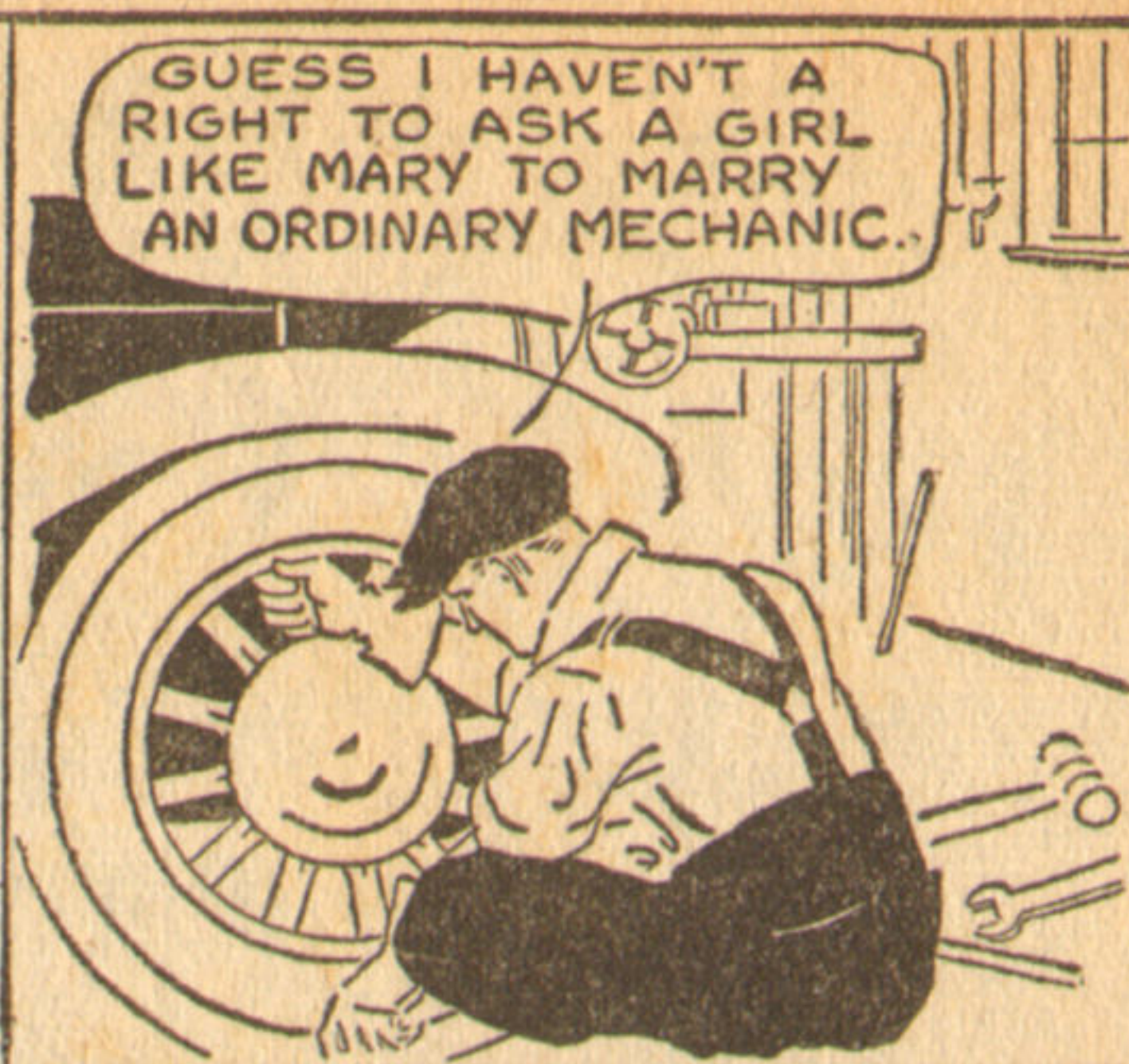
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THE BULLETIN BOARD.....A Department 104

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J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 8D09
National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

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National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Smith: Without obligating me, send "Rich Rewards in Radio," which points out the spare time and full time opportunities in Radio and explains your 50-50 method of training men at home in spare time to become Radio Experts. (Please write Plainly.)

NAME.....AGE.....

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Broad-
casting
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\$300 a
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Own Busi-
ness.

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Before
Graduating

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MORE MONEY



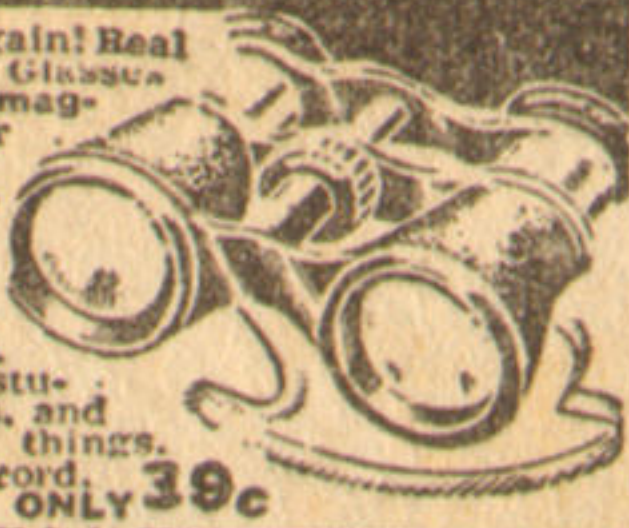
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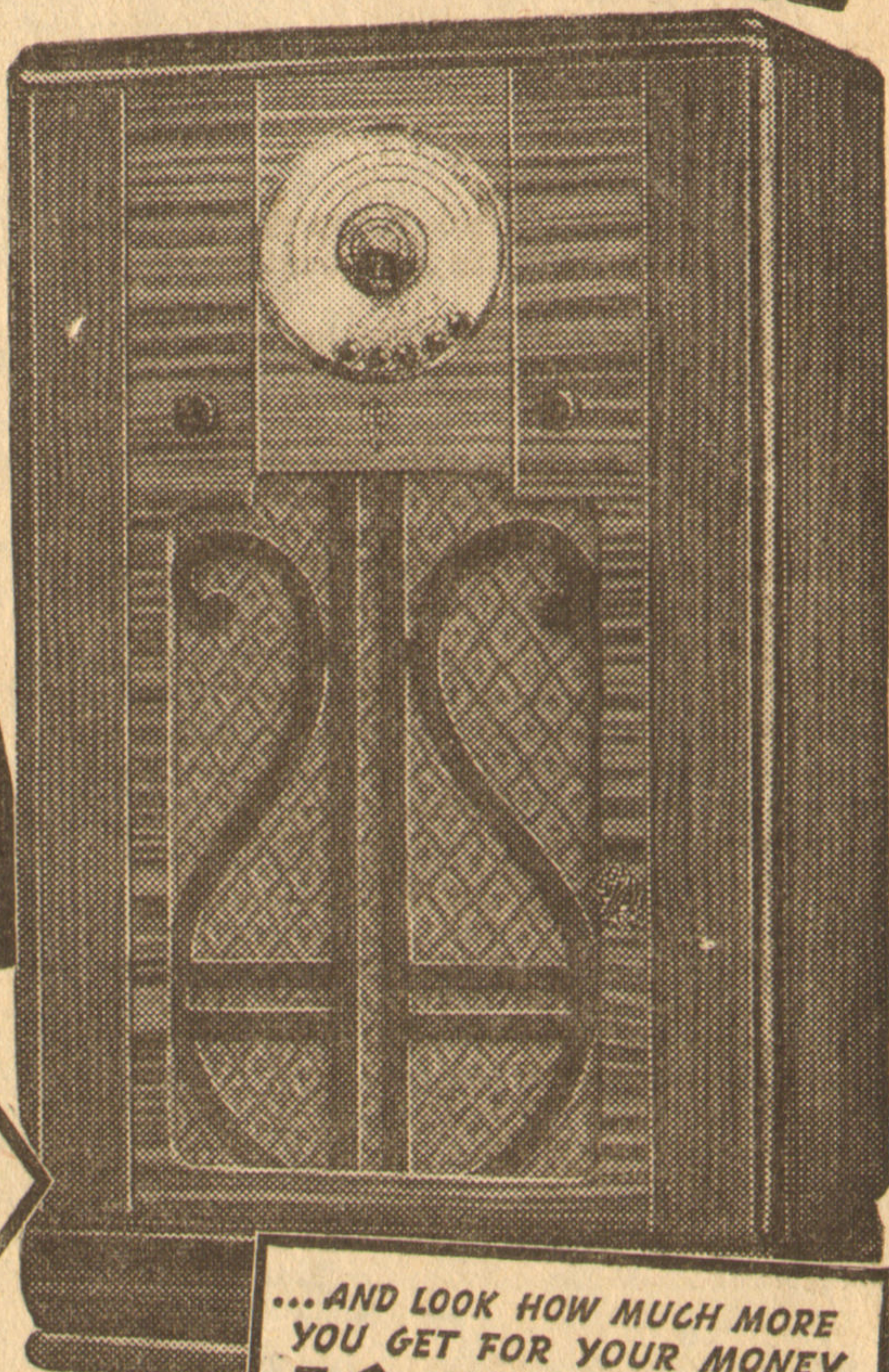
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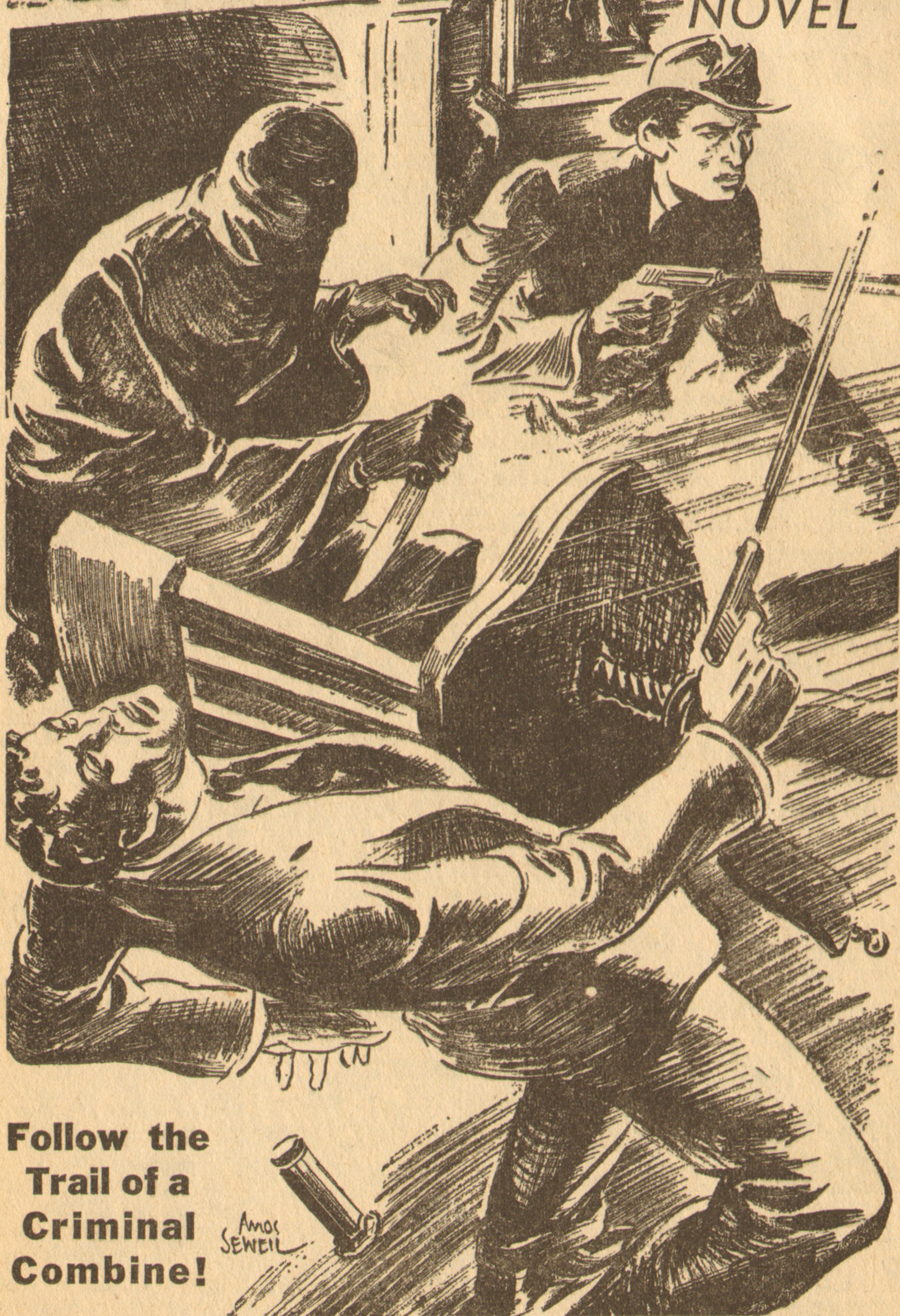
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Author of "The Death Parade," "Five-Star Death," etc.

CHAPTER I MURDER AT SEA

THE dark veils of night, dropping imperceptibly out of the sullen sky, hid the shore at last. The bleak Jersey Flats, with its squalid warehouses, its gaunt-chimneyed factories, ram-

shackle billboards and littered quays, faded mysteriously into the darkness.

Lights appeared, studding the night like the eyes of a phantom host, looking askance at the lone yacht as she nosed her way down the river. The night sounds of the Lower Bay, swelled up out of the

A Criminal Organization, Controlled by an

darkness, fading to silence again as the yacht pressed on.

A crash of falling planks came from a quay where the small figures of men labored in the amber glow of searchlights, unloading a lumber boat from Riga. A motorboat, unseen in the darkness, chugged across the yacht's wake.

Somewhere down river, a fog-horn boomed warningly at regular intervals. The yacht pressed on, sliding into the mist. The danger call ahead grew gradually closer. Abruptly the yacht's own siren answered the call.

The ear-splitting loudness of the sound startled Beth Vickers, so that she turned quickly from the rail, looking up. The siren whined again, high up near the top of the smoke-stack. She laughed softly and turned again to the rail, her blue eyes peering into the fog ahead. The answering call came again after a moment, very close now.

The eerie, warning sound sent a little thrill of excitement through Beth's trim body. Here was romance and mystery and—danger! All the young, eager spirit in her responded to that thought. For the first time in her life she was outward bound.

SHE knew that dinner was long over, down below, but she cared nothing for that. Ever since the yacht had left the North River on the evening tide, she had stood there at the rail, watching New Jersey slide by through the gathering dusk. Not for anything in the world would she have missed one moment of this.

It was magic, all of it—the throb of the yacht's engines under her feet; the low voices of the captain and the pilot, up on the bridge! the sounds, the sights, the smells

of the river, and the enchantment of the mist.

It was hard to realize that it was actually she—Beth Vickers—who stood here on the deck of this luxurious yacht, outward bound for Miami. Somehow, it seemed too good to be true. When first, two years before, she had started as a typist in the Newark office of the Pan-American Trading Company, she had never dreamed that in less than twelve months she would be promoted from the general office staff to private secretary to Mr. Alban Doane, millionaire chief of the firm.

AT first she had thought the job would be too big for her; but she had confidence in herself. Two years of absolute self-dependence, for she had been alone in the world ever since she was eighteen, had created in her a sure, steady courage. She had tackled the job with determination, and she had mastered it.

Now, after fourteen months of hard work and little relaxation, her reward had come. Alban Doane was taking her with him to Miami, where he had a branch office, and to Beth this voyage seemed the first real step up the ladder.

The yacht's siren was sounding constantly now, shrilling its warning through the fog. A red light came swimming up mistily on the port bow; a great dark, towering shape slid slowly by, like a shadow—a freighter, limping home in the night. The yacht nosed blindly forward.

Beth sighed faintly, happily. She thrilled as the sea wind played havoc with the brown ringlets of her hair. Suddenly, she stiffened, peering along the dark deck. The door of one of the upper cabins

Mystery Clouds the Secret Behind a Grim

Evil Eight, Pits Itself Against Blackmailers!

stood open, casting a yellow shaft of light into the fog. The figure of a man stood in the doorway, silhouetted starkly against the light from the cabin behind him. He seemed to be listening for something with a rigid intentness. Beth watched, curious.

The man moved back suddenly, closing the door of the cabin; blotting out the shaft of light. Beth waited, standing motionless in the



Jimmy Fitzgerald

darkness, one hand on the rail. The yacht's siren started again overhead. The engines throbbed steadily, like a mighty pulse, under her feet.

Beth relaxed, half turning. Even as she did so, the door of the cabin opened again, sending its shaft of light stabbing out into the night. The figure of the man reappeared, one hand on the knob of the door. Beth could not see his face.

For perhaps thirty seconds the man in the doorway stood unmoving; then, abruptly, he closed the door again, blotting out the shaft of light. Beth's heart, beating

slowly and heavily, ticked away the seconds. The door of the cabin opened once more. The man waited briefly, standing on the threshold; then he stepped forward on to the deck, closing the door of the state-room behind him.

Beth stood quite still, peering along the deck. Her intuition told her that there was something wrong here. The man along the deck had not displayed and blotted out that light at such carefully judged intervals, three times in succession, from mere idle fancy. It had been, Beth felt certain, a signal of some kind.

SHE glanced shoreward. No light showed there. If that signal had been directed to someone ashore, it had gone unanswered. She could see nothing, but there came faintly to her ears the shuffle of rubber-soled shoes on the planking, and a low thud.

The siren echoed again, close overhead.

The yacht quivered a little, nosing forward warily into the blind, blank curtain of fog.

Beth made no move. She knew that she ought to slip away from the deck, go below, call somebody; but a strange tense fascination seemed to grip her.

Heavy footsteps sounded ahead, just beyond the point where Beth knew the prowler to be lurking. Someone—some member, probably, of the yacht's passengers, was mounting from the lower deck. The red eye of a cigarette appeared above the edge of the companion-way, came moving toward Beth through the dark.

Above the thud of the newcomer's footsteps, Beth caught suddenly another sound—the faint padding of rubber-soled shoes on the deck. A

Succession of Baffling, Sudden Deaths!

cold thrill of horror flickered through her. The prowler, retreating stealthily before the newcomer's advance, was moving directly toward her!

She would have changed her position, have cried out; but some dire fascination seemed to hold her motionless where she stood. A dark figure brushed against her in the gloom. There was a sibilant intake of breath, checked instantly. Something hard, round and cold jabbed against her back, just over the heart. A voice snarled, very low:

"Quiet!"

She was rigid, her heart pounding under the menace of the prowler's gun. His breath was hot in her face.

The footsteps of the newcomer came on along the deck, wavered, halted a few yards away. The red eye of the cigarette described a downward arc.

"Anybody there?"

IT was Raine, first officer of the *Bendex*. The gun over Beth's heart dug deeper.

"Only me, Mr. Raine," Beth said.

She fought to keep her voice steady. Somewhere in the mist behind her there sounded the *chug-chug* of an approaching motorboat.

"Sightseeing, Miss Vickers!" the first officer laughed. "Can't see much on a night like this—thick as soup!" He moved closer. "Where does that idiot in the motorboat think he's going? He'll be under our bows in a min—"

He broke off, peering forward. He had seen the dark shape which loomed beside Beth at the rail!

The gun muzzle whipped away suddenly from her heart. The cry of warning which sprang to her lips was drowned by the boom of the siren, drumming piercingly overhead. There was a flash, then a low report, muffled by the deep baying of the siren.

The first officer of the *Bendex* toppled forward at Beth's feet.

A hand gripped Beth's arm, hurried her aft along the deck. She did not resist. Her mind was a

whirling chaos. Murder! She had seen a man shot down before her eyes!

Dimly, she realized that the engine of the motorboat was ticking softly under the yacht's flank.

The killer paused. Still gripping her arm, he leaned over the rail. Then he whistled three times, very low. The engine of the motorboat quickened briefly and stopped. There was a mutter of voices—a thud. Someone was climbing a rope-ladder to the boat's deck.

Beth's brain was racing. These men in the motorboat were those for whom the prowler's signal had been intended; they had been waiting offshore in their motorboat for that signal to come. The prowler must have just made fast this rope-ladder when the approach of the first officer had interrupted him.

A figure loomed up darkly over the rail.

"Okay?"

"Yep," the killer breathed. "Snap into it!"

Beth knew him now. The man was Kelton, the grim silent-footed steward who had shown her to her cabin when she had come aboard.

A second dark figure climbed the rail, dropping down on to the deck. Another followed—a fourth. In less than a minute there were six men on the deck—a dark knot of figures, hemming her in.

Footsteps sounded suddenly up on the bridge companionway.

"Who's there?" a voice called sharply.

Kelton's grip tightened viciously on Beth's arm. A dark figure detached itself from the group, moving forward, crouching a little. A cry of warning leaped to Beth's lips:

"Look out! Oh, look out!"

Kelton swore savagely, clapping a hand across her mouth. The man on the bridge companionway moved quickly down the steps. It was the captain. The white beam of a flashlight stabbed out suddenly from his hand.

"What's wrong? Who—"

A revolver barked. The captain

pitched forward on his face. The flashlight rolled, still lighted, across the deck.

There was a shout from aft, then a sudden rush of footsteps. Another officer had caught the alarm. The dark figures of the attackers scattered swiftly across the deck, seeking cover. Kelton's grip slackened slightly on Beth's arm; and it was then that the thought of her employer pierced like a blade through the bewilderment which, until that moment, had held her helpless.

Mr. Doane! The killers could only be after him! He was somewhere below. He must be warned!

With all her strength, she wrenched free her arm from Kelton's grip. As she raced forward along the deck she heard a shuffle of feet behind her—shouting—the bark of an automatic. Another of the crew had fallen before the guns of the raiders.

The girl gained the forward companionway, raced down it to the lower deck. She checked there for a moment, glancing back. There was no pursuit. Sudden hope surged in her. There was time yet—time to warn Mr. Doane!

Her heart laboring, her breath coming short and fast, she made her way swiftly below. She wrenched open the door of the salon. He was not there. She hurried along the brightly lighted corridor to the bar. It was deserted. She stood uncertain for a moment in the doorway, listening.

Faint sounds, far-off shouting, came to her from the upper deck. She became aware that the yacht's engines had stopped. The silence below seemed eerie, unnatural. The chill hand of fear froze tight about her heart.

She swung round, hurrying again along the corridor.

"Mr. Doane! Mr. Doane!" she called aloud desperately, as she went.

There was no reply.

She swung open the door of the dining room, paused on the threshold, her blue eyes wide and frightened, her hand quivering at her lips.

Alban Doane sat at the great oaken table, his head slumped forward on his crooked arms, one cheek upturned, deathly white against his dark, short, pointed beard. From an overturned high-ball glass at his side some liquor still dribbled, staining the white cloth.

"Mr. Doane—"

Beth's voice was a whisper. She moved forward slowly across the thick carpet, her eyes on the still form at the table. She touched the shoulder of his jacket gently, fearfully. He made no move. She withdrew her hand swiftly, stepped back. The high heel of her shoe clicked against something metallic. She looked down.

A blue automatic lay upon the carpet at her feet.

The girl stood rigid for a moment, looking down at it. Outside, in the corridor, footsteps sounded, approaching swiftly. She glanced round over her shoulder. The killers! She bent quickly, reaching for the weapon.

She was an instant too late.

Even as she straightened up, gripping the automatic, a voice spoke harshly from the doorway:

"Drop that gun!"

CHAPTER II

FRAMED!



NERVES taut, Beth whirled around, her finger quivering on the trigger of the automatic. She had a fleeting glimpse of Kelton, the steward—dark, thick-lipped, hook-nosed—covering her from the doorway; then he lunged forward, his left hand whipping out, closing about her wrist, forcing it downward. His dark, small eyes, bloodshot and narrowed, glared into hers.

"Ah! Would you?" he said softly. "Drop it, I say!"

She fought desperately, striking at his face, trying to free herself. His thumb bit agonizingly into the veins of her wrist. She gasped

faintly, her hand slacking open. The gun fell with a thud to the carpet.

Kelton stepped back, kicking the weapon aside.

"Bit of a spitfire, eh?" His thick lips twisted cruelly. "We'll cure that!"

Beth did not speak. She could not. The big salon, with its pink-shaded wall lights, its oak-paneled walls, its luxurious furniture, seemed to reel and sway about her. The squat, menacing figure of Kelton, the steward, receded from her eerily, like a thing seen through the wrong end of a pair of binoculars. The breath caught in her throat, and for a moment she thought she was going to faint.

As from a great distance, his voice came to her, flat, harsh, vaguely exultant.

"I never knew you were on deck when I did my little signaling act; but you just saved me the trouble of hunting you up—that's all!"

"I—don't know—what you mean."

SHE spoke in gasps, breathlessly, her voice low. She had the feeling that this was all a dream—some dreadful, vivid nightmare.

"You don't know, eh?" the ruthless, flat voice of the killer continued. "You don't understand? You will! Alban Doane is dead at his own table; the gun that killed him is there on the floor—bearing your fingerprints! There ain't no others on it—I seen to that! And one look round your cabin'll tell the dicks whose fingerprints are on the gun—yours! Thought you was clever when you broke away from me and come down below to warn Doane, didn't you? Girlie, I let you go! It saved me the trouble of fetchin' you down here and making you handle that gun! Get me now?"

His face was an evil mask, grinning at her. But even yet she did not understand; only sensed the menace behind his words, and stood tense there against the table with her back to the still figure of Alban Doane.

Kelton's grin broadened.

"Listen, girlie! Get this! Doane

ain't the only one we're after aboard this yacht! We want you—an' we got you cold! Listen! When the dicks come aboard, I'll be found here, tied up. The crew and the pilot'll be found locked in, in the fo'c'sle.

"And what a pretty tale I'll tell! How I see you signaling on deck—how you shot down Alban Doane—how you made off with your gang! The pretty little secretary, eh? I should laugh! The gang's decoy who's been plotting and scheming and waiting for two years to bump off Alban Doane! That's what the dicks'll believe! Everything'll point to it. Live alone, don't you—nice little apartment in Tudor City, eh? No people—"

"You—know that?" Beth breathed.

"I know plenty," Kelton said harshly. "And get this, girlie! Before dawn, every cop in New York and New Jersey will have memorized your description." He moved closer, gun in hand, his great shoulders hunched. A vicious, exultant amusement glittered in his small eyes. "Ever hear the word 'framed'?"

"Framed?"

Beth's voice was a whisper, low, tremulous. She was beginning to understand. Cold horror crept through her; she could feel the coils of some deadly net inexorably closing about her.

Sudden ferocity flared in Kelton's eyes, distorted his thick lips. The gun jerked forward in his hand.

"You killed Alban Doane!"

"No—no!"

Desperation edged her voice. Involuntarily she shrank back before the menace in his eyes; her hand quivered at her lips. She was trembling now, uncontrollably. Kelton's hand closed on her arm; his squat fingers bit like nails.

"You killed him! The dicks'll believe that! They'll get you for it! There's one hope for you—only one chance! You were in Doane's confidence. You knew his friends, all about his affairs. You—"

He broke off abruptly, swinging round. A man stood in the door—

way. He came forward swiftly, his face half hidden by the shadow of his cap.

"All clear, Max! The boys 've got 'em boxed up in the fo'c'sle! The yacht's driftin' fast."

"Get goin'," Kelton said harshly. He swung round on Beth, standing white and panting against the table. "Go with him—and go quiet!"

The man in the cloth cap moved forward, taking Beth's arm. She went mutely, without a glance either at Kelton or at the body of Alban Doane, sprawling still and silent across the table. She knew that it was useless to struggle.

At the harsh order of her captor, Beth climbed down the ladder into the waiting motorboat and took her seat in the stern. One by one, the dark figures of the raiders followed her, dropping down into the boat. The engine purred into life. The boat slid away from the yacht's side. The looming, dark outline of the yacht dropped back into the darkness and disappeared.

Soon, in the eyes of the world, she would be a murderess and a fugitive. Her hands clenched tight on the edge of the seat. A murderess and a fugitive!

The steady *chug-chug* of the motorboat's engine ceased suddenly. The voice of the man at the wheel rasped harshly:

"Listen!"

The gangsters were motionless—dark, still figures looming before her in the boat. Under its own volition, the boat slid forward through the fog; the water rippled alongside. Beth peered forward into the fog, her heart laboring.

From somewhere ahead, there came to her the *chug-chug-chug* of a second motorboat. A bright, broad beam of light leaped out suddenly through the fog, away to the left. A searchlight!

The silver beam came questing round over the dark water—found the motorboat, wavered, checked.

For a moment Beth saw the haggard, grim faces of her captors outlined starkly in the dazzling light. Then the engine shrilled into ac-

tion, and the boat surged forward out of the radius of the searchlight.

"Motorboat, ahoy! Stand by!" a hail came faintly through the fog.

The roar of the engine, opening out, drowned the voice. A sheath of spray whipped back over the bows, struck chill against Beth's face.

The boat swerved dizzily to the left, avoiding by inches the looming bulk of a moored freighter.

"Dicks! Step on it, McGurn!"

The boat roared forward, spray-sheathed, into the fog. Police! A wild thrill of hope leaped up in Beth—and at once was gone, as the full significance of her position came home to her.

Across her mind, vivid and terrifying, there flared a picture of what awaited her if she fell into the hands of the police. Soon, now, the drifting yacht must fetch up against some moored vessel; the alarm would go out instantly. If she were in police hands when that happened, a charge of murder faced her.

She turned in her seat, peering back into the fog. She could see nothing, but faintly there came to her, above the churning of the screw in the dark water, the boom of the police launch.

The wind swept back the hair from the white brow; chill drops of spray stung her face. The dark shapes of moored vessels loomed past the speeding boat, perilously close.

The boat veered around suddenly to the right, swinging in toward the shore. The engine stopped. The boat rippled on through a strange, unnatural silence. Far back along the river there sounded the faint boom of the police boat, drawing nearer.

THE dim outline of a low wooden jetty loomed up out of the fog ahead.

"Duck!" a voice said sharply.

She leaned forward in her seat, keeping her head down. The boat rippled quietly between the piles of the jetty; the floor-boarding, water-logged and rotten, was no more than

an inch or two above her head. The boat drifted to a standstill.

The man beside Beth on the stern seat twisted around, dropping to his knees on the floor of the boat. He lifted something heavy and metallic on to the seat, balancing it on the stern-board. Dimly, she made out the squat, ugly shape of a machine gun, its muzzle pointing out under the edge of the jetty.

The gunmen waited. In the electric silence, Beth could hear the water dripping slowly from the wet floorboards of the jetty; the river mouthed and sucked about the piles. The police boat had fallen silent.

Beth twisted around in her seat, her head down, trying to peer out under the edge of the jetty. Her foot touched a fuel can on the floor of the boat; the can fell sideward with a clatter against the thwart.

"Quiet, damn you! They're listen-in' for us!" a voice snarled behind her.

OUT in the fog, the engine of the police boat roared up again. The boat boomed in shoreward. The bright beam of the searchlight leaped out through the fog, questing along the shore. It picked out the jetty, wavered above it for a moment, then flickered downward. The brilliant light glared full in Beth's eyes. Simultaneously the machine gun beside her ripped into action.

There was a crash of breaking glass, a shout. The bright beam of the searchlight disappeared. A voice panted, close to Beth in the thick dark under the jetty:

"Shove, you water-rats!"

Thrusting against the piles, the killers worked the boat deeper under the jetty. The prow bumped against a stone wall. In the darkness, the leader was rapping out orders.

"Sloan—Maddock—stick by the gun! Take the girl, Fitz!"

Groping hands touched Beth, lifted her out from the boat on to what appeared to be a stone ledge under the jetty at its shore end. She felt herself being carried up steps. Before and above her, she

could see a faint, yellowish light. In the boat behind, the machine gun rattled again into action, ripping the quiet with its ugly din.

The man who carried her gained the top of the steps. Beth saw then that the light came from a street lamp, glowing dim yellow in the fog. A closed car was drawn up under the lamp; a dark figure hunched over the wheel. The man who carried Beth moved forward swiftly. He set her down beside the car, wrenched open the door at the back.

"Get in!"

She did as she was told. Four of the criminals piled in after her. The man at the wheel pressed down on the starter. He waited, his engine ticking over quietly.

Beth peered from the window. In the dim light of the street lamp, she could see a dark opening in the narrow pavement. Even as she watched, a figure emerged swiftly from the opening, raced forward to the car, leaped in beside the driver.

"They got Maddock—step on it!"

The car jerked forward. Beth peered back through the window. She was just in time to see a second figure loom up out of the opening in the pavement. The light from the street lamp gleamed on wet oilskins. The pursuer's hand whipped up. Beth ducked. A bullet shattered the glass of the rear window, just over her head. The car ground into top gear, booming forward down the narrow street.

Beth sat back wearily in her seat, drawing a deep, shuddering breath. At least, for the moment, she was safe from the police. But what lay ahead of her? Why had these men gone to such trouble to get her into their power? What did they want with her? What had Kelton meant when he had said that there was one chance for her—one chance?

A voice breathed softly in her ear.

"Steady! Keep your head!" it said.

She started, half turning in her seat. Then her heart leaped, pounding, to her throat. In the darkness

of the speeding car, the man beside her was pressing something into her hand! She stiffened, her fingers closing tightly on the butt of an automatic!

CHAPTER III

THE HOUSE OF TRAPS



BETH VICKERS was no coward, neither was she a girl devoid of brains. During her association with Alban Doane, she had been called upon more than once to play her part in situations demanding a level head and a sure, steady courage. The swift and violent succession of events which had brought her world crashing in ruins about her had, for a time, caused her to feel alone and helpless, as though her life had passed out of her own control into the hands of these killers.

The solid feel of the automatic in her hand changed all that, and, even in her first moment of incredulity and excitement, she felt new hope and courage come to life in her. Her heart thumping, she slipped the gun into the pocket of her grey costume coat, peering sideward at the man on her right.

The car swung into a wider, better-lighted street where even yet one or two shabby restaurants were open, casting yellow blurs upon the fog. For a moment, against the dim glow from one of those restaurants, Beth made out the silhouette of the man on her right. He was leaning slightly forward in his seat, looking out of the window. She could not see his face.

She leaned back in her seat, questions rioting in her mind. Who was the man on her right, so close to her in the car that his shoulder was warm against hers? Why had he given her this gun?

She glanced at the other three men, one on her left, two of them on folding seats before her. They sat grim and silent, bulking darkly in the gloom. Had they noticed what had passed between herself

and the man on her right? If they had, they made no move.

She touched again the small, hard bulge of the pistol in her pocket. She was no longer defenseless, anyway; she was ready, now—ready for anything. It was queer, Beth thought, how she, who had never fired a revolver in her life, could find so reassuring, so heartening, the feel of the weapon in her pocket. It created in her a reckless, desperate confidence.

She laughed suddenly, quietly.

"Does the etiquette of the underworld permit a prisoner to smoke?"

There was no answer. The car rolled on.

"Because, if so," Beth said lightly, "I'd be grateful for a cigarette. I find all this popping off of guns and things just too terribly exciting!"

Again she laughed. Her laughter had in it the strained, unnatural note of hysteria; and it was hysteria, too, which gave to her a queer, incongruous feeling of mental exaltation. The man on her left swore softly.

"Pipe down, girlie!" He peered back through the shattered rear window. "Okay. Give her a smoke, Fitz—an' gimme one, too!"

The man on Beth's right stirred in his seat. He thrust a cigarette case into her hands. A little uncertainly, for her hands were unsteady, she snapped open the case and took out a cigarette. She passed the case along to the man on her left. She was thinking swiftly. Fitz! It was Fitz who sat on her right—Fitz who had given her the pistol. So that was his name! She peered sideward at him.

"Have you a match?"

He struck one, held it for her. In the small, flickering light, she looked straight into his eyes. They were grey and keen and steady under the brim of his hat. Very slightly, his left eyelid flickered. Then the match went out.

She sat back again, drawing deeply on her cigarette. Was he a friend? Dared she believe that? There had been something strangely

*Anselm Morrison*

reassuring about those grey, steady eyes.

Under the soothing effect of the cigarette, her mind was steadying down. A friend? Wait and see, she told herself; she was bound to find out before long.

The man on Beth's left spoke suddenly.

"Was Maddock shot, Sloan?"

"Reckon so, McGurn," Sloan said, turning in his seat beside the driver. "He went down backward, half over the thwarts."

"I hope he's grabbed himself a ticket to Paradise," McGurn snarled. "He knows plenty, an' he'll spill it if they put the screws on him. We can afford no talkin'! Kritana—"

"Kritana's got plenty trouble right now," Sloan muttered. "The League's—"

"SHUT it!" McGurn rasped. He peered from the window. "Okay! It's safe to pull in an' get them license plates changed now."

The big car slowed into the curb. The driver switched off his lights and climbed out. The car was hidden completely in the fog and the darkness of a narrow, deserted street. There was a brief wait. The driver returned to his seat, restarted his engine. The car rolled forward again, traveling westward.

It was not until they were sliding through the Holland Tunnel into New York that Beth, peering from the window, got her bearings.

It was with a sense of shock that she realized, from glancing at an illuminated sidewalk clock, that the night was young yet; no more than eleven o'clock. Eleven o'clock! The past few hours had seemed an infinity. The docking; Sandy Hook by night; the fog; the signaler; the killers from the dark; the murder of Alban Doane that had made of her an outlaw; the river police, the searchlight, and the pursuit; the man called Fitz—into those few hours, it seemed, there had been crammed the mystery, terror, and adventure of a lifetime.

More slowly now, the car nosed up through traffic-jammed Times Square, made its way along Broadway, and so, presently, reached that territory of narrow streets, and discreet houses which is Hell's Kitchen. It stopped, at last, before a tall, dark house standing back behind a railed area.

The man called Fitz touched her arm.

"Come on!"

He swung open the door, stepping out. Beth followed him, glancing up and down the street. It was very narrow, hemmed in by tall houses with heavily curtained windows. The dark figures of the killers closed in about her.

A hand gripped her hand, leading her forward up a short flight of stone steps. Over the doorway of the house there was suspended a small yellow globe burning dully in the fog; in block letters on the outside of the globe three words were painted:

THE GOLDEN POMEGRANATE.

McGurn touched a bell to the left of the door. Almost at once a shutter slid back in the upper panel, disclosing a small, barred grille. A face peered out, showing dimly in the light from the yellow globe. It was the face of a Hindu.

"Okay, Chandra," McGurn spoke sharply. "McGurn here."

The shutter snapped back into place. Bolts rasped. The door swung open. With the hoods about her, Beth moved forward into a long, narrow hall, richly carpeted and illumined softly by yellow-shaded wall-lights. Through big double doors on the left there came a medley of music and voices, of rattling crockery and dancing feet.

The killers were removing their hats and trench coats. Beth had none to remove. She stood watching, seeming very small and fragile in her simple grey costume, with her dark, soft, shingled hair curving gently away to either side of her white brow, and her eyes wide and darkly blue against the pallor of her face. The Hindu, white-uniformed and white-turbaned, closed and bolted the door carefully. He turned, bowing, to McGurn.

"The master waits."

"I'll go up," McGurn said. His eyes, pale blue in a face seamed and battered, flickered to Fitz. "Get the girl under cover!"

Fitz nodded, looking at Beth. For the first time she saw him clearly. He was tall and broad-shouldered, and, now that he had removed his coat, she saw that he was in evening dress. His hair was dark and close-cut, and there was in it a touch of grey over the temples; but his face, lean, clear-cut, and tanned, was that of a young man. His grey, level eyes were expressionless as he looked at her; there was something of grimness in the firm set of his lips.

"Will you come with me?"

BETH nodded mutely. He took her arm, moving with her down the hall toward a flight of broad, thickly carpeted stairs. Her mind was racing. What was this place? And who—and what—was Fitz? Why had he given her that gun?

