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DETECTIVE TALES

**12
STORIES**

**10
CENTS**

**DEATH WAITS
FOR A BLONDE**

SMASHING DRAMATIC NOVELETTE

by **GEORGE SHAFTEL**

EMILE C. TEPPERMAN

J. LANE LINKLATER

NORVELL PAGE

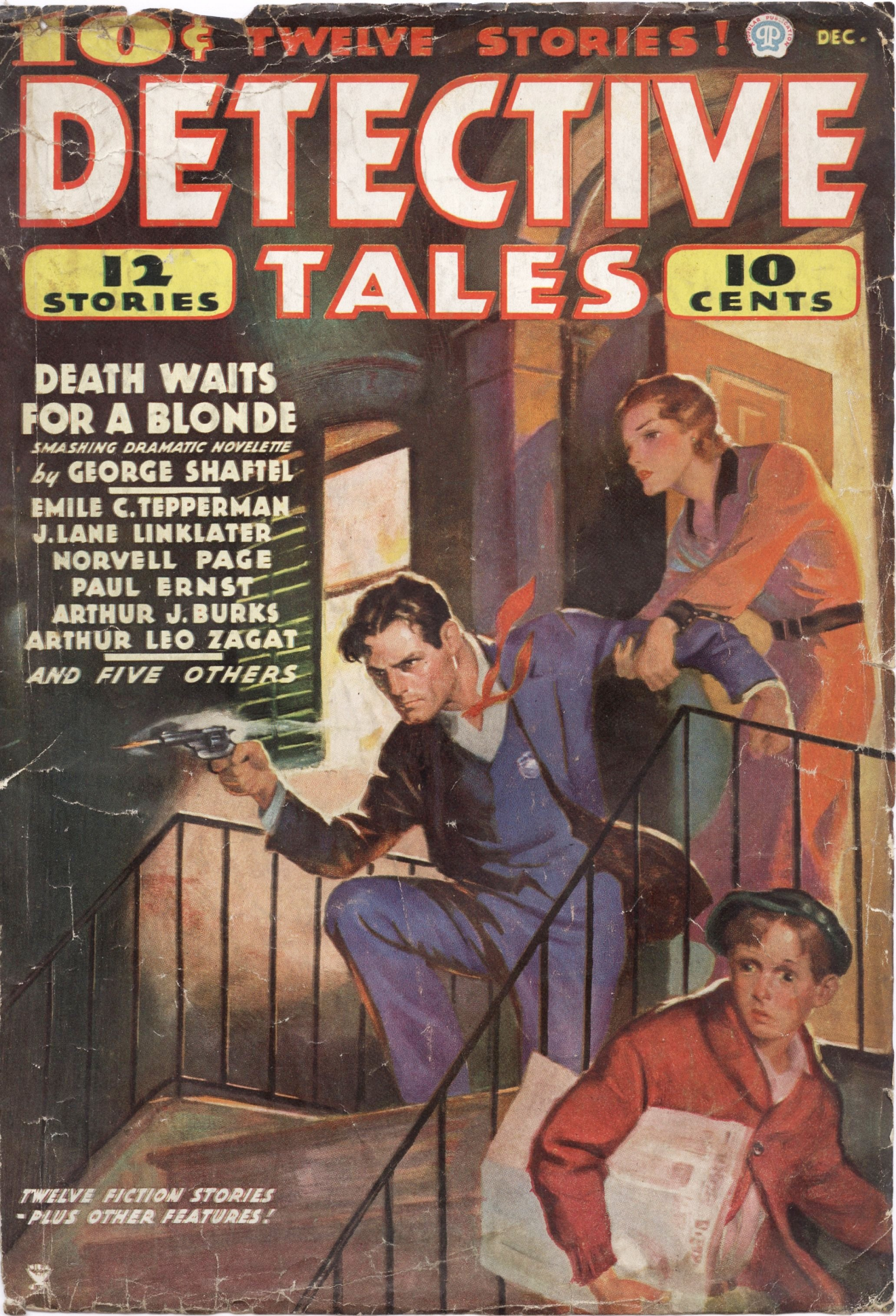
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by clearing skin irritants
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DETECTIVE TALES



12 STORIES

TEN CENTS

VOLUME TWO

DECEMBER, 1935

NUMBER ONE

1 Feature-Length Novel of Thrilling Action and Mystery 1

- GUARDIAN AGAINST THE LAW**.....*By Frederick C. Davis* 12
After seven years of prison hell he found the girl he loved in the arms of the reckless youngster he had trusted—and who was now headed for the chair. While police guns hunted him, Jim Bruce, swore to even the score in his own way!

2 Stirring, Human Novelettes of Crime and Crime-Fighting 2

- CRUCIBLE OF COURAGE**.....*By Emile C. Tepperman* 44
The forge of disaster fired into steel the temper of Dirk Blaize who came back from black halls of blindness to settle accounts with the murderers of his father!
- DEATH WAITS FOR A BLONDE**.....*By George Armin Shaftel* 72
Alone, with her past a blank, she was a hazardous liability for a man whose life was already forfeit—but she was blonde and pretty, and she thought him her lover!

9 Short Stories with Human, Emotional Punch 9

- IN DEBT TO THE DEVIL**.....*By Paul Ernst* 36
Dick Harlan wanted to be D. A., but to do so he must crush the man who had made him!
- MORGUE EXPRESS**.....*By Wyatt Blassingame* 59
Once on the subway train it was too late for Dick Broca to escape the death that awaited him.
- MURDER FOR CHARITY**.....*By J. Lane Linklater* 63
Felix knew what would happen to the Cauldron's benefactor when he fell in with Kozak's killers!
- KILLER'S TOY**.....*By Emerson Graves* 89
Old Detective Bolson wanted retirement—but he fell afoul of the town's boss!
- HIDEAWAY IN HELL**.....*By Arthur Leo Zagat* 97
He was running from the law—and carrying Death with him as a passenger!
- DEAD MAN'S SHADOW**.....*By Kenneth L. Sinclair* 102
Frank Drew saw his pal electrocuted—and then saw him later in his old haunts!
- GUNLESS COP**.....*By Henry T. Sperry* 108
Iron Mike never thought his nephew would bait a murder trap for him.
- THE LOVE THAT KILLS**.....*By Norvell W. Page* 114
The evidence pinned the killer-gun on the woman he loved above all else!
- SNOOPS**.....*By Arthur J. Burks* 120
He was a low-comedy Scotty—but his nose knew the scent of murder.

— And —

- STATE TROOPER**.....*The Inspector* 11
He was under-cover man in the crook's hide-out.
- THE CRIME CLINIC**.....*A Department* 127

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Story Illustrations by Amos Sewell, David Berger and Ralph Carlson

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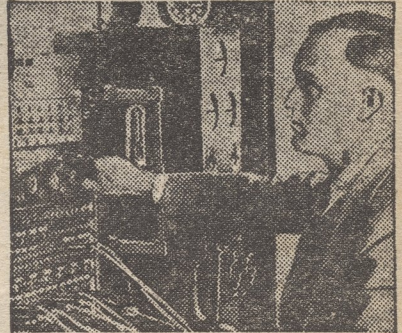
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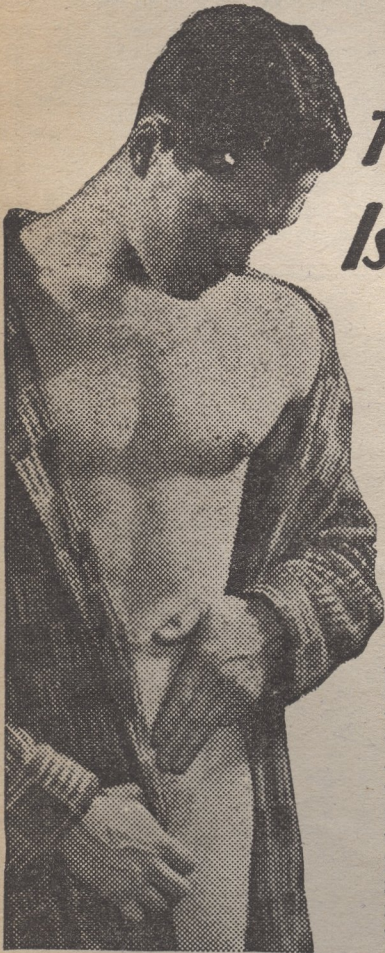
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STATE TROOPER

STATE TROOPER JACK ARMSTRONG felt almost physically sick. It wasn't the insistent drumming of the sub-machine guns and automatic rifles with their obbligate of lead that swept from the old Marcasson mansion. He'd been under fire before. White-faced, Jack Armstrong tried to hold his service gat steady on the upstairs window, but something seemed to hold that weapon away from the mobster hideout. Spade Hatch, his partner since he had been in the service, was in that house.

Spade had volunteered for that suicide detail of worming his way into the Drummond mob so that he could keep his brothers-in-arms on the outside advised of Drummond's movements. Now Spade was trapped there; there wasn't a chance of his ever coming out alive.

Jack aimed at the top of a head that showed in the nearest window and squeezed the trigger. The head disappeared, and Jack knew the black fear that the head might have been Spade's. Then suddenly he stiffened.

The front door of the house swung open and drew a blast of fire from the troopers. Then a handkerchief on the end of a rifle was thrust through the opening. The troopers' firing ceased. There was a pause, and—

Jack's blood ran cold. Spade Hatch's tall figure, arms bound tightly at his sides, suddenly appeared in the doorway. Behind him were grouped three men who took great care to keep as much of their persons as possible behind Spade's body. One of them called out.

"Listen, you coppers," he yelled, and Jack recognized the features of Duke Drummond, himself, in the speaker, "we got one o' yer playmates here, an' we're gonna bring him out. We're gonna walk out to the car in the drive, there, an' beat it. If you don't try to pull any rough stuff we'll leave him go as soon as we're out o' range. But if you start anything before that, we'll fill him so full o' lead he'll weigh twicet what he does now. You can't get us all before one of us gets him—so watch it. . . . Here we come!"

Slowly the quartet began marching down the steps. The three men behind Spade had fanned out a little, now, so that all three of them had their guns lined on their hostage's back. A silence fell on both the remaining men in the house and the troopers that was electric with tension. Spade's face was as white as death, but his jaw was hard, and Jack recognized a certain springiness about his step that, to his mind, presaged sudden action.

The rest of the troopers, apparently, were as spell-bound and helpless as Jack. They dared not make a move—even though they knew in their hearts that Spade was doomed whatever happened. If they permitted these three ring-leaders to get away it would not save Spade—they knew that. A little later they would find his bullet-riddled body lying by the side of the highway. And yet not one of them dared to risk any overt act.

Then Spade, as Jack had feared he would, took the decision out of their hands. The quartet had almost reached the automobile in the drive when Spade yelled and flung himself sideways. "Get 'em, fellas!" yelled Spade, and the echo to his brave cry was a multiple-throated belching of guns. . . .

For some time after Spade Hatch's funeral, Jack Armstrong felt pretty bitter. More than once he contemplated quitting his job with the State Troopers, and his manner among his fellows was marked by a certain cynicism that caused his superior officers some concern. However, the latter were wise men, and they were patient with the young trooper. In the end he justified their faith in him, and snapped out of the fit of depression he had been thrown into by the death of his partner. Jack Armstrong, in short, accepted the heroic dictum that is engraved in every efficient officer's heart: "Public safety is bigger than my life or the lives of my brothers-in-arms!"

This theme is dramatized in many of the stories that appear in *Detective Tales*—the magazine that presents all the tense, realistic drama—and sometimes the bitter heartbreak—of men and women on both sides of the law.

—THE INSPECTOR.

GUARDIAN AGAINST THE LAW

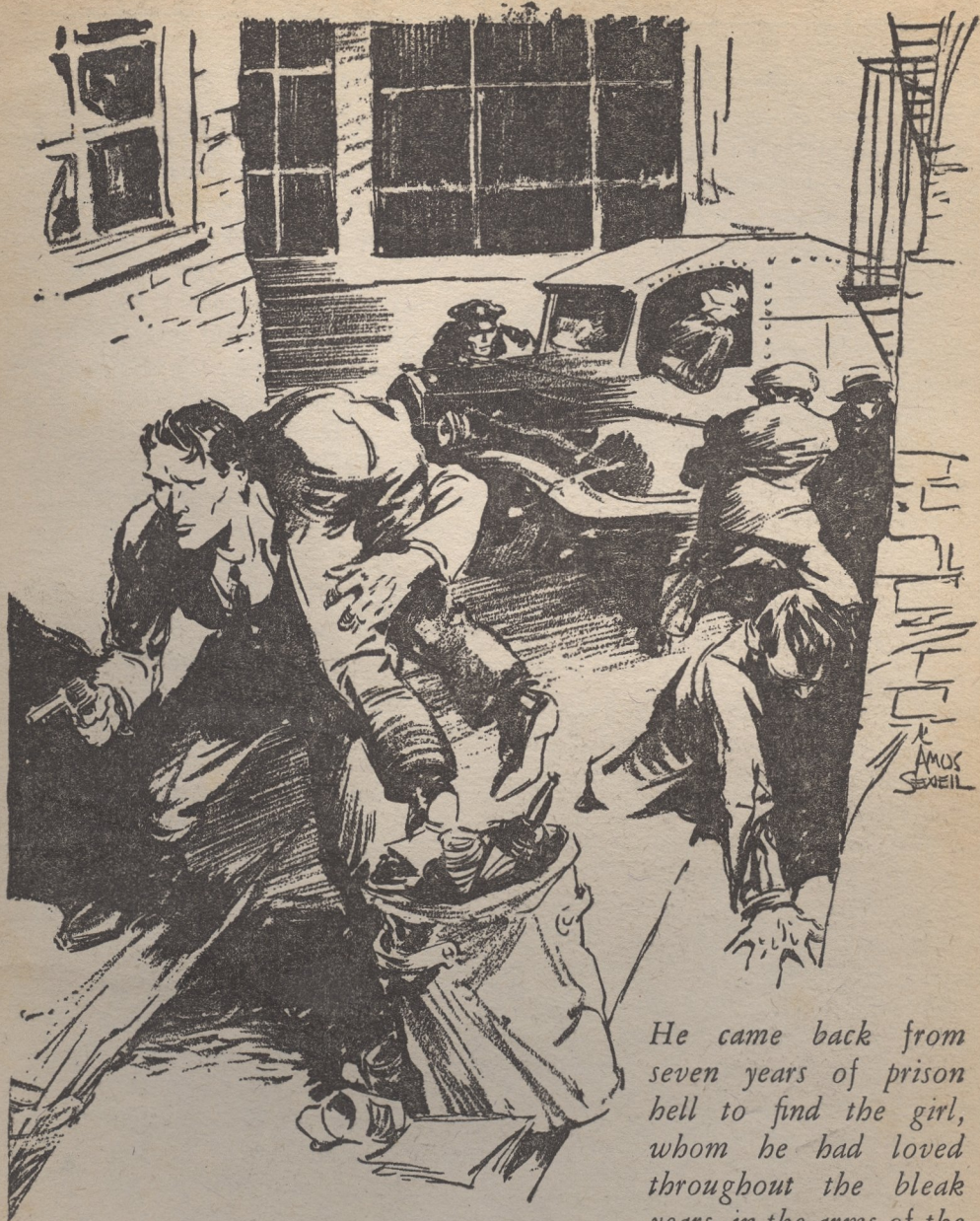
by **FREDERICK C. DAVIS**

(Author of "Outlawed Lawman," etc.)

*Feature-Length Novel
of Thrilling Action and
Mystery*



"Come an' get it, Bruce," Lynch snarled.



He came back from seven years of prison hell to find the girl, whom he had loved throughout the bleak years, in the arms of the reckless youngster he had trusted, and who was now headed straight toward the chair. Jim Bruce swore to repay those two his own way—though a thousand police guns hunted him as murderer, and the hidden hand of a city's criminal ring had him spotted for death!

JIM BRUCE walked slowly, wonderingly, in a world made strange to him by seven years in prison. His clear blue eyes, no longer blinded by forbidding grey stone, turned eagerly along the street with its rainbow neon glare—

a commonplace to those he passed, but to him a dream come true. His lungs, no longer weighted with the dankness of his cell, swelled with the fresh night air. His blood tingled as he felt his way through this familiar yet joyously new world, and

his mind sang a one-word song over and over—*free—free—free!*

Jim Bruce had been released from the state prison this morning. He had stepped out the ponderous gates clad in a convict-made suit, with a ten dollar bill in his pocket—all he possessed, save the treasure of freedom and the right to face any man with the hard-won assurance that his debt to society was paid in full.

He had hastened back to the city, from which he had been taken a manacled prisoner seven long years ago, with the deliriously happy thought that now he could see Dud and Fay again—see his kid brother and the girl he loved, with no heavy screen to bar him from them; could feel their hands in his, and hear their laughter because he was back and one of them again. Because he was free!

Two hours ago he had stepped off the train—bitterly empty hours because he had not been able to find either Dud nor the girl among those waiting at the station. Jim Bruce had gone eagerly from place to place, inquiring for his younger brother, his heart falling each time he heard, "No, he's not here," or "Haven't seen him today." With new hope he turned toward the City Athletic Club, because Dud had mentioned it several times in his too infrequent letters. His prison-made shoe was on the first step when he saw the kid.

He saw Dudley Bruce slim and lithe, stride out the entrance with two other men. Jim Bruce's tightened muscles stopped his impulse to bound toward Dud. His lips compressed, halting the greeting that he was about to utter. For interminable years he had waited for this moment—the moment when he could step up to Dud, smiling, and say, "Well, kid, I'm back—" but now he kept silent. He stood apprehensively quiet at the base of the steps while the kid hurried past without seeing him.

The hard determination pictured on the boy's face sent a warning chill through Jim Bruce. Sight of the two men striding at Dud's side sharpened the coldness in his heart. He recognized them both—two predatory crooks who prowled in the pack led by Nat Dynan. Dynan was the man who had engineered the jewelry store robbery which had sent Jim Bruce to prison. And Dynan had gone free while Jim Bruce had paid with seven of the best years of his life. And now his kid brother was walking shoulder-to-shoulder, in common purpose, with two of Dynan's henchmen.

JIM BRUCE watched, his cold dread growing, while Dud climbed into a taxi with Karpf and Manther. He hesitated, confused by the humming of the new world around him, but he remembered, with galling vividness, another night when he had started off like this with Dynan and Karpf—on the job that had sent him to the living death behind cold grey walls. Concern for the boy hurried him toward the curb as the cab drew away.

His signal brought another. His orders turned it quickly after the car in which Dudley Bruce was riding with the two crooks. A red traffic light stopped Jim Bruce's cab at the corner while his brother's speeded ahead. He kept his eyes on it, his anxiety growing, only vaguely conscious of the strident voice of a newsboy shouting on the corner:

"Police Raid Gambling Den! Commissioner Promises Clean-Up! Detective Overton Leads Raid! Read about—"

Jim Bruce's cab spurted past the intersection. He searched the dark street tensely until he picked up the crimson tail light of his brother's cab. It was turning into a modest residential district. Jim Bruce was still several blocks behind it when it paused, then went ahead again.

Watching it anxiously as it turned the next corner, he saw that it was now empty.

He ordered a stop, and slipped out. The fare sheared into Jim Bruce's small store of money. He went along the sidewalk with quick, quiet steps, knowing Dud and the two men were somewhere ahead in the shadows. The gloom covered them as it sheltered Jim Bruce during his cautious approach. He caught no glimpse of the kid—but he stopped, his blood suddenly iced, his pulse, trip-hammering.

During Jim Bruce's interminable sentence, the fortress-like walls of the state prison, impregnable to escape, had leaked with news from the city's underworld, whispered from convict to convict in the yards and the shops. Nat Dynan had become a big shot. Nat Dynan was raking in ten grand a week. Dynan was running a string of secret gambling rooms and protecting himself by shrewdly placed graft. Remembering it all as he searched the shadows for the kid, Jim Bruce stood chilled.

He knew it was one of Dynan's dens which had just been raided by Detective Tom Overton, the squarest dick on the force. He knew that the little house, directly ahead on this quiet street, was Overton's modest home.

Jim Bruce started forward, tortured by a frigid fear, but again he jerked up short. He heard a protesting whisper from the shadows: "My God, you—you can't do—that!"—and the voice was Dud's. At the same moment the door of Overton's house opened. Overton's chunky figure was silhouetted until the door closed; then his firm steps crossed the porch. A shout of warning was on Jim Bruce's lips—but he was choked off by the thunderous blast of a gun.

Bullet-flame flashed from a tree near the curb. Jim Bruce stood frozen while heels gritted swiftly on the sidewalk. A

lithe figure darted toward the gate where Overton was standing. In stunned dismay, Jim Bruce saw Dud's figure whirl at the gate, arms outspread; then saw that the kid was protecting Overton with his own body.

The detective had taken a staggering step. Lurched against a gate post, he made a strangling noise as he groped toward his hip-pocket holster. A woman's startled cry sounded inside the house while Dudley Bruce backed, hooking one arm around Overton, attempting to wrest the wounded detective back into the shelter of the hedge. Jim Bruce started forward desperately—but black figures sped from the trees with the swiftness of attacking wolves.

Three swift shots crashed near the gate. Karpf and Manther, darting along the fence, turned blazing weapons at the man huddling helpless behind Dudley Bruce. The fire of their guns limned Overton's deathly white face and reflected terror in the kid's widened eyes. They rushed on without stopping, fleeing into the shadows beyond, while Overton slumped from the boy's arm and dropped.

Dudley Bruce whirled as the front door of the house flashed open. Bright light fanned out along the walk, across Overton's motionless body. A woman stopped short, staring stricken, while the boy crouched out of the glare and retreated. He spun, ducking through the shadows, breath beating fast, while Karpf and Manther fled. He raised to sprint at frenzied speed—but the hand of Jim Bruce clamped on his arm.

"Dud! For God's sake, Dud!"

The boy stood stock still, staring into Jim Bruce's face—the face of a ghost marked with prison pallor, its eyes shining with a frantic anxiety. They faced each other speechless, both frozen by the very desperation that urged them to escape. Again a cry came from the front of

Overton's home—a whimpering wail of grief—and it put a mad light into Dudley Bruce's eyes. He wrenched his arm from his brother's grip. He pushed wildly and broke past with a sob.

Stunned, Jim Bruce swayed back against the hedge, Dud's swift footfalls tattooing in his brain. He blinked through a crazy confusion to see Mrs. Overton hurrying toward the gate. He sped away, his breath burning in his lungs.

BREATHLESS, his heart drumming, Jim Bruce sidled into the darkness of an alley, blocks away. He heard a whining of tires and knew that prowling cars were speeding to the home where Tom Overton lay dead. He crossed a yard, then a street, and walked swiftly. His muscles ached with tension and his mind beat with dread as he hurried. He signaled a cruising taxi and climbed in, and as it carried him toward Dudley Bruce's room, his anxiety for the kid became a consuming obsession.

He left the cab in front of an apartment building not far from the center of the city and sent furtive glances along the street as he climbed the stoop. On the second floor he knocked quietly on a door. This was Dud Bruce's room—but the rap brought no response. As he faced it, nerves drawn tight, Jim Bruce listened to the voice of a radio that was booming through another door:

"... Flash! Detective Tom Overton was cut down by killers' guns at the door of his home only a few minutes ago. The police are swiftly organizing a search for the murderers. It is thought that the killing of Overton is connected with his recent raids on several secret gambling rooms. Orders have already gone out to pick up a number of suspects. The information in Overton's last report, made only an hour before his murder, promises to send the killers to the chair. . . ."

In agony Jim Bruce called through the

panels: "Let me in, Dud! It's Jim!" A mocking silence answered him. He turned back, his dread a torment. As he went down the stairs the radio announcement haunted him: "Pick up suspects. . . . Send the killers to the chair. . . ." The thought that Dud Bruce had already been seized was a burning barb in his mind. Hope of finding the kid quickened his movements as he reached the landing—but as he turned he stopped short.

A man was standing at the base of the flight, his narrowed eyes on Jim Bruce, lips thinned in a cruel smile. He stood as motionless as Bruce, but his posture was easy while Bruce's every muscle was drawn to aching tightness. Sight of his face was like a stinging blow—for Second Class Detective Jay Lynch, relentless and hard, was the man who had branded Jim Bruce with guilt more than seven years ago.

Jim Bruce went down the stairs slowly, as Lynch's snaky smile grew. He paused on the landing, his face even whiter than the prison pallor had made it. He knew Lynch was here to pick up Dud. He knew Lynch's sadistic pleasure was doubled by his own presence. There was a threat in Lynch's eyes as he drawled:

"Why, hello, Bruce. Been looking for you. Got word today you were coming back. Always like to look up old friends." His voice was edged with contemptuous sarcasm. "I'm paying a little visit on your kid brother."

Jim Bruce said tightly, through a dry throat: "Dud's not here. I haven't seen him yet." Another question tortured him: "What do you want to see him for?"—but he crushed his lips together to keep from asking it. He said, instead: "Everything's square between you and me now, Lynch."

Lynch humphed. "Hear you've got yourself all set. Got a job over at Sam Owens' sporting store, haven't you?"

That's good—an ex-con working for an ex-cop. Going straight, and all that? That's a line they all pull, Bruce."

Jim Bruce's jaw muscles lumped. "You knew Sam Owens as a cop, and so did I. He's got a heart as big as the world. He offered me the job in his store because he believes I'll play square. I'm going to do it. I've learned my lesson, and whether you believe it or not, I'm going straight from now on."

Lynch's lips curled. "All ex-cons go straight—until they get the easy money fever again. I hope you're an exception. But if you go the way the rest of them do, Bruce, I'm telling you here and now—watch out for me. I got you cold once, and I'll do it again."

Jim Bruce smiled bitterly. "There was more than your job behind it, Lynch. You hounded me because you hated my guts. You were waiting to nail me, because of Fay Belden. I took her away from you, and you couldn't forget that. Well, you can keep on hounding me, Lynch—because I'm going to marry Fay Belden."

