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JAN. 25, 1934

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Story Magazine

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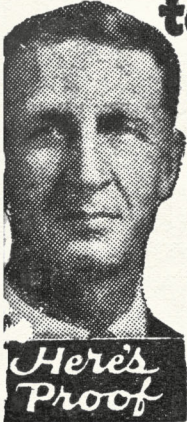


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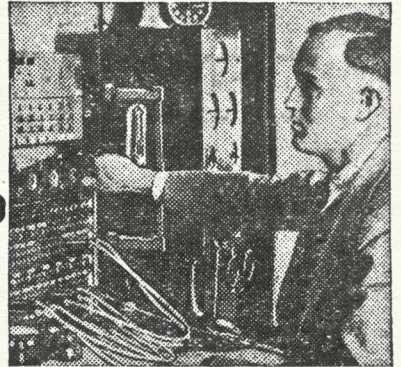
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Make me PROVE that it's EASY to learn at home to fill a **GOOD PAY** Radio Job



Clip the coupon and mail it. I'm so sure I can train you at home in your spare time for a big pay job in Radio that I'll send you a sample lesson free. Examine it, read it, see how clear and easy it is to understand. Then you will know why many men with less than a grammar school education and no technical experience have become Radio Experts and are earning two to three times their former pay as a result of my training.

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**SPECIAL Radio Equipment
for Broad Practical Experience
Given Without Extra Charge**



to \$75 a Week

National Radio Institute put me in a position make more money in less time than I ever before. I am in the service business for self, where I can make \$50 to \$75 a week.
BERNARD COSTA
150 Franklin St.,
Brooklyn, N. Y.



**as Successful
Radio Business**

I am a member of the South Grand Radio Service Co., which is a very successful business. I have been successful part of my time to N. R. I. Our training, I have been successful. Radio, I have been successful. Radio & App. Co., Grand Blvd., St. Louis, Mo.



**Yes Radio Work
in Spare Time**

I am operating a 120-acre radio class. Three nights a week I teach a Radio class. On other nights I make radio calls. Words cannot express my gratitude to N. R. I. Your training preme to earn nice sums in spare time.
HOYT MOORE
R. R. 3, Box 919,
Indianapolis, Ind.

**Many Radio Experts Make
\$40, \$60, \$75 a Week**

In about ten years the Radio Industry has grown from \$2,000,000 to hundreds of millions of dollars. Over 300,000 jobs have been created by this growth, and thousands more will be created by its continued development. Many men and young men with the right training—the kind of training I give you in the N. R. I. Course—have stepped into Radio at two and three times their former salaries.

**Many Make \$5, \$10, \$15 a Week Extra
in Spare Time Almost at Once**

The day you enroll with me I send you instructions which you should master quickly for doing 28 jobs common in most every neighborhood, for spare-time money. Throughout your Course I send you information on servicing popular makes of sets. I give you the plans and ideas that have made \$200 to \$1,000 a year for N. R. I. men in their spare time. My Course is famous as the Course that pays for itself.

Get Ready Now for Jobs Like These

Broadcasting stations use engineers, operators, station managers and pay up to \$5,000 a year. Manufacturers continually employ testers, inspectors, foremen, engineers, servicemen, buyers, for jobs paying up to \$6,000 a year. Radio operators on ships enjoy life, see the world, with board and lodging free, and get good pay besides. Dealers and jobbers employ servicemen, salesmen, buyers, managers, and pay up to \$100 a week. My book tells you about these and many other kinds of interesting Radio jobs.

**Television, Short Wave, Loud Speaker
Systems Included**

There's opportunity for you in Radio. Its future is certain. Television, short wave, loud speaker systems, police Radio, automobile Radio, aircraft Radio—in every branch, developments and improvements are taking place. Here is a real future for thousands and thousands of men who really know Radio—men with N. R. I. training. Get the training that opens the road to good pay and success.

You Get a Money-back Agreement

I'm so sure that N. R. I. can train you satisfactorily that I will agree in writing to refund every penny of your tuition if you are not satisfied with my Lessons and Instruction Service upon completion.

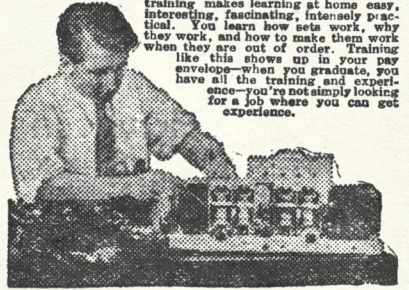
FREE 64-page Book of Facts

Act now, and in addition to the sample lesson I'll send my book "Rich Rewards in Radio", free to any ambitious fellows over 15 years old. It tells you where Radio's good jobs are, what they pay, tells you about my Course, what others who have taken it are doing and making. Find out what Radio offers you without the slightest obligation. **ACT NOW!**

J. E. Smith, President

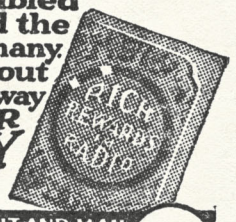
**National Radio Institute, Dept. 3ND
Washington, D. C.**

My Course is not all theory. I'll show you how to use my special Radio equipment for conducting experiments and building circuits which illustrate important principles used in such well-known sets as Westinghouse, General Electric, Philco, R. C. A., Victor, Majestic, and others. You work out with your own hands many of the things you read in our lesson books. This 60-50 method of training makes learning at home easy, interesting, fascinating, intensely practical. You learn how sets work, why they work, and how to make them work when they are out of order. Training like this shows up in your pay envelope—when you graduate, you have all the training and experience—you're not simply looking for a job where you can get experience.



With N. R. I. equipment you learn to build and thoroughly understand set testing equipment—you can use N. R. I. equipment in your spare-time service work for extra money.

**I have doubled
and tripled the
salaries of many.
Find out about
this tested way
to BIGGER
PAY**



**FILL OUT AND MAIL
THIS COUPON**

TODAY

**J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute, Dept. 3ND
Washington, D. C.**

I want to take advantage of your offer. Send me your Free Sample Lesson, and your book, "Rich Rewards in Radio." I understand this request does not obligate me. (Please print plainly)

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Town..... State.....

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To make this the greatest typewriter bargain for all times I have reduced the price for this sale only to bed-rock bottom. You save over \$60.00 by acting **Now.** Simply send coupon for wide-open 10 day trial. **No Money Down.** If you have ever wanted a genuine standard make \$100.00 model typewriter at a real bargain—here's your chance. But, you must act at once. This liberal offer may never be repeated. All orders filled in turn. **Don't Wait—Send Now!**

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To those who think Learning Music is hard-

PERHAPS you think that taking music lessons is like taking a dose of medicine. It isn't any longer!

As far as you're concerned, the old days of long practice hours with their hard-work exercises, and expensive personal teacher fees are over with.

You have no alibis whatsoever for not making your start toward musical good times now!

For, through a method that removes the boredom and extravagance from music lessons, you can now learn to play your favorite instrument entirely at home—without a private teacher—in half the usual time—at a fraction of the usual cost.

Easy As Can Be

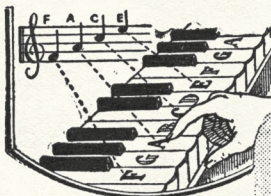
The lessons come to you by mail from the famous U. S. School of Music. They consist of complete printed instructions, diagrams, and all the music you need. You're never in hot water. First you are told how a thing is done. Then a picture

shows you how, then you do it yourself and hear it. No private teacher could make it clearer or easier.

Over 600,000 people learned to play this modern way—and found it easy as A-B-C. Forget that old-fashioned idea that you need special "talent." Just read the list of instruments in the panel, decide which one you want to play, and the U. S. School will do the rest. No matter which instrument you choose, the cost in each case will

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Send me your amazing free book, "How You Can Master Music in Your Own Home," with inspiring message by Dr. Frank Crane; also Free Demonstration Lesson. This does not put me under any obligation.

Name

Address

Instrument Have you this inst.?



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Not used or rebuilt. A new Remington Portable. Carrying case free. Use 10 days without cost. If you keep it, it's yours for only \$3 down. Write today. Say: Tell me how I can get a new Remington Portable typewriter on 10-day free trial offer for only \$3 down. Remington Rand Inc., Dept. ES-1, Buffalo, N. Y.



WANTED TO BUY

Collections of old U. S. stamps, commemoratives, revenue stamps, telegraph stamps, departmentals and higher values especially wanted. Do not want regular issues since 1890—only commemoratives. Also want envelopes used during Civil War showing pictures of flags, soldiers and mottos, containing regular or Confederate stamps. Highest cash prices paid. Send 10c for interesting information. F. STEIN, Dept. L, 7360 N. Seeley Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Clean Out Your Kidneys —Win Back Your Pep

Stop Getting Up Nights—Whip Burning Acidity That Saps Vitality—Make Guaranteed Cystex Test

There is nothing that can make men or women feel more run-down, nervous and lacking in vitality than poor functioning of the thousands of tiny, delicate tubes in the Kidneys.

If poorly functioning Kidneys or Bladder are stealing your vitality and make it hard for you to keep up with the speed of modern life—if they make you suffer from Getting Up Nights, Leg Pains, Nervousness, Stiffness, Burning, Smarting, Itching, Acidity, Neuralgia or Rheumatic Pains, Lumbago or Circles under Eyes, don't waste a minute. Try the Doctor's prescription called Cystex (pronounced Siss-tex).

Thousands of men and women are getting back on their feet, sleep like babies, and feel years younger

by fighting irritating acidity and poor Kidney and Bladder functions with this Doctor's prescription called Cystex, specially prepared for these troubles.

This guaranteed medicine starts work in 15 minutes. Acts as a mild, gentle laxative to the Kidneys, helping them clean out poisons, wastes and acids in the blood. Soothes and tones raw, irritated tissues. Be sure to get Cystex, the special laxative for the Kidneys. Ordinary bowel laxatives can't do the work. Cystex is helping millions of sufferers and is guaranteed to fix you up to your satisfaction or money back on return of empty package. Cystex (pronounced Siss-tex) is only 75c at all druggists. Don't suffer from delay, get Cystex today.

LIVING YOUTHFULLY *Even After 60*

Thousands of Men Prove the Wonders of This New Drugless Gland Stimulant

MANY men have a false notion about the real significance of rejuvenation. This misinformation has been greatly fostered by the distorted newspaper accounts of European gland operations. These spectacular operations are but one aspect of a subject which is of the utmost practical importance to aging men.

Rejuvenation is not merely an attempt to turn back the hands of time. It is not just a whim or vanity that interests men past middle age in the subject of rejuvenation. Few men past the prime of life are interested in rejuvenation simply for the sake of growing younger or prolonging life.

Robust Health . . . Abounding Energy

By far the most important aspect of rejuvenation is health . . . freedom from pain, weakness, debility and certain distressing and often painful symptoms so common to old age.

So little is generally known about the subject of glands that it would probably amaze many men to learn that most of their suffering and distress oftentimes is due to the failure of the tiny prostate gland.

Symptoms of Gland Trouble

When this vital gland slows up in men past middle age it often hypertrophies — and becomes congested, swollen and greatly increased in size. In this condition it often bears or presses on the bladder and colon—thus directly causing severe bladder trouble, frequent nightly rising, broken sleep, and not infrequently, both chronic constipation and hemorrhoids.

Are You Blaming These Troubles on Approaching Age?

Prostate trouble is also the frequent cause of debility, weakness, pains in the back, feet and legs, chronic fatigue, and a general lack of ambition, a feeling of age, depression and irritability. Few people realize how widespread it is. Some medical

men believe, however, that fully two-thirds of all men past the age of 50 have some of all of these symptoms of gland disorder. Untold thousands of aging men suffer in this way and do not know the cause. For the most part they blame these troubles on approaching age.

There is no medicine known which will reduce the swollen prostate gland to normal size. Palliative treatment is by finger massage and physiotherapy methods. When the gland swells beyond the ability of palliative measures to correct, the only alternative is to remove it, which is a serious surgical operation every man would like to avoid.

A Safe Home Method of Natural Stimulation

Now you can stimulate the prostate gland in a safe, natural way. This discovery goes directly to the area of the gland without drugs, medicine, diets, or application of electricity, and greatly increases the circulation. The method is as safe and harmless as washing your hands. It is easy and pleasant to use in the privacy of your own home. It has the enthusiastic endorsement of many noted physicians. One doctor says of this treatment: "A hundred years ahead of modern medicine; a thousand years ahead of the surgeon's knife."

100,000 men have already used this remarkable treatment with the most amazing results in many cases. Often noticeable relief comes almost overnight. Quick as is the response to this treatment, it is by no means merely a temporary relief, but it is designed to relieve the distressing symptoms by correcting the cause!

Feel Ten Years Younger

While it is not claimed that the treatment will actually make you grow younger, the method is so amazingly effective that it is offered under an agreement that unless you feel ten years younger in seven days the treatments cost nothing.

Remarkable Book FREE

This new discovery is of such universal and far-reaching importance in the health, activity and robust vigor of men past 40 that it is described in a remarkable 24-page illustrated book, "Why Many Men Are Old at 40."

Mail the Blank at Right

If you have this gland trouble or any of the symptoms mentioned, write today for this free book. You can ask yourself certain frank questions that may reveal your true condition. Every man past 40 should make this test, as insidious prostate disorder often leads to surgery. This book is entirely free, but mail the coupon immediately, as the edition is limited. Address



W. J. KIRK, Pres., The Electro Thermal Co.
7672 Morris Avenue, Steubenville, Ohio.

If you live West of the Rockies, address The Electro Thermal Co., 500 Wm. Fox Bldg., Dept. 76-C, Los Angeles, Calif. In Canada, address The Electro Thermal Co., Dept. 76-C, 53 Yonge Street, Toronto, Canada.



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The Electro Thermal Co.,
7672 Morris Ave., Steubenville, Ohio.

Please mail at once a FREE copy of the booklet "Why Many Men Are Old at 40" and all details of the new treatment. I am not obligated in any way.

Name

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City..... State.....

Stomach Disorders Threatened His Life Says N. Y. Patrolman

"I tried everything," says Officer David R. Caldwell, 2721 Bronxwood Ave., New York City. "I suffered from gas in the stomach and heartburn so bad that I could hardly stand it. My case was diagnosed by one doctor as ulcers, another said I had gall stones. One went so far as to tell my wife that I had cancer and had only a short time to live. I suffered much agony and lost weight until one day I saw an advertisement in the New York Daily News, by the Udga Co., St. Paul, Minn. I wrote for their treatment and thanks be to God I did, for today I am a different man. I have no pain, can eat anything and I am getting back to my normal weight."



DAVID R. CALDWELL

Acid Stomach Afflicts Millions

Hyperacidity (acid stomach), is, as every physician can tell you, the curse of millions. It is the most common cause of stomach or gastric ulcers as well as many other distressing conditions and there are comparatively few adults who can truly say it has never troubled them. In addition to stomach ulcers, acid stomach is often the direct cause of gas pains, dyspepsia, poor digestion, pains after eating, bloating, belching, gnawing pains, heartburn, gastritis, sour stomach, constipation, etc.

Double Acting Treatment Needed

To combat these conditions you need a treatment that will first counteract or neutralize the excess acid secretions and then protect, soothe, and tone the membranes or stomach lining in order that the process of healing may take place. This is the function of the Udga Treatment and the excellent results it has produced in so many thousands of cases are due to this double acting feature.

**Offered On
15 DAYS TRIAL**

And now that the merits of this splendid treatment have been so conclusively proved, the distributors invite all sufferers to try it at their risk and are willing to send a full 15 DAY TREATMENT ON TRIAL. So if you can believe what your own stomach tells you—if you agree that freedom from stomach pains, distress and misery are the surest proof of results, accept this liberal trial offer and see for yourself what the Udga Treatment can do for your sick stomach.

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Please send me your 15-DAY TRIAL OFFER on the Udga Treatment. Also free copy of your book on stomach troubles, testimonials, affidavit of genuineness and \$1,000.00 Reward Offer to back it up. This does not obligate me in any way.

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30x5.00-20	2.85 1.05	33x4 1/2	2.35 1.15
28x5.25-18	2.90 1.15	34x4 1/2	2.35 1.15
28x5.25-19	2.95 1.15	30x5	2.65 1.35
30x5.25-20	2.95 1.15	38x5	3.75 1.45
31x5.25-21	3.25 1.15		
28x5.50-18	3.35 1.15		
28x5.50-19	3.35 1.15		
30x5.50-18	3.40 1.15		
31x5.50-19	3.40 1.15		
32x5.50-20	3.45 1.25		
33x5.50-21	3.65 1.25		
32x5.50-20	3.95 1.35		

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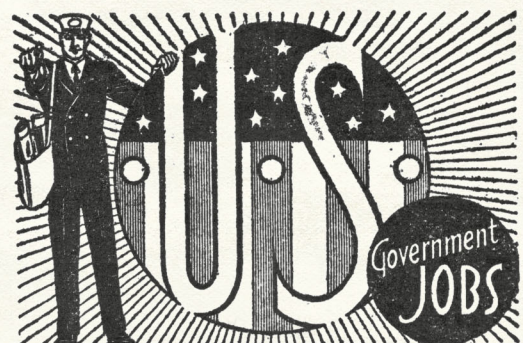
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ESTABLISHED ROUTES PAY UP TO

\$60.00
A WEEK

PAY begins at once where you call on established neighborhood routes. No capital or experience required. If you are a good, honest person, willing to follow my simple instructions on distributing trial packages to waiting route customers, I can offer you a bona fide chance to make up to \$60.00 a week right to start for full time work, or up to \$3.00 to \$5.00 a day just for spare time. The work is pleasant, the hours are right, and the job is steady. I am opening my mammoth factory to full capacity and I am in need of Route Managers at once.



Have A Permanent Route With Big Weekly Cash Income

My Tea and Coffee Routes pay best because I supply people with the things they need daily to live—Tea, Coffee, Extracts, Spices, and other Kitchen Necessities. Your job is to handle all the money, make delivery of goods, and you keep a big share of the cash you take in for yourself. I'll furnish you with hundreds of fine premiums and other amazing special bargain offers just to give away with Tea, Coffee, and other fine Food Products. Hundreds of people are now waiting to be served in many localities.

START WORK AT ONCE

My amazing new Tea and Coffee Route Plans provide for your having immediate cash earnings. If you are honest and reliable and willing to take good care of one of these Routes you are eligible for this job. You start work right in your own locality, right near where you live. There is nothing hard or difficult about this work. There will be no red tape connected with this job. You don't have to buy a lot of high priced equipment to start with.

EXPERIENCE OR CAPITAL UNNECESSARY

I am not nearly as much interested in your experience as your showing a willingness to follow a few plain, simple instructions. I will tell you all the inside workings of my nationwide, "home owned" Tea

and Coffee Route Plan. I'll explain just how you go about distributing advertising material and trial packages to people where your route is located. There is no stock to carry—no store rent to pay—no capital needed.

OPENINGS FOR WOMEN

I have good jobs for women. Neighborhood Tea and Coffee Routes pay up to \$9.50 a day full time and as high as \$5.00 a day for spare time. The work is light and pleasant. Mrs. Carrie McCalman, Nebr., says she has never let her earnings run below \$50.00 a week. Mrs. Jewel Hackett, here in Ohio, made \$33.00 in seven hours. These exceptional earnings prove the amazing possibilities of my offer to women.

NO LIMIT TO THIS OFFER

This is one job where your pay at the end of the week is not limited. If you are honest, conscientious, and willing to listen to reason, I won't put any limit on your earnings. You will have steady work day in and day out. No danger of lay-offs—no chance of getting fired. That's the kind of work I am offering you now.

SEND NO MONEY—JUST NAME

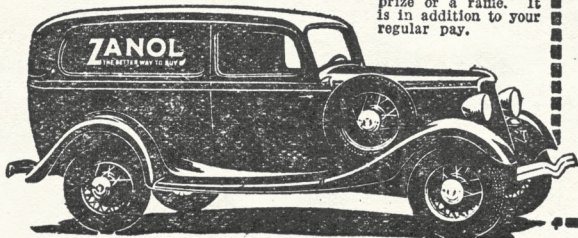
I want people right away to handle Routes and look after my business. Don't send money—just your name—so I can lay all the facts before you and then you can decide if the work and pay are satisfactory. Send name on coupon or penny postcard. Costs nothing. Do it today.

FREE FORDS

I furnish my producing Route Managers with 8-Cylinder Ford Tudor Sedans free to ride in. This is an extra bonus—not a prize or a raffle. It is in addition to your regular pay.

SOME VACANCIES ALREADY FILLED

My Tea and Coffee Routes are not an experiment. Others are making big money—why not you? If you have been working part time or for poor wages, this is your opportunity to get cash immediately to pay your bills and live well. Here's what some have already done. Wm. E. Berkheimer, Pa., cleared \$20.00 in one day and as high as \$90.00 in one week. Stanford Berg, \$75.00 in one week. Wm. H. Newcomb, N. Y., \$24.00 in one day; \$80.00 in one week. G. V. Budaus, Tex., jumped his income from \$20.00 a week to \$65.00 a week. These exceptional earnings are proof of the amazing possibilities of my offer. Hundreds of other Route Managers have written me like this. Better send me your name today.



FOOD ROUTE COUPON

ALBERT MILLS, Route Manager
1262 Monmouth Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio

Tell me about your Tea and Coffee Route Plan and how I can get started making up to \$60.00 a week at once.

Name

Address

(Please Print or Write Plainly)



Skinny Scrawny Folks Add Alluring Pounds... this new way!

New Natural Mineral Concentrate From The Sea, Free From Drugs, Fills Out Ugly Hollows With Firm Flesh—Adds 8 Pounds In 12 Days—Or No Cost!

3 TO 8 POUNDS in 12 days! 5 to 12 pounds in a few short weeks. Think of it! Yet these results are not unusual. Hundreds of skinny, scrawny rundown people are amazed at this astounding new natural way to win back health and weight.

Doctors know how vitally necessary are natural food minerals often so woefully lacking in even the most carefully devised fresh vegetable diets. Unless your system gets the proper amount of these minerals, many of them needed in only the tiniest quantities, even the best food fails to nourish you, fails to build rich, red blood, firm flesh and sturdy muscles. This lack of mineralization results in the failure to digest starches and fats in the normal diet. It makes no difference whether your appetite is good or bad, your food is converted into poisonous wastes instead of firm flesh and tireless energy.

Scientists, however, have only recently discovered a marvelous source of practically every single mineral essential to body needs. It is called Kelp-A-Malt, a pleasant, easy-to-take vegetable concentrate made from a luxuriant sea plant from the Pacific Ocean. It provides iron, sodium, calcium, phosphorus, iodine and other essential minerals in easily assimilable form, and also provides the effect of Vitamin A, B, D, E and G.

Try Kelp-A-Malt for a single week. Watch your appetite improve, firm flesh appear in place of scrawny hollows. Feel the tireless vigor and vitality that Kelp-A-Malt provides through its easily assimilable iron and copper. Its calcium and phosphorus build strong teeth and bones. Its sulphur and phosphorus assure proper

elimination. 6 tablets provide more iodine than 486 pounds of spinach—assures protection against goitre.

A few weeks' Kelp-A-Malt treatment not only improves your looks but your health as well. It quickly corrects sour, acid stomach. Gas, indigestion and all the usual distress commonly experienced by the undernourished, underweight, disappear.

Prove the worth of this amazing weight-builder today. Two weeks are required to effect a change in the mineralization of the body. At the end of that time, you will gain at least 8 pounds, will look better, feel better, and have more endurance than ever before or the trial is free.

Precious Minerals Contained in Kelp-A-Malt—what they do for you

1. Sodium, Potassium, Magnesium—to correct stomach gas, acidity and indigestion. Also stimulate the action of kidneys.
2. Phosphorus and Sulphur—to correct constipation and intestinal disorders.
3. Iron, Copper, Manganese for rich pure blood, vitality.
4. Iodine—prevents goitre.
5. Phosphorus, Calcium for strong bones and teeth.

Read What Users Say:

Kelp-A-Malt helped my nerves and blood.—M. E. Deer River, Minn. I find one bottle of Kelp-A-Malt has put seven pounds on me already.—F. M., Dunkirk, N. Y. I have gained 5 lbs. on your Kelp-A-Malt.—L. L. R., Hannibal, Mo. I have gained 6 pounds on my first bottle of Kelp-A-Malt. I am very much pleased.—D. E. G., Silver-town, Ga. I have gained 7 pounds in 10 days since taking Kelp-A-Malt and have a continuous appetite.—W. C. F., Mt. Vernon, N. Y.

KELP-A-MALT

Limited Offer

Don't wait any longer. Order Kelp-A-Malt today. Regain alluring curves and youthful energy this easy scientific way. Special short time introductory offer gives you 10 Day Trial Treatment for only \$1.00. Regular large size bottle (200 Jumbo size tablets—4 to 5 times size of ordinary tablets) for only \$1.95. 600 tablets, price \$4.95 postage prepaid. Plain wrapper. C. O. D. 20c extra. Get your Kelp-A-Malt before this offer expires. Write today.

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Originators of
Health Foods By Mail
27-33 W. 20th St., Dept. 57,
New York City



Seedol Company,
Dept. 57, 27-33 West 20th St., N. Y. C.

Gentlemen—Please send me postpaid

☐ 10 Day Trial Treatment, \$1.00.

☐ 200 Jumbo size Kelp-A-Malt tablets, 4 to 5 times size of ordinary tablets—\$1.95.

☐ 600 Jumbo size Kelp-A-Malt tablets.

Price \$4.95. (Check amount wanted) for which enclosed find..... C. O. D. 20c extra.

Name.....

St. Address.....

CityState.....



THE LOST WATCH

By C. WILES HALLOCK

WE found Patrolman Sullivan's
gun
And Patrolman Sullivan's stick
In Central Park, in the scraggly dark
of a hedgerow, tangled and thick.
We found no trace of Sully the cop,
Cheery bulk of valor and brawn,
Who walked a beat in the near-by
street,
On patrol from midnight till dawn.

We scanned the ground in search of
a clew;
But of clews found never a one;
Of strife no hint; neither stain nor
print
Could we trace on nightstick or
gun.

But Dugan came, and Dugan dis-
closed

In a search more thorough and
slow,
A wrist watch rare, such as women
wear,
Kicking through dead leaves with
his toe.

At dawn near Yonkers Sully was
found

In a taxi, foundered by lead;
But none could tell why the crime
befell;
For the taxi driver was dead.

The last sad rites for Sully were long;
And a woman wept at his bier.
But Dugan knew she was "Mokey
Lou,"
Also known as "Lua the Seer."

Her woe seemed real; and Dugan
made bold
The afflicted girl to assist;
And Dugan saw that she paled with
awe

At the watch he wore on his wrist.
The self-same watch he found in the
park!

And she screamed in utter dismay!
By Dugan pressed, Mokey Lou con-
fessed

She had helped put Sully away.

"We bumped him off for vengeance,"
she said.

"It was me and Biffy Adair,
The Bowery wop, who waylaid the
cop,

'Cause he sent my man to the
chair!

Go nab Adair at Finnerty's speak.
I ain't got no love for the force.

I made a botch when I lost my
watch,
But I shed them tears in remorse!"



By MARION SCOTT

Author of "Three on a Kill," etc.

NEED FOR MURDER

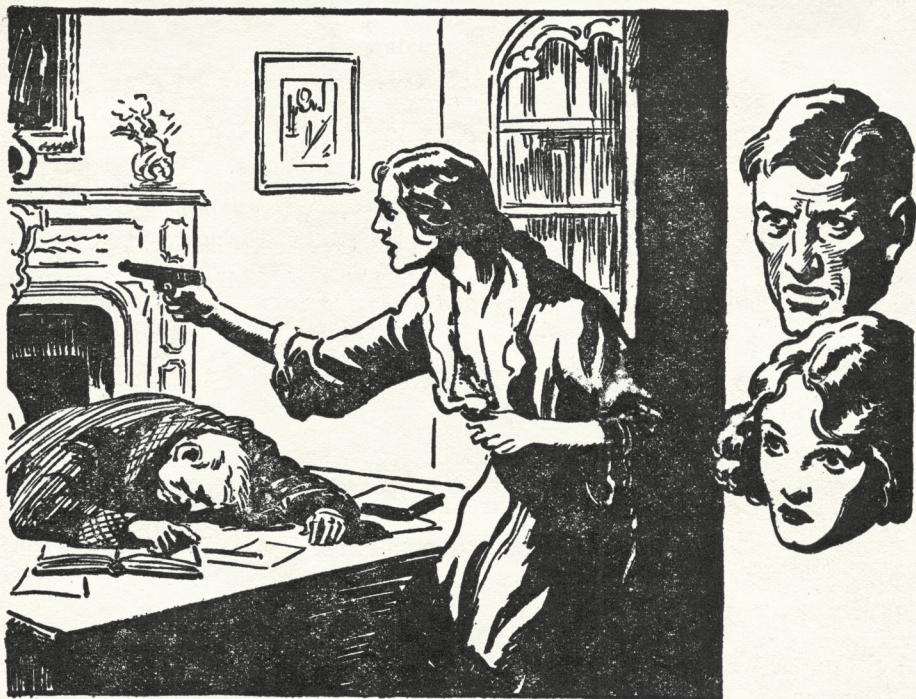
CHAPTER I.

THE WEAKLING.

ELLEN KANE stood by the window, thinking of murder! Not with her conscious mind, which was occupied with the problem of her son, Hubert, slumped there by the table behind her! Rather the thought of murdering her husband occupied that secret portion of her mind which she reserved for hidden, furtive things.

Outside, a thick October dusk wrapped the grounds of Kaneshaven. The dusty road ran past the big estate of Lucian Kane, down the hill, through the sleepy little village of Arborville, three quarters of a mile away, finally running its blunt nose into the smart severity of the concrete highway. The highway shot on, a bright, polished arrow through bustling, hurrying towns, to lose itself at last in the outskirts of the city.

Ellen's cold gray eyes gazed at



the crimson and gold of low hills, beyond which the highway lay. The highway and the city! They were synonymous in Ellen's mind, and it was the city for which she longed. She could not endure the stuffy dullness of Kaneshaven, the silence, the brooding heat of summer, the chill solitude of winter, the great drafty rooms, the old-fashioned, doddering servants.

She stirred impatiently. There was little time now to worry about that when Hubert, her only son, whom she loved better than her life, stood in the shadow of prison.

Somewhere below her a heavy door clanged shut. She glanced down. Her thin lips curled scornfully. A bent, shabby figure was hurrying down the winding gravel path to where a battered car stood listlessly before the wide gates.

Doctor Egan had little in personal appearance to recommend him. Ellen constantly fretted against his

presence. He was a small, musty man with soiled linen and soiled hands, better fitted, in Ellen's opinion, for a day laborer than a man of science. Ellen only tolerated him because she thought old Lucian Kane might die the sooner under his care. She smiled meagerly, turned, and came slowly toward the table. Deep in her heart, the thought of murder, temporarily buried, still stirred sluggishly.

She rested her hands on her slim hips, studying her son, seeing him clearly for what she knew him to be: a sullen, hot-tempered weakling, unable to resist anything his appetites craved, securing it any way he could, then cringing at her feet for protection. Why, she wondered fiercely, should the one creature in the world she really cared for defeat every hope of her proud and selfish heart.

Through some involved mental process she blamed Lucian Kane for

it, though Lucian was not Hubert's father. Hubert had been twelve years old when she married Kane. He had never liked the boy. In groping for excuses where Hubert was concerned, Ellen had come to believe that her husband's unfriendliness toward her son these last nine years was responsible for the boy's many faults.

Her conviction on this point was another ember added to the smoldering fire of her hatred for the man she had married—married, hoping, through control of his fortune, to lay the world and its pleasures at her son's feet. And what a joke that had turned out to be! Miser! Tightwad! Doling out a niggardly monthly allowance! Threatening, growling, complaining! That had been her life with Lucian Kane.

Tears of angry resentment filled her eyes. If he had been decent about money matters, Hubert would not be in this fix to-day.

"Lucian has the forged check, of course?" she asked slowly.

Hubert lifted his flushed, twitching face. His blue eyes were blood-shot; his loose lips quivered.

"Yeah, the old devil," he replied. "He waylaid me as I was going out to golf two hours ago. He'd just got the bank statement. The check was among the others. I thought that——"

"Exactly what," Ellen rapped, "did you think, Hubert? How did you expect to manage this thing?"

Anger darkened her eyes—not because her son was, legally, a criminal, but because he had displayed so little ability in his criminal activity. Ellen found it hard to forgive stupidity.

Hubert drew a shaking hand across dry lips. His eyes avoided hers, cold and gray as sleet. He feared this woman, hated her at

times, but, in his frightened flounderings, he always came to her for help. So far, she had never failed him. Somewhere in her hard, unyielding nature was one spot of maternal softness. Into it, Hubert could sink his greedy fingers and drag her to her knees before him. He wondered now, watching her covertly, if there were anything he could do, which she would refuse to condone.

A shiver twitched his thin body. Hubert felt there was a limit to what he dared ask of her, but, so far, he had not reached it.

"You'll talk to him?" he asked thinly. "Make him promise to lay off me this time? I swear I won't do anything like this again, mom. Honest, I swear it." He groped for her hands.

She flinched from touch of his hot dry palms, but weakness flowed over her at the contact. It had always been like that. She was helpless before him.

"Oh, I'll do something," she replied, turning away.

Hubert leaned on the table, his chin buried in his hands. Already the look of frenzy was leaving his eyes. A touch of his normal satisfied complacency was returning. The old girl always got him out of a hole. Trust the old girl, she could do the trick.

"Couldn't you touch him for something at the same time, mom?" he suggested. "I need a few hundred."

She turned on him, her lips curled back from strong white teeth. "Yes, I'll try," she said fiercely. "And what will be the result? Insults. Yammering. Reviling." She leaned on the table, her bare arms tense. "Why should I always be begging from him?" she demanded. "Why have I no money of my own? Isn't

that why I married him? Isn't that what I had a right to expect?" She lifted her clenched hands above her head. "Oh!" she said between her teeth. "Oh! I wish he were dead!"

Hubert blinked and wet his lips. "Don't take on like that, mom. You mustn't wish any one dead."

She whirled on him, eyes like sleet. "You poor weakling!" she cried. "Don't preach to me! You haven't the courage to wish any one dead, let alone"—she checked herself before she said—"let alone killing them as I intend doing!" For she knew then that she meant to kill Lucian Kane.

Hubert cowered back, fumbling at the edge of the table with thin blue fingers. He was afraid of her when she looked like that. He thought he would die of fear if she hated him as she hated Kane.

"Go now!" she ordered harshly. "Keep away from him until I straighten this out!" She watched him slouch to the door, thin-shouldered, wabbly-legged. Oh! How she scorned him! And how different his father had been! She had thrilled at the sight of him, strong, mighty-chested, deep-voiced. A man who could own her, rule her, kill her if he liked, but always hold her love! And from the union of that man and herself, this weakling had been born. For just a moment, Ellen Kane swayed helpless before the tragic joke of biological perversity.

Hubert opened the door. He was leaving her. Perhaps she would never see him again. Something might happen to him before he reached his room. She gave an inarticulate cry, ran after him, groping for him with her strong, beautiful hands.

"Hubert!" she gasped. "Oh, Hubert, my son! Trust me, dear!"

She had her arms around him, clutching at him feverishly. "I'll take care of it, darling. I won't let anything hurt you—ever."

Tears ran down her thin cheeks, into her mouth. Hubert strained against that fierce possessive embrace for a moment, then he put his hands on her shoulders, buried his working face on her shoulder.

"Gee, mom," he murmured. "Gee, you're swell. I love you, mom. Honest I do."

She relaxed, angry because he had done the thing she longed to have him do. "I've heard you say that before," she said contemptuously. "Get out of my sight now!"

She stood like that, unmoving, until he had closed the door behind him.

CHAPTER II.

MURDER IN HER HEART.

LUCIAN KANE pounded on the table with his clenched fist. "No!" he shouted. "No, damn it! Don't argue with me any more. I'm tired of humoring the young puppy. This time he pays."

He stopped for breath. His heavy face was red. He sat in the chair beside the fire in the little study which was his particular domain. He glared with blazing eyes at the woman who had been his wife for nine years. "This time your son pays!" he repeated angrily.

Ellen, standing opposite, gave no sign of the dismay that gripped her. She had long ago learned control.

"You mean that you will send your son to the penitentiary?" she asked softly.

"He's not my son. If I had a son like him——"

"He's your son legally. You adopted him when I married you."

Lucian Kane snorted indignantly. "Can't help it," he rumbled. "Can't help it. I've bailed him out of many scrapes. I've wasted enough money on him to cancel the national debt. I've educated him, given him every chance. What's the result?" He leaned forward, glaring up at her. "What's the result?" he demanded. "Well, I'll show you!" He pulled a small, inlaid box toward him on the desk, jerked it open, snatched up a slip of paper, and waved it before her.

"Do you see that?" he shouted. "Forgery! Bah! The stupid fool! As if I wouldn't know I never drew a check for five hundred to one"—he peered nearsightedly at the check—"Martin Sellers," he finished. "Who is Martin Sellers? Some dirty crook in town, I suppose, to whom your son owes money. Dumb, that's what he is. Dumb!"

Ellen trembled with helpless rage. Across the face of the check the old man had scrawled in red ink one hateful word, "Forgery!" She smiled with white lips. "The bank accepted it, I gather," she said. "It must be a pretty fair forgery."

He glared under thick white lashes. "Yes, they're dumb, too. I'll have a word with them to-morrow right after I call at police headquarters." He grinned at the flinching of her thin body. "It won't do him any good to clear out. I'll find him, send him to prison for this thing, if it takes every penny I've got!" He leaned back, breathing heavily.

Ellen straightened slowly, then turned toward the door. "You're being very cruel," she said. "I think, before to-morrow, you'll reconsider your unjustified decision. The boy is young. He is foolish, I admit. If

you were only not so—stingy with him!" Hate flamed in her eyes. "If you only gave him a decent allowance!"

The pounding of the old man's cane cut her short. "Allowance! Allowance!" His voice thinned dangerously. "It makes no difference what I give him! He spends it all and whines for more. No. That's my final word. I'll have him arrested to-morrow and it won't do him any good to cut and run."

She closed the door on his choked utterances, stood there in the darkened hall, eyes closed, breathing brokenly. She heard far-away sounds of activity from the kitchen: old Wheeler's doddering footsteps on the second floor; Katie, the housekeeper, rustling around in the dining room.

All the servants were old at Kaneshaven. Everything was old. She thought of lights, music and people, of all the bright, dangerous gayety which she loved. Wearily, she passed a cold hand over her eyes, brushing the thick waves of dark hair from her brow. She was still handsome, still young enough to find life good. If he in there were dead, she would have a chance.

Upstairs she ran, took a dark cape from her closet, pulled on a small hat, and went outdoors. The somber autumn evening was in tune with her mood. She walked quickly along the drive toward the road. The afterglow had faded, leaving a cold blue twilight. Bare branches of the maples stood out starkly. Wind whipped her cape behind her, like a broad black wing.

Stepping through the gate, she collided with a man, then stopped with a startled gasp. He was a poor enough specimen—a thin, haggard fellow, shivering in ragged, sodden clothes. She saw his white, unshaven

face, his sunken, hungry eyes, his dirty restless hands. She started back, a cry on her lips.

"Please, ma'am, would you give me a dime?" he asked uncertainly. "I'm hungry and I ain't been able to find work. Please, ma'am!"

Revulsion seized her. She hated his whining voice, his insistence. She loathed suffering, discomfort of any sort.

"No!" she said angrily. "Go away! I haven't any money. Go quickly or I'll have you arrested."

The man's watery eyes blinked helplessly. His battered body sagged lower. He opened his cracked lips to protest, but she pushed quickly by him, hurried down the road, little puffs of dust rising from the soles of her slim shoes. She did not pause until she had half covered the distance to the village, then she stopped on a rise and looked back. Of course, it was too dark to tell anything about it, but she thought she made out his shuffling, dispirited figure some distance behind her.

On the way back, however, she did not see him, though she could not forget his thin, unshaven face, his pale, futile eyes. She was painfully conscious of the thick shadows under the trees and breathed more easily when she once more entered her door.

Wheeler was pottering around in the dining room. He looked up with a sickly grin at the sight of his mistress. Wheeler had served Lucian Kane for twenty-seven years. He loved his master, but he feared and disliked his master's wife.

"Wheeler," Ellen said crisply, "have you seen any tramps around here this evening?"

The old man blinked apologetically. "Well, yes, ma'am," he replied timidly. "There was a shabby

fellow came to the back door begging. He seemed that hungry, ma'am, that I told cook to give him a joint of ham that was most gone anyway and some bread."

Ellen's gray eyes were hard. "After this," she ordered curtly, "you are to send people like that away promptly! There is a charitable organization in the village to care for them. I don't want them hanging around here. They're dangerous, understand, dangerous!"

Wheeler nodded helplessly. "Yes, ma'am," he muttered.

She met Hubert in the upper hall. He was groomed and polished, and there was a debonair swing to his shoulders. His thin, weak face was flushed. There was a distinct alcoholic odor about him. He wore a light topecoat, carried his hat and a smart ebony stick.

Ellen eyed him coldly. "Going out?" she inquired.

He nodded uncertainly, his eyes defensive. "Going in to town for a movie," he said. "Ain't any fun staying here." He stepped closer to her. "What'd the old gent say, mom? You got it fixed, ain't you? It's all settled?"

Her cold gray eyes narrowed. "I'm sorry to report," she told him, "that it is distinctly not settled. Your stepfather is determined to take legal action. He is calling at police headquarters to-morrow. He asks me to tell you that it will be useless for you to run away."

Hubert's pasty face whitened. His loose lips sagged. He tried to speak, but his throat seemed paralyzed. Ellen's heart bled for him. She hated him for his weakness, pitied him for his fear. She would have glossed the matter over, perhaps, if the sight of him, off for an evening's revelry, had not infuriated her. Let him wriggle! Per-

haps it would do him good. When he would learn that everything had been arranged by the simple expedient of old Lucian dying, well, then he could relax.

"Get along," she said sharply. "Maybe by morning he'll feel differently. And don't get yourself into a scrape to-night." She caught a quick breath. "Can't you arrange to spend the evening with some one respectable, for once?" she inquired. "Some one who would shed a little credit on you?" It had just come to her that, if Lucian Kane were murdered to-night, as she meant that he should be, this precious son of hers might be involved. "Haven't you any decent friends?"

The boy's pale face flushed angrily. "I'll take care of myself," he said sullenly and clattered downstairs.

Ellen waited until she heard the roar of his motor, then with a sigh she went to her room. She was thankful that he was going to be out of the house. Respectable or otherwise, his giddy friends would furnish an alibi for him. He would likely proceed to get himself gloriously drunk and spend the night in some one's apartment. He was well out of the way.

Ellen Kane lay very still on her low white bed, staring into the dark. Every nerve in her body was quivering. Her fingers were curled so that the bright pointed nails cut into her palm. She could feel each one separately gouging into the flesh. The pain held her steady, quickened her already white-hot brain.

Yet she was quite cool when, a few minutes later, she slid out of bed, drew on a dark negligée, slipped her bare feet into slippers, and opened the hall door. It was five minutes to twelve. The house

was painfully silent. The servants had retired to their quarters at the back. Hubert was in the city. Lucian, who never went to bed before one o'clock, would be dozing in his study, a book propped open on the reading stand at his side. The door would be unlocked, the window, likewise. The old man had a contempt for locks and bolts.

She stepped into the hall. Her thick, beautiful hair lay in a heavy braid down her back. There was the shine of cold cream on her face. In her steady hand she clutched a cheap shiny automatic. Ellen had purchased it months ago, in town, when the fright from a local burglary had set the countryside to quivering. She had kept it locked in her trunk. No one knew she had it. She wondered now, as she walked silently along the hall, if, in her subconscious mind there had not always been the idea that some day she would murder her husband with it.

Her plan was very simple. Its very simplicity made for perfection, in Ellen's opinion. She intended walking into the study and shooting the old man as he dozed over his book. The explosion would undoubtedly waken Wheeler who was a light sleeper. But before he got his rickety old frame out of bed, into some clothes and downstairs, she could be back in her own room.