Halfway up the yellow-lighted stairs, Fitz glanced back. His hand tightened a little on her arm. Moving on with her up the stairs he began to speak, swiftly, urgently, quietly, looking straight ahead:

"Listen! You're in about as



Inspector Mort

deadly a position as a girl can be in! But you've got courage and you've got brains; you showed that back in the car. You'll need 'em both before long! This place passes as a night club. It's not. You'll discover that presently, when you meet a man called Kritana. Are you listening to me?"

"Yes—yes," she breathed.

"Don't show it. Keep—"

He stopped abruptly. They had reached a long, thickly carpeted corridor at the top of the stairs. A second white-turbaned Hindu slid past on silent feet, showing his white teeth in a smile. He went on down the stairs.

"That," Fitz said, out of the corner of his mouth, "is one of the reasons for caution. This is a house of traps and watching eyes!" They were moving along the corridor. He did not look at her. His voice was so low she could scarcely hear it: "You've got a gun on you. I gave you that because—you may need it. Obey any orders you may be given—answer any questions. Don't use that gun unless your life's in danger! Keep it out of sight. Understand?"

"I understand perfectly," she whispered.

Again his arm pressed hers. There was something strangely re-

assuring and comforting in that small pressure.

"Who are you?" she said, very low.

"A friend. That's all I can tell you now." For the first time he turned his head, looking at her. They had come to a halt, halfway along the luxurious corridor, outside a door. "Can you—trust me?" he breathed.

His eyes, very grey and level in his lean, tanned face, met hers steadily.

She nodded.

"Good. Do that," he said softly. "Trust me! Whatever I do, whatever happens—trust me!" His hand touched hers, gripped it tightly for a second. "Remember—I'm your friend!"

ABRUPTLY he released her hand, pushing open the door.

"You will wait in there!"

She looked at him. Very slightly his left eyelid flickered. She understood. Someone was approaching along the corridor. Without a word she turned from him, moving beyond. The door clicked shut behind her. A key rasped in the lock.

She stood very still in the darkness, listening, her heart thudding. She heard Fitz move away along the corridor, whistling softly. She heard his voice, another voice answering him, then the silence closed down and she was alone.

Her mind was a tumult of doubts, fears, and questions. But the thought of Fitz reassured her.

She began cautiously to explore her prison, groping her way round the walls, keeping one hand on the butt of the automatic in her pocket. The darkness was intense. She could find no electric light switch, and she was without matches. So far as she could discover the room was small, about ten feet square, and empty of furniture. There was a carpet under her feet.

She stiffened suddenly, listening. Somewhere close in the darkness, a door had clicked open. Footsteps sounded—low voices. Suddenly startingly, a shaft of light stabbed

through the darkness full into her eyes.

For one moment of panic she thought someone had entered the room; but then, her eyes growing accustomed to the light, she saw that it came through a small aperture, perhaps a foot square, in the wall opposite her.

She moved to one side, out of the line of light. Tensely she stood listening, watching the aperture, every nerve in her taut and ready. Through the opening voices came to her from the room beyond. She could hear every word.

"You were right, Chief. The *Bendex* passed Ringer's Wharf pretty well up to the minute. We got Kelton's signal, and boarded the yacht."

Beth recognized that voice. It was McGurn's. The answering voice was strange to her.

"How have the mighty fallen!" it began. "McGurn, we have struck our first blow!" The voice laughed softly. There was in that laughter a smooth, cold, deadly note, utterly devoid of mirth, that gave to it a chilling effect of sheathed malevolence. "Alban Doane is dead, and we have the girl."

"Just exactly," McGurn rasped, "where we want her, Chief."

"That is good—that is very good, McGurn," the second voice said smoothly. "We have need of her. She will do as she is told, or—"

"Or burn," McGurn snarled.

"So! Or burn for the cold-blooded murder of her employer—eh, McGurn?"

The voice dropped, speaking more softly. Beth could not distinguish the words. Her breath held, her hand tight on the automatic in her pocket, she moved forward soundlessly across the carpet. Close under the aperture she hesitated for a moment, crouching. The room beyond was deadly silent.

Very cautiously she raised her head, peering through the narrow slit.

The cold, flat, deadly voice spoke suddenly, loudly.

"Nor shall it profit her, McGurn,

to listen at spy-holes—as she was intended to do!”

Through the aperture she had a glimpse of a green turban—of a dark, aquiline, satanic face, thinly smiling. Sunken eyes, very black and strangely luminous, looked into hers.

“Kritana!”

With a gasp she started back. She was just too late. Through the aperture there slid a lean, black hand, hook-fingered. The hand closed on her throat.

CHAPTER IV

THE LAIR OF THE SPECTER



IT is highly probable that, after locking up Beth, the movements of the man called “Fitz” would have been of considerable, even of passionate, interest to the presiding genius of that ambiguous establishment, the Golden Pomegranate, if he could have witnessed them. With every appearance of casualness, almost of boredom, Fitz descended again to the yellow-lighted hall, paused for a moment fastidiously to adjust his white tie, grinned at his lean, brown reflection in the mirror, ran a hand over his dark, crisp hair, with its hint of grey above the temples, and then, lighting a cigarette, moved across to the white-turbaned Hindu door-keeper.

“My coat and hat, Chandra.”

The Hindu fetched them swiftly from a small ante-room to the right of the hall. He helped Fitz on with his coat, handed him his hat, gloves, and white silk muffler.

“Thank you,” Fitz said. He handed the Hindu a key. “You will give that to Mr. McGurn, and tell him I shall be at the usual place, if he needs me.”

“Very good, Mr. Fitzgerald,” the Hindu bowed.

Fitz went out. His smile was gone as he strode through the night down the narrow street. He looked like—and was—a man with more than enough on his mind to keep

his brains from rusting. Even thus early in their acquaintance he sensed that the girl with blue eyes and brown hair was destined considerably to complicate his affairs.

Turning out into Broadway, he paused for a moment, looking back at the street he had just traversed. The street remained empty. He decided he was not being followed. That was perfect, for he had not the slightest intention of going to “the usual place.”

To concentrate in one building a large number of men engaged upon business which might be deemed unusual, even questionable, is inevitably to attract the curiosity of those incorrigible individuals, the police. The leader of the gang which had its headquarters at the Golden Pomegranate was aware of this.

Consequently, each one of his minions had his own quarters, where, in the event of need, he might be reached quickly and with convenience. “The usual place” at which Mr. James Fitzgerald was to be found was the Caledonian Hotel, on the West Side. Tonight, however, Fitz had business elsewhere.

That business took him, in a taxi, to an address in Morningside Heights. The house, standing on the corner of a side street, was quiet and extremely respectable. He let himself in with a housekey, took from the hall-stand in the dim-lit corridor a pile of letters addressed to one Michael Brand, and moved quietly upstairs to a room on the first floor.

The room was small, but cozily furnished with the accommodations of a combined living room and study. It was already occupied by a small, spidery individual clad in black pants, a grey shirt, and a pair of suspenders of striking pattern.

As Fitz closed the door behind him, the spidery individual sat up with a start in his easy-chair before the radiator. His eyes, extraordinarily blue in a brown, leathery face, were startled; his inconsiderable remnant of hair stood up in unruly form on top of his head.

Fitz grinned, tossing the pile of letters on to a flat-topped desk.

"Well, Barney?" he said, addressing the excitable cockney he had picked up in a Bowery Mission.

"Cripes, Boss," the little man said, "you gimme a scare, comin' in like that! What's new?"

"The worst possible," Fitz said. Without removing hat or coat, he sat down on the arm of a leather armchair. He took a cigarette from a box on the mantelpiece. "Listen! Kritana's got hold of a girl, Barney—Alban Doane's secretary. She's a sweet kid, and she's got sand. But Kritana's mob has made her absolutely helpless."

"Framed, eh?" Barney said softly.

"Just that," Fitz said. He lighted the cigarette. His eyes, looking at Barney through the drifting smoke, were steel-hard. "They got Doane tonight, Barney, and they're holding his murder over this girl's head. Kritana's got some use for her. I don't know what it is yet, but I can make a guess."

"The League," Barney suggested.

"You've hit it," Fitz said grimly—"the League of Specters." He pulled deeply on his cigarette, considering. "Listen, Barney! Here's the lay of the land, as I see it. On the one side, there's Kritana, there in that death-trap of his, the Golden Pomegranate. On the other side, there's the League of Specters. We know nothing about them, except that they're powerful, secret, and are out to smash Kritana."

"We don't know what their motive is, but we know they got Lu Wendel, Kritana's lieutenant, bumped him off, and left their brand burned into his throat—'The League of Specters.' Kritana knows they're out to smash him, and he knows they're mighty powerful."

"He's bribed half a dozen smaller gangs—Gun McGurn's, Givo Saphir's, Dope Remsen's, and others—to give him first call on their services. He's organized to fight back. The thing is, he doesn't know who's behind the League of Specters—the Specter himself! Get me?"

"Wot-'o!" the cockney said.

"Right! Now, my idea is that he got a tip, somehow or other, that Alban Doane, the millionaire, was in with this League. He murders Doane and takes the girl, knowing she's Doane's trusted secretary, in the hope she'll tell something about Doane's associates and movements that'll lead him to the other members of the League. It would have paid him, I guess, to have taken Doane alive—but it's a mighty dangerous thing to have a live and missing millionaire on your hands, so he takes the girl instead. How's that?"

"GO UP one, Boss," the little man nodded.

"Okay! Now here," Fitz said, "is where we stand. I'm one of Kritana's mob. You know why, Barney. It's vital to me that Kritana's smashed; the coming of this girl's made it just that much more urgent. She's a sweet kid, and I intend to get her clear. Now, there's only you and me, Barney, and we're up against the deadliest mob in America. We can't go to the cops or J. Edgar Hoover—if they knew who I was and where I was, I'd be warming a bench in Atlanta this minute—so we've got to get help elsewhere."

"We've got to find out who's at the head of the League of Specters, and we've got to go in with him against Kritana. Kritana doesn't suspect I'm anything but one of his gang. It's my inside information on Kritana's hideouts and organization that the League of Specters needs. The problem is, how're we to find out who is the Specter, and how're we to get our information to him without his smelling a trap of Kritana in it, or, maybe bumping us off on sight as spies of Kritana?"

He rose, snuffing out his cigarette in a hammered ashtray. "Well, there's the story. Anything to add?"

"Plenty," the little man said softly. "You figured the League's got a meetin' place somewhere outside New York, Boss?"

Fitz looked at him sharply.

"Well?"

The little man grinned. "Ever hear of the Boston Post Road?"

"I'll bite," Fitz said.

"According to your orders, Boss, I've been snoopin' 'round in the car, these last few days, lookin' for a likely place, the way you said. I found it this morning—a big 'ouse near the Boston Post Road, a mile from the nearest town. It's got a 'igh, spiked wall around it—an' a dozen 'arf-starved mastiffs rangin' the grounds!"

"Boy," Fitz said, "it sounds as if we've got something!" He thought for a moment, his eyes gleaming. He glanced at his watch. "At one o'clock, Barney, bring the car around!"

"Wot! Tonight?"

"Every minute that girl's in Kri-tana's hands," Fitz said harshly, "she's in deadly danger! What we've got to lose none of, Barney, is time! Travel!"

Barney traveled. He traveled so competently that, by a few minutes after two, Fitz' big coupé was sliding through the Hutchinson River Parkway in the direction of the Boston Post Road. A mile beyond, where a narrow lane turned off from the main road, Barney drew into the side of the road, backed and turned, bumped the car up on to the grass at the roadside, and switched off the lights.

"'Ow about this, Boss? The 'ouse is a 'undred yards up that lane!"

"Barney," Fitz muttered, "you've got so many brains you'll get round-shouldered! Come on!"

HE swung open the door, stepping out to the wet grass of the roadside. Barney followed him. For a moment they stood listening. Through the darkness there came to them, like a menace, the deep, muffled baying of dogs. Barney spat eloquently. "'Ere's wherè the blink-in' band plays!"

They moved forward through the

fog, keeping to the wet grass at the side of the lane. The savage baying of the starved dogs grew louder as they advanced. A high wall of grey stone loomed up on their left, darker than the darkness. Fitz stopped suddenly, gripping Barney's arm. "Listen!"

From somewhere just ahead of them there came the sound of a motor ticking over quietly in the dark. "Boy," Fitz breathed, "we're in luck! Wait here!"

He released Barney's arm, moved forward quickly, crouching a little, over the wet grass under the wall. Before him there loomed up suddenly the black outline of a limousine, with all lights out.

Even as he saw it the car hooted softly—one short, one long, one short. A pair of iron gates swung open, silent, on well-oiled hinges. To the right of the gates there reared up the dark outline of a house, with one lighted window, heavily curtained. It was by a lever in the room beyond that window, Fitz guessed, that the gates were controlled.

The car's engine quickened. The car slid forward, curving in at the gates. Fitz saw his chance. Lightly, swiftly, he ran forward, gripped the trunk grid at the back of the car, swung himself aboard, his feet on the rear bumper.

The car hooted. The great gates slid shut.

The car purred forward up a private road lined with dark shapes of willows to either side. Gravel scrunched under the wheels. Fitz hung on. He could hear the dogs baying very close now. A black, lithe shape came padding up out of the night, followed the car for a little while, dropped behind.

The mastiffs would not attack the car. He had counted on that.

The driveway curved round to the left. In a moment the car slid to a standstill before the huge, looming bulk of a house. Lights showed in one or two of the big Gothic windows. A man stepped out from the

car. Fitz heard his footsteps on the gravel, heard him mounting stone steps. Very cautiously, Fitz lowered himself from the bumper, peered, crouching, around the back of the car.

The door of the house opened, casting a shaft of light down broad, stone steps. Fitz had a glimpse of a black figure silhouetted against the light. His heart leaped.

The midnight visitor was clad in a long black garment which covered his head and face and dropped straight to his heels!

A feeling of exultation quivered in Fitz. He was on the right trail. This was the headquarters of the League of Specters!

CHAPTER V

THE EVIL EIGHT



FITZ watched closely and saw the hooded man step forward into the house. The door closed.

For a moment Fitz stayed where he was, getting his bearings. He could hear the unseen dogs baying their challenge through the dark, prowling around the walls of that great, silent house. He looked at the house. A blade of light showed in a window to the right of the entrance steps.

He moved forward softly over the graveled drive, stepped on to the flower-bed under that lighted window. Crouching close against the sill, which came almost shoulder-high above the ground, he saw with a thrill of triumph that the window, opening inward, was an inch or two ajar. He applied his eyes to that narrow gap between the drawn curtains.

That which he saw set the blood drumming in his temples.

He was looking straight down the center of a long, polished table, illuminated by three great, cut-glass chandeliers, pendent from the paneled ceiling. On one side of the table, three men sat. On the other, four. Each one of those men was masked and hooded! Even as Fitz

watched, another of that strange and sinister gathering came within his line of vision. A silence fell as the newcomer took his seat at the head of the table, with his back to Fitz. The newcomer was the first to speak. His voice, harsh, crisp, decisive, rang out clearly.

"Gentlemen, you will each give your pass letter. Chicago?"

"S."

"Los Angeles?"

"P."

"Boston?"

"E."

"New York?"

"C."

"Paris?"

"T."

"London?"

"E."

"Berlin?"

"R."

A pulse was racing in Fitz' throat. S-P-E-C-T-E-R!

The chairman was speaking again:

"You will have noticed, Specters, that there is one of our number missing tonight. I alone am aware of his identity; to you, he is 'Atlantic.' You know the reason, gentlemen, for his absence. I had cause to suppose that he was under observation by the spies of the man against whom we are leagued. Accordingly, 'Atlantic' received our warning to leave the country at once. I have no doubt that at this moment he is far out at sea."

One of the hooded men spoke nervously.

"He knows nothing?"

The chairman laughed harshly. of our company, gentlemen, knows

"What can he know? No member the identity of the others. I alone know the real name behind your pseudonyms; you alone know the real name behind my pseudonym. 'Atlantic' can do us no harm, even if he were to fall into the hands of the enemy—and, knowing what would await us if that happened, each one of us has sworn to accept suicide before capture.

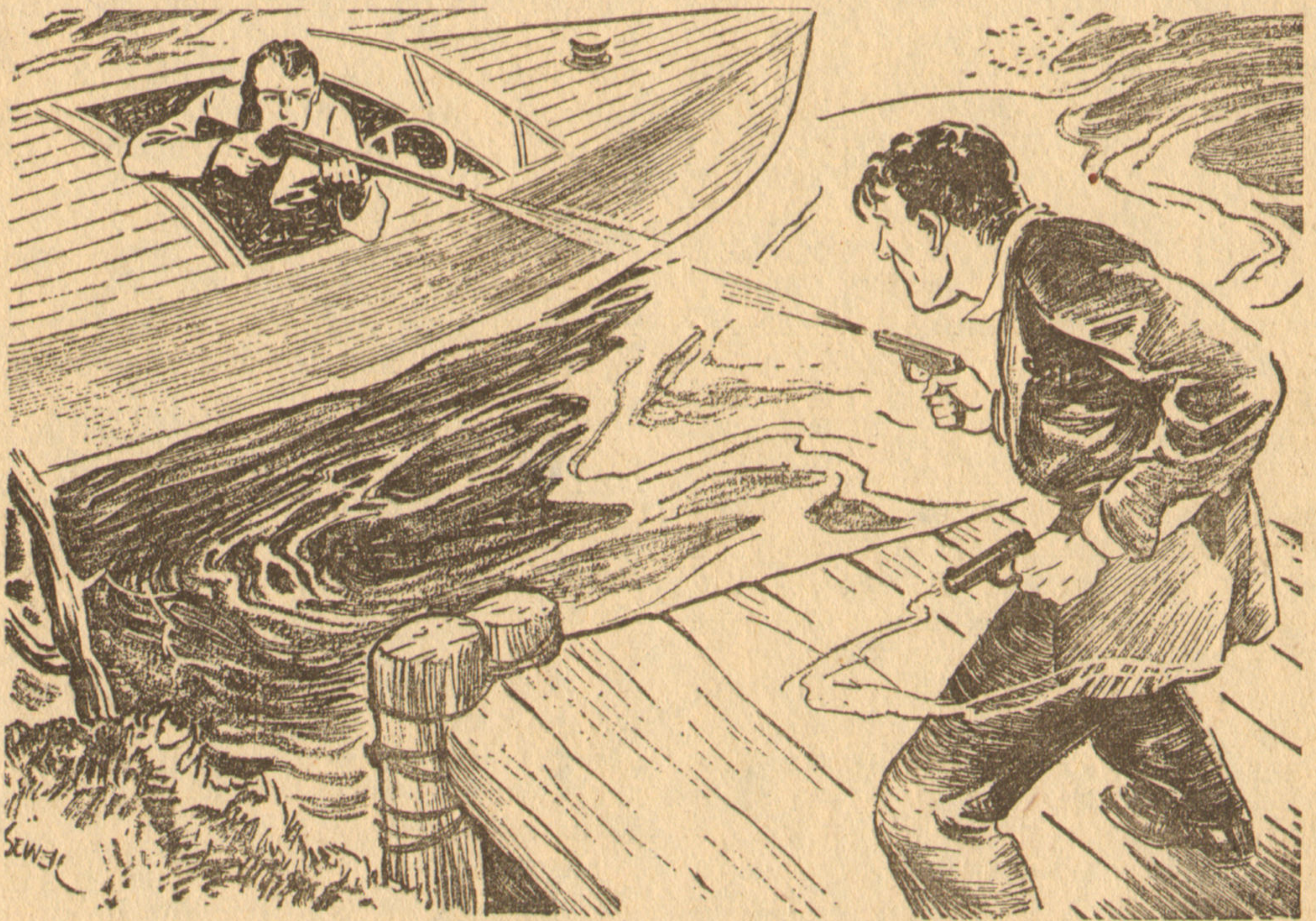
"Furthermore, each one of us has deposited one million dollars as a

guarantee of silence and integrity. 'Atlantic's' deposit, of course, is forfeit to our fighting fund, according to our agreement. We shall need every penny of it. We are fighting, gentlemen, the biggest and deadliest blackmailer in the world—Vedas Kritana!

"His henchmen and spies are in every big city; during the past few years, he has bled the class to which we belong—the wealthy, self-made man—of millions of dollars!"

who would not listen to me—perhaps because they were untouched by this great evil of blackmail, or perhaps because they had not the moral courage to admit that there was anything in their lives which would not bear police examination. But there were others, gentlemen—goaded to desperation—who wished to know more of my scheme.

"Ultimately, when I had revealed my identity, had backed my scheme to the extent of one million dollars,



Hell broke loose on Ringer's Wharf.

He paused for a moment. Fitz was rigid, peering in at the window, listening.

The chairman continued.

"The time has come, gentlemen, to stamp out this unseen cancer! The police are useless to us. There are things in our lives that the police must never know. Therefore, we are banded together to fight a criminal with the weapons of a criminal! We shall win! I told you that when, tentatively and anonymously, I first approached you with my scheme.

"There were some I approached

and had made it clear that they need reveal nothing of that black spot in their lives and that their anonymity was assured, those men threw in their lot with the League of Specters!"

Again he laughed harshly.

"My scheme was simplicity itself. Get hold of all the ex-convicts, just out of jail, at a loose end, desperate for money, enlist them into our service, and fight Kritana with the weapons of the underworld! We pay them well; preserving our anonymity by means of these hoods we wear, we broadcast our orders

through those we have selected as our lieutenants—and we are winning! Kritana cannot discover who we are, because, in our daily lives and under our real names, we continue to pay meekly the tribute he extorts!

"But Kritana grows nervous; our stool-pigeons report that he has formed alliances with other gangs! Our killing of his lieutenant, Lu Wendel, brought that about. He is organized—and we, too, are organized! Gentlemen, the climax grows very near! The showdown between us is imminent! As soon as we can discover Kritana's lair"—his fist crashed on the table—"we attack!"

Close upon those words there came to the tense watcher at the window another sound—a soft swift padding on the gravel behind him. He wheeled about, his feet making no sound on the damp flower-bed.

THERE was a low snarl just before him in the darkness. Something black and lithe hurtled at him—a mastiff. The blade of light from the window glared for a moment in the lambent eyes of the fanged and savage guardian. Then the dog was upon him, toppling him over backward on the wet ground. Gleaming fangs searched for his throat.

He flung up both his hands, getting one under the dog's muzzle, forcing it back. With his other, he got a grip on the mastiff's throat, tightening it with all his strength. The beast wrenched free its muzzle. The fangs snapped together within an inch of Fitz' chin. They fought in silence, save for the panting of the dog and a scuffling. Fitz got his other hand to the killer's throat.

With a jerk he wrenched the beast over, rolling on top of it, forcing all his weight upon it.

Simultaneously, there was a rasp of curtain rings. The window jerked open above him. He lay quite still, face downward, his weight holding the four-footed killer motionless beneath him, his hands on its throat.

Black, hooded shapes pressed about the window, five feet above

him. He could see their moving shadows flung out over the graveled drive; one of them had a revolver in his hand. A voice snarled.

"I heard—"

Another voice broke in, abrupt, harsh, urgent.

"There! Quick—"

Fitz lunged to his feet, releasing the dog. His fist flailed down on the wrist of the man with the gun. He leaped clear, crouching to hide his face, racing out into the drive, making for the car there. Behind him, an automatic snapped twice, in quick succession. But he ran zigzag and the shots went wide. He gained the car, wrenched open the door, leaped in, and fumbled for the starter.

The engine screamed alive.

He wrenched the gear lever, sent the car roaring back in reverse. He changed gear, snapped on the lights, swerved forward toward the mouth of the driveway.

"Stop him! Quick! The gates—" they were shouting behind him.

He rammed into second—high. The car rolled forward down the road, between the twin lines of willows. A bullet thudded into the rear panel of the body. In the glare of the headlights, the great, wrought-iron gates sprang up ahead. He pressed the horn—one short, one long, one short. The gates swung wide.

He roared through them, brought the car skidding around, with a scream of brakes, into the lane. He pulled up, leaped out. In back of him he could hear the wild, savage baying of the dogs coming nearer.

A figure loomed up, running, out of the dark.

"Boss—"

"Run for your life!" Fitz panted.

They raced along the lane, reached the waiting car at the corner, leaped in. Barney started his engine and switched on his lights. The car lurched clear of the grass curving out on to the road. Barney slipped into second, eased into high.

The car darted forward on the road to New York.

CHAPTER VI

THE CATSPAW



A LONG, closed car came sliding through the drizzle down Madison Avenue. There were three people in the back of that car—a woman and two men. The woman sat in the middle, gazing listlessly out of the window at the traffic rumbling by through the grey December drizzle. The man on her right was well but flashily dressed; his eyes were pale blue and narrow in a face seamed and battered, like a prizefighter's.

The man on her left was a remarkable contrast. His face was very dark, aquiline, cruel as a vulture's; he wore faultless morning clothes and a green turban, set with one magnificent ruby. He laughed softly.

He turned to the girl. "Look at me!" His voice was smooth, cold, with a singular quality in it of latent malevolence.

She obeyed mutely. In contrast to the pallor of her face, her painted lips seemed startlingly artificial. Her eyes, so darkly blue as almost to be violet, were deeply shadowed with mascara. A small black hat, with a black veil tucked back across the front, hid her hair. She wore a fashionable tweed spot suit, with a lynx collar high about her throat. She had the appearance of one dazed, only partially aware of her surroundings.

The Hindu laughed softly.

"Yes—Maheen has made a good job of you. The cosmetics, those clothes, change your appearance considerably. I do not think the police are likely to identify the Miss Elizabeth Vickers whom they seek with my so charming companion, Miss Louise Delorme. If she obeys my orders implicitly, Miss Vickers may yet escape the police and leave this country alive!"

Beth said nothing, only looked out of the window. The horror of the night before was upon her still. First, there had been Kritana's

third-degree methods of questioning her as to the associates and movements of her late employer, Alban Doane. The Indian had appeared at last to be pleased with her answers; he had handed her over to the charge of a wizened Hindu woman—Maheen, wife of one of the employees of the Golden Pomegranate.

Maheen had shown her where she might sleep, and later had come to her with food, clothes, and cosmetics. Beth had submitted without protest to the Hindu's commands. Fitz had told her to obey orders without questions—and, moreover, she had had no choice. The police were after her; she had seen the newspapers. Her only hope was Fitz—and of him she had seen nothing since he had locked her prison door.

But she had, at least, contrived to hide from Maheen that gun Fitz had given her; she had that still, concealed in the top of her stocking. If the worst came to the worst, she was resolved to use that weapon. It was one way out, anyhow—and she was getting very near the end of her rope.

On her right, McGurn glanced out of the window. The car was sliding down 110th Street. The criminal leaned forward to speak to the chauffeur.

"Stop about a hundred yards this side of the St. Denis Hotel," he said.

The chauffeur nodded, bearing in to the curb. McGurn glanced at Kritana.

"Okay, Chief."

The Hindu nodded, taking something from the pocket of the door. It was a small, square, black leather vanity case. He gave it to Beth.

"You clearly understand the orders I have given you?"

"I understand," she said dully.

His long, dark fingers touched her arm, gently, almost caressingly. She felt herself go rigid under that touch, for the horror of those writhing fingers upon her throat was vivid in her mind. His face came close to hers, thinly smiling.

"Do not make any mistake, little

one! Remember that treachery to me can be only your own downfall. The police are eager to make your acquaintance, and I"—in his eyes there flared for a second that strangely luminous unnatural glow—"I shall be waiting. Remember that!" He turned from her, opening the door of the car. "Go now!"

Without a word she lowered her veil, then stepped out from the stationary car. The chauffeur made a quick movement as though to descend. The movement attracted her glance, and for the first time since she had entered the car she saw who the chauffeur was. Her heart leaped. The chauffeur was Fitz!

Very slightly he nodded his head, smiling. She moved on down the street, her heart thudding. Fitz! There was reassurance in the knowledge that Fitz was close to her, watching over her. Perhaps, even yet, there was hope—

She drew level with the St. Denis Hotel, famous for its guests, who were chiefly diplomats and politicians. For a moment, outside the revolving door, she hesitated, glancing down at the black leather vanity case dangling from her hand. She knew exactly what she had to do, but of the meaning behind her orders she had no conception.

A uniformed doorman, sheltering her with dignity beneath an umbrella, laid a hand inquiringly on the revolving door. With abrupt decision Beth nodded.

"Thank you!" she said warmly.

Very trim and smart in her sport suit, she passed through into the luxurious hall of the hotel. At the reception desk she asked the clerk for Mr. Achille Cavour. As she mentioned the name of the French diplomat, the clerk took up a telephone from the gleaming counter.

"One moment, Miss, if you please." He spoke into the telephone. "Put me through to Suite three sixty-nine. Hello? Mr. Cavour? A lady wishes to see you, sir. Very good, sir." He put a hand over the mouthpiece, smiling winningly at Beth. "May I trouble the lady for her name?"

"Miss Louise Delorme," Beth told

him. In that moment she was glad of her veil, for she could feel the color creeping warmly into her cheeks. She was neither a natural nor a practised liar. "Will you tell Mr. Cavour that the matter is urgent?"

"Very good, Miss," the clerk smiled. He spoke name and message into the receiver, listened. He looked again, more narrowly, at Beth, trying to pierce her veil. "Pardon, Miss, but Mr. Cavour desires to know the nature of your business?"

BETH could feel her heart drumming. Was Cavour, whoever he might be, suspicious? What was behind this thing Kritana was forcing her to do? She forced herself to speak normally.

"I cannot give it over the telephone. It is private and very urgent."

The clerk repeated that into the telephone, listened for a moment, acquiesced, hung up.

"Mr. Cavour will see you, Miss." He beckoned to a bellhop. "Take this lady to Mr. Cavour's suite—three sixty-nine."

The boy did so. In response to his knock, the door of Suite 369 was opened by a short but very erect man with quick, dark eyes and a pale, fattish face. He was faultlessly dressed. He bowed stiffly.

"Please come in, Miss Delorme."

Beth moved forward into the room, glancing about her at the rich surroundings. The French diplomat closed the door carefully, moving across to a small antique table. His eyes were narrowed, watching Beth. His white fingers toyed with a walking-stick which lay upon the table.

"You will be seated, Miss Delorme?"

"Thank you!" Beth said.

She sat down in a leather armchair, facing him, with her back to the tall window.

"And now, Miss—this so urgent, so private business?"

Beth answered him as she had been told to answer:

"I came to warn you, sir, that your life is in danger!"

The Frenchman stiffened, his hand tightening on the cane.

"So?" His voice was cool, but she could see from the slight dilation of his nostrils that he was badly frightened. "Miss Delorme—who are you?"

"I—I have told you—"

He made a quick movement, snatching up the cane. The bright blade of a rapier glittered in his hand. He moved forward a pace, crouching a little, his eyes narrowed. Before she could move, the point of the rapier was at her throat. He spoke between his teeth:

"Mademoiselle, lift your veil!"

Her breath coming fast, she obeyed.

For a moment he studied her face narrowly, then he stepped back, lowering the rapier.

"I do not know you." He thought for a moment. "Miss Delorme, this is a serious thing you say. Suppose I were to keep you here and call the police?"

"Every minute I'm with you," Beth said, very low, "your danger grows. Even now we are being watched—"

SHE glanced quickly at the door behind him. He wheeled about, lithe and swift as a cat, the rapier quivering in his hand. It was the chance she sought. With a quick movement she thrust the black vanity case behind her on its side under the cushion of the chair.

When he turned back she was rising to her feet.

"I can tell you no more. If you keep me here you sign your own death warrant. Your only chance is to leave America—at once!"

She moved past him to the door. He stepped forward a pace, as though to stop her, thought better of it, and bowed ironically.

"A million thanks, Mademoiselle," he said.

Without a word she opened the door and went out. She knew what was in the Frenchman's mind. He

intended to have her followed. But she could do nothing about that. She had obeyed Kritana's orders and she had hidden the black vanity case in that room.

She went down in the elevator, crossed the hall, returned to the car. Kritana looked at her hands. His teeth flashed white in his dusky face.

"You have left it?"

"I did as I was told," Beth said. As the car slid away from the curb, she added, "I might be followed."

Kritana laughed softly.

"YOU will not be followed, little one! That black case is filled with compressed phosgene gas. When you laid it on its side you set in motion a certain delicate mechanism. A clock-work inside controls a small spring shutter which will open



two minutes after the bag was laid on its side, releasing the gas. Its action is deadly. If Cavour remained in that room two minutes after you left it, he is dead!" There was murder in his laugh. "A little improvement of my own on the old-fashioned time bomb. Thanks to you, we have struck our second blow at the League of Specters!" He smiled approvingly at Beth. "I congratulate you!"

Beth went deathly pale behind her veil. Murder. She had been an instrument of murder in the hands of this ruthless, cold-blooded killer. As the full horror of the thing seared through her, she gave a little choked cry and snatched at the door.

"Stop!"

She was struggling, desperate. Kritana's hand slid across her mouth, pulling her back.

Fitz did not turn from the wheel.

CHAPTER VII

NIGHT CLUB RAID



HERE were three reasons why Fitz did not intervene during the momentary struggle in Kritana's car. The first was that intervention would have served no useful purpose—he couldn't possibly have been in time to save the Frenchman; the second was that it would have cost him his strongest weapon against the Hindu, which was his membership of the gang; the third was that he had other plans.

When, at two o'clock, he had left the Golden Pomegranate, ostensibly to return to "the usual place," his quarters at the Caledonian Hotel, it was with the intention of getting actively to work on his own plans. The situation was getting more desperate with every hour; to prevent himself from intervening that morning had cost him more self-control than he was aware that he possessed.

He had to get Beth out of Kritana's net, and he had to work quickly. That the Hindu had contrived to wring out of her certain information he needed, Fitz was sure. Certainly, somehow or other, Kritana had discovered that Cavour was one of the League of Specters. He had used Beth as his means of attack.

With the police after her, would he risk using her again? Suppose, he decided, Beth was no further use to him, what then? The devil, Fitz knew, would simply get rid of her in any way that struck his fancy. Fitz knew he must work quickly.

He did. At a quarter past two he entered a second-hand clothes shop on Third Avenue. He emerged in a short while wearing a shabby blue suit, a felt hat, and a brown coat. From there he made his way through the drizzle to a small lunch counter, picturesquely named as "Happy Joe's."

Save for one customer the dingy tables were deserted. The customer

was Barney Conklin. Fitz ordered a cup of coffee at the counter and carried it across to Barney's table.

"What's new?" he said softly, sitting down.

"Plenty," Barney said. His ingenuous blue eyes were gleaming. "Listen, Boss. I done what you said. I been prowlin' around the Post Road all the mornin', seein' what I could pick up in the nearby town. That 'ouse, where you saw the Specters, belongs to a bloke called Anselm Morrison—a big shot in the city, they say!"

"A big shot in the city?" Fitz spoke through his teeth quietly, but with a restrained, taut excitement. "Anselm Morrison, my bucko, is the head of the International Loan Company. He's a big shot—so big he's been heard of all over Europe and America!"

He lighted a cigarette, thinking swiftly, his grey eyes hard and calculating under the peak of his shabby hat.

Was Anselm Morrison the leader of the League of Specters? The Specter himself? From what Fitz had heard of Morrison, he was a likely man to undertake the desperate and deadly task which the League of Specters had set itself. Known all over the world, he had the reputation of being a clever and not too scrupulous operator in international finance.

He was just the sort of wealthy and powerful man in whose career might be found those cancer spots upon which a blackmailer could batten and grow fat.

Fitz remembered some of the pseudonyms beneath which the members of the league sheltered; Paris, Berlin, London. Foreign cities, three of them. Who more likely than a man dealing in international finance would have acquaintance with wealthy men in those places?

Further, who was more likely to have sufficient influence to bind those men together into a league against blackmail? Further still, the secret headquarters of the league was the property of Anselm Morrison.

Fitz smiled grimly, his brown, strong fingers drumming on the oil-cloth-covered table. Distinctly in Anselm Morrison he saw a lead to the identity of the Specter. He rose abruptly.

"Got a telephone directory, buddy?" he asked the man at the counter.

The greasy, shirt-sleeved attendant produced a ragged volume from beneath the counter. Fitz flipped over the limp pages, ran his finger down the "M" column. His finger checked. "Morrison, Anselm, 150 Riverside Drive." He pushed some coins across the counter, beckoned Barney. Together they left that depressing establishment. It was then half-past three.

AT four o'clock they were loitering without ostentation in the general neighborhood of 150 Riverside Drive. The rain was drizzling down steadily, bringing with it the first grey veils of night. Already the street lamps were glowing; the lights of the passing traffic and busses gleamed on the wet road.

From the opposite pavement, Fitz and Barney had a good view of the wide, illuminated entrance to Morrison's home. A resplendent doorman was on duty outside the swing doors, scanning an evening paper with the melancholy air of a man who's backed a horse suffering from rickets.

For half an hour nothing happened to reward the vigil of the watchers across the road. But at last a grey, expensive Cadillac slid to a standstill in front of the house. A uniformed chauffeur climbed out, spoke to the doorman, returned to the car. The doorman disappeared into the building.

"This should be our man, Barney," Fitz said softly, out of the corner of his mouth. "Fetch a taxi, and stand by to follow that car. Stick to it as though you're it's tail-light. Report home tonight. I've got to be at the Pomegranate at six. All clear?"

"Wot-'o!" the little man muttered.

He disappeared unobtrusively among the passers-by.

Fitz stayed where he was, watching the steps of Morrison's residence. Presently the doorman reappeared, moved down the steps, opened the rear door of the car, stood waiting. Almost at once a man in striped trousers, spats, a black overcoat and a silk hat came out through the swing doors.

He paused for a moment at the top of the steps, hooked his umbrella on his arm, and lighted a cigar. Fitz saw his face clearly. He was olive-skinned and dark-eyed, with a black, distinguished-looking beard and a neat mustache. From newspaper photographs Fitz recognized him immediately. It was Morrison.

The financier moved down the steps, entered the grey limousine. The doorman closed the door and stepped back. The car slid away from the curb. An instant later, a taxi rattled by past Fitz. He had a fleeting glimpse of Barney Conklin peering out from the window, grinning, both thumbs up. Then the taxi was past and gone, following the grey limousine.

Fitz turned, walking briskly down the drive. A hot trail at last. Any suspicious move by Morrison would be noted by Barney. If Barney's report seemed to point to Morrison as the Specter, Fitz told himself, he was going to risk his reception and pay an unobtrusive call on the financier tonight. With the League of Specters' manpower and his—Fitz'—inside knowledge of Kritana's gang, they'd have the Hindu trapped.

He cursed now the necessity which took him back to the Golden Pomegranate. But he did not dare risk getting himself in wrong with the gang, and McGurn had ordered him for duty on the dance floor.

He was at the night club in time, immaculate in evening dress. Duty on the floor meant keeping an eye peeled for any visitor who looked like a detective in disguise; but precious hours were wasted in loitering about before at last, in the

neighborhood of ten o'clock, the dancing room began to fill up.

Over coffee and a brandy Fitz sat smoking at a table near the big double doors, scanning the patrons as they came in—elaborately gowned, overpainted women, haggard, immaculate men, all thrilled by the thought that they were mingling with the "toughies" of New York. He reflected ironically upon the certain panic which would result if these satiated sensation-seekers were to discover the truth about the Golden Pomegranate—that it was, in fact, run merely as a blind to cover the activities of the deadliest blackmailer in America.

The room began to brighten up after the first few dances. The hum of conversation grew louder. The white-turbaned Hindu waiters began to flit with greater frequency between the small tables and the serving hatches. The orchestra was getting warmed up.

Sitting there at his table near the door, Fitz was in an agony of impatience. In one of the rooms upstairs, Beth was imprisoned. Was she all right, he wondered—and what luck was Barney having on the trail of Anselm Morrison? He cursed the precious time that was being lost as he waited about in this room.