Lynch's eyes narrowed. "Watch your step, Bruce." He said it again as Jim Bruce went past with fists clubbed: "Just watch your step."

JIM BRUCE paused at the entrance, listening to the rapping of the detective's knuckles beating on Dud's door above. In one of the lower rooms another radio was breathlessly announcing a round-up of suspects. Before he went down the stoop, Jim Bruce heard the rasping voice of the radio:

"Tom Overton was the best loved man on the police force. He was respected and esteemed for his fair dealing and generosity. Commissioner Blake is supervising the search personally, and his men will exert every effort to take in Overton's killers. . . ."

Jim Bruce let the outer door shut soft-

ly behind him. Uncertainty about his kid brother was a torment that racked his mind and brain. In search of Dud, he hurried toward Fay Belden's apartment. When he reached the entrance of the building, he furtively searched the dark street. He climbed the stairs quickly, strode to the girl's door and, reaching for the knob, paused with relief surging through his aching body.

He heard Dud's low voice through the panels, speaking quickly. Fay Belden answered, in a quiet, crooning way that brought a pang to Jim Bruce's heart. It wiped away the years that had built a barrier between them—it brought back the days when there had been no steel screen to rob him even of the touch of her fingers. She was here, in this room. He had only to turn the knob to see her.

He paused. His smile faded from his lips. He stood just inside the door, silent, suddenly painfully conscious of his prison-made suit and his prison-made shoes, looking at the girl and his brother. They were in each other's arms. They had not even heard him come in.

CHAPTER TWO

Blood Money

IT was the girl who saw him first. Her blue eyes widened with dismay, then lighted with surprised gladness. She turned from Dud and flew toward him. He forced a wry smile as she paused, studying his wan face. The kid stood back, swallowing hard, speechlessly watching Jim Bruce. The girl was silent, lips parted, cheeks flushed crimson, until:

"Jim! Why didn't you tell us you were coming?"

His bitter smile tightened. He had wanted it to be a surprise. It was, all right—a two-way surprise! He straightened, crushing down seven years of yearning in one torturous moment, and extend-

ed a hand calloused by work in the prison shops.

"Hello, Fay," he said.

She whispered "Jim!" and flung her arms around him. He had hungered for her warm perfume, the sheen of her corn-colored hair, but now it all hurt. As she clung to him, he looked at Dud. The kid was standing braced against a table, his tongue creeping across dry lips. Dud forced a smile and came forward. His slap at Jim Bruce's shoulder was like old times—lost times won back again—except it was forced. There was a strange happiness in the boy's eyes, but the worry in them was stronger—an anxiety that was gnawing at his heart.

Jim Bruce took the girl's arms and forced them down. She looked at him in alarm as he turned grimly to the kid.

"Lynch is looking for you, Dud," he said, his voice rasping. "Seven years ago he was looking for me, and now he's looking for you. You know what for, don't you? Dud, for God's sake, why did you do that?"

Fay asked quickly: "Do you know, Jim? He won't tell me what's troubling him. He came in a moment ago, white as a ghost, out of breath—but he won't tell me."

Jim Bruce cut in savagely: "Listen to me, Dud! The police are tearing this town apart. You know how they go after cop killers. You know the kind of man Tom Overton was, and that makes it worse. They're cracking down on every possible suspect. They'll take you—"

"Leave this to me!" A challenging fire came into Dudley Bruce's eyes. "I can take care of myself!"

Jim Bruce's knuckles rapped the table. "What's going to happen when Lynch nabs you? He'll put you under the light. I know how they'll work on you. I've been through it. They'll wear you down—pound at you, pound, pound until you

break. For God's sake, why did you do it?"

The kid blazed: "Let 'em break me! I'll tell 'em the truth! You saw it happen, didn't you? I didn't know they were going to kill him. You know I tried to keep Overton from getting hit. What have I got to be afraid of?"

Jim Bruce drew up. He looked hard at the kid's drawn face. This crazily defiant and unreasoning thing Dud had said—it came of the very qualities in him that Jim Bruce loved. The pure boyishness of it—Jim Bruce hoped Dud would never lose it. He closed his hard hands on the kid's shoulders and spoke through drawn lips.

"I saw it. I know what happened. But do you think the cops will believe it? Do you think Lynch will? They'll laugh in your face—and it won't matter even if they believe it. You made yourself an accomplice. You went there with Karpf and Manther with a gun, and if they find that out, you'll go to the chair."

Dudley Bruce's face went even whiter than his brother's. He tried to speak, but Jim rushed on:

"Listen, kid. You just said you'd tell the cops the truth. I began taking care of you before you could walk. I put you through school and got you a job. I built my whole life around you—until Lynch got me. You mean a hell of a lot to me, don't you realize that? Well, tell *me* the truth. I've got it coming, haven't I? Why did you do it?"

Fay Belden listened with speechless anxiety as the boy answered: "I had to."

"Why did you have to?" Jim Bruce's question hammered. "Good Lord, kid, I'm only trying to keep you from going the same way I did. You know that! Who forced you to do it?"

"Nat Dynan." Suddenly the boy struck Jim's hands from his shoulders. "All right, I'll give it to you. You got me a

job, yes—a filthy job, feeding a printing press, hour after hour, day after day, the same suffocating thing week after week. I lied to you in my letters. I haven't had that job for two years. I've been playing along with Dynan because it meant big money."

Jim Bruce retorted bitterly: "Big money! That's what I thought."

"I haven't done anything crooked," Dudley Bruce sped on. "I've gambled—that's the worst I've done. I won, too—until lately. I had a bad streak. I owe Dynan more than I can ever pay back by working and saving. Do you want me to welsh on what I owe? I've got to pay it, haven't I? What chance would I have of getting out even, if I didn't—"

Jim Bruce rasped: "You crazy kid, don't you know any games Dynan runs are crooked? You won when he wanted you to, and you began losing when he needed you to do his dirty work for him!"

The kid's voice became shrilly defiant. "All right—go ahead and preach! I'm twenty grand in the hole. Dynan said he'd cancel half of it if I went along with Karpf and Manther. He said they were only going to rough up Overton. That's God's truth. What else could I answer? You saw me try to stop it. It's too late now for your preaching!"

"Kid." Again Jim Bruce's hands went to his brother's shoulders. "Get this straight: I'm not preaching at you. I'm trying to get you clear. I'll do anything to keep you from going the same way I went—do you understand that?—because I know what it means—know it from the inside. And it's hell!"

Dudley Bruce's eyes steadied on Jim's. A flush of regret colored his cheeks. He said in a whisper. "Okay, Jim."

"You've got to clear out of town, kid."

The frenzy came back into Dud's voice. "I can't do that! Clearing out would be a confession of guilt. Nat and the others

will say I'm yellow. I stand bad enough with them now. I can't leave town, Jim!"

Jim Bruce's mind raced. "Maybe you're right. I was thinking of Lynch—the way Lynch will handle you, the same as he handled me. Maybe you'd better face it, and try to stand the gaff. It'll hurt, kid, but—" He broke off, determination squaring his jaw. "You're in this too deep now. I'm helping you get out. I'm going to see to that Dynan lets you alone."

Fay Belden's hand went quickly to Jim Bruce's arm. "Jim, you've got to be terribly careful. We both know how mean Jay Lynch is. Trying to get Dud clear will make you an accomplice too, won't it? If you give him the slightest chance, Lynch will—send you back, Jim."

"I know that." Jim Bruce's lips formed an acid smile. "What happens to me doesn't matter. I'm thinking of Dud—of Dud and you both, now." His own words made him wince. "How many times have I got to say it? I'll stop at nothing to keep Dud from going the way I went."

He strode to the door and gripped the knob. The girl followed him anxiously, and seized his hand. The boy stood uncertain, forehead furrowed, while she asked.

"Can't I talk to you just a little while, Jim, alone? I don't want you to go—like this."

"Sure, Fay—later. This can't wait. I guess, no matter what you've got to say, I'll understand because I've got to. I've got to take it and like it." His stinging eyes turned to Dud. "Come on, kid. We're seeing Dynan."

HE went out, glancing again at the girl's anguished eyes. The lingering touch of her hand seemed to sear his skin. For seven endless years prison walls had shut him away from Fay, and now a

stronger barrier had risen between them.

"Better lead the way, Dud," he said quietly. "You know where Dynan's place is. We'd better keep out of sight as much as possible, hadn't we?"

They walked a block without speaking. Jim Bruce sensed the nervous tension of the kid. He knew that sensation—a feeling of being watched and hunted, a feeling of a mighty invisible man-trap inexorably closing down. They strode close to the buildings, in the shadows. When they turned, Jim Bruce saw the kid open his wallet and slip a worn, folded paper from it.

"You'd better keep it, Jim. Know what it is? It's the option you bought just before Lynch arrested you. Remember?" he asked quietly. "I've kept it bought up ever since."

Jim Bruce remembered all too clearly those cherished plans, since destroyed. He remembered the week when they had toured New England, the three of them together, with the zest of discoverers finding a fresh, rich, verdant world. He remembered the old ramshackle inn they had found in a paradise of peace—the Twin Bridges Inn, it was called, mouldering with pre-Revolutionary traditions, promising them everything they had ever dreamed of.

They had planned its development together, the three of them, after Jim Bruce had bought an option on the place from its mossy proprietor. Dud and Fay had shared Jim's enthusiasm and purpose, saving for the day when the Twin Bridges Inn could become theirs—but, instead had come the day that had wrecked all their precious plans, when Jim Bruce had gone to prison.

Dud was saying: "It's still there, Jim. Nobody else has come along to buy it. I thought it was the least I could do, to repay all you've done for me; to keep the

option running. I wish—I wish we could buy it now."

Jim Bruce said huskily: "That was swell of you, kid. Swell."

Grim relief filled Jim Bruce as the kid turned toward the entrance of an apartment house in the center of the city.

They climbed to the top floor of the low dwelling. Dudley Bruce knocked quietly at a door at the end of the corridor. A safety chain rattled; an eye looked out. The boy led the way in, and Jim Bruce followed. They went along a corridor and into a room outfitted as an office. When Jim Bruce paused, facing Nat Dynan across the polished desk, he was again conscious of his prison suit and heavy prison shoes.

Dynan's clothing was expensively tailored. He extended a glittering, manicured hand to Jim Bruce—the grim-faced man who had been a kid like Dud and had fallen for Dynan's lure of quick, easy money. His smile faded as Jim refused to meet his hand.

Dynan asked pompously: "What have you got against me, Jim? I'm glad to see you back. I'd like to help you out. I can put a little money your way, you know. It wasn't my fault you took the rap, was it?"

"I didn't come here about that." Jim Bruce's gaze leveled into Dynan's squinting eyes. "I took the rap, and I'm square. I've got a job, and I'm not expecting any conscience money from you, Nat. I'm here about Dud."

Dynan challenged: "What about him?"

JIM BRUCE smiled wryly. "You've come up in the world, haven't you, Nat? You didn't have much when we grabbed the stones together. You're raking in plenty—you almost run the town. You've come pretty high, but you haven't changed, under the skin. You're still the—"

Dynan snapped again: "What about the kid?"

"Plenty!" Jim Bruce leaned forward. "You're leading him along the same way you led me. You've trapped him, bound him to you, with your crooked games. When you need somebody to take a rap, to satisfy the police and the papers, so Nat Dynan can stay on top of the heap, he'll be the one to get it. You sent him out tonight to kill—whether he knew it or not. Under the skin you're still a rat."

Dynan's pinched eyes glittered. "You're wise, Jim. You've had plenty of time to get wise. It ain't good for the health to talk like that."

"I'm giving it to you straight." The square line of Jim Bruce's jaw hardened. "From now on the kid's out of it. He's not playing any more of your fixed games. You're not giving him any more orders. If you don't figure him out of it, you've got the fight of your life on your hands."

Dynan sneered: "Ex-cons like you don't fight *me*."

The telephone purred. A silent moment passed before Dynan's jeweled hand reached toward it—a moment, while his squinted eyes narrowed with a silent, merciless threat.

"Wait a minute!" Dynan snapped it, then took his palm from the transmitter. "All right," he rasped into it. "All right," he said again, "he'll get it." He looked ominously at Jim Bruce and added: "Tell him there's an ex-con in town who'll bear watching. I'll bring it myself—with a bonus for watching the ex-con." He lowered the instrument and strode to Jim Bruce.

"How'll you like going back up the river? I can do it. You said a minute ago I damn near run this town. You're not telling *me* where to get off—not Nat Dynan in this burg. When I want to use

the kid again, I'll use him. I guess we understand each other now, don't we?"

Jim Bruce answered through drawn lips: "Touch the kid again, Nat, and the next time I go up the river it'll be for murder!"

Dynan laughed. The mocking, contemptuous sound brought angry heat beating to Jim Bruce's temples as he walked out the door and strode down the stairs. Dudley Bruce was at his side, eyes widened with anxiety. Wariness slowed them when they reached the sidewalk. Cooling wind fanned Jim Bruce's hot face as he drew the kid into a shadow.

"It's suicide—talking like that to Dynan!" Dudley Bruce protested. "You told him too much—he knows you know about Overton. God, Jim—you'd better play along with him or you'll get it the way—"

Jim Bruce had begun to smile. "Play along with a rat like Dynan? I did that once, and it cost me plenty. It's exactly what I'm going to keep you from doing. Kid, listen: I'm licked before I start if you're not with me. God, you don't want what I got, do you, kid—the best years of your life spent inside that soul-killing—"

Dudley Bruce interrupted earnestly: "You don't understand, Jim. You don't see it right. I'm not a welsher. I can't walk out on a man I owe ten grand—Not even a guy like Dynan, I can't—"

Jim Bruce's fist smacked into his palm. "You're not welshing when you walk out on a man who's planning to use you for a fall-guy. You crazy kid! You're asking for a trip up the river, feeling like that! Loyalty! Are you loyal to me, Dud, or to that rat?"

"I can't—"

The boys eyes widened with alarm as he broke off. Jim Bruce's alert gaze followed Dud's to the entrance of the building. Both stepped into deeper shadow while Nat Dynan strode out. Dynan's

heels clicked away as Jim Bruce's hand pressed urgently to the boy's arm.

"Go back to your room, kid. You've got to take your chances with the cops. Your best bet is that they don't know you. If they happen to pick up Overton's killers, you'll get it—sure as hell! Then, if you break, you're done for—understand? That's your part of the job—not to break. The rest is up to me. Beat it, kid."

DUDLEY BRUCE moved off, his face drawn with anxiety. Jim Bruce saw him mingling with the shadows beyond as he turned to follow Dynan. He reached the corner without being aware that the kid had paused and was turning back. Dud Bruce re-entered the apartment building as his brother stepped out of sight. Jim Bruce, walking quietly, kept his thoughtful eyes on Dynan—and followed.

He realized Dynan's evil power, the odds he was facing. A feeble hope that he might gain a strategical advantage led him after the leader of the gambling ring. Dynan's telephone conversation, in the office above, had kindled a spark of suspicion in Jim Bruce's mind. He told himself that Dynan's words could have been addressed to only one man. If he could find proof, it might be a weapon in his hand to wield for the sake of his kid brother.

Dynan kept walking, and by that Jim Bruce knew his destination was not far. It was a house on a side street. A "Rooms For Rent" sign was tacked on the door to which Dynan climbed. As Dynan stepped in, Jim Bruce hurried. He bounded up the stoop and shouldered through to hear Dynan's footfalls on the flight above.

He went up the stairs with wary quickness. As he reached the third landing he glimpsed a door just closing. Jim Bruce paused, glancing around. Another door-

way in the hall stood open, disclosing a dark, unoccupied room. He took quiet steps past it, crouched at the door of the room Dynan had entered. Inside, a husky voice said:

"If you're askin' me, it's dough well spent. You goin' to keep on feedin' him, Nat?"

Dynan countered: "What do you think? We've got just one gambling room left now, after those damn raids, and we've got to build up. His tips'll keep us clear. When is he due?"

"In a few minutes now."

"All right. Tell him I want Jim Bruce out of the way—got that? Bruce knows too much. His kid brother's too squeamish to be safe. Both of them have got to be handled easy, on account of Overton—but they've got to be handled."

Jim Bruce stepped back quickly as footfalls came to the door. He slipped into the empty room as light shafted across the hall. Covered by the darkness, he watched Nat Dynan go down the stairs. He waited tensely until Dynan's heels beat out through the door. Then, urged by strengthening suspicion, he slipped into the hall and glided back to the other door.

A tumbler lock fastened it, but light sparkled through an old keyhole. Jim Bruce pressed his eye close. His lips tightened at sight of the man sitting at a table in the center of the room. The face of Chet Roche, notorious fixer and go-between of the underworld, recalled a courtroom scene to Jim Bruce's mind. He saw Chet Roche again, seated on the witness stand, falsifying testimony in support of Jay Lynch's—testimony that made a prison stretch inevitable for Jim Bruce—Roche perching forward in the chair, just as he was leaning now across the table, fingering a thick envelope.

Quiet footfalls on the stairs startled him. He straightened and sped into the dark room while they climbed. He stood

deep in the gloom, peering—and a crazy exultation filled him at sight of the man who appeared at the top of the flight. He watched Detective Jay Lynch go toward the room where Roche was waiting.

The sound of a knock followed, and the click of a drawn bolt. Jim Bruce eased into the hall as the light from the other door waned. He strode to it, his pulse throbbing. He drew a deep breath, then he thrust with all his strength against the panels. The door opened with a creak and shatter of metal and wood. Chet Roche stumbled back to the table, an automatic wavering in his hand, as Jim Bruce straightened, backed to the door.

Roche, the go-between drew up, gun lifting level, staring aghast at Jay Lynch. The detective stood at the table, jaw out-thrust, eyes slitted—in hand an envelope, in the other a fat roll of bills he had apparently just taken from it. Instinctively, Lynch jammed the money in his pocket. So that was the way Dynan was “feeding” Lynch!

They peered at each other in silence, the three of them pale and scarcely breathing, until Jim Bruce said tightly:

“Now I know the answer, Lynch.”

Lynch’s eyes flickered a merciless message to the staggered Roche. It said clearly as uttered words: “Get him!” Roche began to draw up, tensing himself for the moment when he would pull the trigger. Jim Bruce watched the gun, leaning his weight toward the tips of his toes, spreading his fingers, as he went on levelly:

“Now I get the reason why Nat Dynan was never brought to trial for a jewel robbery seven years ago—why I took the rap alone. You were crooked even then, Lynch. You took Dynan’s graft. That’s good. A cop crooked as I was, hounding me up the river—and promising now to do it again!”

Lynch’s eyes gleamed. Roche was peer-

ing at Jim Bruce. His widened eyes were black and small as the ominous muzzle of the gun. The tremble of his wizened body was carrying into his trigger finger. It was squeezing tighter, tighter, while Jim Bruce peered at the gun and said:

“Do you think now you’re going to get anything on me, Lynch? Do you think now you’ll be knocking on my kid brother’s door again? You figure it out. You’re going to lie low and let the kid alone or—”

A jerk of Chet Roche’s body signaled Jim Bruce’s leap. He sprang forward at an angle, twisting in the air. He struck down at the gun as it blazed. The crackle of splintering wood blended with the thundering report. A bullet cracking through at the spot where Bruce had stood. Jim Bruce’s fingers gripped the hot pistol barrel as he twisted past Roche.

One of Lynch’s clubbed fists was driving toward his drawn face. Hard knuckles jarred along the line of his jaw. He wrenched again, tearing the weapon from Roche’s fingers. He struck with his left, squarely into Lynch’s twisted mouth. The detective’s blood marked his hand as he sent the automatic spinning through the window. When he whirled, Roche and Lynch were lurching at him together.

Jim Bruce struggled against arms pinioned around his waist as Lynch struck twice swiftly. The detective pulled back, snatching at the service revolver in his hip pocket holster. Bruce struck down at Roche’s neck, then kicked. His toes clicked to Lynch’s arm as the revolver flashed up. He struggled forward, dragging Roche as he gripped Lynch’s wrist.

He seized it in both hands, twisted it high and back. Bone grated against bone as a tortured moan drooled from Lynch’s mouth. Bruce whipped the gun downward and shook it to the floor. He struck once, with dazzling swiftness, squarely between Lynch’s eyes. Lynch spilled back, snarl-

ing with fury. Bruce gripped Roche's waist, raised him, sent him crashing against the wall—and drew back smiling.

Lynch straightened slowly, lips bleeding, eyes steely slits. He made no move to pick up the revolver. But the threat in his eyes was as deadly as though the gun had been leveled at Jim Bruce's heart—still Bruce smiled. Roche lay unconscious while they stood, their eyes battling, their fiery hatred a mutual challenge. Jim Bruce said, "Yellow as hell. I knew it!"

He opened the door. His heels beat an even, dogged rhythm as he went down the stairs and out into the night—and still, thinking of the kid, he smiled.

CHAPTER THREE

Heartbreak Bargain

JIM BRUCE waited anxiously in the telephone booth. His knuckles still seeped red. He had something on Jay Lynch now—something he could use to help Dud—but a chill crept through his body as he recalled the glint in Lynch's eyes. The crooked detective was playing a cautious game, but a deadly one. Jim Bruce knew that he was now—if never before—marked for death. He blinked in dismay as he heard a woman's voice say over the line:

"Mr. Bruce isn't here."

He broke the connection and dialled the number of Fay Belden's apartment. He asked quickly, "Fay, Dud's there, isn't he? I want to talk—"

"He hasn't come back, Jim," the girl answered quickly. Jim, listen. Won't you let me explain? I've got to see you. Please let me—"

Jim Bruce said in a dead voice: "You don't have to explain anything to me, Fay."

He hung up, shouldered from the booth, hesitated in thought, then strode swiftly.

He turned into the street where Dynan's gambling place was located. There was a chance that Dud might be there. When he reached the entrance and glanced around, a chill struck through him. He glimpsed men standing quietly at the corners—headquarters detectives. Jim Bruce sensed an electrical tension in the air, as though a storm were about to break—but he went in. He climbed quickly to the door of Dynan's office.

The safety chain rattled a response to his knock. A wary eye scanned him through the crack. He said tightly: "I guess you know me. I'm looking for Dud Bruce."

The door closed. A feverish anxiety filled Jim Bruce while he waited. When the door opened again he noted a sardonic smile on the face of the man who admitted him. He parted heavy drapes and stepped into a humming, amber-lighted room. Inside it, fifty men and women were huddling tensely around the gaming tables. Instantly Jim Bruce saw Dud watching with haggard eyes the bounding of a ball on a roulette wheel.

The croupier raked in the chips as Jim Bruce strode to the kid. Dud looked up, startled, dismayed, when Jim's hand took his arm.

"I asked you to go home, kid. I told you I was licked at the start if you weren't with me."

Dud drew away from the table anxiously. "I came back to see Dynan," he said huskily. "I want to try to square you with him. God, Jim, you talked yourself into a bullet in the back. I've got to see Dynan to tell him you mean all right and—"

Jim Bruce's gesture interrupted. I'll chance the bullet. Can't you understand plain language? I don't give a damn what happens to me—but you've got to get clear. You were crazy to come back here, with the cops trying to connect you with Overton and—"

A shrill whistle cut into his words. It rattled in the street below. The fluttering sound brought silence into the room. Those at the table straightened tensely. Cards dropped with palsied fingers. Stacks of chips toppled. The roulette wheel whirled unseen. Glassy eyes peered toward the windows and doors as a whisper broke through the hush:

"Raid!"

Jim Bruce's hand tightened on his kid brother's arm. "We're getting out of here, Dud! It'll go twice as hard on you if they pick you up here! Get out that door!"

He hurried toward the entrance, tugging Dud with him. Three of Dynan's men were crowded at the door. One had opened it as far as the safety chain would allow and was peering out, gun in hand. Beyond, heavy heels beat on the stairs. Headquarters men bounded into sight as the door slapped shut.

The man at the door blurted: "Inspector Northrup's leading 'em!"

THE building was suddenly alive with movement. Those in the gambling room began to scatter in panic. Scores crowded toward the door as Jim Bruce turned back with Dud. He elbowed his way through them, forcing the kid ahead. Two of Dynan's men broke past, rushing toward another door. They whirled through and attempted to close it—but Jim Bruce's shoe thrust into the crack.

"Get in there, kid!"

He heaved against the door. The two men retreated across the office, toward a window, as Jim Bruce pushed Dud in. Men and women were crowding along the corridor when he slapped the door shut and twisted the bolt into its socket. At the entrance of the suite gruff voices were shouting orders. Rifle butts were beating the door. The sounds carried into

Dynan's office as Jim Bruce tugged the kid to the window.

"Get out of here, Dud!"

The boy's face was ashen as he legged over the sill. A dark gulf lay outside, but from some point below came the sound of running feet. Dynan's men were already making a quick escape. The kid hung, peering down fearfully, then dropped. Jim Bruce poised, hearing Dud's feet strike a roof below. Women were screaming and men were shouting in the corridor when Jim Bruce pulled over and fell.

He tumbled into baffling blackness. He groped across the roof at Dud's side. Swinging over a cornice, then another, they worked their way toward the corner building. A fire escape led them down into a bleak court. They climbed a fence into another yard and hurried to the rear door of a building facing on the next street. The raid was making a Bedlam in the night when they pushed through.

They emerged breathless, crossed the street, hurried anxiously past the corner. Dud Bruce kept at Jim's side. Blocks away they paused, blood still rushing hot. Jim's hand closed hard on the boy's arm.

"This time you're going to your room and stay there! You've got to take your chances with the cops if they pick you up. You were crazy to go back. If they'd found you there—"

"They're wiping Dynan out!" Dud Bruce blurted. "That room's the last of the string. God, they're going after him! He's done for in this town."

Jim Bruce said grimly: "That's what happens to cop-killers, kid. All the graft Dynan can plant won't keep him from getting the works for the Overton killing. That goes for every one of his pack of rats. Listen, kid: When they pick you up, you can't let yourself break. If

you break, it'll mean the chair. Don't forget that!"