Who could prove that she had done this thing? Let them suspect if they liked. Proof was another thing. She did not think she would even be suspected. She was known as a sober, careful woman, who attended to her own household, cared efficiently for her aged husband, and gave liberally to local charities. No one knew how stingy Lucian was. Her pride had seen to that. No one guessed at her fretful discontent, how her longing for life chafed at

the chains that bound her. She felt perfectly satisfied with herself as she crossed the library, without turning on a light, opened the door of Lucian's study soundlessly and paused, frozen in her tracks.

The old man was sprawled across the desk. His white hair was stained with blood from a savage cut on the right temple. His eyes were open, staring straight at her. He was dead. Need for murder was gone.

Hours seemed to pass while she stood there, not noticing anything except that grim figure by the desk, while her mind struggled to comprehend this thing. Cold air blowing across her face roused her. She knew now that she had felt it when she first opened the door.

Her eyes lifted, flashed across the desk. The window was open, and a man was crouched beside it—a pitiful, sodden creature, with a thin, emaciated face and sunken, watery eyes. His lips opened when her eyes met his. He muttered something.

She did not catch the words. She was not interested in what he had to say. A miracle had happened. Lucian was dead, so there was no need for her to kill him. This wretch, cowering there by the window, the same one she had encountered at the gate, had done it.

Fierce joy surged through her. On the heels of it came madness. She lifted her gun. The man started up, hands outstretched. She saw his gaunt, whiskered face through a red mist. His croaking voice was drowned in the crash of the shot.

She shot true. The bullet made a small blue puncture directly between his bloodshot eyes. He staggered, wavered a moment, then crashed to the floor. Blood trickled thinly across the pale rug. There wouldn't be much blood in that stringy body, she thought. Her

hand fell. She closed her eyes, swaying. From overhead came the sound of a closing door, a startled cry. Old Wheeler!

No need for her to fear Wheeler now, or any one else. She had killed a man, but she had done it within her rights. She would be praised for her courage. She walked stiffly toward her husband's body, stood there, staring down at it. If she had put through her original plan, if she had killed Lucian and the crime had been traced to her, she would have likely died in the electric chair. She considered, abstractedly, the difference in murder.

The hall door opened. Old Wheeler staggered across the library into the study. He was shivering and his teeth clicked audibly. His wide, horrified eyes went straight to the body of his murdered master. He opened gray lips, without speaking.

"Your master has been murdered, Wheeler," she said curtly. "I shot the man who did it." She motioned toward the crumpled form by the window. "I was worried about that tramp who was around here, so, when I heard a disturbance, I came down. Will you notify the police in the village and also Doctor Egan, though, of course, he can do nothing?"

She said it all very slowly, so that each word would be impressed on the old man's dazed consciousness. Not that she had anything to fear, of course!

Wheeler was sobbing in broken, laboring gasps. Old Katie Kenyon appeared in the door, wrapped in a gray kimono. She saw the dead man at the desk, and started moaning. Ellen turned impatiently, picked up the telephone, and put through a call for the Arborville police station.

After that she called Doctor Egan. As she set the phone down, the room went suddenly black. She thought that Wheeler had turned out the light. The light was still burning, however.

Ellen Kane had fainted, for the first time in her life.

CHAPTER III.

THE MISSING CHECK.

WHEN she opened her eyes she was in her own bed. The fire was blazing on the hearth, and Dan Besant, chief of the local police force at Arborville, was sitting beside her.

Ellen's eyes went past the policeman, centered on old Katie Kenyon, the housekeeper, fussing around the table. Katie's thick body slumped. Her face was swollen with crying. She sniffed audibly.

Dan Besant leaned forward when he saw that Mrs. Kane had recovered consciousness. He was a slow, heavy man, whose thought processes were never rapid, although he had a fair amount of intelligence. He had steady, deep-set gray eyes.

Ellen studied him through half-closed lids. She had nothing to fear from Dan or any one else now. Lucian was dead—by another's hand. She began sobbing, tears blurring the feverish brightness of her eyes.

Besant made a clucking noise in his throat. "There, there, Mrs. Kane," he soothed awkwardly. "You mustn't take on now. You couldn't help it, and you done a brave thing, ma'am, a very brave thing."

"Lucian!" she cried. "My husband! Was he——"

Dan Besant swallowed a lump in

his throat. He had never liked Mrs. Kane, but he was a sympathetic man and it pained him to see any one suffer. "He's gone, ma'am," Besant said uncomfortably. "His skull was crushed." He mopped his damp reddish face. Now, that hadn't been a very nice way to tell her.

She buried her face in the pillow. Joy was bursting in her heart. Freedom! Release! The joy of life again!

Like swift scenes on the silver screen, she saw her future actions: the stupid business of the funeral, the final arrangements for closing the house, discharging the servants; she, herself, would act decorously stricken, moving sedately, showing no undue anxiety to acquire her husband's money. That was bound to come. She would move to the city just as soon as she could, get a modern apartment, and engage servants that suited her. Then she would settle a comfortable sum on Hubert.

Her fingers locked in her thick dark hair. Hubert! The forged check! She had to get that! If it were found, suspicion might be directed toward her son. Besides, he would be disgraced and publicly branded as a forger. Oh, why hadn't she secured the beastly thing at once, before Wheeler came, before she fainted like an idiot. Again she saw that savage red scrawl across the face of the blue check: "Forgery!" Perspiration stood cold on her trembling body.

Dan Besant was speaking again. "Would you be able to tell me exactly what happened, Mrs. Kane? I know what you told Wheeler, but I'd like some details."

She drew air into her lungs, lifted her head, deciding she was unduly worried about the check. There would be no reason for any one else

opening that little inlaid box to-night. She would get downstairs very soon. In the meantime, Dan Besant was patiently waiting for her story.

"I met that horrible man," she said slowly, "when I went out for a walk about dark. He was hanging around the gates. He asked for money. I didn't have any, and he was very ugly and threatening. I was frightened and ran. When I returned, I questioned Wheeler and found that the fellow had been begging at the back door. Wheeler had told the cook to give him some food."

She paused on a deep breath. The policeman listened quietly. He was wondering just how much money old Lucian Kane had left, and if any one else besides Ellen would get a share of it—that good-for-nothing son of hers, for instance.

"I went to bed, but couldn't sleep," Ellen continued. "I kept thinking of the tramp. My son had gone into town for the night, so I was alone, except for the servants who are too old to be of use, and my—husband." Her voice broke with just the right amount of pain.

Besant urged her on. "And you heard somethin', ma'am?"

"Yes. I was dozing, I guess, and something roused me. I got up, found my gun, and went downstairs." She studied him through her tear-wet lashes. Practically everything she was telling was absolutely true, only he couldn't know the motive that had taken her downstairs, with the gun in her hand.

"I opened the study door," she stated. "The first thing I saw was Lucian lying across the desk. Then cold air brushed my face. I looked at the window. It was open. The man was just in the act of climbing

out. I don't know how I had the courage. I can't remember what I thought." Her voice rose, tight with well-assumed hysteria. "I only know I fired! I saw him fall! I saw his eyes! I killed him! He deserved to die because he had murdered a kindly, gentle old man, but I never thought to kill any one. I'll never forget him looking at me."

Dan Besant mopped his face. "Katie," he called over his shoulder. "Can't you do something, Katie?" The old woman shuffled to the bed, sobbing under her breath.

Between them they finally got Mrs. Kane quiet. Besant heaved a sigh of relief and turned toward the door. "I'll send the doctor up," he whispered to Katie. "I reckon I shouldn't have questioned her, but I wanted to know how it happened." He tiptoed out, closing the door softly.

Ellen lay very still, but within her she was laughing. Great shuddering gusts of laughter swept over her taut body. She wanted to leap up, throw off this idiotic guise of mourning. She longed to settle everything to-night, get her money, leave the house, and run—run away from it all, back to light, laughter, and life.

But she held herself very quietly, and at regular intervals stifled sobs shook her. She was a good actress. She thought of the forged check, wondered when it would be safe to secure it. Some time to-night, certainly. In the morning Forbes Lancaster, Lucian's attorney, would be out to take charge of things. She had to get it before then.

She opened her eyes. Old Katie was sitting beside the bed, staring at her. The old woman's heavily lined face was sagging with grief. Ellen remembered that Katie had been with Lucian's first wife. She

wondered at the loyalty his servants had for him.

"Katie," Ellen whispered, "isn't it terrible? Oh, why did this thing have to happen to us?"

Katie heaved a shuddering sigh. "It's the Lord's will, ma'am," she muttered dismally.

"I can't believe it, Katie," Ellen said faintly. Her satisfaction might have endured, except that just then she happened to look directly at Katie, and the burning brightness of those faded old eyes, the unwavering directness of the look startled her. What was Katie thinking? Why did Katie hate her so?

The door opened and Doctor Egan entered. Ellen frowned at the sight of him. Bungling fool! He came straight to the bed, and Katie huddled in the shadows by the fire, like a bent old witch, sobbing faintly.

Doctor Egan looked gray and shabby. He wet his lips frequently, blinking behind his filmed glasses.

"Feeling better, Mrs. Kane?" he inquired, laying a hot, dry finger on her wrist.

Ellen shivered from that touch but answered naturally enough. "I'll not give you any trouble, doctor. Just let me—be alone, won't you?" She was desperately anxious for them all to leave her. She wanted to get down to Lucian's study. Suppose Dan Besant should leave one of his men to guard the place to-night? She had read that such precautions were taken sometimes. Then before she could get in and secure the forged note, Forbes Lancaster would arrive.

"I'll leave you a bromide," the doctor offered. "You must get some sleep. There is nothing we can do for Lucian, of course."

"Nothing," she agreed, and shivered.

The doctor rose. "Well, if you're all right," he said, "I'll be leaving you. It's a terrible thing, Mrs. Kane. That fellow has been hanging around town for several days. There are too many of these dangerous bums on the roads to-day. The government ought to do something about them."

A strange curiosity seized Ellen. "Who was he?" she asked. "Does any one know who he was?"

The doctor shook his head. "There was no identification on his person, but he's been seen asking for mail, so I guess Dan Besant can find out who he was. Likely, the police in town will have his record. There's one thing I can't understand, though. That is what the fellow used for a weapon."

Ellen's eyes widened. "Why—why——" she began, but the doctor interrupted.

"Oh, I guess they'll find it, but it seems kinda curious it wasn't there beside him, or somewhere in the room."

"Maybe he tossed it out of the window," Ellen ventured.

Doctor Egan shook his head. "Besant looked all around and he can't find anything. There wasn't an object in the room heavy enough to have given that blow." He sighed and shoved his hands in his pocket. "Well, I guess they'll find it. Good night, Mrs. Kane." He turned toward the door.

"What have they done with Lucian's body?" Ellen asked thickly.

"It's been taken to the village mortuary," he told her. "I took the liberty of arranging it without consulting you, since you were so ill."

She relaxed weakly. "Is Besant leaving any one here?" she asked, watching him under heavy lids.

"Yes. Bill Whistler is to patrol the grounds. Several of the village

folks heard about it and came up to see what they could do, but we sent 'em away. Besant thought you'd feel safer with Bill around."

She nodded assent because she couldn't do anything else. If Bill Whistler kept to his beat, she had no need for worry, and she was desperately glad the stupid villagers had been sent away.

The doctor paused by the door. She could feel his pale, uncertain glance on her.

"Hubert ought to be notified," he said. "Do you know where he is, Mrs. Kane?"

"I don't exactly know," Ellen answered wearily. "He went into the city to attend a show. He'll likely stay the night with friends. Let him be, doctor. He'll know soon enough."

The doctor nodded and went out, saying he'd call again in the morning. A little later Ellen got rid of old Katie, listened until she heard old Wheeler's uncertain steps falter past. Standing by the window, with the light out behind her, she saw a tall, shambling figure pacing the path below her. Bill Whistler!

She waited nearly an hour before venturing downstairs. Doubts assailed her at every step. Suppose Dan Besant had locked the study door! What reason would he have? The crime was all quite simple and plain. There was no mystery connected with it.

Quietly she crossed the unlighted library, her heart jumping. The study door was unlocked. She opened it softly. Perspiration beaded her forehead. The room was dark. There was a stale odor about it that set her shivering. She had a tiny flashlight. Snapping it on, she took a quick look round. The windows were closed, the curtains drawn.

She groped over the desk for the inlaid box. The smooth, satiny wood was cool, smooth to her touch. She opened it, shooting the thin rays of the flash on the thick piles of paper it contained—bills, notations, notes, canceled checks.

Swifter and swifter her cold fingers flew, sorting, arranging, searching. She laid the flash on the desk and dropped to a chair, teeth biting her under lip. Papers rustled in the silence. She crushed them furiously. She had missed it—that was all! It was here. It had to be here. Nothing could have happened to it.

Minutes ticked loudly on the bright-faced clock beside her. Her trembling fingers slowed. There were gray hollows beneath her eyes. She leaned back, trembling. The check was gone.

She sat up, forcing herself to control. "Well, Lucian put it somewhere else," she reasoned. "He was afraid I would steal it." She began pulling out drawers, searching through pigeonholes, rummaging in compartments.

Better than an hour was consumed in that frantic search. When at last she left the study, she knew that the check was not there.

Back in her own room she sat down before the dying fire, her mind whirling with speculation. There was no reason that she could see, why Dan Besant, called in on a case of murder as simple as this, should examine the dead man's papers. Moreover, if he had found the check, wouldn't Besant have immediately started a search for Hubert? Wouldn't he have asked her where her son was? He had not done so.

She straightened, her eyes narrowed. Doctor Egan! Had he found the check? He had undoubtedly been alone in the study while Dan Besant was upstairs talk-

ing to her. It would be like Doctor Egan to snoop. She leaned forward, her chin in her cupped palm. What would Doctor Egan do if he did find the check? Turn it over to Besant as something to be investigated? She doubted it.

Rising, she started a restless pacing. In the silence of the softly lighted room, the nervous pad of her slippers was the only sound.

Pursuing his lonely rounds, Deputy Bill Whistler frowned up at the lighted window of Mrs. Kane's room. It must have hit her pretty hard after all, Bill decided, pausing to light his pipe.

CHAPTER IV.

BLACKMAIL.

LUCIAN KANE'S murder caused State-wide indignation. The old man was well known over a wide territory, and, in spite of his bad temper, his snorting and cane thumping, he was well loved and respected. Ellen was frankly surprised at the messages of esteem and sympathy that flowed in from friends and admirers of her husband.

She moved through the flurry of excitement—a controlled, dry-eyed woman, whose handsome presence and grave sorrow added dignity to the proceedings. She told and retold her story, first to Forbes Lancaster, her husband's attorney, later to representatives of metropolitan newspapers who flocked to the house. She even received the awed, frankly curious housewives from the village with courtesy and kindness.

To her surprise, Hubert conducted himself with a decorum and judgment with which she could scarcely credit him. He had arrived

at Kaneshaven the morning after the murder, and the shock he received was real enough. Moreover, he had an unbreakable alibi. Not that the question of an alibi really arose, but a restlessness in Ellen's heart was quieted when Dan Besant said to her the next day:

"Hubert spent the night with Martin Sellers, all right, Mrs. Kane. Both Sellers and his wife, Marcia, vouch for it. Just thought you'd like to know."

Ellen nodded. So Besant had checked up on Hubert's alibi! It was merely routine, she supposed. There could be no question of really suspecting the boy, not after laying the blame on that man she had shot.

Her victim had been identified as Charlie Locke, and his home had been in Seattle. Charlie had no police record. He had a wife and five-year-old son who mourned him. According to the newspaper reports which Ellen read, Charlie had started out four months ago to find work. An enterprising reporter, with a nose for human interest, had secured a statement from Charlie's wife. She said savagely that Charlie had not killed Lucian Kane. Charlie might have been tempted to steal, through hunger, but he would not kill. Why, Charlie wouldn't even kill a turkey for their Christmas dinner when they had been able to buy a turkey a long time ago.

The newspapers were not particularly interested in what Charlie's wife said about him. They were interested, rather mildly, in the fact that Mrs. Charlie Locke's father was Hiram Botts, a wealthy realtor of San Francisco, prominent in social and civic activities. They didn't rest until they dug up the story of the elopement five years earlier and how Botts had sworn

then that he would let his daughter starve before he'd forgive her.

Botts made good his threat, too, and Mrs. Charlie Locke had scrubbed floors to feed her son, rather than appeal to her stiff-necked parent.

However, the press pointed out, the tragedy of Charlie's death had reconciled father and daughter. Mrs. Locke and the youngster had been brought to the Botts home. That part of the affair had ended happily. Hiram Botts was photographed several times with his curly-haired grandson, of whose existence he had not previously known.

A certain curiosity was also manifested in that no amount of searching had uncovered the weapon with which Lucian Kane had been killed. This created a mild three-day wonder, until Doctor Egan, physician of the murdered man, produced a heavy bronze incense burner from the mantel in the study and advanced it as being the possible weapon. It was Doctor Egan's theory that Charlie had possessed sufficient presence of mind to replace it after killing his victim. An attempt was made to find Charlie's prints on the bronze, although, by the time the authorities had gotten hold of it, all possible prints had been blurred.

Furthermore, the public was so concerned with reviling the government for not at once eliminating the army of hoodlums haunting the highways, that not too much attention was paid to the absence of definite prints on the incense burner.

Within five days everything had been cleared up and the newspapers were ready for something new. Lucian Kane had been fittingly interred. The will had been read. Ellen was sole heir except for liberal bequests to the old servants.

Forbes Lancaster, who had never liked his client's second wife, had departed immediately after his mission had been accomplished. Ellen still lived on at the country estate, inwardly seething, but outwardly calm, awaiting the final judgment.

She had placed a sum of money at her son's disposal, and he seemed satisfied for the present. He spent a great deal of his time in the city now. When he came out, he was always more or less under the influence of liquor. Ellen regarded him with somber, angry eyes. She told him of the missing check. It jolted him, but he took it rather well, on the whole. As the days passed and nothing was heard of it, Ellen began to relax.

Then one bright, sunny autumn morning, exactly eight days after the murder of her husband, she paused in the hall to glance through the mail. The usual notes of condolence were still arriving. There was an advertisement for a Mediterranean cruise. She considered that with brightened eyes. Next, she saw a floppy, soiled envelope, with typewritten address. She tore it open and took out one sheet of cheap paper. The message left her shaking.

ELLEN KANE: Will you pay five hundred dollars for my silence concerning a certain check, made payable to Martin Sellers, signed with your husband's name, and bearing the word "Forgery!" across the face? Send the money to John Jones, General Delivery, N. Y. C., not later than to-morrow afternoon. The papers would like this story.

Ellen did not move for a long time. There was a whirring in her head, a bitter saltiness in her mouth. Blood trickled from her lip where her teeth had bitten it. She folded the letter, put it back in the envelope, and went upstairs.

All morning she thought about it. At last she opened a small steel box that stood, carefully locked, in her closet, and took out a thick packet of bills. Her fingers were steady, her eyes hard as ice. She counted out five hundred dollars, wrapped the bills in a sheet of plain paper, put them in a stout envelope, and addressed them as directed. She went into the village that afternoon and mailed the envelope.

Blackmail! Walking home in the blue twilight with golden leaves falling around her, she faced defeat. She was only paying for silence, and she knew well how temporary that would be.

Hubert came home that night, driving up in high spirits. His thin face was flushed, his eyes bright. He threw his arms around her as she sat motionless in her private sitting room. She pushed him away.

"You've been drinking again," she accused. "You have very few brains, my son."

He backed off, flushing hotly. His lips quivered, and Ellen's blood turned to water. He looked so young, so unhappy.

"Hubert," she murmured. "I'm sorry, dear."

He stood sullenly regarding her. "You're swell," he said harshly. "I'll say you're a swell one. First time I been happy since I can remember. I come home to tell you about my invitation to spend a month with the Sellers."

"With whom?"

"Martin and Marcia Sellers. They got a place up North. We're goin' up for the shootin'. They're friends of mine. It was at their apartment that I stayed that night—the old gen was bumped."

Her eyes narrowed. "I remember. And it was to Martin Sellers, if I am not mistaken, that you drew the

check which you signed with your stepfather's name."

His lips whitened. "What you gotta bring that up for?" he demanded angrily. "Didn't I tell you I wouldn't do anything like that again? Can't you let me alone? Can't you forget it?"

She rose, facing him. She was very angry. Bright spots of color burned in her thin cheeks. Her voice low, she said: "Sorry to upset you, my son, but I think I have a right to mention that check." She snapped open a drawer in her desk, drew out the blackmail note, and thrust it into his shaking hands. "You might consider this in the light of your approaching vacation," she suggested icily.

Hubert read it with distended eyes. His hands shook so that the paper fluttered to the floor. He groped for it. She heard his heavy panting breath, saw the line of his neck, with the thin edge of blond hair, curling slightly, just as she remembered it from his babyhood. He looked so helpless there on his knees, fumbling for the thing that would ruin him, unless she prevented it. Tears blinded her. He straightened, the paper clutched in his hand. Perspiration streaked his white working face.

"You won't let me down, will you, mom?" he pleaded. "You'll do somethin' about it? I been happy since the old man died. I been havin' a good time. You won't let somethin' spoil it now, will you?"

"I paid, Hubert, but what's the end going to be?" she said faintly. "Can't you help me? Can't you help me figure out who might have done that?"

He was squinting at the paper with twitching eyes. She saw his helplessness. Angrily, she snatched the paper from him.

"Oh, get out!" she snapped. "You make me sick. You've always been a liability to me. Some day I'll get tired of paying for you."

He caught her hands, pleading with her, making extravagant promises, pressing her fingers against his hot cheeks. Ellen watched him with haggard, hating eyes. It was always the same; he could always manage her. She loathed weakness more than anything in the world, and she was so weak where her son was concerned.

When he left her to return to town, she knew that she had virtually agreed to pay the blackmailer any amount he asked, for as long as he asked it.

As the roar of her son's motor died away, she sank into a chair, shaking with hysterical laughter.

CHAPTER V.

AT DOCTOR EGAN'S.

ELLEN was not one to give up easily. She made a list of the people who might possess that wretched check; the people who, the night of her husband's murder, had had the opportunity of finding it in the inlaid box.

She sat with the pencil gripped tightly in her fingers and studied it.

Dan Besant.
Doctor Egan.
Wheeler, the butler.
Katie Kenyon, the housekeeper.

Her eyes hardened. She moistened the tip of the pencil and wrote:

Forbes Lancaster.

His opportunity would not have come that night, but the next day would have been as good.

The police chief, she eliminated at

once. Wheeler was entirely too simple, in her opinion, to figure the thing out. Katie had a sly way with her, but Ellen knew the old woman had not left the house for weeks and the blackmail note had been mailed in the city. Katie might have sent it to some one to mail for her, of course. Ellen thought this over carefully but decided against it. It implied a cleverness with which she could not credit the housekeeper.

She considered the lawyer thoughtfully. He did not like her or her son. His attitude said plainly that he thought Lucian Kane had been taken in thoroughly when he remarried. But the game seemed too small for a man of Lancaster's gifts. She did not dismiss him entirely, but she put him aside for a time.

There was only Doctor Egan left. She knew that in the back of her mind she had from the first suspected Doctor Egan. It was like him. It was the kind of dirty, underhanded thing which Ellen thought he would do. He had the motive and opportunity. The motive was his poverty, in spite of his wide country practice. And he had had the opportunity of securing the forged check while he made his examination of the dead man.

She leaned back, closing her eyes. Her chest jerked with her excited breathing. She was considering many things, remembering Doctor Egan's avoidance of her eyes these last few times they had met, recalling suddenly that he had made a trip to the city yesterday, the very day before the blackmail note arrived.

With startling clarity the case against him grew. For a long time she sat there, while darkness thickened around her and the fire smoldered to gray ashes. She wouldn't

come to any snap judgment, of course. She would be calm, judicial. But her brain whirled. Another thought that formed in her mind was that Doctor Egan's combination house and office was in a lonely spot at the far edge of the village, and also that he lived alone.

She rose slowly, bathed and dressed for dinner.

It was a dark, moonless night. Wind, which all day had worried at the golden leaves, had died down with sunset. Silence was a heavy brooding weight over the world when Ellen slipped, unobserved, out the side door of the house and hurried toward the village.

She was going to call on Doctor Egan, to decide, in her mind, on the question of his guilt. There was no ability in him to handle criminal matters skillfully. She was convinced that at the end of the interview she would be sure, one way or the other.

The night and silence followed her. Her feet made a crunching sound in the thick white dust. She glanced sidewise at the towering trees fringing the road, angry at her nervousness. She felt that unseen eyes watched her progress, that unseen feet followed hers.

Once she paused in the darkness of the elder grove, watching, listening. Shadows moved. Was it a swaying tree limb? There was no wind. And what could cast a shadow in this brooding darkness?

Her cold fingers locked around the handle of her automatic. It gave her moral support in the lonely journey. She returned it to her coat pocket now and went on hurriedly. It was ten thirty and the village slept. Houses were dark, stores closed. A sleepy attendant of the one filling station in the town

drowsed inside his lighted cubicle. Ellen hesitated, crossed to the other side of the street, ducking down the alley behind the bank.

She wondered a bit at her furtive caution, at what lurked far back in her mind, causing her to steal through the night like a murderer.

Doctor Egan answered her knock. He wore a dusty, spotted smoking jacket, and his soiled glasses tipped crazily on the end of his shiny nose. His jaw sagged when he recognized her.

"Mrs. Kane," he stammered. "What is wrong? Has anything happened?"

She walked past him into the little office. An unshaded light burned over the old-fashioned littered desk. The worn linoleum was stained with cigarette burns. A sofa sagged against the wall. On a shabby cane rocker a fat gray cat dozed complacently. Doctor Egan followed Ellen, closing the door behind him. She noted with satisfaction that the thick shades were tightly drawn.

The doctor placed a chair for her, then sat down at his desk. The furrows in his pale face showed starkly in the fierce uncompromising light. His thin soiled hands trembled as he placed his pipe on an ash tray.

"And now," he asked, "what is the matter, Mrs. Kane?"

Ellen's hands were tightly clasped in her lap. Her eyes raked his face. "It's about Hubert, doctor," she replied.

The doctor's fumbling hands stilled. A curious tenseness seized him. "Yes? What is the matter with Hubert, Mrs. Kane?"

"I thought maybe you could tell, doctor. Since Lucian's death, the boy hasn't been himself. He insists he's all right, but I'm sure something's on his mind."

Doctor Egan picked up a cheap

metal paper knife, turned it thoughtfully. A muscle twitched around his left eye. "Have you any idea what it may be? Something to do with his stepfather's death, perhaps?"

Ellen caught her breath. There was a noisy humming in her head. She was conscious of the weight of the automatic in her pocket.

"I think," she said slowly, "that Hubert and his stepfather had words about a check."

The paper knife clattered from the doctor's hands. Under the cruel light, his face was very white. There was a hot excitement in his eyes. "Yes," he said. "I know. Lucian told me, that afternoon before his death."

Ellen's fingers curled. "Lucian told you?" she asked gently.

He nodded. "He was very angry. It's worried me a lot. I wondered——" He paused, breathing hard.

"I've wondered, too," she admitted, "who stole the check after Lucian was killed."

"Stole? You mean it's gone?" His fingers were locked round the edge of the desk so that the bony knuckles stood out whitely.

"It's gone!" She leaned forward, one hand resting lightly on the chair arm. The other was curled round the automatic in her pocket. "I'm being blackmailed about it," she added.

His thin body twitched. His eyes were startlingly bright behind the soiled lenses. "Of course," he said very low. "I understand it now."

"Understand what?" She trembled, feeling the metal of the gun burning through her glove. She had to keep cool, be sure, very sure. Every cowering atom in him seemed to proclaim his guilty knowledge. Still, she wouldn't rush matters. She'd take her time.

He rose, straightening his slumped

shoulders. "Mrs. Kane, let me think this over, will you? There is something I want to decide about—something that has been troubling me for days. Will you leave me now? I'll come and see you to-morrow."

She rose also. The gun was concealed in the folds of her coat. He walked to the mantel, leaned on it, his back to her. The sight of his thin shabby body infuriated her. She waited until she could speak calmly. Perhaps he sensed menace in her silence.

He turned, blinking at her.

"You wrote that blackmail letter," she accused.

His mouth sagged. His eyes glittered like bright points of fire. "Me?" he cried. "You think that I would do that?"

She came slowly toward him, head lowered a little. "I think you stole that check the night Lucian died. You were the only one, aside from my immediate family, who knew about it. It was your chance to make some easy money."

He shivered back against the mantel. "No," he said thickly. "No, Ellen Kane, I did not steal the check. I did not blackmail you."

She laughed at his futile protestations. "Give it to me!" she ordered, and lifted the gun, pointing it steadily. She heard the breath go out of him.

"You're crazy," he whined. "Put that thing away!"

"Give me the check!"

"I tell you I didn't steal it! I haven't got it!"

"You're lying. Hand it over or I'll shoot you!"

He said on a broken, sobbing breath:

"I haven't got it!"

Her eyes narrowed. "Where is it?"

His glance met hers, curiously

blank. He jerked at his collar. "It's in my desk—hidden," he gasped.

"Oh!" The exclamation hissed between her teeth. Up to that admission, she hadn't been absolutely sure. A hot wave of color swept over her pale face. Her courage had been rewarded. She trembled with joy and relief.

"Get it for me!" she ordered, and stepped aside.

His shoulders sagged. Perspiration ran in glistening trickles down his gray-lined face. He moved toward the desk, walking softly, hands curled. She followed him with her eyes and the gun.

He lifted a shaking, grimy-looking hand and opened a drawer. Perhaps it was the tense set of his shoulders, the way his eyes looked back at her, that aroused her suspicions.

Ellen's glance flashed to the open drawer. There was a gun there. His fingers trembled around it. As he grasped it, and whirled, she fired. His trigger finger moved. The two shots sounded almost as one.

Doctor Egan straightened and dropped the gun. The inkwell behind him on the desk crashed to the floor. Black fluid coiled across the dingy linoleum like a gleaming serpent. The doctor swayed for a moment, his lips curled in agony. He clutched at his chest, then slowly, he slumped to the floor. The brightness was gone from his eyes. Blood soaked the front of his crumpled shabby shirt. He did not stir.

Ellen stood very still, staring at the gun. After a time she looked at the man on the floor. He was dead. His mouth was open. She could see his sharp yellow teeth. The gray cat mewed complainingly, curled lower, and began to purr.

"I should not have killed him until I had the check," Ellen thought. Still, it had been his life or hers.

She looked at the gun beside him and smiled faintly. Suicide! That would be the verdict. Ellen did not know very much about ballistics.

She stepped around him, opened the desk drawer, and began rifling through the dusty yellowed papers.

The telephone rang. She screamed, her hands pressed against her mouth. It kept on ringing. Some one hurt? Dying? Being born? Life and death were always knocking at the door of a doctor.

She glanced down at him. This time death had come irrevocably to claim the doctor himself.

She had to find that check. Again she began searching. The phone kept on ringing, and the sound maddened her, for it meant danger.

Would some one come after him and find her here? She kept on rummaging through crowded pigeon-holes. The ringing of the phone bell roused her to frenzy, but she did her job thoroughly, being careful to put everything back as she had found it. She even searched his pockets, and that task made her desperately sick. His limp body flopped grotesquely. She could feel the decreasing warmth of it through his untidy shirt as she groped. She did not find the check.

Rising, she pressed her hands to her temples. Abruptly she could stand it no longer. She stumbled from the house, staggered against a porch post, breathing in the fresh sweet air.

Out in the road quick steps sounded, then slowed before the doctor's gate. She tiptoed to the far end of the porch, crouched in the blackness of the vines. Her heart was leaping. The gate clicked. Steps crunched on the gravel. A man appeared in the faint light from the glass door. She studied him with hot, narrowed eyes.

He was young, slim, with low,

hunched shoulders, a soft dark hat pulled over his face. He mounted the steps. She felt the rickety porch sag under his weight. He was staring at the yellow oval of glass. Ellen took a good look at him. He had a lean hard face, a wide mouth, a thin, high-bridged nose. His eyes were sharp sparks of brightness. He kept one hand in his coat pocket.

He crossed the porch and pressed his face against the glass. Ellen felt endless agony, wondering if he would go in, give her a chance to escape. The telephone was ringing again. The man opened the door, slid into the hall, then closed the door after him.

Ellen rose stiffly, groping among the vines. She found an opening, threw her legs over the rail, and dropped softly to the ground. Dried weeds caught at her skirts, prickled her ankles. Dust rose in thick, choking swirls as she ran through the dark, avoiding the village this time, taking the short cut through the fields to strike the homeward road on the other side.

There was a strange elation in her, a sense of victory, even though she had not found the check. One thing was certain. It had not been in the desk or on the doctor's person. She shuddered at the thought of the search.

As she let herself in the side door again and silently regained her room, she realized that her victory was only half won. The check was doubtlessly concealed somewhere around the house. She stood in the middle of her own room, breathing hard. Some one would find it when the contents of the house were cleared away.

She removed her coat, picked the brambles from her skirt, thinking furiously all the while. When at last she was ready for bed, her plan

was completed. She would assist at the clearing up of the doctor's possessions. He was an old friend of her husband's. Her interest would seem natural. She lay under the cool, fragrant sheets, staring into the dark. She had murdered a man, but the thought did not disturb her greatly.

The stranger who had come had not seen her. There would be no reason to suspect Mrs. Lucian Kane of the murder of Doctor Egan. Besides, it would look very much as if Doctor Egan had killed himself. She fell into a heavy, deadening sleep finally, her last thought not on the man she had killed, but on the one who had entered the doctor's house while she crouched in the sheltering vines.

CHAPTER VI.

ELLEN'S DECISION.

THE verdict was suicide—not the official verdict, for the coroner's jury put off their deliberations with curious obstinacy. But the village, that had known Doctor Egan for thirty years, was satisfied that he had killed himself. His passing did not create much stir. A few old friends mourned him. There was a vague sense of loss in numerous homes. Children cried when a strange doctor arrived to give them potions, but the quiet eddies closed over the spot where the little doctor had vanished, and life went on as usual.

Ellen experienced a growing sense of satisfaction. She had managed her scheme cleverly. The doctor had no relatives. The kindly women of the village undertook the business of tidying the shabby little house,

and Ellen headed the delegation. She spent the better part of a day there, and, when she returned home that evening, she knew that the check had not been in the doctor's possessions at the house.

She thought a great deal as to what he could have done with it. There was no question of a safety-deposit box. The doctor had nothing of sufficient importance to require guarding. She built up a gleaming wall of security around herself, having become convinced at last that wherever the check was it would not come to light.

She also met Larry Dayton, the thin young man who had discovered the doctor's body. Larry, it developed, was a writer, who had recently come to the village to finish a novel. He lived quietly at Mrs. Munson's boarding house, and his visit to the doctor's house that night had been for the purpose of getting an injured hand dressed. She remembered how he had kept one hand in his pocket. That was because it was hurt, not because it had gripped a gun.

Ellen smiled into his lazy eyes and remembered the shock he had given her. He was, seemingly, a careless, indifferent fellow, and his interest in the tragedy was purely impersonal. All in all, Ellen considered, everything had gone off very satisfactorily.

It was on the fifth day following the doctor's funeral that Ellen received the second blackmail note.

Old Katie Kenyon brought it to her on a silver tray, all neat and proper, as she sat before the fire in her living room. Ellen recognized the cheap-looking envelope at first glance.

Katie's mildly popping blue eyes blinked curiously behind her shiny

glasses. "It just come, ma'am," Katie said. "Special delivery. I thought you'd want it right off."

Ellen had difficulty in lifting her hand. It seemed as if it were made of lead and as if the weight were dragging her down. The old housekeeper was watching her avidly. Ellen shivered as she accepted the letter. The curious thought came to her that she might have to kill Katie, too.

Ellen did not at once open the note after Katie had left. She sat there, gazing into the fire, the letter on her lap. It was dusk, and a cold drizzle had set in late that afternoon. It beat desolately against the windows.

Ellen began shivering so that her teeth clicked. She thought quite clearly: "I killed him to no purpose. I killed Egan and he didn't have the check. Some one else has it." Her haggard eyes crept over the shadowy room. "Who has it?" she whispered. "Who has it?"

The amount of money demanded was increased this time. Five thousand dollars! She folded the note carefully, walked to the window, staring down into the gray weary rain. The maple boughs were bare now. The leaves lay, limp and dead, a pulp mass on the soaked ground.

She thought again: "I killed Egan to no purpose." She pressed a cold hand across her eyes. "Why did I kill him? He admitted having the check, and now I know that was merely to give him a chance at the gun in the drawer." She drew a startled breath, wondering oddly where the bullet from Egan's gun had lodged. Her thoughts went back to a more pressing problem.

"Egan didn't have the check. He never had it." She pushed hair from her eyes. "I killed him to save Hubert. Hubert isn't worth it. No,

he isn't worth it," she thought savagely, and dropped her head on the window ledge. "I'd do it again," she told herself. "I'd kill again to save him."

A car sped up the drive—Besant's car. Ellen tore suddenly at the lace at her throat. Besant was getting out. There was another man with him. The loud peal of the bell seemed to hold a sinister note. Katie came presently to announce the police chief and Larry Dayton.

"What do they want?" Ellen asked hoarsely.

Katie blinked and smoothed at her apron. Ellen felt the probing of those bright bulging eyes. Katie knew something. Katie was planning something. Ellen's hand clenched. She might have to kill Katie.

"What do they want?" she demanded again.

"I don't know, ma'am," Katie answered meekly. "Mr. Besant just asked——"

"Bring them up," Ellen rasped.

Katie bowed and departed. Ellen went into her dressing room, smoothed powder on her damp face, and brushed her rich dark hair until it gleamed. Her eyes had a curiously sunken look. There were shadows in the hollows of her cheeks. Her lips were gray. She applied some lipstick over them and smiled at her reflection. Her dark-green frock was becoming to her, intensifying the creamy pallor of her face. She was beautiful. The sight of her beauty gave her added strength. She was standing carelessly graceful before the fire when they came in, Besant first, Larry Dayton following him.

Besant came at once to the point. "You'll excuse us, Mrs. Kane," he said, "but Mr. Dayton here is interested in the two killings we've had

lately—Mr. Kane's and Doctor Egan's. He writes crime stories, you know. He thought you might be willing to clear up a few points for him."

Ellen smiled at Larry Dayton. He had thick black hair and curiously sleepy eyes. She remembered how bright they had been that night he entered Doctor Egan's house—to get an injured hand treated. He sat down at her invitation, crossed his long legs, and laid his stick across them. Besant dropped to a low stool near the fire.

"I'll be glad to give Mr. Dayton any help I can, though I'm sure I don't know what I can say that is new," Ellen stated. "My husband was, as you know"—she looked at Larry—"murdered by a wandering thug who entered the house to rob us."

Larry nodded as though he had not heard all this before. "What was Charlie Locke doing, Mrs. Kane, when you entered the room?"

Ellen stared at the fire, recalling that moment. "He was in the act of climbing out of the window," she replied. "He had one foot over the sill."

"And you shot him?"

Ellen's gray eyes met his, shadowed, wary, unrevealing. "Yes. I knew that my husband was dead the moment I entered the room. I knew that this fellow had murdered him."

Larry Dayton leaned forward a little, his hands clasped around the head of his stick. "You'll pardon my seeming curiosity," he said slowly, "but just how did you know that Locke had murdered your husband?"

Ellen's eyes opened wide, in unassumed amazement. She even smiled a little, though her whole body was tense with hostile caution. "It seemed quite evident I think,

Mr. Dayton. Can't you picture it yourself? Lucian, my husband, dead—lying across the desk. A man crawling out of the window."

Larry gazed at the fire. Autumn rain tapped against the windows. "Yes, I suppose it seemed logical enough," he admitted. "But you know, Mrs. Kane"—he smiled up at her brightly—"I have an interesting theory to the effect that Charlie Locke did not murder your husband."

She stared at him blankly. It was as if he had dealt her a stunning blow. She could not adjust herself to it.

"You see, Mrs. Kane, we never found the weapon Locke used," Besant said.

"The incense burner?" she asked.

Besant shook his head.

Larry Dayton spoke. "That's ridiculous and always was. It wasn't heavy enough, in the first place. There was no blood on it, no prints, nothing whatever to suggest that it was used as a weapon."

"Doctor Egan—" she began, when Larry cut her short.

"Yes, Doctor Egan advanced that theory. Every one was so imbued with the notion, anyway, that they accepted it without much thought." He leaned forward, his strong, supple hands locked round the head of the polished cane.

Ellen wondered why he flourished it so ostentatiously. It was a handsome thing—rich, dark ebony, with two narrow silver bands just below the head.

"Mrs. Kane, did your husband ever have any trouble with Doctor Egan?" Larry Dayton asked.

Her eyes shifted from the contemplation of the stick. "Why—why—" she began.

"Fact is," Larry interrupted, "we've discovered that the two men

did have a rather nasty quarrel that very afternoon—something about a check, I believe."

The room reeled before Ellen's eyes. "Check," she whispered through stiff lips.

Larry Dayton nodded energetically. "Yes, one of your servants overheard part of the argument. The report is incomplete, of course, but we gather that there was a question of forgery involved—that the doctor, perhaps, had signed Mr. Kane's name to a check."

Ellen gasped. The two men were watching her intently.

Larry Dayton spoke again. "This is very thoughtless of us, Mrs. Kane. We really have no right to intrude on your grief this way. I am sure, however, that you would want the matter cleared up, if there is any doubt about it. From the newspaper reports at the time, it appears that this fellow Locke came from a good family and had just fallen on hard ways. Also he had a son, a lively youngster, and it would be too bad if the boy had to grow up under a shadow."

Larry rose, tapping at the hearth with his cane. Ellen held her eyes on it. She could not trust herself to look at Larry.

"Fact is," Larry continued slowly, also looking at the stick, "I think that Doctor Egan murdered your husband over the business of the check."

Ellen's eyes closed. She thought for a moment she would faint. "This is too much," she said in a very low voice. "I cannot grasp it."

"That is why he committed suicide," Larry pointed out. "Conscience and all that. By the way"—he tapped more forcefully with the stick—"you didn't come across a canceled check that aroused your suspicion, did you? The one that

the two men were undoubtedly quarreling over? It wasn't among your husband's papers?"

She shook her head, struggling in the throes of a ghastly nightmare. This bright young man with his genial cheeriness frightened her. That beastly tapping!

"I found nothing of the sort," she said, and leaned forward, staring hard at the cane. She mustn't let go now. They would be leaving. Already Besant was walking toward the door. Larry made a point of running the stick from one hand to another.

"Well, we'll be going, Mrs. Kane," Besant said apologetically. "I guess we've upset you some. We wouldn't have bothered you, only we'd like to clear Charlie Locke's name, that is, if he is innocent."

"This is preposterous! I think you're both mad," she cried angrily. "Of course Locke killed my husband."

"Maybe so," Larry Dayton agreed, and laid the stick on the table while he drew on his gloves.

Ellen couldn't hold her eyes away from it. The light struck it fully. There were familiar scratches and dents in the silver. There was also a legend engraved on it—broad, handsome old English script. She stared at it, while her heart slowed. It said:

To Hubert, from mother on his eighteenth birthday.

Hubert's stick! The one she had given him! Where had this man secured it? Bought it from Hubert? Traded for it? Stolen it?

Larry Dayton picked up the stick carelessly. They were saying things, but she did not understand. She followed them to the door, smiling mechanically, saying she'd be glad to help them if she could.

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Besant opened the door, saying: "We dropped round one night last week, Mrs. Kane, but you weren't here. It was Thursday, I think."

Ellen thought she would scream if they didn't go. How did Larry Dayton come to have Hubert's stick?

"It was Friday," Larry Dayton insisted. "I remember because later I cut my hand and went to the doctor's." He stopped uncomfortably because he had mentioned another unpleasant subject.

Ellen's only thought was that they had called here Friday night and found her gone. She had to fix it some way. "Friday night? Oh, yes, I remember. I had gone to my dressmaker's in the village. A belated fitting, you know." It sounded convincing to her.

They seemed to accept it without question. They thanked her and said they wouldn't bother her any more.

As the door closed behind them, she remembered suddenly where she had last seen Hubert's ebony stick. Under his arm as he started for the city the night Lucian was murdered!

It seemed hours later that she heard the starting of Besant's car on the driveway.