He ground out his cigarette stub savagely, selected another smoke from his case. He struck a match. But he did not light his cigarette. Raising the match, he stopped abruptly, his eyes on three men who were in the act of entering the big double doors.

THERE was about the three men nothing peculiar to the casual eye. The leader was big and heavily built, with a red, good-humored face, and a shock of black hair. The two who followed him were undistinguished, save perhaps by a certain grimness about the lips and a wariness about the eyes. All three were in evening dress.

They took a table near the door, opposite Fitz. They might have been three tired business men out on a

spree. But they weren't. Fitz knew detectives when he saw them; particularly, he knew the black-haired man—Inspector Mort of Centre Street.

The match burned his fingers. Casually, without haste, he dropped it into an ashtray. He struck another match, lighted his cigarette. Through the drifting cloud of smoke he watched Mort without apparent curiosity.

Fitz finished his brandy, rose casually to his feet. He strolled toward the door. With a clash of cymbals, a burst of applause, the specialty number came to an end. The chorus girls returning to their dressing rooms. Fitz had his hand on the knob of the door.

"Not just now, son!" a voice said gently at his shoulder.

For a second Fitz stiffened, his jaw tightening. But when he turned, he was smiling slightly, his brows raised.

"What's the idea?"

Inspector Mort returned the smile good-humoredly; but there was no smile in his slate-grey eyes.

"I'll tell you, son." He tucked his arm affectionately into Fitz's. "Come and join us! I want a little chat with you."

"Delighted, I'm sure," Fitz said, without emotion.

He accompanied Mort to his table, bowed briefly to the detective's assistants, and sat down.

Mort was smiling at him across the table.

"No, son—you did that a bit too slick to be natural. Casual sort of light to your cigarette, finish your brandy, stroll across to the door. Son, I can tell an old hand blindfolded!"

"You're so original," Fitz said idly.

His face was emotionless, but he was taut with suspense inside. Would Mort recognize him?

The detective leaned slightly forward across the table, speaking quietly, smiling all the time.

"Watching for cops, eh, son? You belong here?"

"That," Fitz said, examining the

top of his cigarette, blowing a fleck of ash from it, "is a question I might refuse to answer until I saw my lawyer."

MORT was not provoked. His eyes flickered around the room. The "swing" orchestra was starting a new dance. Couples were moving out on to the floor. Nobody in that big, garish room showed more than casual interest in the four men at the table near the door.

"Listen, son," Mort said. "We're here on business tonight—big business. We've got a tip that there's something phony about this place."

"From a stool-pigeon?" Fitz said, dryly.

"Never mind. That's our business. What concerns you," Mort said, "is that you can do yourself a good turn by coming across with some dope. How many men have you got here, and is there a girl among 'em?"

"Fitz' lips curved slightly in a weak smile.

Mort's voice hardened a shade.

"Son, think hard! We're going to clean this place up tonight. The right tip from you might make a load of difference in your case. Are you talking?"

Fitz hesitated. He didn't have to be told to think hard; he was doing it already. Beth was upstairs; if Mort found her, it was the finish. Also, Fitz knew, at any moment Mort might recall their previous acquaintance. He said casually, stalling for time:

"What d'you mean by—"

He stopped. The detective was looking at him strangely, his eyes narrowed, calculating.

"One minute, son. I seem to know your face. I can't just place it, but—"

Inspector Mort rubbed his cheek reflectively. Every nerve in Fitz was strung taut, on the alert. Mort frowned.

"It's coming. There was some fellow name of—what was it, now? He was sentenced for a bank safe-breaking job—curious case. He got three years. But he was fair, I remember, with a mustache." He

stiffened suddenly. "He escaped! I got it! Magill—Terry Magill!" His hand whipped out suddenly across the table. "You—"

But Fitz was ready. He dodged the detective's hand and lunged to his feet, thrusting the table with all his strength against the policemen.

Mort went over backward, chair and all, clawing down the man on his right. The third man leaped at Fitz, grappling. Fitz's fist took him flush on the jaw. He reeled back, crashing down on top of Mort.

Before they could disentangle themselves, Fitz was through the door, racing across the hall.

CHAPTER VIII

OUT OF THE PAST



OUT on the dance-floor, behind him, a woman screamed wildly. The orchestra fell silent on a bizarre blast from a saxophone. Mort's voice sliced through the sudden pandemonium.

"Keep your seats, everybody! This is a raid!"

A police whistle blasted shrilly. Another echoed back from the street. A door crashed open.

Fitz gained the stairs, raced up them to that long, yellow-lighted corridor on the first floor. The corridor was deserted. There was no sign of Kritana, McGurn, Givo Saphir, nor of any other of the gang's leaders. Had they got wise to the raid and made their getaway already? And had they taken Beth?

Fitz moved forward swiftly along the corridor, tried the door of Beth's prison. The door was still locked. He rapped urgently.

"Are you there?"

A voice answered him, faintly tremulous.

"Who is it?"

She was still there! Kritana, Fitz guessed, must have left in a considerable hurry.

"Stand clear!" he cried softly.

He stepped back across the corri-

dor, braced himself, charged the door with his shoulder. It shivered under the impact, but did not give. He gathered himself for a second charge, hurled himself again at the door. Lock and hinges were wrenched away. The door crashed down on the floor of the lighted room.

Fitz stumbled forward, recovered himself, looked about him. Beth stood against the wall to his left, shrinking back, her hand at her mouth.

"Dicks! Come on!" he gasped breathlessly.

He gripped her wrist, swinging about to the doorway. A figure loomed suddenly in the opening.

"Back, you!"

It was Mort, gun in hand. Fitz plunged forward, ducking, hitting upward at the official's gun hand. The gun went off. A bit of plaster fell from the ceiling. The men crashed down, grappling, on the broken door. Fitz rolled over on top, straddling the detective. He wrenched free of Mort's grip and leaped clear. Mort heaved up, ploughing in again. Fitz met him with a right and left to the jaw, straight and hard. The big detective's legs crumpled under him. He pitched forward across the broken door.

FITZ took Beth's arm again, hurrying out into the corridor and along it to the blank wall at its end. He bent quickly, lifting the edge of the carpet. There was a small switch there, sunken in a little recess. He pushed over the arm of the switch, dropping the carpet back into place.

A panel of the wall slid aside, revealing a small boxlike elevator. It was the gang's secret exit. Every member in the gang knew of that, just as they knew of the emergency hideout for reassembling in the event of a raid.

"Get in!" Fitz said.

She obeyed, breathing fast. He crammed in after her, touching a switch in the wall of the box. The panel slid shut. In pitch darkness

the elevator began to descend. There was a little jerk, and it eased to a stop.

Fitz fumbled in front of him, pushed up the sash of a glazed window. They climbed out onto a small terrace, unlighted save by the dim reflection from the windows of the night club's kitchens.

"Wait here!" Fitz breathed.

Quickly, quietly, he moved along the terrace, peering into the street. A little to his left an open touring car was drawn up, its parking lights burning. A uniformed policeman was patrolling the pavement, glancing up at the curtained windows of the night club. He drew near them. Fitz leaped.

He got the policeman from behind, one arm circled tight over his neck, forcing back his head, clamping his jaws shut. He dragged the man backward onto the terrace.

The policeman recovered his balance in a moment. He wrenched free, wheeling to meet his attacker. Fitz bored in close, punching with both fists. The policeman went down backward, clattering over an ashcan. He lay still.

Fitz grinned in the darkness as he removed the policeman's coat and cap. He donned them himself, buttoning the coat over his evening clothes.

He took Beth's arm again.

"Come on!"

They moved swiftly over to the waiting car. Fitz took his place at the wheel and pressed the starter. Beth climbed in beside him. The car purred forward without haste past the open door of the night club.

Fitz chuckled softly, slipping into second gear.

"Girlie, we'll beat 'em yet!"

Involuntarily she moved a little closer to him. Their shoulders touched.

They reached Broadway without pursuit, turned into a side street, and there deserted the car, together with the policeman's coat and cap. Then they hailed a taxi. The driver looked at them without curiosity. Fitz, hatless, was in evening dress;

Beth was still wearing the outfit she had worn that morning.

The taxi dropped them presently at Fitz' little private hideout.

Beth surveyed the small, cozy living room, wide-eyed.

"What—what is this place?"

Fitz put a match to a cigarette, exhaled twin streams of smoke, and straightened.

"This," he said, "is the humble residence of a chap known as Michael Brand, reporter."

"Michael Brand?"

Fitz grinned.

"'Michael Brand' is a name of convenience I used at times." He saw that she did not understand. "I'll explain in a minute. But you're going to have some coffee first, and make yourself comfortable. We shall be safe here."

SHE sat down wonderingly in a leather armchair before the fire. Fitz crossed to the desk by the window. He drew the curtains carefully. There was a scrawled note on the desk.

Fitz took up the paper, read swiftly through the few lines scrawled on it. It was a note from Barney. The little man had been in, waited a while, then returned to keep watch on Morrison's house on Riverside Drive. Morrison had gone back there, he said, and, so far, had not emerged. He—Barney—would stick to Morrison's trail, and report to Fitz at Happy Joe's the next day at four. So far, Barney said, the financier had made no suspicious move.

Fitz tossed the paper back on to the desk. The call on Morrison must be postponed. At any rate they had him watched. If, after the fight by the Post Road, the League of Specters got nervous and changed their meeting place, Barney would be on the trail. Also, if Morrison made any move that seemed to point to him as the Specter, Barney could be trusted to catch it. Things, Fitz reflected grimly, were getting very near explosion point!

Over coffee and doughnuts, Fitz explained the situation to Beth.

"That raid was a bit of luck. It's made things a bit more dangerous in one way, but on the other hand, it's got you out of Kritana's clutches. I shall have to report at Kritana's emergency hideout now. I shall say I made my getaway without seeing anything of you; they'll think the dicks got you."

"Meanwhile, you'll be safe if you lie low here for a bit. Neither the police nor Kritana know of this place. You'll be alone in the house, but there're plenty of beds and plenty of eats."

She nodded slowly, her face very pale against her dark, soft hair.

"Fitz—why are you doing all this for me? If it hadn't been for you—"

He shrugged slightly, looking at her.

His face was drawn and haggard, but his grey eyes were keen.

"I'll tell you why I—I started to try to help you. It was because we were in the same boat. Until Kritana's smashed, and we can prove that you were 'framed,' you're a fugitive, too." His brown fingers toyed with his cup, resting on the arm of his chair. "You see, Beth, my name is not Fitzgerald, and it's not Michael Brand. I wonder—I wonder if you've ever heard the name of Terry Magill?"

The girl shook her head slowly, her blue eyes on his.

"No, I thought not," Fitz said. "It's nearly a year since that name was mentioned in the papers." He lighted a cigarette. "Terry Magill was one of those mugs who go wandering around, looking for excitement, doing any sort of job in any country, and usually so broke that he had his clothes made without pockets."

"He had a pal who used to knock around with him, a little cockney called Barney Conklin he'd picked up in the Bowery. One day, in Mexico, they cleaned up a nice little pile at roulette, and, still believing in the theory that excitement's the spice of life, they beat it back to New York. Magill started in business as a private detective, with an

office on Fifth Avenue, and Barney Conklin as his assistant."

"Yes?" Beth said softly.

"Clients," Fitz went on, seemed to be pretty scarce, but at last a chap came along who wanted Magill to find out the identity of a black-mailer. While on this job Magill was prowling around town one night when he saw two men breaking into a bank. Magill, thinking of landing the robbers red-handed and getting some swell publicity, followed 'em in.

"Unfortunately, the robbers saw him and tapped him neatly on the skull with a blackjack. When Magill came to in the morning, he was in jail, having been found unconscious beside the empty safe. The police theory was that Magill entered the place with a confederate, who, not wanting to split the loot, downed Magill and got away."

"WHAT—what happened?" Beth breathed.

Fitz smiled grimly.

"What happened was that Magill was charged with the job. Nobody in New York knew anything about him. The police declared his detective agency to be a blind. The night watchman of the bank swore that Magill was the man who knocked him out when he tried to give the alarm. Magill's client, the dirty dog, anxious to keep his name out of the papers, denied all knowledge of Magill. And the upshot of it was that Magill got three years.

"Barney Conklin was brought up as well, but discharged. Magill served two months of his sentence, and then, thanks to Barney, who managed to smuggle a gun into him, escaped from prison one night. He got to New York, changed his appearance by darkening his hair and touching it up a bit with grey—the police had already shaved off his mustache—and set about finding the men who cracked that bank."

"You—he knew who they were?" Beth said softly.

"He knew all right! He saw the face of one of 'em as they got in at the window. After three months

of hanging around the likely joints, and making a living by sending in crime articles to the magazines under the name of Michael Brand, Magill found his man.

"He was 'Gun' McGurn, a gangster. Magill scraped acquaintance with McGurn, who absolutely failed to recognize Terry Magill, the man he'd let go to stir, as Jimmy Fitzgerald, ex-convict. After a while Magill scraped his way into McGurn's confidence and his gang. What Magill was looking for was a chance to trap a confession out of McGurn about that bank job.

"But he soon saw it wasn't going to be easy, for McGurn was working for someone bigger—Kritana! They were as thick as thieves and they stuck together, which made McGurn just twice as powerful. To get one, Magill soon saw he'd have to smash 'em both! And then he—"

He paused for a moment.

"And then?" Beth said, very low. Her eyes were shining.

"And then," Fitz said grimly, "a girl came into the case. She was in much the same boat as Magill. That was why he started to try to help her. He went on, after he'd seen her, spoken to her, because—"

He paused.

Beth's voice was a whisper.

"Why did he go on—Terry Magill?"

Fitz rose abruptly.

"NOT Terry Magill—not yet! Terry Magill comes to life the day he can clear himself—and you—the day Kritana and McGurn are smashed and captured! Until then there's no Terry Magill—just a fellow called 'Fitz'."

Beth rose, facing him.

"Will Terry Magill," she said, very low, "finish the story that day—Fitz?"

He looked at her, startled. For a moment their eyes met and held. Then he smiled, and his hand found hers, holding it tightly.

"He will—and the day's mighty near! You know nothing about the Specter yet—but you will. I've got to uncover the Specter if Kritana's

plot is to be smashed and Terry Magill to live again!"

He pressed her hand and released it.

"Now, let's get things clear. What happened between you and Kritana last night?"

For nearly an hour they talked. It was two o'clock when Fitz left the house and headed for Kritana's emergency hideout.

Had he known then what Beth discovered later, he would never have left her alone.

CHAPTER IX

THE ONE CHANCE



MORNING came, and it was then that Beth made that discovery. She had slept the deep sleep of exhaustion, alone in that quiet house, and had awakened refreshed. She bathed and dressed, and, having found the kitchen, prepared for herself a breakfast of eggs, toast and coffee.

She felt much better, more like herself. The paint was gone from her lips and from her eyes; there was a faint, delicate color in her cheeks.

She had still the sensation of one lost in a strange place; but the horror through which she had passed seemed remote and unreal, like an evil dream, and she found it almost impossible to believe that she was a fugitive from the police.

Only Fitz seemed real to her. Soon, she felt sure, he would come to fetch her—to tell her that everything was all right, that there was nothing more to worry about. Thinking of Fitz, she felt safe and almost happy.

But when, just after eleven, she pulled back the curtains in the little living room, her feeling of safety went from her abruptly, and every nerve in her became tinglingly alert.

On the pavement opposite the house, a man was standing. He was shabbily dressed, a hat pulled down over his eyes. He had a newspaper in his hand, but he was not

looking at it. He was looking directly at the window where Beth stood.

She stepped back quietly, dropping the curtain. Her heart was thudding. The house seemed suddenly strange and empty and quiet. A watcher! She was certain of that. But was he a detective, or one of Kritana's men? Had she and Fitz been seen last night, entering this house?

She paced the room restlessly. What was she to do? Fitz might have been followed when he left the house last night; if that were so, he might at this moment be in the hands of the police—or of Kritana and his gang. On the other hand, if he had not been followed, he might, if he came back today, walk straight into a trap!

She stopped her pacing, listened. A low rumble of traffic came to her. The clock ticked quietly on the mantelpiece. Her mouth was dry. The atmosphere of the house seemed suddenly electric with suspense, inimical, mysterious.

The window drew her irresistibly. Ever so slightly, she lifted the curtain, peering out into the grey street. The man was still there. Another was with him now. They were speaking with one another. The second man moved away.

A little to the right of the house, a small truck was drawn up. The man reached it and lifted the hood. He began idly to tinker with the engine. The shabby man with the newspaper propped himself against a telephone pole and glanced up casually at the window of the living room. Again Beth dropped the curtain.

Why didn't Fitz's friend, Barney Conklin, come? Fitz had said that probably he would; and Barney would know what to do.

But Barney did not come, and her fear for Fitz grew more acute. It must be Fitz that these men were after—and, if he came, he was trapped! Fitz must be warned—but how?

She remembered suddenly what he had told her last night—that he

was to meet Barney at four o'clock at a restaurant called Happy Joe's. It was nowhere near four yet, but suppose she were to go to that restaurant, and leave a note of warning for him there? She could see two objections to that—one, it was certain she would be followed; two, she stood a dangerous chance of being recognized as the woman wanted by the police.

The first possibility she could overcome; surely, she thought, she could contrive somehow to shake off any follower, and, if those watchers weren't detectives, they would not dare to attack her in broad daylight in a public street. The possibility of being recognized she must risk; she could do nothing about that.

Another objection occurred to her. Where should she go when she had delivered the warning? Pacing the room, she thought that over. She dared not return here. She would have to risk recognition, and go to some quiet little hotel, telling Fitz in her warning where he could find her.

To warn Fitz—that was the main thing!

She would, she decided, give Barney Conklin until two o'clock. If he wasn't here by then, she would go—risk everything!

Those few hours of waiting were for Beth an age of suspense. Barney did not come. Though her heart was drumming, it was almost with relief that she drew on her small black hat, tucking her brown hair well out of sight. Any sort of action was better than this feeling of being trapped, of waiting for the blow to fall.

She went downstairs, let herself out into the raw, grey afternoon. Now that the rush hour was over, the street was almost deserted, except for the man watching her and the ostensibly broken-down truck.

Beth walked briskly along the sidewalk, a slim, neat figure in her sport suit and black hat. She had to keep a firm grip on her nerves to prevent herself from looking behind.

Where the sidewalk began to curve, she crossed the street.

Even as she stepped from the sidewalk, the roar of a motor's engine sounded behind. In terror, she glanced round. The truck, which, had been creeping quietly along behind, was racing straight for her.

With a little choked cry, she ran forward, trying to get clear. There was a scream of brakes, a shout. Something hit her shoulder, throwing her down into impenetrable darkness.

IT was nearly six o'clock before, at last, Fitz reached Happy Joe's, that dismal little restaurant. Barney was there already—had been waiting almost two hours.

"Cripes, Boss, you're late!"

Fitz sat down at the table. His face was grim, his grey eyes anxious under the brim of his hat.

"I know! I had the devil's own job getting away!" He leaned across the table, speaking swiftly, quietly, urgently. "Listen, Barney! I've burned my bridges! Kritana's preparing for something big. I think he has a tip and intends to wipe out the Specter's gang. He's massing his whole gang at Ringer's Wharf. That raid last night has made him desperate.

"When I tried to slip away, McGurn stopped me, wanted to know where I was going. I downed him and ran for it! If I show my face back there, Barney, it's a bullet for me, no flowers by request! Tonight's our last chance to get Kritana and McGurn! What news of Morrison?"

The little cockney grimaced, laying his left hand on the table. The hand was wrapped in a bloodstained handkerchief.

"That! I was 'angin' around 'is 'ouse this mornin', Boss, about ten o'clock, when — *phut!* Air-rifle. I never dawdled to see where it come from, nor to make no inquiries. I 'ooked it so quick I could 'ardly keep up with myself! I dodged about from place to place all the mornin', then, about 'arf-past two, I looked in at the house to make sure you got that note I left."

"I got it," Fitz said. Excitement glittered in his eyes. "Barney, if Morrison shot at you, it certainly looks as though he's our man—the Specter, eh? It's dead sure he took you for a spy of Kritana's. He's our man, Barney, I'll bet!"

"I got an each-way bet on the same nag," Barney muttered.

Fitz frowned, thinking. "Did you see the girl?" he said abruptly.

"The girl?"

"Beth Vickers." Swiftly Fitz told Barney of the raid on the Golden Pomegranate, of the getaway with Beth the night before. "Didn't you see her, when you went to the house today? I told her you might be going there."

The little man shook his head.

"There wasn't nobody at the 'ouse."

"What!"

"Nary a soul," Barney said positively.

For a moment Fitz stared at him, incredulous.

"Barney, there must be something mighty wrong here. She'd never have left on her own accord, and I'll swear we weren't followed last night from Golden Pomegranate. That wipes the police out. Kritana's been at Ringer's Wharf all day. That wipes *him* out. Who is there left?"

Their eyes met. The same thought

was in both of their minds. Barney voiced it:

"The Specter!"

Fitz was thinking swiftly.

"Barney, you followed Morrison to his house last night. You watched there. How long?"

"Until maybe eleven."

"And then," Fitz said softly, "you went to the house and left that note for me. Which door did you go out by, after you'd left the note?"

"The door on to the side street," Barney told him. "I always do, Boss—just in case there's anyone pryin' around!"

Fitz' fists gripped tight on the table.

"Barney, there's only one answer. You were seen watching Morrison's last night. They wanted to find out what your game was, and, when you came to leave that note, you yourself were followed. You were seen entering the house, but because you went out by the side door, the trailer missed you. He stayed on watch. He saw Beth and me arrive after the scramble at the Golden Pomegranate.

"You can be mighty sure he took particular note of Beth. The Specter must know, from the papers, that it's a girl who's supposed to be responsible for the murder of Doane and Cavour. Barney, some time

[Turn Page]

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after I left the house last night, Morrison's watcher captured Beth Vickers!"

He rose abruptly, Barney with him.

"What's next, Boss?"

"Morrison's," Fitz said, between his teeth, "*right now!*"

CHAPTER X

NIGHT ATTACK



ALONE with Barney in a taxi, Fitz drew back his cuff and glanced at the illuminated dial of his wrist-watch. It was six thirty-two.

"All right. Stop here," he directed the driver.

The taxi slid to a standstill, fifty yards beyond the residence of Anselm Morrison. Fitz glanced at Barney in the gloom.

"Last chance, Barney. I'm putting everything on this card. It might be an ace, or it might be the joker. If I'm not back here in half an hour you'll know that it's all up. Beat it, see? So long, pal!"

Their hands met briefly. Fitz opened the door and stepped out on to the pavement. Briskly, purposefully, he walked along to the house of Anselm Morrison and mounted the broad steps. In the darkness of the pillared porch he paused for a moment to knot a handkerchief across his face, just under the eyes. One hand tight on the automatic in the pocket of his shabby jacket, he rang the bell to the right of the front door.

Almost at once, the door was opened by the butler. Before the man could speak, Fitz pushed past him into the lofty hall. Between the down-drawn brim of his soft hat and the handkerchief across his face, his eyes glittered like steel. In his right hand he gripped his automatic, menacing the butler.

"Shut that door!"

The butler obeyed. He raised his hands slowly.

"Where's your master?"

"He—he's in conference."

"In conference?" Fitz's eyes nar-

rowed above the handkerchief. "With whom?"

"I—I don't know. He sent me away for half an hour, answered the door himself."

"Is that so?"

Fitz was thinking swiftly. In his own mind he was certain now that Anselm Morrison was the leader of the League of Specters—the Specter himself. Was it possible that Morrison had called a hasty meeting of the League to discuss the fate of Beth and the question of what was to be done about the spy, Barney, who had been watching Morrison's house?

Was it possible that he, Fitz, was going to barge in on a meeting of the hooded men? It made no difference, anyhow; he was here, and he had to go through with the business that had brought him here. He jabbed the gun forward in his pocket.

"Where are they?"

The butler jerked his head at a pair of tall, double doors across the hall.

"Okay! Stay where you are! Any funny stuff and you'll get so much lead you'll spit rust! See?"

Fitz moved across swiftly to the big, double doors. Outside the doors he listened for a moment. There was no sound from within. With his free hand, Fitz tried the doors. They swung open, revealing a brightly lit room.

He entered cautiously, his eyes trying to adjust themselves to the dazzling light. Suddenly a voice yelled, "Get him!"

Two thugs appeared from nowhere, automatics in hand. Even as Fitz darted sideward, a gun roared out. He felt the wind of the bullet past his ear, but he only moved the faster. Like an uncoiling spring, he leaped toward an adjacent desk.

He reached it in two fast strides. His feet left the floor in a flashing hurdle, clearing the desk as a high-jumper clears a bar. On the way over, his feet kicked a desk-lamp and smashed it to darkness on the floor.

He kept running. Running toward an open door. Two guns were belch-

ing flame and lead now. And one of the masked men was crouching ahead of him with a long blade in his hand.

Fitz zigzagged on his way. A thin trickle of red seeped from his side as a bullet grazed his ribs. His coat peaked up at the shoulder as a slug tore through the fabric.

He slammed against the door and his hand shot out to punch at the light switch which was beside it. With the overhead light joining the desk-lamp in oblivion, the room was plunged into darkness. A darkness streaked with livid flame and crackling with curses.

Fitz dropped to the floor beneath the switch and felt plaster from the wall sifted down on him as lead bored the space he had occupied an instant before.

His hand went up and fumbled for his gun. He squeezed the trigger. The gun was jammed! With a stifled curse he threw the useless weapon to the floor.

“WHERE is he?” snarled one of the men.

The white ray of a flashlight suddenly cut the darkness. Fitz exploded into movement. That light meant death.

He jumped to the desk, picked up the heavy swivel chair in front of it, and hurled it toward the light. The beam played on him for a second before he dropped to the floor again—and before the chair drew a howl of pain from the holder of the flash, and sent the light smashing to destruction against the brick of the fireplace.

Fitz followed the chair, leaping like a tiger toward the place where the light had been. A gun cracked out, so close that his cheek suddenly stung from powder burns.

He caught the arm behind the gun and wrenched. There was a moan, then a scream of pain. After that, arms went around Fitz from behind and he lost his hold.

Three against one in a darkened room. The hands gripping Fitz from behind tightened. A blade sought his throat in the darkness.

The league member, with cold purpose in the heat of the fight, was trying to kill him.

Fitz swung the man behind him off his feet. He whirled, with the men still on his back. Somebody grunted with pain as flying heels raked into him. The arms relaxed their grip, and Fitz was free again.

Fitz retrieved the flashlight, let its beam hover for a second over the room. The pale light focused on the league member. Fitz snapped the light off, raced for the hooded man. With a short, swift move he twisted the league member's arm behind him. The man groaned with the pain.

“Now, where are the rest of your tribe?” Fitz hissed in his ear.

“Over—over there—next room,” the league member muttered under his breath as Fitz increased the pressure on his arm. “They haven't heard the shots—room's soundproof here.”

“Tell your henchmen here to lay off,” Fitz instructed.

The hooded man shouted a brief command to the two thugs.

“Okay. Now lead the way!”

Through the darkness the league member walked ahead, Fitz close behind him. At last they came to another room.

“They're inside,” Fitz' guide told him. “The butler signaled me when you came in; that's why we laid the trap for you. What do you want?”

“Shut up!” Fitz barked. He stopped for a moment, searched his prisoner hastily. He found what he wanted in a second—an automatic in the man's back pocket. This he transferred quickly to his own right hand.

Then Fitz kicked the door ahead of him open, shoved the hooded man before him. Six cowed figures were seated before a table in the middle of the room. Fitz' gun covered them all.

“Gentlemen, put up your hands!”

The robed men obeyed slowly, their blank eyeholes turned to him. He moved forward to the foot of the table, facing the hooded man who sat at its head.

"Gentlemen, which of you is Anselm Morrison?"

The man at the head of the table nodded briefly.

"I am Anselm Morrison."

"Right," Fitz said. "I believe you're holding a girl here a prisoner?"

There was a moment of silence, then the man at the head of the table said harshly:

"That is correct!"

"Right!" Fitz said again. His gun circled round the table. "Keep your hands up, all of you. You captured that girl, I believe, in order to try to obtain from her certain information as to the whereabouts of a man known as Vedas Kritana?"

"Again," Morrison said, "that is correct."

"Have you obtained that information?"

"We have not. The girl is unconscious."

"Unconscious!" Fitz' hand tightened on the gun. "What've you done to her?"

"Since she appears to be a friend of yours," Morrison snarled, "let me hasten to reassure you. She is suffering merely from shock. At any moment she will awaken, little the worse."

"That," Fitz said grimly, "is as well for you. Keep your hands up. I'm here to make you a proposition. You hope, I believe, to smash the blackmailer, Vedas Kritana?"

"You seem to be well informed!" Morrison rasped. "It is possible perhaps that you are the—visitor, shall we say—who called upon us the night before last at—"

"At the Post Road House," Fitz said. "I am. If my reception had been a little more hospitable that night, I might have made my proposition then."

"AND this so mysterious proposition, what is it?"

"I can show you," Fitz said slowly, "where to find Kritana, and how to smash him by midnight tonight!"

There was a brief silence. Morrison was the first to speak.

"Who are you?"

Fitz told them. Briefly, hastily, he told them the story of Terry Magill.

"That's the truth. I want Kritana, but I need your manpower; you want Kritana, but you need my information. If we cooperated and attacked Kritana tonight, we should get him."

A man on Fitz' right interrupted.

"And your terms?" he said curtly.

"They are simple," Fitz said. "If Kritana and McGurn are taken, I want them handed over to me for one hour. During that time I could force out of them the written confession I need. Then I want two of Kritana's men handed over to me, to witness those confessions, and to be placed by me in the hands of the police, to verify my story."

"Furthermore, I want that girl you hold prisoner released. In exchange for that I guarantee to keep silent concerning the identity of your leader, Anselm Morrison, who is the only one of you whose name I know."

"How are we to know that you're not leading us into some trap—some ambush? That you're not in the pay of Kritana?" Morrison rasped.

Fitz nodded.

"That's a fair question. As a proof that I'm playing absolutely square with you, I'll place myself absolutely in your hands." He jerked the handkerchief from his face, tossed his gun on to the table. "There you are! I am on the level with you. If you care to double-cross me now, I've no defense; but I can assure you that you'll never force out of me the information I hold!"

Again there was a little silence. The hooded men lowered their hands slowly. Fitz faced them, smiling slightly.

"Well, gentlemen?"

One of the hooded men spoke abruptly.

"I think he's playing square. I suggest that we put it to the vote whether or not we accept his terms and act upon his information. After

all, our purpose is to take Kritana. Once taken, we lose nothing by allowing this man one hour with him—at the Boston Post Road place, I suggest, where we can keep an eye on them both. After that, we will deal with Kritana—in our own way!”

His suggestion was taken up instantly.

“A vote!”

At the head of the table, Morrison nodded briefly.

“Those in favor of this attack raise their hands.”

Five hands were raised.

“Very well,” Morrison commented. He moved over to the table, took up the gun, looked at Fitz. “You will be placed, unarmed, in the hands of four of our men. You will lead those men to Kritana’s hideout. If they are satisfied that there is no trap, we shall attack. At the first sign of treachery, they will have instructions to shoot you down like a dog!”

Fitz nodded. He was about to say that he had a friend outside, waiting. But, even as he opened his mouth to speak, an idea flared across his mind. His teeth snapped tight.

RINGER’S WHARF was the disused and ramshackle pier of a once prosperous but now defunct line of freight steamers plying to and from South America.

Backing upon a long, narrow alley known as Ringer’s Passage, the wharf ran parallel with the river for almost a hundred yards, and was separated from the alley by a high, tarred fence. Beyond the fence, there loomed up amidst the darkness and the drizzle the dim outlines of warehouses. No lights showed there. Decay and silence brooded upon the place.

Flanking the wharf on the right, a short flight of worn, stone steps led down, under the shadow of the tarred fence, to the river. The dark water eddied softly at the foot of the steps.

Merging so completely into the darkness as scarcely to be visible,

five men crouched. One of them was speaking softly.

“I know they’ll have three or four guards along the fence, inside, covering the street approach, but it’s pretty sure they’ll only have one or two men on the river side of the wharf. If we had a couple of boats attack from the river, we could draw them all over to that side, and then smash in with the main body of our men, from the street, taking them in the rear. It’s a cinch, I tell you!”

“Looks like he’s right, Spider,” one of the other men muttered.

“I’m the guy who says who’s right!” the man called Spider snarled.

He peered close at Fitz in the gloom.

“Listen, you! If you’re handing us the doublecross, there’s a bullet ready for you! Tell me now, what’s their full strength?”

“I should say,” Fitz whispered, “fifty.”

“That puts us in the lead,” Spider muttered. “We got sixty-four men standing by, ready at the next pier, and if you’re on the level, we got the advantage of surprise. What time is it?”

Fitz peered at the luminous dial of his wrist-watch.

“Ten to twelve.”

Spider grunted.

“Okay. I’m chancing it, and giving the word. If this bird tries any funny stuff, boys, let daylight into him—an’ quick—see?”

Swiftly, quietly, he moved up the steps on to the pavement of Ringer’s Passage. The night swallowed him.

Fitz stayed where he was, squatting on a step slightly below the three gunmen. They had their guns in their hands, alert for treachery. The league was taking no chances. It had required almost three hours of quiet reconnaissance around Kritana’s hideout to convince Spider Shane, leader of the league’s hired fighters, that Fitz’ was a straight tip and not a trap.

Spider was on his way now to report to his hooded principals; on that report would depend the league’s

decision to attack or to withdraw. If they withdrew, Fitz knew that it was all up with him and with Beth; on the other hand, if they attacked—

His lips clamped shut. Crouching there on the dark steps, with only a tarred fence between himself and the hideout of Veda's Kritana, he waited in suspense.

He was without a weapon, but he was watching his chance to get his hands, somehow or other, on a gun.

The rain drizzled down steadily, soaking him. The darkness was intense. The water swirled and sucked at the foot of the steps. Far off eastward, an unseen train shunted and clanged.

Suddenly he went tense, listened. Away to his right there sounded the purr of a motorboat. It came closer, stopped. The silence closed down again.

A dark figure, crouching, ran up the steps. It was Spider Shane.

"Stand by, you boys!" he whispered hoarsely. "We're going to attack! We got two motorboats standing offshore, four men in each! They open fire on the pier at twelve-five, giving the boys a chance to get organized in the street! You men stick here and watch this bird. If he tries anything, let him have it! Get me?"

"Okay, Spider!" they chorused.

The messenger moved away swiftly up the steps. The three gunmen were rigid, watching Fitz. Fitz peered again at his wrist-watch. Twelve-two. Three minutes to go. He could feel his heart drumming in his throat. He had precipitated this pitched battle between the rival gangs. How would it end?

Two minutes to go.

The silence was uncanny, as though the night waited, holding its breath.

One minute!

Every muscle in his body was tense; his eyes flickered from the gunmen to the dark water at the foot of the steps.

Away to his right the roar of a motorboat ripped the quiet like an explosion. The roar became close.

Like a racing shadow, low down on the water, the boat screamed past, curving in toward the wharf.

The quick rattle of a machine gun blended with the engine's roar.

Another boat dashed by, its pilot firing as it came with a pump gun. One of Fitz' men ran forward to the wharf, two guns in hand, exchanged shots with the attacker. The pump gun hailed lead across the rotten planking, pumping death through the wooden walls of the warehouse.

Hell broke loose on Ringer's Wharf. The night was a tumult of shouting men, crashing glass, and spinning lead. A splintering report came from the alley side of the pier. The league's hired fighters had smashed their way through the tarred fence—were attacking Kritana in the rear.

The fight was on!

Swiftly, without warning, Fitz hurled himself up the steps, closing with the three gunmen. In a moment they had merged together—a fighting, grappling knot of dark figures, swaying dangerously on the wet steps, only a few feet above the black water of the river.

CHAPTER XI

THE SHOWDOWN



DESPERATE, Fitz hit out blindly. His fist landed on something hard. Teeth clicked together audibly. A figure detached itself from the knot, reeled backward down the steps lost its balance, and splashed into the dark waters. A knee took Fitz in the solar plexus, doubling him up.

But, even as he swayed forward, he grabbed his man about the thighs, toppling him over. The man's head struck the tarred fence violently. He rocked sideward, rolling over and over down the steps. The third man got Fitz' right arm and hung on desperately.

"Doublecrossed, by—" he snarled between his teeth.

Fitz' left swept round and up, slamming into the gunman's middle.

The man gasped, but kept his grip, trying to bring his gun into play. Fitz got his gun-wrist, twisting it. The gun dropped to the steps. Fitz crooked his right leg round the gunman's, pushing his left fist under the man's jaw. The man toppled backward over Fitz' leg and went down, losing his hold. He lay still, sprawling on the steps.

Panting, his hat gone, a long, bleeding scratch down his right cheek, Fitz bent quickly, fumbling for the fallen gun. He found it, then peered along to his right.

Fifty yards from him a sheet of blue-white flame leaped into being, showing fleetingly the dark figures of running, crouching men. Kri-tana's killers were meeting the attack with grenades. Close on the heels of the first explosion another came, a devastating roar, dimming the rattle of the machine guns on the river side of the pier.

Fitz turned left, breaking into a run down the middle of Ringer's Passage, leaving the fight behind him. He stopped suddenly and whistled—three times, short and sharp.

From the mouth of an alley to Fitz' left, a dark figure flitted, running toward him.

"Cripes, Boss, you okay?"

It was Barney, panting, his gun in hand.

"Yep. You followed, then?"

"Wot-'o! I saw you come out o' Morrison's with them four guys,

an' glance along at the taxi where I was waitin'. I knew I was meant to follow—"

"Good man! Listen!" He spoke swiftly, quietly, for a second. "That's the way the wind blows now. Travel!"