Dudley Bruce stared aghast. His dry lips worked in agony. Jim Bruce drew him away, and they walked swiftly again. As they went along a dark street, Jim said tightly: "Head for your room, kid—and wait." He turned abruptly at a corner. The kid hesitated in dismay, then strode on swiftly. The heels of Jim's prison shoes beat the pavement heavily as he walked alone. His own words haunted him: "The chair. . . ."

DARK lines were bitten deep in Jim Bruce's face when he approached Fay Belden's apartment late the next afternoon. Banner headlines in the morning papers had announced the sensational raid. Nat Dynan and his lieutenants were in hiding and being hunted. A grim police machine was crushing the gambling ring. Yet none of the startling news struck as sharply at Jim Bruce's heart as a single line that still haunted him:

"Dudley Bruce is one of those picked up as a suspect in the murder of Detective Overton."

Fay Belden opened the door at Jim Bruce's imperative knock. Pale, worn with anxiety, she studied his drawn face as he came in awkwardly. He took an envelope out of his pocket, fumbled with it, and put it back before he spoke:

"You haven't heard anything from Dud, have you, Fay?"

"Nothing, Jim." She took his hand. "I'm glad you've come. There are so many things I want to say to you. It isn't as it seems—between Dud and me."

He said softly: "The kid's in love with you."

"I didn't mean it to be that way, Jim. Perhaps it's my fault—all of it. I knew Dud quit his job, of course, but I couldn't tell you. I knew he was getting himself into a bad fix. It was because he means

so much to you, Jim, that I tried to straighten him out. That's what led up to it."

Jim Bruce said again: "He's in love with you."

"I let it happen because it was my only way of helping him out of it," the girl said in a rush. "Don't you see that, Jim? I thought he'd get clear of Dynan for my sake. It has helped, I think. Dud is straight. He's square and clean. He's in trouble only because of his boyish sense of loyalty to the wrong things."

He observed bitterly: "If it's a choice between losing you and getting the kid straightened out, why—I want to save the kid."

"I know that. But listen. He hasn't taken your place with me. No one ever can. You believe that, don't you, Jim?"

He looked deep into her earnest eyes. His arms ached to take her and hold her close—but a quick step in the hall held him back. He turned stiffly, throat parched, as the door opened.

Dudley Bruce came to a standstill on the sill. His eyes were shot with red. His face was white with fatigue and worry. His tie was crooked, his face unshaven. He backed to the door, breathing deeply, and forced a tired smile.

"I didn't break," he said in a small voice.

Jim Bruce strode to him swiftly. "God, what did they do to you? You're worn out. You got through it, didn't you, kid?"

Dud blurted again: "I didn't break."

He fell into a chair and sobbed. Jim Bruce winced when Fay knelt beside him and drew her arms around him.

"You're all set, then, kid. You know I'm working for Sam Owens at the sporting goods store, and he's for us. His brother is manager of an advertising firm in Chicago. Sam telegraphed him today, and the answer just came. Your job's

waiting for you. Here's a letter from Sam to his brother, and two tickets. All you have to do is—"

Fay Belden asked in a whisper: "Two tickets, Jim?"

Jim Bruce went on. "It's a good job, kid. It's a chance of a lifetime. Here are the reservations for the ten o'clock, to-night."

Again the girl asked: "Two tickets, Jim?"

"Sure," he said tightly. "For you and Dud. The kid needs you, Fay. You'll be the making of him." He straightened, turning from the girl's anguished eyes. "Better start getting packed. I'll be at the station to see you off—and—and to wish you luck." He put the envelope on the table.

Dud came out of the chair suddenly. He gripped Jim's hand as his cheeks flushed. "Thanks," he said. "Thanks. But the hell with it. I—we're not leaving you out in the cold, Jim. What're you going to do here? Listen, we've got to talk this over and—"

Jim Bruce repeated huskily: "See you at ten o'clock—at the station." Still conscious of the girl's burning eyes, he strode to the door. He did not look back as he went out.

JIM BRUCE couldn't keep his eyes from the clock while he worked behind the counter of Sam Owens' sporting goods store. When he went out to supper, he ate alone. Ten o'clock became a mark Jim Bruce dreaded to reach.

Returning to the store, he found florid-faced Sam Owens frowning into a glass display case.

"I don't find any record of it, Jim," he said worriedly, "but did you sell an automatic this afternoon?"

"Haven't sold a gun since I came, Sam."

"That's funny. One's missing."

They searched the cases together, while

Jim Bruce kept glancing at the clock.

When the telephone rang, Sam Owens continued the hunt for the missing gun while Jim answered the call. The voice that spoke over the line was lowered and cautious.

"Listen, Bruce: This is a friendly tip. I'm telling you because your kid brother's a friend of mine. He's in trouble."

Jim Bruce snapped: "Where is he?"

"I'm not saying much," the cautious answer came. "I don't want to get mixed into it. He's over at Sixty-eight Carter Street now. That's all I'm saying. Find out the rest for yourself."

The connection broke. Jim Bruce's cheeks prickled with a chill as he turned from the instrument. He snatched up his hat and strode along the shiny counters while Sam Owens blinked. Reaching for the entrance knob, he paused. Jim Bruce knew the man who was coming in. It was Inspector Northrup, Tom Overton's closest friend, who had led the raid on Dynan's den last night.

Bruce, heart speeding, felt the force of Northrup's scrutinizing stare. He dreaded to hear what the Inspector might say. Puzzled, he saw Northrup smile and extend a hard hand.

"Glad to see you've got a good job, Jim. Sam tells me you're straightened out, and that satisfies me. I hope you keep it up."

Bruce asked anxiously: "What about my kid brother, Inspector? He's in the clear, isn't he? You haven't got anything on him, have, you?"

Northrup's eyes hardened. "That kid brother of yours has been running wild. Anybody connected with Dynan is under suspicion. Some of his rod men killed Tom Overton, and we're not going to stop until we've got those rats. I hope your brother didn't have anything to do with it, Jim. It'll be damn tough if he did."

Jim Bruce's lips went dry. "You watch

that kid. He's got a good job in Chicago now, and he's getting married. You know Fay Belden. You don't have to worry about the kid when he's got himself a fine girl like her."

Northrup said dryly: "I hope not, Jim."

THE hard glint in the inspector's eyes troubled Jim Bruce as he strode out and hurried to a taxi station. The sinister implications of the telephone call cooled his heart while the cab carried him toward 68 Carter Street. He hurried from it toward the house. It was old, silent and dark.

Jim Bruce stepped into the gloom of the porch, knocked and gripped the knob. The rap echoed with a hollow sound. He found the door unfastened, and looked into a dark hall. He called "Dud!" as he stepped in. He paused when no answer came out of the darkness. "Dud!" he called again, and fumbled for a match.

Sudden movement startled Jim Bruce. It fluttered through a dark door in the hall. A heavy body crashed against him, hurling him against the opposite wall. He twisted in a desperate effort to ward off the man who pressed him back. He felt hot, panting breath, but he could see nothing of the face of his assailant. He struck out once, and his knuckles clicked. The black man fell back, then whirled and sped out the door.

Bewildered, Jim Bruce stumbled onto the porch. A dark figure was fleeing along the street. He was certain it was not Dud, but the certainty only increased his puzzlement. As he hesitated, he became conscious that one of his coat pockets was sagging. He thrust his hand into it and felt cold metal.

He jerked back into the hallway, pulling the thing from his pocket. He knew without being able to see it that it was an automatic. He closed the door and called again: "Kid! Are you here?" There was

only empty echo of his own voice. He tore a paper match from a packet and in the yellow flare peered at the gun. It was new, but the pungency of burned powder clung to it. Its chill crept up his fingers and arm to his heart.

Jim Bruce carried the match along the hall. At the next door he jerked to a stop. The dying flame outlined something on the bare floor of the room beyond. He dropped the stub, struck another light and stared aghast. The flicker showed him a man sprawled face up, his shirt front glistening redly—Chet Roche. And he knew Chet Roche was dead.

A cold frenzy forced Jim Bruce into the room. Concern for Dud dominated his mind. Did the telephone message mean that the kid had done this? If he had—

He jerked from the room, eyes widened at a shadow blearing over the pane of the entrance. He straightened, breath drawn deep into his aching lungs, as the beam of a flashlight struck along the hall and impaled him against the door.

"Stay where you are, killer!"

It was Jay Lynch's voice!

Jim Bruce stood erect, as Lynch strode close, keeping the shaft in his eyes. A second torch gleamed in the hand of another man who turned into the room where lay Chet Roche's murdered body. Lynch stopped, eyes glinting.

"Murdock and I have been watching this place," he said with ominous softness. "The murderer always returns! Dropped your gun when you let Roche have it, didn't you? Had to come back for it, didn't you? You didn't know we'd already had a call from a neighbor and knew about it. We've got you cold, Bruce!"

Jim Bruce answered levelly: "A nice little frame, Lynch!"

"That's what they all say," Lynch grinned. But it won't stand up this time. Your fingerprints are on that gun and we can

connect you with it otherwise. Roche helped send you up the river, and you were getting back at him for it, weren't you?" Lynch laughed scornfully. "I almost wish you'd try to make a getaway, Bruce. That would save the state the expense of frying you."

Jim Bruce snapped: "You've got your wish!"

He leaped toward the gun in the detective's hand. His swift, straight-arm blow struck the bicep of Lynch's arm. The paralyzing impact forced the revolver aside as Bruce struck again. The gun exploded at his side, shattering a pane of the rear entrance. Lynch staggered back, light wavering, as Bruce pistoned his fists between the detective's eyes.

Lynch slumped down. Bruce snatched the revolver and hurled it blindly. Flashing light swung through the hallway door as Murdock lurched out. Bruce still had the automatic—and used it. His swift bullets blasting across the door forced Murdock to retreat. Firing again, he leaped past to the entrance. Then Jim Bruce was out and running wildly.

He rushed through a maze of yards and alleys, through shadows and black streets. As he crouched breathless, blocks from the house he had escaped, he knew that the grim police machinery would already be going into action. He could almost hear the signal that was closing a trap around him.

"Pick up Jim Bruce—for murder."

CHAPTER FOUR

Gun Gamble

JIM BRUCE, wanted for murder, huddled in a well of darkness. Buildings walled the narrow space on four sides. A checkerboard of lighted windows threw a gleam into the court. He looked up, with aching eyes, at one of them. It opened into Fay Belden's apartment, and a shadow

moving across the curtains told him she was there.

He had groped his way circuitously to this block, risking capture at every corner. It was nearing ten—his last chance to see her and tell her good-bye.

Jim watched anxiously as her shadow moved back and forth again across the curtains. Filled with hot urgency, he crossed the court to the rear door of the apartment house. He peered through the grimy panes, made sure no headquarters man was stationed in the lower hall, and shouldered through.

His knock at the girl's door brought a quick response. She stood back, widened eyes searching his, as he came in. He looked around, bewildered disappointment showing on his face. He had half expected to see Dud here.

"Jim! I heard it on the radio. They're looking for you. You didn't do it, Jim—I know you didn't!"

"Where's Dud?" he demanded, disregarding her urgent voice. "What're you waiting for? You've got a train to catch."

She whispered: "We're not going."

He gripped her shoulders. "Listen! Dud's whole life depends on it. I can't look after him now, with the cops on my tail. That's up to you. If you don't—"

The girl broke in: "He came to tell me a little while ago that he's not going through with it. He's crazy, Jim—but it's only because he's thinking of you and me. He told me he's in on a new job with Dynan—that they're going to make a clean-up before they skip town, and—"

"Dynan!"

Jim Bruce's face was close to hers. His fingers bit into the softness of her shoulders. "Good God, Fay, where's Dud? We've got to find him before—"

"I don't know, Jim. He told me this and went away. I've been trying to reach him, but I can't. He's hiding out with Dynan somewhere. He's insane to get

in on a job like that—robbing an armored truck. They're going to hold it up when it makes collections at the Green Hill Dairy in the morning. There'll be a quarter of a million in that truck—that's what they're after."

Jim's face was white, his mouth tense.

"He was crazy, I tell you, Jim. I tried to stop him, but he got away. I couldn't stop him, Jim. You can't find him now—not with the police hunting you. Dud said he couldn't be a welsher on both you and Dynan. He had to pay his debts. That's the real reason behind it, Jim. Dud sees us all working and saving for years to come—and losing the place to someone else. He thinks our getting the inn is the solution to everything, and that's what he's after. And now—now we can't stop him."

Jim Bruce said bitingly: "Can't we? I'll stop him. If the cops let me live—I'll stop him!"

"Jim—what're you going to do?"

He thrust into the hall without answering. Watching the front door, he stalked down the stairs with the alertness of a hunted animal. His hand poised, ready to snatch at the automatic weighting his pocket. At the base of the flight he jerked to a stop, frozen. Had he seen the sneering face of Jay Lynch through the pane of the entrance, for one fleeting second?

THE door remained closed; Lynch's face did not reappear. Jim Bruce turned in alarm, suddenly aware that the girl was standing behind him. A fierce determination shone in her eyes as she asked:

"Where are you going, Jim?"

He said: "You stay here. The kid'll come back. You've got to go with him."

"I'm going with you."

He seized her wrist. "You can't do that, Fay. Every cop in town is looking for me. You've got to stay here."

"I'm going with you."

And she went with him. Her clear, firm gaze challenged him to keep her back.

Their every move was a risk. An agony of anxiety filled Jim Bruce as they went furtively through the gloom—concern for the girl and the kid too. As they angled at the corners, he felt a haunting fear that they were being followed. While they went on he grew certain that unseen eyes were watching them.

Furtively they entered a street where yellow bulbs burned over the loading platform of a squat brick building. Milk delivery trucks were backed to it, and white uniformed men were unloading gleaming cans. It was the only activity in a block that was otherwise dark.

Fay Belden went with Bruce into a musty, littered hallway. They waited, searching the street, but caught no glimpse of anyone who might have trailed them. They climbed creaky stairs, and went into a forward room. Jim Bruce's muscles tightened as he looked down through the cobwebbed panes.

A stocky man was walking quietly on the opposite side of the street. He paused before he reached the light of the loading dock, and backed into a doorway. He melted into the blackness as Jim Bruce straightened.

"Lynch," he whispered. "Watching."

Jim Bruce looked at the automatic in the dim light. He drew out the clip and saw only two bullets were left.

DAWN crept into the city like a thin fog. An awakening medley of busy noises carried in with it. The grey glow, filtering in through the grimy panes, made dark lines in Jim Bruce's face. All night he had watched the ominous shadow in the opposite doorway. He had seen Lynch shift across the street and disappear, but he knew the detective was still posted somewhere below. And he had kept the

automatic tight in his hand.

The girl had remained at Jim Bruce's side, while delivery trucks rattled to and from the dock and men worked in the dairy office. Now the street lulled.

Bruce's breath stopped at the hum of a motor. A heavy closed car with drawn curtains turned into the street and rolled slowly. It drew to the left side of the street and braked. The driver, slouching at the wheel, appeared to doze. Silence returned while the car waited opposite the dock—the first move, Jim Bruce knew, in Dynan's desperate plan.

Fay Belden asked anxiously: "Is Dud in that car, Jim? Can you see?"

"I don't know."

Now iron-rimmed wheels rattled on the pavement. A push-cart rolled into view. A hunch-shouldered man with grimy face shuffled behind it. A dirty tarpaulin covered the empty bed of the cart, and through it Jim Bruce detected suspicious outlines. Beneath the canvas, Jim Bruce knew, a machine gun lay.

"That's not the kid."

Another hum quickened Jim Bruce's heart. A second sedan appeared, rolling from the opposite direction. Its curtains were also drawn. Once past the dairy office it slowed, drawing to the opposite curb. One door opened several inches and narrowed eyes looked out. Lips thinned. Bruce took a retreating step from the window.

"The kid must be in that one. He's got to be!"

"Jim!" Fay's hand seized him. "You can't show yourself now! Lynch—"

A new sound in the street broke into her words—a louder motor, grinding closer. They looked down through the filmed panes and saw the armored truck. It was a green fortress on wheels, drawing toward the dairy office. The money it would pick up here, Bruce knew, was small loot, but its doors must be opened

upon a fortune in cash it already had collected. Once those doors swung wide—

"I've got to stop that kid!"

Jim Bruce tore his hand from the girl's. He hurried down the creaky stairs, the automatic at his hip. At the broken door he stopped in dismay. The quick, efficient crew of the armored truck was already in action. Two uniformed men, revolvers in hand, were standing at its rear. Another, gun also bared, was striding into the dairy office. And the doors were open.

Bruce jerked through the broken entrance and onto the tenement stoop—and froze. At the same instant all of Dynan's pack went into action.

The doors of both sedans burst open. Men stepped out, automatics glinting. They began a quick scatter of shots along the street as the other man at the push-cart threw the tarpaulin aside. The sub-machine gun signaled battle with its deathly hammering.

Slugs hailed across the street. They spanged to the side of the metal truck as the two armed guards whirled. Their revolvers blazed at the men crowding toward them. Automatics barked into the stutter of the rapid-fire weapon, slashing at the uniformed men from both sides. Dynan and his masked lieutenants fired with murderous swiftness as they closed in—all except one.

Jim Bruce, as the savage attack broke, saw one of the masked robbers retreat to the wall. Jim's automatic raised, but he did not fire. Instead, he stared appalled into the center of the holocaust—Dud Bruce. His brother recognized him. His widened eyes pictured horror as the machine gun fire raked across the guards at the truck.

JIM BRUCE bounded down. He sped across the street, circling behind the farthest sedan. Pandemonium was storming the street when he reached the kid's

side. The windows of the dairy office dropped in splintering fragments before the onslaught. Inside men howled and scrambled for cover. The armed guard who had entered sprang out with revolver barking. Fusillade clashed with fusillade as Jim Bruce seized his brother's arm.

"Get across, kid!"

A snarl twisted the boy's mouth. He tried to jerk away—then was free of his brother's restraining hand. Then, with a forward lunge, Jim Bruce's closed fist came up; his knuckles cracked against the kid's jaw. And Dud Bruce sank down to the sidewalk, his gun clattering on the concrete.

Jim Bruce stooped, picked Dud's limp form with a mighty sweep of his left arm, and started with him, into the open. Caroming bullets, flying at wild angles off the walls, filled every foot of space with the danger of death. Jim sped with his human burden, toward the tenement door, peering back. Dynan's onslaught was spilling blood in the street while the doors of the truck still swung open on the treasure.

One guard had sprawled down at the rear of the armored car, his head pouring red. Another, his uniform ripped and stained by blood, was fighting on his knees. In the office doorway, the third clung to the jamb, jerking the trigger of his gun with a crimsoned hand. Again the murderer at the machine gun raked the street with a vicious blast. Slamming bullets whitened the glass around the wounded driver.

Jim Bruce was running, his gun out, doing what he could to shield the inert form of Dud from the bullets of Dynan's gang. He was almost across the street when he stopped, raised his gun, his heart thumping wildly in his breast.

There, not ten feet before him suddenly appeared Fay, on the tenement stoop. And behind her, his pistol levelling on

Jim Bruce's heart, stood Jay Lynch.

"Come an' get it, Bruce," snarled Lynch. "You aren't getting out of this!"

He could see the desperate, terror-stricken eyes of Fay, as she fought with the detective, struggled to free herself from the detective's grip. Lynch's pistol blasted under Fay's arm, and a bullet clipped Jim Bruce's ear; he felt the hot blood run down his neck, under his shirt collar. He came on, angling for a shot. Again Lynch raised his gun—and the automatic jammed.

With an oath, Lynch moved his left arm from the girl. It was an instinctive gesture, one which took the fraction of a second, but Fay whirled, pushing the hulking form of her captor back. He stumbled off balance down the steps, against the side of the tenement. And in an eye-wink, she was back inside the darkened hall, holding the door open for Jim.

Almost blindly Jim rushed up, hunched the kid from his shoulder. Dud moaned, shook his head as Jim sent him inside that darkened hallway with a savage thrust. Inside, Jim slammed the warped door and whirled, backing up as he saw a figure come toward the doorway. Lynch had discarded the jammed automatic that he had carried, and now his service gat beaded Jim Bruce's form in the darkened hallway.

Jim crouched as Lynch's bullet smashed plaster from the wall beside him. Lynch was coming at a run when Jim retreated after the kid.

He backed along the musty hall, watching the door. Dud was crouching at the base of the stairs. Fay Belden had come halfway down and now, white-faced, she was watching Jim in speechless terror. He kept backing toward the rear door that gave into a bleak yard, his eyes on the front. He had two bullets in his gun—and when Jay Lynch appeared at the entrance, he spent one.

The slug slapped bits of glass into the detective's merciless face. He ducked down and vanished as Jim gestured wildly to the girl. She stumbled down, to Dud's side. They started together toward the rear door, reeling half dazedly.

"Get out fast!" Jim Bruce rasped. "The squad cars will be closing in! You can make it that way!"

He had come down once, during the night, to make sure escape was possible through the tenements facing on the next street. He twisted the knob and jerked the way open. Dud Bruce stumbled out into the gloom. The girl caught at Jim's brother's hand as she paused. Instantly he tore free, still watching the entrance.

"Jim!"

"Clear out!"

He forced her through. Slapping the rear door shut, he turned, staring along the hall. The front door had swung askew, covering the lurking figure of Lynch. In the street, guns were still cracking, while the motor of the armored truck sang a powerful roar. The first whine of a prowler car siren cut the air as Jim Bruce started forward.

He looked back once through the misty pane of the rear door. Dud and the girl were no longer in the yard. They must be already hurrying through one of the other buildings, away from the battling guns in the street. A tight smile curved Jim Bruce's lips as he took slow steps along the hall. He became aware vaguely that his left arm was dripping red. In his burning concern for Dud he had not felt the impact of the bullet.

He stopped near the door and said evenly, "I'm right here, Lynch!"

THE door slammed back. Lynch straightened, his service revolver leveled. His smile was a cold sneer. Bruce's automatic was as steady as the evil-faced detective's as they edged closer

and closer to each other and death.

"I've got you, Bruce—and I saw the kid. I'll get him. He's going to fry for that Overton killing—but you're not."

"You're letting the kid alone."

"You're not going to fry, like the kid, Bruce," Jay Lynch said, "because I'm turning you in dead."

Their leveled guns blasted at the same instant. Within two feet of each other, the flames of the weapons seared out. The bullet that hit Jim Bruce jarred him back. He stood, one red hand bracing against the wall, peering at the hate-filled mask that was Lynch's face. Lynch looked down at himself, at the hole in his chest pouring red. His venomous eyes glinted up as he said: "God!"

The hard quirk of Jim Bruce's lips persisted as Jay Lynch lurched against the stair-rail. Lynch went down slowly, stiff with torture. When he reached the floor he rolled face up. The spurting through his vest stopped abruptly. Jim Bruce gazed down at the hot automatic in his hand and said, half aloud:

"One bullet was enough."

The wound in his body was a thing of flame. He stood straddled, staring out through the broken door, as a blue roadster streaked past with siren shrilling. The drumming of gun reports in the street was a far-away sound in Jim Bruce's numb brain. He heard another siren coming, and a third, as he turned away.

Like an automaton, he walked stiffly along the hall, the empty gun in his hand. He went the way Dud and Fay had gone, driven by a crazy desire to make sure they had gotten clear. He fumbled at a door and went through. He shouldered along a hall, and out the entrance. When he stumbled down the stoop, he looked intently both ways, along the street. His voice was a choking sound:

"They're—all right."

He heard no sound save the drumming

in his ears, though sirens were screaming their banshee wails in the surrounding streets. Blindly, he peered straight ahead, and walked. Each step he took sharpened the searing pain of the bullet in his body, but he walked. Nothing stopped the even swing of his stiff, numb legs. He brushed aside a policeman who grabbed at his arm, and was not even aware that the stunned officer was following him. He crossed streets while auto horns blared. He walked, a bullet in his guts, to a heavy door set in stone.

Uniformed men stared as he stalked across a foyer. He pushed at a door and saw, in a blur, a wide-eyed man spring up from a desk. He stood straddled, trying to speak, vaguely conscious of voices around him, while one voice said:

"They didn't get the stuff in the truck, Inspector! Two of 'em are cornered—we'll grab 'em. But not Dynan. Dynan got it in the heart."

But Inspector Northrup was staring at Jim Bruce, and Bruce was trying to speak.

"Lynch must've been onto it!" another man blurted across the desk. "Maybe he tried to stop 'em. We found him dead inside an open door. None of that pack of rats is going to stay alive to answer for killing him!"

Then the room was silent. Those around the desk peered at Jim Bruce. He put the empty automatic very carefully on the desk blotter. He said, in a whisper that was scarcely audible:

"I'm giving myself up Inspector. Giving—myself—up."

Then he dropped.

TWO months later, Jim Bruce watched twelve good men and true file into the jury box. They came to their places with inscrutable faces betraying nothing of the decision they had reached—a decision that must mean either freedom for a

man charged with murder in the first degree, or death in the chair. Each hour of their deliberation had increased Jim Bruce's dread, but now it was over. Now he would know.

Fay Belden sat at his side, her fingers twined with his. Since the beginning of the trial she had been close, whispering encouragement, never letting him despair. They had listened intently to every word of testimony, to the summing up of the District Attorney, to the plea of the defense.

"Beyond a reasonable doubt, gentlemen of the jury," Bruce's attorney had said. "That is the reading of the law. There is no doubt that gun was used to kill Roche. There is no doubt it was found in the defendant's possession. The fact that the gun was empty when taken by the police, that only one bullet was fired into Roche's body, has no bearing whatever on the vital question. It is this. Did Jim Bruce kill Roche?"

It had brought no hope to Jim Bruce's heavy heart.

"You have heard Sam Owen, as fine and honest a man as ever lived, testify to facts which show the gun was stolen from his store. Only one man handled that gun—Jay Lynch. He came into Owens' store and was allowed to examine half a dozen automatics, and this was during Jim Bruce's absence. Shortly afterward, when Jim Bruce returned, the weapon of murder was missing. There is no reasonable doubt that Jay Lynch stole that gun and used it to frame Jim Bruce."