Ellen stared at the letter she had just finished rereading for the twelfth time. It suited her at last. It said:

MR. JOHN JONES,
General Delivery,
City.

I will meet you any place you designate and for the document which you hold I will pay you ten thousand dollars in unmarked bills. I will come entirely alone and, no effort will be made to discover your identity. If this proposal does not appeal to you, you are at liberty to make such use of the check as you see fit. I trust I have made it clear that this is my final word on the matter.

ELLEN KANE.

Tears came to her eyes as she sealed the envelope and addressed it. She felt as if she were murdering her son. She certainly was doing something she had never done before—letting him down. She seemed to hear his broken voice there in the empty firelit room:

"You'll fix it, won't you, mom? You won't let me down? You won't let me down, will you, mom?"

She closed her eyes and pressed the bell. Letting him down? But she had to do something. She couldn't go on like this—paying, paying. If the blackmailer accepted, if she secured the check, that wouldn't be letting him down, would it?

Resentment rankled in her heart that Hubert had not been near her for days. He hadn't even phoned. Perhaps he had gone north with the Sellers. There came a light tap on the door.

Old Wheeler entered.

Ellen handed him the envelope. "Take this to the village at once, Wheeler!" she ordered. "You have just time to get it in the ten-o'clock mail for the city. It is important."

The old man bowed, accepted the letter, and went out. Ellen sank back, breathing hard. Suppose her offer were refused. What would the blackmailer do with the check? To whom would he show it? Forbes Lancaster, her husband's attorney? Well, what would Lancaster do? Lucian was gone. There was no one to prosecute. He would come to see her, doubtless. She could plead with him to let the ugly matter rest. Suppose they gave it to some sensational scandal sheet, would the police be interested? Would they scent in it a possible motive for Hubert's murdering his stepfather?

She laughed harshly, rose, extending cold hands to the fire. That

wouldn't get them anywhere. Hubert had an alibi. He had spent the night with Martin and Marcia Sellers. She wondered about the Sellers and decided she would arrange to meet them soon.

Her mind flew back to the check. If it became public, Hubert would be branded as a forger, even if he weren't prosecuted. Had she let him down after all?

She forced herself to read a book until Wheeler returned to report that the letter had caught the ten-o'clock mail. She dismissed him, then threw wood on the fire.

The room was very still, except for the crackling of the flames, the dripping of the lonely rain. The printed lines became blurred when she tried to read again. She saw again Hubert's pale face, Doctor Egan's glittering eyes, in that moment before he died. Then she recalled Larry Dayton's lazy glance as he toyed with the ebony stick. Hubert's stick! Where, oh, where had he gotten that?

She threw the book across the room, crouched forward, her face buried in shaking hands. She was cornered, helpless, defeated. She could not explain the sense of defeat that lay over her like a thick, cold mantle.

CHAPTER VII.

KILLER'S ROUND-UP.

THE hall was dim. There were many closed doors. Occasionally a bleary light showed through a transom. Outside was the restless surge of the city—the city, vibrant with life, even in its sleep. It was eleven fifteen. Ellen was due to keep the appointment with the black-

mailers at eleven twenty. She had timed everything carefully—her drive to the city, her location of the address they had sent her. Two weary days had elapsed before the hoped-for acceptance of her offer had come, along with careful instructions as to her actions. In that time she had not seen or heard from her son. His neglect deepened her satisfaction with what she had done.

She paused on the second floor. She wore a trim dark suit, a small, tight-fitting hat. In her hand bag she had ten thousand dollars in bills. She also carried a small expensive automatic which she had purchased on her arrival to the city. The other one, the weapon with which she had shot Doctor Egan, she had strangely misplaced. She was sure she had returned it to her trunk, but it was not there. She did not worry too much about it. Her mind was too fully occupied with other things, and there were many places where she might have concealed it.

She had used every possible precaution to make sure she was not followed on her mission, though who would follow her, or why, she could not guess.

Her feet made no sound on the dusty floor as she walked along the hall, peering up at the grimy numbers in the light of the small electric light overhead. No. 27! Her heart skipped a beat. There was no light showing through the transom. She followed instructions carefully. She tapped twice softly, waited while she counted ten, then tapped three times.

Blood pounded in her ears. She thought she heard furtive steps somewhere behind her. Her eyes crept over the dim hall, glanced down the stairs, but she saw no one; yet the silence was filled with menace.

The door opened. Blackness stared at her. The crack widened. She entered the room. It was black as pitch, smelling of stale cooking and tobacco smoke. There was movement behind her, the click of the lock as the door was closed.

A light came on. It was very dim, heavily shaded, but it blinded her for a second. She cowered back, shading her eyes. She heard thick stifled breathing, then she uncovered her eyes.

She saw only the light. There was something about it that drew her glance, held it. It stood on a table, deftly shaded so that it threw a tiny circle of radiance directly below it. The rest of the room was impenetrably dim. Some one stood on the other side of the lamp.

Ellen walked to the table. She was so weak she could scarcely stand.

"You have the money?" a voice asked.

It was a woman's voice, low, thick, sweet. Ellen lifted her eyes, caught only the very pale blur of her face.

"Yes. Where is the check?" Ellen asked.

There was a rustling noise. A piece of paper was laid on the table. Ellen's straining eyes glanced at it—a crumpled, soiled blue paper. The writing danced before her sight. She made out the signature, "Lucian Kane," the name, "Martin Sellers," the amount, "Five hundred dollars." Scrawled across the face was that bold, angry accusation, "Forgery!"

She drew air into her lungs, fumbled at the clasp of her purse. Her fingers were icy cold, yet heat played over her body in fierce waves. She drew out a thick white envelope and hurled it on the table. A slim beautiful hand came out and seized it. The fingers were long and very tapering. The nails were bright red

and pointed. The woman took out the bills from the envelope and leafed through them.

Ellen fought against weakness. The dimness of the room oppressed her. To her right she caught the creak of a board. She turned her head. Her eyes, more accustomed to the semidarkness, made out a door. She looked at the woman's hands again. They were trembling hungrily as they caressed the bills.

Suddenly their greedy movement ceased. Ellen lifted her head. Was that a step in the hall? What of it? Other people lived here. The woman opposite her said in her thick, husky voice:

"It is correct. Take the check and go. Don't try any tricks."

Ellen fumbled for the check, then stopped, a cry choking in her throat.

"Red!" she cried. "That word was written in red!" Her fingers relaxed. The check fluttered to the table top. She leaned forward, staring into that baffling glow of light. It made a curtain between her and the woman on the other side of the table.

"This is not the check! You have cheated me!" she said fiercely. She was breathing gaspingly. Her hand went out, clutching at the thick wad of bills.

"You lie! Get out! I don't want to talk to you!" the woman said savagely.

Ellen laughed. "Cheat!" she cried and snatched the automatic from her bag. "Give me the original check!"

There was movement behind her. Arms went round her—strong, brutal arms. One crooked under her chin, pressing into her throat, choking her.

"Get the cash and beat it, Marcia!" a man said hoarsely.

Marcia! Ellen registered that

name through her fighting gasps for breath.

"Fool!" the woman snapped. "Forget the names!" She was cramming the bills into a black hand bag.

Ellen's head was pressed down over that savage hold. Hot hairy flesh touched her writhing lips. She buried her sharp strong teeth into it and suddenly tasted blood. Nausea sickened her. The man cursed.

"You devil!" he cried hoarsely and smashed his fist into her face.

She screamed. He struck her again with the flat of his hand this time.

"Kill her!" the woman cried. "Strangle her! It's all off now!"

"No, you don't!" a voice cried, and something crashed on the head of the man who held her.

He groaned, lurched sideways, dragging her with him. The brutal hold on her throat relaxed. He thumped against the wall, groaning.

Ellen stood motionless in the center of the room. Thought, feeling, reason were blurred. There were sharp voices and steps in the hall, a pounding on the door panels. The crash of the shot roused her. A thin tongue of flame cut the dimness. A man screamed.

She turned, stumbling to where a limp figure slid down along the wall, moaning. Dimly she heard curses, the thud of an overturned chair, the splintering of wood.

Swiftly she dropped to her knees beside the twitching figure. Her hands found his face and caressed it. "Hubert! Hubert!" she said under her breath, softly, crooningly. "My Hubert! My son!"

The door gave with a groan. Rays of a powerful flashlight dispelled the gloom.

"Steady there, Sellers! Steady!" a hard voice said.

Ellen was sopping the blood on Hubert's shirt front. Odd, she thought, that Besant should be forcing his way in here—Besant and that troublesome fellow, Dayton. She recognized their voices perfectly. She laid Hubert's heavy head in her lap. His eyes were open.

"Sorry, mom, I got you into it but I couldn't let them mess you up," he said.

She opened his shirt, folded her handkerchief against the small blue puncture in his chest.

"There, there, Hubert, don't worry, son," she said softly. "I'll take care of everything."

It was quiet in the room. Ellen turned curiously. The woman cowered sullenly by the table, the bills dropping from the black hand bag. She had a pale, pretty face, black eyes, and her auburn hair was disheveled.

The man stood against the wall, a tall, dark fellow with hot brooding eyes. Blood from a cut on his head streaked his face.

Besant covered them with a steady gun. Larry Dayton stood by the smashed door. He straightened suddenly, came forward, looking down at Hubert.

"How bad is the kid hurt?" he asked.

"Let him alone!" Ellen said savagely. "He's all right."

Hubert grinned weakly. "Sure, mom, I'm all right, but you got to understand. It was a dirty trick, blackmailin' you. The Sellers, here, made me do it. They wouldn't let up on me. They knew that——"

"That you murdered old man Kane," the woman shrilled. "Sure, we knew it, pretty boy. You didn't fool us that night about goin' to see your sweetie, and Martin trailed you out of town."

Hubert tried to sit up, muttering

broken sentences. "Dirty bums! Pretended to be my friends."

"Yeah!" The woman laughed, and Ellen sat there very quietly, with her son's head on her knees, not bothering to turn her head. "Yeah," Marcia Sellers said, "and you palmed off a forged check on us. Martin knew it all the time, but then he's good. He used to work at the business."

"You shut up!" Martin Sellers growled. "You're talkin' altogether too much."

"Yes, and I'll talk more. Hubert, the poor sap, hadn't any better sense than to ask us to fake up an alibi for him for that night. We was glad enough to do it. We figured we could make him talk later."

Sellers struck Marcia. The woman screamed.

"Lay off that, Sellers, or I'll crack you down!" Besant growled. "Dayton, keep those gaping idiots away from the door. Go on, lady, this is interestin'."

There were excited voices in the hall. Larry Dayton said through the split panel: "Clear out, you guys! If any of you want to be busy, give the coppers a ring."

Marcia Sellers was moaning brokenly. "It was a swell plant while it lasted. If that fool Hubert had worked it right, we'd 'a' been sittin' pretty. I was afraid when his old woman said she was comin' here. I knew she would bring the flatties."

Dan Besant interrupted her. "You're wrong about that, lady. Mrs. Kane didn't double-cross you. We just followed her, that's all. We been readin' her mail for quite a while now, and we was interested to know what was goin' on."

Ellen was smoothing Hubert's wet face. It felt cold. So Besant and Larry Dayton had read her mail!

She turned suddenly, under an impulse she could not control.

"Where did you get Hubert's stick?" she asked Larry Dayton.

He looked now as he had that night outside Doctor Egan's house—thin, determined, as hard as a rock.

"I found it in the woods east of Kaneshaven, Mrs. Kane, where Hubert either lost it or tried to conceal it. The head was covered with blood. There were also some human hairs adhering. They belonged to your late husband. The only prints on it were those of your son. Your reaction when I flourished the stick before you was a bit disappointing. It upset you, of course, but I decided then that you did not know Hubert had murdered his stepfather."

Ellen pulled off her hat. There was an ugly bruise beneath her right eye where Sellers had struck her. Hubert had murdered Lucian Kane. She felt as if she couldn't breathe very well.

"Locke?" she asked dully.

"Charlie Locke," Dayton said, "was the unfortunate victim of circumstances. He entered the study to steal. He found your husband dead."

"Oh, no, flatfoot," Marcia Sellers drawled, "that's bologna. That Locke egg was in the room when Hubert climbed in the window. Locke saw the killing, all right, and, if the old dame hadn't plugged him, he could 'a' told plenty. Ask Hubert! He'll tell you he saw Locke sneak out from behind the bookcase before he'd scrambled himself. Hubert was watching the show from outside, and was relieved no end when mamma appeared and plugged Charlie."

"Oh, that's it!" Dayton said softly. "I wondered about Locke entering the room with Kane dying

across the desk. Locke likely got in when Kane was out for a few minutes." He spoke slowly, as if he were figuring the thing out for his own satisfaction. He added abruptly: "There's one other point while we're waiting for the police."

Ellen Kane lifted her heavy head. Her eyes were deeply sunken, old and exhausted. Hubert was dead! He had died without a tremor, clinging to her hand with his thin, futile fingers. Nothing mattered any more.

"Yes, I killed Doctor Egan," she said. "How did you know?"

Larry Dayton smiled ever so slightly. "I was watching the house that night and saw you go out. You gave me the slip there by the filling station. I reached Egan's place too late. We knew, of course, that the doctor was not shot by the gun beside him. Katie Kenyon, your housekeeper, obligingly sneaked yours out for me and I did some checking.

"Your husband talked to the doctor about a forged check, all right. Katie Kenyon heard the conversation, but the forgery had been done by your son, not the doctor as I suggested to you. I think Doctor Egan guessed Hubert had murdered his stepfather and suggested the incense burner as a weapon, hoping to divert suspicion from him. He wanted to save his friend's name. It was a pathetic gesture though it worked for a while. We let the suicide theory stand because I wanted the whole story. I wanted to finish my job."

Ellen asked in a strangely normal voice: "Exactly what was your job?"

"To clear Charlie Locke's name. Hiram Botts did not want his grandson to grow up under that shadow I mentioned the other day. There seemed more than normal doubts

about his guilt, so I was engaged to come back and check up on things."

"Oh," Ellen said wearily, "I suppose you're a detective."

"Yes," Larry Dayton agreed, "I suppose I am."

Ellen smoothed Hubert's hair. His eyes were closed. He looked young, helpless, and strangely peaceful. She thought how stupid it had been of the Sellers to try and palm off that fake check. Possibly they did not know she had seen the original. If it hadn't been for Hubert at the end, Sellers would likely have

killed her. Hubert had stood by her. In the crisis, Hubert had not let her down.

Soundlessly, she began to cry, tears running over her tired face. Hubert had been a forger, a black-mailer, a murderer! She had killed to try to save him. She had failed. Hubert had failed. Life had failed, them both. It didn't matter, though. Nothing mattered now.

She drew stiff fingers through the dead boy's hair. In the restless quiet of the city night sounded the approaching wail of a police siren.

A Thrilling Novelette, "A THIRD KEY," by FOSTOR HAYES.
in the February 10th Issue.

"MUSIC HATH CHARMS"

MUSIC has been the means of bringing temporarily insane people to their senses, having soothed and calmed their ruffled spirits. Now it has been found in a recent experiment that music has an uplifting effect upon criminally inclined children.

Nine hundred children, all of whom had police records, were congregated in a hall to listen to some classical music. The conductor explained the meaning and "story" of the music before playing it. He told them about the witches who were closing up on *Peer Gynt* in Grieg's "Peer Gynt Suite No. 1," and, as the music increased in volume, the children became visibly excited. The final crescendo earned loud and enthusiastic applause. New York's Crime Prevention Bureau, which gave the concert, were of the opinion that music might be a further means to eliminate crime in youngsters.

It is true, of course, that a rousing band will induce citizens to join the ranks of an army marching to war, and it is true that soft music will put many a baby to sleep. However, it may have other effects, too, as one newspaper editorial points out.

"It might well be that, after listening to Beethoven's "Minuet," a New York boy would have no inclination to rush out upon the sidewalk and start a game of craps. But suppose the director included a martial number. Mightn't the boy be fired with a desire to throw a brick at some inoffensive policeman? It is certain that boys will not be forever listening to Bach and Beethoven. For the sake of holding an audience, it is necessary to interpolate in a program something that is provocative."

THUBWAY THAM AT THE DAN'THE

By JOHNSTON McCULLEY

Author of "Thubway Tham—Ganghter," etc.



AS the policeman deliberately approached, "Thubway Tham" thought that he detected a glitter in his eyes. The man in uniform gave every indication of intending to engage Thubway Tham in conversation, so Tham searched his mind for withering comments and bits of stinging repartee. He, who had clashed wits with the best detectives on the force, including Detective Craddock, did not intend to submit to any nonsense from a common harness bull.

Thubway Tham took out a fresh cigarette, struck a match, and ignited the smoke. The policeman continued to advance. He stopped in front of Tham and stood with his feet set far apart, his club swinging nonchalantly at his side, his face a mask.

"You're Thubway Tham, aren't you?" the policeman asked.

"Tho what?" Tham countered.

"Thought I recognized you. I see you on my beat often."

"Yeth. I like to go thlummin' onthe in a while," Tham informed him.

The patrolman grinned. "Well, Thubway Tham, I'm going to put the bee on you."

"Meanin' what?"

"We've got to pay as we go along in this world, Tham. We have to share with others."

"Jutht ecthactly what," Tham asked, "are you tryin' to get at?"

The policeman fumbled in a

pocket. Thubway Tham flinched, mentally. Did this cop have a warrant for him? Had he slipped somewhere? Had Nemesis finally swooped down upon him, and all that sort of thing?

"If you really have any thort of buthineth with me——" Tham began loftily.

"One moment," the policeman begged. "Tham, I size you up as the sort of guy who'd always want to do the right thing. You'd even do the wrong thing in the right way, Tham. That's you!"

"Tho what?" Thubway Tham was rather bewildered.

"I know you'll want to help, Tham. Now, the police ball is next Wednesday evening. The receipts go to the sick and benefit funds, as perhaps you know."

The officer withdrew his hand from his pocket. Tham saw that he held a sheaf of pink tickets. A surge of relief passed through him.

"I hope you can use a ticket, Tham," the policeman said. "We need all the help we can get."

Tham grinned. "Why, thure!" he responded instantly. He searched a waistcoat pocket for currency. "Nothin' giveth me greater pleathure than helpin' thick and crippled copth. If only there were lotth and lotth more of thick and crippled copth to be helped! If only they were all thick and crippled, jutht tho I could help them!"

The smiling policeman handed Tham the ticket and took the money.

"Thanks," he said. "And listen, Tham. Thousands of guys buy tickets for the annual cops' ball, just to help us out, and tear them up or throw them away. They're missing something. We always have a swell time, Tham—lots of dandy vaudeville acts, and all that stuff. Give

yourself a treat and use your ticket. Come to the ball, Tham, and you'll have the time of your life."

"Thankth! I may, at that, though I theldom go outthide my own thothal thet."

"I'm on the floor committee, Tham. Look me up, and I'll introduce you to some girls."

"No thkirtth for me!" said Tham. "No janeth! No frailth! If I come to the ball, it'll be to watch the thhow."

"Let me give you a hint, Tham. On the night of the ball, we put aside all professional activities."

"Oh, I underthtand!" Tham was a little indignant. "If you mean what I think you mean, it ith not nethethary for you to thay that. A politheman'th ball ith the latht plathe in the world for thertain men to work. A pickpocket, for inthtanth. There won't be fifty dollarth in the crowd!"

Solomon in all his glory was a piker compared to Thubway Tham when he appeared the following Wednesday evening at the great hall where the annual police ball was being held.

Tham was arrayed in a new suit which ran to loud checks in the pattern. He had a waistcoat of delicate pink striped with green. His cravat was a flaming red. He had visited the barber, and what hair remained to him was slicked down with a pomade which made it glisten like a newly polished shoe. And, wherever he went, he left perfume in his wake.

Tham was used to crowds, but this one seemed different. The professional instinct stirred within him, as it always did when he found himself in a crowd, but he fought it down.

Inside the hall, he wandered

around like a lost soul for a quarter of an hour. The police band was playing, but Tham heard it only from a distance. Somebody was singing, but Tham could not make out the song because of the bedlam of talk.

He came to rest against a wall, and mopped his face with a handkerchief. Somebody touched him on the arm. Thubway Tham turned swiftly. Beside him stood Detective Craddock.

There was an expression of surprise on Craddock's face, and it was mingled with distrust. "Fancy finding you here!" Craddock said.

"And why not?" Tham demanded.

"Plenty of cops scattered around here, Tham."

"Tho I thee! But that ith nothin' in my young life."

"And may I ask why you are honoring this affair with your presence?"

"Oh, yeth, you may athk! Craddock, I alwayth like to help my friendth. Thome day, Craddock, you may be broke, or thick and crippled, and have no money and no home. Then maybe the polithe benefit fund will take care of you. They may even uthe thome of their money to bury you, Craddock. And I thhall be glad to know that I have done my thmall bit to defray the cotht."

"Tham, I detect in your remarks an undercurrent that I don't like."

"Pothibly! Craddock, thith ith thome danthe."

"I agree with you, Tham. It's a great party. But how do you happen to be here?"

"A harneth bull cornered me and made me buy a ticket. It ith a great racket."

"You're not here professionally?"

"Now, Craddock, ith that nithe? I am here jutht ath one of thith

happy gatherin', ath a private thitithen, tho to thpeak."

"You expect me to believe that, Tham?"

"Thuit yourthelf." Tham's face flushed and he felt mildly indignant.

"You're here as the guest of the department, Tham. I trust you'll conduct yourself accordingly."

"Yeth? I'm here becauthe I got gypped two iron men for a ticket. I ain't anybody'th guetht. I bought my way in," Tham told him. "You theem to be thour to-night, Craddock. You're thpoilin' my evenin'. But that ith to be ecthpected. Onthe a cop, alwayth a cop."

Detective Craddock laughed and moved on, being a member of one of the committees and having work to do. Thubway Tham moved on also, to stop again presently and listen to the band. Leaning against the wall, he watched the ever-changing crowd through half-closed eyes.

Tham decided that the event was growing stale, as far as he was concerned. He did not dance, and had he danced, he knew none of the fair sex present. But a master of ceremonies mounted the stage which had been constructed for this event, and bellowed for attention. The vaudeville show was about to commence.

Tham decided he might get some amusement out of that. He struggled to get closer. The stage held his interest for a time. Then, as a throaty tenor started an encore, Tham let his attention wander.

His gaze became focused on a group a short distance from him. In that group was a certain alderman who belonged to a famous political organization. A flower girl approached him, and the alderman indicated that he would take her stock, and that she was to distribute the flowers gratis to ladies in the

vicinity. He took a fat wallet from the side pocket of his coat, gave the girl a bill, waved aside his change, and slipped the wallet back into his pocket. It was a grand gesture by a clever politician.

Thubway Tham felt his heart pounding when he observed that fat wallet. Here was prey almost legitimate. There were no doubts in Tham's mind how the politician acquired much of his wealth. He even had been investigated once, and treated to a coat of whitewash.

"The crooked thap!" Thubway Tham growled.

Then he bent forward slightly, and his eyes bulged. The crowd had surged forward toward the stage, and there was a moment of elbowing and jostling. In that moment, Thubway Tham saw something which startled him.

First, he beheld a rather inconspicuous individual known as "Sneaky" Lewis. The latter was a sneak thief and dip, and not of the first order. In the world of crime, Sneaky Lewis was down at the foot of the ladder, and probably always would remain there.

Thubway Tham did not need to be told that Sneaky Lewis had seen the alderman's wallet and intended making a try for it. Nor did Tham care particularly if he got it. He would not interfere, it not being professional ethics to do so.

As he watched, Sneaky Lewis did his work. Because of the elbowing crowd, he got away with it. Tham, watching from the side lines, gasped at the crude methods of Sneaky Lewis. Sneaky did not have the true professional touch.

He watched as Sneaky got away from the scene of his crime, wondering what Sneaky would do now. The latter did not even have sense enough to ditch the leather. He had

stuffed the wallet into a pocket and gone on.

Thubway Tham gasped again. He had seen Sneaky Lewis get a necklace from a girl's throat. Sneaky was making an evening of it, apparently. Well, it was none of Tham's business!

It flashed through Tham's mind that there might be an uproar if persons discovered their losses, particularly the alderman. Tham was a known professional dip. Moreover, he had held speech with Craddock, who knew he was in the hall, and Craddock had seemed suspicious.

There was no law against a man protecting himself. He did not want anybody to think that he had come to the annual police ball to ply his trade. He glanced around wildly—and beheld Craddock hurrying along the wall toward the entrance.

Thubway Tham overtook him and drew him aside. Tham's face betrayed to Craddock that something was amiss.

"What's the trouble, Tham?" he asked.

"Take me into one of the little roomth and have me thearched, Craddock," Tham implored.

"What'd be the sense in that?"

"There ith a dip workin' in thith hall, and I don't want to be blamed for it."

"Who is it, Tham?"

"I ain't thayin', and you thould know better than to athk. But I thaw a dip workin'. I don't want to be blamed for what he'th done."

"You haven't been working, Tham?"

"No, thir! Word of honor!"

"That's enough for me. You've never broken your word to me yet, Tham. I understand what you mean. Stay right with me, Tham."

Craddock turned to glance around

for somebody to help him. But there was no need. The master of ceremonies bellowed from the stage. Beside him stood a captain of detectives.

"Attention!" the captain called. "Officers go immediately to guard all exits. I'm informed a pickpocket has been working in the crowd. Officers will bring all known criminals to the anteroom immediately for investigation. Anybody finding valuables missing come to the anteroom also."

"Come along with me, Tham," Craddock said. "We'll get you a clean bill of health right away. Boy, it's lucky you spoke to me when you did. That was Captain Murgan, and he's a terror."

"I've heard of him," Tham admitted.

There was a commotion at the edge of the crowd in front of the stage. Tham saw that a couple of officers had grabbed Sneaky Lewis. Other officers were hurrying toward the exits. A fine place for a dip to be caught, with a couple of thousand policemen within easy call!

Tham went with Craddock to the anteroom. Captain Murgan was waiting there. Beside him were a couple of other men high in the department. The detective captain was furious.

"Damned outrage! Get into the papers and make us laughingstocks! Pickpocket working the crowd at the police ball! If I get my hands on him—What's this, Craddock?"

"Thubway Tham, sir."

"So you caught him, huh? Time I get through—"

"Tham's all right, sir. A moment before you spoke from the stage, Tham told me he had seen a dip working in the crowd and asked me to search him to clear him."

"Craddock, are you an ass? Old

trick! Got whiskers on it. This man undoubtedly did the work and passed the swag—"

"Tham always works alone, sir," Craddock interrupted. "He's given me his word he's done nothing here to-night."

"His word? A crook's word, and you put stock in it? Craddock, you must be insane!"

"Tham wouldn't lie to me, sir. He's a square crook. He was afraid he'd be blamed."

"If he saw a dip at work, who was it?"

"Naturally, he'll not say."

"Oh, he won't! Maybe we can get it out of him," Captain Murgan said ominously.

There was a commotion at the door. An indignant man came storming into the anteroom.

"Alderman Whenny!" the captain gasped.

"Murgan, I've been touched!" Alderman Whenny cried. "My wallet's been lifted. Right under the noses of two or three thousand policemen! Maybe we'd better investigate the department. At the next meeting—"

There was more commotion, and the alderman was interrupted. Two detectives pulled Sneaky Lewis into the room. Sneaky's face was white; his eyes bulged, and he was jabbering meaningless phrases. He had a vision of the big stone house up the river.

"Frisk him!" Captain Murgan cried. "Frisk this Thubway Tham, too!"

Tham held up his arms, welcoming the search. He was found innocent of carrying stolen goods. But from the pockets of Sneaky Lewis the detectives took Alderman Whenny's wallet, a necklace, a lady's purse, and a wad of currency.

"My wallet!" the alderman cried.

"Lock that man up! See that he gets the limit!"

Sneaky Lewis was pushed out of the room again, as though the mere sight of him might offend the alderman.

"How does it happen that pickpockets are in the hall?" the alderman demanded of Captain Murgan. "Can't the department protect its guests? How about this man, Thubway Tham?"

"Rated as a dip; but has never been caught," Craddock said promptly.

"And why hasn't he been caught?" Alderman Whenny cried. "Why do we have policemen? What's he doing here?"

Thubway Tham stepped forward. "I'm here becauthe a cop made me buy a ticket," he reported. "And why thouldn't I be here? Thith party ain't tho damned ecthcluthive."

"What's that?" the alderman snapped. "Are you trying to be insolent to me?"

"I'll dress him down!" Captain Murgan said.

"I ain't done nothin'," Tham complained. "I came to thith danthe the thame ath thouthandth of otheth. I thaw a dip workin', and I told Craddock, becauthe he knew I wath here, and I didn't want to be blamed afterward. If I wanted to lift a leather, I'd have more thenthe than to do it with a thouthand coph lookin' at me. Have thenthe!"

"Captain Murgan," the alderman roared, "if you haven't anything on this fellow, have him ejected. Throw him out of the hall!"

Tham had a moment of bravery. "I paid to come here, and I've been behavin' mythelf. You ain't got any right to throw me out. I'll have a lawyer thtart a damage thuit!"

"Throw him out!" the alderman repeated.

"I paid for a ticket," Tham reminded them. "And the thhow ain't been tho hot. You give me my money back. If you're pikerth, I can be a piker, too, for onthe."

"Take it easy, Tham," Craddock cautioned.

"I know my rightth," Tham replied. "I'll tell the newthpaperth about thith!"

Captain Murgan didn't like the thought of the newspapers getting the yarn. He saw the possibilities of ridicule in it.

"Forget it!" Murgan said. "We didn't find anything on you, Tham."

"I demand that you throw him out of the hall!" Alderman Whenny cried. "If he goes to the newspapers, or makes trouble in any way, I'll have him handled."

Craddock touched Tham on the shoulder. "Maybe it'd be better, Tham, if you just slipped out quietly," he suggested. "No sense in making trouble."

"He'll not slip out quietly," Alderman Whenny said. "You'll lead him out by the ear! You'll give him the bum's rush! The very idea—petting a pickpocket!"

"Come along, Tham," Craddock said, grasping him by the arm.

"Thith ith a nithe how-de-do," Tham complained. His indignation was bubbling over. "I ain't done nothin'. But go ahead—toth me out! Kick me into the thtreet! Take my two dollarth and give me the bum'th ruthh!"

"Here, you!" the alderman snapped. He jerked his wallet from the hand of the detective who had taken it from Sneaky Lewis, opened it, displayed a sheaf of currency, selected a bill and tendered it. "There's your two dollars! Now, get out!"

Thubway Tham recoiled in horror. "Me take a two-dollar bill?" he cried. "I wouldn't touch the thing! It ith bad luck!"

"Damned nonsense!" the alderman roared. He fumbled in the wallet again. "Here's a five—now get out!"

"I don't want a five. I ain't got any right to a five. I want two oneth," Tham said.

"Of all the fools! I'm about fed up!" the alderman complained. He fumbled with his currency again. "Here! Two ones! Now, toss him out!"

"Come along, Tham!" Craddock said. Craddock was having a difficult time trying to keep from smiling.

They left the anteroom and went along the hall toward the front entrance. Thubway Tham's face was a mask—a red mask. He was corking up his wrath. Behind him rumbled the voice of Alderman Whenny:

"Get out of here and go to a private party. See you later, Murgan. Want that dip who took my wallet to get the limit. Object lesson."

"The big thtiff!" Thubway Tham growled.

"Forget it, Tham," Craddock urged. "Just a bad break. It's a lucky thing for you, old-timer, that you came to me when you did. Yes, and it's lucky you kept your hands in your own pockets to-night."

"You make me thick!" Tham said. "All coptth make me thick!"

Tham squared his shoulders and left the hall, threaded his way

through the throng on the sidewalk, making for the curb. A big car pulled up, and he heard the chauffeur shouting:

"Alderman Whenny's car"

"Pull up to the side entrance," one of the doormen said. "He wants you there."

Thubway Tham walked slowly along the curb to the corner. The limousine slipped around the corner before him and pulled up to the curb. At the side entrance, there was quite a crowd watching the comings and goings of notables.

With two fawning sycophants before him and a blonde on either arm, Alderman Whenny came from the hall and started toward his car. He waved a hand at those who recognized and greeted him. For an instant, a group of admirers swarmed about him. Tham was in the group, though he was not an admirer.

Presently, the limousine rolled down the street, a burst of girlish laughter floating back. Thubway Tham was getting around the corner at that moment. Behind him, in the deep shadow against the wall of the building, was an empty wallet. In Tham's coat pocket was a comfortable amount of currency. And in his breast was such a song as rings in the breast of a man when he has had a satisfying revenge.

"The thap!" Thubway Tham said to himself, as he made for the nearest subway entrance. "The thilly ath! Have me put out of the danthe, huh? Well, it cotht him thomethin'!"

In the February 10th Issue, "DIAMONDS ON WHEELS," a
Stirring Novelette, by JOHN JAY CHICHESTER.



ORCHIDS FOR BLONDIE

By GEORGE A. McDONALD

Author of "Tiger Bait," etc.

CHAPTER I.

HOT STUFF.

O'ROURKE whistled softly as he turned to close the door of his hotel room. The whistle died at his lips when a soft body bumped him sideways and the door jerked inward and open. He had a glimpse of a wide, startled pair of eyes gleaming at him out of a face

that was deathly white. Then the girl was inside his room, and the door slammed in his face.

O'Rourke stared and reached for the knob. As he did, he heard the heavy slap of lumbering feet against the corridor. He was pulling his keys out of his pocket when a heavy hand fell on his shoulder, spun him sideways, and slammed him face first up against the wall.

Things were happening too fast

for the red-headed "shamus" from Chicago. His nose slithered along the plaster of the wall, and his temper flared. O'Rourke whirled, with blood in his eye. His right fist had started up as he turned. A feeling of joyous satisfaction flowed through his veins as he felt the impact of his knuckles against the stubby jaw of the man who had slammed him into the wall.

One second the man was vainly bumping his shoulder against the panels of O'Rourke's door. A second later his head was bumping the panels as he went down. O'Rourke eyed him with a glitter in his blue orbs and blew softly on his knuckles. Then his breath whistled through tight-clenched teeth as he got a good look at the man's face.

"How did he get here?" he asked ruefully.

The man he had sloughed was Chad Clough, plain-clothes man on the city force. The big shamus stared at the unconscious city dick, then speculatively eyed the door to his room. A slow grin split O'Rourke's square freckled face. He had never liked Clough very much, anyhow.

O'Rourke found his keys, opened the door in his room, and stepped across the threshold. He bent down, fastened one big hand in the neckband of the city detective's shirt, and started to drag Clough into the room. A sound of ripping fabric made O'Rourke mutter curses about phony silk shirts. He grabbed the man's coat collar and dragged his heels across the threshold.

Then he kicked the door shut, and his eyes went around the room in a quick, searching glance. There was no sign of the blond jane that had crashed in. The bathroom door was open. She wasn't in there.

O'Rourke let Clough's head bump

on the floor. He narrowed his blue eyes on the closet door and said softly:

"Come out, you little tramp, or I'll come in and get you."

The closet door popped open. A tousled blond head showed in the opening, and two carmined lips bounced a stream of aspersion at him. When the blond girl finished, O'Rourke concluded that the gist of her remarks was that she wasn't a tramp.

"So why do you go running around hotel corridors then?" O'Rourke's accent was widely at variance with his red hair and freckled face.

The girl smiled wanly. She started past him and headed for the door.

O'Rourke's big hand reached out and clamped on her shoulder.

"Stand still or I'll paddle you proper," he grated. "What's the racket, sister? What was this mug trailing you for?"

The girl's brown eyes went wide. "He tried to flirt with me in the hall. I got scared and ran. I saw your door open and popped in before I realized what I was doing."

Clough was stirring on the floor.

The shamus eyed the girl sardonically. "We'll verify that in a minute, gorgeous."

The girl's face went white beneath the make-up. There was no levity in her tones as she said in a low, tense voice:

"Please let me go, O'Rourke. It's a matter of life—and death. For me—and for your pal, Tony Harcourt."

O'Rourke's eyebrows crawled up, and he stared at her. He heard the scrape of metal on leather, and his eyes slithered to Clough. The city detective's eyes were still glazed. He was sitting up, trying to drag a

gun from a shoulder holster. O'Rourke stepped quickly toward Clough and said: "Naughty, naughty, Chad. Might go *bang-bang* and hurt some one." As he reached down to twist the gun from the plain-clothes man's fingers, the sound of a door slamming reminded him of the girl. He looked sideways and saw that the blond girl had taken it on the lam.

"Just like a frail," he muttered. "Bailing out and leaving me with a nice pot of trouble to dish out."

Clough's eyes were focusing properly now. They were hard, gray bits of flint as they fixed on O'Rourke's face. Clough was mad, so mad that it was difficult for him to talk. When he did find his voice, he blasted the Chicago redhead with choice invective.

O'Rourke eyed him calmly, and, when the city copper stopped for a breath, he murmured: "You forgot my grandfather on my mother's side, Chad. Just what do you think of him?"

O'Rourke was displaying a nonchalance that he was far from feeling. The big private detective knew that he had many enemies down at headquarters. There were crooked cops whose toes had been crushed when they got in O'Rourke's way. There were some straight coppers, too, who hated him and figured him for a crooked shamus masking his underworld activities behind a private detective's license and badge. The redhead from Chicago didn't know into which classification Clough fitted. But he did know that the bullet-headed, heavy-jowled city dick could put him onto a hot spot, unless he could bluff him out of it.

"Where's that frail?" Clough growled thickly as he rose to his feet.

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O'Rourke arched his eyebrows. "Frail?" he muttered.

"Yes—frail—dame. The skirt that kited into your room a couple minutes ago. Where did she go?"

"I must have slammed you harder than I thought, Clough," O'Rourke said repentantly. "Sounds like a concussion to me. Better go down and have the doc give you the double O."

Clough's overhanging jowls took on a purple tinge. His eyes narrowed to thin slits, and he opened and shut his fingers convulsively. For a second he eyed O'Rourke venomously. Then he shoved his face closer and rasped:

"You've been riding high, wide and handsome since you hit this burg four months ago, shamus. A lot of the boys down at Centre Street have been looking for a chance to hang up your scalp. Now you're going to take it on the chin—and plenty. You've interfered with an officer in pursuit of his duties. And that's bad language in any man's courts."

O'Rourke eyed him coldly. "Are you making it a pinch?"

Clough smiled vindictively and said: "You're right, I'm making it a pinch. Do you come peaceful or feet first?"

"Be right with you, Clough," O'Rourke said with a studied grin. "I'd like to tell them down at headquarters what a prize horse's neck they've got sporting a third-class dick's rating."

"And then what will you tell them to prove it?" growled Clough.

"I'll tell them the one about the guy that came barging down the hall as I was locking my door and slapped me into the wall. They'll get a great laugh when I tell how I slammed the mug on the whiskers so hard that, when he came to, he was

chirping about some doll that he was trying to make."

For a split second indecision flitted across Clough's face. The lad from the stockyards had made a couple of the boys on the force look like bums when they had him dead to rights. O'Rourke smiled inwardly. His face was bleak and cold as he said:

"I suppose you had a search warrant when you tried to bust down the door in my room."

Clough glared at him malevolently.

"You're hornin' in on hot stuff this time, shamus," he said. "Kidnapin' ain't no joking matter in this town, right now. I ought to drag you down and toss you in the clink on general principles. But it would be smarter to let you hang yourself—and maybe a few of the brainy members of your snatch-racket mob at the same time. That doll that you are working with is a marked ace in the deck. Keep on playing with her and see how quick you wind up in back of the eight ball."

O'Rourke pressed his advantage. He saw that the city man wasn't sure whether the girl had been in his room or not.

"I don't know what you're talking about, Clough," he said levelly. "I wouldn't have slammed you if I had seen who you were. But when you shoved my face into the plaster, I went a little haywire and winged you before I looked you over. The dame you are raving about went past me just before you showed up. I never saw her before and I probably won't ever see her again. Your cracks about a snatch mob are just so much happy dust to me. So let's call it a day right now."

He walked toward the door and held it open. His left hand held out Clough's gun. "You might need

this if you catch up to that dame," he said sarcastically.

There was an evil glitter in the plain-clothes man's eye as he snatched the gun from O'Rourke's hand.

"Stick around, wise guy," he snarled. "We'll pin your hide to the wall yet. Your lucky breaks won't always be with you. We'll meet again soon. I'll pin this rap on you if it's the last thing I ever do."

O'Rourke laughed derisively. "In your hat, feller. In—your hat!"

The doorknob was pulled out of his grasp as Clough slammed it. The Chicago redhead grinned as he heard the city dick stamping down the corridor. Then the grin faded from his lips. There was something big behind all this. O'Rourke didn't know what it was, but he had a premonition that he'd butted into a bad game. And he'd better do something about it, or Clough might be able to make good his threat and hang up the scalp of a certain Chicago shamus.

CHAPTER II.

SELDON GOES SOFT.

LIGHTING a cigarette, O'Rourke furrowed his brow in thought. There had been something vaguely familiar about the blond girl that had crashed into his room. He tried to remember where he had seen her but couldn't make his memory click.

He recalled the set, strained look on the girl's face. The girl had been scared—badly scared—when she charged into his room. Her expression hadn't been the sullen, furtive fear of retribution for a crime. It had been deeper, more palpitating, like the fear of death. O'Rourke

scoffed at his imagination, but the picture of the girl's face stayed with him. What was it she had said, just before she took the run-out powder? Something about it being a matter of life and death for her and for Tony Harcourt!

O'Rourke swore suddenly. Harcourt, the Broadway columnist on the *Daily Planet* was his closest pal along the Drag; a smart, wisecracking lad that got hold of all the dirt along the Big Stem, sifted it, and discarded more than he used, as holding too much dynamite.

The Chicago redhead grabbed up the phone and called Harcourt's apartment at the Stanhope. Hi-Lo, the Chinese valet, answered his call.

O'Rourke asked for Harcourt, and the scowl on his forehead deepened as he listened to the voluble conversation of Hi-Lo.

"You say Tony no come home for two nights, boy? . . . Maybe go away for week-end? . . . No? . . . O. K., Hi-Lo. Tell him O'Rourke called. . . . Sure I find him and send him home."

The big Irishman dropped his finger on the cradle of the phone, got a new connection, and called the city editor of the *Planet*.

"Hello, Grove? . . . O'Rourke talking. . . . Got any idea where Harcourt can be located? . . . The hell you say! . . . No column for to-morrow, eh? . . . Had to use a spare to-day. . . . No, I don't think he's crocked in some speaklow. I've got a hunch that he's in a jam. . . . Yes, that paragraph he ran in yesterday morning's sheet about some underworld big shot being marked for a snatch! . . . Sure it was labeled T N T. . . . Why did you let it go by?"

"So he scooped the town on the Albion snatch! . . . That's swell. And right now he's probably spilling

blood while some hoods are killing him by inches, trying to make him squawk about where he got the advance tip-off. . . . Go ahead, put the cops on the case and have Harcourt knocked off because of the publicity!

"Certainly, I'm going through on it. Tony's my pal. . . . The devil with the reward. . . . I'm not a Broadway pal—with a hearty handshake and a knife in the back. . . . Yeah, I'll keep you informed. . . . Sure, I know you'll do all you can—give him a nice two-column obit and send a swell floral wreath. . . . I've got a swell chance. Five million people in this city, and only a few of them are guilty. I'll be seeing you."

O'Rourke paced the room like a caged tiger. This thing was hot—hotter than he had expected. Kidnaping had swept across the country like a plague. New York had contributed its share in the crime wave—so much so that the commissioner had issued a public statement exonerating the blundering efforts of amateur bunglers who acted as go-betweens, and in many cases obstructed the efforts of the police so much that the criminals escaped scot-free. Commissioner Barker stated that he intended to treat all such mediators as accomplices of the criminals in the future and that it would go hard on any that his police officers encountered.

The big detective's brain traveled in a wide circle. He remembered the blond girl now. Her name was Rae Summers, and she was a tap dancer at the Club Diano—one of the hottest of the hot spots along the Rialto. He had seen her at the club with Lew Albion—dapper Lew, mystery man of the underworld. Albion who looked like a movie star,

with his black curly hair and tiny mustache, had hit the big town with a European reputation and connections that won him a quick entrée and a prominent position among the élite of gangdom. According to the smart-money boys, Lew Albion had dipped his slender fingers in every type of crime on the Continent. Jewel lifting, blackmail, and crooked gambling had been his specialties.