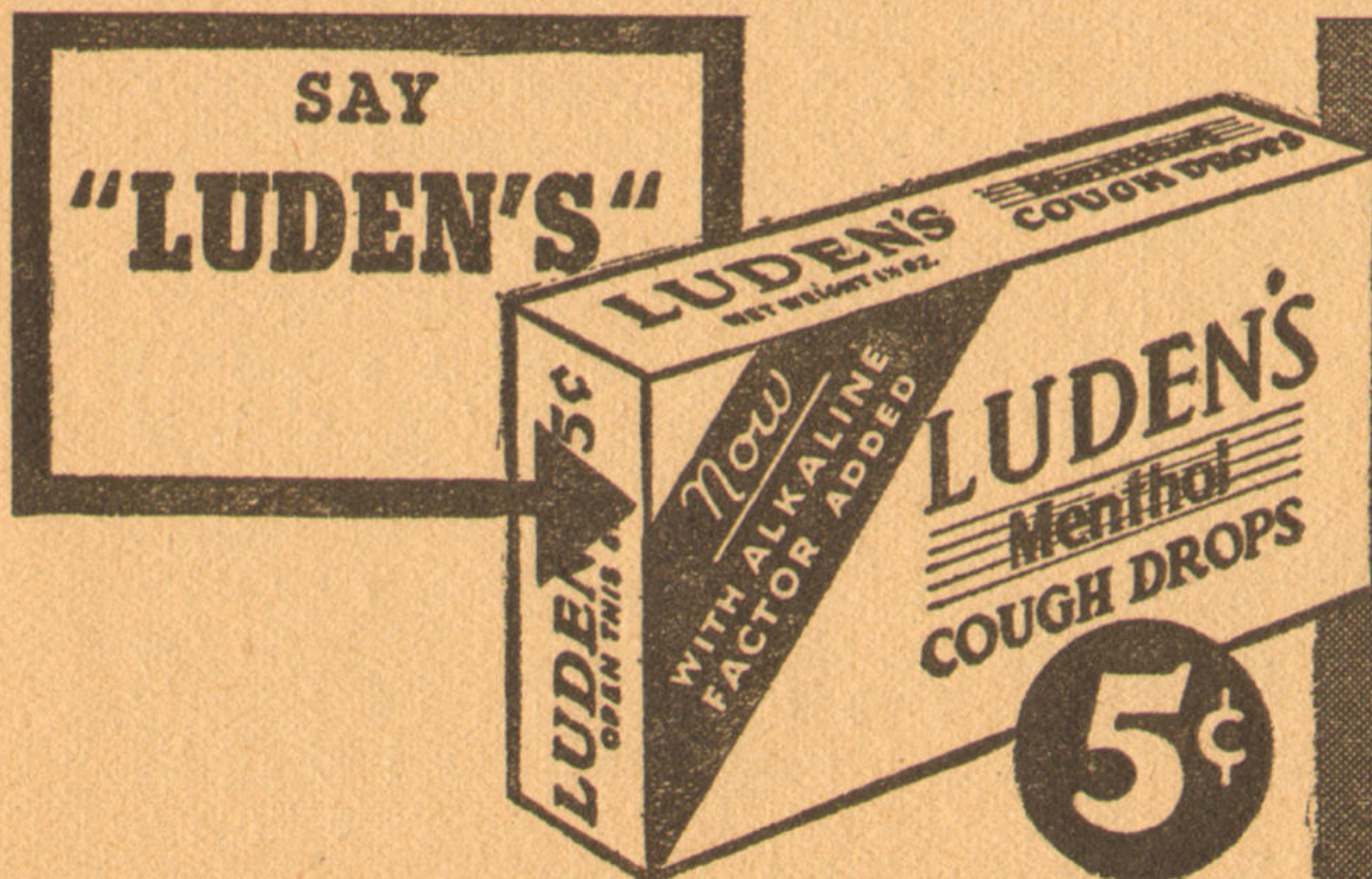
Barney traveled. The dark mouth of a passage swallowed him. Fitz ran on along Ringer's Passage. The sound of the fight had faded into silence behind him. He stopped abruptly, opposite a narrow opening between two warehouses on his left. This was the next pier. He moved along the opening with the sides of the warehouses looming darkly above him. He came out on to a ramshackle wooden jetty, thrusting out into the dark water.

At the jetty's end, lights showed. He moved cautiously, gun in hand, along the jetty. The lights came, he saw now, from the deck-cabin ports of a small steam yacht, moored to the jetty. The yacht's side loomed a foot or two above the level of the jetty. As the yacht rocked on the incoming tide he could hear her side scraping and straining against the planks of the jetty.

He broke into a quick, silent run, gained the end of the jetty, crouched down beneath the level of the yacht's side. He listened, holding his breath.

Footsteps sounded on the deck, coming close. The footsteps stopped. Peering up, he saw the dim outline

[Turn Page]



From a MEDICAL JOURNAL: "The researches (of these doctors) led them to believe that colds result from an acid condition. To overcome this, they prescribe various alkalies."

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of a man's head and shoulders; he was leaning against the rail, not two paces from where Fitz crouched. Very cautiously Fitz twisted the gun in his hand, gripping the squat barrel. He leaped.

HIS pistol took the guard on the side of the head, over the ear. Without a sound, the man went limp, slumped against the rail. He did not fall.

Fitz gripped the rail, climbed up, peering each way along the deck. Lights from the cabin ports barred it with alternate stretches of dark and brightness. He could see nobody. He slung his legs over the rail, dropped down on to the deck. Silently, on his toes, he moved along the deck, peering by turn into each of the lighted ports.

He stopped, going rigid. Through the round port of one of the deck cabins he looked upon a strange and sinister scene. Along the wall opposite the port, six men were lined, their arms pinioned to their sides by cords which secured them to the wall. Each one of these men was hooded. Between them, bound as they were bound, was a girl, her face pale against her hair, her wide, blue eyes looking straight before her. Beth!

At a table in the middle of the cabin another man sat. The table faced obliquely the six bound men and the girl. The man at the table was hooded. As Fitz watched, the man at the table rose to his feet, pulling back the hood of his robe. Smiling thinly, Anselm Morrison, olive-skinned, with a neat, pointed beard and mustache, sat down again at the table. Fitz' eyes gleamed. He had been right!

Upon the table before him were eight thick wads of parchment, each wad secured neatly by an elastic band. There were also an automatic and a small, black briefcase. Morrison was speaking. Through the open port his words came clearly to Fitz.

"Gentlemen, for the lamentable tragedy which is shortly to occur, involving the loss of seven lives, you

may thank the man called Terry Magill. Had he not forced my hand, you might have lived quite a while yet. As it is, I have been compelled to adopt cruder methods." He touched the wads of parchment on the table before him.

"In a minute or two we shall put to sea, leaving behind us the strife which no doubt is being waged now on Ringer's Wharf. You go to your deaths; I remain with your seven million dollars—your contributions, gentlemen, to the fighting fund of the league against blackmail. Watch! You may be interested!"

The blank eyeholes of the bound and hooded men were upon him. Beth, too, watched. Not one of them noticed the face at the port. Fitz waited, knowing what was coming.

MORRISON drew toward him the black briefcase, flipped it open. From it he took a small bottle, tipped it up to moisten his fingertip lightly along the edge of his beard and mustache. With a curious rubbing motion he removed both beard and mustache from his face. Thinly smiling, he drew toward him another bottle, poured a little of the liquid from it into the palm of his hand, began gently to rub his face.

"Behind the wall mirror over your heads, gentlemen," he continued, "there is concealed a considerable quantity of high explosive. On the outside of the wall there is an electric light, marking exactly the position of that explosive. Presently when we near the mouth of the river, my men and myself will transfer on to another yacht I have in readiness.

"From the deck of the second yacht, a neat shot at that electric light marking the position of the explosive will cause a most deplorable upheaval from which I gravely doubt whether you will emerge alive. But I shall not be greatly concerned, gentlemen, for I shall be on my way to another country. Though there is in me a certain amount of white blood, my heart is all for that other country."

He reached behind him. Another man stepped into Fitz' line of vision, placing something in the killer's hand—a green turban!

"That other country, gentlemen is—*India!* You will have the satisfaction, as you die, of knowing that your money is aiding the cause of India against the white man!" He rose abruptly, donning the turban. He bowed ironically. "Gentlemen, Vedas Kritana, alias Anselm Morrison, alias the Specter—Vedas Kritana, the man who blackmailed you all of millions, then made you pay millions to defeat the blackmailer!" He laughed harshly. "Gentlemen, we are putting to sea—your last voyage!"

He turned sharply. Fitz ducked down from the port, his gun ready in his hand.

Three yards from him the door of the cabin opened. A turbaned Hindu stepped out on to the deck. Fitz leaped, swinging the butt of the gun at the man's head. The Hindu went down. Fitz stepped into the doorway.

"Kritana, put up your hands!"

They faced each other, Fitz in the doorway, hatless, his shabby suit sodden with rain, his brown face haggard and deathly grim, his gun menacing the half-white; Kritana, his back to the table and the bound prisoners, his face darkened by some stain to the hue of an Indian, aquiline, cruel as a condor. In his black eyes there burned a strangely luminous, unnatural glow.

"Mr. Terry Magill!" his thin lips twisted, snarling.

His hands went up slowly above his green turban, with its wonderful single ruby.

"Kritana—"

Fitz got no further. A sudden warning shout from Beth cut across his words.

"Behind you! Oh, look out!" she cried.

He wheeled involuntarily. A figure hurtled at him, closed with him. They crashed down, fighting. The gun was knocked from his hand. Kritana pounced on it, snatched it up.

Fighting, rolling over and over with his assailant, Fitz whipped out a hand, catching the killer's ankle, bringing him down.

Outside, on the deck, there sounded the thud of feet.

"Police!"

Fitz fought clear, lunged to his feet, reeling back toward the bound victims.

Kritana was up, the gun still in his hand. His face was twisted with rage.

"Police!" he shouted crazily. "You have brought them here, Magill! Then you die—all of you! I win in the end—I win!"

His gun went up, covering the wall mirror a little to Fitz' left, the mirror of death, behind which was the store of high explosive.

There was no time to reach him across the floor.

Fitz leaped, sideward and up, covering the mirror of death. The pistol cracked simultaneously.

The mirror remained intact.

But the next second, when Barney Conklin and Inspector Mort raced into the cabin, grappled with Kritana and overcame him, Fitz lay unmoving on the floor.

CHAPTER XII

THE END OF MR. FITZGERALD



POLICE INSPECTOR MORT walked jauntily into Headquarters.

"Eleven dead, sixteen wounded," he said grimly. He tossed his hat on his desk. "How's your shoulder, Magill?"

The late Mr. James Fitzgerald grinned slightly. He was very pale under his tan. His right arm was in a sling, and there was a strip of adhesive tape on his right cheek. His hair, no longer dark with a touch of grey over the temples, was fair and crisp.

"I'm okay, now, thanks."

Beth, standing beside him, patted his unwounded hand.

"He's nothing of the kind, Inspector, and I won't have him bothered with a lot of talk. Where's

that boat you promised to get to take us to Miami?"

"It's outside now, Miss," the inspector said cheerfully. He grinned. "And to think I was after you for murder only a few hours ago. Well, you're out of it now, both you and Magill. Kritana's confessed, and we found McGurn wounded, on Ringer's Wharf. He told the truth—cleared you entirely."

"That was some fight on the pier, eh?" Terry Magill asked.

"Eleven dead and sixteen wounded. And we captured about twenty others. A swell job, thanks to the tip you sent us by Conklin here. But, tell me, Magill, when did you discover that Morrison and Kritana were one and the same man?"

"I discovered the truth," Terry Magill said, "when I faced the hooded man I believed to be Morrison at the very end of my interview in his house. Through the eye-holes in his hood I saw his eyes. They had that queer, luminous glow peculiar to Kritana's eyes, Inspector. Worse luck, I could do nothing then, for I'd parted with my gun, and he had it. But I argued that he'd have to order the attack because the others had voted for it, and he'd have betrayed himself as a doublecrosser if he'd withheld the order."

"MY only chance was to get away when the fight started and land him somehow at that place where he was waiting with his hooded victims. Luckily, Barney had followed me, and I was able to send word to the station here about what was going on. I arrived at his yacht"—he pressed Beth's hand—"just in time!"

"You certainly did," Mort said grimly. "Well, we've got the truth now. Kritana's half Hindu, half English, but he hates his English blood. Calling himself Anselm Morrison, he organized the International Loan Company, and then he discovered, in the way of his business, lots of opportunities for blackmail, so in order to grasp those opportunities he created Veda Kritana—his

real name, by the way—the mysterious Hindu blackmailer.

"When he saw that his victims were getting desperate he had the gall to approach them in his rôle as Anselm Morrison, with a scheme for smashing Kritana—himself. He got them to put down negotiable bonds to the extent of a million each, as a fighting fund. One by one eventually, he intended to kill them off, so that the money—according to the arrangement—would revert to him.

"When you forced him into that fight, Magill, he decided to risk everything, and kill the five remaining members of the league, in one grand slam."

"And the reason," Terry Magill said quietly, "that he captured Beth on the night of Doane's murder, and framed her as he did, was because he had to explain to McGurn and the others, the source of his discovery of the identity of the members of the league. Otherwise McGurn would have wondered how he got his knowledge, see? I began, I think, to get a little suspicious about how he discovered that Cavour was a member of the league, when she told me that Kritana got nothing out of her, because she knew nothing."

Mort nodded.

"Kritana wanted to use her, too, as against Cavour; and the reason he bribed McGurn, Remsen, and Saphir into his mob, was because the original members of his gang were getting nervous owing to the rumors in the underworld about the men who were out to get Kritana. He never confided in a soul, except his Hindus, that he was both Kritana and the Specter. His disguises were perfect. The reason he killed Lu Wendel, his own lieutenant, was because the league was getting restive about lack of results."

"What about the other members of the league?" said Magill.

"Forget 'em," Mort said. "I've released 'em. I know who they are, but I'm giving no names, and I'm asking no questions. They were duped from beginning to end, and they've paid heavily, the poor dev-

ils. It's best to forget all about 'em, eh?" He rose. "Well, I'll go and see if that boat's ready. I've got an interview with a perjurer and a killer ahead of me. Max Kelton doesn't know what's happened yet. We've been holding him for cross-examination about Alban Doane's murder. He's got a shock coming!"

THE inspector held out his hand, grey eyes kindly in his big, red face. "You saved quite a number of lives, Magill, when you jumped in front of that mirror—mine was one of 'em. If you don't bear any hard feeling for—er—past attention, I'd like to shake hands."

Terry Magill, alias Fitz, grinned cheerfully, offering his hand.

"The left hand, Inspector, I'm afraid, but the feeling's right!"

"Thanks!" Mort said.

He shook hands and went out. Magill looked at Barney Conklin. He winked. The little man stood up, grinning.

"I can't 'elp you in a case like this, Boss!"

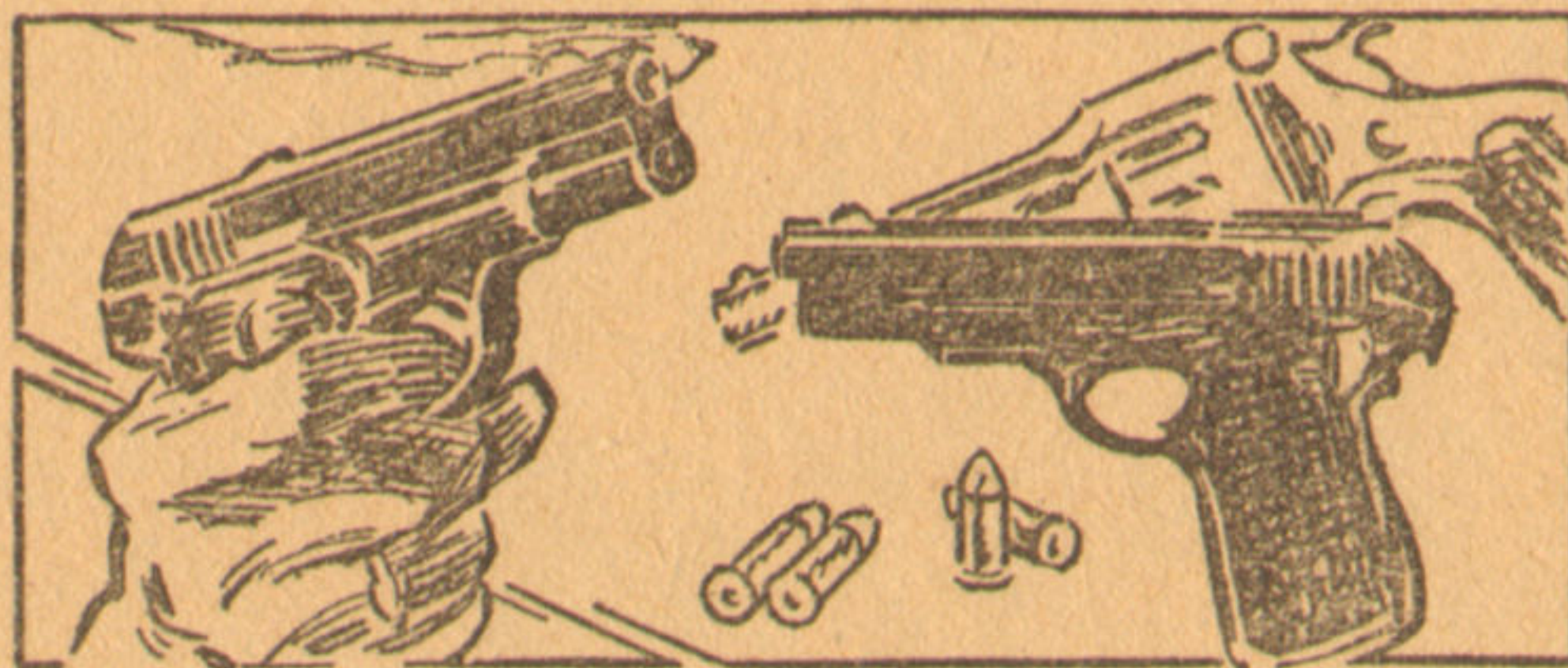
Terry looked at Beth. She smiled, her blue eyes very bright, a faint, delicate color creeping into her cheeks. Terry pressed her hand.

"I don't think I need any help, Barney, thanks! I'm only going to finish a little story that I started last night. Tell us when the boat's ready. We'll be waiting."

"Wot-'o!" said Barney.

But twenty minutes later the situation was reversed. The boat was waiting for them.

They weren't in such a hurry, after all.



IN THE NEXT ISSUE

SOMEONE ALWAYS DIES

An Exciting Full-Length Murder Mystery Novel

By G. T. FLEMING-ROBERTS

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No Cause for Alarm

Detectives, a sergeant, and uniformed men had arrived at the scene



*Patrolman Tim Brady Is Torn Between Fire and Loot—
and Finds the Answer to a Riddle!*

By **JOHN L. BENTON**

Author of "The Well of Murder," "Vain Escape," etc.

PATROLMAN TIM BRADY fastened his black rubber rain-coat closer about his husky broad-shouldered form.

It had been raining ever since he had come on duty for the mid-

night to eight A. M. patrol and now he was wet and cold.

He reached the door of Harrison's Jewelry Shop and tried the knob. His eyes narrowed as the door swung open to his touch. There was a single

single electric light bulb burning in rear of the store. No one in sight.

There were two things which worried the big patrolman. The first was the unlocked door, and the second the electric burglar alarm that was connected to the door and which was not ringing. It might be that John Harrison or his two clerks had neglected to switch on the alarm when they had left the store, but it seemed unlikely. All three of them were methodical men, as Brady knew.

"I don't like it," exclaimed the patrolman, opening his raincoat and drawing out his service revolver. "There's something wrong here. I—"

HE glanced over his shoulder, caught a red glow out of the corner of his eye. Halfway down the block a fire had suddenly started in a tin trash receiver. Brady uttered a startled curse as the red glow revealed what appeared to be the legs and the lower part of the body of a man whose head and shoulders had been wedged into the trash can.

Brady hesitated for an instant. Down the block a man was apparently burning to death and in front of him was a jewelry shop which might be robbed. Human life was the first consideration — so he dropped his gun back into the pocket holster and raced to the burning trash can.

He reached it and grabbed at the legs sticking out over the side of the container. A sickening wave of horror swept over him as he found himself holding the lower part of a body. What had been the head and torso were merely charred embers. The fire in the can was dying down, and now there was only a few flickering flames that hissed and then disappeared as the rain struck them.

Brady stood there cursing as he held the trousers in his hands. Beneath the cloth the legs felt hard and there was a wax-like odor mingling with that of the smoke from the trash can.

"A dummy!" snapped Brady.

"That's what this thing is. One of them clothing-store dummies that somebody put in the trash can!"

He dropped the dummy on the sidewalk and started back toward the jewelry shop on a run. He came to a sliding halt at the door and grasped the knob. The door did not open—it was locked!

Brady peered in through the glass and saw that the night light was no longer burning inside the shop. He whirled as he heard a slight sound in the shadows to his left, but he was too late. A dark form lunged toward him, then a heavy object crashed down on his head and he dropped to the sidewalk unconscious.

He recovered his senses to find that he was still sprawled out on the sidewalk. A green coupé with the familiar lettering of a prowler car had drawn up to the curb, and behind this a squad car containing four detectives and a sergeant stopped. Two uniformed figures ran up to Brady and picked him up. Two patrolmen from the burglar alarm association had also appeared on the scene.

"Phone Harrison and have him come here at once," ordered Detective-sergeant Doyle, and a detective moved away to obey instructions. Doyle turned to the patrolman. "All right, Brady. Now tell us what happened."

Brady told his story slowly and carefully, explaining how he had discovered the door of the jewelry shop unlocked, and then had seen the man apparently burning to death in the trash can.

Doyle listened silently until Brady had finished, and then led the way down the street to the trash can. The patrolman frowned as he followed. There was no longer any sign of the half-burned clothing-store dummy.

"You say there was a fire in this can?" Doyle turned on his electric torch as he spoke. Both men looked inside the can. It was empty and the tin had not been blackened in the slightest degree. "It doesn't look like it now."

"Mebbe I'm crazy!" Brady reached into his pocket and drew out his handkerchief to mop his moist face. As he did so an object wadded in paper dropped to the ground. "You'll be thinking I dreamed the whole thing."

Doyle was not paying any attention as he reached down and picked up the paper wad. He opened it and revealed a small roll of bank notes. The detective-sergeant read what had been scrawled on the paper by the light of the electric torch.

"Here it is," read the scrawled lines. "Thanks for being a wise guy."

That was all. Doyle gave Brady the flashlight to hold as he slowly counted the crumpled bills.

"FIVE hundred dollars," he said finally. "Guess you have your own ideas, Brady, but when I was a patrolman my job was worth more than that to me."

"But, Sergeant, I didn't have anything to do with robbing the jewelry store. I—" Brady realized there was no use saying anything more. He had been framed, the money and note planted on him by the man who had knocked him out. "There was a burning trash can with what looked like a body in it," he said half to himself. He glanced across the street where there was the foundation of a building. "They switched the cans—that's it."

Under protest he finally got Doyle to follow him across the street. In the excavation they finally succeeded in finding the scorched trash can and part of the burned dummy.

"I'll believe part of your story, Brady," said Doyle finally. "But this doesn't clear you of the bribe angle. We'll go back to the jewelry shop now."

When they reached the shop John Harrison and his two clerks, Sam Grey and William Stanley had arrived. Harrison was a thin, grey-haired man of fifty. Sam Grey was a short fat man with a face that made him look like a codfish. Stanley was young and dapper.

Harrison unlocked the door. As he did so the burglar alarm started to ring. It continued to do so until the store owner went inside and switched it off. One of the burglar alarm patrolmen followed him, and phoned the home office to report there was no cause for alarm—though the bell had just rung.

Lights gleamed in the shop as the police and the two clerks followed Harrison and the protective association watchmen inside. The jeweler went to the big safe in the rear of the shop. The doors were half open. Harrison went quickly through the small drawers in the safe. He was shaking as he turned to Detective-sergeant Doyle.

"At least fifty thousand dollars in unset jewels are gone!" he exclaimed. "Business has been bad lately. This about ruins me, Sergeant!"

"What about your insurance?" demanded Doyle. "Aren't you covered?"

"Well, that might do some good," said Harrison doubtfully. "At least, I hope so." The elderly man dropped weakly into a chair. "I've had so much trouble lately. First my brother's dry goods business failed and I've had to help him—and now this!"

Brady had been wandering about, seeking some means of clearing himself. There was a door in the rear of the shop. He opened it and glanced in. It was a small store-room. He stepped inside, switched on the electric light and then deliberately closed the door behind him. In one corner of the room he found a neatly piled stack of flat boards. Some of them were about eight feet long, others four feet. On one of the longer boards was stamped "Model Manufacturers."

The big patrolman studied it for a moment and then he caught a glimpse of something gleaming in a dark corner of the room. He discovered it was a five-gallon kerosene tin. He lifted it and found it was nearly empty.

"That might be it," murmured Brady. "But I've got to prove it to Doyle."

He returned to the front of the shop. Doyle and his men were still there, so were the two watchmen from the Burglar Alarm Protective Association. The detective-sergeant glanced at the patrolman as Brady appeared.

"Find anything?" asked Doyle.

"Enough to make me certain this was an inside job!" stated Brady.

"Trying to save himself," said Sam Grey with a sneer. "We know that he is suspected of having been bribed by the crooks. The sergeant told us."

"Thanks, Doyle," Brady glared.

"Never mind that," said Doyle.

"Let's hear what you have to say, Brady."

"ALL right," said the big patrolman. "In the first place this whole thing was timed so that I could be used as a goat. The person who planned the robbery knew what time I usually passed this shop on my rounds. He left the door unlocked so that I would find it that way and know there was something wrong. When he saw me at the door he set fire to the dummy in the trash can."

"Dummy in the trash can?" demanded Harrison. "What's he mean by that? It sounds fantastic."

"Which was just the way it was planned," went on Brady. "Doyle didn't believe that either until we found the can and dummy—and they both had been half burned. The fire in that can burned very quickly because someone had poured kerosene into the can and on the wax dummy. You'll find the kerosene can back in that storeroom."

"What of it?" demanded Stanley; the dapper young clerk suddenly seemed nervous. "Anyone might have a can of kerosene around the place."

"Sure," said Brady, "Someone around here is very methodical and saving. So much so that they went to the trouble of taking a big packing case apart in order to save the boards. A packing case from the Model Manufacturers that originally contained the clothing-store dummy. He got it from his brother's store."

"But who did all this?" demanded Doyle, as the big patrolman paused.

"Harrison robbed his own shop," said Brady. "For the insurance, I guess. What he probably did was have the unset jewels insured for fifty thousand, then cut them up and mounted them and sold them wholesale without telling the insurance company. This robbery is merely an attempt to collect on jewels that are no longer in his possession. Such things have happened."

"He's lying!" exclaimed Harrison excitedly. "Trying to clear himself after receiving a five-hundred dollar bribe to let outsiders rob my store."

"That's all I wanted to know," said Doyle. "You admitted everything right then, Harrison. I told about Brady being bribed hoping someone would make a slip. You did it when you said he received five hundred. Only Brady, myself and the man who planted it on him knew the sum."

"Trouble with him is that he's too methodical," said Brady, as one of the detective's placed the handcuffs on Harrison. "Who ever heard of a robber switching on a burglar alarm after it had been turned off like Harrison did here tonight, and then locking the door of the shop? That was just force of habit, and it was the first thing that gave him away to me."

"Yeah, we've been waiting to learn more about that angle," said one of the protective association watchmen. "We got the usual owner's signal that all was well when Harrison first unlocked the door tonight. Then a little later he phones in and tells us to send some men around; he'd been robbed."

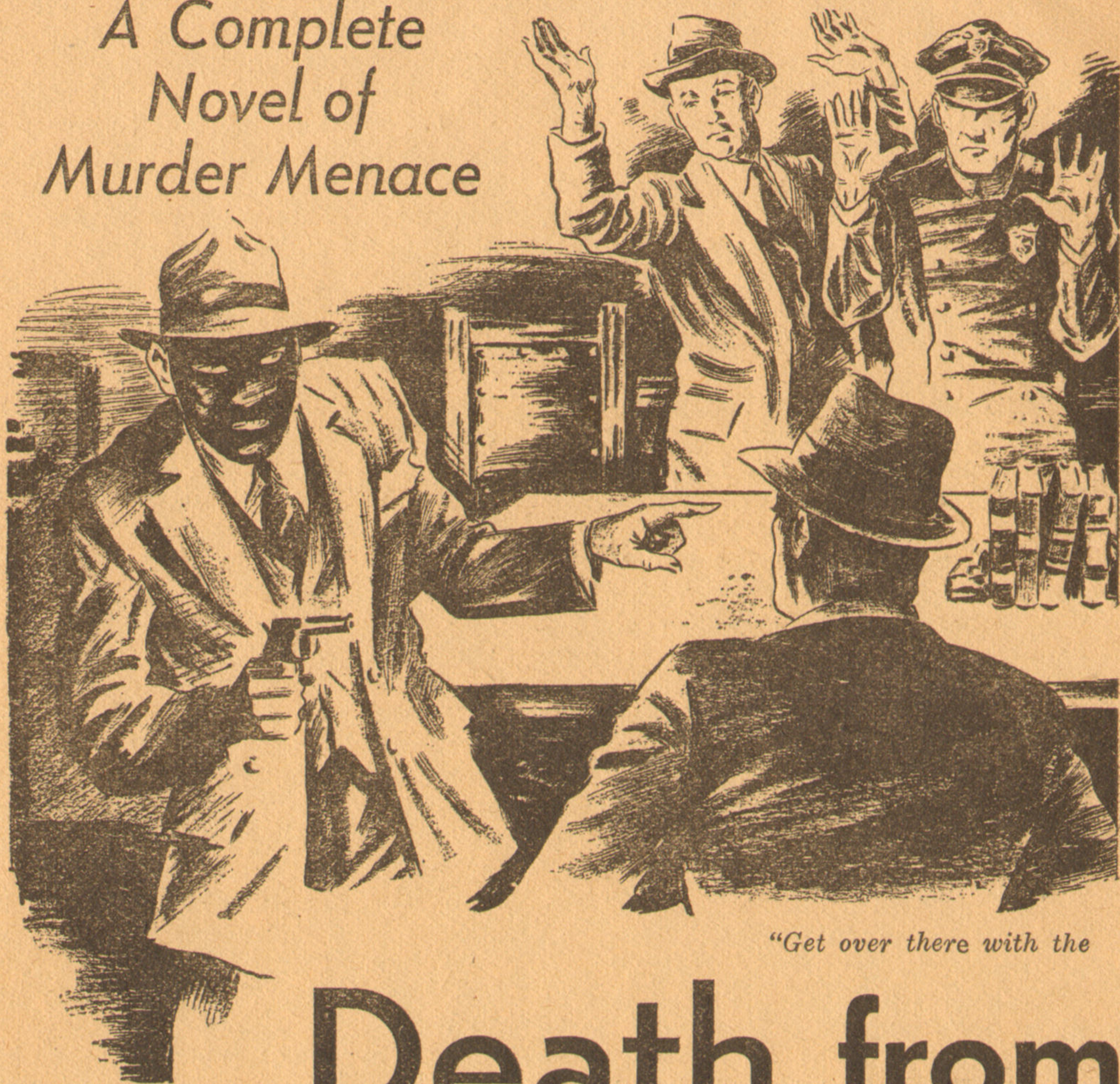
"He phoned the police, too," said Doyle. "But he tried to disguise his voice and refused to give his name." The detective-sergeant glanced at the big patrolman. "I'm beginning to think that I could use you, Brady. I'll see what can be done about it."

Brady glanced out at the rain.

"I'd better get back on my beat," he said. "I still have two hours to go." He grinned. "Nice night for a murder or something!"

The Celluloid Burglar Stamps His Trade-

*A Complete
Novel of
Murder Menace*



"Get over there with the

Death from

CHAPTER I

THE CELLULOID BURGLAR

INSIDE the luxuriously furnished penthouse living room, three men sat about a big mahogany table that had been drawn up into the center of the floor. They were oblivious to the drizzle that beat against the windows, oblivious to the vistas of misty lights that spread

beyond the shrubbery-decorated terrace outside the windows.

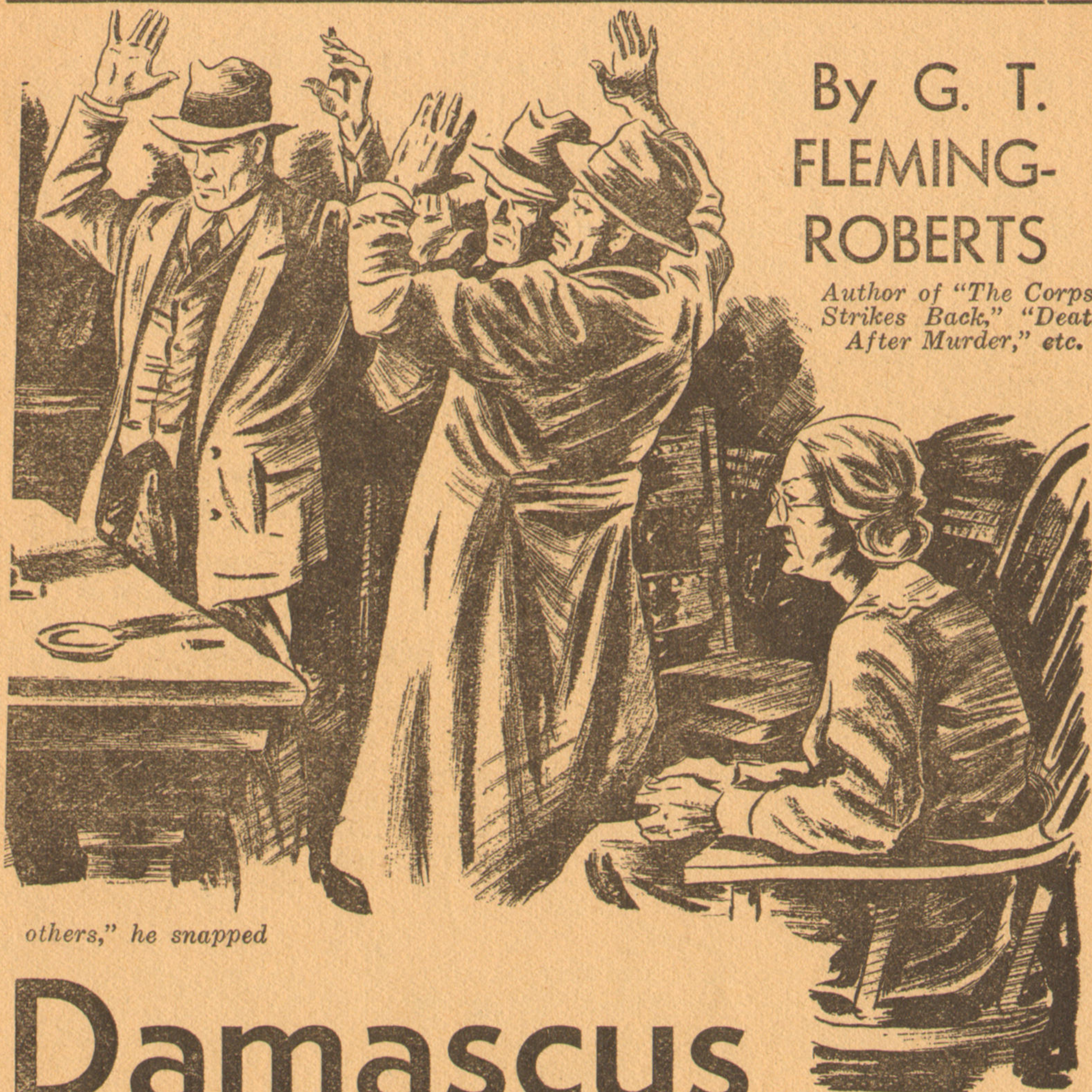
On the table before them lay great stacks of banknotes that one of the three men was carefully dividing. His long, slender, immaculately manicured fingers rippled swiftly through the crisp notes. His thin, handsome face contrasted strangely with those of his two companions who leaned forward, tensely

A Knife with Wings Takes Deadly Toll—

Mark on an Unpatented Murder Case!

By G. T.
FLEMING-
ROBERTS

*Author of "The Corpse
Strikes Back," "Death
After Murder," etc.*



others," he snapped

Damascus

watching. He wore his smartly tailored evening clothes with the same ease that the other two wore their ill-fitting, cheap suits.

But his small, too closely set eyes now had a greedy gleam that was a match for that in the piggish eyes of his ill-assorted acquaintances. The big, hulking man at his right suddenly grinned, showing snagged teeth.

"Some snatch, eh, Boss?" he said huskily, exultantly. "And safe as a church."

"Safe, yes," the man counting the bills said. "But I'm wondering if you and Slick should have come here for the split."

"So what?" the small, pasty-faced man whined. "We can git out the back way same as we come, without nobody seeing us." He stirred rest-

and the Stake is a Priceless Dagger!

lessly. He had the jittery look of a dope addict whose jangled nerves craved a precious shot.

"Yeah," the big man growled. "What's the worry? Everything went off like clockwork. There ain't a clue for the police to work on. And who'd ever guess a swell like you was mixed up with lugs like us? Hell, Boss, this job was a cinch."

The man in evening clothes smiled. "I imagine you're right, Bull. It was safe and profitable."

A voice came from behind them abruptly, and three heads jerked around as if they were on strings.

"Don't be so sure of that, Stanley Grimshaw!"

For one startled instant the three men stared at the awesome figure that had suddenly materialized out of the darkness of the room beyond and stood outlined against the draperies over the doors. A black mask that glittered like polished ebony hid the man's features. Two menacing eyes bored at them through the slanting eye slits of the mask. A hand held a small gun trained on the three men, a gun that seemed pitifully frivolous compared to the heavy .45 automatics that lay on the table.

BUT they did not lie there for long. As one man, the three at the table made a grab for those automatics. Three shots rang out simultaneously. But they were not quick enough. Three other shots had spat from that small gun in the masked man's hand an instant before the .45's roared.

The two thugs at the table yelled curses as their guns magically flew from their hands, and blood spurted from shattered wrists. Their bullets dug into the floor at the masked man's feet even as he ducked Grimshaw's shot and his own sped accurately at the leader's legs. He had known that Grimshaw, more unused to guns than his companions, would be slower. Therefore, he had attended to Grimshaw with the third shot from the .25.

Grimshaw sank to the floor, cursing and groaning, blood spouting

over his smart evening trousers from a shattered leg bone.

The masked man shot across the room as if propelled from a catapult. Bull and Slick were groping blindly on the floor for their guns. One well placed slam along the side of the head from the butt of the small .25 and Bull went down, a loud *whoosh* torn from his lungs. One blow from the masked man's powerful fist and the small hophead reeled across the room. He lay where he fell, his teeth chattering as his piggish eyes darted glances at that shiny black mask.

"Don't shoot! Don't shoot!" he whined. "I'll talk! I'll tell everything! Grimshaw, he—"

The masked man whirled from Slick contemptuously, faced the wounded Grimshaw who was crawling for the nearest of the guns; crawling desperately, determinedly, with murder in his slitted eyes.

The masked man was across the room in a flash. Grimshaw yelled as pain stabbed through his wounded leg, when the masked man grabbed it, and jerked just in time to prevent Grimshaw's fingers from closing over the gun butt.

"Shut up!" growled the masked man. "Or would you rather I taped your rotten lips as you taped old Steven's lips?"

"You can't get away with this, you damned hijacker!" Grimshaw snarled. "I'll—"

The masked man slapped him in the mouth.

"There's plenty you and your kind of lice can't get away with. You're about to find out some of them."

His hands were working swiftly, expertly, as he tied Grimshaw with heavy curtain cord, crammed a gag into the raging leader's mouth. Then he started toward Slick with more of the cord.

"Lemme go!" shrieked the quivering hophead. "I'll talk, I tell you! I'll talk!"

"Tell it to the cops," said the masked man curtly, and proceeded with his task. A few swift moments later, he had the unconscious Bull

tied and gagged, too. He dragged the three bound men to the center of the floor and laid them side by side.

Then he turned and picked up the telephone from a nearby stand, and dialed Police Headquarters.

"Give me Commissioner Brady," he said, when he got his connection. "Nobody else. The commissioner, I said! It's about the Stevens kidnaping."

That got him action, as he had known it would. The Stevens case was a thorn in the side of the police. The newspapers had been riding them plenty for not solving it. All they knew to date was that Malcolm Stevens had been kidnaped, that he had been returned to his home upon payment of twenty-five thousand dollars ransom. The police had not been called in until the ransom was paid.

The masked man began speaking rapidly into the phone as soon as he heard Brady's gruff voice. "Commissioner, you'll find the men who did the Stevens snatch tied up and ready for your boys." Quickly he gave the name of the owner of the apartment and the address. He grinned at the sputtering on the other end of the wire.

"That's right," he continued. "Stanley Grimshaw, the handsome playboy is the kidnap gang's leader. No, his dough doesn't come from Wall Street. He doesn't have to work because he's the brains of this snatch gang. With him are two of his lugs. That's the way he worked it. A penthouse for a front and the lugs to do the dirty work— He had Stevens hidden in his fancy apartment. Bring Stevens along—he's said he could recognize the men by their voices and that he caught a glimpse, a peculiar scar on somebody's hand. Grimshaw has a scar and I was careful not to obliterate it— I shot him in the leg—

"Yes, the dough's here, but it won't be for long. It's going back to the Stevens family. No, thanks, Commissioner, I'm leaving now. Don't let Grimshaw fool you. There's a hophead here who'll talk plenty

for you. Good-by, Commissioner. This is the Celluloid Burglar signing off."