It had all been said. It would not be said again. What weight it had carried in the minds of the jurors was not revealed by their faces as they took their places in the box. As a hush settled over the court room, Jim Bruce looked over his shoulder.

His kid brother was sitting just inside the rail. Dud had been granted a few

days' leave from his job in Chicago that he might attend the end of the trial. His face was white with anxiety now, but he forced a smile. His whisper, "Okay, Jim!" brought an answering curve to his brother's lips. Fay Belden's fingers tightened on Jim Bruce's as the solemn man on the bench asked:

"Gentlemen of the jury, have you reached a verdict?"

"We have."

"What is your verdict?"

"Not guilty."

Jim Bruce's smile grew dreamily. He wasn't sure he had heard it right. He looked in surprise at the reporters sprinting out the doors. A cheer from the back of the court room startled him. He came to his feet, and immediately Fay Belden's arms were around him. She sobbed over and over, "Jim! Jim! Jim!" while Dud Bruce gripped his hand. He mumbled his thanks to his attorney, and to those who rained congratulatory slaps to his should-

ers, made him inarticulate by a consuming gladness—gladness not that he had escaped the chair, but a surge of relief he would live honestly, a man among men with a brother who had a clean record; a clean life!

"You won't have to worry about me from now on," Dud said huskily. "Not any more, Jim."

"I know that, Dud."

Fay's arm kept snugly around his as Inspector Northrup and Sam Owens crowded up together. The old ex-cop was blinking joyously. The inspector's smile was sincere, his hand-clasp hearty.

"I knew it damn well. Sam Owens believed in you, and that's enough for me any time. You're straight, Jim—you'll always be. There'll never be another time when your address is the Big House."

"The time's coming, Inspector," Jim Bruce said firmly, "when our address is going to be the Twin Bridges Inn—for the three of us."

THE END

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a chance*



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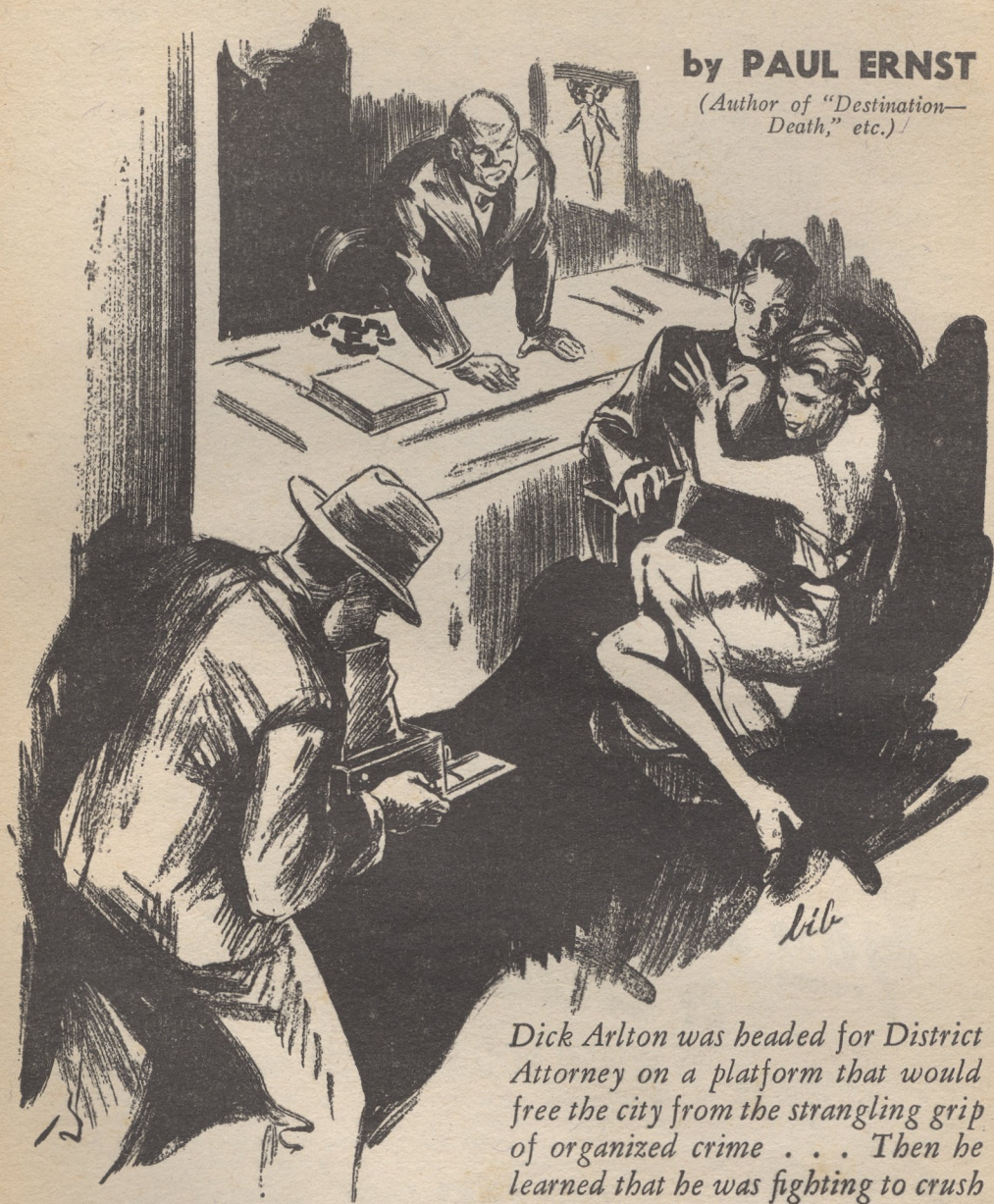
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IN DEBT TO THE DEVIL

by PAUL ERNST

(Author of "Destination—Death," etc.)



"When the papers print your picture with a half-naked dame—"

Dick Arlton was headed for District Attorney on a platform that would free the city from the strangling grip of organized crime . . . Then he learned that he was fighting to crush the one man who had raised him from the slums; whose generosity had brought his most ambitious dreams close to realization!

RICHARD ARLTON stood in a shadowy doorway and stared across the street at the entrance of the Klack Klub. There was a detective near the entrance: Harry Parks, tall,

thin, saturnine, with keen eyes seeming to see everything at once.

Arlton stepped back farther into the doorway. Parks knew him by sight, and the last thing on earth he wanted was to

be seen here by some one like Parks!

A bitter smile twisted his lips. Richard Arlton, twenty-eight-year-old candidate for District Attorney on the reform ticket—lurking here in shadows like a criminal, waiting to skulk unseen into the notorious Klack Klub!

He felt of the note in his pocket. He didn't often curse, but he did so now, under his breath, hopelessly, with all the words he'd picked up in the tenements when he was an orphan of seven.

Parks was walking on. Arlton watched his narrow, spring-like form jerk nervously along to the corner. Parks turned it.

Arlton glanced up and down the street and hurried across to the entrance of the Klack Klub.

Arlton went past the doorman and up to a lounging youth. He'd have liked to go on by with his hat brim hiding his face. But he knew he couldn't find Burman, proprietor of the place, without a guide.

"I want to see Burman," he said to the man. "Tell him the man he wrote the note to is here, will you, please?"

The loungee looked at him with no sign of recognition in his face, for which Arlton was thankful. Then he saw why. The pupils of the man's dull eyes were pin-points, with the whites wild around them. Dope, Arlton saw. The man was hopped to the roots of his hair. Walking, irresponsible dynamite with a gun at his armpit.

"You want to see Burman?" the man said. "Okay."

He straightened from the wall and walked inside the place. He was back in a minute.

"I'll steer you to him."

Arlton swallowed, and walked behind him, past another wide entrance through which he could see a midnight crowd in the cafe room, past a plain door which he knew was a panel over an elevator going

up to the gambling rooms, to a staircase.

On the second floor the man preceded him down a corridor lined with doors. The last door on the left was opened for him.

"In here," said the man with the dope-glazed eyes.

Arlton stepped into a room containing a table for four people, a low, wide divan, and chairs. Seated alone at the table was a heavy-set man with bluish jowls and choleric little eyes; a man Arlton had publicly sworn to run out of town or put behind bars: Burman, owner and manager of the Klack Klub.

The hophead closed the door, and the young lawyer, who was already becoming known as an outstandingly resourceful fighter against politician-protected crime, was left alone with the man who ran the most notorious crime-nest in the city.

FOR a moment the dull red of one of Burman's well-known fits of temper swept his heavy face. Then the red faded and the beginning of a tentatively friendly smile shaped his lips.

"Sit down," he said, waving his hand affably to one of the other chairs at the table.

Arlton hesitated, leaning back against the closed door, breathing heavily. Then he walked forward and sat down. His eyes never left the man's face. He looked more ill than ever.

He drew the note from his pocket and tossed it toward Burman.

"You wrote that?" he said.

Burman shoved his hands in his pockets and leaned back in his chair. The chair creaked under his weight.

Burman looked at the note and then at Arlton.

"Yes," he said slowly, "I wrote that."

"I can't believe it," whispered Arlton. Burman shrugged.

"It's true. I'm the man. It's probably

the one decent thing I've ever done in my life, and I wouldn't have spoiled it by tipping you off, ever, only—" a wry smile twitched his lips—"you've been so hot on my trail lately that I felt I had to, in self protection. You're a fighter, boy."

Arlton said nothing for a little while. He stared at the note. The light showed greenish on his drawn face.

"All my life," he said slowly at last, "I've moved in a kind of mystery. Somebody saw me in the tenements and sent me away to a boys' school. Then the same person sent me to prep school and later to law college. I never saw him. I only heard from him at long intervals when I'd get a letter with pocket money in it. The rare notes with the money were signed N. Histon. That's all I ever knew of my benefactor, that name."

His fingers fumbled with the buttons on the cuff of his sleeve.

"I used to dream about this person. The mysterious lift out of the gutter and into a fine profession came straight out of heaven as far as I was concerned. N. Histon, for me, became almost God. I felt like praying to him sometimes after studying extra late and hard so he'd be proud of me."

His tortured eyes played over Burman's perspiring face.

"And now I get a note from N. Histon asking me to come and see him. And I find out the man masquerading under that name—who did all that for me—is you!"

BURMAN nodded. "Me. As I say, it's probably the only decent thing I ever did. I saw you that day under the El tracks. You'd just had a scrap with a kid twice your size. Licked him, I remember. But you'd got busted up in the fight pretty badly and you were crying. Hell. The money meant little to me, so I educated you. I was kind of proud of

you at first when you started running for D. A. Then you began gunning for me."

"So you wrote that note, asking me to come and talk it over with you," said Arlton dully. "*You* are N. Histon."

"Yes. And now—I'd like to know what you're going to do about it. Me, the guy that's given you all you have."

Arlton's fingers plucked at the buttons on his cuff.

"This joint and a couple more like it, support me," Burman said. "They're my living. They're all I've got. Sure they singe some suckers—but a sucker always gets singed. Lay off me, Dick."

Arlton stared at the ceiling.

"When I started this campaign," he said, "I swore I'd get after the places like this that are doing so much damage. The money you take? The graft? That's nothing. It's the young fellows who come here and lose at your tables and go out and steal to get more, or kill themselves because they've already stolen what they lost. It's the girls who come here young and go out old. It's the dope you sell—"

"I wouldn't sell dope," protested Burman.

Arlton ignored him. "From the first, I've put your name at the top of my black list as an outstanding example of the kind of thing I wanted to be in the D. A.'s office to fight against. In a way I've built my campaign around getting rid of the Klack Klub, and running you out of the city. If I lay off you now, after working so hard against you, it would kill my political chances forever."

He stared again at the note.

"I'd have to get out of the law entirely—or stay in it only to take shyster criminal cases no decent attorney would touch. Because every one would say I laid off you because you bribed me to."

Burman sighed. His face was pleading, though his little eyes were very watchful.

"If it wasn't for me, you'd still be in a tenement. Maybe a crook yourself, Dick. That's a debt. Now's the time to pay it. Call off the dogs."

"God, you ask a high payment for your debt," said Arlton hoarsely. "I'm to give up everything—break all the promises I made to the people backing me—"

Burman's look of watchfulness faded a little. He nodded, after a long stare at Arlton's face.

"But you're going to do it," he said. "You're not going to let me down. I can see it in your face."

Arlton's hand clutched the note and crumpled it. The crackle of the paper was loud in the room.

"Yes, I'm going to do it. I came here, really, intending to—"

Burman suddenly jumped up from the table, while Arlton stared in amazement. He put his pudgy finger to his lips and tiptoed to the door. He jerked the door open suddenly.

A woman stood in the hall, walking away from the door. She was faded, once beautiful, now an elderly fifty. She had a large square box which she carried by a strap.

"You!" snapped Burman. "Come here!"

The woman halted, then slowly came back. In her faded blue eyes was panic.

"You were listening at that door!" raged Burman. His face was dark with fury. His jowls trembled with it.

"I wasn't," said the woman shakily.

"The hell you weren't! I've let you come here and sell your soap and perfume and junk to the girls—and you've made a good thing out of it. And now you turn stool-pigeon on me."

"I—I—" the woman faltered.

She screamed softly as Burman's hand closed over her arm. Arlton got up, fists quivering, but slowly sank into his chair again.

"What did you hear?" snarled Burman. "Come on—speak up!"

A little of the panic left the woman's face. Her chin went up a bit.

"I heard about the note—"

"Shut up!"

Burman glanced at Arlton, then back at the woman. His fist was doubled and held threateningly close to her face.

"Eddie!" he called.

Steps sounded on the stairs after a moment. The wasp-waisted lounge from the street doorway came down the hall.

Burman jerked his thumb toward the woman. "See that she doesn't talk. And if she tries—I mean *see to it!*"

BURMAN came back into the private dining room, closing the door on the sight of the woman, face panicky again, being hauled down the corridor by the man with the dope-dulled eyes.

The night club proprietor glanced furtively at Arlton.

"Well?" he said, after awhile.

Arlton faced him. His head was back and his shoulders were squared.

"Bets are off," he said crisply. "I'm changing my mind."

"You mean—you're still going after me? You're going to ruin me—after all I've done for you?"

"All I can say about that is—I'm sorry. And I mean that. But I'm going after you just the same."

"If it's because I talked loud to that da—that hag of a stool-pigeon—"

"No, it's not that. Anyway, not entirely. The sight of her counts more with me than the rotten way you handled her. She must have been pretty once. And straight. Now, she ought to have a nice home and a couple of grandchildren in the place, and a few memories. Instead, she sells soap in a lousy night club like this. It's men like you that's responsible."

"You ought to run the Mission on the

corner—" Burman began. Then he stopped. His face was expressionless for a full minute. Then he smiled and pressed a buzzer set in the wall by the table.

"You talk of girls," he said. "I'm going to give you an angle on that you might not have thought of. If you close me, you throw a couple dozen of 'em out on the street. Sure, their work here isn't so high and noble but it's better than—"

The door opened to admit a girl.

She was very blonde, very madeup; but she was pretty in spite of it, and she was still young. Twenty-five or so. She looked at Burman, then at Arlton. She smiled wistfully at the attorney.

"Here's what I mean," said Burman, glancing for a second at the door. "Take this girl. Rose Fremont. She came from a slum as bad as the one you saw when you were a kid. She worked for eight a week in a department store. Then I took her on here. Ask her if she wants to leave."

"You can save your breath when you hand out arguments like those," said Arlton. He took a step toward the door. "I'm going."

"Tell him about yourself, Rose," said Burman.

The girl went up to Arlton and stood in front of him.

"Go on," said Burman, with something in his voice that hadn't been there before.

The girl's hands raised to the shoulder straps of her evening dress. Quickly she jerked them down over the white flesh of her shoulders. Then her right arm went around Arlton's neck while her left hand rumbled her blonde hair.

"What—" said Arlton. The thing had been done so swiftly that he was caught completely unaware.

A soft explosion drowned his words. There was intense light in the little room and a click.

A man, leering, stepped back from the doorway. In his hand was a camera.

The girl laughed, voice hard and brittle. Arlton stared at Burman, white-faced. Burman's lips crawled back to show his yellowish teeth.

"All right, you sanctimonious, duty-hugging, ungrateful ape," he grated. "Keep on giving me the works and see how soon the papers print a picture showing you in a private room of the Klack Klub with a half naked dame in your arms!"

The girl laughed again. Arlton tried for words and couldn't find them.

"Candidate for D. A. on the reform ticket, huh?" Burman went on. "Well, this'll fix that. The noble young Richard Arlton, helling around in the very place he leads raids against—"

"Wait a minute!" the girl said suddenly.

The two men turned to face her. She was not laughing now. An odd, uncertain expression was on her face.

"Richard Arlton?" she said. "Are you Dickie Arlton that used to live down by the El tracks on the East Side?"

Arlton nodded, eyes perplexed.

"Dickie Arlton. . . . Don't you remember a dirty-faced little kid that used to come to you when the bigger kids yanked her hair and ripped her dress?"

The perplexity began to fade from Arlton's eyes. Burman was watching with open mouth.

"I think I do," said Arlton slowly. "Rose . . . Rose Frieder. . . ."

"That's it! That's the name, before I grabbed onto Fremont for a fancy title." The girl swung toward Burman. Her eyes were frightened but determined. "I'm not going through with this. Not with the only guy that ever treated me like I had a right to live."

Burman's breath sucked audibly between his teeth.

"You'll go through with it—and like it! When prints of that picture are passed around—"

"I'll tell about the frame!" cried the girl, voice shrill but defiant. "So help me, I will! I'm not going to—"

Burman leaped toward her.

"Damn you! We'll see whether you'll squeal or not!"

"No, no—don't hit—"

Arlton knocked a chair over on his way. But his rush didn't get him to Burman and the girl in time.

Burman's hamlike fist had lashed out and thudded against the girl's cheek. It was a sickening blow; it would have knocked out a strong man.

The girl fell straight back. There was a second sickening thud, blood on the sharp corner of the table, and the girl lay without a quiver on the floor beside it.

Arlton, eyes flaming, leaped toward Burman, stopped as a gun appeared in the man's hand. But Burman paid no more attention to him than was necessary. He kept flicking glances at the still body on the floor.

"By God, she's dead," he mumbled, after a moment. "Cracked her head on the table. Accident, of course. Didn't mean to kill her, damn her. But her cheek's marked up . . . couldn't get away with the accident business. . . ."

His gaze flicked back to Arlton—and stayed there. Slowly a cunning, relieved glint appeared in his little eyes. He pressed the buzzer beside the table, keeping his gun trained on Arlton.

A waiter came to the door, stared first at the dead girl and then at Burman.

"Get the cops," said Burman. "This girl's just been murdered—and I've got the murderer right here for 'em."

DETECTIVE PARKS stared first at the negative of the flashlight picture, and then at Arlton. On the detective's

usually saturnine and cynical face was an expression of reluctance seldom to be found there.

"You see?" said Burman. "The girl didn't know who Arlton was. To her he was just another sap, coming here for a good time. So she played the badger game on him, and her boy friend took this picture. That made Arlton so sore he let her have it in the face with his fist. She fell against the corner of the table there, where the blood is, and it killed her."

Parks turned to Arlton.

"Well?" he said evenly.

Arlton bit his lips.

"All I can say is, it's a damn lie. Burman himself framed me. The girl suddenly remembered she'd known me when we were kids—thought I'd been decent to her then—and wouldn't go through with it. Burman smashed her down himself."

Parks shook his head. "You're electrocuted now. That picture, and the fact that you're here at all, after riding the place for months, will cook you."

"Far as that goes," Burman said, smiling a little, "I think the waiter that takes care of this room might have seen Arlton sock the girl—"

"Shut up!" said Parks. His eyes went to Arlton again. "I know you. I've worked with you. If you say Burman framed you, I personally would take it from you against a hundred Burman's. No jury would, but I will. Only—what the *hell* were you doing here in the first place?"

Arlton's lips tightened, then relaxed. He shrugged, and looked around the floor. Finally he saw the crumpled note where he had dropped it. Burman made a convulsive start forward when Arlton stooped to pick it up, but restrained himself.

Wordlessly, Arlton gave the note to Parks. It didn't matter much whether

the detective believed or disbelieved. . . .

But Parks stared at him with a different look in his eyes after reading and re-reading the note.

"Say, you were in a spot!" he said softly. "So that's why you were here!"

"I don't see that my picking up a little gutter rat and making a lawyer of him has anything to do with this murder—" Burman blustered.

He stopped under the detective's slow stare. Parks' lips twisted.

"You're right about the murder rap I'm afraid, you fat slug," he said thinly. "After you put a dozen waiters on the stand who 'saw' him hit the girl, and after this picture is flashed around, Arlton will be dished. This note won't help him. As for the bunk in the note—I simply don't believe it. You—do that for a tenement kid just out of the goodness of your heart? Bologney!"

"Believe anything you want to," shrugged Burman. "You're taking this 'future District Attorney' in for murder."

"I'm taking you in too, big boy," snapped Parks.

"Okay," said Burman easily. "I haven't a reputation to lose. I won't be sent to the chair by a town that's taking things to pieces because I went in for holier-than-thou stuff and then got caught in a dirty murder—"

He stopped. There was a commotion in the hall. A woman's voice sounded: "Let me go . . . let me. . . ." It was drowned by a man's snarl: "Give me that gat. Where the hell did you get it, anyway?" Then running steps and a curse.

Parks leaped to the door and swung it open just as frantic hands were pressing against the other side. A woman half fell into the room. Arlton stared dully, then with more attention. It was the woman who sold soaps and perfumes around the night club.

"You're in the wrong place, sister," Parks began.

But she pushed on past him and faced Burman, whose heavy face was suddenly livid.

"In the wrong place?" she cried, pulling a small automatic from her shabby leather bag. "We'll see! Mr. Arlton was framed by Burman. You hear? Framed! Burman killed her. I was outside this door and I heard it all. I got away from the man Burman told to shut me up and I heard everything—"

"Hey, give me that gun!" Parks said, jumping toward her.

Burman was leaping at her too, fist swinging for her mouth. And then a gun blazed from the doorway and the woman was down.

Parks veered in midstride. He jumped out the doorway of the room and fired almost before he lit on the balls of his feet in the hall. Down the hall the wasp-waisted man with the drugged pinpoint eyes fell and lay still. . . .

Like an echo to the detective's shot there was the crack of an automatic back in the room. He whirled.

The woman was up on one elbow. In her hand was a smoking .32. She was pointing it for another shot at Burman when Arlton twisted it out of her hand. But a second shot was unnecessary. The proprietor of the Klack Klub lay beside the dead girl with a blue hole in his head. . . .

"**D**ICKIE won't have to stand trial now, will he?" whispered the dying woman, clawing weakly at Parks' sleeve.

Parks bending over her, said perplexedly: "Dickie?" Then he glanced in comprehension at Richard Arlton. "Oh! I guess he'll still have to testify—"

"No, no! That would ruin him even if he was acquitted! If you have pencil and paper I think I could write how Burman

did it and then say I killed Burman. . . ."

Her voice trailed off. Arlton and Parks stared at each other and then back at the woman.

"What's it to you if Arlton does get muddled up in court?" said Parks. His narrowed eyes searched first her face and then the attorney's.

The woman's faded eyes rested on Arlton's face. Parks had seen much in the way of expressions. But he'd never seen one to bring a lump to his throat as this one did. But all she whispered was: "Hated Burman. Knew innocent man . . . framed. The pencil . . . and paper. . . ."

Parks picked up the shabby leather bag she'd taken her gun from. He looked in it as the pencil scratched weakly over the paper. But after hardly more than a glance he shut it swiftly, and stared at the attorney with sagging jaw.

"There," whispered the woman. "That . . . clears him. . . . Can't he be kept entirely out of. . . ."

She choked, struggled up a little, then sank back. And Parks let his hand rest on her shoulder in a diffident, oddly gentle way for an instant as he got up.

The detective touched a match to the note, and the negative of Arlton with the dishevelled girl in his arms. Arlton watched him mutely.

"Go along home," said Parks. "There's a back entrance. Use it."

Arlton looked at the detective for a long moment. All he wanted to say, and couldn't, was in his eyes. He went to the door, but at the doorway he turned. He stared at Burman's body.

"Anyhow," he said, "whatever he was—he gave me my chance in life—"

"Nuts," said Parks. "He found out from the real N. Histon what was being done for you. Then he took the part of Histon and got you here to make a play on your sympathy. That's all?"

"But—if he isn't Histon, who is?"

"How should I know? You'd better run along now."

Parks waited till the door was closed, then drew out his matches again. He touched flame to three things he drew from the woman's shabby purse. One was a newspaper picture of Arlton, frayed and creased from much handling. The second was a picture of a smiling young woman and a little boy. The faded face of the dead woman bore a slight resemblance to the young woman in the picture—and the lad might have been Richard Arlton as a boy. . . . The last thing was a shoemaker's bill calling for twenty-five cents for new heels from Mrs. Nathalie Histon.

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CRUCIBLE OF COURAGE

Few men emerge from the forge of disaster fired to the steely temper of a Dirk Blaise. A lone, crippled weakling condemned by a crooked political machine, he was driven to exile . . . forgotten for years. Yet Dirk Blaise came back to dare again those murdering guns; to pit his life and iron will against the corruption and greed of a killer-czar. Here is the gripping story of that single-handed fight—one of the most absorbing, dramatic tales of human courage ever published!



His voice ended with
the crack of his gun.

The Forging of Dirk Blaise

forge—to form by heating and hammering;
to beat into . . . shape . . .

Webster's New Int. Dict.

SIX years ago the City of Middle-
vale was rated at 190,000 popula-
tion; principal industries: gambling,
vice, graft. The latter information, of

*A Stirring, Action-Packed Novelette of
Lone-Hand Courage*

by **EMILE C.
TEPPERMAN**

course, did not appear in any gazeteer or almanac. It was, nevertheless, true.