The handsome, black-haired crook hadn't been operating any in the few months he had been in New York. Heeled with a heavy bank roll, he had spent most of his time dining and dancing, with an occasional whirl at roulette in one of the swell gambling palaces, or at the tracks, where his luck had been phenomenal.

Grove, the city editor of the *Planet*, had told O'Rourke that the news had just broken—some one had put the snatch on the dapper Lew Albion. This then was the kidnaping that Tony Harcourt had foretold in his paragraph, at least twenty-four hours before the actual kidnaping.

The Summers dame must have been implicated in the snatch. She probably had put the finger on Albion. And Chad Clough had been hot on her trail when O'Rourke had stepped in like a sap and impeded the wheels of the law. No wonder the plain-clothes man had made that crack about getting his scalp! They couldn't miss this time. He had asked for it, plenty, in covering up the escape of the blond girl.

O'Rourke knew he was in a tough spot with the cops. And if he went chiseling in, he would be in a tougher spot with the big guns of the underworld. Probably the finger was on Rae Summers, right now, for slipping Albion the double cross.

That part didn't bother him so

much as did the fate of Tony Harcourt. There was no doubt in O'Rourke's mind about the fate of the long, lean columnist. The same gang that had kidnaped Albion had grabbed off Tony. Somewhere along the line, there had been a leak. Tony had found the leak and hadn't been able to resist the temptation to scoop the town. He had run the paragraph about the Albion snatch—and had written himself a ticket for the cemetery in doing so.

There was a slim chance that the kidnapers would hold the columnist alive until they grilled the source of his information out of him. O'Rourke went to work on that slim chance.

He jerked on his snap-brim felt, slipped his automatic into the spring clip shoulder holster that had become part of his street dress, and rode the elevator down to the lobby. His eyes raked the lounge as he headed for the revolving door of the Hotel Metropole. If Clough had been serious about suspecting him of a hook-up with the kidnaping mob, there might be a flattie ready to pick up his trail.

He made the sidewalk without picking up any sign of a shadow. At the curb he flagged a cab and told the driver to head north to Fortyninth Street. Through the back window he failed to spot any car that might be picking up his trail.

O'Rourke settled back against the cushions and tried to study out a plan of campaign. Right now the blond Summers doll was his only lead. She was probably in hiding, knowing that both the police and the underworld pals of Lew Albion were on the hunt for her. It looked like hunting for a needle in a haystack. However, O'Rourke grimly resolved that, if she were in town, he'd locate her and make her tell

him where Tony Harcourt was being held.

Satisfied that he wasn't being trailed, O'Rourke told the cab driver to turn east for a couple blocks, then north. He was headed for the Club Diano. The "Dynamite Club," it was dubbed by the Dawn Patrol.

He looked at his wrist watch. It was nearly five in the afternoon—too early for the dinner crowd at the club. But there was a chance that Seldon, the manager of the club, would be at his office, getting ready for the night's business.

O'Rourke got out at the corner of the street in the West Fifties where the club was located. A brisk fall wind slapped the brim of his hat down across the bridge of his nose, as his long legs carried him up the street toward the canopy marked "Club Diano."

The doorman looked at him as he swung in at the entrance and said: "Nothing doing for another hour, buddy."

O'Rourke handed him a cold smile.

"That's where you're wrong, feller," he said cryptically. He pushed past him into the rococo foyer, and his heels clicked down the marble tiles. The girl in the check room was arranging the checks for the night's business. She looked up and said:

"Check your hat, mister?" Then she recognized Terry O'Rourke, and her penciled eyebrows crept upward.

"What's the matter, O'Rourke? Lost something?" she asked. "How come you're blowing in at the middle of the day like this?"

"I lost a pal of mine," O'Rourke replied, grinning easily. "Thought I might find him under one of the tables."

"We sweep out every day," the

girl smart-cracked. "I run the lost-and-found department and I haven't a single pal in storage."

"Maybe it was turned in to Seldon," murmured the Chicago shamus. "I'll go on back and ask him."

The red-headed check girl's eyes narrowed a little on that one. But she said casually: "If it's a pinch, wait until morning. To-night's pay night around here. We need Little Izzy to help the ghost walk."

Alex Seldon was short, thick-bodied, and swarthy of countenance. He had sharp black eyes that peered out from beneath shaggy black brows on either side of a nose that was sharply hooked. His lips were very full and very red. Seldon was seated at a flat-topped desk when O'Rourke walked in. He slid the tip of his tongue nervously across his lips as the big detective stood silently in the door of the office staring coldly.

"Hello, O'Rourke," he said with forced cordiality. "A little bit early for the festivities, aren't you?"

"This is a business call," O'Rourke said tonelessly.

"Business?" Seldon questioned.

"You've got a kid working out on the floor named Summers. She's a hoofer. I want her address."

The night-club manager narrowed his eyes and started shaking his head.

"Sorry, but I can't give it to you," he said, with a thin smile. "What my girls do outside of working hours is their own business. But I make it a rule to keep my nose out of that business. I can't help you promote anything there, shamus."

Something about Seldon's smile got under O'Rourke's skin and irritated him. He dragged a chair to the side of the desk and sat down. His blue eyes were bleak and cold

as they became fixed on Seldon's dark face.

"I said this was a business call, Seldon," O'Rourke said levelly. "And I meant it just that way. The Summers kid is mixed up in some business that I'm interested in. I think you know what it is. Act smart now and tell me where she lives."

Seldon grew fidgety under the bleak stare of the Chicago shamus. He tried to meet O'Rourke's hard look, but his eyes dropped. Then he tried to bluster, but his voice was more of a whine than a bluster.

"I ain't mixing up in any police business," he said. "I'm running a straight place here and I'm not standing for any high-pressure stuff from any dicks."

"You little rat," rasped O'Rourke. "You know your dump here is so hot that it's likely to go up in spontaneous combustion any minute. Do you think I'm dumb? That blue room upstairs where the Avenue swells kick the gong around could get you twenty-five years in Atlanta if the Feds crashed in. Your opium layout up there must cost you plenty in protection dough. Don't kid me about what a straight joint you're operating. I know all about the gang that hang up there watching the blue blaze until sunup."

The night-club manager's face went several shades lighter. His eyes showed fear as he said:

"You're screwy, O'Rourke. I ain't running any dope hang-out here."

O'Rourke stood up, leaned over the desk, and shoved his face close to Seldon.

"I don't give a continental damn what you're running here," he grated. "I'm no Federal dick. I want some information, and I'm go-

ing to get it if I have to squeeze it out of your lying throat."

Seldon slid out of his chair and moved away from O'Rourke. He was shaking now, like a jelly mold on a plate. The red-headed shamus followed him around the desk.

"Where does the Summers dame live?" he asked bleakly.

"I don't know."

O'Rourke swung his arm in an open-handed slap. Seldon went back against the wall and cringed there, with his eyes gleaming like a cornered rat's. A red splotch showed on his cheeks.

"You big tramp," he snarled. "You'll pay for that."

A big fist smashed against Seldon's red lips, and a little trickle of blood ran down to his chin.

"Where does the Summers dame live?" O'Rourke asked in a dead monotone.

He lifted his fist again and Seldon's snarling defiance fled. He started to cry. Tears seeped down through the wrinkles of fat around his eyes and rolled down his cheeks.

O'Rourke shifted his feet a little and pulled his fist back. "Talk up, screw-ball," he said. "I know you can't take it."

"Don't—don't hit me again," screamed Seldon. "She lives up in the West Seventies. I've got the address in my desk. But you won't find her there. Some of Albion's friends are gunning for her, too. She dragged out of there yesterday."

"Where did she go?" O'Rourke asked tonelessly.

"I don't know—so help me—I don't know," cried Seldon.

O'Rourke hit him again and said:

"You're a liar. You do know, and you're holding the information for some one else. That kid was playing for a spot in the big-time shows. She thinks you can help her there

and she'd tell you where she was hiding out until the Albion snatch blows over."

Seldon's lips were puffed and swollen now. He licked them with the tip of his tongue, and his eyes darted around the room, seeking a means of escape. Then he looked at O'Rourke beseechingly but found no pity in the granite face of the private detective. Something in the expression of the night-club manager's eyes told O'Rourke that his guess had been correct.

Seldon was hooked up in the Albion snatch, had double-crossed one of his best customers. He had also double-crossed the girl and was holding the information for some one who must be pretty powerful, or the fat little softie would have cracked down before this.

Tony Harcourt's fate was in the fat, soft hands of this two-timing rat. O'Rourke's eyes were cold and murderous. He said softly:

"Seldon, you're going to tell me where I can locate that dame or I'll put you in the hospital for a month."

Seldon cursed him venomously. O'Rourke's fist crashed against the sharp hooked nose, mashing it flat. Seldon sank to the floor, groveled on his knees, whining for mercy. O'Rourke grabbed him by the collar, pulled him to his feet, and punched him again. The night-club manager raised both his hands.

"Don't," he cried. "I'll tell you, but I'll get killed for telling you." He gasped out the address.

"Thanks," O'Rourke said grimly. He slammed Seldon back against the wall and grinned coldly as the fat little man's knees buckled and he slid to the floor. "I certainly hope you do get killed for telling me." Then he softly closed the door of the office.

CHAPTER III.

FIGHTING MAD.

THE address Seldon had given O'Rourke was in the Chelsea Square district. It was a rooming house much frequented by show people. The big redhead thumbed a cab and leaned back against the cushions.

There was a chance that the night-club owner had given him a bum steer. O'Rourke thought not for there had been too much fear in the heart of the swarthy little chiseler. A twinge of compunction stirred O'Rourke at the recollection of the manhandling he had given Seldon. It was short-lived as he thought of the suffering that Tony Harcourt was probably undergoing at the hands of the kidnapers. And Seldon was implicated. The Chicago shamus was certain of that. Maybe it would have been better to have worked on Seldon to make him tell the identity of the snatch mob. The red-headed Irishman knew the underworld code. Fear of the "squealer's death" probably would have locked Seldon's lips when it came to spilling any information about the kidnapers.

The Summers jane didn't rate. O'Rourke felt that he had been wise in avoiding the big issue by concentrating on the minor one. It was a roundabout course, but it would be quickest in the end.

O'Rourke's brows met in a puzzled frown as he thought about the blond girl. Just where did she fit in the picture? She had been very much "that way" about Lew Albion, yet it looked as though she had put the finger on the handsome lad for the kidnaping mob. Harcourt had told him something only a few days be-

fore—something about Albion giving the blond hooper a walk-out in favor of a French twister that was the star attraction at another club. Maybe that was why Rae Summers had put Albion on the spot.

Where had she been headed for when she crashed his room, with Clough at her heels? And why was the plain-clothes man so anxious to get his mitts on her? Then, too, there was the crack she made about it being a matter of life and death to Tony Harcourt. Coming from her, it sounded like a phony line.

O'Rourke's smile grew grim and sardonic. He muttered to himself: "This is one time you'd better get smart, mick. You're a sucker for a bunch of swell curves and lazy eyes. The dolls can usually take you over the jumps and make you like it. But this doll's got Tony Harcourt's safety tight in her fist. Just remember that little fact when she starts to hand you a nice bed-time story."

The cab rolled to the curb at the address O'Rourke had given. He handed the driver a dollar and told him to keep the change. His face was bland and pleasant as his heels clicked up the granite steps and into the vestibule.

A thin, hatchet-faced woman with a sharp nose and beady eyes answered his ring at the bell. She took O'Rourke's disarming smile like a tight-fisted friend takes a touch, frozen-faced and suspicious.

The big shamus brushed past her into the carpeted hallway. She handed him a fishy eye and said:

"What do you want?"

"I want to talk to the blond girl that just rented a room from you," stated O'Rourke. "Her name is Rae Summers, though she might be using a new stage name now."

"I've got three blond girls living

here," snapped the hard landlady. "Which one do you want?"

"The last one," O'Rourke said easily. He slid a folded bill into the landlady's hand and winked.

"I know how it is," he said pleasantly. "You have to look out for the reputation of your place. This is the real McCoy. I've got a spot for the kid on the Heyward circuit. Go up and tell her that Mr. O'Rourke wants to talk to her. She'll kiss you for it."

The hatchet-faced woman pointed her head toward the sitting room off the hall. Her sharp eyes had spotted the denomination of the bill the detective handed her. Her suspicion was dulled somewhat. She was muttering something about a respectable house as she went up the stairs.

O'Rourke stepped into the sitting room and shuddered as he looked at some of the chromos that decorated the walls. Framed lithographs of strong men with walrus mustaches vied with prints of hour-glass-waisted Floradora stars of the gay '90s. Plush and overstuffed furniture crowded the room. O'Rourke made a bet with himself that they served prunes every morning for breakfast at the boarding table for eating guests.

He heard the click of the landlady's heels on the Brussels carpeting of the stairs. She came in, nodded grumpily at him, and said:

"She said for you to come up. Leave the door open. This is a respectable house."

O'Rourke's smile was angelic as he said:

"I could tell that by looking at you, gorgeous." He moved across the hall and went up the stairs.

Rae Summers was standing in the door of her room. Her face still wore a hunted look, but she gave him a welcoming smile. He took a

good look at her, saw that she was a good looker, had nice eyes and a cute figure.

"Gee, but I'm glad you came, O'Rourke," she said. "I was afraid you wouldn't get my message."

"What message, beautiful?" asked O'Rourke as he stepped into the shabbily furnished room.

The girl widened her brown eyes, and her red mouth opened a little in surprise. "I telephoned you twice at your hotel," she said. "But you were out. The second time I left a message for you to call me here."

"I haven't been back since you left me singing lullabies to Clough," O'Rourke said. His eyes narrowed a trifle as they met the girl's frank look.

"Then how did you find me?"

"I persuaded Alex Seldon to divulge your whereabouts, baby. It took some persuasion, but he finally came across."

"Good old Alex," she murmured. "He's a real friend. Wouldn't tell you because he thought you were on the other side of the fence."

O'Rourke stared at her, then decided that she meant it. Blondes were reputed to be dumb, and this one was living up to the reputation.

"Yeah," he growled. "Good old Alex. He's a swell pal. Such a grand guy that you'd better pack your toothbrush and kite out of here. How long ago did you tell him you were here?"

"Just about an hour ago. When I couldn't locate you, I got jittery. Didn't know what to do next. Alex Seldon has always been a good friend to me. Gave me my first break along the Big Stem and is helping me to crash the big time. I asked him what to do. The dicks are on my trail—and so are Albion's pals. He said to sit tight here until I heard from him."

"I didn't know they made them like you any more," O'Rourke said. "Seldon wants you to sit tight until he can hand you over to the big shot in the kidnaping job."

"You're screwy," the girl snapped. "Seldon wouldn't sell me out. Besides, he knows that I didn't have anything to do with the snatch. Albion and I broke up a week before he got snatched."

"Seldon would peddle his grandmother's right eye for ten bucks," O'Rourke said grimly. "I had to peel off half his hide to make him beef where you were. He was all in favor of holding the information for some one that would pay him for it."

The girl looked worried and said: "So what? Do we start after the mob that got Tony Harcourt? It may be too late now. That was why I took a chance and started for your room at the hotel this afternoon, when Clough picked up my trail."

The doorbell rang downstairs.

"We'll start right now," O'Rourke said. Then he stiffened as he heard voices at the front door. He couldn't distinguish words, but the general sound of the voices was ominous.

The landlady started a shrill protest. It was suddenly choked off. O'Rourke swore softly under his breath. It hadn't taken Seldon long to start the pack hunting at his heels.

His brain clicked fast. Both he and the girl were on a spot that was very hot. He couldn't shoot it out with the hoods downstairs. The cops were probably hot on his trail, as well as on the girl's. A pinch right now would spell lights out for Tony Harcourt.

O'Rourke's eye raked the room and spotted a window leading out onto a fire escape.

"Scram out that window, keed," he rasped. "Take the fire escape down. Head for detective headquarters and get hold of Detective Sergeant Devlin. He's a square copper and a pal of Tony Harcourt's, too. Tell him that I sent you. And if you know where Tony is being held, lead Devlin to the spot."

"But what about you?" the girl protested. "I can't leave you in a jam like this."

"Get out of here!" O'Rourke snapped. He got her by the shoulder and ran her across the room. "I'll take care of myself. But I don't want to take a chance on a slip-up. You beat it and I'll probably be at headquarters as soon as you are. Scram now."

The girl gasped: "My hat and pocketbook." She was lifting the window.

O'Rourke grabbed the soft hat and hand bag on the table, handed them out the window to her. "Good luck, baby," he said, then pulled the window down.

Rapid footsteps sounded on the stairs. Everything was quiet down below. O'Rourke wondered if the thugs had slugged the old girl or had tied and gagged her. He flattened himself along the wall, with his automatic reversed in his right hand. The door was partly opened, and he was on the far side, where the door could swing in and away from him.

"This must be the room," he heard a harsh voice growl.

Then the door started to swing in. O'Rourke's hand lifted, and, as a brown felt-clad head and a pair of wide shoulders came through the opening, he swung downward.

The hood caught the movement and swung his body sideways through the door. The pistol butt missed his head and crashed down

on his shoulder. Then the man growled a curse, lurched at O'Rourke, and they grappled. Another figure pushed into the room, as O'Rourke wrestled across the room with the man he had tried to gun-whip. The red-headed shamus had a tight grip on the hood's gun wrist with his left hand, and was trying to jerk his right hand free to rap the gunman with his pistol butt. His opponent was short, barrel-chested, and powerful.

Chest to chest, they swayed and tugged. O'Rourke saw that he was getting nowhere. He shifted his grip on the hood's gun wrist, clamped his fingers shut, and threw a hard uppercut at the squat man's jaw. The blow landed too high for a clean knock-out, but it staggered the man back and made him loosen his grip on O'Rourke's gun. The Chicago shamus whipped his gun up and down fast, and the man dropped to his knees.

O'Rourke whirled to meet the attack of the second man, who was dancing around with a blackjack in his hand, trying to get home a lethal wallop without crowning his pal. The blackjack was winging at O'Rourke's head as he turned. The big shamus shifted, weaved on his feet, and smashed the barrel of his automatic into the face of the slender, black-haired hood. The man screamed with pain and went back on his heels. O'Rourke grinned savagely and threw a hard left hook into the battered face of the thin lad. His heels suddenly left the floor, and he went back against the wall.

Then something crashed in back of O'Rourke's ear. He went down on his hands and knees, shook his head blindly to clear his head before getting up to meet the attack of the third man who had followed the first

two up the stairs. A hard toe crashed against his ribs, bowling him over sideways. O'Rourke swore fitfully, rolled over twice, and scrambled to his feet.

He was fighting mad now, berserk with rage. He tucked his chin into the hollow of his shoulder and charged forward, swinging both fists. His automatic had slid out of his fingers when he went down. The wild Irishman forgot about it as he fixed his eyes on the square, ugly face of the man who had slugged him.

A pleased expression showed on the plug-ugly's battered, twisted face. He bore plentiful scars that trade-marked him as an ex-pug. He bared twisted, yellow teeth, measured the half-dazed shamus with cold, calculating eyes, and jabbed O'Rourke off balance with a hard left jab. The big Irishman rolled his head and took the right uppercut that followed the jab, with a contemptuous smile. His head was clearing a little now. His own left hand reached out in a snakelike, jolting overhand hook, then his right fist smashed into the leering mouth of the plug-ugly.

The man went back on his heels, crouched, and for a minute they stood toe to toe, slamming home punches as fast as they could drive them in. O'Rourke's right eye shut tight, and his mouth tasted salty from split lips. A heavy fist crashed into his ribs where he had been kicked. A wave of nausea swept over him. He firmly gritted his teeth and drove both hands in quick succession at the craggy jaw in front of him.

The battered face was twisted in pain now. The ex-pug gave ground before O'Rourke's smashing blows. The red-headed Irishman looped a long left and saw the thug's knees

rock and bend. He set himself for a finishing wallop when he heard a venomous curse in back of him. One of the other hoods had come out of the fog and joined in the battle.

It was the first hood that he had cold-caulked. For a few seconds the mad Irishman waged the uneven battle, with blows raining on him from all sides. Then the floor tilted in front of his glazing eyes as a heavy fist slammed against his jaw. He tried to get to his feet, but another blow crashed against the base of his skull. He thought it was another kick, then everything went black before his eyes.

CHAPTER IV.

A HELPING HAND.

O'ROURKE woke up on the floor of a barely furnished room. Through one slitted eye he made out the legs of an unpainted table and three chairs, all of them occupied. He opened his good eye a bit more, then tried to lift his head. The effort was too much. Sledge hammers pounded at the top of his head. Every muscle in his body seemed to throb with a separate ache. He closed his eyes and listened to the rumble of voices.

One voice, a hoarse rasping growl, nearly caused him to pop open his injured optic as well as the good one. He peered through half-closed lids and swore softly to himself. The speaker was Chad Clough, the plain-clothes man.

"Let him lay here," Clough was saying. "The chief will send Big Luke Burns around to take care of him."

O'Rourke's hair lifted along the back of his neck. Luke Burns was

one of the deadliest torpedoes in the city. "The Executioner," they called him. A visit from "Big Luke" meant just one thing—a one-way ride, a couple of red-hot slugs and a ditch by the roadside somewhere. The big shamus wondered who Clough meant by the "chief."

The gorillalike gunman was talking now. His voice was a flat monotone as he said:

"Toughy can take care of him all right. We'd better beat it up the line with you, Chad. That jane slipped through our fingers. She may have gone to the dicks with her story."

"No chance of that," Clough said tersely. "When I grabbed at her and this mug butted in, she knew that the cops were on her trail, too. She'll get under cover again and stay there. I'll dig her out. Do you think we ought to tie this big mug up? He's bad medicine, Rocco. Better make sure Toughy doesn't have any trouble with him before Big Luke gets here to pick him up."

O'Rourke saw that the barrel-chested man answered to the name of Rocco. The gunman's face creased in a cold smile.

"After the shellacking he took," he said boastfully, "the big palooka won't be able to move a finger. Toughy and me gave him a nice work-out."

"Looks like it wasn't all one-sided," Clough said sardonically. "Toughy looks as if he had gone through a sausage machine. You've got a few bumps yourself, and Finella's out getting a busted nose repaired."

"That mick is the toughest baby I ever tackled," Toughy said out of the corner of puffed, swollen lips. "But he's a peaceful Irishman now. Don't worry about him getting

away. I've got his roscoe here, and, if he moves too fast, I'll give him a taste of his own lead."

"O. K., then," rasped Clough. "Don't plug him unless you have to. We may be able to get a squawk out of him, about where the girl lammed to before Luke turns the heat on him. I'm not banking on it, but it's worth the chance. We'll be back sometime before midnight. Keep both eyes on that red-headed maniac."

O'Rourke closed his eyes as he heard the chairs slide back. He heard the clump of feet moving across the room, then heard the door open and shut. Footsteps went down the hall, then receded as though Clough and Rocco were going downstairs.

For a few seconds the private detective lay motionless. When he lifted the lid of his good eye a trifle, he saw the ex-pug sitting about four feet in front of him, eying him balefully. O'Rourke got a glimpse of the automatic that the hood cradled in his lap.

The situation didn't look any too promising to the big lad from the stockyards. There was a look in the fishy eye of the plug-ugly that assured the private dick of the fact that Toughy would take no chances whatsoever on another battle with a certain red-headed shamus. He'd throw lead first and argue later, if necessary.

He contemplated trying to catch the ex-pug by surprise and slam him before Toughy could shoot. It looked like a million-to-one chance. Each time O'Rourke peered out through slitted eyes, he found the guard's eyes fixed on him, in an unwavering stare. Then, too, the big Irishman was so lame from the mauling he had taken that he doubted if he could move off the

floor fast enough to get the guard before he could shoot.

O'Rourke wondered how long he had been out; he tried to figure how many hours of grace he had left before Big Luke came to give him the works. Perhaps Toughy's vigilance would relax in an hour or two.

Then the thought of Tony Harcourt intruded itself. Clough and Rocco were heading up the line—which might mean to the hang-out of the kidnapers. Each hour was precious; there was no telling how soon the mob would finally decide that they were wasting their time trying to make Tony Harcourt talk, for O'Rourke knew that the lean, sardonic columnist had plenty of intestinal fortitude. Tony could take it, and he would let them kill him before he would betray a confidence and put the person on the spot who had tipped him off on the kidnaping.

Of course, there was a chance that the blond hooper would crash through with Devlin. It was a gamble. O'Rourke hadn't yet been able to figure out just where Rae Summers fitted in the picture. She had seemed genuinely glad to see him and had told a perfectly straight story; she had accounted for her being in the corridor of the Hotel Metropole and had backed up her story by the statement that she had tried twice to get in touch with him after that.

She talked "dumb" at times, as when she had said that Alex Seldon was her pal. But her actions weren't as dumb as her talk. He was sure that a pretty smart set of brains worked behind her nice brown eyes. Why was she so anxious to get Tony Harcourt out of the jam he was in? O'Rourke knew that Tony didn't play around much with Broadway frails. They were his stock in trade, but he cynically

looked at them as material for his column and poison to his system. The blond hooper was something of a mystery. Maybe she had a crush on Harcourt at that. There had been others before her that had fallen hard for Tony's sardonic smile and his smooth line of Broadway patter.

O'Rourke opened his eyes slowly. Toughy was still staring in his direction. As O'Rourke looked, he stiffened involuntarily. The door to the room was at the guard's back. It was opening now, very slowly and very carefully. He had to squint his eyes to make sure that he wasn't seeing things.

A slim white hand showed in the opening, waved up and down in a peculiar little jerk. Something hit against the wall beyond the guard and rolled along the floor. Toughy's eyes slued around quickly at the sound.

He stared at a round, black button that lay on the floor. His low forehead corrugated in thought. Then his eyes slithered back to Terry O'Rourke who lay motionless and still with his eyes shut tight again.

A thrill of admiration went through the big detective. He thought he recognized that button and the slim white hand. Rae Summers's dress had sported three black buttons like that, and she wore a dinner ring like the one that showed on the hand. The nervy kid had passed up his instructions to chase after Devlin. She had ducked undercover somewhere in the rooming house and had trailed his captors when they carted him out. Now she was trying to distract Toughy's attention enough to allow O'Rourke to make a bid for liberty.

The door was shut tight when Toughy moved his eyes around to

look at it. He scowled again, and his eyes moved back to O'Rourke. As he did, the door started to open again. Another button clicked against the wall and rolled along the floor.

It looked as if the nervous strain were too much for the dull-witted guard. He cursed in a low voice and started to get up from his chair. His eyes moved indecisively from O'Rourke to the door, then to the wall where the button had fallen. There was a partly opened window at that side of the room. The big shamus could almost read Toughy's thoughts as he stared at the open window. He was figuring that some one outside the window was signaling. He gave O'Rourke another sharp look, then he moved slowly toward the window.

As Toughy's big back turned, O'Rourke's knees drew up. He turned softly and crouched on his hands like a sprinter waiting for the starting gun. He breathed a fervent wish that his lame muscles wouldn't go back on him. He would have time for only one effort. It had to be good.

O'Rourke braced his toes against the baseboard and launched upward in a powerful spring that carried him halfway across the room to the slow-thinking guard. Toughy heard the scuff of shoe leather against wood and whipped around at the noise. O'Rourke's feet hit the floor, and he bounced forward in a long stride. His eyes were glued on the point of Toughy's jaw as he swung a round-house wallop from down by his hip.

The gun in the ex-pug's hand snapped up and barked. O'Rourke felt the pluck of the bullet as it grazed his hip. There wasn't a second shot, for his haymaking right fist crashed home. Toughy started back on his heels, walked backward

a couple steps before he started down. O'Rourke's weary, lame muscles responded to the driving urge of his fighting heart. He was on the falling plug-ugly like a panther, snapping home short, vicious blows as the guard went down. There was no doubt in the mind of the red-headed shamus when Toughy finally hit the floor. He was out—as cold as a Boston haddock.

The door flew open, and Rae Summers darted into the room. Her flashing glance lingered a minute on O'Rourke's battered face, then went to the unconscious guard, crumpled on the floor. The Chicago shamus grinned a crooked smile and reached for the gun in Toughy's hand.

"Hello, keed," he said casually. "How's all the folks back home?"

For a long second the girl looked at him. Admiration filled her eyes. Then her brown orbs glittered as though through a veil of tears. She ran across the room and threw both her arms around O'Rourke's neck. Her red mouth pressed hard against his battered lips as she said:

"I didn't know they made 'em like you any more, Irish. Can you take it, though! I'm asking you, can you take it!" It was a statement, not a question that she uttered. Her face sobered a little.

"I didn't know I was letting you in for anything like this," she said contritely. "I knew you were swift with a rod and that you were a pal of Tony's. But I didn't figure that the boys would use your face for a playground. I almost wish I'd taken a chance and gone to the cops in the first place. There must be some square shooters on the force."

"What are you beefing about?" growled O'Rourke. "You ought to see the other three mugs. This one here's no bet for a beauty contest right now. There's another one in a

hospital getting his face fixed, and the third one won't wear his hat straight for a few days yet. I didn't do so bad by Mrs. O'Rourke's little boy. I managed to get a bite while they were taking a square meal."

The girl was tugging at his arm, moving him toward the door.

"Let's get out of here," she begged. "That shot may bring some uniformed copper up here. Besides, some of those thugs may come back."

O'Rourke hunted around and found his hat crumpled in the corner. He looked at it and swore. The girl had to grin at his vehemence. He caught the smile and said morosely:

"That chapeau set me back eighteen bucks. These mugs have ruined it on me."

"What a man! What a man!" the girl said softly. They went out the door and down a flight of stairs to the street.

O'Rourke's prison was a vacant house in the West Nineties. A big gray building that looked like a storage warehouse flanked it on one side. A vacant lot that was strewn with parts of wrecked cars separated the house from a garage on the other side.

"A swell place for a hide-out," O'Rourke said as they walked past the warehouse. "I'll bet that warehouse is loaded with contraband stuff and that there's been many a hot car that changed its color in that garage."

The girl was silent as she walked by his side. A tiny V showed over the bridge of her pert little nose, and her eyes moved in quick jerky glances from side to side as they moved east toward Broadway.

Under a street light O'Rourke looked at his wrist watch. It was nine forty-five. Only five hours

since this girl had bumped past him and into his room! It seemed like that many days to O'Rourke. He glanced down at her grim determined face and said:

"Where's old Highpockets at, gorgeous?" She looked up at him vaguely.

"Oh, you mean Harcourt!" she said. "I'm only playing a hunch—that the same mob that grabbed off Lew Albion got Harcourt, and that they took him to the same place. I hope we can get there in time to save him."

"You seem more worried about him than you do about Lew Albion," O'Rourke said quite thoughtfully.

"The devil with Albion!" the girl grated. "It's no skin off my nose what happens to that two-timing rat. He deserves anything he gets. But Harcourt's a white man. I feel that I got him into that jam and I certainly want to get him out alive if I can."

"We'll get a cab on the next block," O'Rourke said. "Where do we go from there?"

The girl looked doubtful and said:

"It's away up the line, a place on Pelham Bay. Scar Altone bought it for a summer home before they handed him the book on evading his income tax and shoved him in the gow at Atlanta. Some of Altone's pals still use it as a place to throw special parties. Maybe we'd better go back to Grand Central and get a train."

"Say, sister. One of these cruising night hawks would take us to Halifax and back for a double saw-buck," declared O'Rourke. "We'll rescue Tony in real style." His good eye was scanning the line of cabs that flanked the curb along Broadway. He spotted one that wasn't sporting any of the fleet insignia.

He walked up to the driver and said:

"How about a trip up to Pelham Bay, feller?"

The driver was a square-chinned, pug-nosed Irishman. He looked at O'Rourke's battered face and his half-closed eye. Then his sharp eyes moved to the girl.

"Swell, feller," he said. "What'll we use for money?"

O'Rourke's lips split in a grin. He reached in his coat pocket, then swore luridly. The thugs that had captured him had lifted his leather bill fold. The girl had her purse open.

"I've got some money, O'Rourke," she said. "How much do you need?"

The pug-nosed taxi driver looked at the big detective again.

"Are you Terry O'Rourke, the shamus from Chicago?" he asked.

The redhead nodded and said: "So my old man told me. What about it?"

"You don't need to spend the girl's dough," the driver replied. "I read a lot about you. Us Irishmen have to stick together. Your credit's good for this trip. My name's Shaughnessy. You can look me up and pay me later."

O'Rourke grabbed his hand and pumped it enthusiastically. He said: "Spoken like a true Far-Downer. You'll collect double tariff for this job, mick." He turned to the girl: "What kind of a car were the mugs driving that put the bee on me, gorgeous?"

The girl told him.

"The hooligans that messed me up have got a fifteen or twenty-minute start on us," O'Rourke told the driver. "Can you beat them up to Westchester?"

"Watch my smoke," replied Shaughnessy, grinning. "I'll be crowding their tail before they've

crossed Bronx Park. Climb in and hang on."

CHAPTER V.

GRILLING TONY.

O'Rourke and the girl got in the taxicab, and Shaughnessy meshed the gears. The car purred away from the curb and started for the nearest cross cut in the park. Shaughnessy drove like a gimlet-eyed racer. He went in and out of traffic, rubbing fenders and scraping hub caps, beating lights and shaving seconds wherever possible, oftentimes where time saving was all but impossible.

The big shamus leaned back against the cushions and half closed his eyes. His voice sounded weary as he said:

"Suppose you tell Uncle Terry all about it, beautiful. Start with the Albion snatch. I've got a hunch that the kidnaping of handsome Lew wasn't a regular 'I'll-hold-you-until-they-pay' grab-off. Why was he picked off?"

"Because he was a stool pigeon for the Federal dicks," the girl replied levelly.

O'Rourke sat up straight and widened his good eye.

"What was he snooping for?" he asked. "Dope, smuggling or counterfeit?"

"Anything that he could pick up and peddle," the girl said. "He hit this town with a reputation as a big-shot crook. Across the pond he had been rated as a twenty-carat mob man. The boys downtown took him on his reputation. He made a play for me, and for a while I fell for his line. He had plenty of jack, and he liked me because I didn't pal

around with any of the mob that hung out at the Diano. I'm no saint, but I'm no gun moll either. Albion told me that he was off the rackets for good and was looking for a chance to invest his dough in a good legitimate proposition like a night club or a brewery. I swallowed it hook, line and sinker.

"After a while, I began to get a little suspicious. He was always nagging me to take him upstairs in the blue room—you know the dive where the swell dopes go to hit the pipe for a thrill. I kept telling him that I couldn't get him in up there, that he'd have to see Seldon about that. Then he'd tell me to forget about it.

"A couple of times when he got pretty well plastered, he made some funny cracks about being a Federal dick. That didn't click with me. Mugs with reputations like his don't hook up with the government. We didn't get along so well, and one night we agreed to disagree. He was plenty oiled that night and he made a nasty crack about pulling the club and my getting tossed into the clink with the rest of the crew up there.

"I figured that Seldon had been pretty square with me, took me in as a greenhorn, and built me up pretty well—so I'd pay him back. I tipped him off about what Albion had said. They started checking up, and a couple of card sharps that play the big boats tipped off Albion's hand. He'd been doing undercover work for the British Intelligence, and had been run out of the service for crooked work.

"Seldon figured that Albion had been trying to get evidence on the gong kicking at the Diano, and that he knew too much. So he told me that Lew Albion was going to be snatched—and that he'd never come back from the kidnaping."

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O'Rourke was listening with deep interest. The rumor he had picked up was a fact.

"And then you whispered the news to Tony Harcourt, and the dumb egg printed it," O'Rourke muttered. "How come Alex Seldon didn't know right away that you were the one that blabbed?"

"He did," the girl acknowledged. "He was sore about it. But he couldn't do anything because he'd talked out of turn in telling me about the snatch. He didn't dare tell the big shot that's behind the racket that he was the one that had spilled the news first. He had to protect me to cover himself. I didn't think Harcourt would run the paragraph until after the job was done. But he must have got drunk after he talked to me that night and thought it was a swell scoop. I nearly died when I read the item in his column the next day. Now they've picked him up to make him tell where he got his information—if they can."

"Which they can't," O'Rourke said grimly. "You talk about a head man in back of Alex Seldon. Isn't Alex the main squeeze in this play?"

"No," the girl replied. "There's some bird that backed Seldon in financing the club. I don't know myself who he is, but he's a big noise in this town. I know that from the way Seldon gets jittery when he talks about him."

O'Rourke frowned and tried to figure out that one. It was too deep for him. He had always believed that Seldon owned the club. Most of the Dawn Patrol took it for granted. Now that he looked back on things, he was sure that the blond girl was right. The thing was too big, too hot, for Seldon to have manipulated it. Seldon was too

much of a lightweight to put across anything like that.

"That explains a lot of things," said O'Rourke thoughtfully. "I wondered why Chad Clough didn't slip me a set of bracelets after I bopped him on the whiskers. He was hooked up in this kidnaping and he didn't know where I stood on the matter, so he was afraid to stir up things too much. I suppose he added two and two together and guessed that Seldon must have beefed to you about the snatch. That's why he wanted you on ice. When did you learn that Tony Harcourt had fallen into the hands of the kidnapers?"

"Just after the club closed this morning. About three a. m., I guess it was. Seldon knew I was worried about the paragraph getting in the paper. I'd changed my address already just to be on the safe side. He told me that the gang had nabbed Harcourt and that I'd better get set to do a shuffle-off-to-Buffalo act—if Harcourt blabbed on where he got his information. I went home feeling pretty low—got a couple of hours' sleep and started trying to figure a way to get Harcourt out of the jam. I remembered that he was a pal of yours, so I came up to see you. Clough spotted me out on Broadway, trailed me into the hotel, but he missed the elevator I caught. You know the rest."

O'Rourke nodded grimly. He asked the girl some questions about the mob, but she couldn't give him much information. She had no idea whether there would be two men or twenty at the hang-out of the kidnapers. O'Rourke thought it didn't matter much. It would take more brains than brawn to snake Harcourt out of their clutches.

He looked out the window of the cab, and his eyes registered approval

as they moved to the back of Shaughnessy's head bent low over the wheel. They were on a wide parkway, and the pug-nosed driver had the accelerator jammed down to the floor boards. Cars whisked into view and flowed backward like a panorama show in reverse.

They made the run in less than an hour. The Chicago shamus was willing to bet that they had hung up a record on that trip. Rae Summers directed the driver to a gravel road that ran along the shoulder-high privet hedge bordering the estate of the former liquor baron. They parked the limousine a few hundred yards down the road where it would be out of sight from the main highway.

"Do you pack a gun, Shaughnessy?" O'Rourke asked as they got out.

The little Irishman lifted the corners of his wide mouth in a happy grin and reached into the pocket on the door beside the driver's wheel. He dragged out a shiny police special revolver and balanced it lovingly across the palm of his hand.

"Who do I have to burn down?" he asked pleasantly.

"Can't tell yet," O'Rourke replied, smiling. "Don't start using that cannon until you have to. I'll start the ball rolling when it comes time to throw lead."

They skirted the hedge, keeping to the shadows. O'Rourke was surprised when they made the wide-arched entrance without encountering a guard. A semicircular drive curved away from this entrance up to the front of the big house that set away back from the road.

The front of the house was in darkness, but O'Rourke took no chances. He stepped onto the green velvet lawn and followed the inside shadows of the hedge back and

around to a spot where he could approach the house from the side. They walked around three sides without spotting a light.

O'Rourke was puzzled and began to grow a little bit suspicious. He turned to the girl who trailed at his heels and asked: "Are you sure this is the place, sister? Don't look as if there was any one availing themselves of Scar Altone's hospitality."

"I'm sure of it," the girl said levelly. "Seldon told me that this was where Albion had been taken."

Cold fear began to clutch at O'Rourke's heart. The thought crept into his mind that they were too late. Either that or—the blond jane had outsmarted him, and led him off on a wild-goose chase, to take him off the trail.

"It would be just too bad if you'd made a mistake, gorgeous," he snapped, and his voice had a razor-like edge as he said it. "Us Guinzbergs don't take kindly to being played for suckers."

"Skip it—skip it," the girl muttered. "Albion and Harcourt are up here some place, alive or dead. We've got to step on the gas or Clough and Rocco Tralli will be rolling in here."

She was looking away from him as she said it, her eyes raking the darkness in the direction of the water front. Suddenly her fingers gripped O'Rourke's arms.

"Look, shamus," she whispered. "Isn't there a light in that building?"

O'Rourke followed the direction of her gaze. He saw a small, two-story building that looked like a boathouse, partly surrounded by overhanging trees. Chinks of light showed through curtained or shuttered windows in the side of the building facing them.

"Damned if you aren't right at

that," O'Rourke muttered. He broke into a run, feet padding on the soft lawn, in the direction of the house.

They approached like silent shadows. As they drew near, O'Rourke swore softly. Heavy board shutters masked the windows on the three sides they could see. At the opposite side, a big oblong of light showed on the planks of a wharf that ran down to the Sound; one of the windows on that side must be clear, thought O'Rourke. There was a door in the wall in front of them, but O'Rourke's noiseless moving of the knob showed that it was locked.

"You stick here for a few minutes, Shaughnessy," O'Rourke said in a low voice. "Watch that door there and keep an eye on the pathway leading up to the house. If any one comes, either way, halt them. I don't care how you halt them—as long as they're stopped." He looked at the girl and said: "You'd better stay here, too, sister. I'm going to take a look from in front, and I may crash in. If I do, there'll be hell a-popping."

The girl shook her head in stubborn refusal. O'Rourke lifted a big hand and gritted:

"Act up now, and papa will slap you silly. I'm not taking any chances to get Harcourt loose by having a hysterical dame wabbling around in there."

She moved away from him and over to Shaughnessy's side. The pug-nosed little Irishman chuckled noiselessly and whispered: "He means it, kiddo. He'd smack you down in a minute."

O'Rourke was moving along the side of the house. He found that a five-foot veranda ran along the water-front side of the boathouse. He swung under the sapling railing and moved along on his knees to the

window. He pulled his hat low, raised his head slowly until his eye was on a level with the sill. Then his head inched sideways until he got a view of the room.

With a distinct effort he choked back the curse that rose to his lips as he peered in. Directly in front of the window, Tony Harcourt was tied in a chair. The columnist's pallid face was now a bruised pulp, and streaks of dried blood clotted the side of his head. Harcourt was sagging in the chair, held up by the bonds that lashed him upright. His eyes were closed, and he looked as if he were unconscious.

Two men stood straddle-legged in front of him. One man was a stranger to O'Rourke, though the marks of his breed were definite, in the thin lips, sharp, close-set eyes with their cold, menacing stare. O'Rourke knew the man facing him on the other side of Harcourt's chair. The lean, hard-faced, lantern-jawed man with the sandy hair was Captain Mel Boyd, of the detective division of the city police.

Red anger flared in the brain of the Chicago shamus. Bad enough to have Harcourt in the hands of dyed-in-the-wool hoods! But to find that a renegade cop was at the head of the hottest mob in the city was added fuel to the flames of rage that burned in his veins.

He cursed himself for not having figured it out before. Boyd, head of the detectives of an uptown precinct, was one of the most unpopular officers on the force. Hints of shady practices had drifted around. But the horse-faced cop carried a lot of weight in political circles. O'Rourke could see why. With a corps of thugs at his command, he could practically control the polls in his district. And in addition to his other criminal activities, Boyd

owned the Club Diano—one of the rankest opium dens in the city. No wonder Lew Albion had been snatched!

These thoughts flashed through a part of the big Irishman's brain in a split second. The rest of his brain was trying to figure a way to crash in, without completely jeopardizing Harcourt's life. As he looked, the columnist's eyes opened, or at least the puffed, bruised lids pried themselves apart. A ghastly bitter smile twisted Harcourt's mouth.

Boyd's lean body bent forward. O'Rourke saw his lips move. Harcourt moved his head wearily from side to side. Boyd's fist lifted and crashed into that battered, tortured face again and again. Harcourt's chin dropped down on his chest.

O'Rourke saw red. He jerked himself upright, took his gun from his shoulder holster, and moved back to the rail on the veranda. His feet hit the veranda floor in two fast strides, then lifted in a jump that took him feet first through the window. Glass raked at his face and clothes as he went through. O'Rourke didn't feel it.