Grinning, the masked man slammed the phone down, turned to the table. He picked up the stacks of banknotes, stuffed them into his deep pockets. Then from an inside pocket he drew out a wallet and extracted from it a thin piece of black celluloid about the size of a calling card. Carefully wiping both sides of it with his handkerchief, he dropped it, with a chuckle, on Grimshaw's chest.

After one last look at the men on the floor, he slid into the darkness of the rear room. The Celluloid Burglar was gone—as swiftly and silently as he had come.

AN hour later Police Commissioner Brady sat frowning before his desk in his private office at Headquarters. Seated in a chair beside the desk, smoking a cigarette, was Detective-sergeant Harrison Hasty, ace detective of the department, known affectionately as "Pretty Damn Hasty."

Commissioner Brady pounded the desk, his face apoplectic.

"But I tell you, Hasty, we've got to get that damn Celluloid Burglar! He's not only broken every law on the books, but he's made a monkey of the department again! Handing us those kidnapers on a silver platter! The newspapers will never stop harping on that!"

Hasty grinned. "Better than the kidnapers handing us an empty platter, Commissioner. That Celluloid Burglar gets results even if he does break a couple of laws."

The commissioner groaned. "You, too! That's all I hear. We've got to get him, I tell you! The whole town's laughing at the Police Department."

"How can we get him? We don't have any clue to who he is or where to look," Hasty said, grinding out his cigarette in an ash tray.

"Probably has a gang of his own," Brady snorted. "I don't know how he finds out things, but he doesn't do it legally. If there are any clues

around, why can't you run them down as well as he? Or maybe we'd better begin calling you 'Pretty Dumb Hasty' instead of Pretty Damn!"

"I wasn't on the Stevens case, Commissioner," the detective said quietly. "And from what I hear, there *weren't* any clues around."

The commissioner snorted again. "Well, you're on a case now. I want you to get that Celluloid Burglar! I want that masked man brought in. I don't care if he did give us the Stevens kidnapers. The fact remains, this man is a law breaker, and I want him. Get going, Hasty!"

CHAPTER II

A CALLING CARD



THE library of the Thomas Nelson mansion was of generous proportions. Shadows in the corners lay murkily beyond the rays of the single, green-shaded lamp on the desk in the center of the room. The furniture loomed up as dim, shadowy forms of grotesque blackness.

A heavy silent tenseness hung over the whole room, and was reflected in the features of the man who sat before the huge mahogany, glass-topped desk in the pool of light.

The man at the desk was fat. The room was warm, with the long damask curtains pulled tightly across the ceiling-high and floor-low windows, so that not a breath of air came in from the broad, sweeping lawns outside. Yet neither the man's obesity nor the room's warmth would justify the sweat that oozed down over his forehead to lose itself in the folds of flesh that bulged above a collar that looked too tight. He sat there, tense with a tautness that was alien to his usually indolent, flabby muscles, looking as if he waited for the very hand of death to strike.

It was obvious that the green light that filtered through the lamp shade was not wholly responsible

for the sickly pallor around his heavy jowls. Apprehension, the more terrifying because it was so vague, an apprehension that had grown to startling proportions during the past half hour, had left its mark on the selfishly complacent features of Thomas Nelson, the tight-fisted millionaire who drove bargains that drew blood.

Never in his hard career had Nelson feared the wrath of his fellow-men, nor their disapproval of his miserly grasping. But he was afraid now! And he was a wraith. A man whom Thomas Nelson had never seen, and for all he knew, did not really exist, had thrown a scare into the millionaire that no one had ever been able to duplicate before. A piece of paper in his white, puffy fingers that so often had signed the death warrant to men's hopes, trembled as he held the paper closer to the light. He stared at it with pale blue eyes that naturally protruded slightly, but now threatened to pop from their sockets.

It was a perfectly blank piece of paper, as far as written or typed words were concerned. But it needed no words, no signature. For Thomas Nelson knew who had sent that wordless communication as well as though the name of the sender had been blazoned across the spotless white page in letters of fire.

His dry, thick lips formed soundless words:

"The Celluloid Burglar!"

A spasm of fright showed in the muscular reaction that shook his pudgy shoulders and rippled to the stubby fingertips, as he repeated the name aloud. It was an awesome name to any man whose conscience was not clear. And miserly, grasping Thomas Nelson knew it, as he knew that this message was an inexorable demand on him that could be ignored only at his own peril.

The Celluloid Burglar! A name to conjure with. A name to bless or curse, depending upon the state of your conscience. Many men and women had been forced to pay for their sins against humanity by the mysterious avenger. And Nelson

knew that he held in his hand the Celluloid Burglar's wordless demand that he, Nelson, pay for his ruthless sins against his fellow man.

And deep in his flinty soul the miserly millionaire knew that he would not be able to avoid paying the retribution demanded by this man who worked in the dark, whom no one knew, whose comings and goings were marked only by the fact that one more evil-doer had paid; or that one who had suffered had been paid.

No, Thomas Nelson was not the first man to learn that the Celluloid Burglar was no myth; that somewhere he did exist in the flesh; that, grimly, he kept his promises, when men he warned failed to do as he ordered.

Truly, the Celluloid Burglar had made himself felt in that great city. Hated by criminals, hounded by the police, who nevertheless took advantage of his proffered "tips," he stalked the shadows, extending the arm of justice to places too high for the arm of the law to reach, meting out punishment to the criminal who found protection in the cesspools of political corruption. And never a man had seen him, never had anyone claimed to have even a single clue to his identity.

The paper in Thomas Nelson's fingers fluttered to the desk as a sigh, half fright, half defiance, quivered from his thick lips. He knew what the Celluloid Burglar wanted of him, but he was refusing to pay! Too long had he coveted the priceless dagger that now reposed in his collection. The Prince of Damascus, a priceless steel dagger that was a thing of beauty, that sent quivers of ecstasy through his obese body at the very thought of it. Now that it was his he would never give it up!

His eyes stared at the square of paper that he now dropped to the desk. Beside it lay the ripped envelope, with his typewritten name, in which the card had come. Lying directly in the center of the blank paper was what at first appeared to be a shiny black dot of ink.



Professor Camocho

But it was not ink. It was a piece of gleaming black celluloid, neatly cut to resemble the contours of a face; and lightly attached to the card, two tiny, slanting eyes were clipped through the celluloid. A slit of a mouth in the tiny black mask was curved in a mirthless grin.

The trademark of the Celluloid Burglar! All the warning that he ever gave that a visit from him was imminent. Sometimes more than one card was sent, but it was his policy always to give any man a chance to repent before retribution overtook him.

THOMAS NELSON knew that tiny mask was a warning; knew its meaning. For too long the newspapers had broadcast stories of the mysterious man and his card of warning. Picture after picture of that fantastically grinning mask had been published and was known to every man, woman and child who could read.

And knowing the mercilessness with which the Celluloid Burglar had dealt with others to teach them justice, Thomas Nelson shivered now at this notice that *he* was on the silent avenger's calling list. Nor would it avail him to call for the police. He knew that had been tried before, and it never had helped. Somehow or other the Celluloid Burglar always made his threats good,

and so far even police cordons had been ineffective.

With sudden fury, Thomas Nelson ripped the tiny black mask from the paper card. He crumpled the card into a ball and threw it into the waste basket as though defiantly consigning with it the man who had sent it. Angrily jerking open a small drawer of his desk, he dropped the bit of celluloid into it, for no particular reason that he could have explained.

For a moment, before closing the drawer, he stared down at the little black mask. There were two other identical celluloid masks in that drawer beside the one he had put there. Would this be the last, this third threat? Or would there be more before the hand of vengeance struck?

NELSON stamped to his feet. He took a cigar from a humidor and tried to ignore the fact that the match in his hand was shaking so that he could scarcely bring it to the tip of his cigar. He crossed the library, entered the hall, and went to the coat closet.

As he was shrugging into his topcoat, another man entered the hall. He was short, broad of shoulder, long-armed; and the checkered suit he wore accented the length of limbs and hulking breadth. A gorillalike figure, and protruding lower jaw contributed to his simian aspect. But it was that very likeness which had led Thomas Nelson to hire Emil Ludson as his combined bodyguard, watchman, and general all-around factotum.

Days ago Nelson had discharged all the other house servants. When the first celluloid mask had arrived his suspicious nature had jumped to the conclusion that any one of his servants might be in league with the notorious masked burglar. None of those in his employ had any reason to be loyal to Thomas Nelson, as he well knew. None but the stodgy Ludson who had been with him for years and for some unaccountable reason had given the millionaire his undivided loyalty. Now

Nelson was in the great mansion alone with Ludson.

"Goin' out, Mr. Nelson?" Ludson inquired, a hint of surprise in his husky voice.

"Why, yes, Ludson. A little air will do me good." He added with assumed carelessness: "I may drop in at the theater." Then his voice dropped; there was a suspicion of a waver in it. "Take care of everything, Ludson. Let no one in the house. You understand?"

"Sure, Mr. Nelson. But I thought you had an appointment with that Spanish gent—Camocho, his name was, wasn't it? The one that's interested in art. You—"

"No, no!" Nelson said impatiently. "I won't be here. Don't let him in if he comes. Don't let anybody in, I said!" He passed a sweaty palm over his forehead. "I—I'm not feeling well," then clapped on his hat and hurried from the house.

Waiting outside the tall iron gates of the big, ornamental fence that enclosed the Nelson mansion and the broad grounds surrounding it, stood Thomas Nelson's big Lincoln car. It was outside the grounds instead of before the doors at Nelson's orders. He liked to walk down the sweeping driveway where all could see, and envy him. His ego was an insatiable thing that even fear could not squelch.

A uniformed chauffeur sat before the wheel of the car toward which Nelson walked hurriedly. He was about to enter the car, his foot on the running board, when he chanced to look up the street. There was an automatic furtiveness in that glance.

But the street was empty, except for two men who were coming down the sidewalk toward the millionaire. Headlights from the car reflected on the gleaming police badge one of them wore, and Nelson drew a breath of relief. He stepped back to meet the oncoming men.

"Er—Officer Clancy!" he called.

"Yes, sir." The policeman left his companion and stepped quickly to Nelson's side. "Good evening, Mr. Nelson," he said cordially. "Anything I can do for you?"

"Why—er—yes, Clancy. That is I mean—er—I'm going out this evening, and I just wondered if you'd seen anyone lurking around my place recently. Any suspicious



Detective-sergeant Hasty

characters, you might say." Nelson forced a laugh.

"Why no, sir," Officer Clancy said promptly. "I haven't seen a soul. Expecting trouble?"

"No—no," Nelson denied hurriedly. "That is, it's always a good idea to be careful; strange things have been happening in this town,

what with comic opera burglars abroad and all. Just wondered if you'd seen anyone to rouse your suspicions." He put a foot on the running board again. "You'll keep an eye on my place tonight?"

"Certainly, Mr. Nelson. I always do. It's on my beat."

"Well, then—" Nelson, looking over his shoulder, noticed that the man who had been walking with the policeman had disappeared up the shadowy street. "Er—Clancy," he said off-handedly, "who was that man you were just talking to?"

"Him?" Clancy laughed. "He's not a suspicious character, sir. That was Detective-sergeant Hasty, one of the best dicks on the force."

Nelson's laugh was a little easier. "Oh! I didn't recognize him. Well, good night, Clancy." He fished in his vest pocket a moment. "Have a cigar."

Clancy thanked the plainly disturbed Nelson, wondering a little at the millionaire's jitters. He stuck the cigar in his pocket and paced on up the street as the big car rolled away.

It may have been just as well for Officer Clancy's peace of mind that he could not see what was going on just beyond his range of vision, or know just where Detective-sergeant Hasty had gone when he disappeared. And it may have been just as well for Commissioner Brady's peace of mind that he was unaware that he had given the task of running down the Celluloid Burglar to the Celluloid Burglar himself!

For on the opposite side of the Nelson grounds, at that moment, the lanky figure of Detective-sergeant Hasty moved wraithlike through the shadows. Furtively he approached the high iron fence and waited a moment, listening. Then, swiftly, he seized a pair of black uprights, set foot on a cross-bar, and climbed over the fence with the agility of a cat. In and out of the shadows he moved, until finally he stopped in front of a clump of Japanese barberry bushes not far from the front door of the house.

"Lucky!" Hasty called softly.

CHAPTER III

THE PRINCE OF DAMASCUS



OBSCURED by the gloom, the head of Lucky McGee, ex-con Number 1313, thrust up from the barberry clump, suddenly.

"Wondered when you was goin' to show up, Boss," he whispered hoarsely. "This ain't no bed of posies to wait in." He stopped grumbling to say quickly, "Listen, I guess this is the time you been waitin' for, ain't it? I seen old Nelson just go out, and that leaves nobody here but that monkey watchman of his."

"Yes, I saw Nelson, too," said Detective-sergeant Hasty. "Yes, Lucky, this is the time."

There was a grim note in his voice as he spoke. The look in his eyes was hard, cold and he was thinking of something besides the problem at hand. He was thinking old old, half blind Mrs. Connell whose only son, a young detective detective, had been butchered in cold blood by a hopped-up gunman. Dick Connell had been one of Hasty's best friends; they had been as close as brothers all their lives.

Thomas Nelson had not been responsible for Dick Connell's death at the hands of the doped killer who had been caught, tried, and sentenced.

It was after Dick Connell's death that Nelson had come into the picture. He had put in his appearance like a patient vulture. Taking advantage of the old lady's sorrow, Nelson had inveigled Mrs. Connell into selling for the paltry sum of five hundred dollars, the almost priceless Prince of Damascus dagger that had been made for Melek-ed-Dhaher-Bibras in the time of the Crusades.

Thomas Nelson had known the dagger to be in Dick Connell's possession through the newspaper stories about the relic. He had offered to buy it from Connell, but the young private detective had refused to sell.

Only Detective-sergeant Hasty knew the answer to that refusal. Perhaps he was the only man now living who knew the real worth of that dagger. For he had been told by Connell that it was worth five times what Nelson had offered to pay him for it—and why. Dick Connell had bargained for the Prince of Damascus in the Orient when he had been on a world tour. He had invested his last cent in it, and knew he had acquired the bargain of a lifetime.

Dick Connell had been back from that tour but a short time, and had had no opportunity other than Nelson's offer to turn his treasure into cash. So the Damascus dagger was the only heritage Dick Connell had left his mother.

And Thomas Nelson had unscrupulously swindled an old woman who had no idea of even the intrinsic worth of what her son had left her!

And for a few hundred dollars, the relic that was worth thousands had become the property of the millionaire. It had gone in the private museum in Thomas Nelson's house, another of the ill-gotten treasures to feed the millionaire's vanity.

But Nelson would gloat no longer over his find. Detective-sergeant Hasty meant to make it his business to see to that. He would get that dagger back for Mrs. Connell and he would put the fear of the devil and all his dark angels into Thomas Nelson's black heart, as he did so.

Hasty was acting quickly to retrieve the dagger for he knew that other collectors, like vultures, had no scruples about the manner of their collecting. They would learn of its presence in Nelson's private collection. And knowing it to be no better guarded than by its glass case in Thomas Nelson's museum, by few burglar alarms that could easily be manipulated by an expert, and by *one* guard, there might be other attempts to steal the relic.

It was possible that some of these avid collectors had, in the guise of enthusiastic friends and admirers, already gained entrance to Nelson's

museum and examined the layout of the place. Nelson had a weakness for "showing off."

Hasty knew at least one man who would try just that, if he had not already done so. Charley Frank, a notorious jewel thief, cultured and polished, could carry off any rôle and was a master of disguise.

Yes, even Frank himself might soon be after that dagger, and Lord only knew how many others. If Hasty was to get it back, it behooved him not to linger on the manner of his "getting." And he hoped tonight to put it in a safe place for Mrs. Connell's future needs.

LUCKY MCGEE'S husky whisper brought him up sharp.

"All set?" asked Lucky. "What do I do next?"

"You stay right here," Hasty said.

He was standing stock-still, appraising the front of the house. He had a scheme but was wondering if it would work as smoothly in effect as it did on paper.

Lucky McGee's head rolled from side to side. "I can see what you're thinkin' of doin', Boss," he said mournfully, "and you're goin' to get in the grease without me."

"That's the chance I'm taking, the chance I've got to take, Lucky. Lay low, now. I'll let you know when I need you. My way of getting into places beats yours all hollow, anyway, and it's safer—for you."

McGee obediently ducked back into the bushes. For Lucky McGee knew but one law—the word of Detective-sergeant Hasty. It had been Hasty who had snatched him, a starved kid, from the gutter. It had been Hasty who had fed and clothed him when he had come out of prison and had failed to find honest work.

Detective Hasty battered his disreputable-looking hat down over his eyes, gave his shoulders a hunch, and shambled across the lawn. He mounted the steps of the Nelson mansion, crossed the veranda, and pressed the button of the doorbell. Concealed in his left hand was a

thin, transparent, and exceedingly tough piece of celluloid which he had drawn from his pocket.

He held it ready as he listened to the slow, cumbersome footsteps that approached the other side of the door. The porch light snapped on, casting a shadow from Hasty's hat brim across his irregular, commonplace, besmudged features.

The ape-faced Ludson opened the door. His undershot jaw didn't move as he challenged Hasty with a raucous "Yeah?"

"Friend," Hasty whined in a croaking voice, "can I get a cup of coffee here?"

Thomas Nelson's watchman stared Hasty up and down. "Just a bum, eh? Don't you know this is a ritzy neighborhood? And the front door, too! Hell of a nerve you got!"

As Ludson started to slam the door, Hasty took a step forward. Even as the door moved, his left hand shot out swiftly, darted toward the door jamb. As the door closed the thin strip of celluloid left the palm of his hand, remained against the door latch, neatly wedged between bolt and socket of the latch. With a feigned whine of pain, Hasty snatched his fingers off the jamb. From behind the door he could hear the watchman laughing.

Hasty slouched off down the driveway. But once out of sight of the house, he doubled back to the clump of barberry. Lucky McGee's head bobbed up like a jack-in-the-box.

"Here, McGee!" Hasty's voice was tense with excitement. "I've got to work fast now."

He handed his service automatic, a pair of regulation handcuffs, and his detective shield to McGee. Lucky handed him, in turn, a leather case. Quickly flipping back the lid Hasty removed from the case a second pair of handcuffs that were of a different pattern from those used by the police; several colored cylinders that resembled fountain pens, a full mask that was made of gleaming black celluloid and a small .25 caliber automatic which he dropped into his pocket. The mask was iden-



Hasty's hand darted to his gun

tical, except in size, to those sinister little pieces of celluloid that had caused Thomas Nelson so much concern.

The mask settled over his features, Hasty handed the empty case back to Lucky. His voice was muffled behind the black, mummylike face covering as he said:

"You go back to the car, Lucky. I'm going into that house now, but I may have to come out fast! Be ready for me."

And with his new equipment, which was so far removed from that which any police detective had ever carried, Detective-sergeant Hasty, the Celluloid Burglar now, slid like a shadow through the night, across the lawn, back to the house.

SLIDING silently onto the veranda. He crouched at the door, and listened for a minute. Not a sound came from inside. Straightening, he eased his shoulder against the door. It opened slowly, noiselessly. The strip of celluloid, with which he had prevented the door from locking, dropped to the sill. Stopping quickly he picked it up as he closed the door behind him without a sound.

He was grinning a little in the darkness, as with his handkerchief he hastily wiped the bit of celluloid free of fingerprints and dropped it before the door. That was his calling card. Always he left that to notify either the police or whoever found it that again the Celluloid Burglar had made his appearance at a place, either to bring promised retribution or to distribute largesse to the victimized.

When Thomas Nelson found that card tomorrow morning he would know where his Prince of Damascus had gone. But fear would keep him silent, keep him from reporting his loss to the police.

It was silent in the hall, dark as a tomb. Hasty's fingers counted along the tops of the fountain pens, in an orderly row in his breast pocket, and brought out one that was fitted with a small electric bulb and battery. His hand dropped for

an instant to his coat pocket to touch the cold butt of the gun. That small .25 was the only lethal weapon the Celluloid Burglar ever carried, and even it was never brought into play except in emergencies or for purposes of intimidation.

The tiny ray from his pen-light needled the blackness and darted from one piece of massive furniture to another until it centered on a wide, curtained doorway at the end of the hall. Hasty started walking toward it.

In the room beyond a light was suddenly switched on. Hasty dived for the door curtains, shrouding himself in their dark, musty-smelling length. He could see Ludson pacing through the living room on his regular rounds, head bent, forefingers in his vest pockets, deeply thoughtful over something and frowning.

AS the watchman left the living room and came through the doorway into the hall, Hasty sprang from the curtains. He jammed the snub nose of his small gun into Ludson's back. The watchman jumped and grunted a curse.

"Keep your hands where they are!" came a deep, commanding voice from behind the mask. "Turn around. March! Don't get any funny ideas that because this is a small gun it won't shoot."

Ludson cast one swift glance over his shoulder. A sharp breath caught in his throat as he saw the black, immobile mask. His face went ashy grey.

"The Celluloid Burglar!" he said.

"Keep moving!" Hasty said softly. He nudged the subdued watchman through the living room and into the dining room. At Thomas Nelson's heavy banquet table, the masked man halted his captive. "Down on your knees!" he commanded sharply.

The watchman turned his head, his eyes bulging.

"Don't!" he pleaded. "You—you wouldn't kill me, would you?"

"Down on your knees!" The voice



Camocho held a leveled automatic

behind the mask was relentless. "Put your right hand on the stretcher of the table."

The watchman obeyed. Hasty flipped handcuffs from his pocket. A click, and Ludson was firmly welded to the table. Bending down, his captor jerked the big automatic from Ludson's holster, and took a bunch of keys that bulged from the apelike watchman's pocket. He nodded in satisfaction, glancing at that table. It ought to take two men like Ludson to move it. Then as he arose, he tossed the big gun into a far corner, and backed toward the door.

"I will expect you to inform Mr. Nelson of my call." His voice held a slight note of mockery. "You will also tell him that he will find five hundred dollars in the museum. You need tell him no more unless you see fit to make up some interesting story about how you came to be watching his house from under the dining room table. But I think he will understand."

CHAPTER IV

THE KNIFE WITH WINGS



IN HIS official capacity, Detective-sergeant Hasty had visited the Nelson mansion before. Somebody had got away with one of Nelson's art treasures once, and the millionaire had kept the police department in an uproar until they had apprehended the thief and found the precious jade urn in a pawn shop. Hasty himself had run down that thief.

So he knew that the museum which was his objective was located beside the conservatory that opened out from the big living room, both being in a sort of ell that had been built on to the main house for that purpose. The same roof, which was of thick glass, over which was a layer of heavy wire mesh, covered both conservatory and museum. Hasty knew the mesh was electrified on the museum side. Nelson had considered himself cunning in in-

stalling that extra burglar device after the previous theft.

The museum was built lower into the ground than the conservatory to give it a vaultlike effect. The doorway opening into it from the conservatory and onto steps that led downward was of stone that had been transported, bit by bit, from an Egyptian tomb. The door itself, however, was of heavy steel fitted with a modern lock.

Standing before this door, now, Hasty examined it by the light of his flash. He knew that it was safe for him to tamper with, now. He had made sure of that. His first action after handcuffing Ludson had been to make a trip to the basement to turn off the juice that electrified that door and the roof wiring, though he was not concerned with the wire.

Looking over the keys he had taken from the watchman, he quickly selected the proper one. Swinging the door back noiselessly, he sent the tiny ray of his flashlight down the cold stone steps and into the body of the museum. A slight shudder slipped over him as there was wafted to him the smell of the musty staleness of a long closed tomb.

He started down the stone steps leading into the museum, trying to shake off the vague apprehension that had come to him the moment he had opened that door. A premonition that was like a warning whispering out of that deathly silence.

A shadow stood erect and silent at the foot of the stone steps. Hasty's light swept toward it, played over a stiff, stark statue of the goddess Isis. Hasty chuckled in his throat.

Still, an unusual tension gripped him. Something, he felt, was wrong about the place. He walked on past a gruesome, withered form of an Inca mummy resting in a glass case. Painted eyes on an Egyptian sarcophagus regarded him accusingly. His light darted from case to case of these relics of dead ages, witchery of past civilization.

Then the light ray struck something, and the light came to a halt. The dagger! With a hilt of richly etched gold mounted with rubies and sapphires, with its rippling, watered steel blade, the Prince of Damascus glowed dully against a satin-lined tray. And tray, table and dagger were all covered by a glass case anchored to the stone floor.

Suddenly Hasty's light snapped off. His jaws clicked hard together as his whole body tensed. From somewhere had come a strange tapping sound that echoed hollowly through the room. The museum was not wholly dark. The glass skylight that served for a ceiling let in enough of the moonlight for forms and shadows both inside and out to be distinguishable. The skylight was now a patch of silver from moonlight that slanted down upon it.

Hasty listened, at first unable to place the direction of the sound. But as the tapping went on like the macabre, evil omen of a clicking beetle, he moved backward a pace, staring at the floor. Then he saw, creeping along the floor directly toward the place where he was standing, a shadow. A chill slipped over him as he watched that shadow, like a gigantic spider, creeping slowly, inevitably, toward him.

Then a sudden thought pierced the horror that gripped him and Hasty's glance shot to the skylight. Crawling across the glass of the roof was a man, and it was his shadow that moved along the floor.

The man on the glass roof paused. A thin squeak penetrated the silence. Again the tapping sound. Hasty understood suddenly. The man on the glass roof had cut away the wire screening, and was now cutting a piece of glass from the skylight with a diamond cutter. A rubber suction-cup had enabled him to lift away the portion he had cut, and the circle of glass being lifted had made the squeaking sound.

And to Hasty went credit for the fact that the man up on the glass

roof had not been immediately electrocuted. For unquestionably had he known that the wire mesh was electrified, the prowler would not have taken such a chance.

So somebody else was after the Damascus dagger tonight, thought Hasty, realizing that he had not acted a moment too soon.

HASTY back-stepped, encountered a large, round-bellied urn, and ducked behind it just in time. The piercing beam of an electric torch slashed down through the gloom. The light wavered around the room, came to rest on the Damascus dagger in the glass case.

A puzzled frown knotted Hasty's brow. Of course this prowler was after the knife, but how did he expect to get it from the solid glass case from his position on the roof? For, as Hasty saw it, there was no way in which the man could reach the stone floor of the room. It was much too far from the ceiling for a man to jump safely. Neither the glass case nor the dagger, even if it had not been covered, offered a hold for a grappling hook in case the man attempted fishing for it.

Suddenly a black, indistinguishable object shot through the hole in the glass roof, performed a parabola, and struck the glass case. There was a crash, a tinkling as glass fragments rained on the floor, and in the top of the case was a jagged hole.

"Saved me the trouble!" thought Hasty. "Now if that chap would only turn out his light for a minute—"

He tensed himself for a spring across to the case. Then abruptly something was thrust through the hole in the skylight, something that looked like the barrel of a toy cannon.

Hasty sprang for the case, right arm extended to grab up the knife. There was a sharp, sinister hiss as that cannonlike object cut through the beam of light, moving at tremendous speed. Hasty felt the cold chill of the missile's wake as it sped by his head. And at the very mo-

ment his hand touched the top of the case, the Damascus dagger suddenly leaped like a salmon from a stream, was suspended in the air for one swift moment, then flew straight toward the skylight!

Choking back the startled exclamation in his throat, Hasty stood too amazed to move. He saw the gleaming blade slash across the flashlight's beam, swing back again, and approach the opening in the glass roof, following obediently in the wake of the cannonlike missile.

A HAND with long, gnarled brown fingers thrust down through the opening, clasped the knife by the hilt, and shook it once at the man standing beside the shattered glass case. For in that last moment the light from above had silhouetted Hasty in its glow, throwing the ebony mask of the Celluloid Burglar into bold relief. A triumphant laugh echoed through the museum, and it came from the hole in the roof.

The light went out abruptly. The prowler was gone, his shadow backing swiftly across the glass roof. Gone, too, was the priceless Damascus dagger that rightfully belonged to Dick Connell's mother!

Hasty pivoted and ran for the door, through which he had entered. He took the stone steps in two long leaps, barged through the steel door and into the conservatory, playing his light about the room. No one was there, so far as he could see at first glance. But that man with the Damascus knife had certainly come this way. There was no other way he could have come.

It would have been impossible otherwise to reach the high, vaulted roof of the museum, windowless and with its sheer walls too high to be scaled by anything less than the ladder of a fire apparatus. The man *must* have made his way to the museum roof by way of the conservatory. He must be here somewhere!

Hasty's eyes darted about, searching every inch of the place as his tiny flashlight beam searched, too.

Suddenly his breath rasped out in a sharp intake. There it was! Over in that far corner of the glassed roof.

A small skylight ventilating window was propped wide open. A heavy growth of wisteria climbed up a trellis on a wall directly beneath and beside it. Its heavy, woody branches that would easily support the weight of a small man were sagging down. The man who had clambered down that vine had been in a hurry.

Hasty gritted his teeth and swore as he dashed for the door leading to the living room. Which way had that fellow gone? He must not get away!

Suddenly he heard a muffled yell, that sounded like Ludson's voice. He could make out the words: "I know you, you—"

A shot rang out through the house. Hasty cursed fervently as he sped on. In this wealthy neighborhood, constantly patrolled by private watchmen and police, that shot could easily spell disaster for the Celluloid Burglar.

He bounded through the big, dark living room, through a small game room, and on into the dining room. In the doorway he jerked to a halt. The dining room table had been overturned. Somehow Ludson, with his gorilla strength, had been able to move it, to drag it across the room.

And now, folded across one of the table's knobby legs, his left arm dangling, his right arm chained to the table stretcher, was Ludson. Blood was forming a slowly growing pool on the floor. The still smoking revolver was on the floor beside him. And the long French windows leading to the lawn were wide open.

Hasty forgot that he was a prowler in forbidden places. Here was a murder—a crime committed only a few seconds ago, and seconds counted when the trail was hot.

He sprang across to the table, seized Ludson's shoulder, turned him over as far as possible. There

was a large round hole in the guard's shirt front, a hole too large to have been made by a bullet.

Blood pumped through it with a hideous burbling sound at every gasping breath of the dying man. The weapon, whatever it was, had drilled deep into his lung.

"Ludson!" Hasty said quickly, his eyes searching the man's grey face. "Can you hear me, Ludson? What happened? Who did this?"

The watchman's heavy eyelids sagged open. He stared unseeingly into the gleaming black mask close to his face.

The blood-flecked lips muttered: "The thin, brown man—the Damascus knife—I got over here—tried to shoot—missed—Something silver flew at me—flew away again—He was—" Blood welled into Ludson's throat, choked him. He sagged back across the table.

CHAPTER V

MURDER EVIDENCE



HASTY'S fists clenched and his lips tightened grimly. If Ludson could only have lived a few more seconds! Undoubtedly he had been on the verge of telling the name of his murderer, the man who had Dick Connell's knife. Now all that Hasty knew was that the thief had been someone who at some time or other had been a visitor at the Nelson place, for Ludson had recognized him, and had been killed for it.

Probably someone who had come there on the pretext of admiring the knife, as Hasty had thought some potential thief might do. But who? There had probably been so many that it would be like looking for a needle in a haystack for the man had got clean away with the Prince of Damascus.

Hoarse cries of "Open up!" shouted from outside the house startled Hasty. He leaped to his feet as a heavy shoulder smashed at the front door, rattling the very walls. Hasty raced back into the

living room, his eyes darting about for some exit. He dared not go out of the house through those dining room windows. The police would look out there first.

Across the gloomy living room interior, someone moved swiftly, noiselessly. Hasty twisted around and ran smack into a flying fist. The unexpected blow sent him reeling across the room. He struck something, there was a crash. He sprawled one way, his hat went the other. So the thief hadn't gone out the dining room window after all! He had been hiding here.

The French doors leading out onto the terrace burst open. Somebody else after the Damascus knife! Hasty had certainly picked a night when the whole lot of them were after it! Who in hell was this one? But he could get no idea of his attacker as he caught a glimpse of a gaunt figure legging off into the night.

Then a hoarse voice was shouting from the hall, the voice of Officer Clancy!

Hasty picked himself up, ran somewhat groggily through the French doors and zigzagged across the lawn. From the veranda shouts and yells followed him. Bullets whined through the shrubbery just as Hasty did a rabbit-dive into the hedge. He tore himself free from the brambles, climbed the fence, and ran for the car.

Lucky McGee had the motor running. He jazzed the throttle, jammed into gear, and released the clutch just as Hasty slid into the seat beside him.

"Downtown, Lucky," Hasty panted, "and make it quick!"

Immediately Lucky McGee began. "I told you, didn't I? You should ought to take me along. Some day you're goin' to get your tail caught in a door. You okay? You ain't hurt?" McGee shot a reprimanding glance at Hasty.

The detective was peeling off his mask, plucking fountain pens from his pocket, tumbling them all, with his .25 automatic, into the leather case.

"Hey, where's your kelly?" Lucky demanded.

"Huh?"

"Your lid!"

Hasty passed a hand over his head, touched uncovered wavy brown hair. He chopped out an oath.

"You left it back in that dump?" Lucky accused.

"And a lot more!" Hasty groaned.

"I left a pair of handcuffs on a dead man—handcuffs covered with my fingerprints!"

Lucky McGee dragged down at the brakes. "Whatcha goin' to do? You shoulda let me—"

Hasty checked him with a wave of his hand. "Cut it. I've got to think." He dug in the corner of the front seat, recovered his detective badge, gun and regulation handcuffs.

"I don't suppose you would take a run-out powder," grumbled Lucky. "But what's left for you to do now? You've sure spilled the beans this time!"

They were far on their way downtown when Hasty abruptly stopped Lucky McGee.

"Turr around," he ordered. "Drive me back to the Nelson house like all hell! I'm going after that hat."

Lucky shrugged ponderous shoulders. "Okay. But if the cops lay hands on you, I'll—"

"Stow it," said Hasty sternly. "The law's the law, even if I have to twist it a little in the cause of justice. You stick in the clear, Lucky. That's orders! One little mistake and you'll land back in the Big House. I'll get out of this, alone. Then I'll find that knife and put it where it belongs, and I'll damn well put that killer where he belongs, too!"

A toothy smile beamed across Lucky's face.

"Sure ya will!"

PATROLMAN CLANCY was at the door of the Nelson home when Hasty appeared. He saluted as the detective climbed the veranda steps.

"It's murder this time they've got

on him," Clancy informed grimly.

"On whom? Who's murdered?" Hasty fired at the patrolman. "I was just passing and saw the P.D. cars. Thought maybe I'd better drop in."

"The Celluloid Burglar, that's who. He's been up to murder now," said Clancy. "Nobody else enters a house that way, and they found the usual strip of celluloid on the door sill. That calling card of his. Take it from me, Hasty, there's goin' to be a lot of disappointed people when this comes out. The Celluloid Burglar has sort of got under people's hides. He was always passing hot tips to the cops, grabbin' off criminals they couldn't pin down, and doin' this and that in good cause."

"The commissioner himself says, when he ain't too mad at the Burglar for makin' monkeys of the police, that the Celluloid Burglar is just a guy who ought to be a dick, 'cept he's got no ethics. Now, he's entered this house and we find a man murdered. And District Attorney Snathe is out himself now to get the Celluloid Burglar. Says if you are the department's ace and can't get any farther than you have it's time he took a hand himself. And old man Brady's boiling."

"Yeah," remarked Hasty, nodding. "Looks like the fellow's in a bad spot all right now."

The Nelson house was overrun with police, photographers, newspaper reporters, and fingerprint men who had speedily arrived while Hasty had been driving downtown and back. And the district attorney was there, pompously taking charge. With an assumed expression of bewilderment on his face, Hasty entered the dining room where they were all gathered. Ludson's body still drooped over the table leg.

The glowing tip of a cigar beneath District Attorney Snathe's ugly beak made him squint as he hailed the department ace:

"Hi, there, Pretty Damn Hasty! You turn up at the damndest times! Don't you ever sleep? But I suppose you must—a lot—for the Cel-

luloid Burglar to get in so much dirty work. I understand Brady set you on the job of running him down. And now look!"

Hasty made no comment to the sneer. He jerked a thumb at Ludson's body.

"Who is this guy?" he asked. "What's happened?"

Snathe snorted. "A poor devil who didn't have a chance," he said. "Chained him to a table and stuck a knife in him."

HASTY blinked at the corpse. "Who is he?" he repeated innocently.

"Thomas Nelson's watchman," Snathe said. "I'm waiting for Nelson to show up to tell me what was taken beside that valuable knife of his. It's plain enough to see that's gone; the case is smashed all to hell. Somebody cracked Nelson's museum. And just take a look at those handcuffs on that stiff. They're a new pattern to me."

Hasty walked over to the table. Here was an unlooked-for opportunity. He bent over the corpse and both hands shot out to finger the metal of the handcuffs that linked Ludson's body to the table.

"What the hell!" Snathe roared, and lurched over to stand beside Hasty. He shoved his beak close to Hasty's face.

"Pretty Damn Hasty, eh?" he snarled, "I heard the commissioner laughing about re-christening you 'Pretty Dumb Hasty,' and I'd say he was right! What a sap! I told you to look at those handcuffs, not to plant your mitts all over them! The print men haven't had a chance at them yet, and you mush in! Aw, hell!" His hands were gripped into fists as he towered over Hasty.

Hasty looked surprised. He feigned anger. "A little more of that stuff, Snathe," he said, his eyes glittering dangerously, "and I'll take a poke at you, district attorney or not. Why the hell didn't you say you hadn't got your prints? Where's the damage, anyhow? All you got to do is print me and see if there's any prints beside mine on the cuffs."

Snathe turned on his heel dis-

gustedly. "Get a picture of this guy's mitts," he roared, and turned to glare at Detective Carsons who strode up to him. "What the hell do you want?"

"A hat," said Carsons. "I found a hat in the living room, all mixed up with what's left of a statue. The boys thought you'd want to see it."

Hasty's lips drew a thin, hard line as he watched the district attorney follow Carsons from the room. He suffered himself to be fingerprinted, all the time his mind alert, grappling with the problem of how to regain his hat.

It was a disreputable-looking old piece of headgear, long since discarded except for use by the Celluloid Burglar, and not in the least the sort of thing to be associated with the immaculately clad department ace. Still, he had known just such a thing as a hat to convict a man of murder!

Snathe reappeared in the doorway with the battered brown felt hat in his hand.

"Maybe that hat belongs to Mr. Nelson," Hasty suggested.

"That thing?" Snathe held the hat at arms' length and squinted at it. "A millionaire wear a hat like that? Don't be any dumber than you have to be, Hasty."

Hasty shrugged unconcernedly.

"Can I be of any further help?" he asked. "If not, I'll be on my way."

"Any further—say, the further you get the more help you'll be. I've got an all night job on my hands here, and I don't want you ballin' it up any more than it is. Go on home to bed!"

"Only all night?" Hasty mocked, as he left the room.

At the front door, a reporter for the *Globe* was hastily recounting to a late comer among the newspaper group the facts gathered so far.

"It's a wow! The Celluloid Burglar wanted for murder! After all this time! Killed the watchman and walked off with that prize Damascus knife. Nearly knocked the old man off his seat when I phoned *that* in. He's sending a mob up here on the

jump to cover all the loose ends. He's sending Darby, the best man on the sheet, to see if the *Globe* can grab the guy before the police find him. Would *that* be a beat!"

A little of Hasty's usual good humor returned as he shoved on past the reporters, chuckling to himself. The *Globe* man and the others had a story all right, but what they didn't know was that the Celluloid Burglar had marched out right beneath their noses!

CHAPTER VI

PROFESSOR CAMOCHO



HE walked on quickly to the car, out in the street beyond the iron gates. Hasty noticed Officer Clancy regarding Lucky soberly. He could almost read what was going on in the patrolman's mind.

Clancy wasn't altogether approving the ex-con as an associate for Detective-sergeant Hasty.