Captain of Detective Owen Blaize knew it better than anybody else; and he knew also the hopelessness of fighting the situation—until he came into possession of the slip of pink paper that he had in his pocket on the way home from headquar-

ters. It was a canceled check; and the name signed to it, together with the name endorsed on the reverse side, was going to smash things wide open in Middlevale.

Blaize drove to the modest little widower's cottage that he inhabited with his son in a quiet suburb of Middlevale, had dinner in silence. Dirk, the boy, a slim, dark-eyed, dark-haired lad, respected his father's mood, asked no questions. Since his infancy he'd had no mother, and he adored his square-jawed, honest, plodding father. To him, Owen Blaize, whose hair was

already greying at the temples, was superhuman, a paragon among fathers. The meal was served by old Gunner Swanson, who had only one arm, but managed to keep house for Blaize and his son, and who had done a better job of bringing up Dirk than any woman could have done, except a mother. Gunner had



been a cop once, and had lost his left arm by amputation when infection had set in from a wound received in a gunfight with bandits. So when he was pensioned off, Owen Blaize had made a place for him in his own home.

Now, when dinner was over, and Gunner Swanson was in the kitchen with the dishes, Dirk came over to his father, and affectionately rumbled his greying hair.

"Dad," he asked, "what's on your mind?"

You look as if you'd come back from a funeral!"

Captain Blaize put down the pipe he had just lit, gripped his son's arm tight.

"Dirk, boy," he said huskily, "what would you say if your father gave up his job?"

Dirk looked at him unbelievably. "You mean you're going to quit the force, dad? You only have five years to go for half pay. And by then I'll be ready to join the cops—"

Captain Blaize sighed. "I've got to go out." His grip on the boy's arm increased, so that Dirk winced, but did not complain. "Whatever happens, Dirk, always remember that I've been an honest cop. Sometimes—" his eyes grew dreamy, far-away— "I wonder if it pays—"

Suddenly he arose, crushed the lad to him. Then, as if ashamed of his display of emotion, he let the boy go, said casually: "So long, Dirk, see you later," and went out into the hall, picking up his hat from the rack near the door.

The boy called after him in a voice suddenly broken: "Wait, dad. You—you sound as if you weren't—coming back!"

But the door had already closed behind his departing father.

THE lad stood there a moment trembling. He knew this father of his so well, knew his every mood and each inflection of his voice. And he knew instinctively that there was something wrong—something terribly, cruelly wrong. Suddenly he swung toward the kitchen, shouting in a voice full of panic:

"Gunner! Gunner, come—"

He stopped, still trembling. Old Gunner Swanson stood in the doorway, his seamed face twisted into an agony of sympathetic comprehension.

"Gunner! Did you hear—"

"Yes, lad, I heard. An' I'm sure it's something to do with Roger Mercer's

crowd. Mercer's been running this whole town—"

Dirk broke in frantically, as the sound of the starter on his father's car came to them from outside: "Come on, Gunner. I'm going after him!" He flew across the room, tore open the front door just as the car pulled away from the curb.

Gunner came up beside him, said soothingly: "Don't take on like that, lad. I've known Owen Blaize for years. He can take care of himself—"

"I don't care," Dirk almost sobbed. "I know he's running into danger. Come on!"

Gunner followed the boy, awkwardly untying, with his one hand, the knot of the apron that he was wearing. At the corner they saw a cab returning to the city empty, and Dirk hailed it. He asked the other breathlessly:

"Have you got any money, Gunner?"

Gunner Swanson nodded. "I have. But—"

Dirk literally pushed him into the cab, pointed out the tail light of his father's car, a block away. "Follow that coupé," he ordered.

It was moving slowly, as if Captain Owen Blaize were reluctant to arrive at his destination too soon.

Gunner Swanson sighed, and confirmed Dirk's order to the questioning cabby. As they started after the coupé, Gunner said: "I hope your father doesn't find out I let you follow him. He'd be sorer'n hell."

The boy seemed not to have heard him. He was hunched forward, peering ahead as if his whole heart and soul were in that coupé with his father.

The pursuit took them around the edge of the city, to another, more pretentious suburb, and finally to a modestly expensive private house which sat by itself in the center of a wide, carefully kept lawn.

Gunner grumbled ominously: "Just the

way I thought, lad. That's Roger Mercer's place."

Dirk watched his father pull up at the curb, descend and walk up the path to the front door. He said to the cabby:

"Don't stop. Pass him and go up to the corner."

He watched out of the side window, saw the door open to his father's ring, saw the slender, rat-faced young man who admitted him.

"That's Ned Mercer," Gunner told the boy. "Roger Mercer's brat—and no better than his father, if you ask me."

Dirk nodded mutely, watched the tall straight figure of his father enter, and saw the door shut behind him. Something seemed to stick in his throat for a moment as he got out of the cab, waited while Gunner paid the driver off.

When the cab had gone the old man took Dirk by the arm, said in kindly fashion: "You're too high-strung, lad. What harm can come to your father while he's visiting with Mercer and his son? They hate him, sure. But they would never go in for rough stuff by themselves. They hire all their dirty work done for them."

Dirk eyed the house somberly. It was dark, except for a single light in a ground floor window. That would be where his father was now. . . .

"Let's wait a while, anyway, Gunner," he said at last. And he shut his eyes tight because there was a tear in the right eye, and he didn't want the old man to see him wiping it away.

They waited ten minutes, and then something seemed to spur the boy on, to make him restless. Nobody had passed them in this quiet neighborhood. The nearest house was at the far end of the block, and the lamp across the street cast little light here. Perhaps it was the dismal quality of the place that increased Dirk's nervousness.

He said: "Wait here, Gunner. I'm going

to take a look in the window. I want to see what's happening in there."

The old man shrugged. "You're like your father, lad. When you want to do a thing, nobody on earth can stop you. All right. I'll go with you."

"No. You wait here. If you see anybody coming, whistle." The boy was off across the lawn before Gunner could protest, making for the lighted window.

INSIDE the big house, Ned Mercer had ushered Captain Blaize into the sitting room. "My father's been expecting you," he said glumly. His mouth had a sullen curve to it, and his eyes failed to meet those of the captain. His chin was receding, in marked contrast to the chin of the man who received Blaize in the library.

Roger Mercer was well on in his forties, a younger man than Blaize. But there was a ruthlessness in his face, in the set of his thin mouth and in the coldness of his eyes, that accounted for the fact that he had made himself the political boss of Middlevale.

"Sit down, Blaize," he said, motioning to a chair. "Close the door, Ned, and come in." Then to the captain: "You phoned that you wanted to see me tonight." He smiled thinly. "I've been wondering why."

Captain Blaize did not avail himself of the invitation to sit down. He stood in the center of the room, spraddle-legged, uncompromising. "You know well enough why I wanted to see you, Mercer. I'm a plain man, and I don't know how to beat around the bush. You and your son, here, have been living off Middlevale like vultures—taking the profits from dope, vice resorts, gambling houses. Nobody could ever get anything on you. You've gotten fat on the city's misery; you own the mayor, the judges, the district attorney."

He stopped, short of breath. Mercer was watching him, smiling thinly, sardonically. Ned Mercer was glowering. The

older man cleared his throat, said silkily:

"Those are strong statements, Blaize. I hope you can back them up?"

"I can. Today I located another safety deposit box of the murdered gambler, Joe Milo. In that box, I found this check!" He extracted from his pocket the pink cancelled check, held it in the air, then turned it over so as to show the endorsement. "Your endorsement appears on the reverse side, Mercer. This check is for sixty thousand dollars. Milo paid this to you as your share of the profits when you made the city buy that swamp land from him down at the Old Basin. Do you know what this means, Mercer?"

For a long moment Mercer was silent, studying the grey-haired captain of detectives. Then he said, very low: "You didn't turn it in to the district attorney, Blaize?"

Blaize laughed bitterly. "What good would that do? You own him body and soul. I've come here with it."

Mercer's thin face lit up. "Ah! Then we can do business? Perhaps—"

Captain Blaize's face flushed a dull red. "Damn you, we can't do that kind of business. You ought to know that I've never taken a nickel's worth of graft. I've come here to do a different kind of business. I want you to write your resignation as chairman of the county committee, and as director of public works; I want your son Ned, here, to write his resignation as budget director. And then you can leave the city. Agree to that, and I'll keep this check dark; refuse, and I'll take it to the governor. He's not your man, and he'll appoint a special prosecutor; you'll go to jail as sure as you're standing there—it's grand larceny!"

Mercer's face was inscrutable. He said to his son:

"I guess we're licked, Ned."

Ned said nothing, merely stood by the door, glowering.

Mercer sat down at his desk, shoulders sagging. "You've got me, Blaize." He

reached for a pen, opened a drawer.

Captain Blaize took a step forward. "It's nothing personal, Mercer," he said. "But the people of Middlevale have to get a break; and they can't get it while you're sucking the city dry—"

He stopped short, uttered a short exclamation of surprise as Mercer's hand came out of the drawer with a short, ugly automatic.

Mercer's face was still impassive. He said: "It's too bad, Blaize. You're too dangerous to me." And he fired point-blank.

FROM the window a boy's voice screamed:

"Look out, dad!" and choked in a gasp of terror as Captain Blaize staggered backward under the impact of the slug which had caught him between the eyes. A huge gob of blood stained the pink check in his fingers. The blood was deep vermilion in contrast to the light pinkness of the check.

The boy at the window fought with the sash, trying to get it up; shouting frantically, hysterically:

"Dad! Dad . . . You've—killed my dad!"

His voice broke, he could say no more. Tears welled in his eyes as he started to climb through the window. "I'll kill you—kill you. . . ."

The library door opened, and a girl stood there—a girl of perhaps fifteen, in a trim gingham dress, with dark hair and deep blue eyes that were opened wide in consternation.

"Mr. Mercer!" she exclaimed. "What's happen—"

She broke off with a short little cry of consternation as she caught sight of the body of Captain Blaize on the floor, of the agonized face of the boy climbing in through the window. Her hand went to her throat, and she stood rooted to the spot.

Roger Mercer glanced at his son, cowering near the door, and cursed coldly. "That's Blaize's boy!" he said. "He saw me shoot his father."

Methodically he swung his gun toward the window. The boy was half way in when he fired again, coldly, deliberately.

The slug whined, slapped sickeningly into the side of young Dirk's skull, carried him backward to drop on the lawn outside. There was a long, bloody furrow along the side of his head, and he twisted, moaning.

A big, lumbering, one-armed figure came running across the lawn, and bent beside the boy. "Dirk, lad!" Gunner Swanson whispered. "Did the devil get you, too?"

He folded the lad in his one arm. There was a sob in his voice. "He almost wiped out the whole Blaize family!"

"Daddy!" the boy moaned, and lost consciousness.

Within the room the girl who had appeared in the doorway uttered a cry, stared at the cold, gaunt face of Roger Mercer. "You—murderer!" she exclaimed with loathing.

Roger Mercer grated to his son: "Get her out of here. Take her away through the back entrance. I'm going out and finish up that brat. Then I'll call Preston at headquarters. He'll help me cover up. The story is that someone shot Blaize here through that window, and when the boy came running up, shot him too. There'll be nobody to question it."

He darted around his desk, stooped and snatched the pink check from Captain Blaize's already stiffening fingers, stuffed it into an open safe that stood in the corner, slammed the safe door shut, and twirled the dial. Then he swung toward the window, his face still cold and calculating, his gun ready for another shot.

The girl in the doorway screamed: "No, no! You must be mad! You can't—"

Ned Mercer lunged at her, cut off her words with a hand across her mouth, lifted her bodily and carried her out of the room.

"You know where to take her," Roger Mercer called to Ned over his shoulder. "Keep her there till I talk to her father. He'll make her keep her mouth shut."

He had reached the window, was leaning out, with his gun ready. His eyes found nothing but empty lawn. He cursed fluently. "The brat's got away!" He scrambled out of the window, ran across the lawn, stopped short as the sound of an automobile starter came to his ears, and he saw the dead captain's coupé lurch away from the curb in front of the house, sway wildly, and then roar up the street, lurching from side to side under the guidance of its desperate, one-armed driver.

"Swanson!" he exclaimed. "He's got the kid!" and he turned, raced back to the house. He scrambled in through the window, sprang across the body of Captain Blaize, and snatched up the phone.

"Get me headquarters!" he snapped. And a moment later: "Hello, connect me with Preston . . . Preston? I want you to send out an alarm. Instruct all cars. . . ." A slow, cruel smile spread over his face as he issued his orders.

CHAPTER TWO

The Tempering of Dirk Blaize

temper—to bring to a proper degree of hardness and toughness. (Metal)

Webster's New Int. Dict.

GUNNER SWANSON drove wildly, erratically, with his one hand on the wheel. How he had ever managed to carry the unconscious boy across that lawn and into the car, he did not know. It had taken almost impossible acrobatics to work the gear shift at the start, but once he had it in high he kept it there.

His lined old face was set grimly, and

he stared straight ahead into the night, muttering dreadful imprecations under his breath. He glanced sideways at the inert form of the bloody-headed boy on the seat beside him, and his eyes softened for a moment.

"If I'd only had a gun, Dirk, lad," he whispered. "I'd have paid those two skunks with lead. Dirk, Dirk, lad—" he exclaimed suddenly— "talk to me! God! You ain't, dead, too!"

He let out a deep sigh of relief as his ears caught the sharp, labored breathing of the boy. He swung left, turned into a concrete highway. This was state highway 26, and it would take him into the village of Grattan Lake. He knew a surgeon there who was under obligations to Owen Blaize.

Gunner's shrewd old mind had immediately foreseen the danger of taking the boy to a Middlevale hospital. And his instinct was borne out a moment later when the short wave radio in the dashboard came to life:

"Calling all cars! Be on the alert for police coupé driven by Gunner Swanson. He has only one arm. He will have a wounded boy in the car. They are murderers. Shoot first—they are dangerous!"

Gunner kept a sharp lookout for prowling cars. He knew that number 16 patrolled the highway, knew the crew. They would obey their instructions to the letter—would probably open up with the new sub-machine guns with which they had recently been equipped.

Presently there came into view the lights of the gas station which, Gunner knew, was on the edge of the village. Under the bright incandescent light he could discern two uniformed figures. One was in the road, the other was close to a police radio car that was pulled up in the driveway of the gas station. The figure near the car held a sub-machine gun under one arm.

The officer in the road had apparently heard them coming, and was standing with his hand raised for them to stop. They were probably stopping all cars leaving Middlevale.

Gunner pushed down hard on the foot brake, slowed the coupé up within two hundred feet of the gas station. To his right was a narrow side road that led west off the highway, and Swanson heaved on the wheel with all the might of his single arm, swung the car into the side road, and stepped on the gas.

Behind him he heard the excited shouts of the officers. The unconscious boy at his side was thrown against him by the sudden lurch, but Gunner kept grimly on. He knew this neighborhood, knew this side road, for he had patrolled it many times. It curved southward a little further on, and brought you out behind the village of Grattan Lake. From there he knew a short cut that would bring him to the home of the doctor he sought.

He rounded the bend in the narrow road just as the powerful headlights of the police car swung in behind him. A short burst from the sub-machine gun reverberated through the surrounding woods, but didn't touch the coupé. Gunner kept the car in high, pushed down viciously on the accelerator.

The pursuing car roared around the bend, but Gunner Swanson had already pulled off the road into a small clearing, and jammed on the brake, turned off the lights. The police car raced past, siren going full blast, its searchlight piercing the night ahead.

Gunner Swanson swung out of the coupé, dragged out the inert boy and heaved him to his shoulder, then cut across the road and made his way through the woods, staggering with the weight of his burden, trying to keep the sagging body from falling.

Sweat burst out on his forehead, and

he rubbed his face against the boy's bloody jacket. "Oh, God!" he muttered. "If I only had two arms!"

He staggered on, nearly tripping a dozen times, while the night all around him seemed suddenly to have come to life. From near by came the shrill siren of the police car. They had no doubt realized that they had been tricked, and were back-tracking.

Now Gunner could hear men calling to each other. Eager citizens must have joined the man-hunt. Men were like that—always ready to hunt their fellow men, thought Gunner.

He pushed on, sweat blinding him, and his mouth twisted grimly as he saw the lights of a house ahead. How he got there he didn't know, but he fell against the rear door heavily, banged weakly with his fist.

"Doc Warner!" he called out. "Doc Warner! Open up!"

His eyes blinked into sudden light as the kitchen door was pulled open, and he gasped:

"The boy. Quick. He's hurt!"

A woman's voice came to him as from far away: "Land sakes! It's Gunner Swanson and Owen Blaize's boy. Henry! Let's get them in—quick!"

Gunner Swanson knew that voice. It was Matilda Warner, Doc Henry Warner's maiden aunt, who kept house for him. Gunner Swanson smiled, let his head drop to the doorsill, and fainted.

HOURS later, Gunner Swanson sat in the living room of Doctor Warner's home, drinking hot, black coffee from a cup that rested on the serving table that Matilda Warner had wheeled close to his chair. He alternately took a sip of the coffee and a puff of the fat cigar that the doctor had given him. His eyes rested anxiously upon the closed door to the adjoining examining room.

Opposite him sat Matilda Warner, on the edge of her chair, hands folded primly in her lap. She was tall and angular, but her features, though sharp and pinched now, gave evidence that she must once have been an attractive girl.

"Land sakes, Gunner!" she exclaimed. "You mean to say that Mercer murdered Owen Blaize in cold blood, and then shot the boy? It's—it sounds impossible!"

Gunner Swanson nodded bitterly. "Yes, that's it—impossible. Where would I or the kid get to in court if we told our story? I didn't even see the shooting—I only guess that's what happened. They'd laugh us out of court!"

He turned his head as the door of the examining room opened, and the tall, imposing figure of Doctor Warner appeared there. He was wearing a white operating robe, rubber gloves, and he was just taking off the white gauze mask that surgeons use.

His keen, intelligent features were set and grim, and his eyes avoided those of Gunner.

Gunner Swanson sprang from his chair, crossed the room in two strides and seized the doctor by the shoulder.

"Tell me quick, doc—how's the boy?"

Doctor Warner sighed deeply, and still avoided the other's gaze.

"He'll live, all right, Swanson—"

Gunner shook him. "But what? What's the matter?"

Doctor Warner turned back into the examining room. "Come in. But be ready for a shock, Swanson."

Gunner Swanson glanced back at Matilda, then slowly, hesitantly, his throat working spasmodically, he followed the doctor into the room.

On the examining table lay Dirk Blaize, breathing faintly. His eyes were open, and he turned his head weakly toward Gunner. The old man looked at the boy, cried:

"God, doc! His hair's white!"

The boy's head was bandaged, and through the bandage showed hair that had once been coal black, but was now snow-white.

Warner nodded. "The shock, Swanson. But—that isn't all."

Gunner said dumbly: "Not all?" He stepped closer, looked into the boy's eyes, then exclaimed huskily: "God! He's—blind!"

Dirk stirred feebly on the narrow table, said: "I can't see, Gunner. But doc says I'll be able to—some day." His youthful, thin, pain-wracked face suddenly seemed old, purposeful. "And I'm going back—to—see—the Mercers!"

Gunner took an involuntary step backward, covered his own eyes with his hand. "He's—blind!" he mumbled.

Doctor Warner's soothing voice told him: "The bullet scoured the visual section of his brain, paralyzing the optic nerve. It is not permanent, though. He will regain his sight."

"How long, doc?" the boy's hoarse voice asked.

Warner started to talk, almost choked. He gulped, then managed to say: "I can't be sure, son. Perhaps a week, perhaps a year, perhaps—more. I've seen such a condition to last for as much as ten years."

Gunner Swanson muttered: "Ten years!"

Dirk Blaize forced a smile, reached out and clasped the old man's hand. It's all right, Gunner. As long as you stick by me—I can wait."

Suddenly Gunner Swanson, the ex-cop, the man who had borne stoically the loss of his arm, was sobbing—sobbing loudly, fitfully. "S-sure, lad. I'll stick by you. I'll—stick."

Doctor Warner said in kindly tone: "Fix up a room for them, Matilda. They're going to stay here." Then to Gunner: "You can't show yourselves. The Mercers have issued a statement—I got

it on the radio—that you and the boy came up to the window and that the boy fired at Mercer but hit his own father. They claim that the three of you planned to kill Mercer and that the plan only failed because Owen Blaize stepped into the line of fire at the last moment. Then they claim that Mercer got his own gun and shot Dirk through the window, and you helped him escape, Gunner. They've got every available man on the force hunting for you, and you can be sure that you won't be brought in alive."

Gunner exclaimed: "They've made out that the boy killed his own father! They can't get away with it. We'll go to the governor. Let Dirk tell his story! They—"

Young Dirk Blaize himself put out a hand, gripped Gunner's sleeve. "We couldn't do it, Gunner. Mercer is too powerful. He's already got a couple of witnesses to bear him out—where he got them from, God knows." The boy's sensitive face, with the unseeing eyes seemed to harden as they watched him. "That girl," he went on. "I wonder what Mercer's done to her. She saw him shoot. When we're ready, we'll find her. She'll never swear falsely!"

Matilda Warner came forward, put an arm around him.

"Don't think about that now, Dirk dear. I'll give you something hot to drink, and you can go to sleep. Come—" to Warner and Gunner— "carry him upstairs."

The boy gently pushed her away, swung his feet off the table. "I can walk all right, Miss Warner."

Gunner said: "What'll we do—stay here forever?"

"Of course," Doctor Warner said. "I owe more than I can tell you to Owen Blaize, and I'm going to pay it back to his son. I'll make him see—I tell you, I'll make him see again!" The depth of intensity in the doctor's eyes gave Gunner Swanson renewed confidence.

"I hope to heaven you can, doc," he said under his breath.

Young, white-haired Dirk Blaize heard him. "He will," the boy said confidently. "And meanwhile, Gunner, you're going to teach me to shoot. They shot dad, and they shot me. I'll give them the same."

"To shoot?" Gunner Swanson repeated dully.

"Yes, Gunner. You used to be a marksman. You're going to teach me all you know about shooting. We'll practice in Doc Warner's cellar—where it's dark. I'll learn to shoot at sounds instead of at things. And when I go back to settle with the Mercers—I won't miss!"

CHAPTER THREE

The Annealing of Dirk Blaize

anneal—to subject to high heat, with subsequent cooling, for the purpose of . . . rendering less brittle.

Webster's New Int. Dict.

A TALL, slim young man descended from the train at Union Station in Middlevale, and made his way to the street. He had no baggage. He walked with a certain poised quietness that might itself have attracted attention in one so young, were it not for the still greater thing of interest about him—his hair, which showed under the soft gray hat, was pure white.

Casual observers turned and stared, murmuring to each other. He was no more than twenty or twenty-one, and the phenomenon was unusual enough to cause comment.

What those casual observers did not notice, however, was the peculiar way in which the young man acted. He would stare about him as he walked, his eyes filled with reminiscent interest. And then, suddenly, every few feet, he would shut his eyes and walk blindly—not gropingly,

but as if he knew exactly where each step would take him.

He crossed South Market Street diagonally, strolled with a seeming air of casualness down New Bond Street, where the City Hall Building was located. Here though it was well on into the evening, there were dozens of men, white and colored, with small boxes, soliciting the privilege of shining the shoes of passers-by for five cents.

One of these apparently destitute individuals was a man with one arm, whose face was smeared with grime and even shoe-blackening, so that his features were unrecognizable.

The young man seemed to think that he ought to patronize the one-armed shoeshiner, for he stopped, leaned against the wide stone railing that ran the length of the street, and placed his shoe upon the little metal foot-rest on the box.

The unkempt, one-armed man said: "Yes, sir. I'll shine 'em up for you," and proceeded to do as good a job as his physical handicap would permit.

As he was applying polish to the leather, his lips moved, and he spoke so that only his patron could hear him.

"I'm glad you got here, Dirk, lad. I'll have to give this spot up tomorrow. I think one of the city dicks has me spotted. You sure no one recognized you?"

"No, Gunner. It's six years, and I was only a kid then. I'm changed. My hair—"

"Well, don't take too many chances. You want to be sure—"

"Never mind that, Gunner. I came here to take chances. What about that girl? Have you located her?"

"I have. And it's bad news, Dirk, lad. She's *Mrs.* Ned Mercer now."

Dirk Blaize's lips tightened. "It can't be, Gunner. I remember that face of hers, staring in horror at Mercer. She could never have married Ned Mercer after seeing them kill dad—"

"She did, Dirk." Gunner Swanson finished one shoe, and Dirk raised the other. "Her name was Patricia Lane. She's the daughter of George Lane, the manager of the Mercer State Bank. Lane has worked for Mercer all his life, and he shivers when the old man looks at him. How she came to be there that night I don't know. But she's married to Ned Mercer now. They live in that same house where—where your dad was—killed."

He finished the second shoe, and Dirk handed him a dime. "I'm going out there, Gunner. I've got to make her talk somehow. She's the only one who can clear us."

"Ned Mercer won't be home," Gunner told him. "There's a political rally at the Stadium tonight. Roger Mercer is running for mayor of Middlevale."

"All right, Gunner. Wait for me here." Dirk Blaize left him, bought a paper from the old woman at the newsstand close to the curb, and hailed a taxi.

When he left the cab in front of the Mercers' home, he surveyed the house moodily. There was the same lawn that he had crossed six years ago, the same window with the light in it—only now the blind was drawn and the window closed.

For a moment a red wave passed before his eyes, and he had a burning desire to get his hands on the throat of the man who had shot his father.

He mastered himself, forced himself to walk up to the door and ring the bell, just as his father had done, six years ago.

In a moment the door was opened, and the girl stood before him, a sort of half-frightened look in her eyes.

IT was the same girl. Older, taller, but the same gleaming dark hair and the same wide blue eyes. Only now there was a furtive fear in them. The diamond wedding band on her finger shone in the glow from the hall light.

Dirk said, keying his voice low: "Mrs. Mercer?"