His eyes were glued on the two men in front of Harcourt. The thin-faced man whirled at the sound of crashing glass. His hand was snapping up as O'Rourke hit the floor inside. The gun in his hand never got into action. The big shamus planted a bullet between his eyes before he had a chance to fire.

The automatic in O'Rourke's fist whipped across to cover the crooked detective captain who stood rooted to the floor. Boyd's eyes seemed to be starting from their sockets.

"Reach for the roof, Boyd!" O'Rourke rasped. "Unless you feel lucky and want to reach for a rod instead."

"You—you, O'Rourke?" Boyd

muttered in tones of unbelief. His hands automatically lifted shoulder high.

"Yeah, me!" the Chicago shamus snarled. He heard a hoarse, rasping noise, slanted his eyes in a sideways glance, and saw Tony Harcourt peering at him, a feeble semblance of a sardonic grin writhing his swollen lips. "My pal," Harcourt murmured. "The red-headed hellion from Chicago." Then Harcourt passed out.

Something quickly brushed past O'Rourke, and he saw Rae Summers run to the side of the battered newspaperman. She cradled his bloody head in her arms. "You poor, poor darling," she cried.

"Snap out of that sympathy stuff!" grated O'Rourke. "Frisk that stiff on the floor for a knife. Cut Harcourt loose and pour some water on him." He looked at Boyd and said savagely: "Walk over to the wall, rat—face first!"

The shock of the first surprise had worn off. Boyd was eying the private detective with shifty, calculating eyes. He moved back and suddenly dropped his hand toward his hip pocket.

A tigerish smile split O'Rourke's face.

"I hoped you'd do something like that," he grated. One long stride carried him in front of Boyd. O'Rourke's left fist smashed out in an overhand swing. There was a sound of crunching bones when the hard knuckles of the red-headed Irishman collided with the bridge of Boyd's nose. "I wouldn't waste lead on a rat like you." O'Rourke's tones were savage. His right-hand fingers doubled around the automatic and followed his left. Boyd's face was a wreck as he hit the floor. All the fight was gone out of him. He started to bleat and beg for mercy.

The blond girl had cut Harcourt's bonds. There was an iron sink with a faucet on one side of the room, and she filled a tin washbasin with water. When O'Rourke looked at her, she was mopping Harcourt's face with a tiny square of cloth that had once been a handkerchief.

"For the love of Mike," growled O'Rourke. "Ain't that just like a dame!" He reached down, lifted the basin, and threw the contents in Harcourt's face. The newspaperman opened his eyes, and said:

"O. K., carrot-top. Let's go!"

A thumping noise attracted O'Rourke's attention. His eyes moved to the side of the room, and his eyebrows went up at the sight of the trussed figure there. Lew Albion mouthed noises from behind the gag that stuffed his mouth.

"You here, too," O'Rourke said none too cordially. "We ought to leave you here for causing this mess, but I suppose we'll have to take you along, too. You can be a witness against Boyd." He nodded to the girl and motioned for her to cut Albion loose.

Defiance showed in the girl's face. O'Rourke glared at her, and she moved her body across the room to Albion's side.

"Hello, rat," she said hostilely. "Enjoy your vacation?"

Albion rubbed his wrists and ankles for a few seconds before he answered. Then he snarled: "You double-crosser! I've got a good mind to——"

"You've got a good mind to shut your trap and keep it shut," O'Rourke said icily. "You'd be food for the fish out in the Sound in a couple hours if it hadn't been for this kid. Take it and like it, punk."

He saw Harcourt rise to his feet, try a few weak steps, and he nodded his head approvingly.

"Atta boy, Slat," he said. "You're making it fine."

"Can I take it, though?" the columnist murmured, grinning weakly. "Or am I a softie?"

O'Rourke moved over to Boyd, who was still huddled on the floor, holding onto his face, moaning low.

"Roll along, little dogie, roll along!" O'Rourke hummed softly. He clamped his fingers in the crooked officer's collar, pulled him to his feet, and pitched him halfway across the room.

Boyd's knees buckled and he slid along the boards on his face. Harcourt tried a weak kick at the nearest part of Boyd's anatomy, but missed. Albion and the girl trailed along. The dapper stool pigeon was mouthing generous promises of a reward to O'Rourke.

The Chicago shamus walked past Boyd, turned the key in the lock, and threw open the door. He got Boyd to his feet and herded him out the door ahead of him. Shaughnessy moved up and said excitedly:

"A car just pulled up there. I guess it's them other hoods."

O'Rourke swore softly, but kept moving up the pathway. His eyes caught the dark outlines of running figures coming down the path. Then the figures halted, and the darkness was punctured by an orange and blue flash. He heard the *plunk* of the bullet in flesh, and Boyd slithered out of his grasp to the ground.

Shaughnessy's gun barked. One of the figures staggered, ran a couple of steps sideways, and went down.

"Got him, first shot," shouted the little Irishman.

O'Rourke was running forward, crouched low. The other man had winged a shot, then sprinted for a clump of shrubbery on the lawn. The Irishman's automatic roared, then blazed again. On the second

shot, the running figure straightened and went forward in a long dive. Then it lay still.

O'Rourke passed the gunman Shaughnessy had winged. It was Chad Clough, and he was trying to crawl into the underbrush.

"Gather in this rat," O'Rourke called over his shoulder. He kept on going out to where Rocco lay. The Chicago shamus's gun was in a position of readiness. O'Rourke had seen men play possum before. But the squat gunman wasn't faking. O'Rourke's second slug had struck square between his shoulder blades.

The big detective stirred him with a foot as he stared down at him. He bared his teeth in a cold grin and said: "I think you've got something that belongs to me, feller." He dropped to his knee, and rapidly went through the dead man's pockets. In an inside coat pocket he found his leather bill fold.

"You won't be needing this where you're going," O'Rourke muttered grimly. He stuck the bill fold in his pocket and started back to the pathway.

The others were gathered around Clough, who sat up, holding his hand over his chest, blasting them with profanity. Blood was seeping through the fingers held tight over his chest.

Rae Summers was standing back a little, catching her breath in rapid, sobbing gulps. O'Rourke patted her on the shoulder.

"Hang on to yourself, keed," he said gently. "It's all over now."

"I never saw so much killing before," she cried.

"You never will again, I hope," O'Rourke said grimly as he moved up the path. He looked at Chad Clough and asked:

"How you making it, Chad? Can you stand a ride into town?"

"You'll never take me into town," the plain-clothes man rasped heavily. "I'm going to beat the rap. Where's Boyd?"

"You winged him with your first shot," said O'Rourke.

"That's swell! Must have been yellow or you wouldn't have taken him alive." The wide, staring eyes closed suddenly, and Clough went over sideways.

A single glance was enough.

"It's a pay-off," O'Rourke said abruptly. "Let's go. Shaughnessy probably left the meter running in his gocar."

O'Rourke had one of Harcourt's arms, and Rae Summers had the other as they went down the gravel drive to the highway. Harcourt tried to wisecrack, but his feet stumbled as he moved along. O'Rourke cursed gently and affectionately at him. Shaughnessy and Albion followed behind.

The blond girl got into the car first and helped the battered newspaperman in beside her. O'Rourke climbed in and dropped wearily onto the seat. Albion got in front beside Shaughnessy.

The taxicab backed, turned and started back on the parkway.

"Find some place to eat, mick," directed O'Rourke in a tired tone. "I just remembered I haven't eaten for a coupla days."

The little Irishman behind the wheel chuckled and jammed down the accelerator. "O. K., boss," he said. "We'll be there in no time."

O'Rourke turned to Harcourt with a grin. He said:

"Wait until the Dawn Patrol gets a look at that mug of yours. There's going to be many a heartache on Broadway."

"You're no Rembrandt yourself, Irish," Harcourt declared. "Though you weren't much to start with. I

never could see how dolls like blondie here could give you a tumble. It must be the sunset hair."

"Tumble, hell," growled O'Rourke. "This kid's been busting things wide open just because she was worried about a John Sap newspaperman that didn't have brains enough to know better than to put himself on the spot. She's bucked cops and hoods and proved to be a spunky kid, just on account of you, stupid."

Tony Harcourt looked at her with wondering eyes. He said: "You did all that for me, Rae Summers? In the name of all that's holy, why do I rate that kind of stuff?"

"I guess you forget that you were the one that steered me out of that crooked joint downtown and made old Branstein break the phony contract he'd sewed me up with," the girl said softly. "Then you played me up like a million until I got the chance I wanted to show the Broadway crowd what real hoofing was. I haven't forgotten, Tony, you were the first guy in the big town to give me a helping hand, without a lot of strings attached."

"Say, sister," Harcourt said flatly. "I've done that for a lot of kids in this town, and none of them even bothered to thank me for it. I figured it's just part of the Main Stem code. But you can be sure that I'll get you a break now. You'll be out there with the big-timers if my column has any influence."

O'Rourke shook his head as the blond girl threw her arms around Harcourt's neck and kissed him.

"And they call me a sucker for the dolls," he said morosely. "Well, I guess it will be orchids for blondie in the old scandal column in the morning." He was quoting a favorite expression of the columnists of the city.

"And how, brother! And how!"



ONE PINK ERROR

By JEAN BROWN

Author of "Wolf Face," etc.

BUSINESS was not flourishing at the Paradise dance hall. Sam Rosenberg, the manager, scowled down from his boxlike office at the wide gleaming dance floor where only three couples were gyrating listlessly about to the strains of a languorous waltz. He scowled at the musicians on the dais in the center of the floor and thought they seemed half dead. He scowled at the huddle of hostesses who lounged at the little tables outside the railing. At that rate, they wouldn't take in enough tickets, deducting

the cuts the hostesses received, to pay for the musicians. Sam swore softly under his breath. Business was really bad.

Most of the hostesses sat gazing listlessly into space, their hands perhaps toying with a glass of tepid lemonade in front of them. Some of them smoked. One of them began swearing softly. Her nearest neighbor looked around at her, and her eyes spoke the question her lips did not bother to utter. The swearing girl pulled two small pink tickets out of the front of her dress.

"Two tickets," she wailed. "And

it's nine o'clock. I won't make enough to-night to pay my car fare."

"The new one ain't doin' so bad," said the one with questioning eyes. "Bet she's got nine, ten tickets."

"You mean the one callin' herself Sena?" asked the swearing girl.

"Yeah, her."

They looked at the girl under discussion, a lithe brunette with a half-bold, half-shy smile, and big dark eyes.

"Dresses crummy," said the swearing one.

"Just in from some little hick town," muttered the girl with questioning eyes with a yawn. "Thinks she's got the world by the tail."

The swearing one laughed.

The music ended on a long, quavering note, and the chimes announced dolorously that that would be all. The three couples walked off the floor. The one called Sena was with a tall thin man with dead-looking eyes. He smiled a little as he looked down at her.

"You're a nice kid, Sena," he said. "See you later."

"You bet," Sena murmured and smiled back at him.

Sena joined her lounging sisters.

"You give 'em all the old soft soap, don't you, Sena?" said the one with questioning eyes.

"Oh, sure," replied Sena good-naturedly. "One of these queer-looking guys might be a millionaire. You can't tell."

The swearing one laughed.

The door opened, and three men came in. They were well-dressed, prosperous-looking. They glanced around and came over toward the hostesses. Two more men entered. Then the door opened, and Hoke Burton came in. Hoke was well known in Chicago—a little too well known; that was why he had left Chicago. The police in San Fran-

cisco had heard of him, but as yet there had been no personal contact.

The hostesses rose to their feet and began smiling and casting coy glances. The men hesitated for a moment, then began asking for dances. Hoke hesitated for a moment, too, looked the girls over with insolent casualness, then went over to Sena. He didn't ask her if she would dance; he merely laid his hand on her bare arm possessively and said, "Hello, sister." He didn't smile.

"Hello," beamed Sena. Sena was nice to everybody, and she could tell by looking at this man that he was somebody of importance. His clothes looked expensive; he wore a big diamond in a ring, and he had an air of confidence about him, almost a swaggering air of confidence. His face looked as though he never smiled, but it was handsome in a hard, frozen sort of way.

The music began, and Hoke Burton steered Sena toward the dance floor. He gave her a little pink ticket, and, this, Sena dropped down in the front of her dress. They danced around the floor in silence. He was a good dancer.

"Not a very large crowd to-night," said Sena sociably.

Hoke looked down at her, but he didn't say anything.

"Us girls don't make much on an evening like this," murmured Sena. "We don't get many tickets."

Hoke still said nothing, but the hand that rested on Sena's back plucked at the sleazy dress she wore as though speculating on its cheapness.

"You don't make much any time, do you?" asked Hoke indifferently.

"Not a great deal," replied Sena. There was a little quiver in her voice as though just for the moment

an old hopelessness she had been fighting back had burst through her cheerfulness. "It's pretty discouraging. Cheap clothes, cheap room, cheap food. What I wouldn't do for a lot of money. Just to have a lot of money once for clothes and things." Her voice was definitely, unashamedly plaintive now. "I guess you don't know what it is," continued Sena. "I suppose you've always had money. You look it. I guess you make a lot of money. You look like a man who did."

Hoke looked at her with his frozen eyes, but there was a faint gleam in them now.

"Yeah, I got a good racket," he said. "The best racket in all the world."

She looked at him with wide, wondering, childishy enthralled eyes. "You make a lot of money!" she said.

"Yes, I make a lot of money. And I make it easy. And I'm needing a girl—somebody with nerve and looks. You'd have the looks if you was dressed right."

"And I've got the—I've got the nerve, too," snapped Sena. "I'd do even dangerous things for big money."

He looked at her sharply. "Who said dangerous things?" he snapped.

"Nobody said dangerous," replied Sena. "But if it takes nerve it must be dangerous."

"You're a pretty smart girl," said Hoke, and something faintly suggestive of a smile twitched his lips.

It was nine thirty when they left the hall. Sena had gotten her cheap little wrap with the rabbit fur collar. She looked a little ashamed of it and tried to hide a worn place in the fur with her hand.

They passed through the gaudy foyer, past the brightly lighted

ticket booth, and were on the street. Hoke led the way to a powerful-looking, low-slung, black roadster. It looked as if it had cost a good bit of money.

"Get in!" he ordered, and Sena stepped into the front seat. Hoke got in beside her.

The big car turned away from the curb, and Hoke headed it out toward the ocean. They passed Van Ness Avenue, a long lane of glittering lights, and after that the streets were darker. Sena looked at her companion. In the dim light his face looked harder and colder than it had in the bright lights of the dance hall.

They drove out through the park. It was a moonless night, and the shrubbery on either hand looked like dark crouching monsters. Now and then a car with beaming headlights came hurtling through the darkness toward them, and passed by. Then the windmill loomed darkly against the star-flecked sky, and they were at the ocean.

Hoke drove the car out through the sand dunes until they could hear the water as it crawled up over the beach. He switched off the motor and the lights, and they looked out over the tumbling, hissing tide. There was a light of some sort on the beach, and two men were standing there talking. One man held something dark in his hand, and now the second man raised the light until they could make out the object. It was a woman's shoe.

Sena gave a little gasp. "Why, I bet it's that girl's shoe—the one who was found murdered here on the beach. Why, it must have been near here she was found. I read about it in the paper."

"Yes," said Hoke, "it's her shoe. I had the boys throw it out away from the body—just to give the

police something to puzzle about. A great bunch, the police!"

Sena seemed to shrink back in the seat a little. She turned her big black eyes on the man at her side. "You—you—" she stammered.

"Yes," muttered Hoke. He lighted a cigar. "Yes, I killed her. Did you read what the papers said had been done to her? Well, that was done while she was alive."

There was only silence, and Sena's big black eyes looked at him. He took a puff on his cigar.

"Did you read how she was dressed? The swell mink coat and the expensive dress and all? I gave those to her. She had diamonds, too, but I took the diamonds offa her."

Just silence and Sena's big black eyes looking at him!

"You're goin' to take her place. I'll give you the diamonds. I'll give you a swell mink coat, and I'll give you swell dresses. And if I ever think you're tryin' to double-cross me, I'll give you what she got. See?"

Sena gulped.

"See?" he repeated.

Sena nodded. "Yes."

"Still want to be my girl? If you say no, I'll take you back downtown and set you out without harming you. Now's the time to say it—yes or no?"

Sena straightened up in the seat. "Yes," she said defiantly. "Yes, I want to be your girl. I want a mink coat and diamonds and lovely dresses. And I don't care how I get them. I'm sick to death of cheap clothes, cheap food and cheap rooms. I'll never double-cross you as long as you give me all those things."

For the first time Hoke really smiled. He threw his head back and his lips peeled back over his strong

white teeth in a horselike grimace, but he made no sound. "O. K.," he said. And he could have added, but didn't, "Good thing you said yes, girlie. No, and there would have been another murder puzzling the dumb police."

He started the motor, and the big car slid back out of the sand dunes. He headed down toward Fleishacker's Pool, and, reaching this, he turned to the right over the Skyline Boulevard.

"What is your racket, anyway?" Sena broke the silence.

"Kidnaping."

"You—you mean you've got Mrs. Walters, the millionaire's wife?" Sena's eyes were again big and round. "The one he's goin' to pay half a million for?"

Hoke nodded.

"Half a million!" gasped Sena softly, and beneath the softness was a sharp note of greediness. "Half a million! Will you get it soon?"

"To-night" said Hoke.

"To-night! Half a million!" gloated Sena. Then she laughed shrilly. "What I couldn't do to a slab of that!"

It was after eleven o'clock when they stopped at a gate set in a barbed-wire fence. A dark figure materialized from the trees at one side, and a gruff voice said, "What's wanted?"

"It's me, Pete," said Hoke. "Me and a lady friend."

Pete gave a grunt, and with alacrity unfastened and flung open the gate. Hoke drove through, and as he did so Sena saw three other faces peering at them from out the brush, and she saw the light quiver on the barrels of as many guns.

They drove down a road that led toward some dimly looming buildings. At one of these, a shed, they

stopped. To the left of this shed stood a large farmhouse, and at first Sena could see no light in it, then she was able to make out a faint glow toward the rear. Hoke made for this glow, and Sena followed. They crossed a small porch, and Hoke flung open the door.

Three men were seated at a table beneath a swinging kerosene lamp, playing cards. One was a big fellow with knotty shoulders, swollen eyes and hairy fists; one was tall and thin with pale-blue eyes and thick blond hair, and the other was short and swarthy. They looked up and nodded when Hoke came in. They looked at Sena, but said nothing.

"Did Snyder get off on time?" growled Hoke.

One of the men at the table nodded—the tall, thin man. "On time."

"He's due back in fifteen minutes," informed Hoke.

There was no response to this; it didn't seem to require any.

Quiet fell on the room except for the slap of the cards on the table. And now there came a faint knocking from some place over their heads.

"Still at it, is she?" asked Hoke.

One of the men laughed, the big man with swollen eyes and hairy fists. "She's got it in her head we're goin' to kill her," he mumbled.

"She musta overheard somebody talkin'," said Hoke. "Maybe Myra spilled it to her we were goin' to do away with her as soon as we got the money."

"Well, Myra won't spill anything else from what I hear," said the hairy-fisted one with a low chuckle.

Sena drew from this that Myra was the name of Hoke's former girl, the one who had been found dead on the beach.

"You mean you're not going to

turn her loose after you get the money? You're going to kill her?" asked Sena. There was amazement in her voice.

The men at the table cast pitying glances at her. Hoke laughed.

"To turn her loose would be just like signing our death warrants, sister. She's seen all of us, and there wouldn't be one of us safe. No, when we get the money, she croaks. Once we get the dough, we won't need her to write any more piteous, pleading letters tellin' how she's bein' abused."

Sena's face twitched into a little grimace at this piece of information, but, whether it was in horror or approval, it was impossible to tell.

"This is Sena," said Hoke in a belated introduction to the men at the table. "She's goin' to take Myra's place."

The men at the table looked at Sena, but said nothing. One slapped a card on the table.

"And we might as well break her in now," continued Hoke. "Go upstairs," he told Sena, indicating by a jerk of his head a door that led out of the room, "and quiet the old dame. It takes a woman to handle a woman, and you might as well get used to it. Soon as Snyder gets back, Creepy here'll silence her permanently. But make her stop that noise. It gets on my nerves."

Sena went through the door Hoke had indicated. It opened into a short, windowless hall dimly lighted by a hanging smoky lantern. There was a stairway leading upward into darkness, and beneath this stairway was heaped an old broken harness, pieces of rope, and other débris.

Sena took the lantern from the nail on which it hung, and with a set, determined look on her face climbed the stairs. There was a strong draft, and she could hear the

wind mumbling as it whisked through a crack somewhere above. She pulled her cheap wrap more closely about her and shivered.

At the top of the stairs was a door barred with a piece of iron, and Sena knew that it must be behind this door that Mrs. Walters was held prisoner. She lifted the bar and opened the door.

The light of the lantern fell into the dark room, showed in one corner a rude bed of straw and quilts, a pitcher of water and a glass. And that was all the room contained except a white-faced, weary-eyed woman with disheveled gray hair. She stood there in the center of the floor as if she had stopped suddenly to turn about as the door opened.

Sena set her jaws, and her dark eyes hardened the way they had when she had been gloating over the money. "You gotta be quiet," she said in a loud, harsh voice. "You're making altogether too much noise. Cut it out. Do you understand?"

The woman didn't say anything, but just stood there staring, her lips twitching, her fingers plucking futilely at the air.

When Sena came downstairs a few minutes later, there was no sound from the dark room above.

The four men turned to look at her as she came in. "She'll be quiet now," said Sena with a hard, confident smile. "I know how to handle women."

Hoke threw back his head in his horsy, soundless laugh, and at this moment the door from the porch opened, and a man dressed in the rough clothes of a farmer strode in. Over one shoulder was slung a gunny sack that contained something soft and lumpy.

"Get it, Snyder?" rasped Hoke, wheeling about at the newcomer.

Snyder nodded, and, letting the

sack down from his shoulders, began drawing from it packets of currency. Hoke seized the money eagerly and began counting it.

"O. K," he said crisply when he had finished and the currency lay in neat green stacks on the table. "Five hundred grand. And now, Creepy, it's time to do your stuff and we'll be gettin' out of here." He turned to the man with swollen eyes and hairy fists. "Make a neat job of it and put it in two sacks so we can carry it away without trouble. I've a good notion to throw it out at the place we promised to let the old dame out. That would be a good one." He threw back his head in a horsy grin.

Creepy got to his feet. There was a grin on his face as though in pleasant anticipation of the work ahead of him. He moved toward the door to the hall as lithely and almost as silently as a cat.

"Leave your gat here," Hoke called out to him. "Can't trust you with a gun, Creepy. You like to use one too well. I want this done quiet. Just a knife, and that's all."

"Creepy" muttered an oath, but he pulled his automatic from his pocket and tossed it onto the table. Then he stepped through the door and shut it behind him.

All in the room turned their faces toward the hall door, and no one said anything. From beyond the door, there was no sound until presently there came a squeak from the stairs. Sena set her jaws hard and looked at the money on the table, but her face had gone a pasty white and her hands twitched in her lap.

From above they heard a door open. For a moment there was silence. Then came a thud and the muffled cry of a woman. Again silence!

Hoke looked at those about him, and, throwing back his head, gave his horrible, silent laugh.

"He'll be down in a few minutes," he said. "Then we gotta scram. We'll dump her out some place, and then get to my place and divvy this stuff up."

The "stuff" referred to was the money lying on the table, and he now began scooping this back into the sack. He looked up to see Sena's eyes fixed on it greedily.

He tied the sack and then stood waiting, tapping his foot impatiently. Snyder leaned against the door, the blond man and the swarthy one still sat at the table, and Sena had sunk into the chair vacated by Creepy.

"What's keepin' him?" he muttered finally. "You'd think he was holdin' a wake. Tell him to get a hustle on, Blondie."

"Blondie" was the tall thin man with blond hair. He got up and went slowly as though not relishing the job. They heard his feet mounting the stairs, stumbling now and then as though he couldn't see well.

"Hey, Creepy," they heard him call hoarsely, but they could not hear an answer.

They heard a muffled yell, then feet pounding heavily on the stairs. They heard a stumble, a fall, lurid oaths, then Blondie burst in through the door.

"She's gone!" he gasped. "Out the winder on a rope. Creepy's knocked cold."

"You're lyin'," snarled Hoke. He struck Blondie a blow with his fist as he dashed by him. All those in the room followed him, and Blondie wheeled about and came last.

The hall was dark, but at the top of the stairs a faint light showed. This light flickered a little as though in a wind.

Hoke reached the door first, and the others came stumbling up behind him. They all stared into the room. Creepy lay on the floor, blood trickling from a scalp wound. At his hand stood the lantern flickering a little in the wind that came through the open window. A rope, knotted over a projecting piece of the casing, disappeared over the sill into the night.

A stream of lurid curses issuing from his mouth, Hoke dashed to the window and looked out. He wheeled about almost immediately. "She's gone," he said hoarsely. "What the devil!"

Then his eyes fell on Sena, and his lips peeled back from his teeth, but this time not in a grin. He took a step toward her.

"You was the last one in here. What do you know about this?" he snarled. He seized her by the wrist and twisted her arm savagely.

"Hoke! Hoke! I don't know nothin' about it. I gave her a slap in the face to make her be quiet. And that's all. You're breaking my arm!"

She fell to her knees and groveled there at his feet.

"It mighta been Myra before she left," suggested Blondie.

At this moment Creepy stirred. He moaned and rolled to his side, then opened his eyes and pushed himself groggily up on his hairy fists. "Whazza matter?" he grunted.

Hoke turned on him. "What happened, you brainless half-wit? You're a hell of a guy! What happened? Can't you talk?" Hoke grabbed Creepy by the shoulder and shook him.

Creepy felt the split place on his head and looked about him in a puzzled manner. "A man hit me," he said. "I opened the door and a man jumped out at me and hit me."

"A man?" It was Hoke speaking. "Yes, I'm sure it was a man. A man jumped out and hit me—with a club."

Hoke looked startled. "Somebody found out where she was," he muttered. "But I don't see how he got in. But we've gotta git them. They're here on the grounds some place. They can't get out without the guards seein' them. Get out of here, all of you apes, and look for them. Mow them down. If she gets away, we're sunk."

Hoke pulled Creepy to his feet and shoved him on ahead of him, and the crowd of them piled down the stairs to burst out the back door and spread out in the darkness. All but Sena! She stayed behind, near the sack of money that Hoke had flung under the table when he made for the stairs. Perhaps Hoke noticed it, thought of the money there. At any rate, he came lunging back, slammed the door behind him, and stood there glaring at Sena with cold red eyes.

He flung an epithet at her. "I gotta feeling you had a hand in this. Funny, you bein' the last one there. I——"

His words were cut short by a rapid volley of shots from without, a hoarse, wordless shout. "They got her," he said.

But the grimace that he used for a laugh passed quickly from his face as he looked back at Sena. She had crouched down back of the table, and there was a queer, glittery look in her eyes. Hoke took a step toward her, his hands curved like talons, his eyes cold slits.

"I gotta feeling you had something to do with that," he cried. "Maybe you was tryin' to double-cross me, huh?"

"Yes," said Sena. "I was tryin' to double-cross you, and I did. Take

another step and I'll fill you full of lead." Her hand had come out from under the table, and in it she held the automatic Creepy had tossed aside when he started toward the hall.

"Step back toward the wall and put your hands in the air," she directed, and her eyes were as cold and hard as Hoke's as she spoke.

Hoke raised his hands slowly, and he took a step back toward the door before the steely glare in her eyes.

"You little fool, do you think you can get away with this?" he ground out through clenched teeth. "Do you think you'll get very far with that sack of money? Before——"

"I don't want the sack of money," said Sena. "That goes back to Walters. I want you, Hoke, you and your gang. I'm Detective Mary King of the San Francisco police department. When you kidnaped Mrs. Walters, you left one clew—a little pink ticket good for one dance at the Paradise hall. It was a slim clew, but it was all we had to go on. So I became a hostess, and for the past few days I've gotten acquainted with all the men I could at the Paradise, hoping to learn something there."

"Yeah, a ticket to your death," snarled Hoke. His eyes were no longer cold; they were hot and red and blazing with fire. "I'll pull you to pieces with pinchers for this. What Myra got won't be——"

He stopped. There came from without the sound of footsteps, of mumbling voices. He didn't say anything, but Mary King knew that he was only waiting for the door to open and his henchmen to appear before he made a lunge at her. She kept the gun trained steadily on him, but her face went white, and from the corner of her eye she was watching the door. The opening of it

might mean death for her, and again it might mean——

The door swung open, and two men stepped quickly in. They were big men and had about them an air of authority. They both held revolvers in their hands.

"Hello, Mary," one said. "Who's this?" He was looking at Hoke as he asked the question and his gun had followed his eyes. He now had the gangster covered.

"It's Hoke Burton, Bill," replied Mary. "He's the one who kidnaped Mrs. Walters. And he's the one who tortured and murdered the girl that was found on the beach the other day."

"Ah!" said Bill. He took out his handcuffs.

Hoke resisted, but Bill was neither weak nor gentle.

When he had thrown the handcuffed gangster, panting and glaring into a chair, he turned again to Mary King.

"You say he's the one who kidnaped Mrs. Walters. Where is she? We trailed you from the dance hall, and the bunch of us have been lying low waiting for developments. When

we saw the commotion, we thought it was time to butt in, so we jumped in and began rounding them up. Had to hurt a few."

"Mrs. Walters is upstairs," said Mary King. "In a closet. They were going to kill her. I knew it was impossible to get her out or get word to you, so I gave her some rope that was under the stairs and a piece of iron bar that was there, too. The rope she hung out the window, and, when Creepy opened the door to get at her and kill her, she slugged him. Then she hid in the closet. Of course with the window open and the rope hanging out and Creepy slugged, they never once suspected that she was in the closet. And here's the money. I guess everything's all right."

Mary hoped everything was all right, for she had suddenly begun to feel very weak and giddy as she thought of what might have happened had things gone differently. Hoke's balefully glaring eyes seemed to expand and rush at her like two fierce birds of prey, and Mary laid her gun down with a little sigh and did a very womanly faint.

SUICIDE MOUNTAIN

IT has been often advocated to suppress all news of suicides. Probably reading about suicides does not sow the germ of self-destruction the first time, but it causes the would-be suicide to select the same point or location for enacting the deed.

In Japan there is a mountain on Oshima Island, called Mount Mihara. In February, 1933, a schoolgirl threw herself into a thousand-foot volcano crater which is at the top of this mountain. Those who had suicide in mind read of the account, probably, and decided that it was an excellent place from which to jump. During the next three months, fifty-five people had taken their lives and one hundred and fifty had been prevented from doing so.

At the edge of the crater is a guard, who says that there is an average of two attempts a day, some of them, of course, being successful. Not all visitors who climb the mountain to view the crater are would-be suicides, so it is hard always to be on the spot to pull back any who try it.



By
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THE SUBSTITUTE VICTIM

CHAPTER I.

PLANNING A SNATCH.

HENRY CASCO was tall and slender. Very cold blue eyes were set deeply in his thin face. His skin was pale and his head was sparsely covered with sandy hair. He had a suite of offices in an old

walk-up building down behind the jail on Sansome Street, where he maintained, with his middle-aged wife, and Ben Malkin, his partner, a small detective agency.

At five o'clock of a dust-colored autumn evening, he sat in his office with a murderer.

The murderer was a delicate young man known as "Red" Stipa

who looked as shy as a deer. He came from Kansas City with certain introductions to Casco, and, having satisfied the detective that those introductions were genuine, he was laying his problem before Casco in clipped sentences.

"I'm hot as a poker. I got to get under. They smashed the mob—blew us to hell. Five of the boys got it. Killed, or wounded so they couldn't lam. Me, I'm clear. But we got a bull or two when they were getting our five, and that makes me a cop killer."

Casco nodded and smiled sympathetically. "I read about it. Well, you're a long way from Kansas City, but you're a cop killer! They'll hunt a long way for you. If you have any brains, Red, and I guess you have, you must see that you're through. I could line you up with the underworld here, but any time a dick looks at you, he might put the finger on you, and, if you were ever picked up on suspicion, you'd find yourself poulticed with a murder rap. You'd better get out of the country."

"You're a mind reader, Casco. Get out of the country is right. But how?"

"It can be arranged. I can get you on a boat sailing for Australia. You'd go in the crew."

"When?"

"In a few weeks. It will cost money; and it will cost money to bury you until the boat sails. You know how those things are—and you're hot as a poker."

Stipa counted five hundred dollars and tossed it carelessly to Casco's desk. "Bury me. Line up the boat ride. I can stand any gouge within reason."

Casco's fingers entwined themselves about the money. "Ben!" he called softly.

A thick-featured, flat-faced man with a short black mustache came from the outer office.

"My partner," Casco said nodding to the newcomer. "Ben, this is Red Stipa, from Kansas City. He's going under cover for a while. Take him down to Mary's."

Ben Malkin stiffened at the name, Stipa. He shot a quick, questioning glance at Casco.

Stipa looked from one to the other of the two men. "Not so fast, not so fast," he said tensely. "What is this hide-away? Is it a dump that's crawling with prowlers and filling station heist guys? If it is——"

Casco shook his head. "You're alone down there. Nobody else will be taken in while you're there. It has a secret room. If cops went there with a warrant, they'd never find you." He smiled thinly and glanced at his partner. "You'll be buried down there!"

Casco waited in the shadows of the street door of the building that housed his offices. At ten o'clock a taxi stopped a block distant and a man who was short, stout, and middle-aged walked toward the entrance.

Casco stepped out, saying, "Here we are, Mr. Graves."

He unlocked the street door, held it open for Graves, then, seeing that the door was locked again, lighted his visitor up two flights of stairs, with a torch.

They took chairs in Casco's office. Graves, florid and stout with self-esteem, shifted restlessly under Casco's direct gaze.

"Cigar, Mr. Graves?" Casco offered trying to put his caller at ease.

Graves shook his head. "Call me Tom, Henry," he said familiarly.

Casco smiled, lighted a cigar, and sat puffing contentedly while Graves

grew redder and moved more restlessly on his chair.

"I waited until ten to see you," Casco reminded.

Graves nodded. "Good of you, Henry," he said in heavy guttural tones, "we were boys together." Casco smiled. Graves continued: "I went up, and you've—you've done well enough, I guess."

"Sure," Casco said easily. "You gave me my start when I got rid of that girl for you!"

"S-sh!" Graves glanced uneasily at the door.

"Don't be nervous," Casco said. "You wanted to see me alone, and we are alone."

"I'm in worse trouble now than I was then," Graves said. "I'm ruined!"

"Ruined?" The interest in Casco's eyes diminished slightly.

"I'm ruined if——"

"Ah!" Casco murmured. "There's an if! Let's have it, Tom Graves. I've made a tidy bit of money out of other people's ifs in my day."

"If I have to turn over my niece's money when she's twenty-one."

Casco whistled softly. "So that's the way it is! Well, do you have to turn it over?"

"I have to if she's living on her twenty-first birthday."

"When's that?"

"Three weeks from to-morrow."

"Well, can't you sell some of your chain store stock and pay the girl?" Casco asked.

"I can't. If I sold enough stock for that, I'd be ousted. Besides, I don't believe the stock could be absorbed so quickly without running the price down to nothing."

"Well, how can I help you?" Casco asked. "Can I lend you some money?"

Casco had no intention of lending Graves any money. He knew

that any sum he could raise would be insignificant to Graves, but it was a gesture.

Graves shook his head. "Good of you, Henry, but what I need is beyond your power to lend and beyond my power to repay."

"Well?"

Graves crouched low and leaned toward Casco. "The only hope is that I won't have to pay over the money I've been holding in trust for her."

Casco knew well enough exactly what Graves meant, but he foresaw a psychological advantage in making Graves speak out. "What do you mean, Henry?" he asked innocently.

Graves's voice was a whisper. "I mean if something happened to Viola, then the money would revert to my wife. There'd be no accounting. I can handle my wife."

"What do you mean—if something happened?"

"Don't torture me, Henry! You know well enough what I mean!"

"You mean you want her killed?" Casco asked.

Graves dabbed at his wet face with a handkerchief. "That's my only chance, Henry."

Henry Casco's pale-blue eyes were expressionless. He reached into a desk drawer and came up with a bottle of whisky. "Have a drink, Tom. Any one would think you'd killed her already!"

He smiled as Graves snatched the bottle and hurried with it to a rack of paper cups that stood beside a water cooler.

"How much have you blown?" he asked when Graves resumed his seat.

"I didn't blow any of it! It's the times. I got caught in the market, tried to recoup, and got caught again."

"Well, for how much?"

"There was more than half a million."

"And how much is there now?"

"Two hundred thousand."

Casco smiled. "You'll be all right, Tom. Don't worry."

"You mean you'll——"

"It's as good as done, Tom. Take another drink and pull yourself together. You brought something with you?"

"I brought ten thousand, Henry."

"Let's have it."

Tom Graves reached into the lining of his coat. "You'll not fail me, Henry?"

Casco, counting money, did not answer.

"I'll want forty thousand more," he said at last.

"Forty!" Tom Graves whispered. "That's——"

"Robbery?" Casco said, and smiled thinly. "You could hire a bum to do it for a few hundred. But what good would the dough you saved do you when your neck was in a noose?"

Color ebbed from Graves's face.

"I'll want that other forty right away—before I do anything," said Casco.

"Before?"

"Sure. I'm not sticking my neck in a noose for a promise. Turn whatever you have left of hers into cash, at least enough of it to raise forty thousand. When can you do it?"

"Say Wednesday?" Graves asked thickly.

Casco shook his head and smiled. "Say to-morrow at four o'clock. And don't worry. I know just how to work. Worked out my plans while we've been talking. We'll pull a snatch job on your niece. That will be convincing enough because, with all the snatching that's going on it's a wonder she hasn't been picked off

already. I'll want to draw her out of a public place where people will see and be able to identify the fellow who snatches her. I'll need a note of some kind from you to do that.

"After the snatch, you'll get a few telephone calls warning you not to notify the police, and demanding thirty thousand dollars. But you report the business to the cops in spite of that warning, and so the kidnapers bump the girl. I'll fix it so her body will be found. That's the thing roughly; there are details that may be changed or elaborated. How do you like it?"

"It's splendid. But——"

"But what?"

"What about this man who does the abducting?"

Casco chuckled. "The best part of it. He'll think it's a real snatch. I have just the man for the job. He's a notorious gangster and killer who's hiding out here. He has to leave the country and will welcome the chance to make a little extra money before he goes."

"But can you trust him?" Graves asked in bewilderment.

"Trust him hell! I can kill him, can't I?"

CHAPTER II.

RED'S FATE.

DENNY O'NEILL sat at a table with Viola Porter in the Club Moderne, the supper room of the St. Mark Hotel.

A girl with nice legs and a thin, flat voice was singing in a dance intermission.

Viola, smiling across the table, picked up the words, "Love is the thing," and sang the chorus through softly, her lips and eyes playfully

provocative. Suddenly she put her hand over the table, dropped it on Denny's, and asked: "Do you believe that, Denny?"

"Believe what?"

She pouted. "Believe that love is *the* thing, of course. Do you? Do you believe that it's not only *the* thing, but *every* thing?"

"I believe in the filthy lucre that your greedy ancestors wrung from the——"

"Denny! Can I help my money?"

"No. No more than I can help being a starving reporter blowing two days' pay on a siren."

She laughed. "What do you want me to do with my money?"

"Get rid of it quickly. Then I could get a swell apartment for forty a month, and we'd have twenty for gin, sixty for groceries, and a hundred to blow and save for the education of little Viola."

"And clothes?"

"We've got clothes," he said rebukingly.

"Well, I'll get rid of my money. I'll have it all in three weeks, Denny. Then I'll buy a newspaper and make you managing editor at six hundred a month. We can live on that, even if the paper doesn't pay."

"I won't be your gigolo."

A waiter asked their pardon and thrust an envelope into Viola's hand.

"Why, it's from my uncle! Excuse me, Denny; I guess I'd better read it. I hope nothing's happened."

Denny's eyes roved over the room, rested briefly on the doorway. A slim, tight-coated young fellow with delicate features and red hair stood, hat in hand, in the entrance. For just a second his eyes engaged Denny's, then he moved slightly and turned his side to the room.

"I'm sorry, Denny," Viola said. "But something's happened. I've got to go."

"That's too bad, honey. Waiter! Let's have the check."

"No, Denny, please. I have to go at once. Uncle sent some one for me."

"What's up, Vi?"

"It's nothing, Denny. Please don't ask me more now. Later perhaps I'll be able to tell you. Call me to-morrow."

She read the brief message from her uncle again as she moved fleetly across a corner of the dance floor to the doorway. Funny that he should be facing a tax inquisition at this time of the night! She glanced at her watch. Ten forty! She supposed he'd been there all evening. And it was over her taxes! What a pity that he should get in trouble over her taxes! Maybe it wouldn't amount to anything. She remembered once before they'd been sent for like this, and, when they both arrived at the post office, they were given a refund on some tax they shouldn't have paid.

She glanced up at the slim, red-haired youth in the doorway. "You're——"

He smiled and said, "Mr. Perry. Mr. Graves is at the post-office building. I have a machine outside."

She went through the crowded lobby, speaking and nodding to acquaintances. Outside the hotel, a taxi starter came forward, but the young man waved him away and led Viola to a black sedan.

He opened the right door for her. She saw some one in the back seat and stepped back involuntarily.

"My mother," the young man explained.

He snapped on the small dome light, and Viola saw a plump woman of about forty-five. The woman nodded and smiled as Viola climbed in beside her.

The car moved away from the curb, turned out into traffic. The woman made small talk with a persistency that was wearying to Viola who was worrying about her uncle.

The car turned right, drove on a block, turned right again.

Viola leaned forward. "That's not the way to the post office!"

The older woman turned her smiling face full upon Viola. "Don't you worry about the destination, miss. You just leave that to us."

"What do you mean? Stop!"

"Be quiet or this gun will go off and make a nasty mess of your stomach!"

Viola whitened, strained away from the weapon that was prodding her side. The woman beside her smiled. "That's right. Take it easily. Just relax."

Unconsciously slipping into the jargon of Denny, Viola asked: "Am I being snatched?"

The woman beamed. "That's it, dear, you're being snatched."

Viola thought of kidnappings wherein, after desultory attempts to collect, the kidnapers and kidnaped had never again been heard from; of others wherein the money had been paid and in exchange a mutilated body had been delivered.

"I'm in danger," she thought, "but, if I'm careful and do nothing to arouse these people's fear, I should emerge safely. I must keep cool, and do nothing to antagonize them. They want money, and, thank heavens, I have it."

The car came to a desolate subdivision of few houses and many vacant lots. It stopped before a house that had no neighbors in an entire block. The driver left his seat, opened the door, and with a wave of his hand urged Viola out of the car.

She saw a revolver in his right

hand, and felt again the prodding weapon of the woman. They walked down the driveway at the side of the dark house. A door opened and Viola was pushed into the house. For a moment she stood in darkness and her abductors became vague but threatening forms.

A light was turned on, and Viola saw a second man framed in a doorway between the kitchen she stood in and the hall beyond it. He was tall and slender with chilling blue eyes in a face that was pale and thin. He held a revolver loosely, but, when the woman closed the door by which they had entered the house, he put the weapon in a pocket of his coat.

The red-haired youth grinned proudly. "We got her."

"Obviously," the tall thin man said. "Bring her in here." He moved out of the doorway.

"You hear that? Follow him."

Viola was pushed forward and came to a dining room. A new fear clutched her heart like an icy hand. Why hadn't these kidnapers masked themselves? Why had not her eyes been covered when they drove her to this desolate house?

She turned slightly to face the woman. Surely, from one of her sex she could hope for some sympathy and understanding.

The woman was standing in the dining-room door. The revolver hung loosely from her hand. Her face was expressionless as it stared at the back of the red-haired youth who had taken her from the St. Mark, and who was now talking quietly to the tall thin man. It was a face that was neither plain nor pretty, neither good nor bad.

The hand that held the revolver was a square, thick competent hand. Soft and smooth, it looked like a hand that would have been more at

home in a kitchen's flour bin than fastened around a gun.

But as she watched silently, the hand stiffened slightly; a finger moved around the weapon's trigger, and the revolver rose. Viola tensed, moved slightly. The woman smiled reassuringly, but the revolver jumped up a foot.