Most of the men on the force did not; nor did they regard it as an ideal situation for a man on the force to be having an ex-convict living in his apartment. Lucky couldn't do much good to Detective Hasty—they were all sure of that. More than once Hasty had heard the complaint:

"Yes, I know you have good intentions in making yourself responsible for Lucky's good behavior, Hasty. But take it from an old-timer, once crooked, they stay that way."

Hasty had his own notions about that, however. He knew Lucky; knew his loyalty. He couldn't ask for a better or firmer friend. So now, as always, he ignored Clancy's disapproving look at Lucky.

Settling down in the car, Hasty nodded and McGee shifted gears quietly.

"Did ya get the hat?" asked Lucky.

"Nope." Hasty shook his head glumly. "District Attorney Snathe beat me to it."

McGee was silent a moment. Then

he changed the subject to remark:

"Say, while you was inside, there was a man passed the Nelson house on the other side of the street, just like he'd like to know what was goin' on in there. He walked back and forth several times with his eyes on the house. Then he ducked around the corner. I couldn't tell much what he looked like, what with having to talk to that bull, Clancy. But the fellow acted funny, Boss. You got any idea who's in this game besides you? Any notion who it was you run up against in there?"

Hasty thought that over soberly before he said:

"It might be any one of a dozen or more collectors I know of, that are as crooked as corkscrews and would never stop at murder to get a prize piece like that dagger."

Again he was silent a moment before he shot a quick, inquiring glance at his ex-con chauffeur.

"Listen, Lucky. You ever know an ice peddler named Charley Frank? One of the cleverest jewel thieves in the business. Been hanging out on the Coast a year or so, I've heard. Know him?"

Lucky shook his head. "Heard of him. Never met him professionally."

"Well, I've got a hunch that Charley Frank is not on the Coast at all, that he's right here where he would be as soon as he heard what an easy touch that jeweled dagger was likely to be. I haven't got a thing in this that might tie up with Frank either as the thief or Ludson's killer, except—well, Charley Frank has never been known to overlook a good bet, and he's the best white man with a knife I've ever known.

"And his reputation as a jewel thief is international. This Damascus dagger is just the sort of thing that would attract him. He's got connections in Europe; that would give him a swell market for disposing of the thing if he ever gets it—and it sure wouldn't surprise me if he has got it.

"Now, here's what I want, Lucky.

I want to know if Frank is in the city. It might take the police a hell of a long time to find out. His cleverness at disguise is phenomenal. You take the car; I'm getting out at the next block and do some circulating around. Drop in at some of your old hangouts, and spend this ten." He handed over a bill. "And find out where I can find Charley Frank."

"Where you goin', Boss?" There was a worried note in Lucky's voice.

"I'm going to see Mrs. Connell."

Lucky dragged the car to a stop in front of an old-fashioned apartment house in a poor section of the city. He got out and McGee drove off.

Hasty took the uncarpeted, creaking steps three at a time and came to a stop at a brown painted door three flights up. His knuckles played a cheerful tattoo on the door.

"COME in!" a high, quavering voice called.

With a deceptive smile on his face, Hasty entered. Old Mrs. Connell was sitting in a cane-bottomed rocker. She shaded her eyes from the yellow light and peered up at him. Her worry-lined face brightened as she recognized Hasty.

"Oh, you're back!" she exclaimed. "I was getting a mite worried. Did you get my knife?" There was such eagerness in the faded eyes that Hasty cursed to himself, fervently. With the elation on that old face, he would never admit he didn't have the relic.

"Yeah," he said. "I got the Damascus knife. But I didn't bring it here. I put it in a safety deposit box. I'll see a man tomorrow about selling it for you. This time we'll see that you get the right price. It should be worth plenty."

"Believe me, senior, no truer words have ever been uttered," said a smooth, oily voice.

Hasty spun around. His hand darted toward his gun and stopped halfway as he stared into the cold eye of an automatic. It was held unflinchingly in the hand of a dap-

per, olive-skinned man whose mouse-tailed mustache jerked up and down with every movement of his thin lips. The man stepped through the open door into the room.

"Ah, 'Professor' Camocho, I believe," Hasty said. "So you're in on this, too, eh? I thought you'd been chased back to Mexico for keeps after that last little torture killing you pulled."

The Spaniard shot him a menacing glance as his finger tightened on the trigger.

"Which shows you know little of Camocho," he sneered. "If the stakes are high enough, what matters the slight danger of collecting them?"

Hasty's face looked serene, unworried as he faced the oily-skinned *ladrone* who called himself Professor Camocho. The whole police department knew the professor. They had reason enough to know him, after the chase he had led them. Though they had wanted him on half a dozen counts, most of them had breathed signs of relief when it was thought he was safely back in the middle of his Mexican mountains.

Now here he was back in town, a man Hasty hadn't counted on to be after the jeweled knife. Plain enough he didn't have it yet, or he wouldn't be here, so the thief was someone else.

"I have to hand it to you, Professor," Hasty said sourly, staring straight into the bore of the gun that covered him. "You always knew value."

"*Gracias, senior,*" the Spaniard's lips parted in a thin taunting smile. "So valuable is this knife that for it I will pay you one tooth from the head of the Senora Connell, here, for every hour you delay in bringing it to me at my house at 1112 Newcomb Road. And if she runs out of teeth, there will be fingers. And, if you seek to bring in the police, she dies, and you will never find me!"

A little gasp of terror from Mrs. Connell. "You wouldn't dare!" she breathed.

"Ah, you do not know Professor Camocho!" the man boasted again. He smiled broadly, unpleasantly. Then, without turning his head: "Cuito!"

Another man appeared in the doorway; a man with the face of a hardened criminal. Hasty knew him at once. Maurice Cuito, a local hoodlum, with a reputation for merciless cruelty. Cuito seemed in good spirits.

"Hi, Sarge," he said, and grinned at Hasty.

"Cuito," said the man with the gun, "you can take Senora Connell out while I cover this—this detective, shall we call him?"

"Okay, Professor." Cuito lounged across the room toward Mrs. Connell. Hasty stepped in the way, arms still above his head. Cuito frisked Hasty, took his gun and tossed it across the room.

"Just a minute, you!" Hasty rapped. "There's no point to this. I haven't got the Damascus dagger. Charley Frank's got it."

THE Spaniard laughed. "My old rival has it, eh? So that is why he is in this town, to get the knife. But I know *you* have it. I will tell you why. Tonight, I have an appointment with Mr. Nelson. I am, he thinks, a collector who craves an opportunity to admire his treasure. I was anxious to see the Damascus dagger, see the house and to make my plans. But when I get there, I see Mr. Nelson just leaving. Moreover, Cuito, who was with me, recognizes in a certain parked car an old frien' of his, Lucky McGee by name.

"I am suspicious, so I watch with Cuito. Soon I see running from the house a man whose face is covered with a shining black mask. It is, Cuito tells me, the Celluloid Burglar who has become famous during my temporary retirement. I think he have the knife and I must know where he goes. We follow that car, Cuito and I, in our own coupé—follow it downtown. Not once does it stop; no one leaves it, nor does one enter.

"We follow it when it turns and returns to the Nelson house. And what is my horror when we reach there, and I see getting from that same car Detective-sergeant Hasty, who has been riding with this ex-convict. Then I see it all plain. Then I know who is this Celluloid Burglar!"

"Later, I hear a reporter with lungs like a bull shout that the Celluloid Burglar has the dagger. So, my frien', my ultimatum! You get me the dagger and I let the Senora Connell go unharmed. Furthermore, I will protect you, my Celluloid frien'. For protection you will need! I have not five minutes ago telephoned Police Headquarters. What did I say? I say that Detective-sergeant Hasty is the Celluloid Burglar. So that is why you will not attempt to bring the police to my house."

Hasty's upraised right hand balled into a fist that suddenly hammered down, crashing into the bridge of Cuito's nose. The hood reeled into a corner. Hasty swung toward the smiling Camocho, stopped.

"The old senora, Sergeant. My fun is on her. Another step and I will let her have the bullet you so bravely ignore!" The Spaniard snorted.

Hasty hesitated, but he had not been nicknamed "Pretty Damn" for nothing. He had an even chance of jumping Camocho's gun. He was about to leap when something came hurtling through the air toward him. He tried to duck, but the thing struck him in the side of the head. He lurched forward, saw a swirling floor flying up to meet him and sank into the black abyss of unconsciousness.

Hasty was dragged from oblivion by someone shaking him. He opened his eyes and stared up into the homely face of Lucky McGee.

"You hurt, Boss?" McGee asked anxiously.

"Hell no!" Hasty groaned, and sat up looking around. No sign of Mrs. Connell, nor of Professor Camocho and Cuito.

"I seen Charley Frank," Lucky

said eagerly. "He's here all right."

"To hell with Frank! They've got Mrs. Connell. Cuito and that dirty Mex, Professor Camocho." He grabbed Lucky's arm and pulled to his feet.

"Cuito!" Lucky snapped. "Did that rat pop ya, Boss?"

"Yeah. They think I've got the Damascus dagger. They *know* I'm the Celluloid Burglar." Hasty groaned. "I got to bring 'em the knife or they'll torture the old lady. I got to go out on Newcomb Road and get her."

"You ain't goin' to do that, Boss!" Lucky pleaded. "They'll finish you and the old lady both if you ain't got the knife!"

"Not while you're along as my ace-in-the-hole, Lucky. You follow me out in a taxi. Mrs. Connell and you and I can ride back in the car after the row is over. Let's go, McGee!"

CHAPTER VII

COUNTER ATTACK



ERGEANT HASTY raced the car to the nearest taxi stand. There, Lucky was left with orders to follow the detective in about half an hour. Hasty then turned the nose of the car eastward and opened it up.

The house in Newcomb Road was a three-story building in the middle of an eight-acre field on the outskirts of the city. A realty man had constructed it as an apartment house on a speculation. He had expected the city to expand tremendously along its eastern boundary. But, perversity itself, the city had expanded in the opposite direction. The apartment had been recently sold at a ridiculously low price—whether to Camocho or not, Hasty could not guess. Apparently Camocho was the only tenant, for the windows above the ground floor were all vacantly staring.

Hasty parked his car on the road at the end of the cinder lane that led up to the building. Then he

started across the field of ragweed, keeping as far as possible from the boulevard lamps. Under his arm he carried the leather case that was associated with his identity as the Celluloid Burglar. He opened it, clipped the assortment of "fountain pens" to his breast coat pocket. His small .25 automatic was already in his shoulder holster. The black mask, he found, to his annoyance, was not in the case. However, since Camocho knew the identity of the Celluloid Burglar, a mask would avail him nothing, anyway.

Except for threads of light that stole through cracks in the dark green shades on the ground floor, every window in the house was dark. Hasty walked around to the back of the house, sighted an old rusty fire-escape, and made for it.

Tucking the empty leather case into the inner pocket of his coat, he began the ascent of the narrow iron ladder. At a window on the second story, Hasty looped a leg through the rungs of the ladder, brought out his pen-light and played its beam upon the pane of glass. The window latch was partly turned, preventing him from opening the window with his hands.

From the pocket of his coat he brought out two strips of celluloid that were fastened together at one end. This he worked into the crack where the lower half of the sash joined the upper. He slipped the thin strips along until they were a quarter of an inch from the window latch. Separating the thin strips, he held one tight while he pushed the other upward. The joined pieces of celluloid curved sharply when thus manipulated, until the edge met the handle of the window latch. A little patient maneuvering, and he had shoved open the latch.

A small rubber suction-cup when pressed against the pane of glass gave him a handle for raising the window. He slipped in under the tattered shade, turned around, and closed the window. He played his light around the room. It was entirely bare of furnishings, appar-

ently had never been occupied. He crossed to a door, opened it, and looked into a second barren room.

He was crossing this second room on tiptoe when he stopped abruptly, whirled in time to see the door behind him silently close. He had seen no one and there had been no sound. Maybe it had blown shut—

Ahead of him was a wide open door frame. He passed through it, playing his light around. His face tensed then. He was in a cul-de-sac! For the room he had just entered was without windows; in there were only bare, staring walls. Two white oblongs of new plaster showed where windows had been completely blocked up, and that recently. He cursed, turned quickly, but not quickly enough!

A SLIDING panel of steel had dropped over the door with a slithering sound, completely blocking his exit. A low laugh, coming from beyond the door, within the barren room. A voice that he recognized as that of Professor Camocho spoke mockingly from out of nowhere.

"Didn't you know that you were in the abode of a scientist, Sergeant Hasty?" Camocho sneered. "Camocho is not called 'Professor' without reason. Front door, back door, window, what difference could it have made? Did you never hear of the grid-glow tube? That silent, electric watchman that is so sensitive to light and shadow? You should not have attempted to come here surreptitiously. Every time you passed a door or a window, I learned of it in my basement laboratory. I closed the doors after you by means of electric remote control. The very door of the room you are in acts as a diaphragm to the reproducer through which I speak."

Hasty wiped worry from his face. How did he know that the professor could not watch him also? That man had always been a thorn in the side of the police with his scientific knowledge. A man who would have been a great scientist, a benefactor of humanity, had he not

chosen to use his learning for his own greedy satisfaction. He must carry off his bluff like a veteran actor if he expected to strike at Professor Camocho.

"I have the knife, Camocho," he called. "Can you hear me?"

"Of course I can hear you." The scientist-criminal laughed. "And I have only one tooth from the senora's mouth to give you for it."

"Want me to show you the knife?" Hasty volunteered.

"I must take your word for it," Camocho said. "As yet I have not completed the installation of my telephoto system that will enable me to see into each room."

Hasty grinned. He took his automatic from his shoulder holster and dropped it into his coat pocket. Camocho was speaking again.

"However, do not delude yourself into thinking that you are not completely in my power. I am coming to the room to see the dagger in a minute."

"Bring Mrs. Connell with you," Hasty insisted, "or you don't get the knife."

Camocho laughed and shut off his phone apparatus. Evidently he was coming up at once, for somewhere in the building Hasty could hear the whir of an electric elevator. Then he caught the sound of footsteps moving outside the sliding panel of the room.

When directly outside the door, Camocho spoke. "I will raise the door just far enough for you to push your gun through the opening."

Hasty hesitated. Did he dare take a chance and risk trying to drill through the opening beneath that steel door? No, it was too great a risk. Even if the bullet hit Camocho he would be no nearer freedom than he was now. And he would yet have Camocho's henchmen to deal with. For of course there would be others besides Cuito.

He tossed his automatic on the floor and kicked it through the crack revealed beneath the sliding panel.

"Now," said Camocho, "you may

give the Prince of Damascus the same way." Something rolled beneath the door, almost striking the detective's shoe. "There is the tooth. Now where is the dagger?"

Hasty tried to stifle his rage, forcing himself to think clearly.

"I don't trust you," he said calmly. "You might keep me here forever after I gave you the knife. Can you see me, Camocho?"

"Perfectly. I have a secret peephole in this panel. What is it you wish to say?"

Hasty pulled the empty leather case that had contained his special equipment from his pocket. He dropped it in the middle of the floor.

"The Damascus dagger is in that case," he said. "Come and get it."

The professor hesitated only for a moment. "Very well. Why should I not? But I must inform you that our estranged relations will not permit me to enter without keeping a gun pointed at your heart!"

The sliding door shot upward. Professor Camocho was framed in the doorway, a smile twisting his mouse-tailed mustache. There was a heavy Colt in his hand. His greedy, pin-point eyes darted to the leather case.

"The Prince of Damascus!" he exulted. "I have searched the world over for the knife of Melek-ed-Dhaher-Bibras. The blade has been drenched in the blood of a hundred Christian knights. Do you realize that the blade alone will bring thousands simply because it is an antique? And the gold in the hilt! The jewels!"

"Ever stop to think that this little act might cost you something?" Hasty bit off.

"Cost?" Camocho laughed. "I shall be off to Europe tomorrow. There, I find people who appreciate things of value! And I have beaten that pig of a Charley Frank. For once I have beaten him!"

Camocho shifted his gun to his left hand while his right hand manipulated the clasp of the case.

"To Europe tomorrow!" he muttered.

"It will be kind of warm for you here," said Hasty lightly. "Of course, though you may not think it, you're not out of this yet."

He was watching the professor narrowly as he fumbled at the lock on the case. Then abruptly, the lid of the leather case sprang back. For fully a second Camocho stared at the empty case. Then he sprang to his feet, a cascade of Spanish profanity rippling from his tongue.

"You *cochino!* You *perro!* You *cochino!*" he screamed, trembling with rage.

"Why don't you decide which it is and stick to it?" Hasty asked calmly.

With difficulty, Camocho gained some control over his emotions. "I will kill you within an inch of your lives! I will eat the heart of the Senora Connell!" His knuckles grew white as his grip tightened on his automatic. "I am going to shoot. Have you some word to say about giving me the knife before you die?"

"Well, I might say this—if you do pull that trigger, you're going to regret it!"

And Hasty leaped straight at the Spaniard. The gun roared. The shot seemed to repel the detective in mid-air. His leap ended abruptly. He sprawled to the floor, hand clutched over his heart. A shudder convulsed his muscles. Crimson drops began to squeeze from between his fingers and threaded along the back of his hand. He shuddered, then lay very still.

CHAPTER VIII

STRANGE RESCUE



AMOCHO stared down at the detective. He was smiling grimly.

"There! You thought Camocho would not dare! And I will kill the old senora, too!"

Hasty's right leg gave a convulsive twitch. Camocho took a step nearer.

"Not dead yet, my celluloid frien'? I am too humane, perhaps. I think I shall put another bullet in your

head, so!" He knelt, took careful aim at the center of Detective-sergeant Hasty's forehead.

Then Pretty Damn Hasty earned his right to his nickname. His right leg shot out. His shoe pounded into the professor's thigh. At the same moment his hand came away from his breast pocket holding a shiny green penlike thing. Even as Camocho's gun roared a shot that smashed ceilingward, there came a sharp *pfft* from the green thing in Hasty's hand. A white mist sprayed straight into the professor's face.

Camocho screamed, leaped to his feet, and dug both fists into his eyes. His gun dropped to the floor.

In one bound Hasty had leaped to his feet. He sprang to the professor with handcuffs in his hand. The cuffs clamped over Camocho's wrists.

"Now you can cry all you want. Didn't you ever hear of tear-gas with all your scientific knowledge?" He laughed mockingly. "Tear-gas in one fountain pen, then I have another that has the bad habit of leaking red stuff all over my clothes whenever I want to play 'possum. And a bullet-proof vest stops all bullets that come my way and reduces their kick to the slight unpleasantness of that of a mule."

Camocho dropped his hands from his streaming eyes and squinted at the detective. Hasty had scooped up the Spaniard's gun and was motioning towards the door.

"Down on your belly, Camocho, before I knock you down! That's right. Now, just crawl halfway through the door. No? Stubborn again, eh? Then I'll help you!"

HE seized Camocho by the loop that connected the handcuffs and dragged him to the door.

"Anybody ever show you how a guillotine works? That's something scientists should never neglect. Well, you're goin' to have a demonstration!"

Not for a moment letting his gun waver from the professor, Hasty stepped into the hall. His groping hand found the lever that operated

the sliding panel. He pushed the lever far down and let the door drop fast. Camocho screamed and fainted. Half an inch from the Spaniard, Hasty braked the door and lowered it slowly over Camocho.

"That moment of torture," he said grimly to the unhearing ears, "that little scare will settle for the tooth you pulled from that poor old woman's mouth! And if you've done anything more to her, you'll pay for that, too!"

Leaving the scientist-criminal pinned under the door, Hasty crossed into the next room and found the entrance to the hall.

Suddenly, below stairs, hell cracked open! There was a sudden noise of running feet. Somebody was tearing up the stairs yelling at the top of his lungs:

"Prof! My Gawd, Prof! The real Celluloid Burglar's busted in with an army! And it ain't that dick at all!"

At the top of the stairs, Hasty stopped short, hearing that. The Celluloid Burglar? Was somebody crazy?

A man leaped to the landing below, started up. He saw Hasty at that moment and pulled up fast. It was Maurice Cuito, the Spaniard's hireling.

He jerked up his gun at Hasty in a lightning move.

"Here's where you get lead, dick!" he yelled.

He fired, but in his haste it was a wild shot that whined over Hasty's head and knocked plaster from the wall behind him. The detective-sergeant dropped on the floor, sending back a shot that sent Cuito spinning on his heels, clawing at his shoulder.

Detective-sergeant Hasty leaped down the stairs, hurdled the fallen Cuito, and ran into the main lower hall that opened off the apartment occupied by Camocho. There he found a bunch of harmless fire-crackers rattling off like a machine gun. At the other end of the hall stood three hoods, back to the wall, hands above their heads. A little nearer the door were Detective Car-

sons and a bluecoat, looking sheepish, with their hands raised.

A little grey-haired woman slumped in a cane-seated chair beside the crooks. And facing them all, his threatening automatic moving like a gun in a battleship turret, was a man wearing a mask of gleaming black celluloid!

The masked man waved his gun toward Hasty.

"Get over with them others, you!" snapped a voice, muffled behind the black mask. "I've done what I come here to do, and now I'm goin' to vanish, that's what! And youse dicks can take out a ticket for these punks on extortin' an old lady for somethin' she ain't got and I ain't neither! I never seen no damn dagger, an' I didn't knock off that watchman at Nelson's dump. Tryin' to put somethin' like that on the Celluloid Burglar, huh? You get that ol' lady to the hospital, and if she don't pull through this, I scalps the whole police force!"

The man in the celluloid mask back-stepped toward the rear door.

"Hold it, copper!" he snarled at Carsons, as the detective's hands started to drop. "Make a try for that gat, and I'll give you the works in spite of it bein' against my morals!"

And then he was gone with a throaty chuckle that he vainly imagined was a good and convincing imitation of the Celluloid Burglar's laugh.

Carsons yanked out his gun and made a dash down the hall.

"Hold it, Carsons!" Hasty called sharply. "I'm giving orders. This is my job. You telephone the ambulance for Mrs. Connell and the wagon for these hoods. You'll have to book 'em on extortion. Their chief is upstairs. They'll hold an old home week jubilee at Headquarters when they see who *he* is."

Carsons spun around with an angry frown, and yelped:

"You know what the orders are about—"

"Do I give a damn if it was Napoleon?" Hasty snapped back. He walked over to where Mrs. Connell

was seated. Tenderly he took her hand and felt her pulse.

"Good heart," he muttered. "I think she'll get out of this nicely." He turned to the bluecoat who was covering the three hoods as he heard Carsons at the phone inside the apartment.

"What brought you fellows here anyway?" he demanded.

"Somebody telephones Headquarters and says there was trouble out here," the patrolman said. "The chief sends us on the jump. Carsons happens to be in the neighborhood in a prowler-car."

Though he couldn't quite understand that, even with his suspicions, Hasty nodded, then turned his full attention to Mrs. Connell. She was coming to, uttering little jerky sobs like those of a child awakening from a bad dream.

"You're all right, Mrs. Connell," said Hasty cheerfully. "Trouble's all over."

Her dim old eyes brightened. "Harrison Hasty! Oh, I knew you'd come! And did you give them the dagger? Did they make you?"

Hasty gulped and looked away from her. "Don't worry," he comforted. "I know where I can lay my hands on it any time I want it."

Detective-sergeant Hasty considered a lie, when it was merely a white lie, one of the prime necessities of existence. He got to his feet and rambled to the front door.

"Whoever this Celluloid Burglar is," the bluecoat called after him, "he ought to have a medal for cleanin' up a mob like this. He's sure got my vote."

Hasty did not reply. He was in deep thought—and Charley Frank was the subject of those thoughts.

RETURNING to the car, Hasty found Lucky McGee slumped down behind the steering wheel, apparently sound asleep and snoring innocently. He got in and gave McGee a prod.

"Get goin', Lucky," he said. "You're not foolin' me a bit!"

Lucky pretended to stretch awake with a yawn, Hasty eyed him re-

proachfully. "So you stole my gag?" he said.

"Me, Boss? Whatcha mean?" Lucky's eyes opened their widest.

"Oh, you know well enough." Hasty chuckled. "Nobody could mistake that lingo of yours even if you did have a mask on. And right now you smell like a kid after the Fourth of July. You got a little too close to the firecrackers."

"I had to, Boss, honest!" Lucky protested as he tooled the car around the corner. "With the cops thinkin' the Celluloid Burglar was a killer, I was scared you'd get took up on account of somebody might get hep to you bein' the guy with the celluloid mask. Guess they'll have sorta different ideas from now on."

"First I calls the cops, so they'll be sure to be good witnesses for the whole show. Then I busts in the prof's house, tosses the firecrackers, and gets things goin'. I sends a slug to warm the pants of that Cuito bird, but I guess I misses him, 'cause he runs up the steps yelling to the prof. You ain't sore, are yuh, Boss? I figured yuh needed help—"

"Sore, you sap!" Hasty laughed heartily and his hand clamped down on Lucky's arm with an affectionate grip. "Why, it's the best good turn you ever did. Remind me to give you a Christmas present." Then he frowned. "But what are we goin' to do about that Damascus knife? We're not gettin' any closer to it."

"If it was Charley Frank who got it, we are," Lucky insisted. "I found out about him and was just tellin' you when you busted out here. He's hangin' out at the Senate Hotel under a false monicker, and part of the time at a joint called Milly's Place not far from where Mrs. Connell lives. One place he's a gent; the other he's a bum. That's where I seen him tonight, at the Senate Hotel. He was all dolled up in puppy blankets and an iron hat. Looked like the Dook of Yoik, he did!"

Hasty glanced at his watch. Two A. M.

"Milly's Place first," he said.

"After midnight's when he always liked to play his bum rôles."

Milly Moran was a woman who could keep her mouth shut. Hasty knew, and even high-class crooks like Charley Frank made her place their headquarters. Half the criminals who were on the lam hit her dive when in town. Raided almost monthly, Milly's Place was inevitably empty by the time the police arrived, and it had a reputation of being a safe haven.

They were rolling slowly down Silvester Street in the direction of Milly's when Hasty gripped Lucky's arm.

"Stop her!" he whispered. "That guy who just came out of that pool hall. I recognize that walk. That's Charley Frank! Wait here, Lucky. I'm going after him!"

CHAPTER IX

THE KNIFE MAN



JUMPING out of the car before it stopped, Hasty looked back. Half a block behind he could make out the figure of a man moving along under the dingy street lamp. The man looked every inch the gentleman. But Hasty knew he just couldn't be that and be walking down Silvester Street at two o'clock in the morning.

The man wore a black derby and a light grey topcoat. He stopped, looked apprehensively about, and turned into an alley. Hasty double-timed to the corner and plunged into the black maw of the alley after him. Something poked him sharply in the ribs, bringing him up with a grunt. His hand yanked out his automatic. A blinding light hit him full in the face. He saw then that the thing that had nudged him in the ribs was nothing more formidable than a cane.

"You happen to have a matsh, old chappy?" the man with the cane muttered thickly. "It may be—hick—that I had a drop too mush to drink, but I mush have a matsh or I can't shee my way. Get me?"

Hasty snatched the flashlight from the man, reversed it, and turned it on the talcumed, bloated face of the man in the derby. No make-up there, for a wonder, and he had seen that face too often under the bright glare of the lights at Headquarters not to recognize it.

"All right, Charley Frank," he said softly. "You can drop the drunk act. You're no more soused than I am."

The man blinked. "You shay my name ish Frank? That isn't right. Frank— Frank?" he muttered bewilderedly. "It'sh a very good name, but it'sh not mine, I'm shorry. What ish my name, now that you meshun it?"

"All right," snapped Hasty. "If you want to play drunk you can trot along to the station house on a drunkenness charge. Your fingerprints ought to tell us if I'm right. And the chief wants you to talk over that little job at the Nelson house."

WITH unexpected dexterity, Charley Frank twisted around and started up the alley. Had he not been wearing a topcoat, Hasty wouldn't have had a chance of catching him, so speedy was he. As it was, the detective managed to grab him by the tail of the coat. Frank pivoted. Even as he spun around, a knife appeared magically from his sleeve. Hasty cupped his gun in his hand and drove up with a smashing blow to Frank's midriff. Frank doubled, dropped back.

Suddenly, there was a faint pop, a hiss from somewhere up above. A strident shriek of agony tore from Charley Frank's throat and echoed and re-echoed down the canyon formed by the buildings that bordered the alley. Then Frank toppled over, the bulging arch of his back slowly flattening out. He lay very still, a gleaming thing like a knife hilt stuck out of his back right above the heart.

Hasty stared, transfixed with horror and bewilderment. Out of the dark had come a flying knife that was somehow unlike a knife!

And it had been so perfectly aimed in the dark that it seemed impossible that a human hand could have flung it! Where had it come from?

In the next moment, he was asking himself where it had gone! For the knife in Charley Frank's back suddenly came to life. It leaped from the wound, leaving a fountain of blood behind it. It ran tinkling down the alley and leaped into the air. Hasty, startled, tried to follow it with his flashlight beam, lost it, but picked out a thin shadow of a man standing on the lower section of a fire-escape attached to a building some thirty yards away!

The man on the fire-escape apparently saw Hasty at the same instant. A sliver of orange-red flame spat through the darkness toward Hasty. A shot crashed. A bullet sang past Hasty's ear. The detective snapped off his flashlight, darted to the wall of a building, and ran toward the fire-escape.

Above, outlined against the grey patch of sky that showed between the buildings, he could see a thin man running up the iron steps of the escape, and oddly, even in that tense moment, there was a flash of recognition in Hasty's mind. He had seen that running figure before—and recently!

Hasty raised his gun and fired. His shot spanged against the metal of the fire-escape and ricocheted off into darkness. He was taking the clanging iron steps in giant strides. He knew who that man ahead of him was now! Knew where he had seen him running. For there went the man who had killed Ludson, the man who had the Damascus dagger! He must be taken, to burn for that poor watchman's death. But before that, he must give up the valuable Damascus knife that belonged to Mrs. Connell!

Hasty saw the killer spring to the guard rail of the fire-escape and leap ten feet through space to catch the elbow of a drain pipe leading down from the gutters on the eaves of the building. Swinging there, he made a perfect target. But if the man fell four stories to the ground,

he would be in no shape to tell what he had done with that precious dagger. So Hasty didn't dare shoot to maim him.

The killer, somewhat encumbered by a gunlike thing that was strapped over his shoulder, had a hard time swinging up onto the roof, and by the time he had disappeared over the eaves, Hasty had gained on him considerably.

REACHING the top landing of the fire-escape in swift leaps, Hasty imitated the killer. He vaulted to the railing, stood wavering on his precarious perch, and leaped for the drain pipe. He swung up his legs, caught his toes in the pipe, and by straining every muscle hauled himself to the eaves. Being much the larger of the two men, that was a far more difficult feat for Hasty than for his quarry.

Straightening up, Hasty stared about him. The fan-tailed ventilators on the roof assumed the likeness of angered wild beasts crouching to spring. A peaked skylight in the center of the roof was like the mound of a grave. He gripped the butt of his automatic tensely, searching every nook and corner and shadow. But the killer had vanished! Yet at any moment, one of the shadows might discharge the thin man with his mysterious weapon—the knife that seemed to have wings!

Gun in hand, senses alert, Hasty circled the nearest ventilator. Nothing there. He tiptoed to the skylight, flattened himself on its glass roof, and peered over the peak. No one there. He picked up a pebble from the roofing and tossed it to the other side. Its rattling sound drew no fire.

Hasty cursed. The man couldn't have vanished unless he too had wings! How in hell had he disappeared so quickly? He knelt, his fingers digging in under the frame of the skylight. Perfectly tight. Then he walked to the eaves and looked toward the adjacent roof. Too much gloom to see anything clearly, but not ten feet from him,

he saw a plank that bridged the thirteen foot gap to the next building. Clearly the board had been put there as an avenue of escape for the killer who had laid careful plans for every step of this murder.

Hasty stepped on the plank, arms extended, balancing like a wire-walker. He took a hesitant step—another. He was in the middle of the plank and it was springing and wobbling up and down. He gauged the distance to go and was about ready to risk everything in a leap across, when he stopped in mid-action as there came a pop, a short, sinister hiss.

Hasty gulped air, his arms balancing him precariously. His head seemed to have turned into a top. Something struck his arm, something that burned his flesh as if he had plunged his arm into a caldron of liquid fire. He pitched dizzily to one side, arms waving frantically in an attempt to right himself. The plank gave a lurch. A cry of horror broke from his lips. He seemed to be swimming through air, his arm skating along something—something that his fingers gripped instinctively.

He closed his eyes, sobbed for breath. His body was bouncing up and down as his fingers held on in a death grip; his legs were kicking empty air. He opened his eyes fearfully. His fingers were clutched tightly over the edge of the plank; he was thankful that it had beams so tightly wedged to both ends. Looking down, objects were lost in the gloom of the alley, but he knew it was a long drop to the ground.

Across on the next roof he could hear the killer laugh, an eerie, macabre sound. The man was walking away from Hasty, evidently satisfied that he had removed the one witness who had seen Charley Frank die.

Hasty felt that his arms must tear from his shoulder sockets. He couldn't hang there until somebody came along and saw him. At any moment that desperate grip might fail him. He dared not call out lest the killer return and do his job more thoroughly.

After what seemed an eternity of hanging there, with death reaching out of the dark depths below to grasp him, he swung his right hand cautiously ahead of its mate. Then the other. Inch by inch he traveled towards the adjacent building. He kicked out with his feet, and his heart leaped as he found a toe-hold on the stone ledge above the windows.

A moment more and he boosted himself to the roof.

Sky and earth were spinning as he lay there trying to calm his quivering muscles. The wound in his arm made by the flying knife was painful but not particularly serious, as he saw when he was able to examine it. He stood up and looked around the roof. No sign of the killer. There would not be now, of course. Evidently the man had entered the place through a trap door.

As he approached what appeared to be an opening in the roof, Hasty's flashlight picked out a scrap of paper that the early morning breeze was tossing around. The thought came to him that had that paper been there for any length of time it would no longer be white. He bent over, picked it up. On examination he saw that it was a love letter addressed to somebody simply called "Dearest." He was about to throw it away in disgust when two words in the last line attracted his attention. Those words were "Damascus" and "dagger!"

Excitedly, Hasty read that last line:

I will give you my answer when you get me the Damascus dagger.

The note was merely signed, "Sally."

Hasty thrust the piece of paper into his pocket. He was willing to bet next month's pay that Sally was none other than Charley Frank's girl friend, Sally Dumont. The whole force knew about Sally and that love affair. To find Sally, ask her to whom she had written asking for the Damascus dagger was Hasty's next task. For the moment that took on greater importance

than going after the killer of Charley Frank.

CHAPTER X

MURDER FROM ABOVE



WITHOUT much trouble, Hasty removed the covering of the hole in the roof, let himself drop into an attic. He picked his way among dusty trunks, old garments, and packing boxes. Groping for the door he found it and ran quietly down the stairs.

As he came out of the building by the front door, a policeman was blowing his whistle. Evidently the patrolman on the beat had come across the body of Charley Frank in the alley. Hasty ran to the head of the alley and hailed the cop.

"There's a dead man back here, Sergeant," called the cop, recognizing Hasty.

"I know," Hasty said hurriedly. "I was with him when he was knifed. I went after the killer but he disappeared over the roof tops."

The cop stared incredulously. "He was stabbed while you were with him and you couldn't lay hands on the killer?"

Hasty nodded and laughed shortly. "That's how it was. The stiff is Charley Frank and he was stabbed by a knife that flew from that fire-escape clear over to here. Then it flew back again. The killer never was any closer to Frank than that." Then Hasty was off before the cop could make further comment.

"Drive to the Senate Hotel, Lucky," Hasty ordered as he sprang into the car. "I've just seen Charley Frank; he was killed right under my nose. Now, I've got to see that girl friend of his!"

"Didn't Frank have the knife?" asked Lucky in amazement.

"Not *the* knife, but he collected *a* knife in his back. My guess is he came to town simply to have a try at getting that Damascus dagger. If he didn't get it, I'm pretty sure that the fellow who did steal it did so for the damndest reason you ever

heard of. That's why you'd better step on it!"

The Senate was an apartment hotel with a smart clientele, though it was not very well located for a place of its kind. It was an exclusive enough location, however, standing aloof from the commonplace dwellings that were its neighbors.

Having given Lucky orders to run the car around into a side street and wait there for him, Hasty hurried up the flower-bordered walk and into the lobby of the hotel. The desk and lobby were both deserted. It required several minutes before he managed to find the night clerk who was dozing in a nearby reception room. Sleepy-eyed, the man stared at him and demanded what he wanted at that hour of the morning.

"The register," Hasty snapped, showing his detective shield.

The night clerk dragged himself into the lobby, dug out the book, handed it to Hasty, and stood there yawning while the detective inspected the book.

HASTY quickly ascertained two facts that he considered vital. A Mr. and Mrs. Charles Knarf, who gave their address as London, England, had taken a two-room suite a few days before. That would, he felt sure, be Charley Frank and Sally Dumont. Frank hadn't even bothered about a new alias. And that "Charles Knarf" alias of his was as well known to the police as the jewel thief's own name.

The other thing that Hasty had noted and decided was no mere coincidence, was that a man who had registered a day later than the Knarfs and who occupied a room directly above their apartment had come from Little Egg Harbor, New Jersey.

That was, according to police records, where Sally Dumont had come from before she had taken up with Charley Frank. Her father had been a captain in the Coast Guard Service down there, and there was talk that Sally had once been mar-

ried to a member of the Coast Guard, had deserted him and that he, too, had then gone so much to the bad that he had been kicked out of the service.

This looked to Hasty like something more than coincidence. In registering, the man from Little Egg Harbor had written his name as Roy Grubber. Whether that were the man's right name or not, Hasty decided, that Mr. Roy Grubber would stand investigating at least.

Hasty thanked the sleepy clerk, told him he was going only to the second floor so he'd walk it, and left the man dozing again. He located door Number 26, and Knarf suite, then walked to the hall lamp and removed the electric globe, plunging the hall into darkness.

Rapidly his fingers worked as he took his black celluloid mask out of his pocket, fixed it over his face. Then he went to Number 26 and peered through the keyhole. The soft rose glow of a shaded lamp illuminated the room. As much of it as he could see was empty. He tried the door. It was locked.

Taking a bunch of master keys from his pocket, he selected one, scraped the eye of the lock with it. The door swung back on well-oiled hinges. There was still no sound from inside the suite. Soundlessly, on thick grey carpet, he crossed to a walnut-paneled door. This, too, was locked.

When he again tried his master key, he found that something on the other side of the lock prevented the key from moving into place, and the door had been locked from the inside. Obviously, then, the other room was occupied. He had no other alternative but to push out the key on the other side of the door. It dropped silently to the carpet. Then he twisted his own key in the lock and the door opened readily enough.

Hasty fingered the battery of fountain pens in his pocket. He took a cool grip on his small .25 automatic, and boldly entered the room. The place was so still that he could hear his own breathing. It was a bedroom as he had supposed, and

was lighted by a small boudoir lamp on the dressing table. Hasty's eyes shot around the room, came to rest on the bed. For a long minute he simply stared at it. Then he drew in a little whistling breath that might have expressed anything.

Upon the bed lay a woman. In life she had been very beautiful as Hasty was well aware. He had seen Sally Dumont in several police line-ups. Sally Dumont was dead, there could be no doubt of that. Her starkly staring, dead eyes were protruding, riveted upon the ceiling, terror mirrored in their glassy surfaces. There was blood, lots of it, on filmy, pink pajama tops and on the bed clothes, and buried nearly to its hilt in the breast of the woman was the Damascus dagger! But the rubies and sapphires had been gouged from the handle of the knife!

The celluloid mask hid an expression of pity that crossed Hasty's face. He went over to the bed. The knuckles of his fingers brushed the flesh of the white throat of the corpse. Still warm. Only a few minutes had passed then, since death had stalked in that room.