She looked puzzled, said: "Yes. You want to see me?"

"Don't you remember me?" he asked quietly.

Her eyes met his, and she gazed at him for a long minute. And suddenly the color fled from her face, leaving it white, ashen. Her lips parted slightly, trembling.

"Come in," she said huskily.

Dirk Blaize stepped in, and she shut the door. He thought bitterly that it was just as it had been that other time, when his father had called—the servants were gone for the evening, probably. Then it had been by design; this time, perhaps, by accident. It suited his purpose.

The girl led the way into the sitting room, with one hand pressing against the wall of the foyer, as if for support.

The room was just as Dirk Blaize remembered it six years ago—the image of it seemed to be graven on the retinae of his eyes. There was the big desk behind which Mercer had sat. There was the window. Another door, behind the desk, led into another part of the house. It was slightly ajar now.

Dirk deliberately went and planted himself in the spot before the desk where his father had fallen, looked down at the floor, then up at the girl who was staring at him as if he were a ghost.

He said bitterly: "There's a new rug on the floor. The other one must have been ruined. It's hard to wash out—blood."

She put her hands to her face, cried: "Please! Please don't—talk like that. If you only knew how I've stayed awake night after night since then, because I was afraid to go to sleep and dream—" she raised her head, stared at him—"dream about your father lying there on the floor; and of you—I keep seeing your face, the way you tried to get in the window—"

"And yet you married Ned Mercer!" he broke in harshly. "If you felt like that, why didn't you speak up? Why didn't you tell the world that I didn't kill my own father—that Mercer shot him in cold blood?"

"I couldn't. I couldn't. I was—afraid."

"Afraid? Afraid of what? Were you so afraid that you married the son of the man whom you knew to be a murderer?"

Dirk didn't know why he talked to her so bitterly. He himself, and Gunner Swanson, had been forced to hide. Why should this girl have braved the power and influence of the Mercers to save some one she didn't know? He suddenly realized that it was disappointment. He had carried a memory of her fresh young face, of the deep blue eyes and the raven hair; and to find that she had done the last thing in the world he could imagine her doing, was too much to swallow.

But he went on, cruelly: "Did they frighten you into marrying Ned Mercer? Do you want me to believe that?"

The girl's lashes lowered over her eyes. She seemed to be wishing to hide some thought from him.

Dirk Blaize took his own eyes from her, glanced at the door behind the desk. His hand went to his left armpit where he carried the .32 pistol that Gunner Swanson had given him. He said coldly: "There's some one behind that door. I can hear him breathing. Tell him to come out, or I'll riddle the door."

CHAPTER FOUR

The Justice of Dirk Blaize

If one return good for evil, what, then, is to be the return for good? Rather should you return justice for injustice, and good for good.

—From the Books of Kung-fu-tse.

FOR a tense moment there was no sound in the room. Then the girl cried:

"No, no. You're mistaken. There's nobody there!"

Dirk smiled thinly. "My ears are never wrong. I spent six years in the dark. I learned to shoot a quarter out of the air just from the whirl of its turning—so you see, my ears must be very good. Tell him to come out. And tell him not to try to steal away; I will be able to hear his footsteps, no matter how quietly he moves. I give him one minute!"

Dirk's gun was out now, his eyes slitted, watching the opening.

The girl said hoarsely: "Don't shoot!" Then, in a beaten voice: "Come out, father."

Dirk started, glanced at her. "Father!"

He watched the small, frightened man who emerged from behind the door. The man's hands were shaking. His eyes darted from the girl to Dirk, and he stood shuffling behind the desk like a snared animal. He had mouse-colored hair and mustache. He stammered:

"I—I'm not armed. D-don't shoot."

The girl said dully: "This is my father, George Lane. He is the manager of the Mercer State Bank. Father, this is Dirk Blaize—the boy I've told you about."

Dirk asked, puzzled: "But why hide? You didn't know I was coming. You had no reason to be afraid of me."

Lane lowered his eyes. "We—we thought it was—some one else. They wouldn't have liked to find me here."

"You mean the Mercers?" Dirk asked, still uncomprehending.

The girl broke in, talking fast, as if she wanted to get it over with. "Yes, the Mercers! My husband and my father-in-law! We were trying to open the safe!"

She gestured toward the compact little safe that stood in the corner. "I was trying to rob my own home!"

Dirk put away his gun. "Why?" he demanded, studying the girl. He asked the question as if it was his right to know.

And the girl, with a single glance at her father, told him, letting the words tumble out as if she were afraid she had no time.

"There's a paper in that safe. I brought it here the night your—the night you were shot. That's why I was here. Father sent me with it. It's a confession, signed by father. In that paper he admits—embezzling thirty thousand dollars from the Mercedes State Bank. They've held it over our heads for six years, though father has paid them back every penny of it since then. They—they made me keep quiet about—about the shooting, and they made me marry Ned. That's—that's why I'm *Mrs. Mercer* now!"

Her lower lip was trembling as she finished the sudden, brutal statement. Silent sobs wracked her body, but no tears came to her eyes. She let her hands drop to her sides and looked at Dirk as if awaiting his judgment.

"I see," said Dirk softly.

The little man came around the desk, took the girl in his arms. "You've done enough for me, Patsy," he said huskily. "I won't let you go on. You shall demand a divorce from Ned. I'll take my medicine."

Dirk glanced at the safe. "You say the confession is in there? Why don't you get it out?"

"Because they've changed the combination. I only discovered what it was yesterday, but my father-in-law must have suspected something. The safe won't open." There was despair, hopelessness in her voice.

Dirk said quietly: "I can open it."

George Lane took an eager step forward. "How?"

Dirk smiled grimly. "My hearing is acute. I can hear the tumblers drop."

WHILE father and daughter stared at him in wondering hope, he crossed the room, knelt before the safe. His long

fingers twirled the dial slowly. His eyes closed, he listened for the little *clicks* that marked the fall of the tumblers. His ears, trained through six years of blindness, caught the sounds, and he manipulated the dial. It was less than three minutes before the door of the safe swung open. Dirk Blaize sighed, opened his eyes and stood up.

"You can get your paper," he said.

George Lane darted to the safe, began pawing feverishly through the compartments. He strewed papers over the floor, discarding one after the other as it proved not to be what he sought. Among the discards, Dirk saw a pink check. It was lying face down on the floor, and the scrawling signature of Roger Mercer stared up from it.

And Dirk pounced on the paper, snatched it up and turned it over. There, across the date line, was the faded bloodstain. He saw the girl looking at it, asked her:

"Do you remember this?" His voice was choked, tight.

She nodded, wordlessly.

He bent his eyes to it once more. "This must be why they killed—dad. It's a check from Joe Milo to Mercer, and it has Mercer's endorsement! It only needs the testimony of an eye-witness to corroborate it. It supplies the motive for their murdering dad!"

George Lane was still pulling papers from the safe. The girl said:

"I'll testify—whether father finds his confession in there or not—I'll testify."

"Even though Ned Mercer is your husband?" Dirk asked her.

She shuddered. "Even though Ned Mercer is my husband," she repeated. "I—"

She turned as her father uttered a cry of glee, sprang to his feet with a long document which he held in a shaking hand.

"Here it is!" he cried. "Here it is!" He

hastily read through the long sheet, then tore it swiftly into shreds, pocketed the bits. When he was done he raised his head, and his shoulders seemed to straighten.

Dirk Blaize raised a hand. "Wait. There's a car pulling up outside." He closed his eyes, cocked his head and listened. "Four men have come in it. They are walking up the path to the door."

George Lane exclaimed: "It must be Roger and Ned coming back from the rally with some friends. What'll we do?"

Dirk Blaize raised the pink, blood-stained check. "I want to see them," he said, tight-lipped. "The same as my father saw them—with this check in his hand!"

He turned, facing the door. The girl and her father watched him, suddenly breathless at sight of the thing that shone in his eyes.

The outer door opened, steps sounded, and the voice of Roger Mercer from the foyer: "Bring him in here, Preston. I want to ask him some private questions before you take him to headquarters."

The door of the living room opened, and Roger Mercer stepped in. Behind him were other figures, and Dirk Blaize's eyes narrowed as he saw a uniformed officer, and, handcuffed to the officer by his one arm—the bedraggled figure of Gunner Swanson!"

MERCER stopped short just within the doorway, staring at Dirk and the others, looking down at the open safe and the litter of papers strewn about the floor. His heavy face twitched convulsively, and his hand went into his coat pocket.

The others crowded in behind him, and Dirk saw that the fourth man was Ned Mercer.

Roger Mercer's face twisted into a saturnine smile. "So you're Blaize's brat! Robbing my safe, eh?"

Dirk's eyes were fastened to those of Mercer, steadily, unblinking.

"Yes," he said tonelessly. "Robbing your safe. And I found—this!" He held up the blood-stained check. "You killed my father for this, Mercer; to save yourself from going to jail. You should have destroyed it."

Mercer's hand came out of his pocket with a gun. "Turn around, Blaize!" he rapped. "And raise your hands."

Dirk was smiling thinly as he obeyed. He saw Patricia Lane and her father standing in the corner, the girl wide-eyed with fear.

"I think we can take care of you, Lane," Roger Mercer drawled. "I would guess that you've got that confession of yours out of the safe; but we can arrange a charge against you. Ned, would you be sorry to see your father-in-law go to jail—or die?"

Ned Mercer snickered. "Anything you do is okay by me, pop."

"All right, then," Roger Mercer went on. "We caught Blaize, here, robbing the safe. We had a gunfight, and Lane was shot. Think we can work it, Preston?"

The uniformed officer growled: "Sure we can. We'll plant a gun on Blaize. We've got away with murder before."

Dirk Blaize had listened, with his back to the others. In his left hand he held the check. His right was at his side. Mercer said to him: "Raise your hands, Blaize. Ned, fan him. Get his gun."

Ned Mercer said: "Okay, pop," and started toward Dirk.

And Dirk Blaize closed his eyes, raised his right hand slowly in front of him. It was hidden from the others, but visible to Patricia and her father. They saw the swift motion with which he drew the pistol from the shoulder holster, and Patricia's eyes widened. She knew he couldn't turn around and fire without being shot himself.

But Dirk Blaize didn't turn around. Still with his eyes closed he asked:

"Ned Mercer, where are you?"

Ned Mercer laughed. "Right behind you, Blaize, with a gun pointed at your back—" His voice ended with the crack of his gun, Dirk had side-stepped and fired. The report of Ned Mercer's gun was drowned by the sharp staccato bark of Dirk Blaize's pistol. Dirk had fired over his shoulder, at the sound of Mercer's voice; and the slug caught Ned Mercer in the mouth.

Dirk whirled as Mercer's body hit the floor, and fired once more at Preston, who had yanked out his heavy service revolver. Preston was thrown backward, carrying Gunner Swanson with him by the handcuffs. The revolver clattered to the floor from Preston's lifeless hand, and he sank down, dragging Gunner down with him.

Dirk Blaize heard the snick of a safety catch at his left, saw that Roger Mercer had a revolver, was pointing it at him. Mercer's teeth were bared in a snarl. In a moment he would squeeze down on the trigger.

But he never did. Dirk Blaize shot from the hip. The room was filled with the reverberating roar of the explosion, and the heavy slug tore through Roger Mercer's head—directly between the eyes.

His eyes glazed, and the gun dropped from his hand as he crashed to the floor.

Dirk Blaize crossed the powder-filled room, stooped beside Preston's body, and went through the pockets until he found the handcuff key. He released Gunner Swanson, patted him on the back.

"It's over, Gunner," he said huskily. "I gave it to him between the eyes—the way he gave it to dad!"

"I knew you would, Dirk, lad," Gunner told him. "I knew you would."

Dirk turned to the girl and her father, who were still in the corner of the room, staring at the dead bodies. The girl, Dirk could see, was close to hysteria.

"You're free now," he said quietly. "No one has a hold over you. With your—husband and your father-in-law dead, the backbone of the political ring in Middlevale is broken. You will have no reprisals to fear. Will you testify to what you saw here—that night?"

She swayed, leaned against her father. "Of course," she said very low. "Of course I will. I'll do—anything you ask."

Dirk said: "If you testify—that will be enough," and turned to the one-armed man who was watching him with solicitude.

"You and I, Gunner," he said softly, "are going to stick together—for a long time!"

THE END

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MORGUE EXPRESS

by WYATT BLASSINGAME

(Author of "Dead Man's
Alibi," etc.)

THE GREEN CAT



Mike Harris had threatened
to kill him.

*Nick Broca knew that death
waited for him at the Green
Cat. He was afraid. He
didn't want to go—but once
on that subway train, it was
too late to back out. . . .*

IT WAS late twilight when Nick Broca got on the uptown subway at 72nd street. He had drunk three old

fashioneds in McNamarra's bar and he felt warm and pleasant inside. He wasn't tight, certainly not too tight to be cer-

tain that he took the uptown subway.

There were several reasons for going uptown. First, he had a date with Jane Valentine at 125th Street, and Nick Broca was not likely to forget a date with the first girl he had ever seriously loved. Second, he had to stop by his own apartment on 95th Street and get some more money. The third reason for going uptown was that he knew it would not be salutary to go too far downtown. Mike Harris ran The Green Cat on 13th Street and he had threatened to kill Nick the next time the Italian came near him.

It's a long way from 72nd to 13th Street, but since Harris' threat Nick Broca had not felt healthy south of Times Square. Jane Valentine had sneered at him for being afraid, had threatened to give him up if he let Harris run him away from the Village and his main source of income, and though he loved Jane and would have done anything to please her, he couldn't see how getting killed would help. So when he caught the subway at twilight, feeling good from the three old fashioned, he made certain he was headed uptown.

It was an express train and jammed with persons going home from work. Nick barely managed to get on, crowded in between a Negro and two fat women who shouted at one another above the roar and clatter. When the train stopped Nick got off, took three steps toward the left and halted. His eyes were wide in his dark face and his mouth hung slightly open. He shook his head, puzzled. For some reason this didn't look like the 96th Street station.

And then he saw the sign just above him and to the right.

It said: *TIMES SQUARE*

Nick Broca raised the slim, too-clean, too-manicured fingers of his left hand and rubbed his head. He was so sure he had taken the uptown train that for a mo-

ment he was dazed. He cursed under his breath, his dark red lips a sullen line against his handsome face. "I wonder how the devil I got on the wrong train," he thought, and turned to look at a sign beside the tracks.

The sign read: *UPTOWN*

"Damn it!" he said aloud.

He would have sworn that was the train he had just got off. But it couldn't be because he had started at 72nd and now he was at 42nd. He must be feeling those drinks more than he realized, he decided, and looked at the sign again. He made sure he was headed uptown, and caught the next train.

HE STOOD near the door, watching the tracks flicker past and the shaded lights against the concrete walls whip in and out of his vision. And all the while he had the odd idea that the train was going downtown, that he was facing toward Times Square and the train was roaring and clattering backwards, thundering through the semidark tunnel with no more volition and control of its own than if it had left the tracks and were plunging down a bottomless shaft.

The lights of the next station began to flicker alongside. It didn't seem possible that they could have reached 72nd Street so quickly. Nick Broca pushed his face against the glass door, trying to read the signs before the train stopped. And then he saw one on an upright.

PENN STATION—33rd STREET

Nick was out of the door before it was altogether open. He was frightened now, turning to look at the signs above the train while it was still there. The sign said *UPTOWN*—but that was the train he had been on. He was certain this time. It wasn't four seconds since he had stepped off it, and there wasn't another in the station. And this train was going downtown. The sign was wrong.

"Hell, they must all be wrong," Nick thought. "At 72nd, and Times Square, and here. The whole works are wrong. Or maybe the train is running in the wrong direction." He realized suddenly that his face was covered with sweat. He took the handkerchief from his breast pocket to mop the perspiration and saw that his fingers were trembling. "I didn't have but three drinks," he thought. "I can't be drunk. It's these damn signs that are wrong."

There was a subway guard some thirty feet away, his back to Nick, his right elbow leaning on the rail that overlooked the tracks. Nick went up to him and asked, "Which side are the uptown trains?" in a voice which sounded a little shaky.

The guard continued to lean on the rail and never looked around.

"Which side are the uptown trains?" Nick asked again, speaking loudly this time and pushing his mouth close to the guard's ear.

The man stirred uneasily, shifting his weight from one foot to the other, but he gave no sign of having heard. Nick tapped him on the shoulder not meaning to punch hard, but his muscles were jerky now. The guard turned, staring at Nick with wide, incredulous eyes. "Which side are the . . .?"

Nick stopped, his own eyes focused on the guard's face, his voice fading into the rumble of an oncoming train, a cold lump rising high in his throat. He turned swiftly and pushed his way through the crowd.

"Hell, why did he have to look at me like that? I'm not drunk. You'd thought he—he wasn't even seeing me."

Nick went down the steps that go under the local tracks and up again to the street level. He felt cold now, and lonely, standing with his back against Macy's, facing into the eternal whirl and confusion of passing thousands. He remem-

bered the old saying that a man cannot be as alone anywhere as in a city. "It's true," he thought. "I feel like I couldn't even reach out and touch those persons and like they wouldn't see me or care if I did. Millions of 'em and all hurrying somewhere and they don't even see me standing here."

Taxis, caught in the press of late traffic, moved slowly along Seventh Avenue. He started toward one, stuck his hand in his pocket and found that he had only five cents. For a moment he paused, utterly alone in the swarm of hurrying persons. Hesitantly he turned back toward the subway.

Once inside again he walked slowly, straining his ears for jagged fragments of conversation. Since the way the guard had looked at him he was afraid to speak to anybody. Finally he heard a man saying, "I'm going up to Times Square, take the shuttle and . . ." The rest of his words were lost as a train roared in, but that was enough for Nick Broca. He stuck close to the man, almost touching him as they got aboard. Looking back as the doors closed Nick saw that the sign said *UPTOWN*.

ONCE more, rushing through the semi-dark tunnel beneath the steady clang and hurry of the city's traffic he had the weird impression that he was speeding backward, that no matter which way he faced he was still going backward, hurtling toward some inescapable *thing* that was waiting.

When he got off the train at the next station and saw that the signs said *14th STREET* he didn't speak to anyone but pushed his way through the crowd, hands shaking, face wet with perspiration. He had to get out of this subway, quick! Had to get the wind in his face again, look up and see stars above him. He had the

erie impression that the walls were caving in on him.

Again the cold wind bit through his clothes and set him shaking. He couldn't remember it having been this cold, and the persons passing him seemed warm enough. But there was no time to worry about that now. Mike Harris' Green Cat was only a block away on 13th Street, and Mike had promised to kill him if he ever came near it.

He wasn't afraid of Mike now, however. He was afraid of what was happening to him; he wanted to get back uptown and find Jane Valentine and put his head against her breast, holding her hard around the waist. For a week now she had been telling him not to be afraid of Mike Harris, had even threatened to leave him if he let the Irishman run him out of the Village. But she'd understand tonight, if only he could find her. She'd take care of him until this strange, terrible thing was over. Then he'd come back and face Harris.

It was a long way to 125th Street, and he was flat broke now, but he hesitated only long enough to make sure of his direction. Then he started uptown, almost running. He was at the corner before he raised his head. The sign was directly in front of him.

THE GREEN CAT

MUSIC — LIQUOR AND FOOD IF YOU WANT IT

His nerves broke then. He made a loud, sobbing cry, spun half around to run and found that he faced the club's door. His breath made a rasping sound as he plunged down the steps into the place, ran past the doorman without looking at him, across the almost empty dance floor. Then he had gone beyond the curtains at the far end of the room, up a small flight of stairs and had stopped just outside the open door of Mike Harris' office.

JANE VALENTINE and Mike Harris were standing in the center of the room, looking at one another with wide, almost frightened eyes. They did not see Nick Broca but in that first moment, although they were not even touching hands, he could see the intimacy between them.

"How could he have known you were here?" Harris asked.

The girl shook her head. "I left word I had gone to my aunt's in Albany for the week-end. He *couldn't* have known I had come to stay with you."

Nick Broca did not move. He was standing in the light of the doorway, but neither the girl nor the man looked toward him.

"He wouldn't have come without knowing you were here," Harris said.

The girl shuddered. "He must have known somehow that I was leaving him, but how . . .?"

Understanding was coming into her eyes. "I had been laughing at him for losing his nerve. Maybe he came down to prove he hadn't. That's it. . . ." She stopped as the telephone shrilled.

Harris picked it up, said, "Hello. Yes, this is he." Standing in the full glow of the light, as completely unseen as if he had not been there, Nick Broca watched.

"Good God!" Harris said. His hand moved slowly until the telephone was forked. He turned to face the girl. As he did so his gaze swept over Nick but he gave no evidence of seeing him.

For a moment Harris looked full into Jane Valentine's eyes. He said slowly, "That was McNamarra calling. Nick must have left here and gone straight to Mac's place on 72nd Street to have a few drinks. Then he went out—almost sober—and jumped under a subway. He died on the way to the hospital—nearly half an hour ago."

MURDER FOR CHARITY



Kozak was suddenly savage. "We want that dough! Do we get it?"

By
J. LANE LINKLATER

(Author of "Dead Man's Legs," etc.)

FELIX was sipping a cup of coffee in the little lunch counter when Kozak came in. Somehow Felix felt at once that Kozak was on business; not legitimate business, because Kozak's business was never legitimate. At the moment, Felix was talking to the gentleman known as Mr. Spencer.

Felix knew a lot of people in that part of town; knew them better, perhaps, than

Kozak and his crew would kill just for the fun of it, and Felix knew that a dumb, trusting old guy like Mr. Spencer couldn't help but walk straight into their murder-trap!

they realized. He peddled papers on the same busy corner day after day and year after year. He was not a child—he was a grown man, up in the forties—yet he had a childish look in his somewhat twisted, ill-formed face, so that people never gave him credit for knowing much. But he knew many people, watched them without appearing to. And he knew Kozak as well as he knew anyone: a sly

crook who associated with other crooks who were not so sly but more violent.

He knew Mr. Spencer, too, as well as anyone around there did. And yet he didn't know him very well. He didn't know where he lived, nor what his business was, nor whether he had any folks, nor anything about his past. This Mr. Spencer was a good-looking, serious-faced man of nearly fifty. He was always well-dressed, and apparently he had plenty of money.

Felix knew that he had money, because he was free with it, in a quiet sort of way. He was always doing things for people who needed help; indeed, he was always *looking* for people who needed help. And he talked to Felix oftener than to anyone else; asked him many questions in a kindly, modest way.

When Kozak came in he sat on the stool on the other side of Mr. Spencer and ordered coffee. Almost at once he turned to Mr. Spencer with a grin. The grin, like everything else about him, was cunning. He was a thin, pinch-cheeked man with a long pointed nose and close-set greenish eyes.

"Nice evening, Mr. Spencer," he said respectfully.

Felix, apparently, was just drinking coffee, and looking only at Myrtle, the girl behind the counter. But little that Kozak did or said would escape his notice.

"A very pleasant evening," agreed Mr. Spencer.

In a little while, Kozak was talking to Mr. Spencer with cunning earnestness. He was talking as if he had known Mr. Spencer for a long time, although Felix knew that they had never had any dealings. His tone was low, but not so low as to prevent Felix from understanding most of what was said.

Kozak was telling Mr. Spencer about a boys' club in which he claimed to be in-

terested. They were very poor boys, according to Kozak, and Kozak himself was trying to do a great work with them as an adviser and benefactor. But he had very little to work with, and the boys had no regular clubhouse and were compelled to meet in a dilapidated and practically abandoned house without equipment.

It was obviously Kozak's idea to get Mr. Spencer interested in this boys' club. That would be easy to do, because, as Felix knew, nothing touched him so quickly as the plight of poor boys. It appeared, too, that Kozak's boys were having a meeting that night, and Kozak would take it as a special favor if Mr. Spencer would attend and see things for himself.

FELIX ordered another cup of coffee. He was anxious to have Kozak leave, so that he could enlighten Mr. Spencer about him. He knew that the only boys' club that Kozak was interested in was a gang of his own crooks. And Felix could see that Mr. Spencer was really impressed. This was not surprising to Felix, since Kozak at one time had been a school teacher, and still carried something of the appearance of one.

Presently, however, Mr. Spencer turned to Felix, smiled, said good-bye, and walked out of the lunch counter, still talking with Kozak.

Felix exchanged a fleeting glance with Myrtle, the waitress.

In a minute, he got up, walked to the door. Kozak was turning the next corner. Mr. Spencer was driving away in his car.

Felix gazed thoughtfully at Mr. Spencer's car as it vanished beyond the jumbled traffic of the street. This was a very poor, congested part of town, known as the Cauldron. All kinds of things happened in the Cauldron, many of them violent. Felix heard a lot of things, saw a lot of things—and said nothing.

Myrtle was looking at him, carelessly, from inside. The girl behind the counter was small, pretty in a sensible sort of way, quick-eyed. Felix had an understanding with Myrtle—an understanding so carefully guarded that no one else suspected its existence.

Myrtle alone knew that Felix did things besides sell papers. In this furtive, poverty-ridden, crime-hatching district of the Cauldron, tense human dramas were constantly being enacted behind crumbling walls, in concealed corners. And Felix silently took a hand in many of them.

But he never once showed his hand. No one knew—except Myrtle.

And this Mr. Spencer had somehow touched Felix as no one else had ever done. Kozak's plans about Mr. Spencer, Felix knew, were sure to be sinister.

Felix waited a very few minutes. Then he slipped unobtrusively down the street and turned the same corner as Kozak had done. He twisted about through a couple of alleys and presently was at the rear of an old two-story house which appeared to be deserted.

It was dusk now, about seven in the evening, or later. Felix waited a little while, pressed flat against the dusty wall of the building. There was no sound, except the noise from the street beyond.

Presently, as if coming to a sudden decision, Felix reached up, clutched a window sill, and speedily, noiselessly, let himself in through the window.

THE lower floor, obviously, was unoccupied. Felix was in what had been a kitchen. He stepped into a hallway, through which he could look down to the street door in front.