It was pointing full upon the back of the red-haired youth. The woman's hand rose above the level of her hip. There was no threat in the woman's smiling, placid face. Viola could see no menace in the pointing gun. The red-haired youth was one of the band. He had drawn her into this trap with that forged letter. But even as her mind was occupied with these thoughts, the gun moved slightly, spat red flame, and thundered through the house.

The red-haired man hollowed his back, turned spirally, and sank slowly to the floor.

Viola screamed. The smoking gun jerked around, thrust its menacing muzzle into her stomach. There was no smile now on the older woman's face.

A voice that seemed very remote said: "That was well done, Emma!"

CHAPTER III.

THE GHASTLY FIND.

DENNY O'NEILL sat staring at the Club Moderne entrance for long minutes after Viola had disappeared with her red-haired escort. Jazz droned across air that was sweet-scented and smoke-laden. Dancers looked curiously, sympathetically at the "ditched" reporter. A waiter stood attentively near the table, eyes downcast on a check that had been called for but not paid.

Denny was unaware of this notice. He was thinking of the note Viola received, of the young fellow who had waited for her in the corridor.

He had not seen the fellow clearly, yet he had a feeling that he disliked and mistrusted the man. Viola had seen nothing wrong with the note. It must surely have been from her uncle, and yet—

Denny stood up. The waiter reminded him of the check, and Denny handed over a bill and left too large a tip. He went to the telephone room and called the Graves home.

He spoke to a servant, then to Mrs. Graves.

"This is Denny O'Neill, Mrs. Graves. I'm sorry to trouble you. I asked for Mr. Graves."

"I know you did, Denny, but Mr. Graves is in bed. I didn't want to disturb him unless it's important."

"I'm afraid it's very important, Mrs. Graves. I was with Viola at the St. Mark and she got a letter from Mr. Graves telling her to meet him some place. She went with the man who delivered the letter."

"Just a minute, Denny!"

He heard Mrs. Graves call hysterically to her husband. Then, after a moment, Graves's voice, heavy with sleep, said: "Yes, what is it, Denny?"

A moment later he was running through the lobby of the St. Mark to the cab starter. Several taxi drivers had seen the red-haired youth and Viola get into a black sedan, but nobody had noticed the sedan's license number.

Denny jumped from a taxi and took the stairs into police headquarters three to a stride. He ran into Jim Lucey in the corridor and drew the detective into a corner.

"Listen, Jim. Viola Porter's been snatched! Not twenty minutes ago from the St. Mark with a forged

letter supposedly written by her uncle, Thomas Graves, chain-store man. I was——"

"Yeh. Graves telephoned five minutes ago, said you'd be down with a description. You're that way about the girl, aren't you? That's tough."

"He was slim, short, delicate face, red hair, and weighs——"

"Don't get excited, Denny, and come in here. I think I can show you a picture of the guy," Lucey said.

"If you know him, let's go get him."

"Easy, kid. Come in. Take a look."

"That's he!"

"Sure?"

"Positive. What's this?"

"Come on, Denny, never mind reading it. Bagg's getting a car. You can come along. That picture you saw is a photograph of Red Stipa. Kansas City wants him. He looks like a choir boy, but he's bad. Machine gunner. Kansas City wants him for a cop murder. We've known all that for two weeks, but we didn't know he was in town until a few minutes ago, when a guy phoned in a tip that he's hiding out in a shack back of Moran's plumbing shop on Haggard Street."

With Bagg and Denny, Jim Lucey picked his way through a fantastic pattern of rusted water heaters, iron sinks, and worn-out piping toward a two-storied frame ruin. Denny and Lucey went to a front door; Bagg waded through débris to the back. Lucey stalked softly across a patched porch, tried the door that hung aslant, and discovered it was locked at the very instant some one called: "Who's there?"

The voice was high and shrill.

"Police!" Lucey replied in tones

loud enough to reach Bagg behind the house. There was a short silence.

"What do you want?"

"Open up!" Lucey called and drew his revolver.

They heard movements within the building. Through one of the few windows whose glass had not been replaced with cardboard, a strip of yellow light leaped erratically. A muttering voice complained in inarticulate whimpers. The light jumped uncertainly toward the door.

A key turned grudgingly, and the door opened a foot to expose a woman with long strands of disheveled gray hair, an oyster-blue eye, and a thin hand that clutched a coal oil lamp.

"Well?" she demanded shrilly.

Lucey let the woman's lamp shine on the badge lying on his open left palm. "A criminal is hiding here! We've come to get him."

The door opened wider. "Come in," the woman invited.

Lucey and Denny entered the building. A homemade table, a few straight chairs, and a couch with broken springs that penetrated shredded upholstery, furnished the room.

The two men faced the woman holding the lamp. She was small, and of some vague age between fifty and eighty. Her face was lined, and her cloudy eyes were set far back in deep sockets. A worn cotton nightgown hung from her bony shoulders like a mantle of cobwebs.

"There's no one—nobody but me," she said plaintively.

Lucey nodded and closed the door.

"Just the same, I'll have to look around. I have a warrant."

They went through the rooms of the lower floor, down a lopsided staircase to a cellar, and at last up to the second floor of the house,

where large and lofty bedrooms were unfurnished.

There was nothing to indicate that any of the rooms, except the one used by the old woman, had been recently occupied.

"That's a tip for you," Lucey grumbled.

The woman awaited them in the front room downstairs. The oil lamp trembled in her hand. Sheepishly, Lucey put his gun out of sight.

"How long have you lived here?" he asked.

"Two years. Mr. Moran let me come after my boy went to prison. I had no money."

"What's your name? Who's your boy?"

"Mary Connolly. My boy is Joe Connolly."

"Well, sorry to disturb you, mother." He pressed a dollar into the crone's hand. "Good night."

"Good night, and Heaven bless you, gentlemen."

She locked the door, and they saw the light move toward her bedroom.

"Are you satisfied?" Denny asked.

The police detective shrugged. "That's the way of ninety-nine per cent of all tips. You saw how it was."

"There could be a secret room," Denny suggested.

"Do you want to go back there with pickaxes?"

"I want to do something with a pickax," Denny admitted. "While we're doing nothing here——"

"I know how you feel," Lucey said. He stood in the center of that junk-filled yard looking back at the house. The building had settled. One end was noticeably higher than the other. A balcony above the slanting door had fallen into complete decay and juttred crazily with railing gone and floor boards hanging at all angles. It seemed incred-

ible that the husk of a dwelling housed any humans, least of all Red Stipa, a dapper dandy who took a manicured finger to his gun.

Bagg joined them, grinning slyly. "Well, as I said before, who do you suppose is kidding us?"

They started to the street. The rear wall of Moran's plumbing shop loomed before them. Against it, packing cases and barrels were piled. Lucey waved his flashlight negligently over the débris. He started, gripped Denny's arm, as the light fell upon a shape that was neither barrel, box, nor water heater.

The three ran forward. Lucey took one look and said, "Get to a phone, Bagg!"

The beam of his light had fallen upon the sprawled body of a thick-featured, flat-faced man with short, black mustache.

"Back of the head caved in," Lucey said. "A hammer, I guess, or possibly the butt of a gun. Know him, Denny?"

"No."

"I do. Name's Malkin. He works for a private dick named Casco."

He bent over the man. The dead man carried a .38 revolver that was fully loaded. In his pockets, Lucey found a sack of tobacco and some cigarette papers, twenty-four dollars, and a few letters that appeared to have nothing to do with the man's murder.

The detective stood up, sweeping his flashlight over the near-by ground. A few feet from the body they saw a machinist's hammer.

Bagg came running back to them.

"Stick by the body," Lucey said. "Come back to the house, Denny."

The old woman came to the door again, grumbling complaints. Her wizened face crinkled into a smile when her lamp fell on Lucey's features.

"Come in," she said. "You ain't thinkin' I lied to you?"

"Get some clothes on. Now this place is going to get a search."

"Why, mister?"

"A man's been murdered out in the yard."

"Murdered! Heaven help us! Who is he, mister? Who got killed?"

"A private detective, Malkin."

"Murdered!" the crone muttered. "Murdered, you said!" Her lips moved feverishly, but the words they formed were inarticulate. Then raising her voice she said plaintively, "I don't know nothin' about it. I'll get dressed right away. Right now."

Lucey followed her to the bedroom. He looked into the room, then closed the door to permit the woman to dress. For five minutes he stood with Denny in the dark poverty of the living room.

They heard a sigh from the bedroom, then a whimpering mutter. From a great distance came the softened cry of a police siren.

"Hurry, mother!" Lucey called.

She didn't answer.

Lucey and Denny stared at each other. The detective flung the bedroom door open.

The old woman lay across a pile of tattered quilts. Her tired face was fixed in death. The air of the room was almond-scented.

CHAPTER IV.

MOLLIE.

L UCEY and Denny stood in the entrance of a walk-up apartment in the five-hundred block on Goff Street. There were twelve mail boxes with telephones outside the door. Lucey's eyes swept across the

names on the boxes. He pressed the buzzer on a box that said, "Henry Casco."

"Casco, this is Lucey, detective bureau. Want to see you."

Casco asked if it wouldn't keep till daylight, then released the door latch.

The private detective's apartment was a front one on the third floor. He'd gotten into a pair of trousers while Lucey and Denny climbed the stairs.

"What's up?" he asked, giving Lucey and Denny a sharp, short glance.

"Malkin was murdered a couple of hours ago in the yard behind Moran's plumbing shop on Haggard Street."

Casco's Adam's apple jumped up and down his throat.

"Murdered!" he repeated.

Denny wondered why every one had to repeat that word.

"What was Malkin working on?" Lucey asked.

Casco shook his head. "Not a thing."

"What have you and Malkin been up to?" Lucey asked quietly.

Casco shook his head again. "Nothing! Why?"

"Well, if Malkin wasn't working on a case, some one with a husky grudge gave him the bump." Lucey's voice rose. "I was just thinking if you and he had been up to any tricks, why, you might be next!"

He lowered his voice. "Mrs. Casco awake?"

Casco shook his head. "That's all right; she's out of town. Who found the body?"

"I did."

"Hm-m-m! How'd you come to stumble on it?"

"We got an anonymous tip that Red Stipa was hiding out down there."

Casco's cold eyes brightened sharply. "Then Malkin must have got the same tip. I guess he figured to hog the reward and Stipa got him."

"Know Stipa?" Lucey asked.

"How could I?" Casco countered. "Stipa never operated out here. I know his rep. Gangster. Cop killer."

Denny, with unusual self-effacement, stood apart, listening to the questions and answers, watching every shifting expression on Casco's lean and mobile face. He didn't like the man, didn't like his kind, the tricky, shady private detective who lives a weasel-like existence on the fringes of the law. He didn't like the man's reception to the news of Malkin's death—and he wondered if it was news to Casco. There was a cautious, fencing quality to Casco that might be the man's habitual manner, and might not. His every word was too well studied; his every expression seemed to have been too well rehearsed.

"There was a woman down there," Lucey said. "She lived in a shack behind the plumbing shop. When I told her Malkin had been murdered, she went into the next room and drank hydrocyanic acid."

Casco frowned. "Tch-tch! Is she dead?"

"Yeah."

Casco nodded his head vigorously. "That certainly would be Malkin's mother."

Lucey almost bit his cigar in half.

"She was an odd character," Casco said. "A recluse and a miser. Malkin gave her fifty or sixty dollars a month; he'd have given her more if she'd lived decently. A little nutty, I guess. Her husband deserted her and left the old lady with four kids. She had such tough sledding that it made a miser out of

her. I'll bet you find four or five grand hidden down in that house."

"But she called herself Connolly."

"And told you her son was in prison," said Casco.

Lucey nodded.

"Then she asked you for four bits?"

"I gave her a dollar," Lucey admitted.

"Well, when she went off her bean and began panhandling people and living the way she did, Malkin told her he wouldn't give her a dime if she used his name. So she took the name of Connolly and adopted an imaginary son in prison. That was a stall to get her rent free from Moran. I wouldn't tell you all this, only now Malkin is gone, I guess it can't hurt him."

"That would seem to knock the theory that Stipa was hiding out down there and rubbed Malkin out," Lucey suggested.

Casco shook his head. "I've always suspected the old lady ran a sort of hide-away down there. Perhaps she was concealing Red Stipa, and Malkin tumbled and tried to take him. When you told her Malkin was killed, she probably felt responsible for his murder."

Lucey nodded but said nothing.

Casco crossed to the open windows looking down on the street. His chest rose and fell with deep breathing. "Malkin's body still there?" he asked.

"Yes."

"I'd like to go down there," Casco said.

"I was waiting for you to say that," Lucey remarked.

Denny O'Neill walked through gray streets to the apartment of Malkin's widow. The night had been consumed in chasing rumors, tearing out walls of the ruin behind

Moran's plumbing shop in search of a secret room, and in champing at telephones. Now, at six in the morning, the situation was exactly as it had been at eleven. Viola Porter had walked out of the St. Mark Hotel, climbed into a black sedan, and vanished.

There had been one telephone call to the Graves home. A voice said Viola was safe, that she would be well cared for, so long as Graves followed certain instructions that he would receive later, but that she would be slain if he notified the police.

The call was traced to a telephone booth in the B. & S. M. station. Graves's line was tapped and the police were awaiting further calls.

Denny came to the address he sought and entered an apartment house that had a lot of chipped gold furnishings in its lobby.

After some argument, Mollie Malkin opened her door. She was a very dark brunette with lively eyes and small features that were both delicate and hard. Her eyes and skin were clear. She hadn't been in bed and she hadn't been weeping on the night of her husband's murder.

An open magazine lay on a chair; beside it was a taboret with a bottle of very brown whisky and one glass.

"That was tough about Malkin," Denny said.

"Yeah," she agreed. "Ben had his faults, but he wasn't a bad guy."

Denny passed cigarettes. She took one and offered him a drink, going to the kitchenette for another glass.

"The cops think they'll get the fellow that got Ben," Denny O'Neill remarked.

"Yes? Listen, I've been nearly crazy in here all night by myself. I'm glad of your company, Mr. O'Neill. But what's the angle? Are

you looking for a statement for your paper—a sob story of a widow's grief—or are you stooling for Lucey?"

Denny laughed. "If I was stooling for Lucey, would I be here? Nobody thinks you gave Malkin the ride. But what do you mean, you've been here alone all night? Didn't Casco come up?"

"No, the rat. He only telephoned."

"What do you think Malkin was doing down there?" Denny asked.

Smoke funneled through her lips and nostrils. "A dick told me he went there to get Red Stipa."

"Did he?" Denny asked.

She shrugged. "You should ask Casco that."

Denny smiled. "Eliminating this Stipa, who do you suppose might have wanted to rub Malkin out?"

She frowned and was silent.

"That's not bad whisky," Denny said, and filled the two glasses.

He studied the ceiling for a minute. "Mrs. Casco's out of town," he remarked casually. "Funny she went away the night Malkin was killed."

The woman turned hard eyes on Denny. "What's funny about that?"

"Do you know her?" Denny asked.

"I've never met her."

"Well," Denny said slowly, "they tell me she was crazy about your husband. And Casco knew it! It's reasonable to suppose he also knew Malkin went down to Moran's plumbing shop pretty often. You know what Casco's saying?"

She stared at him in suspicious silence.

Denny crushed a cigarette, poured more whisky in the two glasses, and continued: "Casco says Malkin and his mother ran a hide-out for crooks.

That Malkin just used his job for a stall."

Her body writhed on the chair. She flung one knee over the other, then started tapping on the taboret with a shiny, long-pointed finger nail.

"You know how the cops came to find Malkin so quickly?" Denny asked.

"Well?"

"They got a tip."

"I heard that."

"Did you hear who phoned the tip?" Denny purred.

"You don't know," she said emphatically.

Denny smiled. "Casco!"

"You're guessing now."

Denny winked slowly. "If you called the cops and slipped the tip on some one they wanted, d'you suppose they'd plaster your name on front pages? Don't you think they'd cover you? Well, they covered Casco. All tips are anonymous."

Her fingers clung tightly to the arms of her chair.

"It was Casco who told them Red Stipa was down there?" she whispered incredulously.

Denny nodded. "Don't you get it? Stipa was hiding out down there. The reward on Stipa was for seven or eight grand. That was more than Casco could pass up. He phoned in the tip. Maybe Malkin got wise and beat it down there to get Red out before the cops arrived. Some one got him!"

Mollie Malkin filled her glass. "Listen, all that's goofy. You don't know what you're talking about. Have you got this much straight? Did Casco phone that tip?"

Denny drew a deep breath and launched the most appalling lie of his life. "That's straight. Casco phoned the tip!"

Mollie Malkin drained her glass,

then refilled it. "Have one yourself," she invited thickly.

Denny nodded. "Don't you see how it all fits? Casco knows his wife is in love with Malkin. His first plan was to trap Stipa, Malkin, and the old woman all down there. But something happened to make him change his mind. He wanted to use Stipa for something. So when the cops went down they didn't find Stipa, but they did find Malkin—dead! His mother was in too deep to be dangerous to Casco. He knew it—knew what she'd do. She couldn't shout 'copper' so she killed herself. Malkin running that hide-away gave Casco a swell chance to revenge himself for his wife. But when he figured on some other scheme for Stipa, he took direct action on Malkin. See how that fits with Casco sending his wife out of town? She was in love with Malkin, goofy about him. Casco had to get her out of town because a woman won't alibi for a man she's quit loving when his successor is found murdered!"

Mollie poured a drink that bubbled over the rim of her glass to the taboret, to her knees, and to her chin as she poured liquid fire on her rage. She flung the glass to the floor.

"He's rotten!" she snarled. "The double-crosser. The hide-away was Casco's racket. He had the underworld connections. He talked Malkin and the old woman into it. The rat! Malkin loved me! Me! Me!"

Denny nodded sympathetically.

"Ben Malkin never looked twice at that flabby cow, I tell you. Have you ever seen her? Imagine him quitting me for her!" She laughed raucously.

"Yeah, imagine it," Denny agreed. "But that wouldn't stop her from falling in love with him!"

CHAPTER V.

BURNING WRECKAGE.

DULL light made yellow oblongs of the windows in Casco's apartment. Denny O'Neill, watching from the street, saw a hatted shadow move across a room.

He retired a short distance down the block to his coupé. With the skill of a detective, Denny had shadowed Casco throughout the day.

There had been two telephone calls to the Graves house: one at five in the morning demanding thirty thousand dollars for the return of Viola; the second an hour later saying that the negotiations were terminated because Graves had broken faith and notified the police of the girl's abduction.

Denny's visit to Mollie Malkin was a secret he intended to keep for the time. When he had wheedled the information from her that Casco owned the hide-away, he had realized that the private detective was the man behind the snatch. He might have given the information to Lucey, but he was afraid that an overzealous police department would have acted prematurely. Casco might be held on suspicion, but, meanwhile, what would have happened to Viola, held captive by a killer?

Better, Denny thought, to watch Casco. The man would have to be in communication with his confederate, and, if Denny watched him long enough, sooner or later, Casco would lead him to Viola. Despite the telephoned message that the abductors had ended negotiations, Denny could not believe that Viola was dead, or that she was in great danger. The kidnapers wanted money, and it didn't seem likely that they would

abandon hope of getting it so quickly.

From his coupé, Denny saw the light in Casco's windows go out. In another two minutes the private detective was driving his car out of a basement garage.

Casco drove indirectly to Larkspur Park, a subdivision that had flopped. There was little traffic in the dreary neighborhood, and Denny had to drop far behind Casco's car. The detective's car wound in and out of empty streets, and then suddenly Denny could see it no longer.

He drove to the end of the subdivision and worked back systematically. In fifteen minutes he found Casco's car parked near a small bungalow.

Denny drove on, turned a side street, doubled back a full block, and parked at last behind the shelter of an empty house. He started across lots to the detective's car.

At first he saw no light in the building, then drawing nearer he saw the reflection of a flashlight jump across a window. An instant later the front door opened and Casco came from the house.

Denny stood motionless while the detective crossed the walk, got into his car and drove away.

He watched the tail light diminish to a red dot, then crossed the street to the house.

There was an atmosphere of utter desolation to the place. The yard was overgrown with weeds; a window in the front of the house was broken, and no hint of light escaped the building.

Denny walked down a driveway at the side of the bungalow. Looking up, he saw all the windows were opened a little way from the top. It seemed impossible that this defenseless, abandoned-looking place could be the prison of a kidnaped

woman. But Casco had come to this house—had been in it fifteen or twenty minutes.

Denny came to a porch, went up its few steps, and tried a door. It was locked. He went back to the side of the house and, after listening beneath a window, vaulted to its ledge.

No sound, no whispered warning came from the house. Denny closed the upper window and raised the lower. Taking a revolver from his pocket, he put one foot into the house, then drew the rest of his body through the window.

Quietly he edged along the wall, and, when well into the room, struck a match. He was in a bedroom. He held the match until it burned down to his finger tips while his eyes sought evidence that the room had been recently occupied.

Following the wall, he came to a door. Passing beyond it, he immediately struck another wall and knew he was in a hall. His groping hand found another door. For a few seconds he stood in the doorway, then, moving quietly, holding to the wall, he stepped into a room. He went a little farther, opening a match box as he moved. His toe touched something resiliently soft.

Icy coolness struck the back of his neck. He dropped to his knees, the unlighted match still in his hand. His hand encountered flesh that was smooth and very cold. The match fell from his fingers. His hand moved slightly and his fingers were entwined in a woman's hair.

Horror numbed him to an icy stillness. His dry lips moved soundlessly to form the name, Vi!

Before he could move, before he could strike a match to light the dead face, an explosion thundered deafeningly in his ears.

The house rocked dizzily. Tiles

clattered, timbers roared with strain and snapped like cracking whips. The floor was swept from beneath his feet, and he was falling into a black void. He struck solidly on piled furniture and wreckage. A wall crashed and he was buried in an avalanche of plaster. He tried to move. His body felt heavy, dead. Then a great weight fell on him, pinning him, smothering his face in plaster. A roaring noise buzzed in his ears.

He tried to free his arms, and, failing that, tried pressing his body upward against the weight that pinned him down. He twisted on one side, got his face clear, and breathed air that felt like hot sword points going into his lungs. Then he edged a little farther on his side and felt some of the deadness go from his legs. He got his face into the open, clear of the débris. His eyes smarted fiercely from the dust.

The roaring noise increased and the air was hotter, sharper. He got an arm free, used it to haul himself along on his side until he was entirely clear of the wreckage. The basement was brightly lighted except for clouds that appeared to roll from wall to wall.

For a second his dazed senses made this phenomena as incomprehensible as the roaring in his ears, as the burning heat of the air.

His eyes swept over the basement and picked out a mattress that was slanted against a distant wall. Flickering flames played along it and Denny realized that the shattered house was a fiery pit.

He clawed his way over and around obstacles to the only corner of the basement that was dark. Glancing back to where he had lain, he saw splashes of red meet suddenly and roar upward in a ten-foot tongue of flame.

He crawled up shattered furniture, thrust his head into soft pillows of smoke, and, coughing and gasping, groped for a window. Writhing like a cut worm, he came into the open air and lay for a minute on the driveway.

Smoke rose from the roof in a black cloud. Flames curled up the walls and struck like fiery serpents at the eaves. Another explosion shook the building. Black and red objects rose in the air, described wide arcs, and fell clattering down.

He got to his feet, started to run to a vacant lot, and thought of Viola. Gusts of intense heat climbed from the fallen house and rolled over him like waves. To move into what was left of the house was suicidal, impossible. And the body he had touched was dead.

Streams of water struck red embers and rose in hissing clouds.

The bungalow was a cold, black ruin. Police and firemen combed the charred pile. The man's body was found first. Near it was the shell of a woman's hand bag with a blackened compact.

The body of the woman was gathered from fragments scattered over the basement. A fireman said she had been trapped in a room directly over a store of explosives.

Denny and Lucey, standing apart from the others, said nothing.

CHAPTER VI.

RESCUING A CAPTIVE.

BATHED, in a change of clothes, and refreshed by a few hours' sleep on a headquarters cot, Denny O'Neill sat with Lucey in an office of the detective bureau.

"Anthropometrical experts identified the man as Red Stipa," Lucey said.

"What about the poor woman?" Denny's eyes were red-rimmed, dry and hot; his mouth was taut.

"Stipa was a police character," Lucey explained. "We had something to go on. If he'd been nothing but a handful of cinders those guys in the identification bureau would have spotted him; just the sort of job they like. With the woman, it's different. We've nothing to go on with her. We found an arm with a bracelet on it. And we got a few other pieces of jewelry. Graves identified them, and then we showed him the body."

"Well?" Denny said sharply.

"He fainted," Lucey said. "We revived him and he took another look. No one could recognize her. But from the jewelry, Graves said it must be Viola. I went out to his house while he was still at the morgue. I took some of the jewelry with me and showed it to Mrs. Graves. She identified it as belonging to Viola. She looked pretty sick. Then I asked her who was to benefit by the fortune her niece was soon to have inherited."

"That was rank." Denny said bitterly.

"Sure it was, but not so rank as your ribbing of Mollie Malkin. Well, when I asked Mrs. Graves that, she stiffened and said with a lot of dignity, 'I do!'"

"What's the sense of all that?" Denny asked. "The thing to do is to bring Casco in and make him talk. I don't know why you haven't done that already."

"Denny, my boy, that woman isn't Viola!"

"I hope you're right," Denny said quickly. "If you're not——"

"I am right. And if your feelings

weren't blinding your judgment, you'd agree. You say you touched the face just before the explosion and it was cold as ice. Casco hadn't been in the house fifteen minutes. That means he must have killed the woman long before he made that trip to set off the explosion. The only motive for the explosion was to render the woman's body unidentifiable."

"If she wasn't Viola, who was the woman?"

"How would I know that, Denny? Perhaps some unfortunate Casco picked up through an employment agency. But it wasn't Viola. I'll stake my life on that. Casco wanted that body blown up and destroyed by fire so that, when Viola's jewelry was found beside it, the body would be identified as hers. We've checked with the owner of the property and learned that Stipa rented the place a week ago under another name. He signed a year's lease and paid two months' rent in advance. The snatch was phony, Denny. I'm convinced of that. The whole business was rigged by Casco to make us believe that Stipa kidnaped Viola, and that they both died when explosives he was storing in the basement of the house became ignited."

"Then bring Casco in," Denny urged. "Make him talk. That's the quickest way to clear the whole business."

"Not yet, Denny. I want Casco to take us to Viola first. If we pull him in, his wife, or whoever holds the girl, may get in a panic. If Viola's alive now, as I'm sure she is, we don't want to scare Casco too much until we have her safe."

"Well, how are you going to make Casco lead you to Viola—and when?"

"I'm going to follow up your line with Mollie Malkin. We have

Casco under observation now. His office and apartment phones are tapped. If he doesn't make a call in the next few hours that gives us the tip we want, I'm going to pay him a visit."

"Let's go now. What's the sense of stalling?" Denny demanded.

"No. Not yet. I don't know about taking you along. If I thought you'd behave yourself and not fly at his throat, I'd let you come."

"Listen! I'll be good. You can't leave me out of anything. I'm going crazy doing nothing."

Denny and Lucey found Casco alone in his office. The private detective nodded casually and jerked his hand to indicate chairs. "Anything new on Stipa's fire?" he asked.

Lucey glanced at the headlines of a paper spread across Casco's desk. "Nothing. Graves accepted the body as that of his niece; that's the latest."

Casco smiled thinly, stroked his chin, and asked: "How do you suppose they got trapped like that? Asleep?"

Lucey shrugged. "That's not giving us any headaches. Coppers everywhere are rejoicing. I guess Stipa was set to blow up an armored car and got careless with cigarettes. It was tough on the girl. And speaking of the girl reminds me of what I came for. Is Mrs. Casco back in town?"

Casco glanced quickly at Lucey. His Adam's apple jumped up and down his throat. "No."

"When will she be back?"

"I don't know exactly."

"You can reach her by phone?"

"No. She's in the country. Why?"

Lucey frowned. "You know Malkin's wife?"

Casco nodded. "Mollie? Sure, I know her."

"Seen her since Malkin was killed?" Lucey asked.

"No," Casco admitted slowly. "Naturally, I called at her apartment to see if there was anything I could do. She wasn't home."

"No," said Lucey, "she's in the can!"

Casco's head jerked back. "She is? What for?"

"A copper picked her up on Wayne Street. She was liquored to the eyes and waving a gun. She was telling the wide world she was going to kill your wife."

"Kill my wife!" Casco brought out the words with a roar of forced laughter. "Why?" he asked incredulously.

Lucey sighed. "She has some crazy notion that Mrs. Casco killed Ben Malkin."

Casco's face became very tense. He laughed suddenly, noisily. "The woman's insane, Lucey. Beyond a doubt, mad from grief. Why the devil would my wife want to kill Ben Malkin?"

"Mollie says your wife was in love with Ben and killed him because he wouldn't leave her, Mollie."

Casco's face was drawn and gray. "But that's crazy, Lucey. You can't attach anything to loose talk like that. Apart from the impossibility of my wife being involved, such a theory wouldn't hold water. Where would Stipa come into the affair then? How would Malkin's mother's suicide fit in? You see, you'd have so many loose ends dangling."

Lucey laughed. "As one detective to another, eh, Casco?" He laughed again. "Well, don't worry. I positively don't believe your wife killed Malkin. Neither does the district attorney. But he can't have

a yarn like that circulating in the newspapers without doing something about it. He wants you to produce your wife for questioning. Then Mollie's yarn can be spiked, officially thrown into the discard. You see, your wife slipped out of town just about the time of Malkin's murder. If it wasn't for that, nobody would pay much attention to Mollie."

Lucey glanced at the telephone on Casco's desk. "The D. A. will be in his office to-night. He instructs you to bring Mrs. Casco there before eleven o'clock."

"I can't do that, Lucey. Impossible. She can't possibly make it to-night. I can bring her in at nine in the morning."

"That will have to do then," said Lucey. "So long."

At seven in the evening Casco came from a restaurant, got into his car, and drove directly toward the Sunas Mountains. Two police cars followed him.

For five hours the three cars pressed deeper into the mountains. Then near the little resort of Cotton Lake, Casco's car disappeared. The police stopped their machines and went ahead on foot to investigate. They came to a narrow dirt road. Fresh car tracks matched the tread of Casco's tires.

Lucey drew out a map and found the dirt road was unmarked. It seemed safe to assume that the road went only a short distance. The police cars were moved beyond the junction of the roads, and the party walked along the dirt road.

When they had walked for ten minutes, Lucey gripped Denny O'Neill's arm. "That's a light. Look, through those trees."

In five minutes the road ended abruptly in a small clearing on the

edge of a tiny lake. Two cars stood in the clearing. One of them was the car Casco had driven from town.

Lights showed in the windows of a lodge a short distance away. They were advancing quietly on this building when the lights were suddenly extinguished. A door opened and closed.

The police took cover in the trees that bordered the clearing.

Casco and a large, solidly built woman came from the porch to his car. The private detective turned his machine in the clearing, and a moment later the car with its two passengers had disappeared down the dirt road.

Lucey, Denny, and a second detective remained. The other officers returned to the highway to follow Casco.

They broke a window to enter the lodge, climbed through, and found themselves in a large living room. Opening into it were small bedrooms little larger than ship's cabins, a primitive bathroom, and a tiny kitchen. There were no closets, no obvious places of concealment.

"Viola!" Denny shouted.

There was no answer.

He went back to the kitchen, opened a door, and stood on a small porch. Swinging a flashlight, he saw what looked like the door of a large refrigerator or ice house. It was barred and padlocked.

"Viola!" he called loudly.

This time he heard a muffled reply.

Lucey found an ax and hacked out a staple. When the door swung open, a girl in a chiffon evening gown fell into Denny's arms.

Denny stopped his roadster before the Graves home. He took the stairs to the large porch three at a stride. A maid admitted him, and

Mrs. Graves appeared almost immediately in the large reception hall.

He took the woman's two hands. "I've got wonderful news. Viola's alive! She's in the Cedars Hospital and they've put her to sleep, but she's all right."

Graves stood at the top of a massive stairway. His face was lathered, and he held a razor.

"What's that, Denny?"

A moment later he was leaning weakly against the banister.

"Not alive, Denny! You're mistaken, Denny!"

"Not a chance, Mr. Graves. She's alive. A man named Casco had her. He and his wife have been arrested and are at headquarters now."

For a moment, Graves said nothing. Then removing his eyes from Denny, he called quietly to his wife. "Don't wait for me, dear. Order the car and go to the hospital at once."

He waited silently at the head of the stairs until the door closed behind his wife.

"Thank you, Denny, for coming at once."

"I thought Viola would appreciate my coming to tell you before the police," Denny said.

"She will, Denny."

Graves nodded and turned away.

Denny began slowly to climb the stairs. Before he reached the top, he heard the thud of a body falling. When he opened the bathroom door, Graves lay over the tub—dead!

Casco was being questioned in a room deep in the interior of headquarters. Denny sat alone in an adjoining room. From time to time he glanced nervously at a massive door. Sounds that seemed remote penetrated the door occasionally. When Denny heard them, he would arise and pace the room quickly,

drawing deeply on the cigarettes that he was lighting one from another.

For a time, the whole of headquarters was wrapped in deep silence. Then the door opened suddenly, and Lucey came into the room.

Denny jumped up. In Lucey's hard, weary face there was a peculiar satisfaction.

He nodded to Denny and went to a cabinet fastened to one of the walls. Pouring iodine over his knuckles, he said: "Casco cracked!" He turned to face Denny.

"Graves was short in a fortune he held in trust for Viola. He hired Casco to kill the girl. Casco told Graves the way to pull it was with a fake snatch. But Graves had admitted that he still had a couple of hundred thousand of Viola's money and Casco decided to get it all. His wife got hold of a jobless girl and

they killed her and planted Viola's jewelry around the body—then the explosion and fire.

"The scheme was to let Graves believe his niece was dead, let him identify this other body, and bury it as Viola; then, when he thought everything was jake, Casco was to show him Viola alive and shake him down for the rest of the money. It was smart enough, but Casco is a hog, and hated to split with Stipa and Malkin for their help; and I guess, too, he thought he'd be safer with them out of the way. He got to killing right and left."

Denny interrupted to say: "Graves still had a couple of hundred thousand of Viola's money?"

"Yeah. Ain't you lucky!"

"Lucky hell! I wish he'd shot the roll. I won't be a gigolo, Lucey!"

"Well, go to the hospital and tell it to her!"

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BEYOND DISPUTE

By DONALD VAN RIPER

Author of "Mark of the Dollar," etc.

ONE moment Bennett was just part of the crowd that filled Grand Avenue, between five and six in the afternoon. Save for those in the know there was nothing to distinguish him from the mob. Bennett kept his detective sergeant's badge pinned way around to the side of his vest, his gun snugged close, with no conspicuous bulge.

He neither swaggered nor loafed, for Bennett had been in plain clothes long enough to know the value of always seeming to be just

a commonplace, average citizen. But when the sound of shots came rattling from somewhere around the next corner, his muscles responded with automatic swiftness. And even with his first leaping strides, he contrived to get his service gun free from its holster.

There had been perhaps half a dozen shots. He had been too busy threading his speeding course through the startled crowd to make an accurate count. He whirled at the corner into Second Street. At the far end of the block he could see

a small, swift-growing group in front of Felch's Coffee Pot.

Felch's place was small, a one-man business, most of the time, one of those side-street spots where sandwiches, bakers' pies and coffee constituted the entire bill of fare. What kind of a shooting affair would be coming off in a place like that?

Just inside the door stood Pete Felch. The proprietor had just slapped down the phone. "I called headquarters," he said.

"What about?" demanded Bennett.

Color was slowly seeping back into Felch's fleshy face. However, instead of speaking, he pointed toward the back of the restaurant.

Bennett looked and saw a man sprawled there—face down and still. Just beyond the outflung hand in the aisle between counter and tables lay a gun like the one clutched in Bennett's grip.

Suddenly the truth struck home. Even as he approached the motionless form, before he could see a single feature of the man's face, Bennett realized that this was one of his own men. It was the Plain Clothes Officer Bill Mitchell who lay there, every line of his body taut with that horrible rigidity that comes with violent death.

"Drilled him square between the—the eyes," muttered Felch as he came closer to where Bennett crouched over Mitchell's body.

"Who did it?" rasped Bennett. "What went on? How'd they make a get-away?"

"A guy with a mask came through the back way. Must have thought I was alone. Bill Mitchell was sitting back against the wall. This bird pops in, sings for me to stick 'em up. Bill starts up, reaching for his gun. The mug with the mask sees him and lets him have it. That

gives me time to grab my own gun, and I start shooting. So the masked guy ducks out the back door again and slams it shut. And when I get there, I find he's swung the key over in the lock. I yell out the front door for some one to call the police. Then I grab the phone, tell headquarters to come along and make it snappy. And then you pop in."

"And you missed him," sighed Bennett.

"I didn't drop him," admitted Felch, "but I did wing him. He let out a yelp and a curse just as he slammed the door shut."

"Tell headquarters that? Give them what description you could?" demanded Bennett.

"Yes, I told them. But it all happened so fast. About all I could say was that the guy was short and thin, undersized almost, wearing a dark suit, and with a dark felt hat pulled down all round the brim. He was in and out. And poor Bill Mitchell was croaked. I had got in a couple of shots so blame fast that there wasn't time to notice any details. But I told them to get men to cover the other side of this block and to make it snappy."

"Good enough," approved Bennett. He straightened from the grim inspection he had been making. Poor Bill Mitchell! Bumped off by some hop-headed punk with no more sense than to make gun play over the few dollars that would be in Felch's till! "Maybe he's picked up now. The rotten rat, doing this for the little money you'd have in this place."

"That's just it," said Felch. "This afternoon I drew a lot of money at the bank. I was making a dicker to buy this building. I figured if I had a couple of thousand dollars, all in cash, to flash as a down payment, I might make a better

buy. That's why I had my gun so handy."

"And you hit the crook. Too bad you didn't croak him!"

"I wish I had," muttered Felch. The lunch-room man's little blue eyes were agate hard as he spoke. "Me and Bill Mitchell were friends."

Men afoot and others in squad cars were on the scene before Bennett and Felch could talk any more. All through the neighborhood the whistles had been piping the alarm. Bennett lingered only for the preliminary conference, the first quick check-up as the men from the homicide squad did their work. He waited only until the sinister little doubt he had felt about the story of Felch's had vanished. There was always the chance that a story such as Pete Felch had told was a fabrication and that the stick-up man with the mask was nonexistent.

It was Criger, the ballistics expert, who put the clinching O. K. on Felch's recital of what had happened. Criger's dark, thoughtful eyes had a magic way of reading the truth in the way bullets were splashed around the scene of a crime. Here he located the bullets which had splattered from the stick-up rod and the belated shots which had come from Felch's gun.

"The bullet which got Mitchell," said Criger, "was a .32-caliber. The one that nipped the crook was a .38." Even as he spoke, Criger was carefully pocketing Felch's gun, the one which had fired the .38-caliber slug into the fleeing crook. The gun was evidence now; whatever inspection was made of it would be carefully carried on in Criger's little office in headquarters.

Bennett knew all he wanted to know just now. The man he wanted was a runty, undersized crook, who

packed a .32-caliber rod. Also his man was some one who would play a stick-up all on his own if the chance came along. Not much to go on, but enough to make Bennett think immediately of Max Trampler! The one time the police had ever found a gun on Trampler, it had been a .32. On the same occasion there had been a crude mask in Trampler's pocket.

Max Trampler had beaten that case just as he had beaten so many others. Trampler, although he worked alone at times, was pretty close to "Duke" Geist, and Duke was a power in the underworld, able to pay the smartest mouthpieces plenty for springing his friends from the clutches of the law. Some such bitter thoughts were with every decent officer on the force just now. Trampler, or some one like him, had gotten poor Bill Mitchell. The crooked lawyers and the technicalities of the law were forever letting thrice-caught crooks go free. Even now, whoever it was that had gotten Mitchell, was undoubtedly under cover, waiting for medical treatment, having a triple-plated alibi built up by his friends.

The one chance which Bennett had was to follow whatever hunches he had without delay. To guess at the particular hide-out of any wounded crook seeking cover would be even more foolish than looking for the proverbial needle in the haystack. However, there was another bet which Bennett could make and did.

If it was Max Trampler, then there was the possible tie-up with Duke Geist. And suppose Duke Geist wanted a doctor in on the play.

Bennett followed his hunch through. He went straight to the block on Sixth Street where there was a doctor's row in the brown-

stone fronts where the aristocracy of another day had once resided. They were now ideal office locations for the doctors needed by the close-packed thousands of the Grand Avenue section.

Sergeant Bennett, like every other good copper, knew many things which could not be legally proved. He acted now on such a bit of knowledge—that Doctor Swinnerton had drawn many a regal fee for services rendered to Geist and his friends. The pay-off on such medical and surgical work was pretty heavy sugar. Doctor Swinnerton had long since learned that a medical man who would never talk could make a sweet living out of the underworld's questionable cases.

Bennett was ready and waiting in a taxi at the curb when Doctor Swinnerton came racing out from his office and jumped into the coupé which waited before his door. At Bennett's signal the taxi driver swung the cab away from the curb in pursuit. Bennett knew his driver, had used him more than once before. There was no need for any detailed, last-minute instruction.

Dusk was well begun as the pursuit started. It was almost dark when Bennett knew that it was at an end. Swinnerton had driven at a lively yet steady pace for more than half an hour. He had crossed the river and kept going until almost to the city line. Even before the end, Bennett, anxiously watching the tail light ahead, had guessed Swinnerton's destination.

He leaned forward and spoke to the driver. "If he turns in at McQuade's, drive past and drop me up the road a bit."

So far, so good! What had been a hunch a little while ago amounted to positive conviction as he stood there in the gloom watching the tail

light of his cab flickering away back toward the city.

McQuade's West Side Pavilion! Later to-night it would be all alight. There would be music, laughter and dancing. Off by itself, in the half-wooded loneliness of the city's fringe, McQuade's was just handy enough to the city to draw good patronage.

Back from the main building ran a linking structure which connected it with the smaller place which had been McQuade's first road house. It was this second building which was the object of Bennett's most unusual approach.

There was death here for any sergeant, or any other copper, caught snooping. If Swinnerton had come here to patch some one up, there would be others of the gun-packing fraternity somewhere about.

McQuade himself was tough enough. A man had to be tough to be a partner with Geist even in a quasi-legal enterprise like the West Side Pavilion. And if the Duke were here right now, there wasn't a hotter spot in which Bennett could be at work.

He sneaked his way to the darkened dancing pavilion. He went up, from a bench to a window top, thence to a pipe, and up to the roof.

From the far side of the pavilion roof, he peered down at the cars parked before the other building. There was Doctor Swinnerton's coupé with the lights still on. Ahead of it was a huge black sedan, the rear license plate visible by the light from the coupé's headlamps. Bennett read the numbers. He knew that car. It was Duke Geist's, and, when Duke rode the big sedan, he always had "Lefty" Calabrese along as driver and bodyguard.

McQuade! Duke Geist! Calabrese! As bad a trio as the city

could ever gather together in one spot!

Another car, a small one, was parked well over in the shadows. Was that the car that had brought a wounded man here?

There was only one way for Bennett to answer the questions which were popping in his mind. Somewhere in the upper rooms of McQuade's house, there would be plenty of answers. Lights shone here and there throughout the place. The most likely spot was in that third-floor wing where shadows on the ceiling showed that some one was moving about.

Bennett sized up the layout. From the pavilion roof where he was, he could cross the top of the connecting shed to the porch roof of McQuade's house.

From the porch roof he gained another story by shinning up a pillar to a balcony porch. From there he followed the gutter along the building until he reached the wing.

Once there, he had a flat roof again beneath his feet. Only a few feet away was the first of the lighted windows. He could hear voices in there now.

He was in as dangerous a place as he had ever known. To gain it, he had worked and toiled with infinite patience. It had been a matter of moving mere inches at a time, for, once he had taken this course, Bennett knew that a single telltale sound would easily spell his own death warrant.

It all took time—precious minutes—and, if his guesses were right, the chance of success lay in speed. Give Geist and his friends time, and they would frame a story that would baffle any efforts of the law to break down.