Hasty examined the place. The door had been locked from the inside. There were two windows in the room. From one window it was a sheer drop of thirty or more feet to the concrete walk below. The other opened upon a fire-escape, but it was locked, and the thin film of dust revealed beneath the searching ray of the detective's torch was undisturbed. There seemed no way out of the room. And the door had been locked from the inside. Was Sally's killer still here?

Hasty strode to the closet door. He pulled it open fast. But there was nothing in there except Sally Dumont's clothes and two suits that doubtless had belonged to Charley Frank.

Hasty turned in bewilderment, his puzzled eyes darting about the room. But from all he could see only Death himself could have entered that room. And there was no place even a cat could hide.

Seized with a sudden inspiration, Hasty crossed to the door. Carefully he searched the woodwork for any marks of mechanical devices that might have been used in locking the door from the inside after the killer had left. There were such instruments, but they always left marks.

BUT there wasn't a scratch on the smooth enameled door.

There remained but one thing to do, and Hasty had to get that over with quickly. He still had the man in the room above to investigate—the man from Egg Harbor.

He gloved his hand with his handkerchief and picked up an ivory-enameled French telephone that stood on the night stand beside the bed. Fortunately, it was a dial phone, and he would not have to rouse the clerk who might be suspicious when he heard the number. With his black-masked mouth close to the phone he asked huskily, when he got his connection:

"Police Headquarters?" And at the growled affirmative answer: "Is Detective-sergeant Hasty there?"

No, came the reply. Detective-sergeant Hasty would not be on duty for several hours yet. Detective Carsons was speaking. He would deliver any message.

"This is a straight tip from the Celluloid Burglar," said Hasty. He waited until Carsons got through swearing. "Sally Dumont, pal of Charley Frank, the jewel thief, has been murdered in her room. Her killer is a man by the name of Grubber, Roy Grubber. He has the room directly over hers in the Sen—"

Hasty's breath suddenly locked. His eyes had unconsciously been fastened on the ceiling. Either he was losing his mind or the central lighting fixture there was moving. It dropped a few inches, then swung to one side, revealing a round black hole. Hasty had hardly time to realize that what he had seen was not illusion when there came a faint *pop*. Instinctively, he ducked. Something struck the telephone, dashing

it from his hand, driving through the cloth of his coat sleeve, pinning him to the wall.

Hasty seized the small, knifelike thing that had been hurled at him, wrenched it from the wall and sprang across the room. His toe kicked out and caught in the lamp cord as he passed it, breaking the connection and plunging the room into darkness.

Breathlessly he leaped for the window leading to the fire-escape, wrapping his handkerchief over his hand before unlatching the window. Then he had silently pushed up the window and was out on the fire-escape. He sprang up the steps to the next landing.

CURTAINS fluttered like twin ghosts out of the window of the room above. Hasty sought the shielding wall, stripped off his coat, and flattened himself against the brick siding of the outer wall. He transferred his small .25 automatic to the waist band of his trousers and yanked off his coat. He rolled the coat into a ball, tossed it across the open window, and waited. Nothing happened, so Hasty followed the coat immediately, diving across the sill, automatic in hand.

The *plop* of a silenced gun broke the silence, sent Hasty into a crouch while he choked back a cry of pain. The bullet had smashed into the fingers of his right hand that were curled around his automatic. The gun dropped to the floor. He stopped, picked it up with his left hand. Then he slipped away from the light that entered the window, holding his breath, and moved along the wall.

Inside the room, the killer was moving, too. Hasty heard a heavy shoe knock against a piece of furniture. Instantly he fired at the sound. The little gun yapped out its small bullet and a sharp cry from the killer told him that the chance shot had gone true.

A man's thin shadow snaked across the window light, and at the moment of its appearance Hasty leaped, head down, arms extended.

His shoulders hit bony knees—hit them hard! The killer's gaunt form sprawled on the floor. His legs wriggled eel fashion as he slipped from Hasty's grasp and rolled to one side. One foot connected with the detective's left wrist, and his gun clattered to the floor.

But in falling, the murderer had dropped his gun, too. The odds were even then, Hasty thought exultantly, in spite of his own injured hand. The thin, wiry killer had been wounded, too, and now neither of them had a gun.

The door knob clattered as a shaky hand gripped it. The man was trying for a getaway!

Hasty jumped for the door, caught the man and dragged him back. His foot contacted something hard. His automatic. He scooped it up and jabbed it into flesh.

"Another move and I'll take you in dead," he snarled. "You've reached the end of your rope, Mr. Roy Grubber. You should have made that getaway right after you pulled your third killing. Now you're finished."

Hasty heard a surprised gasp as he called the man from Egg Harbor by name. But Grubber made no attempt to deny it.

Still holding the killer under his gun, Hasty's fingers moved along the edge of the door frame, found the button, and turned on the lights. He took a good look at the man whom he had been chasing all night—the man who had killed three people in less than twenty-four hours and had done his best to kill Detective-sergeant Hasty, too.

CHAPTER XI

CAPTURE!



ROY GRUBBER was thin, but it was a gaunt, raw-boned thinness that indicated the fellow had once been in possession of a husky body. He had the bronzed skin of a man who has spent the greater part of his life in the open, exposed to the elements. His cheek-

bones were high, and he had shoe-button eyes. He stared open-mouthed at the black celluloid mask now, one hand clutching at the blood-stained shoulder of his coat.

"Turn around!" Hasty commanded.

The man obeyed. Hasty could now look over Grubber's shoulder. In the center of the room the rug had been pushed aside. Hasty saw that a round hole had been sawed in the floor, directly above the center light in the room below—a light that was now held in place by strong wires fastened to the leg of a table. By manipulating those wires the light below could be moved at will, and anyone in that room would at no other time see anything amiss with it.

In an apartment hotel like this, maid service or not was at the lessee's discretion. If Grubber did not have maid service, his tampering with the floor would not have been noticed until after he was gone.

It was through that hole he had cut in the floor that Roy Grubber had sent the dagger that had killed Sally Dumont. And beside the hole now lay the weapon that had enabled Grubber to throw a knife accurately from a comparatively great distance.

IT somewhat resembled a short-barreled shotgun. Near its muzzle was a large cylinder. From a hole in the cylinder a length of fine, strong line stretched down through the opening of the floor into the

room below, undoubtedly attached to the knife that had been thrown at Hasty.

The weapon was, as Hasty had already rather expected to find it to be, something very similar to what is known in Coast Guard stations as a life-gun. It could propel a line to a drowning man by throwing a projectile which was attached to one end of the line.

Grubber had added some inventions of his own to this life-gun that he had used to kill. It was evidently air-powered, and there was an arrangement like an automatic fly-casting reel for retrieving the projectile after the shot. This, too was the instrument that had robbed the glass case of the Damascus dagger!

The projectile itself, as Hasty had good reason to know, was a round knife blade that fitted the barrel of the gun. It was the knife with wings!

"Clever!" Hasty said. "But it was that invention of yours that gave you away, Grubber. I didn't get onto it, I'll admit, when you stole the dagger. But of course I realize now that you must have worked it then with an electric-magnet. I imagine we can prove that when we search your possessions and find somewhere the portable battery you used. The principal thing is that after seeing the thing work once or twice, I began to think of the Coast Guards' life-gun.

"But you used it for taking lives
[Turn Page]



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instead of saving them. And you made another mistake. You never should have registered from Little Egg Harbor. But I suppose that place was so deeply impressed on your mind that you did it more or less automatically. Or else you were so sure of yourself, sure the police would never take up your trail. For the police department records show that Sally came from Little Egg Harbor. Were you so dumb that you didn't realize that when Charley Frank was bumped, the police would find out where he was hanging out? And finding Sally dead, too, wouldn't they put two and two together, when they examined the hotel register and found that a man from Little Egg Harbor was upstairs?

"The only thing was, as luck would have it, I got here before the police. The minute I lamped that register downstairs, I saw light. I came upstairs to see Sally, to get the Damascus dagger. I wanted that knife, too, and the Celluloid Burglar doesn't give up so easily. I knew she would have the knife or know where it was. She did, but not as I figured. So—well, you know the rest. I guess you can imagine what was in my mind, too, when I remembered that Sally Dumont was once married to a member of the Coast Guard."

HE was staring at the thoroughly broken, cringing Grubber, towering over him, his gun still boring into the man's back.

"You killed Ludson," he accused, "when he recognized you—you must have been there openly before—and tried to prevent you from leaving the Nelson house. You stole that Prince of Damascus dagger for Sally. You killed Charley Frank because you were jealous. You killed Sally because she was up to her old tricks of stringing along a sucker, and you couldn't stand being strung any longer."

Grubber's shoulders slumped suddenly. He made a despairing gesture.

"She was my wife," he said huskily. "I wanted her back. She kidded

me along, said if I'd bring her that Damascus knife she'd—"

"And when you found she was really here with Charley Frank—wanted the knife for him—you gave her the knife—in the breast, eh?"

Grubber said nothing; merely shuddered, head bowed.

"Sweet irony!" Hasty said. "But you were looking out for your own hide, too, weren't you? And you needed a stake for a getaway. So you took the jewels out of the dagger hilt before giving it to her. Funny you overlooked a very valuable part of that knife—the blade. As an antique, that blade is priceless. And the secret compartment in the hilt contains a fortune in diamonds from the treasure house of an Oriental Nabob! Dick Connell thought only he knew anything about them. But the Celluloid Burglar learns a thing or two. He gets around."

Grubber muttered a curse, but made no attempt to move.

"And now, Mr. Grubber," Hasty said dryly, "I'm going to tie you up and leave you for the police who'll be here shortly, after I call them. I'm going to relieve you of the jewels that were in that knife hilt, and then go down there and get that dagger from Sally's breast. I'm going to return the Damascus blade where it belongs, but there'll be a knife in poor Sally's breast for the police to find—one with your fingerprints on it." His glance shot for one second to a table where another knife glittered. "I see you were all prepared for emergencies."

As subdued as Grubber appeared to be, as thoroughly cowed, Hasty was expecting no resistance. He was caught off-guard for a second at the man's unexpected movement. Too fast for the eye to see, even in that bright light, Grubber's hand shot down to the back of his neck, darted into sight flashing a knife. He leaped with the swiftness of a catamount's spring.

His left hand seized Hasty by the throat, beneath the shining black mask, throwing the detective on his back. Grubber now had the strength

of insane desperation as he brandished the knife, red fury gleaming in his eyes.

"Thanks for telling me about the diamonds in that knife, Mr. Celluloid Burglar!" he gritted as he drove down with the gleaming dagger.

Once again Hasty lived up to his nickname. His fingers met Grubber's wrist when the knife was fractions of an inch from his throat. He gave a savage, desperate twist that broke Grubber's hold. He kicked up with his knees, rolled over and was on his feet to meet Grubber's second rush.

The point of the knife blade caught in Hasty's shirt sleeve and ripped down to the cuff. But the detective's flying right fist crashed the point of Grubber's jaw. The man's head snapped back. He staggered. His foot struck the edge of the hole in the floor, twisted in, and caught. As he fell there was the sharp crack of breaking bone. Abruptly the color drained from Grubber's face and he lay still as death.

Hasty stooped over the fallen man and pulled the dagger from his clenched fist. His fingers frisked over the man's clothing, locating a soft leather bag. He pulled it out. As he had expected, it contained the jewels taken from the knife hilt.

As gently as he could, he released Grubber's broken leg from the hole and laid him out on the floor.

"You'll have attention quickly enough," he said grimly, "and now it will not be necessary for me to do more than tie your hands."

He made a swift job of that and had just wiped off the handle of the knife Grubber had tried to use on him, and pressed the man's fingers around its hilt when there came a pounding at the door that jarred the walls and rattled the furniture. The police!

They must have done some quick thinking and acting to get there so rapidly. For Grubber's attempt on his life had come before Hasty had even been able to complete his call. The syllable "Sen—" was the only clue to the name of the hotel—and

evidently the police had finally arrived at the proper deduction.

"Open up in there!" a voice boomed, and Hasty recognized the voice of District Attorney Snathe. He must, the detective knew, have been at Police Headquarters, when the Celluloid Burglar's call came in.

Hasty darted across the room. Out on the fire-escape, he picked up his coat. Then, with the knife in his hand, with his handkerchief over the hilt, he made his way back through the window of the room below where Sally Dumont's body lay.

It was a gruesome task he had set himself, and one that must be done in seconds, for he could hear the booming of heavy police voices in the hall upstairs as shoulders crashed with battering-ram force against Grubber's door. They would be in there in moments. It would be only moments too, before they would be down here.

It took all Hasty's strength to release the Damascus knife from the woman's chest, but a shorter time to replace it with Grubber's knife. Hasty was at the window again as the first pounding came on Sally's door.

As he clattered down the fire-escape steps, he tore the celluloid mask from his face. He leaped the long jump at the ground floor and ran for his car. He jumped and panted to Lucky:

"ALL set! Head for Anderson, the banker on Wilder Street. We can trust him to look after Mrs. Connell's interest. We'll leave the knife with him."

"But," Lucky objected, "there's goin' to be a lot of fuss with all these killings. What if old Nelson squawks about his dagger to the police?"

"He won't." Hasty chuckled. "The Celluloid Burglar has probably made him a good boy, for a time. He won't be wanting to buck that mysterious masked man again soon. Tomorrow Nelson gets an envelope containing a tiny black mask and five hundred dollars. He'll know

then, if he hadn't guessed it before, that the Celluloid Burglar was working for Mrs. Connell. The five hundred will tell him the story. He's such a coward that he won't take a chance on that story coming out!

"As for Grubber, Snathe won't have any trouble hanging onto him the murders of Ludson, Frank, and Sally Dumont after he sees the weapon that Grubber has for flinging his knife. The Damascus dagger—well, Grubber can protest all he wants about who got it, but just wait until you hear what Thomas Nelson has to say. It's a clean job, Lucky!"

* * * * *

Detective-sergeant Hasty was in the district attorney's office the next day when the hectic doings of the night before were recounted. Lucky was with him, a little uncomfortable in such surroundings.

District Attorney Snathe was expansive. The whole world, even the ex-convict, was his friend as he beamed, serenely confident that it was through his own efforts that the murders had been cleaned up.

"Well, Pretty Damn," he said to Hasty. "I suppose you heard I got that triple murderer. Quick work, it was, too. He was a guy by the name of Grubber. Just sweated a confession out of him about thirty minutes ago. He copped the Damascus dagger through a hole in Nelson's skylight; wanted it for that dame he killed. But he says there was a guy in a celluloid mask—I guess you know who *that* was—who hijacked him in his room in the Senate Hotel just before we got there, and took the dagger away from him."

THE district attorney grinned, added a little shamefacedly: "Do you know, Pretty Damn, somehow I'm not half as anxious to get that Celluloid Burglar as I was. But I will get him. You'll see."

"Yes, I suppose you will when you really want him," Hasty said calmly, and the district attorney looked pleased as he went on:

"This morning old Nelson called

me up. He insists we drop the whole matter of the Damascus dagger. Says the knife was returned to him by special messenger this morning before he was out of bed. He's got it in a safety deposit box now, he says, and from now on no man on earth except himself is going to see it. Wouldn't even let me go see it. He says the Celluloid Burglar returned it to him, that that so-and-so is a great guy and he wants us to leave the Burglar alone!"

Hasty grinned. He was visualizing Thomas Nelson's face when, this morning at the breakfast table, he had opened the envelope containing the black mask and the five hundred dollars.

"That weapon Grubber used was the damndest thing," Snathe was saying. Hasty tried to look interested while the district attorney described the weapon.

"Some of this might have come back on *you*, Pretty Damn—and plenty—if we hadn't all been on the job as hard as we were. Maybe you already know, though, that Headquarters got a crank phone call from somebody yesterday, insisting that *you* were the Celluloid Burglar! That's nuts, of course, because Carsons *saw* the Celluloid Burglar hold you up in Camocho's house. But there was *somebody* in Nelson's house last night besides Grubber. And I'm betting it was the Celluloid Burglar."

Lucky McGee moved restlessly. "I—I think I'll be goin'," he stammered, and rolled on bowed legs toward the door.

Snathe ignored the ex-convict. He picked up a battered hat that lay on a table near-by.

"I found this hat in Nelson's place," he said. "It didn't belong either to Nelson, Ludson, or to Grubber. Just can't figure out who it does belong to. And if it is the Celluloid Burglar's—well, even I can't go around clapping the hat on the head of every man who wears a seven and a quarter head size to find the owner."

He laughed a little ruefully. "Guess we'll have to wait until we

get the Celluloid Burglar before we go trying to fit it on him." He reached out for Hasty's hat casually and looked inside.

"Hmm. Seven and three-quarters. That let's you out." The district attorney laughed. "And I wear a seven. So that lets me out. But with the cranks accusing *you*, Pretty Damn, you can't tell how soon they'll start on me or the mayor."

Hasty was grinning as he left the district attorney's office. Outside the door he took off his green felt hat and stared thoughtfully at the size tag inside it. It read seven and three-quarters. And for the last ten years, Hasty knew, he had been wearing a seven, and a quarter hat size, the same as that marked on the brown felt he had left at Nelson's!

He had a pretty good idea about how that had happened now.

Lucky McGee was waiting outside in the car as Hasty reached the street. His homely face was absolutely blank.

"You old sinner!" thought Hasty affectionately. "Darned if you didn't switch hat sizes on me!"

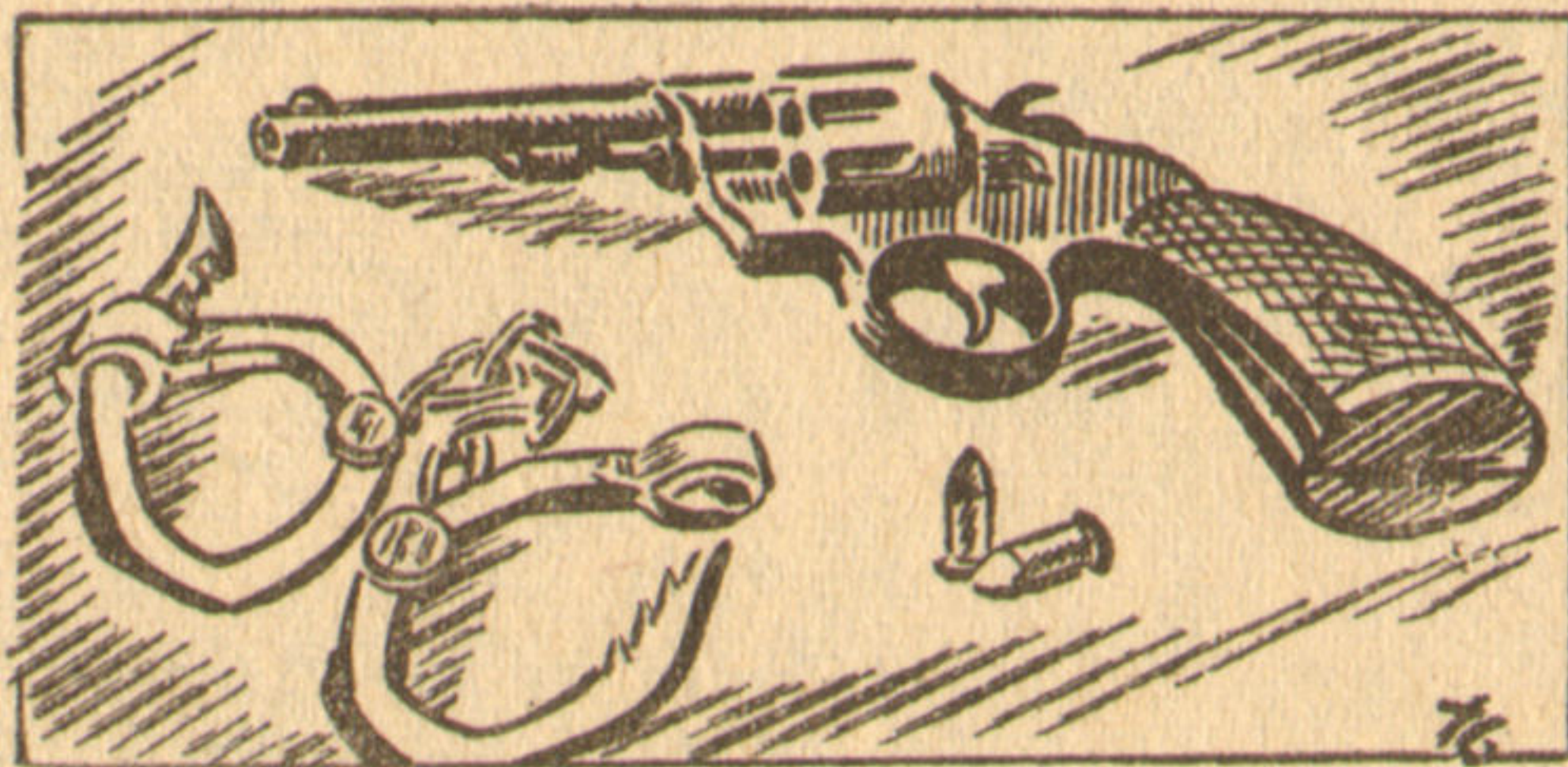
But all he said aloud was: "Get going, Lucky. We both need some sleep."

"That hat," Lucky presently remarked irrelevantly, "I kinda wish it would take fire or somethin'."

Hasty wiped his perspiring brow and grinned again.

"Do you know, Lucky," he said softly, "I've got an idea that kelly would look better among my souvenirs than among the district attorney's. Guess I'll have to collect it sometime. I'll feel better if it's that way."

Lucky let out an explosive breath. "You and me, both!" he said fervently.



NEXT ISSUE

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Frank Croyden's Sudden Wealth Was a Mystery to Him—Until a Vicious Criminal Put Him Wise!

By ROBERT WALLACE

Author of "The Master of Death," "Milestones of Murder," etc.



FRIDAY started off like all the other days in the week for Frank Croyden, expert accountant for the Radio Retail Merchants' Association. One cog in a rather elaborate organization that was welding together the independent merchants from coast to coast, he reached his desk in the suite of offices at Radio City by nine o'clock and settled down to juggle figures and statistics. His salary was seventy-five dollars per week, and he felt that he earned it.

Until he opened his mail. Half-way through the little stack he came upon a letter addressed to him from the Metro Trust Corporation. He read it with bulging eyes.

Dear Mr. Croyden:

As per your original trust agreement with us as the managers of your estate, since we have had no word from your uncle whose power of attorney lapses this week, we are requesting you to call at our offices for a conference with Mr. Simmons to make known your wishes as to the future handling of your affairs.

We are glad to report substantial earnings on your investments during the past twelve months, and feel certain you will be pleased with the balance sheet.

Mr. Simmons is holding open an appointment for you at two o'clock Friday afternoon. He will expect you unless otherwise notified.

Very truly yours,
John Stewart Bloch.
Secretary to Mr. Simmons.

This was Friday. Croyden could arrange for a late lunch hour, even take the remainder of the afternoon off, if necessary. That was easy. But this letter was crazy. The Metro Trust Company was the big-

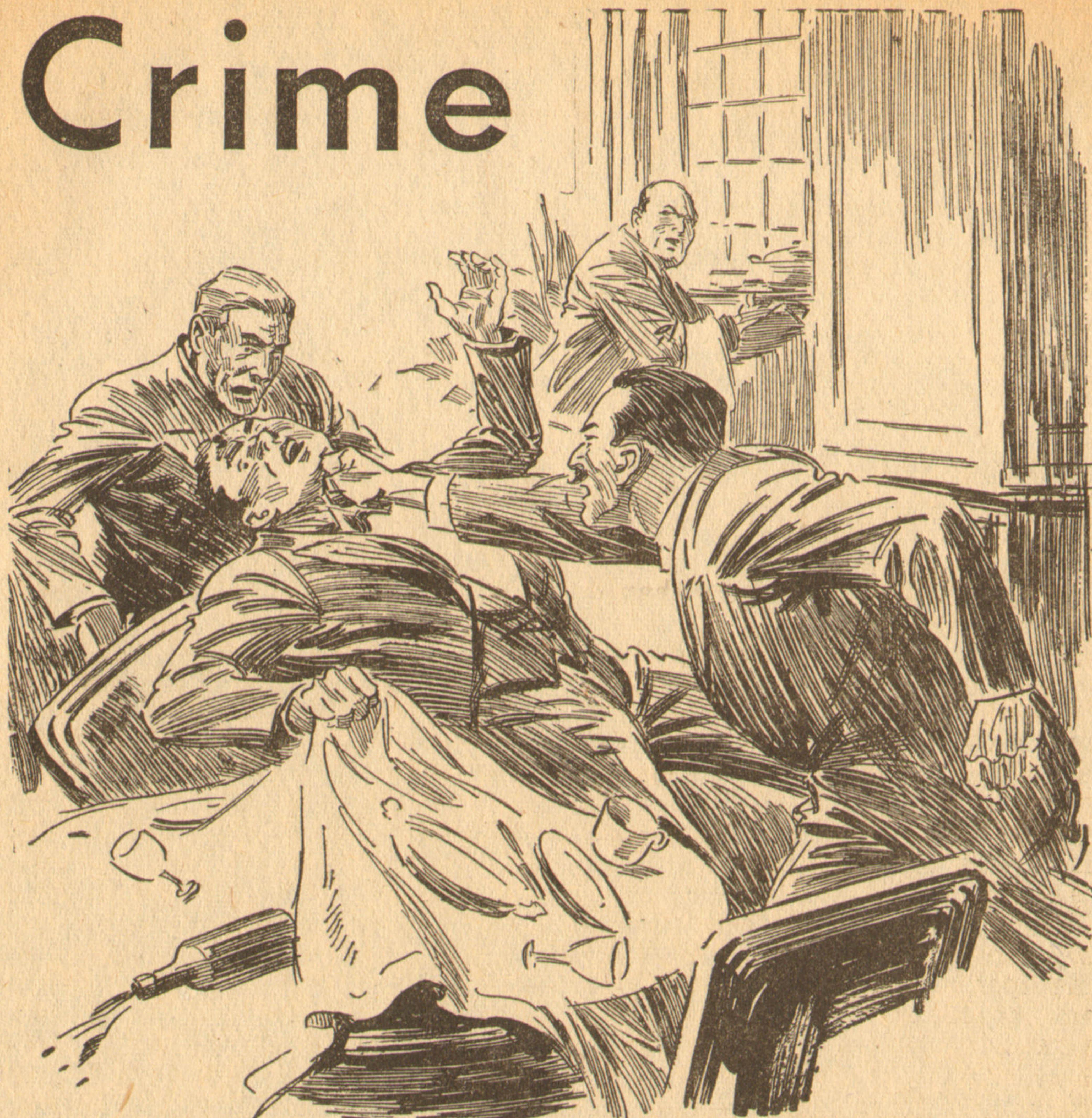
gest and wealthiest investment house in New York. He had no more business to transact with them than a newsboy. He had less than a hundred dollars in a branch savings bank on Madison Avenue.

But there was no mistake in the addressing of this letter. It specified Frank Croyden, accountant, care of Radio Retail Merchants' Association, with correct floor, office, and inner office numbers. It was on both envelope and letterhead. Mr. Bloch definitely meant to reach Frank Croyden. But Mr. Bloch, definitely, had made a bad mistake.

CROYDEN read the letter again. His uncle! The only living relative in this category he could recall would be Allen Croyden, rather elusive brother of Frank's dead father. He hadn't seen the old boy for more than five years. Not since that last hurried visit when—could that have any bearing on this matter? Allen Croyden had been preparing his will, or something, and he had procured his nephew's hurried signature on a couple of papers. For his life, Croyden could not remember just what he had signed. Very foolish action on the part of an accountant, he realized. But Allen was his uncle; there had been nothing at stake; it had made no difference. But had it?

Certainly not in this case. He couldn't have given his uncle a power of attorney to handle an estate he didn't possess. Abruptly Croyden got up and went to the office of his best friend, Ted Price, chief radio announcer of the broad-

Crime



Croyden fought with the strength of despair

casting system. They went into a huddle over the perplexity.

"It smells like money," grinned Price. "Your uncle always was nutty. It won't do any harm to go down there and listen to old man Simmons spout off. At least, you can find out what it's all about."

"I intend to do just that," nodded Croyden, his blue eyes twinkling. "Maybe I can chisel enough out of them before the bubble bursts for us to make one night at the new casino."

Promptly at two he presented himself at the trust company. He gave his name to the husky and armed guard at the entrance to the suite of private offices beyond the ornate marble and grillework that

constituted the front of the firm. By this simple magic he was at once admitted to the august presence of the president of the trust company. Mr. Simmons got down to the meat of the matter at once.

"Thank you for coming, Mr. Croyden. According to the rather unique arrangement you made with us, in the event that your uncle ceased acting in your interests, we have waited the full year before calling on you. I trust Mr. Allen Croyden is well."

So Allen Croyden was, somehow, it!

"Er—yes, I trust so," replied Croyden noncommittally. Being a good accountant, he had learned the value ornate and marble grille work that

other party before committing himself.

"I have here," went on Mr. Simmons, after a polite pause, "a statement of your earnings for the past year. The total comes to ninety-seven thousand, six hundred and forty-five dollars and a few cents. Not bad at all on a million dollars' worth of investments. Since your uncle has not drawn against these profits for the entire year, they have accrued. Here is our check for the amount. And, since you are obviously rearranging your affairs, will you set a date for a complete auditing of our trusteeship?"

"How about next Friday?" Croyden felt his way gingerly.

"Splendid. I will have your accounts ready for a complete check. Suppose you meet me at one o'clock and have lunch with me? I am in hopes that you will be pleased enough at the reports to leave your affairs in our hands. Ah, yes, here's a detailed sheet of the year's earning, too."

In a daze, Croyden accepted the check, the luncheon engagement, and the detail sheet. He looked down at the crisp, green slip of paper. It was a perfectly legible check, payable to him, for nearly one hundred thousand dollars. He glanced at the balance sheet. To his practiced eye it looked okay, but the facts were still Greek to him.

"The total earnings rather startles you, eh?" Simmons smiled tolerantly.

What kind of a game was this? Did all accountants finally go mad over figures and have wild dreams of this nature? One hundred thousand dollars—merely as a year's earnings on a million-dollar account! And Simmons was asking if it startled him!

"Our dealings with Mr. Allen Croyden," went on the president of the trust company, "were always most pleasant. He built up your estate from your various sources from a scant hundred thousand to a million in less than five years. While we are not conversant with your outside affiliations, we feel that your

uncle has done a fine job. I trust there have been no differences of opinion between you."

"Oh, no. Not at all!" said Croyden hastily.

"Where is he now?"

"I wish I knew," answered Croyden, earnestly.

"Can I be of any further service today, Mr. Croyden?" beamed the president.

"Let me glance over our original trust agreement," the young man managed. "I'd like to refresh my mind on a few details."

NO sooner said than done. And Croyden read an amazing document that he had signed six years previous. In substance, he had appointed Allen Croyden to control his affairs and handle all monies through the Metro Trust Company. In the event that Allen Croyden failed to make his monthly visits to the trust company for accounting, at the expiration of one year from date, Frank Croyden was to be called in for conference.

And that was that. But where the devil was Allen Croyden? And what was the answer to this Chinese puzzle? Where had the original fortune come from in the first place? None of the Croydens had been wealthy.

He got out of the building without being arrested. Mopping the cold perspiration from his brow, he crossed Fifth Avenue and walked westward toward Broadway, seeking a more or less quiet haven where he could sit down and figure this crazy business out.

He entered a cafeteria, pulled a ticket from the feeder-box at the entrance, got a cup of coffee, and sat down at an unoccupied table against the wall. He stared at the convincing evidence of the balance sheet and crisp, green check. He shrugged in comical dismay.

Two snappily dressed men paused at his table, and he hastily thrust the papers into his inside breast pocket. The newcomers, empty-handed, surveyed him and then brusquely sat down, one on each side

of him. Plainclothes men! He sighed in resignation. The bubble had already burst.

"You are Frank Croyden," said one, more a statement than a question.

"Believe it or not," Croyden cracked back faintly, "that is really my name."

"Wise guy," intoned the second man, a Roman-nosed individual who shaved blue.

"You just came from your trustees—the Metro Company," went on the first man crisply. He was a slender, rather handsome chap with light brown hair and hazel eyes, whose only oddity was the inscrutability of his expression—a deadpan face.

"Well, I've just come from the Metro Trust Company," admitted Croyden. "I was invited there."

"Yeah, we know. How about coming along with us—quietly."

"I always go quietly," replied Croyden, shrinking with the average person's distaste for being the center of attention. "I think I can explain everything."

They halted at the cashier's desk near the door while Croyden paid his check, and his companions tossed down their own unpunched tickets. Then, herding him unnecessarily close, they bundled him into an inconspicuous black sedan that waited at the curb, sandwiching him between them as the driver nosed out into traffic. The car radio was playing softly. Dance music from a big hotel.

"Where are we going?" Croyden asked. "Back to the Metro, or down to Headquarters?"

"Why?" said the blue-jowled chap.

"Can it, Danube," grated the leader of the pair. "Why drive when you can lead?"

And Croyden, being a very astute young man, understood that he was not in the hands of the police.

"I'll get out here," he said, as the car stopped for the traffic light at Broadway, getting his legs under him and leaning across Danube to lever the door open.

The blue-jowled one bounced him

back against the seat cushions with one sweep of his arm. And something hard prodded his ribs from the side.

"Take it easy, guy," said the frozen-faced Adonis. "This ain't my finger."

"But, why?" demanded Croyden a bit breathlessly, nevertheless relaxing. "I'm just an accountant with Radio Retail Merchants. What—"

"Yeah," said Danube wearily. "We know."

"But, who are you men? What's the idea—"

"Save it, Croyden," advised Deadpan. "You'll learn everything you need to know. Don't get ideas about that traffic cop. This is a million-dollar snatch, and we mean business. See, Danube? I've warned you before. You don't talk much, but what you say is dynamite."

"Hell," soliloquized Danube in disgust.

THE chauffeur grinned through the rearview mirror, glancing at the trio as he shifted into gear and turned north on green, nosing through pedestrian traffic and jockeying for position for a swift flight on the next light change. The spokesman went on conversationally:

"You won't get hurt, Croyden—if you behave. You're headed for a little talk with Rats Beldano. Ever hear of him?"

Frank Croyden went rigid with surprise and apprehension. Rats Beldano! King of the numbers racket, and powerful figure in the underworld in spite of the present drives of the prosecuting attorney. The young accountant strove to recall what he had heard of Beldano.

Just about a year previous a man by the name of George Dawson had been czar of this particular racket. But Dawson had been machine gunned by parties unknown as he stepped out of the Coronet Night Club one night. The ranks had closed smoothly, lieutenants had moved up, and Rats Beldano had taken over. Gangland had one less crook, and everybody—including the police—had been more or less satisfied.

George Dawson and Rats Beldano had been just names to Croyden until this stressful moment. Obviously, it was going to be different from now on.

"My name is Morton," went on the man with the gun in Croyden's right kidney. "'Ice' Morton, they call me because I forgot how to smile when I was a kid. The gent on your other side is Dan Torbin—'Blue Danube' because of his whiskers. Shall we be friends?"

The situation was certainly tense and crisp enough. Croyden laughed bitterly.

"I'm in no position to be otherwise," he commented. "But I think Manhattan must be Mad-hatter today. Everybody mistaking me for somebody else, and me with less than a hundred dollars I can call my own."

"Yeah," grunted Danube. "With a hundred-grand check in your pocket."

"That I can't even cash," added Croyden acidly. "I couldn't even deposit it in my own savings account for collection without getting into a jam."

"That's what you think," informed Morton. "This is on the up and up. Just sit tight, and you may make something out of the deal."

And that was all the satisfaction Croyden got until the car stopped at a swanky apartment hotel on Central Park West. Docilely he alighted and went with his two companions into the place and up to a luxurious suite on the tenth floor. Shortly he found himself in a handsome living room confronting a gimlet-eyed man with vigorous black hair that was greying becomingly at the temples. There was the predatory marks of an eagle about Rats Beldano. Otherwise, he was suave and quiet-voiced, unruffled, and with the air of a gentleman.

"Sit down, Mr. Croyden," invited the racketeer genially. "Have a drink? A cigar?"

Dumbly shaking his head, still flanked by his two guards, Croyden sat down on a divan. Beldano glanced sharply at Morton.

"Did he get it?"

"Sure," nodded Morton. "Everything's jake."

Beldano turned back to study the face of his prisoner. "You are doubtless, Mr. Croyden, wondering what this is all about. I won't keep you in suspense. Bear with me while I explain."

"That's what I'm waiting for," said Croyden grimly.

"In a nutshell, you had an uncle named Allen Croyden, a brother of your father's. You haven't seen him for about six years. Right?"

"That's right," admitted Croyden.

"For some reason unknown to you, he requested and got a number of your signatures."

"YES," admitted the accountant in amazement. "I thought he was ecentric."

"Eccentric like a fox," said Beldano tersely. "He was not an autograph hunter. In your name he founded a fortune and built up an estate of more than a million dollars with Metro Trust Company."

"He intended 'retiring' some day, and he feathered a sweet nest for himself. In the event that anything happened to him before that day, you, his nephew and only living relative, became heir by default—and by a very clever set-up which cheats state and federal governments of inheritance taxes. In short, Mr. Allen Croyden, alias Frank Croyden, never let his left hand know what his right hand was doing."

"If this is true," articulated Frank Croyden, "how do *you* know it? And what's it to you?"

"Telling you one fact should enable you to puzzle the whole thing out," said Beldano, eyeing the young man ironically. "Your uncle was known in certain circles as George Dawson."

This was one to the solar plexus. Croyden blinked and gulped. He was speechless.

"Machine gun bullets," went on Beldano sardonically, "know no master save the hand on the trip. George Dawson was at the wrong end of the chopper."

"Go on," said Croyden tersely, as Beldano paused.

The numbers king shrugged politely as he selected a cigarette and lighted it with an electrical glower, all the while keeping his eyes on his compulsory visitor. He inhaled deeply, and exhaled slowly.

"The answer should be obvious to a man as smart as you are," he replied significantly. "That money belongs to the Numerical Association of Greater New York. I intend to have it. I had to take over a business which had a big deficit. And it's been a terrible struggle to keep the corporation solvent, especially during the past year. But I couldn't get my hands on the estate of Frank Croyden, who was just a name in Dun and Bradstreet to me. But even George Dawson, smart though he was, couldn't hide a million dollars completely. So I've waited until you came into control of the fortune. Simple, isn't it?"

"You are telling me," said Croyden thinly, "that my uncle was a crook. That this sudden wealth of mine is true. That it is illegally acquired money. That you expect me to turn it over to you."

"Precisely," nodded Beldano. "You can begin by endorsing that dividend check you have over to me right now. As an accountant, you can see that we can easily arrange for the transfer of the properties without a raffle over a short period of time."

"And, if all you tell me is true, face a possible prison sentence for complicity."

"Maybe—if you are careless."

"Suppose I don't see things exactly your way?"

Danube broke his silence. "Curtains," he said wearily.

Morton didn't speak. He sat, silent, his handsome face apparently of granite. Beldano daintily flicked the ash from his cigarette. Further speech was superfluous.

Croyden's next words were surprising.

"Who killed my uncle?" he demanded.

"That," replied Beldano softly, "is

a matter of conjecture. There was a rival corporation whose methods were a little primitive—muscling in, I believe is the quaint term applied by the police department and the criminal element. You may rest assured that—ah—something in the nature of reprisals was seen to. Perhaps you read the papers at the time?"

"I KNOW that the killing of George Dawson was never explained," answered Croyden shortly. "I don't know that any of this other stuff you've told me is true. Maybe it is. Anyway, I'm going to investigate it. And you're barking up the wrong tree, Beldano, if you think I'm going to turn that hot money over to you. It's going to the Department of Justice at Washington."