The murmur of voices came to him from upstairs.

The stairway started up from a point near the front door. Felix reached the

foot of the stairs quickly. The steps were ancient, shaky, and it would have seemed impossible for anyone to ascend them without creating a disturbance. Yet Felix did it with apparent ease. He was very thin, light-footed, and stoop-shouldered. He looked like a mere shadow moving up the stairs.

Near the head of the stairs, two rooms were close together. The doors of both were closed. Voices were audible in one of them. At once, Felix opened the door of the other room, entered, closed the door again.

It was quite dark, but Felix crossed the room rapidly to the far side. From here he could see the entire wall dividing this room from the other. And it took him only a moment to find what he was looking for.

There were several small holes in the decrepit dividing wall, through which light shone. Felix crossed the room to the largest one, about waist high. He dropped to one knee, squinted through it.

In the other room were several rough articles of furniture—an old table, several kitchen chairs—and four men.

Felix knew all of the four men. One of them was Kozak. Then there were Berk, Harder and Rowe, all hardened criminals. Berk was the most vicious, and the least intelligent. He was a big brawny man with lowering eyebrows.

Berk, as Felix knew, was Kozak's most dependable tool, easily handled by Kozak's crafty intelligence, capable of the most reckless brutality.

They were talking. Felix listened intently.

It was Kozak's voice at first: "He'll be here about nine." Kozak was smiling in satisfaction. "And he'll have dough with him."

"Plenty?" growled Berk.

"Plenty!" Kozak assured him softly. "I've been watching the way he does

things for weeks. He always carries cash. I don't know why, but I have an idea he hasn't even got a bank account; maybe doesn't trust the banks. Sure, he'll have plenty."

"What's the lay?" said Berk.

"Easy. He comes to the house here. Rowe lets him in, brings him up here. You slug him, take his dough—after I talk with him. Then we take him out, put him in the car, drive away and throw him in a ditch."

"Suppose he squawks?" put in Harder, a younger man, well-dressed, pale-faced.

Kozak chuckled. "He won't squawk. There's something on his mind. One thing I noticed—he always keeps out of the way of the police! I don't know what it is, but I'm sure he won't squawk."

"Ought to make a good job of it," Berk contended. "Then he *couldn't* squawk."

"Not unless it's necessary," Kozak advised gently. "Not unless it's quite necessary. Anyhow, we'll make a good haul. And we won't slug him right away. I think perhaps he's got a lot more dough salted away somewhere. We'll get that, too, if we can."

"Where's that club?" put in Rowe, the fourth man of the group. He was an older man, bald-headed, with vacant blue eyes. "A club is better for a job like that than the side-swipe of a gat. Where's that one we used the other day?"

"It's in the next room," said Kozak.

He turned his head, and his gaze was fastened almost directly at the crevice through which Felix was looking.

Berk got up. "I'll get it," he rumbled, and started for the door.

FELIX, watching and listening, edged away from the wall. He glanced about the room. Berk would probably have a flashlight. There was no furniture in this room behind which to hide.

And he couldn't get out to the hall and

out of sight before Berk emerged from the other room.

He tiptoed softly across to the window, gently flipped it up. This was on the side of the house. He slipped over the sill, hung on to the ledge. His feet found a slight projection.

Berk was just opening the door of the room.

Felix didn't hesitate. Feeling his way with toe and fingertip, he made his way across the outer wall, and then downwards, with amazing agility. He reached the ground, crouched low against the corner, just as Berk's head was dimly outlined against the window.

Presently Berk disappeared. Rapidly, Felix made his way out to the street, walked half a block and stood in the doorway of a small store.

There he looked, with apparent interest, at the crowded display of cheap neckties and sox, but he was thinking about Mr. Spencer. Obviously, his friend was in grave danger. He would be robbed, and at least badly hurt, perhaps killed—the man, Berk, could not be depended upon to be careful in his blows. Kozak and his gang were cheap, vicious crooks, careless of consequences. Kozak himself was the only one who might be intelligently cautious, and he used his caution only to see that if anything serious happened, it would be one of the others, not himself, who would get the blame.

Mr. Spencer should be warned, of course. But Felix had no idea where he lived. That quiet, kindly man appeared in the Cauldron frequently, but he had never given any inkling as to his own residence.

The police? But Felix, while never a law-breaker himself, had absorbed the aversion of the district to calling in the police at any time.

And, besides, in one respect he agreed with Kozak; he had the distinct impres-

sion, although for no tangible reason, that Mr. Spencer himself wouldn't want the help of the police! Clearly, he would have to take a chance on being able to warn Mr. Spencer before he entered Kozak's hangout.

FELIX crossed the street, walked back until he was opposite the front door of the hangout. This was a dark block; old two-story rooming houses and untenanted stores. The best concealment he could find was a shallow doorway.

There he waited. He wondered if the open window through which he had escaped had excited any suspicion. He watched that front door constantly, although he doubted its being used—until Mr. Spencer arrived.

After a long wait, he stirred a little. From where he stood he could see a large street clock, more than a block away. It said ten minutes to nine.

Mr. Spencer would arrive almost any time now.

An occasional pedestrian passed by without noticing him.

A walking figure appeared at one end of the block, on the same side of the street, approaching him. Something in his gait snapped Felix to attention. It was one of the gang—Harder!

Felix stepped out of the doorway, started away quickly in the other direction. He took a few steps, then stopped abruptly. Another walking figure was approaching from that direction, too. It was another of the gang—Rowe!

A narrow alleyway opened just behind him. Felix darted down it, vanished into a rear yard.

He waited. He felt fairly sure that even if Harder and Rowe had known about him, and had been after him, they would not follow him. In any case, he doubted if they suspected him. The open window had probably suggested to them that

someone might have been in that room while they were talking, and the two had been assigned to scout around just before Mr. Spencer was due to arrive. And as soon as Mr. Spencer's car appeared, they would re-enter the house.

Felix waited, uneasily, for a very few minutes. Then he slipped out into the alleyway again, crept forward toward the street. He emerged on the sidewalk. Harder and Rowe were not in sight. But almost directly across the street a car was parked. Felix recognized it at once. It was Mr. Spencer's car, but Mr. Spencer was not in it.

Felix stared across the street for a moment; stared at the doorway. Mr. Spencer had gone in there, was upstairs now.

Without a moment's hesitation, Felix sped back down the street to a small corner drug store, entered the telephone booth, called police headquarters.

A voice responded.

Felix spoke rapidly, in a strange tone: "I'm watching a gang of crooks. They crippled and robbed a man a few days ago."

"Where?" snapped the voice.

"I'm on the corner of Third and Mason. Send your men there. Tell them to wait until they hear from me, after they reach here."

"Who are—"

Felix snapped the receiver back into place, hurried out, moved quickly back down the street. He knew the front door would be locked, so he sped around the back, and again entered the kitchen window. With his uncanny ability to move noiselessly, he crept along the hall and up the stairs. Within three steps of the top, he stopped abruptly.

The door of the room was open. The oil lamp which provided the light in the room was situated so that it sent no rays out as far as the staircase. Felix was in the dark.

He could see Harder standing in the doorway, watching the room and at the same time keeping an ear cocked down toward the front door. And he could see most of the interior of the room.

Obviously, Felix thought, they had not suspected him. Harlow and Rowe had taken that walk a few minutes before just to make sure that the coast was clear.

There, in the center of the room, standing erect, was Mr. Spencer. Sitting facing him was the crafty Kozak. Standing close to him, poking an automatic at him, was the pale-faced Rowe. Standing a little to one side, holding a club, was the brutish Berk.

The expression on Kozak's face was one of cruel elation.

"So," he said, "you're Dudson—James P. Dudson! I been watching you for some time, and I was sure I'd seen your face before—in the papers. You took the whiskers off, eh?"

Felix suppressed a start. Mr. Spencer was James P. Dudson! He recalled the name instantly—and understood why his friend had avoided the police.

James P. Dudson had been the president of a bank, with a branch in the Cauldron. The bank had failed at a time when banks everywhere were failing. But Dudson had been arrested, charged with misusing the funds of his bank, found guilty, sentenced—and then had escaped.

When the excitement had died down, there were a few friends of the escaped banker who had said things in his defense—that Dudson himself was strictly honest, that his own thorough honesty had made him too trusting with others, that he himself had been victimized by unscrupulous associates.

Just a few friends had said that. But most had forsaken him as rats run from a sinking ship.

That had been three years ago. No trace had been found of him. Felix re-

called pictures of Dudson which had been published in the papers he had peddled; pictures showing a benevolent, dignified gentleman with a trim beard. That beard was gone now.

So Mr. Spencer was James P. Dudson—and James P. Dudson was an escaped convict, living in the dark shadow of a prison term!

FELIX watched Mr. Spencer. There was no sign of fear in the man's face. He didn't answer Kozak; merely smiled a little sadly, as if slightly disappointed that his implicit trust in human nature had once more brought him into difficulty.

Berk spoke up suddenly: "We better get rid of this guy, Kozak. We got his dough, now let me—"

"Not yet," Kozak interrupted softly. "He's got more—a lot more—where this came from. We might as well get that, too. How about it, Dudson?"

Mr. Spencer—Felix persisted in thinking of him as Spencer rather than Dudson—still refused to talk.

Kozak chuckled quietly. "You've got a lot of dough. We want it. It isn't in any bank—that's certain. You've got it cached somewhere. You take us there, and save your skin. But, if you don't—"

Kozak shrugged, and glanced at Berk, with the club.

For a little while Mr. Spencer continued his silence. Then he spoke, calmly:

"I'll tell you about myself, and perhaps there may be some good in you that will respond." Felix, listening on the stairs, thought that he could have told Mr. Spencer in advance that no appeal would have any effect on Kozak and his crew. "I escaped just before I was to start serving my prison term for one reason only: a lot of people had lost money through the failure of my bank. I wanted, if I could, to make it up to them—especially the poor people of the Caul-

dron. I knew that if I went to the penitentiary I could help no one. But I was sure that if I were free, I could use certain resources to acquire money quickly.

"I wanted to use that money to reimburse as many as I could, and to do as much good as I could for the poor people of the district who had suffered most from the closing of the bank. I've been doing that to the best of my ability. My work is almost done. I've paid out more money than was lost by the depositors. I have some money left.

"Most of my remaining funds, gentlemen, belong to my granddaughter, a girl of seven. I do not intend to yield it to anyone else!"

Mr. Spencer had spoken so quietly that his words barely reached Felix, but there was an air of unshakable firmness about him.

"Hell," exploded Berk, "we got plenty dough. Let's bust him and—"

"Wait a minute," put in the crafty Kozak. "We'll take all there is to get!" He fastened his gaze on Mr. Spencer. "You wouldn't want the police to catch up with you right now, would you?"

Mr. Spencer answered without hesitation: "Not now. I have one thing more to do—one adjustment to make on an old account—and that done it was my intention to surrender to the police and wipe the slate clean. But I must attend to that one thing first!"

"And what's that?" queried Kozak.

"The finding of an old man who lost his life's savings in the bank. I'm on his trail. But I must be free to—"

"To hell with the old man!" Kozak was suddenly savage. "We want that dough! Do we get it?"

"No!"

Kozak smiled again. He glanced at Rowe, holding the automatic; and at Berk, with the club.

"I'll give you," he said slowly, "ten minutes!"

Mr. Spencer was silent. Felix, alert and tense on the stairway, moved imperceptibly. Ten minutes! It wasn't long.

Down on the next corner were police, waiting for a word from him. But if he called them, Mr. Spencer would be arrested. And if he didn't call them, Mr. Spencer would be brutally assaulted, perhaps killed.

Ten minutes. . . .

WITH the utmost care, Felix slipped down the stairway, along the hall and out of the back window. In a little while he was just outside the lunch counter again. Myrtle was inside, saw him glance quickly down at the next corner. Then he went in. She unobtrusively made a place for him at the far end of the counter, near the little kitchen.

There was only one other customer present. He was at the other end of the counter, against the window.

The clock on the wall said seventeen minutes after nine. It had been perhaps three minutes since he left the hangout.

Felix made a brief sign to Myrtle. She brought him a piece of paper and pencil. He scratched on the paper rapidly. Myrtle took the note without looking at it, stuck it in her apron pocket.

Felix spoke in an undertone: "Man on the corner in brown felt hat—a dick. There are others near him. Give it to him—" Felix glanced at the clock again—"at nineteen minutes after."

Myrtle nodded, slipped back along the counter, paid no further attention to him. Felix slid off the stool, moved quietly out on the sidewalk.

He had five minutes, or not over six, in which to work. Myrtle would know what to do—she would tell the detective that some stranger had handed her the

note to give him, and tipped her for it.

And she would describe this stranger as, probably, a big man, broad-shouldered, handsome, young—filling in every detail which Felix was *not*.

It took him two minutes more to get back to the hangout.

He spent a few seconds standing at the back of the building, glancing up toward the roof. He knew this section intimately—roofs, cellars, alleys, yards; knew every neglected crevice in it.

Then he entered the building and again proceeded down the hall and up the stairs.

He stopped three steps from the top.

Those in the room, apparently, had remained almost stationary. Mr. Spencer, certainly, was standing in exactly the same spot, calm, unmoved.

Kozak was waiting, a confident smile on his face. The others seemed impatient, anxious to attend to Mr. Spencer and get the job done.

Felix, squinting across the top step, past Harder's feet, calculated rapidly. If he could get Mr. Spencer out of that room, at the right moment, he felt fairly confident of getting him away. But the room would have to be dark, and both Berk and Rowe would have to be disabled.

Felix slipped an automatic from his pocket.

He stared into the room again. The room must be dark—and in plunging it into darkness, it would also be plunged into confusion—yet it would be absolutely necessary for him to race into the room and locate Mr. Spencer without a moment's loss. To have a scurry around the room searching for him would be fatal.

Felix's ear was attuned anxiously for sounds outside. The police would be here very soon now. They would undoubtedly crash in the front door. And

one or two of them would cover the back of the building.

"Not much time left." It was Kozak speaking to Mr. Spencer. "Better not be a fool. All you have to do is to take us to where you have the rest of the dough cached."

But Mr. Spencer was silent.

Felix straightened suddenly. Someone downstairs was gently trying the door-knob. Evidently, Harder, in the doorway, had not heard it.

Then there was silence again.

The police would crash that door any moment now. Felix waited with his automatic poised. The one urgent thought that possessed him was that he must be able to enter that room and whisper to Mr. Spencer *without the loss of an instant*.

Smash! Powerful bodies were being hurled against the door downstairs. The noise echoed through the building like a shock.

Those in the room seemed petrified with astonishment.

Felix took aim, fired rapidly.

The first shot tore through Rowe's gun hand. The second took Berk in the shoulder.

The third smashed the lamp, brought utter darkness into the room.

Instantly, there was pandemonium in the room. Hoarse shouts and curses filled the air. The men inside were lunging about in an attempt to find safety.

The darkness in the room was absolute. Nothing was visible.

The front door was splintering now. In a moment or two the police would be through it, and pounding up the stairway.

It would be necessary to find Mr. Spencer instantly!

Silently, Felix darted up the remaining steps, into the room. There was a terrific crash downstairs. The door had

given way. Felix, with someone beside him, was back outside the door of the room just as footsteps sounded on the lower steps!

"This way!" he whispered.

IN A MOMENT they were in the other room, across at the window.

"The roof!" said Felix.

He swung himself out of the window, stood on the ledge, reached up, pulled himself up to the top with as much ease as an ordinary man would have stepped over a small puddle. Mr. Spencer followed him through the window, stood on the ledge. Felix took first one hand, then the other, and with his help the banker strained himself up to the roof.

Without a word, Felix led the way across the roof to that of an adjoining building, and then a third. And presently they found a way down, and were standing in one of the Cauldron's many hidden corners.

Felix spoke respectfully: "You are all right now, sir. I dropped a gun in the

room—a gun that cannot be traced to me. The police will think that Kozak and his gang were quarreling over the loot of a job they pulled the other day."

Mr. Spencer was quiet for a little while, his warm grateful hand on Felix's shoulder.

"How did you know how to find me," he asked, "in that dark room?"

The shadows of the night concealed the smile on Felix's twisted face.

"They were all rats," he said. "They all hunted cover as soon as the light went out. *You were the only one who stood his ground.*"

Mr. Spencer's clasp tightened impulsively. "My friend," he said, "I hope before long to be re-instated in society as a useful citizen. Will you let me help you then—let me, perhaps, put you in more desirable circumstances?"

Felix merely smiled, shook his head. He belonged in the Cauldron. Ten minutes later he was on his accustomed corner—selling morning papers.

Next Issue—Dated January

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FRANKLIN H. MARTIN and THEODORE TINSLEY



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Out November 22nd!

DEATH WAITS FOR A BLONDE

By **GEORGE ARMIN SHAFTEL**

(Author of "Hate's Golden Harvest," etc.)

She was alone, with her past a blank, that girl whom the little crook had rescued from the blazing car. Was she, too, one of the lost legion who eternally run from the law? Or did her luxurious clothes and costly jewels bear out his fear—that she was the missing heiress, Mary Landiss, whose presence in his hideaway flat would bait a death trap for him?



*A Gripping Novelette of a Girl,
a Crook—and a Killer!*



"She screamed as something like Halley's comet hit me behind the ear. . . ."

I TOOK fifty grand out of the wall safe. "Just your 'mad money,' huh?" I said to fat old Leigh Marsh. "To buy you a quick ocean voyage if the D. A. office turns on the heat!"

"You damn thief!" Marsh squawked at me through the gag I'd put over his mouth. "You'll rot in the pen for this!"

"Right beside you, buddy!" I snapped, getting sore.

This Leigh Marsh was president of an investment trust and the top buddha of a pyramid of holding companies that caused more loud smells in Senate investigations than ever steamed out of Teapot Dome. Lord knows, I'm outside the law ;

but alongside of Marsh, I'm a boy scout. Hell, alongside of him, Jesse James was a philanthropist. When Marsh failed, a whole state went bankrupt. He failed—and yet I get fifty grand out of his bedroom safe!

"Mister, I'd like to see your safe deposit boxes!" I said. "I bet they'd dazzle—"

Zzing-g-g . . . Somewhere in the house a buzzer is going.

"Damn! I should've known!" I swore to myself. Likely, when this safe here is opened, an alarm rings.

I sprang to the door, yanked it open—and ducked. *Cras-sh!* The bullet roared over my head, and I swung upward with my automatic and caught the big manservant who'd come running with a gun, smack in the plexus. He doubled up, his pistol blasting out again from nervous reflex. I sapped him on the temple with the blue steel, and twisted past him as he dropped and lunged down the hallway.

I passed a door, heard a voice yelling: "*Operator, operator, for God's sake, give me the police department—*" and turned down an angle of the hall toward the window opening on the fire-escape. Light streamed out at me from a door that was opening. I sent a bullet smashing through that door, high, and like I wanted, that door slammed shut again like a bear trap.

Down the fire escape I ran. I jumped into my car and shot around the corner, rubber screaming on the pavement, and swung out into a stream of traffic on Wilshire Boulevard. I jammed the accelerator to the floor and screwed through traffic like a movie actor late to a party. The signals turned for me as if made to order.

Swinging north on Alvarado, I turned toward Varden Airport. I had a friend with a plane waiting; he'd take me across the Border, where I'd lay low for a couple months. . . .

Abruptly, I stiffened in my seat, panic

searing white-hot along my nerves. It *couldn't* be so! God, what a break!

I'm stopped at a corner, waiting for a red light to turn green: a man has jumped onto my running board and he's jammed a gun into my ribs. *I'm caught!* Already!

"Turn down that alley!" he ordered.

I swung into the alley, intending to stop, talk casual—and make a grab for his pistol. But just as I turned off the ignition and swung to look at him—*whamo!* His arm lifted, and a nickeled barrel flashed down—and I crumpled in the seat, feeling as if a skyscraper had crashed onto my skull.

DIMLY, I felt myself hoisted into the back seat, and felt the car swing into a fast clip down the boulevard. I raved at myself, trying to make my sick brain tick over right and get some action out of my limp carcass. I felt inside my pocket, presently: the packet of money was still there! This guy hadn't frisked me. And looking out, I had sense enough to realize that no police station grew out in this direction. What in blazes was this hold-up aiming to do with me?

We were in a dark part of town, the hilly section out near Echo Park that overlooks the Los Angeles River, where a lot of artists and bohemians live.

Of a sudden, the car stopped. The burly guy who'd sapped me opened the door beside him, started the car again—and damned if he didn't jump out! While the car kept going down a long, steep hill, picking up speed every second!

You know how a door can slam and wake you: yet in that split-wink of time between the slam and your eyes opening, you can have a dream that's packed with action like a book? Man, I saw myself in the car, whizzing down that hill like an avalanche, going faster and faster, then hitting the bottom and crashing into a bank like a comet! I even vis-

ioned the red blaze of fire as the gasoline exploded—and the crowd collecting, and the ambulance coming, screeching blue murder, and the interns hopping out with their stretcher, looking at the wreck, then shrugging, and reaching for shovels. . . .

I lunged into the front seat.

That buggy was picking up speed like a pursuit ship in a power-dive. I recognized the hill: it was one that auto salesmen take new cars up, to show prospects how much power the jalopies have got. The hill is long, it's mean—and at the bottom there's a curve and a big apartment house for me to spread myself onto like a beer sign! Already my car was going so fast that the telephone poles were blurring past in the dark. I grabbed the wheel. I jammed on the brakes. But already the machine was going too fast on a twenty-four degree grade for the brakes to stop it. They squealed and shrieked, but the car didn't slow up.

I switched on the headlights, which the other guy had turned off.

So help me, I screeched like a woman!

Because at the bottom of the hill, right in my path, a sedan was stopped! And in my headlight glow, I saw a white face in the driver's seat.

"Out of the way!" I shouted. "You'll kill us both!"

But that other car didn't budge an inch—and every split-instant my buggy was going faster and faster! Another second, and the two of us would be messy blobs in a heap of blazing wreckage! I thought of jumping; but even if I'd had the ginger, and the guts to risk breaking my neck, I couldn't've done it—not with my car swooping down onto that other guy.

I yanked hard on the steering wheel and whipped my machine over the curb. *Cra-ash!* My bus slammed sidewise against a brick wall, and caromed on

down, slewing like a .22 bullet down a .30-30 rifle barrel. *Bang-g-g-g!* The rear end of my Detroit comet hit the nose of that other car. Over we went! Over we rolled; and for a ways I felt like a man in a barrel going over Niagara Falls—and landing smash onto a rock, for my car slewed against the apartment house and slid over a culvert into a ditch of muddy water that, praise be, caught the machine like springs in the bottom of an elevator shaft!

I staggered out, my head ringing like a gong. I ran toward that other car, zigzag, my knees wobbling and buckling.

That other fellow had been flung out of his car. Holy, jumpin' Jupiter! *It was a girl!*

I bent over her. And got a second shock—I smelled chloroform.

I was groggy. I'd had the damndest scare of my life, I was bruised and banged up—but the facts that kicked me in the face just now were too God-awful plain for me not to read them. This girl had been chloroformed and left in her car parked in the middle of the street *on purpose!* And I'd been knocked on the head and sent nose-diving down this hill also *on purpose.* Deliberately to ram into this girl's car! Somebody wanted to kill this kid in a way that would make the police think she had been rubbed out in an auto accident. Somebody wanted to kill her so bad that he didn't mind killing an innocent by-stander in the process!

Who was the guy? And why this set-up of murder? . . .

"**Y**OU'LL be smart if you scam out of this!" I warned myself, because people were coming out of houses to see if it was an air-liner that had crashed or just an earthquake shaking the tops off of the hills.

I turned to run. Then I took a last look at the girl, and—well, she was stun-

ning, she was young, and somehow she looked so damn helpless and appealing, lying there senseless, her dress torn and all. Her knees were all skinned up in the crash, and there was a blotch of red upon her white bosom. I realized that presently there'd be a mob of people gathered around, staring at her.

I bent down, I picked her up in my arms and stalked down the street. My nerves weren't dead and believe me, I realized pronto I was carrying a lovely girl in my arms; my pulse sputtered and raced and the palms of my hands got hot and I swore at myself. She was a supple kid, with a slim waist and shapely legs. Her black hair was soft against my chin. A faint perfume lifted from her bosom. Passing under a street light, I looked down at her. Her dark brows had a sweet curve and her lashes were long. Her lips were full and moist and had a crinkle in the corners: the sort of mouth that's brimming over with laughs until you kiss it—and then its voltage ripples along your nerves like fire.

The next street was a boulevard. From the corner I hailed a taxi and told the hackie to rush to a hospital.

"Auto accident!" I snapped at the doc in the emergency room. "Fella jammed into us and then ran!" I didn't say that it was my car that hit the girl's, for fear the doc might call a cop to hold me.

They got to work on the girl. I hung around. I wanted to see how she'd come out.

Waiting in the corridor, I heard a radio in the nurses' room beyond:

Radio-News Commentator . . . the police are looking for a daring thief who robbed the home of Leigh Marsh, the banker, this evening. The thief is described as a man just under thirty, six feet tall and wiry, with

red-brown eyes and red-brown hair and mustache. . . .

I groaned to myself. Now, when every cop and buttinsky in town would be looking for me, I ought to be in a 'plane headed for the Border! I jumped up, to leave—but just then the doctor came out to see me.

"My friend," he said, and he looked worried and evasive, "the young lady won't be able to go home tonight."

"She—hurt bad?" I demanded, my heart skipping a beat.

He looked at me as if deciding how much he could tell me. Then, as if taking me into his confidence, he said, "She's shaken up and bruised, of course. I don't think there are internal injuries; but I am afraid there may be some brain concussion. She's suffering from amnesia."

"That's loss of memory, isn't it?" I said.

"Yes. Of course, by morning she may be all right."

"You mean, she doesn't know who she is, or what's happened to her, or where she lives, or anything like that?"

"That's it. Fortunately, you're here to help us out on that score. Have you filled out these forms, yet? What is her name?"