Straight down now was the ground beneath. Just a little way,

and he would be at the first window. But he must rest for a minute. That climb, the unceasing constraint of it, had not been easy. He must have been well over half an hour getting up here from the pavilion roof.

The decision to rest was a lucky one. He had just eased himself down on all fours when he heard the motor of the coupé starting up again in the yard. Swinnerton was already through with his work. And had Bennett been standing, instead of crouched down, the doctor might easily have noted him up there by the lighted windows.

Swinnerton's car backed and turned, and then, at a more circumspect pace than had marked his coming, the doctor drove away. Bennett waited until the motor sound was gone before he began edging his way over the last stretch to the windows.

He passed two windows. They were shut. The third one was open from the bottom a little ways. Here he could listen sight unseen to the men who were talking in the room beyond.

Thirty feet above the ground! Inside there were some of the hardest mugs in the city. If anything went wrong now, Bennett was in a bad spot.

He could hear Duke Geist's voice. There was a metallic hardness to it that was unmistakable.

"Now the doctor's gone. That slug is out of you, Max. But the hole's still there. So here's the dope if any coppers stumble around here."

"Coppers? Here?" cut in Lefty Calabrese. "What'd ever bring the coppers here? Didn't Max tell us that he got away clean?"

"You never can tell," responded Geist. "And anyway," he added, "keep your mouth shut until I go all over the story again."

"O. K.," came Calabrese's answer. "Shut up, Lefty!" This last was a full-throated roar which Bennett recognized as McQuade's voice.

"The story," continued Geist in a twanging, steely voice, "is that you, Max, came here to see if McQuade would hire you as a watchman. Naturally, McQuade asked you whether you knew anything about guns, and you said you didn't know too much."

"That's a laugh," came Max Tramler's high-pitched comment.

"You shut up, too!" ordered Geist. "You're lucky you've got me to get you out of this jam. Croaking a copper is bad stuff. Most fellows in my shoes would figure you were too hot to handle. I'm risking plenty trying to give you a break, see?"

Max Tramler's voice in answer was chastened down to a respectful whisper. "Sure, I know, Duke. I didn't mean nothing by laughing. I appreciate it. Go ahead, I'll shut up."

"The story is that we were all there. You and McQuade talking about you being a watchman here, me present as McQuade's partner, and Lefty sitting in as the fellow that drives my car. Well, here's the story like I told you before. McQuade hands you a gun, a .38, and says, 'Think you could use that?' Remember now!" Geist's voice paused for emphasis. "Word for word, we tell the same story. McQuade says, 'Think you could use that?' And you reach for the gun saying, 'Well, maybe I could.' Just then the gun goes off. See? Accidental shooting. Then we phoned for Doctor Swinnerton. I fixed it with the doctor that he got the phone call at just half past five. It took him almost an hour to drive out here."

"Maybe some one knows he left

at a little before six," came McQuade's protest.

"Swinnerton and his nurse will swear we phoned at half past five. Now tell me how could Max Tramler be accidentally shot at half past five out here and be pulling a stick-up down at Felch's dump at quarter to six. There's the story, and we all stick to it. And with the slug out of you, Max, and the doctor careful to heave it away on the drive back to town, how can the coppers get a case that'll hold? Now if they had ever nabbed you with that slug out of Felch's gun still in you, there wouldn't have been a chance to save you. But now Swinnerton even goes back and enters up in his records that he treated you for this *accidental* gunshot wound. Just in case some copper asks him—see?"

"Yeah," said McQuade, his voice rumbling in protest. "And what copper's ever going to swallow that yarn?"

"None," answered Geist. "But a jury will. At least, a jury won't convict any one with a doubt like that. There's our story. Most likely, we'll never have to use it. But if we do, we stick to it. Understand?"

Bennett, crouching below the window, realized that, in spite of the fact that he actually knew who had killed Mitchell, he was still a long way from having proof which would get a conviction.

It would be his word against the combined, prearranged evidence of these rats. And there was Doctor Swinnerton and even his nurse ready to give perjured testimony to protect Max Tramler.

Bennett was suddenly aware of the deadly silence which had come over the group inside. He crouched still lower. Some one was moving in there, getting nearer to the open window.

He risked an upward glance. There was the shadowy menace of a man's head staring down at him. A gun, trained full upon him, glinted in the light from within the room.

"Well—well—if it ain't Sergeant Bennett. Don't make a bum play, sergeant. You might fall off that roof—with a sudden attack of lead poisoning."

He was caught dead to rights. When a man like Lefty Calabrese trained a rod like that, the better part of sense was to take orders.

"I thought I heard something out here before," muttered Calabrese. "Maybe I wasn't wise to take a look. Stand up, sergeant! Back to me near the window while I frisk you, and then maybe you'll step inside with me and my friends."

Bennett obeyed. One false move and that gun would speak. He felt his service gun and blackjack being taken from him.

"And now," ordered Calabrese, "step right in through the window!"

Bennett did not hesitate. Better to be fully trapped than to chance anything against the nervous itch of Calabrese's trigger finger! His one play was to go inside. Once these mugs thought he was completely at their mercy, there might be some loophole of escape which he could take.

Inside he saw that Trampler lay in bed against the far wall. McQuade stood by the door, a burly physical barrier to escape in that direction. Calabrese, having ushered Bennett in, now stood by the open window.

Tilted back there against the wall was Duke Geist's chair. Bennett doubted if—even during the moments of Calabrese's startling discovery of the eavesdropper—Geist had so much as stirred from his place.

Geist's big mouth twisted in a

mocking smile, and his bleak eyes measured Bennett.

"Well, if it ain't my old friend the sergeant. Seems like it's a tough day for plain-clothes men. I suppose"—his mouth opened even wider in grinning scorn—"I suppose you heard us all hashing things over."

Bennett nodded. "I did. And I more or less agree that you're a man of ideas, Duke. Even now, if I was to tell what I heard, you birds could stick to your story and some sappy jury would say I was a liar and acquit Max Trampler."

"No doubt." Duke Geist's hard eyes flickered with wicked amusement. "But even so, I guess we won't be able to take that chance. And, anyway, as long as you know the truth—if you told the boy friends on the force, just how long would it be before one of them, carelesslike, killed poor Max? You cops sort of get careless that way when one of your friends gets the works."

"You won't make things any better by bumping me off."

"That's for me to decide," observed Geist. "And I can't see as there is anything else to be done. After all, there's just us—and you. You got wise somehow or other. You shinnied up here and listened in. You must have come alone. If you hadn't, by now there would be the devil to pay around here. Now suppose you should just disappear, shouldn't ever show up again. You know how it is when some one weights a dead body down before slinging it in the harbor."

Bennett moistened his lips. He knew now that his life was forfeit. And he was caught worse than the most miserable rat in a trap. He had followed his hunch. He knew beyond the least doubt that Max Trampler had killed Bill Mitchell.

Because of that knowledge, Duke Geist would decree that he, Sergeant Bennett, must die.

"The other men on the force aren't sleeping, Geist. They'll get Trampler for what he did to-day. And they'll get every one of you if anything happens to me."

"And so I should turn you loose to have them get us quicker. Not in court—but ganging us, eh?"

Bennett was silent. Out on the roof under the muzzle of Calabrese's gun he had not dared to risk a move. Now these men were so sure of his helplessness, so confident because he was unarmed in their midst, that even Lefty Calabrese had put away his gun.

The window beside Lefty Calabrese was still open. Beyond the window was the flat little roof. At least out there he would have one chance out of a million to live. Here, when Geist was tired of talking, he would have no chance.

He waved his hands in a gesture of abject despair. He stood there, simulating in every line of his body the beaten misery that Geist and the others expected him to show.

Duke Geist laughed. "Not so good, eh, sergeant?"

"No!" Bennett contrived to force a sound almost like a sob in his throat. "No, not so good, Duke. But maybe if I give you my word that I won't talk——"

"Your word!" Geist laughed heartily, while the others, even the injured Trampler, echoed his scornful mirth. "The word of a dick to me? Why, say who ever——"

Geist stopped short. Bennett had whirled. His great fist swinging like a maul went straight to the angle of Calabrese's jaw. Bennett put everything he could into that swing. It was on that one punch that he counted most.

Lefty went crashing down. There was a roaring curse from McQuade, a startled yell from Geist.

Almost before Lefty's body touched the floor, Bennett was at the window, straddling the frame. He whisked through to the little roof just as a gun banged away at him. There was the crash of glass. The shot had gone high.

No need for stealth now! He must make it fast this time. He leaped to the gutter and reached the balcony porch. He went to the far side and let himself down at arm's length. Again there was a shot, and again it went wild. He let go and landed on the main porch roof below. Then he hurried to the side, toward the place where he had seen the cars in the yard.

From the porch roof to the sedan top he went, then on again to the ground. Meanwhile, he could hear Geist and the others cursing as they ran down the stairs.

The sedan, big and powerful, was his best chance. If he left them that, they would overtake him in no time. If he failed to start it in time, the game was up.

Just as the house door slammed wide and a gun spat fiery death into the night, the big sedan lurched into a wide sweeping turn. Around the yard the big car swerved, fairly keeled over, then leveled off as Bennett aimed straight for the drive to the highway.

A big burly figure stood there, raising a gun to fire at Bennett. It was McQuade who had alone sensed the strategic importance of the driveway.

Bennett swung over the wheel. The big car lurched, bumped something, and then Bennett, with all his strength, set the wheel straight again. There was a scream as the bump came.

Bennett grinned as he settled to driving toward the city. This car must have had its share of get-aways, but this was the strangest of all—a get-away for the very man Geist had sentenced to die. The great motor roared into the road.

From behind him came the glare of pursuing headlamps. Down, down, down, went Bennett's foot against the accelerator. The night air whipped past the open window at his side with a frenzied screaming. The big sedan was swaying with the unleashed power.

But the lights in back came on fast, clinging tenaciously there at his tail.

There was a curious crackling. Something whizzed past his ear. A snowball effect appeared in the windshield. They were firing at him—not only firing but hitting the mark as well.

Bennett had made his run. The first two miles were covered. Ahead, the streets would be crowded. At the first jam up in traffic, those fools in their killing frenzy would surely get him.

He took one more great gamble. He paced the sedan just a shade slower. The lights of the pursuit seemed fairly to leap toward him. Ahead was an intersection. He slapped down the brake. The sedan careened to the shrilling pull, and then as it steadied he swerved for the turn.

As the sedan turned, he heard the wheels of the pursuing car screeching to the belated braking and turning. From the corner came the horrible crashing impact that meant his enemies had not made the turn.

He brought the sedan down to a slower pace—a mere forty miles an hour—as he pushed on toward headquarters. He wondered just how the score stood now. Had he merely

tossed McQuade aside back there as the big fellow tried to stop his get-away? Had the crooks in the pursuing car come through that crash alive? Or had one or more of Geist's pack met swift retribution for their sins?

Bennett parked the big sedan in a back street. He went through a driveway and to the back of the police building. There was a strange frenzy in possession of him now. He knew what he wanted to do and that he would do it.

He went upstairs. Luck was still with him. He encountered no one. The door of the little office where Criger held sway as departmental expert on ballistics stood wide. Criger was out.

He was in there a few minutes, then out again and away by the same route by which he had come.

Bennett was going back. He headed the big sedan resolutely on his way toward McQuade's once more.

He made one stop on the way, pulled up at a corner to ask some one in the crowd a question.

"Accident?" The man shook his head decisively. "I'll say so, mister. One dead guy and another all messed up. They say the dead man was Duke Geist. You ever hear of him? He's a race-track sport or something. You see, they tried to take this corner too fast."

Bennett yelled his thanks and drove on.

At the head of the driveway of McQuade's West Side Pavilion, he stopped the car. He had swung the lights to one side. There they stayed. McQuade's body was there. Strange but it lay almost in the same position as Bill Mitchell's body had lain this afternoon in Felch's lunch room.

Bennett did not need to make a

close inspection. McQuade had caught the full impact of the sedan. No doubt of that! At least two killers were gone. Bennett flicked off the car lights and marched with guarded steps toward the house beyond the pavilion.

There was no one about. He watched warily as he entered, advanced with due caution up the stairs inside. No one! Not a soul to stop him!

Only on the top floor was there a semblance of a challenge. And that came only as Bennett swung open the door to the room where he knew he would find Tramler.

Tramler had flung back the covers, and was half out of bed. He was dressed for the street. One arm was slung outside his coat and bandaged.

Tramler's free hand held a gun which lurched upward at the sight of Bennett. Halfway up the motion started as the gun in Bennett's hand banged out one deadly shot.

Bennett smiled grimly. He was glad that Max Tramler had tried to defend himself. After all, it was better that way.

Bennett did not linger. This time he left the sedan where it stood. He would have to walk a bit to the bus line, but that was just what he wanted to do.

Back to headquarters he returned, this time straight through the old familiar doors between the green lights, right upstairs. On the way he met Criger.

"Say," called Bennett, "mind if I wait in your office until you come back?"

Criger didn't mind. He was sure he would be upstairs again in a few minutes.

When he came back, they talked. The news about the accident to Duke Geist had come in. "And

Lefty Calabrese will be a cripple for life at best," added Criger.

"Good job," sighed Bennett. "Less trouble for us coppers."

"Poor Bill Mitchell!" Criger sighed.

"I'd like to even that up."

"Try and do it," responded Criger. "Grab any one! Have all the proof in the world, and they beat the case anyway. If any crook was carrying a bullet out of Felch's gun, some rotten doctor has it out now. And meanwhile——" He reached over to his desk and stared. "That's funny. I'd have sworn that gun was farther back on the desk than that."

"It was," replied Bennett. "I was handling it just now. I was looking at it and thinking about how Bill Mitchell got killed and how that gun of Felch's might have got the killer."

"Yep," said Criger. "If only we could find a crook with a slug out of that gun in him, we'd have a case that he couldn't beat. Even a dumb jury believes me when I get on the stand and tell them how every bullet takes the characteristic marks from the gun that fired it."

Bennett yawned. "If only we could find the guy!"

It was later that night that the news broke about McQuade and Max Tramler. And it was not until the next day that Criger made his announcement that the bullet which had killed Tramler had come from Felch's gun which was now in his office.

"Felch must have nicked him twice," said Criger. "And yet there was one fresh wound in his arm all bandaged up. And this other one with the bullet in his heart. Why, it doesn't make sense!"

Bennett was standing there, with some other dicks listening. "The

same gun—the same bullet. That's proof enough. I've heard you bragging often enough that the word of a ballistics expert was one thing beyond dispute."

Criger looked up sharply. He started to say something. Then he checked himself. "And I still stick to it," he announced after a mo-

ment's pause. "The bullet that killed Max Trampler came from Felch's gun. After all, it must have been Trampler that croaked poor Bill Mitchell. So why worry how he got it as long as he did get it. It's as I said—a bullet and the gun that fired it make evidence beyond dispute."

JUVENILE WORKERS

ACCORDING to recent reports, over twenty-five thousand factory workers under eighteen years of age are injured annually. Three thousand under sixteen are on the casualty list, and eleven hundred are permanently disabled. This is given as one of the strong reasons why youngsters should be in school rather than working long hours every day in factories. It is believed that youth does not have the judgment to avoid these accidents.

It is said by leading physicians that the body does not attain full strength until the age of twenty-one or over. Freedom and play are two big factors in keeping the mind as well as the body in good condition. Undernourished, overworked bodies mean unbalanced minds which turn to crime or other form of unhealthy existence.

In 1930 statistics show that twenty thousand, six hundred and twenty-five children between the ages of ten and fifteen were working in the textile industry. During the past fifteen years laws have been passed to alleviate the sufferings of the child workers.

In 1924, Congress passed a resolution giving Congress the power to limit, regulate and prohibit the labor of persons under eighteen years of age, but until twenty-two more States ratify it, it cannot become a part of the constitution.

One of the good results of the depression period is that adults are being put to work in mills, instead of the children, as there have not been places enough for both.

CONVICTS AND SLEEPING SICKNESS

THERE was a theory in Mississippi that mosquitoes carry the sleeping sickness germ. In an effort to find out if there was any truth in this, prisoners were used for tests. Ten prisoners were willing and anxious to allow themselves to be used for the purpose. The governor promised executive clemency to those who agreed.

First, monkeys were given the disease; mosquitoes were allowed to bite these monkeys, and in turn bit the ten selected prisoners. Eight days later, none of the men showed any symptoms of sleeping sickness.



MEDICINE FOR THREE

By FRANK B. LONG, Jr.

MRS. SIMPSON was glad when the voices ceased in the room across the hall. Mr. and Mrs.

Perkins were always quarreling, and their angry voices jarred on the sensitive ear of Mrs. Simpson. They were undesirable tenants, she told herself, as she slipped into her dressing gown and crossed the room to the lounge in the corner. Undesirable, noisy—decidedly not nice people! Still, they paid their rent, which was something in their favor,

and Mrs. Perkins wasn't nearly as bad as her husband. It was Mr. Perkins who was really undesirable. He nagged his wife and disturbed every one in the apartment.

She was glad that they had stopped quarreling. All morning she had dusted, scrubbed and polished, and the lounge looked enormously inviting. "It's awful to have a temper like that," she murmured as she sank into the soft cushions. "If I was Mrs. Perkins, I'd not put up with it."

DS-7B

With an air of superior righteousness, Mrs. Simpson settled herself on the lounge. She had scarcely closed her eyes, however, when there came a knock on the door. Mrs. Simpson groaned. Her nerves were in revolt, and she felt unequal to the task of entertaining a visitor. But the knocking was too insistent to be ignored. "Who's there?" she called. "What do you want?"

"It's Mrs. Perkins. May I see you a moment, dear?"

Mrs. Simpson scowled. Here was an additional annoyance, another obstacle to complete repose. Why couldn't the woman remain in her room where she belonged? She was always asking favors and making a nuisance of herself. Grudgingly Mrs. Simpson got up and crossed to the door.

Apparently Mrs. Perkins had decided not to put up with it any longer on that particular afternoon. Her small pretty face was wreathed in smiles, and she was obviously pleasure bent. She apologized for disturbing Mrs. Simpson. She would be gone, she explained, for several hours, and Mr. Perkins was so careless about his medicine. Would Mrs. Simpson remind him in half an hour?

Mrs. Simpson nodded. "Yes, dear, of course," she said. But inwardly she was fuming. What did she care about Mr. Perkins and his old medicine? Was the man a child that he couldn't look after himself?

"Thank you so much," said little Mrs. Perkins. "I'll be back about seven. It's bridge, you know. We meet every Thursday afternoon, and I can't get out of it."

Mrs. Simpson nodded. "Of course, dear. I'll see that he gets his medicine on time."

When Mrs. Perkins left, Mrs. Simpson returned to the lounge and

lay down. But she couldn't sleep. She felt uneasy without knowing why. For five minutes she tossed about while the clock above the mantel ticked out the seconds with a disturbing clarity. The silence was so pervasive that it made her uneasy. Almost she wished that Mrs. Perkins was back in the room across the hall, that the usual hubbub would recommence. She wasn't inured to silence after all. It was too rare and unfamiliar a blessing.

It was so rare and unfamiliar that, when it was dissipated by a voice from across the hall, she experienced no indignation. The voice was confident, breezy, assured, and it was raised, not in anger, but in a jubilant friendliness that disarmed resentment. Mrs. Simpson sighed and resigned herself to the inevitable. She had listened before to Mr. Perkins's radio, and she knew what to expect. Mr. Perkins had a predilection for lively music, for jazz.

Mrs. Simpson was somewhat disdainful of jazz, but, as sleep would not come, it was better to be entertained than to toss restlessly in silence. Perhaps if she listened passively, drowsiness would creep upon her unawares. The announcer was preparing his audience for a very special treat. "This is Station W E V," he affirmed. "I take great pleasure in introducing—" And so on, and so on! It was all very soothing. Mrs. Simpson liked the music, too. The treat was a banjo player of exceptional ability, and he got better as he went along. Mrs. Simpson had nearly fallen asleep when there came another station announcement.

The voice of the announcer aroused her to complete awareness. She gasped and sat up. "Mr. Perkins's medicine," she muttered. "I nearly forgot!"

A moment later she was tapping on Mr. Perkins's door. "Mr. Perkins, please, may I come in?"

Abruptly the radio was turned off.

Mrs. Simpson waited expectantly. There was no further sound from within the room. After a moment, she tapped again. "Mr. Perkins," she pleaded. "May I come in? Please, sir, it's important."

No answer! The silence astonished Mrs. Simpson. Surely Mr. Perkins was up and about for he had just turned off the radio! A strange man! Sulking, no doubt, because the program had displeased him. In impatient disgust, Mrs. Simpson reached for the doorknob and turned it about in her hand. The door creaked slightly as it swung inward.

Mr. Perkins was lying upon the floor. He had fallen from his chair and was lying doubled up in the center of the room. His ashen face was streaked with blood. He seemed to be hugging himself. There was blood upon the rug also and it glistened repellantly in the late afternoon sunlight.

Mrs. Simpson was frozen with terror. Her eyes refused to move from the horrible sight. She was certain that Mr. Perkins was dead. She did not stoop to investigate, for she was certain. The hideous and unnatural silence, Perkins's posture, the blood were unmistakably convincing. She did not stoop because nature had not fashioned her of obdurate oak. She was too cowardly and hysterical to do anything but reel back against the door jamb, and cry out in frenzied alarm.

Detective Sergeant Barnes was a lean, stern-featured little man, but his eyes when he smiled were kindly and sympathetic. He sat opposite Mrs. Simpson in her room and questioned her with patient insistence.

"Now please, Mrs. Simpson," he said. "I want you to try and remember just when it was you heard the radio turned on."

Mrs. Simpson sat hunched in her chair. Fright and anxiety looked out of her eyes, and her cheeks were very pale. "I can't tell you exactly," she said. "But it must have been about five minutes after Mrs. Perkins left."

"That would be somewhere in the neighborhood of four o'clock?"

"Yes."

"You're sure of that, eh?"

Mrs. Simpson nodded.

"And when was it turned off?"

"Just after I knocked on Mr. Perkins's door. It was turned off in the middle of a tune."

"It was a banjo player, you say?"

"Yes, sir. One of the best I'd ever heard."

"You're sure the station was W E V?"

"Yes, sir. I heard it announced. I couldn't be mistaken. It was announced twice."

"In a loud voice?"

"Yes, very loud."

Mr. Barnes shook his head. It was all so utterly bewildering. He had the gravest doubts as to whether Mrs. Simpson was telling him the truth. He doubted her, doubted the evidence of his senses, doubted everything and every one connected with the affair. It was uncanny, incredible. He didn't know what to think.

He had made a cursory examination of the room, and had discovered that he was up against something appalling, something that transcended all his experience. In the first place, he had found the window locked from the inside. That, in itself, was sufficiently startling. But if Mrs. Perkins had committed the crime, it presented no problem. It

was Mrs. Simpson's statements about the radio that stuck in his gullet. Mrs. Simpson's statement virtually eliminated Mrs. Perkins as a suspect, and turned the locked window into a paradoxical affront to his sanity.

He didn't let Mrs. Simpson know that he was bewildered and perturbed and completely at sea. He wanted to retain her respect. Briefly he reassured her, told her not to worry, and returned into the room across the hall.

The medical examiner was getting ready to leave. He had made a thorough job of his preliminary examination, and he explained calmly to Barnes that Perkins had been shot once in the head, and twice in the stomach. "At close range."

"How close?" asked Barnes.

"Three or four feet, I should say."

Barnes bit his lip and stood for a moment staring down at the still form on the floor which had been decently covered with a sheet.

Barnes had seen all he had wanted to see of it during the first half hour of his examination, but he couldn't resist visualizing again the motionless, doubled-up form, slightly corpulent, which lay sprawled beneath the covering. The face had worn a startled and horrified expression, as though the tragedy had occurred with unexpected suddenness.

Barnes's gaze shifted to the chair. It was a large, old-fashioned easy-chair, with velvet cushions, and its position in the room was conclusive evidence that Perkins had not been shot by any one on the fire escape.

The chair was invisible from the window, protected from view by an angle of the wall. Perkins had apparently simply fallen from the chair. The position in which his body lay, and the fact that the lower portion of his dressing gown still

adhered to the soft plush conveyed that he had been shot suddenly, and had slipped with a convulsive tremor from the chair to the rug. A half-smoked pipe, and an open book with jacket awry lay on the floor beside the dead man.

Barnes toyed with the possibility that Perkins had been shot in another part of the room and dismissed it as unlikely. It seemed more than probable that Perkins had been sitting in the chair quietly reading and smoking, and that he had been taken completely by surprise.

But to set all doubts at rest, Barnes examined the window again. He examined it painstakingly, pausing for several seconds to run his fingers along the loosened glass above and below the crack. The crack was in the lower left-hand corner of the upper pane, and it extended across the glass for several inches.

By pressing with his fingers, he could cause a slight aperture to appear. But the aperture was not wide enough to admit the muzzle of a revolver, and it was inconceivable that any one standing on the fire escape could have put three bullets into Perkins's person through such a narrow opening, even assuming that Perkins had paraded his bulk within a yard of the glass. And Barnes didn't believe that Perkins had done anything of the sort.

The medical examiner had left, and Barnes was alone in the room. He walked slowly about, examining the furniture, the knicknacks, and eventually, the radio. He had left the radio to the last because he was a little fearful of it. At bottom he was a sensitive and imaginative man, and he wasn't certain that the radio was perfectly harmless.

It was in a large oak cabinet, and

it stood well out from the mantel. He examined it very carefully. He noted the wave length beneath the arrow on the dial, and studied the wires running from the rear of the cabinet along the wall to the electrical connection in the wainscoting.

This preliminary inspection revealed nothing unusual or amiss. With a slight frown of disappointment, he turned the radio on and stepped cautiously to one side. In twenty or thirty seconds, the music came through and increased rapidly in volume.

He toned it down and waited. In about three minutes the music ceased, and a voice said, very distinctly: "This is Station W E V. You have just listened to Maurice Selingman and his concert orchestra."

Barnes had not touched the station dial. But now he did so, causing all the stations from 0 to 100 to pass before the indicator. There ensued a cacophony of devilish sound. Still standing safely to one side, he reversed the dial. Several times he ran the gantlet of stations, slowly at first, and then more rapidly. Eventually he restored the dial to its original position and shut off the electricity.

He had been dimly apprehensive that the cabinet harbored some hidden and sinister mechanism that ejected bullets when the victim dialed a certain station. He hadn't seriously entertained the idea. It was too much like something out of a book. It had been merely a tenuous possibility lurking in the back of his mind, and he was relieved when it didn't materialize. Without more ado, he got behind the cabinet and examined its contents.

The radio was perfectly harmless. Fifteen minutes later, he was

questioning a tearful and almost hysterical Mrs. Perkins in Mrs. Simpson's room. Mrs. Simpson was in the kitchen bending tremulously over a cup of very black coffee, and none of the other roomers had returned.

Mrs. Perkins's arrival had coincided with the departure of the medical examiner. One of Barnes's subordinates had met her at the door and conducted her in utter silence to Mrs. Simpson's room. Then, gently, he had broken the news.

Barnes was as considerate as could be. He never raised his voice, and only once or twice the suspicion in his mind crept to the surface.

"I'll be as brief as possible," he said. "I realize what a shock this has been, but I must ask you a few questions about what happened before you left. I want to go over it with you while it is still fresh in your mind."

Mrs. Perkins nodded. Her face was haggard and distraught, and tears glistened on her long, dark lashes.

"What is it you want to know?"

"Mrs. Simpson tells me that you and your husband were—well, quarreling, that she could hear your voices across the hall."

Mrs. Perkins nodded slowly. "Mr. Perkins was very temperamental, very easily upset," she said. "He wasn't well, and little things annoyed him. Our quarrels were just lovers' quarrels. We were devoted to one another."

"And when you left, he was reading a book?"

"Yes."

"Sitting in the chair, reading?"

"Yes."

"Mrs. Perkins, had your husband any enemies?"

"Not that I know of. He was

quick-tempered, but every one liked him."

"I see. There isn't any one, then, whom you suspect?"

"No."

Barnes rose slowly. "I guess that's all," he said. "Thank you, Mrs. Perkins."

Barnes was late getting home that night. He was a widower and careless of his hours. His son, aged thirteen, was waiting for him on the landing when he came up the stairs. "Gee, dad," he said. "What kept you?"

Barnes winced beneath the merited rebuke. "Sorry, Jimmy," he said. "I suppose you're half starved, but I couldn't help it. I was busy on a case—a tough case, Jimmy."

"Yeah?" Jimmy's eyes brightened perceptibly.

"Get your coat on," said Barnes. "We're going to a restaurant. I haven't time to cook anything now. Besides, I want to think."

"Yeah, sure," said Jimmy.

Ten minutes later they were seated opposite one another over a really excellent meal. Dining out was a treat as far as Jimmy was concerned. His eyes were bright as he sat watching his father think. Barnes's brow was furrowed, and he seemed indifferent to the food the waiter had placed before him. He sat toying with his fork and staring at the white tablecloth.

Jimmy was growing restive. "What is it, dad?" he asked. "Can't you tell me?"

Barnes raised troubled eyes and gazed at his son for a moment in silence. "I suppose so, son," he said at last. "You're a good listener, and maybe, if I tell you about it, I'll get a new slant on it. It's like this." Briefly he outlined the enigma,

pausing to smile at his son's obvious bewilderment.

"I don't get it at all, dad," murmured Jimmy. "Who could have turned off the radio if the window was locked from the inside?"

Barnes nodded. "That's what stumps me, Jimmy. That's why I said it was a tough case."

"I'll say. It's as crazy as they come."

"Mrs. Simpson heard the radio very distinctly. And she didn't turn it off. It was turned off before she entered the room. Some one was in that room ten seconds before she entered. Ten seconds. Think of that, Jimmy."

"Yeah, I'm thinking."

"What do you make of it?"

"It's got me. What did Mrs. What's-her-name hear over the radio, dad?"

"I've forgotten. Wait—no, no, I haven't either. Some sap was playing a banjo for nearly fifteen minutes. She said it was good, so it's my guess it was an ear-splitting performance."

"What station was it, dad?"

"W E V."

Jimmy started slightly. For a moment he sat silently thinking. Then he put down his fork and stared at his father in incredulous amazement. "But, dad," he protested. "It couldn't have been W E V. I was listening to W E V at four o'clock, and there wasn't any banjo number. I turned on the radio as soon as I got home from school, and listened in for an hour. There was a one-act play, and a couple of crooners, but no banjo."

Barnes was dumfounded. "Are you sure, Jimmy?" he asked. "Mrs. Simpson heard the radio at four. Are you sure you were listening in then?"

"I'm positive, dad. And if I'd

heard a banjo, I'd have remembered it."

Barnes knitted his brow, and ran his fingers thoughtfully over his lean, close-shaven cheeks. Jimmy sat watching him, a trifle awe-struck. Presently he asked: "Got a hunch, dad?"

Barnes was thinking furiously. "I'm not sure, Jimmy. Hunches don't mean much unless you've got at least a part of your case clear in your mind. And this business is a crazy tangle, Jimmy. There's something unnatural about it. It's like a dozen cross-word puzzles all mixed up together."

"But you have a hunch, dad?"

"Well maybe, Jimmy. It's a long shot in the dark, but I'm an old hand, Jimmy, at hitting the target with my eyes shut. I've done it without a glimmer of light to aim by. Sometimes you can get wind of killers just by the odor. But I've got a glimmer of light now, and that's going to help a lot."

The following afternoon Barnes returned to the rôle of inquisitor. He had followed his hunch, and it had led into unexpected places. He was confident that he knew something, and knowledge breeds assurance. Yet he was far from inwardly composed as he sat facing Mrs. Perkins in Mrs. Simpson's room. She was a strange woman, he told himself—enigmatical, deep, as wary as could be. There was one question he would have to ask, and his success would depend on the way she answered it. If she evinced no agitation at all, he would be compelled to admit that he was on the wrong track, that his hunch was worthless. He didn't let her suspect what was passing through his mind. His quiet voice was persuasive rather than threatening.

"Mrs. Simpson tells me that one of her boarders left last week without giving notice. He was an actor, and his name was James Wilson. Were you and Mr. Wilson on friendly terms?"

Mrs. Perkins seemed to start slightly. It was evident from the way she looked at him that she hadn't anticipated the question. Studying her, Barnes saw that she was reflecting rapidly.

"I scarcely knew him," she said at last. "Sometimes I'd meet him in the hall going out, and we'd exchange a friendly word of two. But that was all. He was a quiet, unassuming young man, but for some reason Mr. Perkins didn't take to him."

Barnes nodded. "I see," he said. For a moment he sat stroking his chin. Then, suddenly, he stood up. "Thank you, Mrs. Perkins," he said. "You've been very helpful." He hesitated. "I'm afraid, though, that I shall have to tax your patience a bit further. I want you to step across the hall with me for a moment. I know it will be a strain, but there's something I've got to get clear."

Mrs. Perkins frowned. It was obvious that Barnes's request disturbed and displeased her. But when she saw how insistent he was, she rose, nodding. "Of course," she said. "I want to help in every way possible."

It was a humid day, and perspiration trickled down Barnes's face as he accompanied Mrs. Perkins across the hall to the scene of the tragedy. He allowed her to precede him, but, as they came abreast of the door, he stepped quickly forward and grasped the knob firmly in his large hand. For a moment he stood as though listening. He seemed reluctant to push the door inward.

Mrs. Perkins coughed nervously. "I just want to make sure——" Barnes began and stopped. He stopped because what he had to say was of no importance. Only the *voice* was important. Loudly, and with an unexpected suddenness it arose from beyond the door, and every unspoken challenge in Barnes's mind, every suspicion, and threat, and accusation was caught up, and contained in it. Yet it was raised, not in anger, but in a jubilant friendliness that would have pleased and soothed any one less hideously guilty than Mrs. Perkins. "This is station W E V," it announced. "I take great pleasure in introducing——"

Mrs. Perkins's face twisted terribly. She clutched at her throat and drew the tip of her tongue across her thin, bloodless lips.

Barnes swung about and watched her as she retreated in horror from the door. "Listen," he said. "The banjo. Do you hear it?"

Her answer was a look of unutterable fright. She continued to back away, brushing the wall with her shoulders, and as she retreated the banjo thrummed out its death melody—plainly, unmistakably from beyond the door.

"It's the human banjo," said Barnes quietly. "It's your friend Mr. Wilson, standing beyond the window with a megaphone, my dear lady."

But Mrs. Perkins was no longer attentive. She was cowering white-faced against the wall by Mrs. Simpson's room, and there was an appalling, haunted look in her eyes, as though she had just awakened from some horrible dream.

Having summoned Mrs. Simpson, Barnes faced resolutely the unpleasant but necessary task of extracting a confession in the presence of a

reliable witness. In Mrs. Simpson's room, he stood stern-faced above the cowering, completely terrorized Mrs. Perkins, and fired his questions with the ruthless accuracy of a crack shooter.

"You didn't kill your husband, Mrs. Perkins?"

"No, no. I am innocent of that."

"Then Wilson shot him?"

"Yes."

"I thought so."

Mrs. Perkins moaned. "He did it; he planned it all. I didn't want to help him, but he made me."

Barnes's eyes narrowed. "But you *did* help him. You planned it together."

"I had to. But I didn't realize what I was doing. I was half mad with fright."

"As I figure it," said Barnes, "it happened like this. Mr. Wilson shot your husband. Then he climbed out of the window and you locked it from the inside. Then you came over here just as though nothing had happened, and told Mrs. Simpson you were going to a bridge party."

"Yes," moaned Mrs. Perkins.

"About five minutes after you left," Barnes resumed, "Wilson put his megaphone against the crack in the window, and announced: 'This is Station W E V.' Then he imitated a banjo—produced vocally a perfect imitation so that even Mrs. Simpson was deceived."

"Yes, yes, yes. It's all true. He could imitate a banjo or a violin. He did it on the stage." She lifted pleading eyes. "Please don't torture me any more," she sobbed.

The tenseness went out of Barnes's face. He sat down and mopped his forehead. "All right," he said. "All right. You've told me all I wanted to know. You'd better get her some coffee, Mrs. Simpson."

"How did the hunch work, dad?" asked Jimmy, when Barnes came up the stairs that evening. "Did you put it across?"

Barnes was tired and hot. But his eyes lighted up when he caught sight of his son waiting eagerly at the head of the stairs. "I sure did, Jimmy. I got them both. Mrs. Perkins confessed, and they brought in Wilson about an hour ago. Wilson, the human banjo. It was a great hunch, Jimmy."

"Gee, dad, that's swell. I want to hear all about it."

"All right," said Barnes. "Get your coat on. We're going to a restaurant."

Fifteen minutes later, Barnes was seated opposite his son in a shaded corner of a crowded dining room.

He leaned forward over his salad and emphasized his remarks with an upraised fork.

"As soon as you told me, Jimmy, that there was no banjo number on W E V, I did some strenuous thinking. I hadn't disputed Mrs. Simpson's statement about the station announcement. I had taken the radio pretty much for granted. It was dialed at the W E V wave length, and, when I turned it on, that station came through. It all seemed to hang together, and my suspicions weren't even aroused. I assumed that the radio had actually been turned on and off within the space of five or ten minutes. It was the most puzzling aspect of the case, but it never occurred to me that it was all a clever deception. You see, Jimmy, everything was so cleverly arranged that I was completely in the dark until you tipped me off."

He smiled. "The light began to break then. But it broke slowly. I tried to account for the station announcement in a dozen ways. I fired questions at myself and got some

pretty improbable answers. Was there a phonograph with a doctored record in it concealed somewhere about the place? I hardly thought so. I had gone over that room with a fine-tooth comb, and I was practically certain that nothing of importance had escaped me. I next thought of a talking tube concealed in the wall, with connections in an adjoining room. The idea was possible. I was turning it slowly over in my mind when I remembered the crack in the window.

"That set me to thinking furiously. A crack in the glass, some one standing beyond it with a megaphone, and—great Scott, yes!

"It wasn't so easy to account for the banjo, however. I could conceive of the station announcement being put over that way, but the banjo had me stumped. I thought and thought. And then I remembered that I had once heard a vaudeville actor mimic a banjo and other instruments on the stage. It's a rare gift, Jimmy. I don't believe there are more than fifteen or twenty human banjos in the whole of America.

"As soon as I had the idea firmly fixed in my mind, the rest was easy. What made it easy was the fact that Mrs. Simpson had informed me that one of her boarders was a grand-circuit vaudeville artist. The fact that he had cleared out three days before the crime was committed didn't help his case any. What I did, of course, was to check up on him by getting in touch with the theatrical agents."

"And what did you find out, dad?" asked Jimmy.

"Plenty. I discovered that Mr. Wilson had appeared in Philadelphia, Boston and New York as a pretty slick human banjo."

"Gee!" exclaimed Jimmy.

Barnes smiled and laid down his fork. "It was a good thing," he said, "that Mrs. Perkins got hysterical and confessed without stopping to investigate. I had a man planted in that room with a *real* banjo. When he saw the knob of the door turn on the inside, he announced the station and started

playing. That finished Mrs. Perkins. But if she had pushed past me into the room instead of backing away down the hall, Mr. Wilson might have escaped the chair. As it is, he hasn't a legal leg to stand on."

"Gee!" murmured Jimmy. "Aren't women simps?"

A TRAFFIC MENACE

IT is not always careless drivers who block traffic. Recently in Far Rockaway, New York, a lone squirrel tied up traffic and it took three policemen to break it up. The squirrel had his home in a tree which grew on the library lawn. He went foraging for food and mistook a telegraph pole for a nut tree. Finding nothing but steel wires at the top, he decided to descend, but by that time spectators were gathering from the streets, intent on watching the squirrel run along the high-voltage wires, expecting any moment to witness his demise.

When more than three hundred people had gathered, traffic was indeed tied up. The squirrel attempted to run down the pole, but was frightened by the crowd and ran along the wires to another pole, only to find the same hindrance there. Finally the policemen succeeded in keeping all automobile horns quiet, and pushing the people away from the poles. The squirrel was not long in seeing his chance and beat a hasty retreat to the ground and his home. No arrest was made.

STIFF TERM FOR EXTORTIONIST

A DRUG clerk of Vineland, New Jersey, was the first in that district to be punished under the new Federal Kidnap Law. The clerk had written a letter to a grain and feed merchant, threatening to kidnap his one-year-old child. Although the father of the child said he was willing that mercy be shown to the twenty-five-year-old drug clerk, the judge had other ideas about it.

"I will not stand for childhood being made the target of the criminal world," said Judge Welsh.

The drug clerk was sent to Federal prison to serve a five-year term.



THE SIGNBOARD TO LIBERTY

By WALTER C. SCOTT

Author of "Crook Eat Crook," etc.

THE prisoner stared, his eyeballs swelling, filmed with pain and despair. Not a thing could save him now. He would swing. The cell bars and his wife's grief-stricken face swam through his blinding tears. She had appealed to the governor and failed.

"Time's up, Mrs. Thorrg." Sheriff Coverett's cold voice crashed with deadly finality in Val Thorrg's ears.

Amelia's toil-scarred hand clung pathetically to his, then seemed to

be torn away. The bars bruised Thorrg's cheek as he jammed against them, staring, staring. Amelia's departing footsteps echoed in his ears like the fading sound rolling between the tight heads of a drum.

Presently he found himself at the barred window of his cell in the town jail, black rage in his searching eyes. Thorrg was under sentence of death for murder.

He looked into the thickening twilight and he could see Shore

Drive off where it skirted the high cliff above the sea front. Hate pulled his eyes to this quarter with a terrible fascination. Lightning blazed in red violence far out beyond the headland of the bay.

His eyes wheeled over the house-tops and were arrested in mid-swing by a clump of trees in the near courtyard, stirring in ominous puffs of wind. Above their swaying branches, he could make out, through the blue haze of dusk, the railed platform on the roof of Judge Stoneleigh's old house situated on Shore Drive.

Judge Stoneleigh had sentenced him to die. Hate surged through Val Thorrg. If he could only take the flint-hearted judge with him!

A square of light leaped from a doorway in the foreground just beyond the courtyard; it was the kitchen entrance to Tony's restaurant where Mrs. Thorrg cooked. He saw his wife there now, a big strong woman, broad-shouldered and high-chested; she was whetting a carving knife and she waved her hand with a poignant longing gesture at his window. A lump jumped into his throat.

It was tough on Amelia. A bad break for him! If he only had a chance—a glimmer of a chance—he'd show 'em. His heart sank. He became frantic with terror; his hairy hands leaped, and he shook the cold bars savagely. He wanted to escape and to run and run.

He remembered bitterly how he had been caught robbing Councilman Andy Wellman's home. In the fight to get away, he had killed the game and popular politician. Sentiment flared and ran high against him. No one stuck with him but Amelia. Tears blinded him and blotted out the sad figure of his wife in the kitchen doorway.

Sounds! Voices crashed against his eardrums—the dry, gritty tones of a hateful voice he knew to his sorrow. Judge Stoneleigh was talking to Sheriff Coverett. The judge's tones were indignant and threatening.

"Sheriff Coverett, you're a cheap grafter. I'm humiliated by my past association with you. Now, fortunately I'm leaving for the capital at nine o'clock to-night to pick up my family; I'll take the opportunity to lay my charges against you before the governor at once. You'll steal no more public funds."

The door slammed violently and the judge was gone.

Thorrg heard heavy footsteps in the corridor and then the sheriff's strained, rasping voice called:

"Hey, Gus!"

"Yeah, sheriff," the deputy answered, and lumbered by Thorrg's cell toward the office. Gus Gratz was broad, husky, heavy-jawed, and had close-set, crafty eyes.

"Thick head," sneered Thorrg, and listened keenly.

"We're in a mess, Gus." The sheriff's words came clearly to Thorrg. "Old Judge Stoneleigh's on the warpath. He's got us dead to rights on our pickings. What's worse, he won't listen but is going to tell the governor to-night. You know what that means. Come on. Let's figure this out."

A door slammed. Thorrg's wicked heart stirred. His neck muscles tightened.

The sheriff and a small ring of grafters had a good thing. The sheriff drew sums of money from the county treasury for the upkeep of prisoners; this tallied with the court records of his friend, the crooked Judge Sharpe. Prisoners sentenced by Judge Sharpe increased the cash withdrawal made by the sheriff.