"How very unfortunate," sighed Beldano. "A million-dollar estate reverting to the government—because Frank Croyden dies intestate and without heirs."

A thrill coursed up and down the accountant's spine. Nevertheless, he squared his whitened jaw and grinned gamely as he got to his feet. Silently Morton and Danube arose with him.

"Well," he said, "if that's all, I guess I'll be going. Thanks for an entertaining chat. Sorry I can't—"

"Rats!" crisped out the racketeer, the simple expletive ripping like a curse because of his way of saying it. "Kick in with that check and get right—quick, Croyden, before the boys get rough!"

"Be yourself, Beldano," said the victim tersely, his eyes darting to the fashion plates on either side. "You can't get away with this. I couldn't get away with it, either. Why, I won't even see an audit of this stuff before next week. And I can't endorse this check. I don't care if Allen Croyden, or George Dawson, did use my name. He didn't sign these dividend checks in my handwriting. I'd be in jail for forging my own name. The minute—"

"The check," Beldano cut him off. "Pen and ink are on that desk."

"If—if I give you the check—you'll let me go?"

"Certainly. I can't keep you here. And our negotiations are going to take time. Of course, I don't expect you to do this for nothing. We keep your family name clean—and you get ten percent, or the amount of this check, for your share."

Desperate to get away, knowing that he was helpless until he could have freedom of action, Croyden drew the papers from his pocket and strode over to the desk.

"Don't make the mistake," pointed out Beldano, "of merely writing your name on that check. I want your signature—and I know it when I see it."

Croyden didn't even hesitate. He had already thought of that. He dashed off his signature. Approaching Beldano, he tendered the check. "Here's the report sheet, too," he said acidly. "You might want to check it. It won't do me any good."

"Thank you," said Beldano politely.

"Nuts!" observed Danube.

"May I go now?" asked Croyden.

"Yes," nodded Beldano, casting his blue-jowled henchman an inscrutable look. "By the way, Croyden, I wouldn't advise any precipitate action on your part. You've been under close observation for a year, and your habits are thoroughly known to us. It's hardly necessary for me to point out that you'll be carefully tailed every minute from now on. So don't take a run-out powder. And, it wouldn't be smart to try and get in touch with the police—since endorsing this check. Good afternoon. Did I mention that Ice and Danube have rented the apartment next to yours!"

Frank Croyden managed to leave without collapse. He was hemmed in on all sides. From a carefree and happy situation in life as a salaried accountant, in three short hours he had been plunged to his ears in a criminal conspiracy that threatened his very life, and certainly his liberty. He was already a criminal by complicity. Possessor

of a million dollars, he couldn't spend a nickel of it. He was already afoul of the law, and the moment he stepped outside of bounds to circumvent Rats Beldano he was going to be a fugitive—from criminals. A most unusual situation.

But he felt as helpless as an infant. He couldn't even arm himself against his enemies without violating the law. And the moment he stepped outside his established routine, he knew he had to keep on going—and go fast. A million-dollar crime, indeed.

Knowing that Ice Morton and Danube Torbin were tailing him, he went straight home and let himself into his apartment. He sat down in the living room to think. He heard his shadows entering the two-room suite next door. On impulse, he picked up the telephone. There was a series of clicks.

"Operator," he breathed into the mouthpiece. "Operator, this is urgent! Get me Spring—"

"Naughty, naughty," came the voice of Ice Morton through the receiver. "Mustn't call the police. Hot money's a nasty rap to beat, anyhow."

"Morton!" Croyden gasped. "How did you get on the switchboard?"

"Don't think Beldano is dumb, guy," said Morton, his voice going hard and menacing. "Your phone doesn't go through the switchboard nowadays."

Croyden took that one in his stride. "What are you going to do when I go to work Monday morning!" he asked. "Even Beldano can't cover every phone in our offices."

"If you went to work," replied Morton with peculiar emphasis, "you would have realized that this check was already cashed on Saturday, putting your foot into it. But you ain't working for a couple of weeks, pal. You are taking a vacation—"

"But I've got to work, Morton!" Croyden snapped rapidly. "This isn't like running a racket, you know. I'll lose my job—"

"Don't fret, pal," advised the other. "We'll get around to handling

your job Monday morning. You can always be sick, you know. Do you play poker? Checkers? Pinochle? Chess? Danube craves some entertainment over the week-end."

"Not with me," growled Croyden, prior to hanging up. "He talks too damn much!"

When he went out to dinner at seven o'clock, Morton and Danube trailed along openly. They saw him safely back to his apartment. The same thing happened next morning at breakfast, after he had tumbled and tossed anxiously all night. At lunch time matters hadn't changed any. So he broke down and invited the pair to sit at his table in the little Italian restaurant. If he only knew somebody he could get in touch with! Someone who would understand his predicament without a lot of explanation, and who would act in his name! Ted Price!

"Nice of you," grinned Morton, his face expressionless save for the grimace about his lips. "I wondered if you were highhating us. We're your pals. The other boys, now—you've got a whole flock of shadows—not having been introduced, might play rough, if you gave Danube and me the slip and tried to take a powder."

This was revealing news—if true. And Croyden was afraid to doubt it. A million dollars was worth taking a lot of pains for.

"Okay," he said philosophically. "If I can throw a monkey-wrench into Bedlano's plans without danger to myself, it's understood that I'll do so. If I can't, I can't. Since we're just among us girls here, tell me, who actually killed George Dawson?"

"Is that nice?" chided Morton. "Didn't you hear Rats say a rival—"

"I heard, but I don't believe fairy tales. Not after what I learned yesterday. Somebody on the inside removed Dawson, and I think it was Beldano himself!"

"Dangerous talk," commented Morton. "And it gets you no place. Just be a good boy, and live a long time."

(Continued on page 105)

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The Bulletin Board

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There are 365 good days for reading on the calendar. The glorious and lazy summer days beckon—and then what can compare to the companionship of a mystery novel? A detective novel to read on vacation!

In **DETECTIVE NOVELS MAGAZINE**, remember, there are always two detective book-length mysteries, bringing you an exceptional feast of thrills!

How did you like the stories in this issue? You haven't seen anything yet! Here, let's take a peek over the sergeant's shoulder at the next issue's dossier.

Detective Wyant Reports

Here's a flash on one of our novels, **SOMEONE ALWAYS DIES**, from the report of Detective Packard Wyant.

"Something phony about Donaman's Bird Seed business. Must investigate more fully. Every time anybody pokes his nose into Donaman's business—someone always dies."

So that was the kind of business Mr. Donaman operated. No wonder Private Detective Wyant got curious. And he proceeded to poke his nose into Roger Donaman's business with a vengeance. And what happened? Wyant got tangled up in the most perplexing case he had ever encountered.

It was not an ominous business on the surface. But Donaman's bird seed business, it was well known, was just a blind for his other nefarious enterprises; a blind behind which ruled a Moloch of Crime!

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the sinister web of evil which was grimly spun around Donaman's strange enterprise. Threads spread out in puzzling fashion, and a cunning human spider chuckled as he weaved! Wyant's job was to cut through those threads, but he didn't know where to begin. And his own life, meanwhile, hung in the balance by a very slim cord.

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Dead men tell no tales—but in **SOMEONE ALWAYS DIES**, a dead man, and a dead canary, have plenty to say!

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That's Just a Sample

And that's just a sample of the good things to come in the next **DETECTIVE NOVELS MAGAZINE**, a Thrilling Publication! Two gripping full-length novels! Several outstanding short stories! Watch for it on your local newsstand.

If you have anything to report to the Bulletin Board, put it in writing! Thanks to you all for your enthusiastic reception of our first issue. Many fine letters have been received, excerpts from which will appear in a later number. Keep us posted on your likes and dislikes—so that we can plan future issues to reflect your tastes and requirements in fiction. Be seeing you—and thanks, thanx, and thanques again!—**THE EDITOR**.

MILLION-DOLLAR CRIME

(Continued from page 103)

"Who's buying lunch?" asked Danube with a snort of impatience.

After being conducted back to his apartment, Croyden set himself to consider his problem seriously. Due to the revelation anent Allen Croyden, and the fact that he had endorsed over the hundred-thousand-dollar check to Beldano, he was not expected to attempt communication with the police. The ten percent bait—which he had no delusions about—held out to him was another deterrent. They had already forestalled any hasty action in his primary panic. And they were carefully keeping him out of touch with his few friends.

AT his first dangerous looking move, he had no doubt that he would be snatched with a vengeance and placed under close guard until such time as his usefulness was at an end. Therefore, whatever he did, had to ring the bell the first time, and there must be no slips. What was the greatest foe to treachery and intrigue? Publicity! The nightmare of burglar, crooked politician, and diplomat alike!

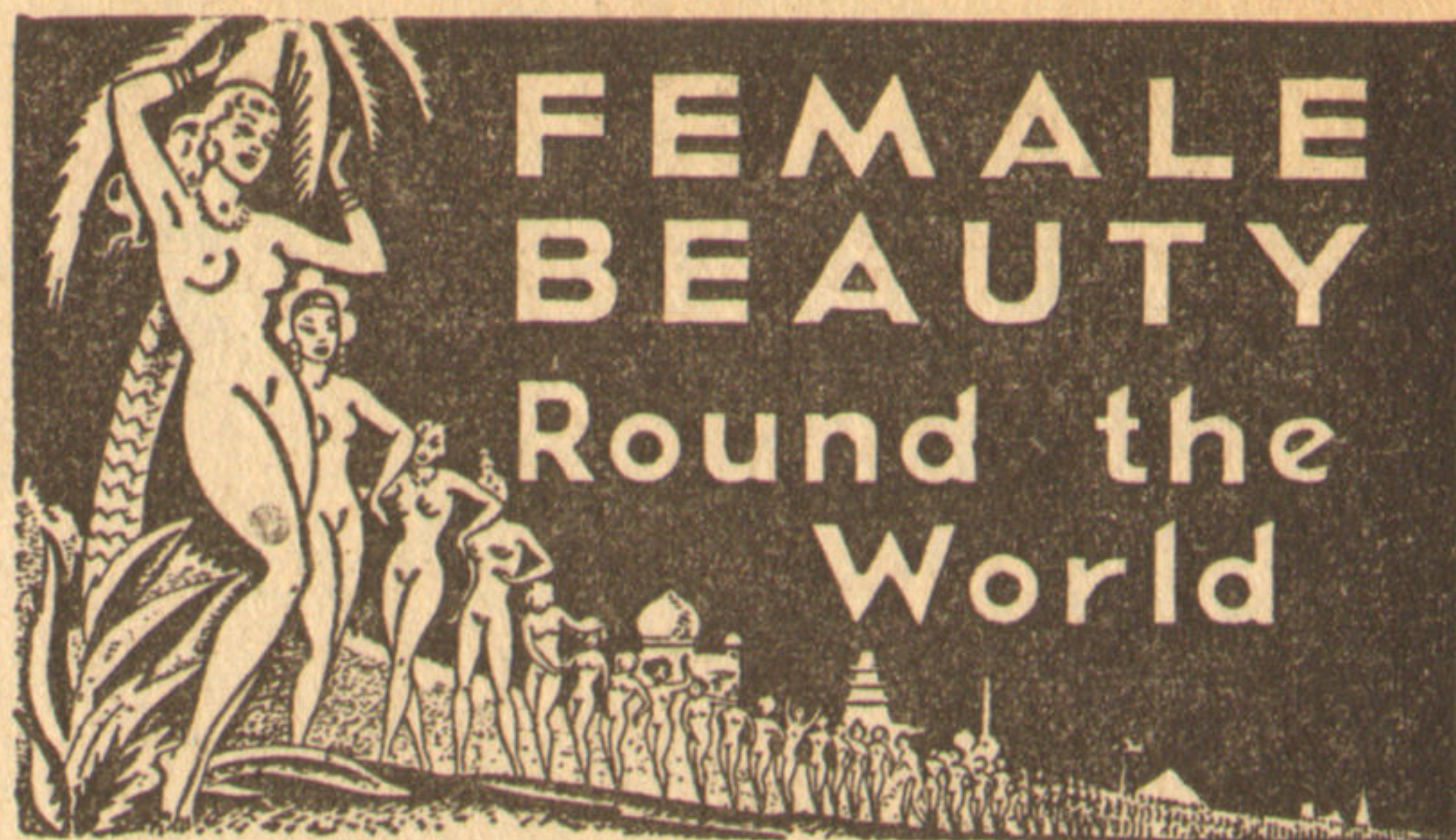
He sat down at his portable typewriter, stuck two letterheads and a carbon in the machine, and began to write. After a bit he addressed an envelope, enclosed two sheets of paper, and sealed it. Hastily he went out into the hall and stepped to the mail chute by the elevator. He found Ice Morton at his side.

"I expected you," he said wearily, extending a carbon copy of a letter. "Read and censor for yourself. I can't take such high-handed methods with my firm without starting inquiry. So I'm not waiting till Monday to let 'em know I've been called unexpectedly to Boston for a couple of weeks."

"Let's see the address!" demanded Morton, and Croyden showed him the envelope.

Morton searched his face and quickly grabbed the carbon. It was

(Continued on page 106)



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(Continued from page 105)

exactly what Croyden had stated. Before Morton offered further objections, the accountant dropped the original in the envelope down the chute.

"I guess that's all right," nodded Morton. "You wouldn't be fool enough to try to explain all this family stuff to your employers. And this'll keep them from trying to get in touch with you Monday. I'll keep this copy."

"Suit yourself," shrugged Croyden.

By dinner time that evening Croyden was desperate. He decided to make a break for it, chancing other shadows if he could only get rid of Morton and Danube. He dressed himself carefully before going out, putting on his golf shoes and a heavy tweed suit. He counted his cash, finding a little more than thirty dollars on him. Then he searched his quarters for a weapon of some nature that could honestly be classed as a weapon.

The only thing available was a paper knife; nothing else could be concealed on his body. Slipping this rather futile item under his belt, he offered up a brief but fervent prayer, commended his soul to his Maker, and snapped out his light. Perhaps he was making a monkey of himself, but he was positive that the Beldano mob was not going to get hold of that million dollars. And if the police were smart, that hundred thousand in dividends would be got back, too.

Morton and Danube met him in the hall.

"Styles have changed in dinner clothes," commented Morton. "Fancy meeting you here."

"The paper knife," said Danube, holding out his hand.

Croyden stared with slack jaw.

"Peep-holes through the wall," explained Morton. "We think of everything. Better give it to him. Danube's ugly when he doesn't have his way."

Without a word, Croyden surrendered the paper cutter. "It wasn't much good," he stated.

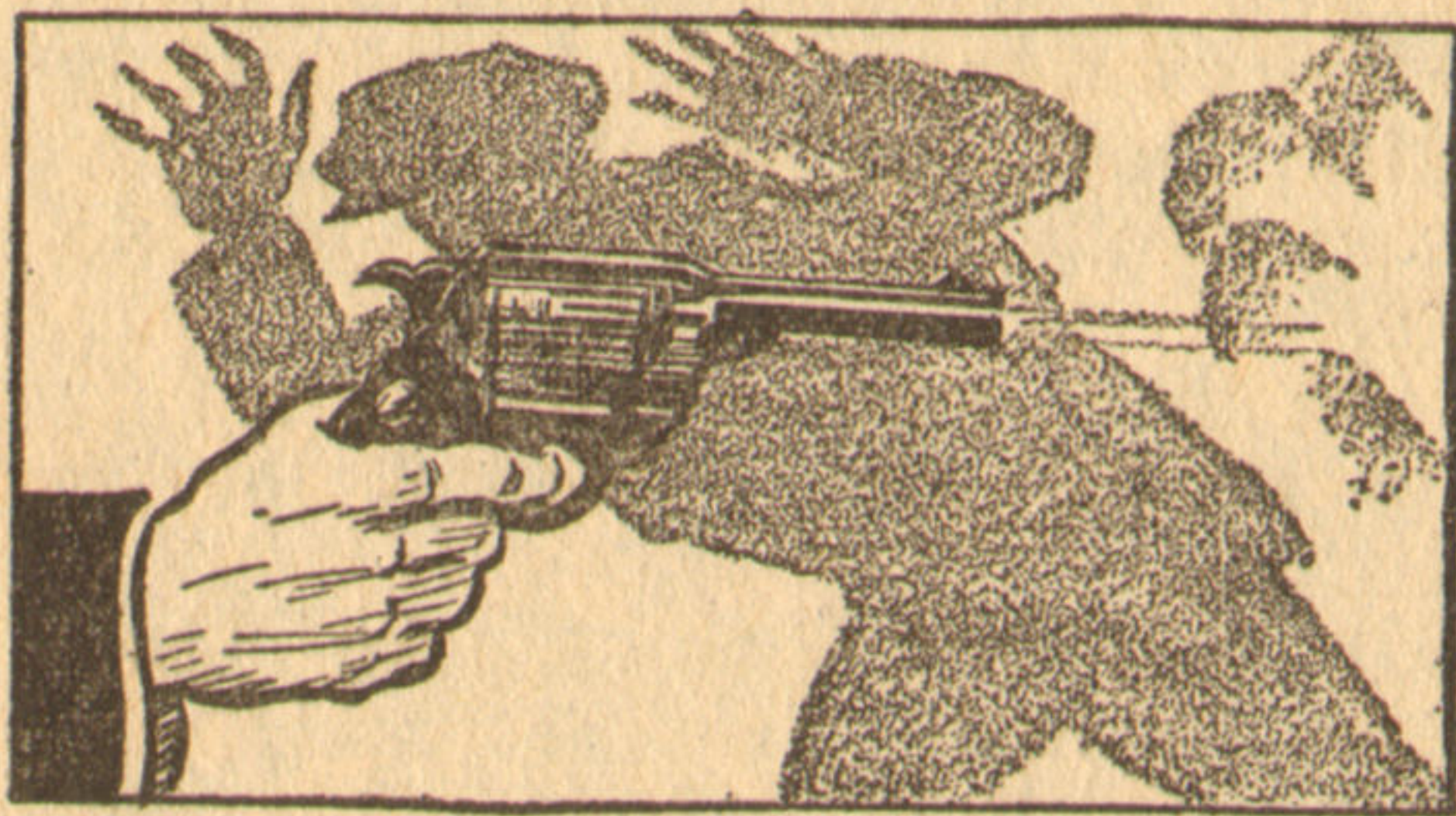
"Brass," grunted Danube, tossing the thing into a corner. "Makes nasty cuts. Poison."

Undaunted, more desperate than ever, Croyden led his two jailers to a hotel that had an entrance running through from one street to the other. As they halted near the entrance to the dining room, he suddenly gave Danube a shove which staggered the man into the room and crashing against a table at which sat three men. Before Morton, not expecting this savage move, could more than open his mouth, Croyden closed it for him with a swinging uppercut that started from his knees.

Morton's teeth clicked together, he grunted, and went down in a twisting heap. Danube was unscrambling himself preparatory to charging recklessly at the amuck Croyden, but the accountant did not wait to note the extent of the havoc he had wrought. Whirling like a

(Continued on page 108)

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(Continued from page 107)

dancer, he sprinted along the corridor toward the far entrance. The yells of waiters and startled patrons faded into nothingness behind him.

He darted out onto the sidewalk, realizing that Danube was doubtless close at his heels, a silent Nemesis. But he didn't take time to look back. A black sedan was at the curb, chauffeur slouched behind the wheel. The motor was purring softly, and the radio was tinkling away musically.

The tonneau door swung open as Croyden barged out onto the sidewalk. He could hear Danube tangling with the revolving door behind him. Instantly he dived for the inviting car.

"Grand Central Terminal! Quick!" he shouted at the driver.

"By all means," said a calm voice from the interior. "Are there any other places you wish to visit, Mr. Croyden?"

Rats Beldano sat in the corner of the tonneau. The muzzle of a .38 automatic leered from his hand at the fugitive.

"Sit down, Croyden," directed Beldano. "Since you're so restless here on Manhattan, it will please you to know that I have arranged for you to visit a place of mine over on Staten Island. I was merely waiting here for you to finish dinner. I don't like your letter-writing urge."

"Get in!" said Danube's laconic voice behind him. "He put Ice on ice, Rats."

All this not two blocks from Times Square! In the midst of traffic, life, light, color, and action Frank Croyden was horribly alone. For twenty-four hours the young accountant had been going slowly insane. Now while he trembled on the brink, deeply chagrined at having run directly into Beldano's arms, things were decided for him.

The driver sat up in his seat, ready to gun his motor. And in that breathless instant, the music suddenly broke off on the radio, and a man's excited voice spoke.

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"This is the Radio Retail Merchants' Hour—Ted Price announcing. Attention, everybody! We've just got a flash of amazing news. Frank Croyden, nephew of the late racketeer, George Dawson, has been snatched by Rats Beldano in connection with the missing million dollars illegally acquired by Dawson and sought by criminals and police alike. Croyden just discovered the key to the enigma Friday at the Metro Trust Company, and he was snatched by Beldano before he could get to the police. By making this public announcement—"

"You've signed your own death warrant!" finished Beldano savagely.

And Frank Croyden went amuck. Shoved by Danube, reckless of the gun in the chief racketeer's hand, he hurled himself forward and grappled with Beldano. The chauffeur crashed his gears into second and snarled the sedan away from the curb, swinging recklessly out into the traffic stream as Danube clung precariously to the open tonneau door.

It looked like curtains indeed for the young accountant. But Rats Beldano had finally caught a terrier.

(Continued on page 110)

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(Continued from page 109)

He found himself fighting for his very life. And Croyden knew that he was.

Tumbling on the back seat, jerked off balance by the convulsive starting of the car, he gripped the right wrist of the racketeer just before Beldano pulled the trigger. The gun blasted; the slug tore out through the roof of the sedan. Kicking out to prevent Danube from clawing his way into the car, Croyden twisted around in his grapple with Beldano and launched a vicious kick at the head of the driver.

He missed a clean swing at the chauffeur's right temple, but the spikes on the sole of his golf shoe raked across the back of the fellow's neck, ripping the skin open like knives. The man screamed, released the wheel, and clapped both hands to his neck just as Danube succeeded in getting around the elusive, swinging door, preparatory to lunging inside.

The accelerating sedan swerved sharply to the right, out of control, and crashed into the side of a cross-town bus, side-swiping the heavier vehicle in a converging diagonal. There was a splintering sound, the shrieking of tortured metal, and one wild scream from Danube Torbin as he was crushed between the two cars.

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The sudden lurch, almost overturning the sedan, threw the struggling pair in the rear against the opposite window. Beldano's head went through the shattering glass. He cried out once, a sharp cry that turned into a gurgle. Croyden still clung to his right hand, one arm about the man's waist, his head resting against Beldano's chest and the car window ledge.

Silence! A silence that was quickly absorbed by the screams of bus passengers and the sounds of irate traffic. A fragment of glass had cut Croyden's cheek, and a bump was rapidly swelling along the side of his head which had struck the window frame. Dazedly, the taste of blood in his mouth, he twisted to look out past the limp Beldano—and found himself staring into the thunderous face of a policeman.

"What the hell!" bellowed the officer, grabbing for his whistle.

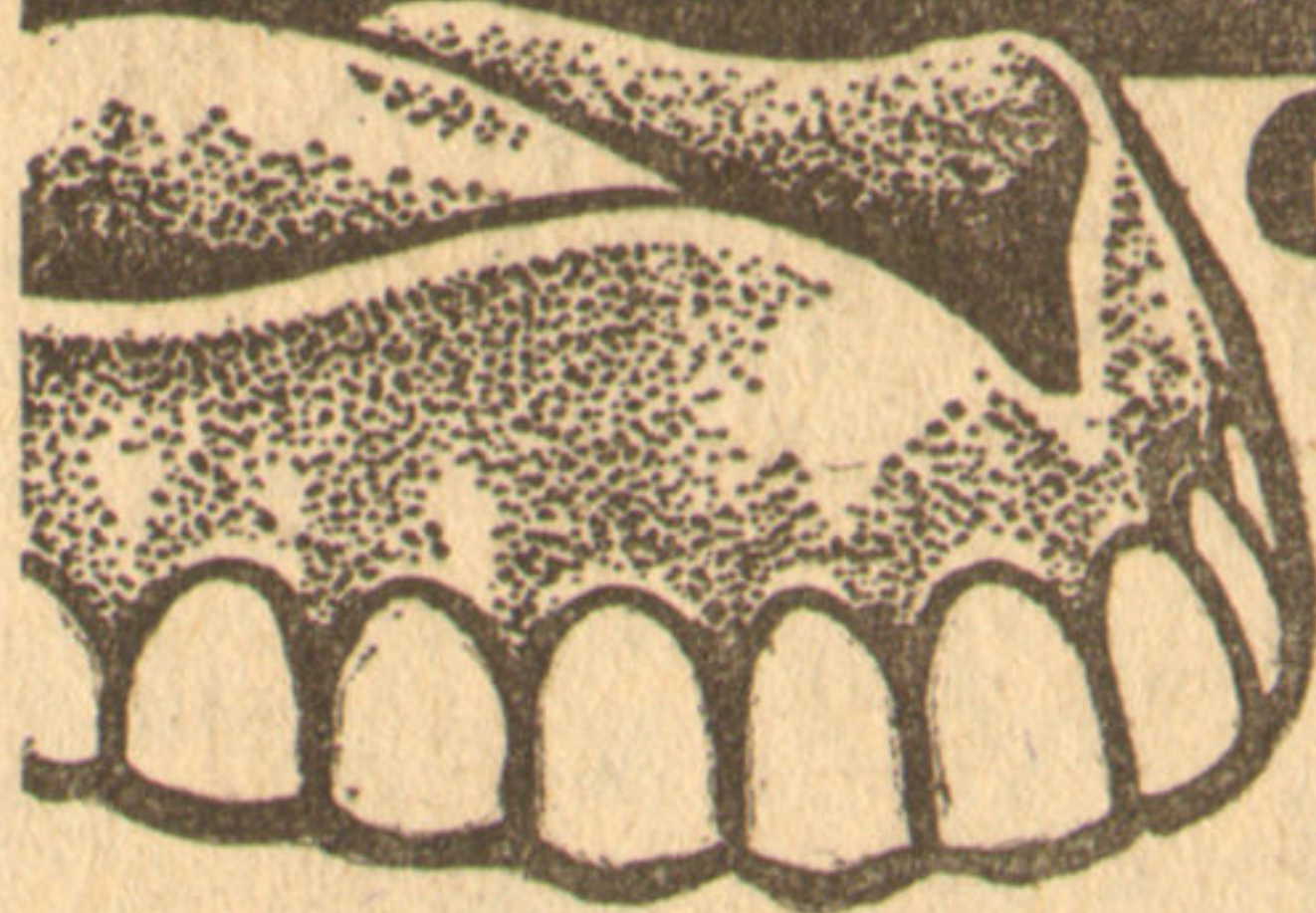
"Don't scold, big boy," Croyden grinned shakily. "Call the wagon and take us down to Headquarters. This is Rats Beldano. Danube Torbin is on the other side. And Ice Morton is back there in the hotel restaurant."

"What the hell!" repeated the officer. "One man crushed against the bus, the chauffeur crazy, and you two playing games on the back seat. I—what? Beldano!"

"Yeah," nodded Croyden weakly. "I've located the missing Dawson money, and I want to beat a confession of murder out of Beldano."

(Concluded on page 113)

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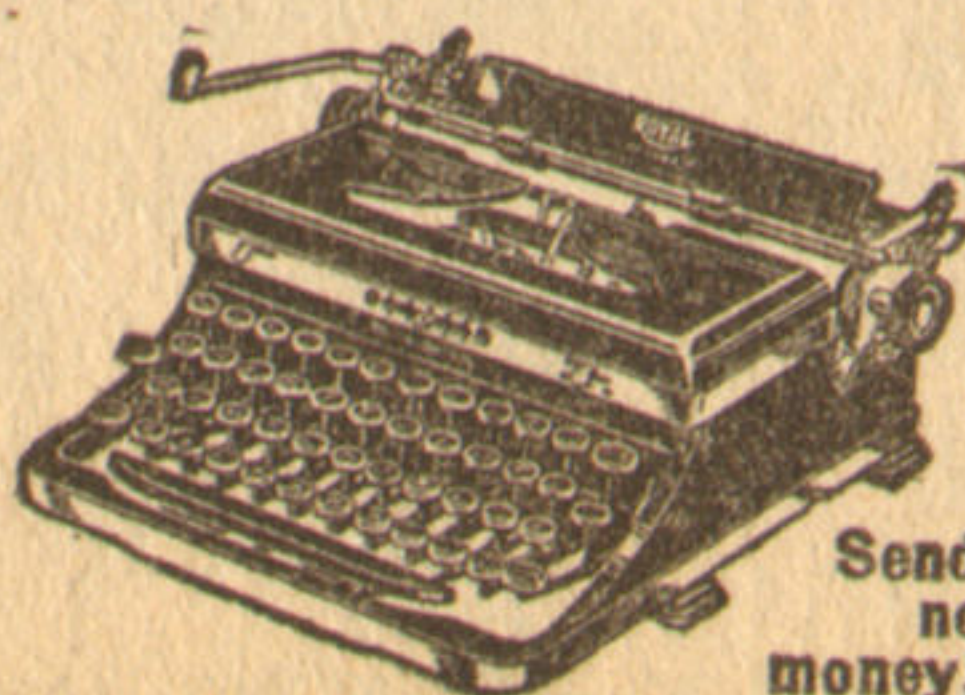
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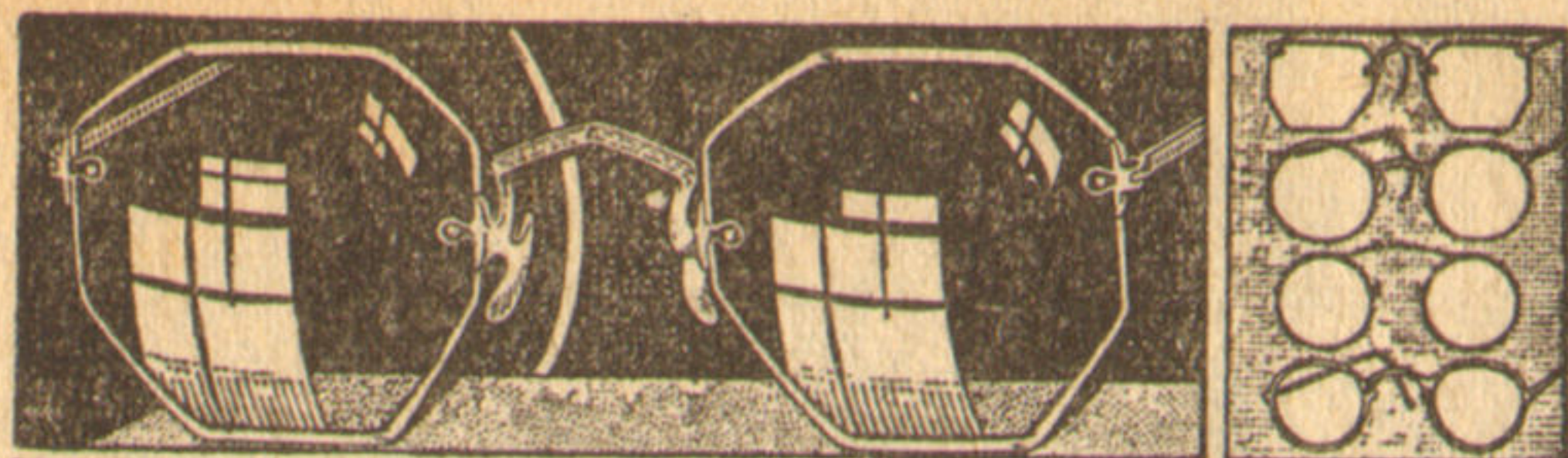
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AT ALL STANDS

(Concluded from page 111)

The policeman stooped to peer at the silent racketeer. He raised startled eyes.

"You'll have to meet him in hell," he said. "His throat's cut open."

On the opposite side, willing hands lifted Danube Torbin out of the V-shaped wedge and laid him on the curb. There was the wail of an ambulance siren far down the street. But it was too late.

Danube shuddered.

"Close squeeze," he gasped out, and died as laconically as he had lived.

"I'll talk! I'll talk!" babbled the bleeding chauffeur. "This Croyden guy is a wizard. He ain't been outa Beldano's hands, and the whole story comes out of the radio right while he's being taken for the snatch. He's a wild man. Rats killed Dawson all right, and he was gonna kill Croyden after he got the money away from him. Get me to the prosecutin' attorney. I'll make a statement."

"On the radio, eh?" grunted the policeman. "How'd you do that?"

"Easy," grinned Croyden. "I work for the company. I sent a letter special delivery this afternoon that I was called out of town. But I included another letter to my friend, Ted Price, telling him to broadcast the whole thing. He's the chief announcer at the studios; he already knew about the money at the Metro Trust Company, and I knew he would be on duty tonight. Beldano just happened to be kidnaping me at the very moment I was getting publicity. It was just luck."

And Frank Croyden was lucky enough to receive a legal reward which was the equivalent of the hundred-thousand-dollar check after all. He and Ted Price had that splurge at the new casino in a big way. But Croyden was a good accountant. He figured he earned it.

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Size	Rim	Tires	Tubes
29x4.40-21		\$2.15	\$1.05
29x4.50-20		2.35	1.05
30x4.50-21		2.40	1.15
28x4.75-19		2.45	1.25
29x4.75-20		2.50	1.25
29x5.00-19		2.85	1.25
30x5.00-20		2.85	1.25
5.25-17		2.90	1.35
28x5.25-18		2.90	1.35
29x5.25-19		2.95	1.35
30x5.25-20		2.95	1.35
31x5.25-21		3.25	1.35
5.50-17		3.35	1.40
28x5.50-18		3.35	1.40
29x5.50-19		3.35	1.45
6.00-17		3.40	1.40
30x6.00-18		3.40	1.40
31x6.00-19		3.40	1.45
32x6.00-20		3.45	1.55
33x6.00-21		3.65	1.55
32x6.50-20		3.75	1.75
6.00-16		3.75	1.45

REGULAR CORD TIRES

Size	Tires	Tubes
30x3 1/2	\$2.35	\$0.95
31x4	2.95	1.25
32x4	2.95	1.25
33x4	2.95	1.25
34x4	3.25	1.35
32x4 1/2	3.35	1.45

Size Tires Tubes

33x4 1/2	\$3.45	\$1.45
34x4 1/2	3.45	1.45
30x5	3.65	1.65
33x5	3.75	1.75
35x5	3.95	1.75

HEAVY DUTY TRUCK TIRES

(High Pressure)

Size Tires Tubes

30x5	\$4.25	\$1.95
33x5	3.95	1.75
34x5	4.25	2.25
36x6	7.95	2.95
36x6	9.95	4.45

Size Tires Tubes

34x7	\$10.95	\$4.65
38x7	10.95	4.65
36x8	11.45	4.95
40x8	13.25	4.95

TRUCK BALLOON TIRES

Size Tires Tubes

6.00-20	\$3.75	\$1.65
6.50-20	4.45	1.95
7.00-20	5.95	2.95
9.00-20	10.95	5.65
9.75-20	13.95	6.45

Size Tires Tubes

7.50-20	\$6.95	\$3.75
8.25-20	8.95	4.95
9.00-20	10.95	5.65
9.75-20	13.95	6.45

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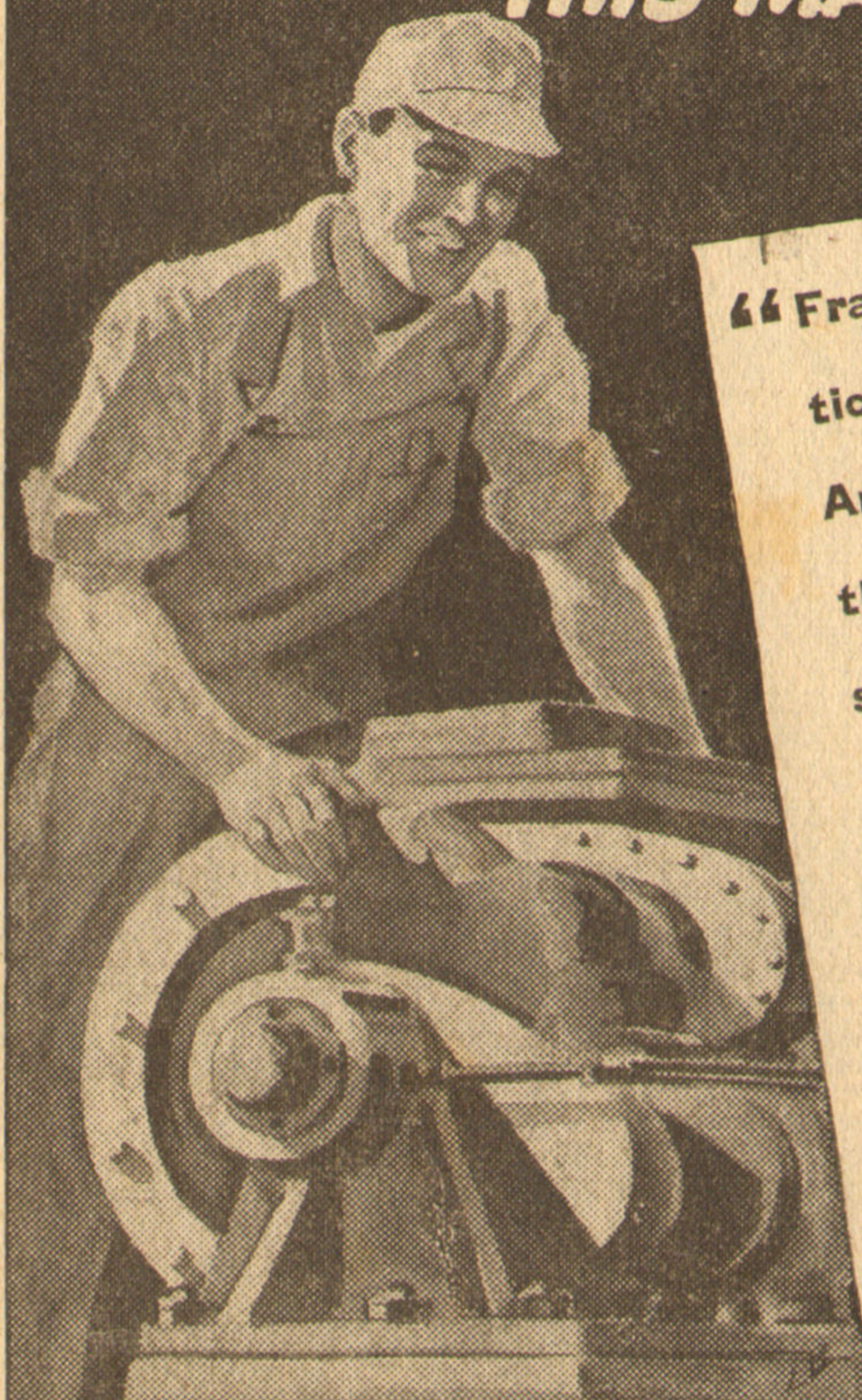
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- ☐ Electric Lighting
- ☐ Welding, Electric and Gas
- ☐ Reading Shop Blueprints
- ☐ Heat Treatment of Metals

- ☐ Sheet Metal Worker
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- ☐ Telephone Work ☐ Radio
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Charles Atlas—
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Photo by Joel Feder

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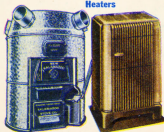
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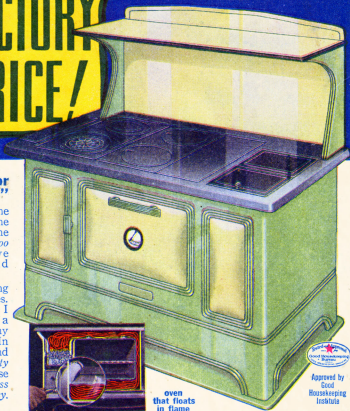
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