But he made no reductions when prisoners were removed from the jail. Thus the expense item increased each month in proportion to the number of prisoners sentenced. The expense money not used, was cut five ways, and finally Judge Stoneleigh had uncovered the fraud.

A door opened, then banged against the wall. Thorrg listened. Footsteps approached. Thorrg sensed a hidden impact upon his destiny. A moment, and he saw the tall sheriff at his cell door. Keys rattled with a prophetic tinkle; the bolt of the lock shot back with an emphatic clang.

"Come out," said the sheriff in a harsh voice.

There was no one in the office; Thorrg stared insolently at the perturbed sheriff. Treacherous amber lights moiled deep in the sheriff's eyes, and he dropped his lids.

"How's pickin's, sheriff?" Thorrg taunted.

The sheriff's face went a lobster red. He stiffened; a spray of perspiration rested in a beady pattern on his brow. He looked at the prisoner, noted the hard brilliance of his eyes, the emotionless and ugly features, the flat nose, the face rigid like an image from an iron mold.

"Know something?" snarled Sheriff Coverett, his misgivings sharpening and deepening.

"I ain't deaf," Thorrg snapped.

The sheriff measured Thorrg with swift portentous glances. Into his worried but determined eyes there came a smoldering gleam of dread and also a vague wavering pity. For him there was no turning aside and his pulse quickened with a febrile rhythm.

"Thorrg, if I gave you a play, would you shoot straight with me?" demanded the sheriff. His glance steadied. The expression on his

heavy face held a startling mixture of fright and eagerness.

Thorrg's gargoyle head thrust forward sharply. The unleashed blood thundered in his head.

"Meanin'—what?" There was a convulsion of Thorrg's mouth muscles that intensified his ferocity.

"A chance to save your neck."

At once the rangy sheriff's figure assumed a sinister aspect that was not alien to Thorrg.

"You wouldn't kid a *dead man*, would you, sheriff?" Thorrg's leer was distorted by the pain of mingled despair and hope.

The strained lines of the sheriff's long face tightened with a swift ripple of excitement.

"I can give you a chance to even a score—for both of us," he said huskily. His eyes were hot with hate. "When you've done that, you can take it on the run, Thorrg. I'll hold back and give you all the breaks for a clean get-away."

"I'm to croak Stoneleigh." Thorrg laughed gloatingly, a goblin bleat of mirth, and poked his thumb into the sheriff's ribs. "Buddies—huh? You and me." The sheriff could see the responsive play of Thorrg's big muscles moving rhythmically in slow convulsions under his shirt.

"You heard us talking, Thorrg." The firm flesh of the sheriff's face seemed to sag, then his face hardened and became fixed in a vile slant.

"I got an earful. Say, Coverett, how you goin' to square yourself on my break?"

"You got away from Deputy Gus Gratz when he had you out for exercise."

Thorrg nodded, his eyes burning. Here was a chance for him—a desperate chance. He stared at the sheriff, boring him through and

through. A swooning hush, sinister in its unvaried quality, pervaded the office. Remote thunder growled ominously over the sea.

"After you've fixed his nibs, how are you getting out of town?" The sheriff's gaze held steady; but the blood began to boom above his ears.

Thorr's jaw set. "Say, I'll light outta here faster'n you can think. Just cop the judge's motor boat from his boathouse at the foot of the cliff and streak it down the coast, see?" Thorr was suddenly alive with foul energy. "Get some togs for me, and a chiv, a flashlight, and a chisel."

The sheriff nodded, swallowed nervously, and stepped into another room. Thorr heard him moving about and then he appeared at the door and beckoned. Darkness had fallen deep and thick.

"Here's your togs and here's your tools," said Sheriff Coverett huskily. "And put this ten-dollar note in your pants. How do you feel, Thorr? Pretty fit?"

"Sheriff, I'm walkin' on air." Thorr's grin was hideous, a mockery of merriment.

A few minutes later, cap pulled low on his head, Thorr passed out the back way, his nostrils twitching as he hungrily sniffed the moist, sweet air.

"Take the alleys and go easy—unhurried," the sheriff warned him. "And do a good job," he hissed.

"To the hilt," growled Thorr. He shook in a surge of hate.

The sheriff closed the door, locked it, and returned to his office. In a moment he was joined by crafty-eyed Deputy Gus Gratz.

"Set?"

"Thorr's on his way." The sheriff licked stiff lips. Then he unfolded the assassin's plan.

"Now," began Gus, "to be careful and sure, we ought to——"

"Cautious Gus," sneered the sheriff irritably. "Always imagining the worst. Don't start that stuff again. You just raise a racket—that's all. It'll work out very sweet from there."

"I'll wake the dead when I start," muttered Gus. "You think feeling won't get too strong for us?"

"Can't get too strong," said the sheriff nervously. "It'll be a swell show. I'll stay right here until things begin to move. Don't lose your head and alter plans; it's going to be a cinch as is."

"Sure. Thorr's like a mad dog. He'll get his man. And I'm a swell actor." Gus examined his gun. "But, sheriff, I'm a stickler for caution."

The sheriff sneered as he looked at the clock.

"Thorr's got three minutes' start, Gus. Better get going. Don't lose him! Good luck, and don't meddle!"

Gus nodded with a crafty and evil grin as he slipped out.

Thorr crossed Shore Drive and climbed the bank beyond. He walked quickly across the sodden stretch to the edge of the cliff. There were several paths, but he had no trouble for he could see the black square of a wooden sign against the red heavens when the lightning flared. In daylight one could read the word, "Stairway," on this sign.

From the stairhead here, iron steps zigzagged to a number of landings down the rocky face of the cliff to the beach one hundred feet below. Thorr descended, moving carefully. He didn't look back and so failed to discover a face peering cautiously after him.

On the beach Thorr walked swiftly across the sand to Judge Stoneleigh's boathouse. It didn't

take him long to pry the padlock from the door. Inside, he closed the door, turned on his flashlight, and measured the gasoline in the tank of the motor boat; then he ran the boat down the skids into the water, where he tied the craft to the jetty.

Back up at the head of the stairs, he stood by the sign and gazed into the desolation over the sea. The storm was coming up in crimson splendor and thunderous mutterings. Twenty miles down the coast, Thorrg had a safe pal. He ought to get there before the squall broke. The illuminated face of the town hall clock indicated eight fifteen. As he looked there was a sound like a footfall, edged and startling. Thorrg went rigid. A shadow of misgiving crept toward him, then receded. The silence was definite, almost like a living presence. Heebie-jeebies, he thought. "Hold your nerve!" he commanded himself. He must hurry. Hate drove him.

The street lamps were far apart on Shore Drive. In the sheltering darkness, Thorrg stealthily made his way across a vacant lot and into Judge Stoneleigh's yard.

There was a light in a window, and Thorrg went up to it and peered within. His pulse pounded as he saw the judge at a desk alone, the telephone receiver to his ear. Thorrg drew to one side. It began to rain. He laughed gloatingly.

At the back of the house Thorrg found a basement window, and, waiting for a clap of thunder, opened it with the chisel. He crept into the basement and up the stairs to the first floor. There was no light in the hall, and he went forward cautiously. A thin blade of light showed beneath a door.

Thorrg turned the knob, entered noiselessly, and, as the judge looked

up startled, he stabbed him with hate-driven ecstasy.

Back out in the yard Thorrg moved quickly. A wild yell from the house propelled him forward with a cowardly gulp.

"Murder!" bellowed a hysterical voice, vaguely familiar. "Assassin!"

Thorrg plunged away. There was a rush of wind and rain. Through the vacant lot ran the wild stir and shock of the storm. The lightning flared. Thorrg cursed for he was revealed.

"There he goes! Stop him! Murder!" bellowed the voice, now from toward the shore. "Judge Stoneleigh's been murdered! Help! Help!"

Distant shouts joined in the terrifying cry. Thuds of pursuing feet from the shore side sent Thorrg forward, twisting, turning toward town. He was headed off from the motor boat and immediate escape by water. The outcries behind him increased, became a great chorus of wild yells. Doors slammed; feet drummed. Thorrg slid through the night like a foul black creature.

Running swiftly, he got into an alley; here he became confused as to directions. The rain was lashing down. He burst from the alley mouth and then he saw the courthouse.

Desperation drove him frantic. An inspiration came to him that he considered brilliant. The jail! What place could be safer for him to hide? The sheriff was with him; the sheriff had to protect himself by protecting Thorrg. He got into the office, teeth chattering, clothes dripping water.

The sheriff confronted him, his chalk-white face working convulsively.

"I was almost caught," Thorrg gasped. "Some one saw me. Hide

me quick! The whole town's chasin' me. I'll be mobbed." He glared at the flabbergasted sheriff. "You didn't put a tail on me to double-cross me, did you?"

The sheriff's voice came hoarse and thick.

"Did—did you do the job O. K.?"

"I croaked the old devil. Hide me quick."

The roar of many voices crashed out in the street.

"What did you come here for?" blurted the sheriff. "You're right back in the fire." His hands were shaking. He was stunned at the saturnine malice of Thorrg's bold play for refuge.

"You ain't yella, are you?" sneered Thorrg. "Hide me, you fool! They'll be in here." His eyes bulged. "They'll get me."

"They ought to get you for coming here." The sheriff was wild with alarm. His plan to throw his assassin to an inflamed mob was getting extremely dangerous to himself.

"If they do, they'll get you, too," Thorrg cursed viciously. "I'll talk fast and loud."

The roar of voices lifted above the storm. Feet drummed on the street. The town shook with mob rhythm.

The sheriff's desperate eyes flicked about.

"The alley won't do. A cell won't do," he muttered, his brow puckered. "Here—quick." His voice was hoarse with relief. He sprang to a door and unlocked it. "Get in front of me." Thorrg saw the sheriff's lips part, his teeth glisten. The sheriff yanked the door open and gave Thorrg a powerful shove. "In there."

Thorrg was through the door; it slammed and the bolt shot home. A frightful curse left his lips. He stood outside in a dark court, blocked at one end by a board fence, open to

the street at the other end. Footsteps were running toward him from the street.

"Thrown to the mob," he cried hoarsely, hate shaking him.

He whirled and bounded over the fence into the darkness. From the slant of his eye he saw the courtyard on his left. Twisting and turning, he got away in the darkness, but at last had to cross a patch of light from a lamp. Instantly a shout of exultation went up. He had been seen. The mob was now in full cry, pitiless, savage.

"Get him! There he goes! Down him! Lynch him! String him up! The dirty murderin' dog!"

The running mob closed in, a pinching ring, narrowing the circle. A shot bit sharply into the air. Thorrg dived for the cover of a garage, ran through, the cursing mob trailing after him. Outside again he saw a close-packed group sweep through the lighted pool under a street lamp, their bodies swinging in unison, coming nearer.

"Public spirit," he gasped.

He sped into an alley, and, with foxlike instinct, doubled back between two buildings, but the pursuers held to his trail. It was a narrow way and slowed the massed runners, for they crowded in, choking the passage. Thorrg was through and on his way. Behind him savage sounds came pouring out, magnified by the constricting building walls.

Thorrg was in a cleared street and found himself rapidly approaching a lighted doorway. A fragment of the mob had given up trying to follow him through the narrow passage and had rounded the building at the end of the block; these men were now converging in upon Thorrg's line of flight. At the sight of him a salvo of shots blazed from the street. The pack's cry, the hideous animal cry

of exultation, telling that the quarry had been sighted, rose in wild halloo.

The doorway beckoned, and he burst through to find himself racing the length of Tony's dining room, trailing water in his wake. The yelping of the pack swelled in volume and fury. Thorrg reached the kitchen in wild bounds.

His startled wife reeled back against the range, her hand to her open mouth, stifling a scream that would have betrayed him. Instantly he went through the kitchen door into the dark alley. There was no one in sight. A quick whirl to the right, and he was in a narrow and blind passageway between the kitchen wall and the adjoining building. He groped along the wall, deep in darkness, behind a pile of boxes. He knew now instinct had guided him here to his wife—his one dependable friend in the town. Thorrg listened.

He could hear the oncoming mob charging into the restaurant; their feet thundered on the kitchen floor. His wife screamed once. Then men burst from the kitchen door, a black tide overflowing the alley, milling, cursing at their vanished prey.

"This way," yelled a piercing voice, and the men sped on, stringing out down the alley, feet pounding on the wet bricks.

Thorrg was quivering; his throat was dry and hot. Hunting cries ricocheted across the courtyard and bustled in his ears, dwindling.

Softly he opened the small door a crack. His wife was alone. She stood wild-eyed, pale, panting, a hand to her throat. Thorrg opened the door soundlessly and sprang inside.

"Val!" she whispered, eyes straining wide, aghast.

"Hide me!"

"Val, they'll be back. You can't—I can't do this. I was afraid it was you they were after. You broke out of jail. How? Did you kill any one? Oh, what can I do?" Thorrg could hear her teeth chattering.

His eyes blazed red with fury. She was turning against him! He began to curse her in a low grating tone. The hot oaths sizzled between his set teeth. Abominable curses and violent threats were hurled at her.

"Hide me, you yella skirt!" His big hand flicked out and he slapped her hard; a black welt marked the track of his fingers.

Her eyes were full of a tortured light; tears began to stream down her quivering cheeks.

"The law, Val. You've got to go back. Give yourself up. Your way is wrong. The sheriff's sworn to protect you."

The brutal torrent of madmen had curdled her blood. Justice was not in them. The law! Where was the law?

"Bah!" he cried viciously. "Bah! A lot you know about the sheriff, and a lot he cares about his oath of office."

"Those men are crazy—drunk to kill. They're wolves, beasts. But, Val, the sheriff—Listen!"

The sound of running feet grew louder; there were voices and oaths.

"They're coming back!" she whimpered. "Val! Oh, Val!"

Thorrg's trapped eyes flicked about.

"The ice box!" he gasped in crazed exultation. "I'll get in there." He bounded across the kitchen. "And, damn you, keep your big mouth shut."

Thorrg opened the ice-box door and vanished within.

Mrs. Thorrg's mind moved in jumping terror. Through a crack of the partly open door Thorrg could

see her. He watched as she nervously mopped up his wet tracks from the little side door across the floor to the ice box.

Quivering, fighting against a great weakness, tortured by a devotional quality and her sense of right, she tried to go naturally about her work. She slapped the cat off the meat block. Then she split the bone of a steak with the cleaver and tossed a shred of meat to the cat. The plaintiff lines about her mouth were now tight from pain and fear as well.

"See anything of your husband, Mrs. Thorrg?" The heavy breathless voice pounced at her from the open doorway. "I had him out for exercise and he broke away."

Thorrg gasped. His wife whirled and uttered a sharp little scream. Thorrg couldn't see the man who had spoken, but he recognized the voice.

"It's thick-headed Gus," he sneered to himself.

Mrs. Thorrg's frightened eyes fixed in horror upon Deputy Gus Gratz. Thorrg watched her, his heart thundering.

Her eyes flicked in swift terror to the ice box. Then her anguished, bewildered glance returned to Gus. His perspiring face glistened in the light. As she looked at the crafty deputy, the full realization that Gus represented the law came to her slowly and with vast relief.

Gus stared back, looked at her bruised cheek, at her white frightened face, and at the angry welt. She reddened under his intent regard, a sense of guilt stinging her. Then she fixed her large black eyes steadily upon him, and a queer, pathetic and imploring smile twisted her lips.

She was saved from seeing a terrible thing. The law was on the

job. She felt easier now. Gus was the law. Val must go peaceably with the law. Her tears were falling like rain.

"You'll save him from—them, Mr. Gratz, won't you?" she whispered shakily, eyes shining with unwavering trust.

Gus shot a speculative glance at the ice box and grinned. Feet scuffed toward him, coming up the alley.

Through the crack Thorrg watched his wife uneasily, listening. His trembling leg muscles tightened for a spring.

Mrs. Thorrg, her eyes racked with the agony of appeal, saw Gus's arm come up, and then she saw the gun. She stood paralyzed, her thoughts balanced in space, her brain numb.

Gus dallied, glanced back into the alley in a prolonged though intense movement.

Thorrg could hear the menacing tread of the mob returning, coming fast, and his blood ran cold.

With studied deliberation Gus leveled the gun, sighted down the barrel, unhurried. Many feet drummed nearer.

"Come out of that ice box, Thorrg!" Gus snapped. "Come out, hands high, and quick, or I'll blast you out."

Thorrg cursed. But he didn't move the ice-box door.

Gus waited while the mob sounds swelled nearer, burst up like a storm. Then he fired, and the unlatched door jumped under the impact of the bullet. The lead slug glanced off and struck the kitchen range with an angry *whang*.

Thorrg shivered. Mrs. Thorrg cried out piteously in fear and amazement. She choked. The hot acrid smell made her throat smart.

"Stop!" she cried. "In the name of Heaven, stop! Val, he'll——"

Her knees were almost giving away beneath her.

The ice-box door swung back, and Thorrg stood out, hands high.

"Ah—ha!" Gus exulted, and looked about him out of the corner of his eyes.

Mrs. Thorrg was staring at the door and past the deputy, her eyes bulging with fright. There was a rustling, straining, scuffling, and explosive breathing. Then came a thud and a yell—Gus's voice. Gus was down, and the infuriated and exultant mob was rushing into the kitchen, pouring over the prostrate deputy. Their rain-soaked clothes glistened in the light.

Thorrg's bloodshot eyes fell upon the foremost man, Samson, the huge butcher. He stood out, fat, bald, a brutal giant, in the front of the line, his quick glances fierce and thrusting. The fierce stamp of mob fever was on his red face.

With a bound Thorrg was behind the meat block in the corner. Mrs. Thorrg looked at her husband and screamed, and in her voice there was a wild note of defiance. The nearness of the danger had suddenly steeled her.

Thorrg saw the kitchen, and both doorways were now filled with crowding, moving men. The hot, sticky atmosphere was charged with blood lust and evil. Mrs. Thorrg's face stood out in it, a pure white, glowing oval.

"Crazy not to have made the sheriff give me a gun," Thorrg cursed to himself.

A poisonous miasma rose from the mob; the mass seemed to beat as one pulse; blasphemy and brutal abominations eddied upward into the stifling air.

Mrs. Thorrg was in the path of the invaders. They inched up, a solid, tight-packed wall of savage

men. Her eyes blazed. In vain she might probe for chivalry here. She could flutter hopelessly against this stone wall of flesh, striking no spark of pity or tenderness, her cries for mercy bringing only abusive taunts and jests.

Thorrg snarled, his unshaven jaws working, froth hanging in clots to his beard. His eyes burned hungrily upon the cleaver, out of his reach. If he asked his wife for it, they'd jump him before she could hand the weapon back. He stared transfixed, waiting as the pack moved forward experimentally, then with wary confidence.

Panting filled the kitchen; there was a shifting sound. Stealthy boots scraped, searched for a foothold to spring. Above all rose the protesting, sobbing gasps of the treacherous Gus Gratz, pinned to the floor, a deep wound in his neck. The deputy had played a game of betrayal and lost; public feeling had gotten too high for him.

From his position back of the meat block in the corner, Thorrg glared over his wife's head. She stood in front of the block and back of the table, sturdily facing the mob, her hopeful eyes wheeling swiftly over the blob of perspiring faces.

Thorrg looked at her in stupid wonder, his heart tightening and swelling with an emotion in which there had kindled a glow of sweetness—born, doubtless, out of the contagion and danger in this crisis. For the first time he sensed the hallowed quality of the infolding strands that bound Amelia and him as one.

"You can't come in here," she shrieked. "Out—out! All of you get out!"

There was a shrill yell of anger; a platter was dislodged and hit the floor with a crash. A hurtling cup

exploded against the wall six inches from Thorrg's head.

"Look at the bloody hound!" screeched a frenzied voice. "Hidin' behind a dame's skirts."

"Yank her outta there!" bellowed a man. "Get Thorrg!"

"You're too yella to get me," taunted Thorrg.

"I'll have all of you arrested for this," cried Mrs. Thorrg. "I'll have the sheriff serve warrants. You're breaking the law."

A loud snort of derisive mirth greeted her words.

Then it seemed she recognized for the first time the huge man confronting her. Samson! Her good-natured butcher! She resisted an impulse to slap his face. Her eye was caught and held by a coil of rope on his hairy forearm; the coils stirred and writhed. She stared in fascinated horror. This was the mob's symbol—a mockery of the law. Thorrg heard her breath coming in painful gasps.

"Look who's stoppin' the parade!" Samson's bullying laughter rolled out in a gale, filling the empty corners of the kitchen. "Naughty cook!"

"You're stopped, ain'tcha, you loose hunk of suet?" yelled Thorrg. "Try gettin' close to me and you'll get yours."

"It's the sheriff's duty only. It's his duty," Mrs. Thorrg sobbed. "You—you men elected him to take care of things like this."

Samson raised his mighty arm. The packed block of men leaned forward, their chests heaving, cheeks burning, breath coming heavily. Samson was going to act. Thorrg held his breath, muscles writhing.

He glared at the faces of his enemies; some fat, red and bloated, others thin and pale, and still others broad and bony; but all mouths were

twisting, and the same fanatical pin-point glitter flamed from every eye.

"A lotta yella pups," jeered Thorrg. "Hadda gang up on me."

Now Samson reached a broad paw toward Mrs. Thorrg. Eyes blazing, she slapped his hand from her arm. He grinned and edged forward.

"Shut up, Val," she cried.

"Wish I had a gun," muttered Thorrg. "I'd run 'em down the alley."

Samson moved closer.

Mrs. Thorrg grabbed the meat cleaver and swung it up. Thorrg saw the knuckles of her hand whiten.

"Keep off," she cried thickly.

Thorrg, behind her, crouched for a rush.

Samson looked at the bright edge of the cleaver and grinned with respect. There was an impatient surging, rustling of moving bodies, the hiss of labored breathing.

"Grab it," prodded a voice back of Samson.

A man sniggered.

"You grab it," leered Samson. "Come on, Thorrg, we got you."

"Go to hell!" roared Thorrg.

"You ain't the sheriff—the law. Get out!" blazed Mrs. Thorrg. The cleaver went higher. "The law protects us."

Samson's eyeballs rolled, then swelled hideously. There was a virile force, surging and foul, about him. Cursing and bellowing, the checked crowd mocked with gesture and jeer—mocked a sacrificing, courageous, martyred woman. Outstretched arms ending in clenched fists were leveled at her and at Thorrg; distorted faces, split by writhing lips and burning eyes, etched a shameful picture of brutal ecstasy from which Mrs. Thorrg forced herself not to shrink. Tears

rolled slowly down her cheeks. The strain was breaking her. Her lips fairly shook.

A shrill cackle rose at regular intervals. It came from a little lean man with flaming eyes, thin lips, and a tight face like a peeled onion. Thorrg watched him, sensing a deadly spirit. The man hooted and hiccuped in sustained effort. Thorrg saw him tug at Samson's arm, whispering.

"All right, Skinny. Get her!" cried Samson.

The onion-faced man stooped and dived between Samson's knees for Mrs. Thorrg's ankles. He clutched and held them and she was down. At the same instant Thorrg kicked at him—and hell broke loose.

The overwhelming rush was forward. Arms flailed. Fists thudded. Hands gripped; fingers tore. Mouths opened in mad clamor. The roof rang under the impact of the whirlwind of cries.

Then the rope was around Thorrg's neck and the mob was racing with him for the trees in the courthouse yard.

"Val!" Mrs. Thorrg shrieked. "Val!"

She saw him stumble and go down in the weaving tangle of cursing, shoving men. He did not come up—at once. The rope tightened, vibrating to the back pull of Thorrg's weight. The men broke into a weird chant and commenced to run.

Then the massed crowd in front slowed the progress. Thorrg gained his feet, right arm lifted, fending off hands, his other hand clutching the rope, easing the strain. The compact mass went forward at a trot again—to halt under a stout-limbed tree.

They wedged against Thorrg, walled him in. His brain swam sick-

eningly. The confusion of storm and frenzy was all about him.

"Over this limb—here! It'll hold the damned cuss."

Thorrg shouted, unheard in the uproar.

The rope coiled upward, writhed over the limb.

Words were cried out quick and short.

"Catch it!"

"Up with him!"

"The sheriff's a crook," Thorrg yelled. "He framed——"

"Wait! Let him talk!"

"Get the sheriff," cried Thorrg. "He——"

"Shut up! The hell with your lies! Pull, you birds! Get this cur dancin'!"

"Pray, you sucker, pray!"

"Wait, the rope's snarled."

"Ready!"

Thorrg, with black fear foaming through his brain, reeled from the swimming block of hot, hateful faces. He was done for. They had him now. The smell of perspiration rose from them. Hoots and cries volleyed in the space between the walls of the courthouse and the jail. But the sheriff hadn't appeared to uphold the law and claim his prisoner. Rain streamed across the illuminated bowls of the street lamps. Lightning blazed white, and the mob's crouching shadows leaped away; then rushing walls of darkness came with the awful thunder.

"A wild night and a wild way to die," thought Thorrg bitterly.

The massed faces swayed in the light of the lamps.

"Now, all together! Up he goes!" Samson bellowed.

The rain hissed loudly through the treetops.

Thorrg felt a blow on his cheek where the knot of the rope struck;

red fire seemed to sear his neck, to stream downward through his body, and the ground fell away from beneath his feet. His hands swung upward, clutching, holding.

An angry voice shouted:

"Why didn't some one tie his arms?"

"Shoot the dog!"

"Tie his hands! Let 'im down!"

There was the sound of a swift rushing. Then came a scuffling, panting, straining of bodies in muscular impact.

"Hey, you, get back!"

"It's his wife. Hold 'er! Damned wild cat!"

A woman's voice shouted, hot and shrill, with something of madness in it; a wild, frenzied cry, bursting upward from the torn soul of a woman offering her mortal all in one supreme effort of loyalty to her mate—worthless though he be.

"Samson, quick!" she gasped.

"The knife! Look out! She's got a knife!"

Then Thorrg hit the ground with a crash as his wife cut the rope. A lightning flash exploded white and blinding. Thorrg was on his feet, and, through the tumbling walls of darkness, was running, butting, slugging, but running, running. The invigorating wet wind of flight was in his face.

Behind him came the thud of a gunshot.

He leaped over the courtyard fence, rounded the jail, and plunged down the alley, flinging off the noose and two feet of cut rope. Then, coming toward him on the run, he saw the tardy sheriff swinging his gun.

The gun muzzle flared red as the sheriff fired. Thorrg weaved, ducking frenziedly, hate choking his brain cells. Bending low, Thorrg was on his man; a haymaker swing

found the sheriff's jaw. The crooked officer hurtled backward, his skull crushing against the brick wall. Thorrg raced on, barely conscious of a ball of fire high in his chest.

Wind flung the rain at him in blinding sheets. The long-drawn wolf cry of the human pack behind him rode the air, quavering through the rain. Thorrg dashed on toward Shore Road, his lungs straining. If he could get down the cliff stairway and to the beach, the motor boat would take him into the sheltering blackness of the bay.

Watching his pursuers as he raced across Shore Road, Thorrg mounted the bank and sped toward the stairway. Swift runners were crowding him. Damn 'em, they'd never catch him now! Perspiration stung his eyes. He bounded onward. His heels were winged. A wave of gratitude to his wife ran through him. She had stuck gloriously in the finals!

"Good girl!" he thought, and his eyes searched for the stairway sign as he leaped ahead. He owed his life and his freedom to Amelia. She alone had set him free—free. Wild sweetness galloped through his blood. He'd send for her soon.

Furiously the pursuing pack charged after him, yelling threats.

"Beat the lynchers!" he gasped, above the hard-pursuing footfalls. "Beat the bloodthirsty monkeys!" But ringing in his ears he heard the harsh words of the murdered judge: "This is a dignified, law-abiding community. The integrity of the upright and peaceful citizens must be preserved." And then he seemed to hear the prophetic words: "Stone walls are no protection against such as you." Thorrg had grinned at that, flattered. "So I'll set an early date when you will pay the extreme penalty of the law."

Thorrge laughed—a sound of wheezing mirth.

“Bunk! Law-abidin’ citizens, huh? Listen to the howlin’ of the disappointed wolves!” It had all turned out swell. He had scored on the judge and the crooked sheriff, and he was free. All even! Raging, inhuman cries flooded the night.

A flutter of lightning rippled across the departing storm clouds; sharply etched against the red expanse of the high sailing cloud rack, the stairway signboard stood out black, inviting, pointing his way downward to liberty. He tingled all over. Gloating laughter bubbled from his throat in answer to the howls behind him.

Thorrge plunged toward the sign joyously. The ground, the darkness

swept past him with sweet promise as he flew onward. His heart sang merrily. Then the bank dropped from under him. The stairway wasn’t there.

A sobbing yell burst from his lips but he couldn’t stop. He was running out on empty air, treading the drifting mists, slipping past the sheer walls of stone. The solemn dirge of the surf swept increasingly nearer, mingling loud with the roar in his ears, like the crash of falling walls.

As an extra precaution to block Thorrge’s possible escape, the careful and crafty Deputy Gus Gratz, mindful of his own skin, had moved the signboard some twenty yards away from the stairhead along the edge of the precipice.

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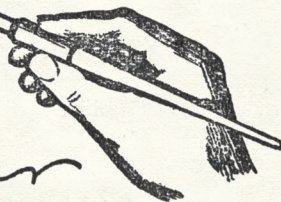
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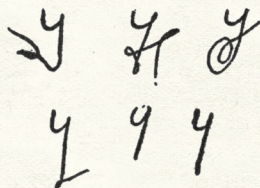
If you are an employer and desire to place your employees in the positions in your office or factory for which they are best fitted; or if you are just about to step out into the world to earn your own living; or if crimes involving handwriting have been committed in your community; or if you want to know the characters of your friends as revealed in their chirography—send specimens of the handwriting of the persons concerned to Shirley Spencer, Street & Smith's Detective Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y., and inclose a stamped, addressed envelope. Shirley Spencer will analyze the samples submitted to her and will give you her expert opinion of them, free of charge.

Also, coupon—at end of this department—must accompany each specimen of handwriting which you wish read. If possible, write with black ink.

All communications will be held in strict confidence. When permission is granted, cases will be discussed in this department, with or without the illustrations. Of course, under no circumstances will the identity of the persons concerned be revealed.

Every care will be taken to return specimens of handwriting, but it is to be understood that Miss Spencer cannot be responsible for them.

This issue's graphology lesson:



Odd lower loop formations reveal eccentricity, and in some cases where the rest of the writing bears this out, it betrays the writer as a drug addict.

The first three loop formations are of the type that shows eccentricity. If other signs in the writing agree, lack of mental stability and even insanity may be indicated.

The first loop of the lower line has

been found in the handwriting of many criminals. I, for one, don't believe that it necessarily means a criminal mind, but it does show a mental state which is not healthy. I have seen it in the writing of perfectly normal, honest people when they have been under great nervous stress, distraction, and totally out of harmony.

The last two show by the uneven, muddy pressure the diseased mind. I have found these especially in the writing of those who admittedly take dope.

In the next issue I will discuss further the writing of criminals and those who are over the mental border line.

Republic of Argentina: It is encouraging to know that I have a devotee way down there in the Argentine, and to know that he is following the lessons in each issue so enthusiastically.

*Four months
ago I became a sub-
scribing member of
this Detective Story Magazine.
I've studied some
on graphology, as*

I would expect your compliments and comments to be phrased warmly and graciously. Your writing is typically Latin, and the forward swing with the large, graceful capitals is typical of the charm of personality which we expect from the Latins.

Moreover, it reveals strength, intelligence, poise, dignity, and force. That stroke which tops the stem of the *F* shows love of authority, dominance, and tenacity.

A. A. Y.: You will notice that you use one of the loop formations which I discussed in this issue's lesson. It bears out my theory that it can be used by those who are temporarily distracted or at odds with their environment. I didn't know I had an illustration of one until I came across your writing just now.

*that sort of a person-
has given me, how
elusive - and what
can be wrong with*

Your circle *i*-dots, the letter formations, heavy pressure and back-hand slant all point to an eccentric and unusual person. I don't wonder that you are often puzzled about yourself.

You have creative ability and should do highly individual work which will absorb your whole interest. I can't suggest exactly what particular art you should follow, or just where your talents might lead, because you do not conform to any particular type or mold. The whole trouble, as a rule, is in either the family or associates trying to place such a person as you in a position they consider suitable to you. Sometimes the force of circumstances is to blame for putting such an unusual person into the wrong position. It is wisest, in your case, to map out your own destiny and follow it. Perhaps the knowledge that you must seek the exotic, the unconventional, the totally unexpected, will give you the changed viewpoint which will lead you to your special work in life.

E. F., Pennsylvania: It is a relief sometimes to hear of a person who is exactly suited to his work and is successful enough to be satisfied. I'm glad you like court reporting.

*I thank you for an analysis of
me through my handwriting, of
out the science of graphology. (It
that you can tell me of character-
processes of which I am not aware.*

Your writing shows that you are a very painstaking, cautious, and conscientious person with a good mind for detail work and excellent powers of concentration. Your thrift is shown in the lack of spacing and the small, tight letters. You are modest, unassuming, but the large *r* shows a particular pride in your appearance.

H. D., North Carolina: For a girl of fifteen, your handwriting reveals

unusual possibilities. It is individual, and far from the calligraphic script of the usual schoolgirl.

*me what kind of w
get (I am a girl) did
know that I had
and I hope that u
to tell them to me*

Your large backhand writing shows you are independent, think for yourself, and have an odd personality. The very rounded letters indicate a slow, deliberate mind. You are reserved, poised, and have definite tastes and inclinations. Artistic talent is revealed.

Mrs. R. E., Idaho: It seems to me that women have been bearing the brunt of this past depression. My mail indicates that the majority of the women have found it necessary to carry on their work of raising and caring for a family on less money than ever before, and have had to seek some means of adding to the family income or providing for it entirely.

They seem to have shown more ingenuity in making and holding jobs and to have carried on with better spirit than the men.

*a dissatisfied mother
by which I mean it
my husband is not
the necessities or wa*

Your case, Mrs. E., is not so very different from your many sisters who write me, unless the difference

lies in the fact that you are more capable than most to run a home and business and succeed at both.

You have real business ability and a personality to make success inevitable. Your heavy, forward swinging writing with fairly heavy *t*-bars and the vigorously penned letter formations is the picture of a capable, intelligent woman. I think real estate would prove better than anything else, though almost any business which you could manage yourself would be suitable. In your case it doesn't matter so much what particular business you manage, so long as you are the guiding force.

Don't let lack of money depress you! You are the type that is a little too easily affected by the lack of material things. Your writing shows some of the strain. What you want for your children *are* the luxuries of life, but I can understand one of your nature considering them necessities. There is no reason why you should sit back and be dissatisfied with what your husband is able to provide. The actual making of money will do much to make you happy and contented.

Don't forget the stamped, self-addressed envelope.

Handwriting Coupon

This coupon must accompany each specimen of handwriting which you wish read.

Name.....

Address.....

Coming February 10th,

"THE DYNAMITE LADY," by LESLIE T. WHITE.

UNDER THE LAMP

By GERARD HOLMES

This department is conducted by Gerard Holmes, for those of you who like puzzles. If there is any particular kind of puzzle that you prefer, please tell us, and Gerard Holmes will do his best to give it to you. Also, won't you work on a puzzle of your own, send it in, and let the other readers wrestle with it?

Answers to problems printed below will be given in the next issue of Street & Smith's Detective Story Magazine.

WARNING: Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram asking for it.

All letters relative to this department should be addressed to Gerard Holmes, care of Street & Smith's Detective Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

GET busy, ye fans, we have an interesting bunch of puzzles before us. First comes Charles F. Perkins, Box 554, Salem, Massachusetts, who has been with us before. We hope you will enjoy his concoction.

1. K I H R R N Z Z S O Z E U
A I Z Y Y C D B G M E -
Z T B M G Z U W O Z T I Y,
O C G M Z T G Y Z T N G,
L C D Y R F P F B F
I H R G Z L W R R W R.

Next in line is Kokomo, 851 West North Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

2. B B Z C Z J J B Z P F .
E K K V K B Q K Q Q O M J
Z B P D P, D W H B B Z C Z
K V F O M J T P J Z N M O O;

G M K U O S P C N W P -
B H X .

A fan from the West coast, Carol McNeill, 1031½ West 18th Street, Los Angeles, California.

3. E Q C X F H V Z X F T W C
B W C Q P W, Q U V W Z
B Q J U K X P G V U Z I B
U K Q B X C P F Q H V K W,
U W Q Z J W Q U B Q X J
K W U V M W G X C J
Q B X J Z Y X C H.

August Kehr, Jr., 2205 Lynch Street, St. Louis, Missouri, has not forgotten that we enjoy his crypts.

4. E W S J H C F B W D C W -
F A W D F G K W L G W F J B,
F B M G D N C J A G F W B M

FBWDCOWKGEK
 EAGNPF, RBJTDC
 WSGRCF HDXDJTD
 GCAWDRC.

The last mathematical contribution by Quefanon made such a hit that he herewith submits another with only two digits given. Can you ascertain the rest of them?

5. XXX)XXXXX8(XXX7.XXX

```

  XXX
  ---
   XXXX
     ---
    XXXX
      ---
     XXXX
       ---
      XXXX
        ---
       XXXX

```

*Answers to puzzles in the
 January 10th issue:*

This crypt was aimed at you, Brother Walker. Did you dodge it? Edward Harris, 381 Charles Street, Providence, Rhode Island, sent it.

1. Sylph quaffs zythum. Reveries vague and pertaining to quadrupedal animality.

From an unknown fan.

2. Extemporaneous cryptograms furnish interesting mental pabulum adaptable to young and old.

By Entomologist, of Cincinnati, Ohio.

3. Nocturnal oddity: while glow-worms gleam steadily, fireflies withhold their light for brief periods.

Composed by Mrs. W. S. Flintoft, 302 North Gorham Street, Jackson, Michigan.

Despondent despot desires desert. Servant serves soup. Despot gets desperate, serves servant with swift kick.

One of our stand-bys, Joseph Dahlia, 3116 North Neenah Avenue, Chicago, Illinois, is again heard from.

5. Chinese mandarin, noted for philanthropy, uses pagoda for purpose of converting heathens.

A long-division problem by Ingvar Stoep, 2217 27th Avenue South, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

6. BANK HOLDUP.

Engineer, of Shaker Heights, Ohio, is another fan who modestly withholds his address.

7. Church chaplain changed chaplet. Chided chapel choir chanting Christmas chorus.

PUZZLE FANS' HONOR ROLL

Send in your answers to each issue's puzzles, ye fans, and watch for your name on our monthly Honor Roll.

Headquarters Chat

JOSEPH ACHMAN is a millionaire. His nephew has been kidnaped. Achman goes to a detective and asks the detective to make an effort to have the nephew freed from his kidnapers. The detective agrees to do this but at a fee which Achman refuses to pay. The kidnapers have threatened to kill their victim unless ransom money is paid. The detective, although he is not to take the case, advises Achman to pay the fee. This is the way

A THIRD KEY

By FRED ALLHOFF

opens. It is the novelette which leads the next issue of Street & Smith's Detective Story Magazine. Because of startling developments, the detective is hired by another nephew of Achman to take charge of the case.

Fred Allhoff has written a lively and stirring story, with the detective playing the leading rôle. The story combines excitement together with "puzzle." This is a very difficult thing for an author to accomplish.

THE DYNAMITE LADY

By LESLIE T. WHITE

is the second novelette in point of arrangement in the next issue. In the Gray Wolf, White has created a detective with strong individualistic characteristics, tall, handsome, courageous. Before he became a detective, the Gray Wolf was a distinguished performer in the "squared circle," an ex-champion. Of course, the Gray Wolf plays the leading part in White's story.

A waiter brings him a message from a woman who wishes to see him outside in the lobby. Upon meeting the woman, the Gray Wolf is asked to be at her apartment that night. The woman has a peculiar use for the detective. He agrees to go to the apartment. He does so and finds—What he finds, and his actions thereafter make the best reading that Leslie T. White has ever offered you. Yes, the Gray Wolf's dog, as usual, assists his master with his canny, Scotty instincts.

DIAMONDS ON WHEELS

By JOHN JAY CHICHESTER

the third novelette in the next issue is a Sanderson story. This means to regular readers of Street & Smith's Detective Story Magazine that the novelette has to do with the nefarious efforts of Maxwell Sanderson, the

Noiseless Cracksmen, and his companion in arms, Barton Clark. At night Sanderson attempts an audacious crime on a railroad train composed of sleeping cars. John Jay Chichester also paces his Sanderson stories at a lively gait. Sanderson is an active, daring, and clever criminal of the Raffles type. There is nothing rough or brutal about him. He is a real "gentleman" criminal, and has an attractive, winning personality. He and Barton Clark have always been very popular characters in the magazine. We think that "Diamonds On Wheels" is as good a Sanderson story as Chichester has written. Certainly, it is fully up to the best.

Among the shorts we have

THE SHADOW OF GRAY WALLS

By LESLIE GORDON BARNARD

Barnard has handled the subjects of this tale with great understanding and feeling. It is a story of a girl whose sweetheart has just been released from jail. The man is torn between a promise that he has given his mother and his affection for his girl. Besides this problem, there is one of far greater importance, and with consequences much more serious. Money is stolen, and a man is killed. Here is the type of story that is genuine, real, and human.

There are other short stories in the magazine, and good ones. Among them is a yarn about an amusing little criminal, Thubway Tham.

Johnston McCulley is doing even better than ever, we feel, with the chronicles that tell of further doings by the little lisping pickpocket.

It is certainly most satisfying when a personal friend, a friend of the magazine, or a business friend, admits he is wrong, particularly if he called you down good and plenty because he thought you were wrong. Carl B. Eimer, a lawyer, at 30 Irving Place, New York City, is the type of man who admits he is wrong the moment he discovers he is. He writes us:

"DEAR EDITOR: On several occasions I have written to your interesting magazine criticizing the knowledge of some of your authors. This time the joke is on me. About two years ago, there was an article by a gentleman whose name I believe is Solomon, about the St. Valentine's Day Massacre. I took the author to task for going to a great deal of trouble to determine whether the empty shells came from an automatic or a revolver.

"I stated that one could tell an automatic shell from a revolver shell

at a glance. Now I find to my surprise that the Colt revolver, 1917 model, had a sort of clip which sold for ten cents, which made it possible to use an automatic cartridge in a Colt revolver. I believe the clip was circular in form and kept the cartridge from slipping through the cylinder.

"If you would convey my respects to the author, I would be much obliged to you.

"My kindest regards and best wishes to you and the authors of my favorite magazine."

Next issue, dated February 10th, will be on sale January 5th.

Asthma Was Choking Her



ILLUSTRATION

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—Mrs. Mary Bean

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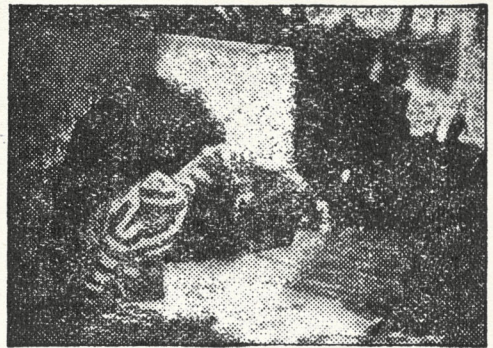
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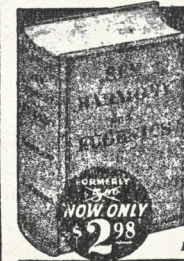
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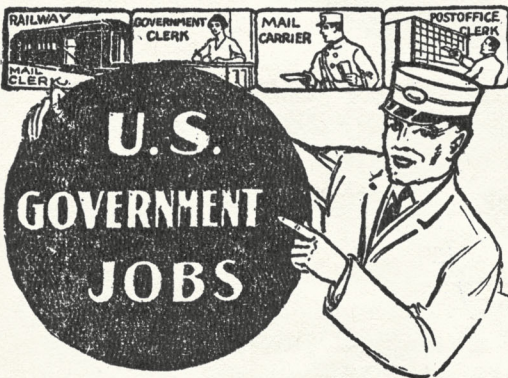
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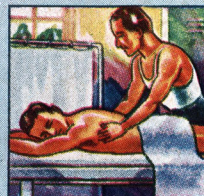
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A woman with blonde, wavy hair and blue eyes, wearing a light-colored, off-the-shoulder top, holding a cigarette in her right hand.

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I enjoy them a lot*



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