I thought fast; I couldn't let the saw-bones get suspicious about me! So I made up facts. I said, "Anne Darsie." And I wrote down a fake name and address and so on.

"You'll be responsible for her hospital fees?"

"Sure," I said. After all, with Leigh Marsh's fifty grand in my pocket, I could afford to be generous!

"Now," he said, "you come in and speak a word to her, just to reassure her." He led me into the girl's room.

She was lying in bed. She sat up, sort of frightened-like, as we came in.

Her eyes weren't brown, like I'd expected to go with her black hair. Her eyes were blue, a deep, clear blue like early morning sky! I'd thought her lovely before, but it was as if her face had been a mask then—it was so full of life and expression now.

"This is your friend, Miss Darsie," said the doc, with enough bedside manner to settle a war.

The girl looked at me, and reached out and took my hand sort of like a drowning person grabbing something to keep her head above water. "Darsie?" she said, her big blue eyes looking appealingly at me. "That's my name?"

"Yes, Anne," I said. I'd let the doctor believe that the girl and I were friends. I had to continue the pretense, or cause suspicion.

"And—who are you? What are you to me?" she asked.

I grinned. Inwardly, I swore at myself because of a sudden I was blushing like a school kid. "Anne, I'm a good friend of yours. Jim Donlon."

"My fiancé?" she asked.

The doc chuckled and the nurse grinned like a fool.

"That's it," I said.

"Take me home!" she sort of cried out, and started climbing right of bed, reaching for me with both arms.

"No, honey," I said, lowering her back onto the cot. "Tonight, you've got to rest. I'll come get you in the morning."

Yes, I will—in a cop's glass eye! I said to myself.

She clung to me a minute. She put her sweet face up for me to kiss. I did—and I was right about the voltage!

"Try and sleep now," I said shakily; and turning, I stalked out of the room, out of the hospital . . . and you know, for the first time since I'd went outside the law, I really felt like a—thief! A lowdown, lying thief. . . .

CHAPTER TWO

Heiress or Thief?

I SLIPPED into a drugstore and into a phone booth.

I dialed the Varden Airport, intending to tell my friend who owns the Goshawk that we wouldn't fly south until tomorrow. I planned to help the girl a little more before hauling my freight. After all, I was partly to blame for her condition.

"Call Mike Lansing to the phone," I said.

"Can't," the air port flunky said. "He's in jail."

I hung up, realizing in a flash what had happened. I scrambled out of the drugstore like a fox backing out of a trap.

The police had grabbed Mike. They'd be tracing every phone call to him. Sure enough! As I whipped around the corner, from up the street a radio squad car came skidding to the curb.

I ducked into a taxi. "To Fourth and Marengo!" I told the hackie, "and step on it!"

We bored through traffic like a snake through weeds.

I sat there, sweating cold, and thinking. It was my own fault that my plans had gone haywire. I'd kept Mike waiting at the field, motor ticking over ready for flight, so darn long that it got suspicious. Soon's word of a big robbery was broadcast, why naturally, every airport and depot and bus station was watched. Mike Lansing had probably been picked up on suspicion and taken to headquarters for questioning. Probably he had told all he knew about me—I'd told him that if ever the cops started working on him with a rubber hose, to spill his guts. I didn't want him hurt on my account.

"The heat is on!" I warned myself. "You leave town!"

I paid off the hackie a block from my apartment.

Nearing the house, I saw a radio squad car parked at the corner, and a cop standing near the door. Likely, a couple of plainclothes men were waiting in my room, right now!

Mike Lansing *had* talked.

I crossed the street and kept going. And I told myself, "If you've got a lick of sense, you'll leave town tonight!"

But if I did, who'd look after the girl, Anne Darsie?

Lord, I could still feel her slim hands clutching me so desperately! Right now, while her memory was a blank, I was the only tie she had in the whole wide world. Suppose I ran out on her? She'd think that her fiancé had tossed her overboard. Coming on top of her fright and her loss of memory and all—why, it would damn near drive her crazy!

These reasons, of course, were just bolsters to the fact that I *wanted* to stay near the girl. The feel of her was deep in my nerves. I knew, suddenly, that if I could make life stack up the way I wanted, it would be Anne Darsie. I'd want to bring pretties to. To see her blue eyes light up and to feel her sweet lips pressed to mine—that would be the pay-off I'd slave for. "Damn it!" the smart part of my brain dinned at me. "Don't be a sucker for a dame!" But if Anne Darsie were the dame—yeah, I'd be a sucker and like it! . . .

I didn't leave town that night.

I PHONED the hospital in the morning. "No," said the doc. "Miss Darsie has not recovered her memory. Otherwise, she is perfectly all right. You can take her home."

I rushed out and rented an apartment on a quiet, ritzy street that was the last

sort of place that the cops would look for a stick-up. Then I went to the hospital for Anne.

Her big blue eyes shone when I came into her room.

She sort of reached for me, and clung to me. Playing my part, I kissed her. Then I paid her bills, and we left.

"Jim," she said later, in the taxi, "tell me about the accident. How did I get hurt?"

Now, if I told her that somebody had tried to murder her, she would be scared sick. So I said, "Honey, we were coming from the station in my car, and some drunk ran into us, and then climbed out of his car and ran."

"Oh," she said. Me, I warned myself once more that the party who'd tried to kill the girl before, would try again. *And the girl would not know who her enemy was*, having lost her memory! She wouldn't know who to look out for! She didn't even know she was in danger. It would be damn easy for that party to rub her out, now. Unless. . . .

"Unless I take care of her!" I realized and swore, "Damn it, you ain't a wet nurse! Staying in town, you're just inviting a long stretch in the penitentiary—if you escape being bumped off when the killer makes another pass at Anne!"

I got a streak of mule in me. Thinking of the risk just made me more obstinate about helping Anne. . . .

We went into the apartment I'd rented.

"It's a lovely place," Anne said, looking around. She came close to me. "But you haven't been living here?"

The apartment did look unlivied in! I said, "Kid, I'd rented it for you. You arrived just before the accident."

"Oh," she said. A shadow came into her blue eyes; then she smiled sort of pathetically. "I came to town, to marry you, Jim? You rented the apartment for—us?"

"Shucks, Anne," I said. "You forget all about that. Soon's—you're well, and remembering everything, then we'll talk about our plans."

She kissed me. She was a warm-hearted, impulsive kid, Anne. A sweet, generous kid. Me—I felt like a thief, again.

"Jim," she asked then, and she was very earnest, "where is my home? Have I got—a family?"

My nerves tensed, my throat tightened. I had imagination enough to realize that to Anne, it was as if she had come back from the dead, back into a life and a set-up of circumstances that she didn't know anything about. Such things as you and I take for granted, she had to *learn*. And whether she was to hear good news or bad news about herself, she didn't know and was in suspense about it. So I set to work to put down her fears.

"Kid," I said, "you're an orphan. You came from Fresno, where your folks left you some property. You've been living with an old, bed-ridden aunt."

She looked down a moment, then looked up at me and her eyes were shy. "Jim, do—do I love you a whole lot? I s-sort of have a feeling that I've been wild about you—"

I threw back my head and laughed; but, inside, I was shaky all of a sudden. To have a girl as lovely and sweet as she was crazy about *me*. . . . Huh-uh—nix. I don't believe in miracles.

"Sure, you're wild about me," I said, turning away. "We'll talk about it, when—you're well. Let's eat, now."

AFTER lunch, she lay down for a nap. Meanwhile, I took her handbag and searched through it. But no letters, nothing that told her identity, did it hold. However, I did find in it a key to a depot parcel check box.

I took the key. Then I left the house.

I took a taxi to the Pacific Electric interurban station.

And with the key, I opened the public parcel check box bearing the same number as the key. Inside the box was a fine suitcase. I grabbed the suitcase, and left. And rushed back home with it.

I smuggled it into my own room, and opened it.

Not one bit of writing did I find in the suitcase. Not one good clue as to Anne's real identity! . . . All I found was some jewelry. A double-handful of stuff: ear rings, cute bracelets, some broaches, a string of pearls, rings, so on. Of course, there were clothes in the case. Nice clothes. My face burned as I handled negligée and sheer underthings that looked like they'd come from Paris.

Of a sudden, I realized something damn funny: *this stuff was all brand new!* And then, like a thunder clap out of a clear sky, another crazy thought hit me: Damned if this stuff didn't look like a wedding trousseau!

And, all of a sudden, I was *jealous!*

I swore at myself for an awry-eyed fool. Being jealous of somebody I'd never seen who'd planned to marry a girl I didn't really know!

"This stuff, being brand new, hasn't any laundry marks on it," I realized. "Lord, these clothes are sure expensive! No gal dresses up like this unless it's her profession to undress—or she's got money to burn!"

I took the suitcase to Anne. She looked at her belongings and her eyes widened with pleasure. "How *nice!*" she said. She held the jewelry in her hands a moment—then impulsively held the stuff out to me. "Jim, darling, please take it all and pawn it. I'm a burden on you. I'd really feel better if I were paying part of my way. Please!"

I frowned. When then I realized she *would* feel better if I did what she asked.

So I took the stuff to a pawnshop.

"Give me five on these two rings?"

I said to uncle, tossing him a couple of Anne's things.

Uncle looked dubious. He examined the stuff. He called his partner, and his partner ogled the rings. They whispered, shook their heads. Finally Uncle turned to me.

"No," he said, "two is the limit for these rings."

"Oh, all right!" I said, disgusted. "Let's have it."

He filled out a slip, and then gave me the money.

He counted out the money onto the showcase. And so help me, he counted out *two*, all right—*two thousand dollars!*

I walked out of the pawnshop in a daze. Punch-drunk!

The rings were the least valuable of the jewelry Anne owned. Which meant one thing: "Anne Darsie" was rich. Real rich, filthy rich, God-awful rich! She came of a millionaire family, sure as fate!

I went downtown, to the Bureau of Missing Persons.

After all, if a young girl of a prominent family gets lost, right away there's a search for her. I asked questions.

But no, the kid wasn't any of the people described as missing!

And then a second realization hit me like a bolt from a blue sky. The jewelry she had, and the new, expensive clothes—maybe it was all stolen! *Maybe Anne was a thief!*

I staggered down the street like I'd been sniffing too much snow. I felt like I was tied between two locomotives pulling in opposite directions.

One of two awful things was true: Anne, that sweet blue-eyed kid, was either a rich heiress—or a lowdown thief.

And either one was a tragic kick in the face for me! . . .

CHAPTER THREE

Midnight Blonde

IT WAS that week-end before I finally got a clue to Anne's identity. A pawnbroker looked at one of her broaches and told me what firm made it, and said they had a record of their customers.

Sitting at home that evening, I was planning to visit that jeweler the next day. . . . Anne was sitting on the davenport, reading a book. I thought how young and appealing she looked there, curled up like a kid. A clean, sweet line she made, from her trim ankle to the curve of her young bosom. It was fun to watch the rapt play of expression upon her lovely face. Even in rest, her big blue eyes were so full of light and her figure looked so supple, that she seemed to brim over with a vital, shining eagerness. Just one thing marred it: now and then I'd see a haunted look in her eyes; as if, down under the forgetfulness that fogged her brain, fear smouldered like a banked fire that occasionally puffed into flame. . . .

"*Holy jumpin' Judas!*"

I came to my feet, oaths swelling into my throat, rage exploding through me. God, it couldn't be true! Yet. . . .

She cowered back in fright as I darted toward her, as I drew her squarely under the lamp and stared at the light shining on her dark, wavy hair.

I wasn't mistaken! There wasn't any doubt of it!

"You been playing me for a sucker!" I shouted at her. "You got no more amnesia than I've got!"

"Jim, what's wrong?" she gasped. "What do you mean?"

"You're just pretending to've lost your memory—to keep from answering questions!" I whipped at her. "What's it

all about? Tell me, or by God, I'm kicking you out!"

"B-But, good Heavens, Jim, whatever makes you think I'm *pretending* to have amnesia?" she asked, utterly thunder-struck.

I pulled her over to a mirror, handling her rougher than I really intended to. It was because I was so fond of her that I was so mad. "Look!" I snapped. "Look at your hair! See? . . . You've dyed your hair black. It ain't really black. Look! It's grown out since you dyed it—and *it's yellow at the roots!*"

"No!" she choked out, and bent closer to the mirror.

"Yes!" I shouted; and I repeated, "You pretended to have lost memory of your name and everything else about yourself—because you don't *dare* tell who you are! You've got something to hide! Now what's it all about?"

But she didn't seem to be hearing me at all.

She stood there, gazing into the mirror, her slim hands pressed to her face, an anguished look in her big blue eyes. Lord, she was scared! And *horrified!* . . . And then I came to my senses. Then I realized that she *didn't* know that she was a blonde! No, by God! She really had forgotten! She had to remake her own picture of herself. She was staring into a mirror at her own image—and that image was of a stranger!

"Why—" she whispered, her low voice agonized—"Why should I have dyed my hair? What could I have done that's so—so terrible—that I want to deny my very self?"

She turned, her face working; she threw herself into my arms and cried as if her heart would break.

Well, my big mad evaporated. Swearing at myself, I patted her shoulder and kissed her. And I told her that everything was all right, that I really wasn't

sore at her, and that I'd pulled this act on her with the idea of maybe shocking her into remembering her past. . . .

And inwardly I resolved that tomorrow I'd trace her broach; I'd find out who she really was. And I'd crack this mystery wide open!

LEAVING the apartment at noon next day, I went out the side entrance and slid real quick into the taxi I'd telephoned for. I moved fast. Yet, looking back presently, I saw a car following. The old dragnet was tightening around me.

I gave the hackie orders, and slid him a ten-spot.

He turned a corner fast: I jumped out and darted into a cigar store—and the taxi streaked on down the street. After it the squad car chased. . . . I stepped into the phone booth and called Anne; I told her to meet me in a hotel lobby at 5th and Main. Today, while I could still call my shots, we were getting out of town! . . .

Then I went to see the jewelry manufacturer who'd made the broach Anne owned.

"Why, yes," the guy said. He was a roly-poly old man with a perpetual-motion smile and a drooping eyelid that made him look kind and sly. "I sold this diamond broach to Miss Mary Landiss, of 58 Alturas Place, Pasadena."

"D'you remember," I stuttered, "what she looks like? An elderly woman with a goiter and—"

"Oh, no! Miss Landiss is a very pretty young girl with blue eyes and blonde hair," he said. "A beauty!"

I mumbled thanks and left in a rush.

I hired a Driv-Yur-Self car and screwed out to give 58 Alturas Place a look-over. . . . Through the business section of Pasadena, up toward the foot of Mt. Wilson I drove; and I found the place on the edge of Eaton Canyon, just below

the observatory road. Man-oh-man, what an estate this No. 58 was!

Acres and acres of smooth lawn being curried by gardeners with motor grass-cutters! And set 'way back was a mansion that looked like a ten-cent store princess's idea of a place to house a drove of grand dukes! At the side was a swimming pool shielded by fancy trees and tropical shrubbery—you've seen this pool, in moving pictures. When a film outfit wanted to shoot a scene that's supposed to be on the Grand Canal in Venice or on a Florida bayou by moonlight, they used to photograph part of this elaborate back-yard lake. Around in back of the estate were stables for horses and garages for long, sleek cars; and tennis courts and bowers and solariums and guest houses. And all this, mind you, was just Mary Landiss's *summer home*!

Honest!

I found out more about Mary Landiss from a souse of a newspaper reporter I knew in Pasadena. He told me that she was an orphan who'd inherited a lot of property from her dad. Old man Landiss had been a railroad magnate. Mary had cash money in banks and she owned slices of mines and oil concerns and had a yacht in Santa Barbara harbor and a *real* mansion in Burlingame and a ranch as big as a county up near Sacramento. She didn't run her estate. She had an uncle who was her guardian—a surgeon named Warren Landiss who had converted her Pasadena place into a private sanatorium.

A lot of this property I discounted as white elephants left over from the financial circus of boom days. Nevertheless, in any language that money talks, "Anne Darsie" was a lady of wealth and social position. . . .

IT was a miracle that I got back to Los Angeles without a collision—my mind

wasn't on driving a-tall! I parked, and hurried into the hotel where I'd told Anne to meet me—Damned if I could think of her as *Mary*!

She was waiting in the lobby. Lord, but she looked pretty and lovable! A hundred times more desirable than before, I guess, now that I knew that she was a swell who belonged on top of a mountain of money that I couldn't ever climb. She saw me coming, and jumped up from her chair with that grand smile of hers—and she kissed me in her warm, impulsive way right in front of everybody. I walked her back to my car.

As we got in, I saw a cop eyeing us.

And as plain as if he had yelled it out, I knew he was repeating to himself the broadcast description of me: "The holdup is a man just under thirty, six feet tall and wiry, with red-brown eyes and red-brown hair and mustache. . . ."

I'd shaved off the mustache and had my hair clipped short; but the way that flatfoot started toward us made it plain he suspected that I was the man who'd dobbed Leigh Marsh of fifty grand. And the way I swung my car out into traffic into a get-away made it plain that I *was* the man he suspected!

We rounded a corner and lost him. Anne hadn't noticed anything. She snuggled close and put her arm through mine.

And right then, temptation swelled up in me so strong it made my brain reel. By God, I'd head right out of town! I'd keep driving until Anne and I were clean out of the state! Maybe she'd never get her memory back. Maybe, after we were married and had a kid, even if she did get back her memory, she'd stay with me. She wouldn't want to go back to her old life and . . .

"Don't be a damn fool!" I raved at myself then. "You're a crook! She's a swell! Blast you, remember that!"

Ahead of me was a turn. If I swung

the car right, we'd head for the Arizona border. If I kept driving straight ahead, I'd be taking her back to her own people. . . .

I drove straight ahead.

And stepped on the gas, because what looked like a radio squad car was burning the pavement after me!

Their siren suddenly yowled blue murder. That means "Pull over and stop!" but I swung around a corner, through a gas station, and down an alley and into a garage and out their side entrance like a rabbit through a briar bush. Behind me, men shouted and swore. Anne clutched my arm.

"Jim, wh-what's it all about?" she asked.

"Kid, you trust me!" I said. "I'll explain later!"

Looking into my rear-view mirror, I saw that I hadn't shaken off that police car. I turned off my lights—it was nearly dark, by now—and I headed up through South Pasadena like I was a cop rushing on an ambulance follow-up call.

Sure, I risked getting pinched! But my plan was to take Anne to her home. I figured that if she once got into familiar surroundings, her memory might come back to her. And if not, her home folks would take her in and care for her. She'd be safe. . . . What would happen to me?—well, I made my mind blank on that subject.

I nigh mowed down a traffic cop at an intersection. He yelled, blew a whistle, hopped onto the running board of a car and started after me.

I grazed a speedster backing out of a driveway, knocked off its rear bumper. That mug slewed around and started after me, blowing his horn. I felt like the red-hot nose of a comet swooping in a blaze of glory through a California dusk!

Right ahead, then, the road forked to both sides of the interurban tracks. I

swung across in front of a long train that promptly stopped the rest of my parade.

This gave me a little more lead.

Roaring to the left on Foothill Boulevard, I yanked the car to a halt in the black darkness of a thick laurel clump, under some trees a block from Anne's place.

"Come on, kid!" I said, jumping out.

And we started at a run through a brush-grown black-lot to her home. For the first time, Anne got scared.

"But, Jim, wherever are you taking me?" she cried.

Through a garden we ran, through a big, thick hedge, and right up onto a huge veranda that was all lit up and set with party furniture. I stopped short, and looked at her.

Would she recognize the place?

She caught her breath with an anguished gasp. She sort of reeled, her face went deathly white and she would have fallen if I hadn't caught her. She *did* recognize it!

"Jim, in heaven's name, get me away from here!" she gasped, and tore away from me and started running like she'd gone crazy with panic.

I started after her—just as some people came out of the house. And *they* started after us.

"Wait, honey!" I pleaded, catching up with her.

"Don't argue, Jim!" she sobbed. "We've got to get away! It's life or death!"

"But it's your home, kid! I wanted to help you get back your memory—"

"*But I've never really lost my memory!*" she said wildly. "That was a desperate attempt to escape from something so terrible—"

She glanced over her shoulder. She screamed—as something like Halley's comet hit me behind the ear and I hit

the ground like I was trying to make my own grave. Everything went black. . . .

CHAPTER FOUR

Wolves Behind

I WOKE up in a room that was doctor's office. I was lying on a sofa, my head on Anne's lap—and she was crying. I lay there, gathering my wits. . . .

Opposite me was a fancy glass case full of instrumentns polished so that they glistened—instruments that were made for cutting and sawing in curlicues and corners. Mostly knives they seemed, long knives, short fat knives; and they looked keen enough to go through bone like it was butter. A pressure-steam sterilizer sat on another instrument case. Beyond me was a surgical table that looked like a rack to put a man on to make him four inches taller.

I stirred, and Anne asked, "Jim, darling, are you all right?"

"Sure, kid. Don't worry."

A key turned, and a door opposite me swung open.

A tall, lean man of my own size and heft cat-footed in. Yeah, cat-footed. Lord, everything about him was pantherish! He was gray-haired and sun-tanned till his seamed skin was mahogany color, and in his dark, twitchy face his amber eyes looked startlingly bright and hard. Across the floor toward us he came. In the way he carried himself there was strength, and yet a jittery uneasiness: like a big cat that's got the claws and horsepower to shred a man, yet runs at a dog's bark. He looked brainy, and he looked mean, crazy mean. For some reason, I felt that I had to face this guy standing square on my feet.

"So you brought back my niece," he said. The hiss he got into his "s" sounds made my spine tingle. "I hope she caused

you no trouble. She is a paranoiac, you know. People with delusions of persecution are difficult."

"The kid's all right!" I snapped.

His eyes narrowed. "Your sympathies are out of place!" he whipped back.

"Jim!" Anne said. "This is my uncle, Dr. Warren Landiss." In her voice was a shaky, bitter helplessness that made me slew around and stare at her. So help me, that look of panicky fear I'd sometimes noticed in her blue eyes was there now plain to read! "Jim, since dad died, Uncle Warren has been my guardian. I came back from college a few weeks ago—and discovered that my respected uncle is a crook!"

"Mary! Mind your tongue!" he spat at her.

"A crook!" she repeated. Her hand tightened on my arm. "Jim, he pretends to run a private sanatorium. But this place is really a hide-out for people the police are hunting for!"

Dr. Landiss darted to the door, opened it, and called, "*Bleeker!*"

"Jim," Anne blurted out, as if afraid he'd silence her before she was through, "he's built up a big practice among underworld characters! They come here to hide. When they're wounded in a gunfight, they come here to be taken care of! He does plastic surgery for them, too, Jim—to change their faces so they can elude the law! And when his fine clients have a kidnaped victim to dispose of, they bring him here, and Uncle Warren helps—for a price! And Uncle Warren sells them dope, too—"

THE door opened, and in came two men dressed in the white of surgical assistants.

"That's why I ran away from here," Anne sobbed, clinging to me. "I dyed my hair. I knew if he ever found me, he'd kill me. Dad left all his property to

me—and Uncle Warren will inherit it if I die. So I ran away, but he *did* find me. He did try to kill me! His men chloroformed me and left me in a car; then tried to get me killed in that collision with your car—”

“And now I’ve brought you back into this trap!” I groaned.

Dr. Landiss shook his head. “No, my friend,” he said to me, “you brought her back where she will get the treatment she needs to take such tragic delusions out of her head.” He turned to his assistants. “Bleeker, prepare Miss Landiss for the operation we’ve discussed.”

Anne clung to me. “Jim, he’ll make an *idiot* of me! He’s already done that to a rich man whose relatives wanted to have him declared crazy so they could control his money. He’ll do something to my brain!”

I went hay-wire—plain loco. I rushed those men, my brain afire with the horror of what Anne faced. But they were expecting a fool move like that. All three of them avalanched onto me, and I went down. One of them sapped me with a blackjack, and they flung me, limp and sick, onto the settee. Then they took Anne out of the room.

Dr. Landiss went over to a case, unlocked it, and took out paraphernalia. Me, I lay there fighting for self-control, thinking, wondering what in blaze I could do.

“You’re going to be a lot of use to me,” Landiss said, putting a fresh long white apron around himself. “One of my clients was blinded by a charge from a sawed-off shotgun. Just the lenses of his eyes were destroyed. None of his pals want to volunteer an eye for him. Now you’ll furnish the lenses I need.”

He put a white cap on his head and laid out a face mask and a pair of gloves, and a can of ether.

“A long time,” he chatted on, as cool as if mayhem were routine to him. “I’ve

wanted to experiment on grafting new skin onto finger tips. It may be possible to give a man a new set of finger prints. Which would be a new lease on life for anybody whose prints are on record, say, in the Department of Criminal Investigation at Washington. I can use you for that experiment.” He sopped a cloth with ether and started toward me. “Also, I have a case of a smashed shin. I shall graft a segment from your leg to that case. Even your body, in the end, will be of service to us. One of my clients wishes the police to think that he has died by slipping under car wheels when trying to hop a fast freight. We will put articles known to be his into *your* pockets. And, of course, your body will have to be so dragged and cut and mangled by the train wheels that recognition will be impossible, except by the articles we will plant in your pockets. . . .”

I LAY doubled up on the settee, the way his two men had flung me onto it. I didn’t stir, didn’t speak; just lay breathing hard like I was fighting back to my senses.

He bent over me, and brought that chloroform-soaked cloth toward my face.

I kicked out, *hard*, with both legs.

I caught him square in the stomach. He crumpled with a strangled gasp onto the floor, writhing so that I realized I’d smashed him in the plexus. I lurched off the settee. I jammed that cloth of sleep-medicine onto his own face. He struggled, but breathed in chloroform, and presently he was dead to the world.

I straightened to my feet, still feeling groggy.

I took that long, white surgical apron off of him and tied it around myself. I put his white cap onto my own head. I put his surgical mask over my face, and drew his gloves onto my own hands. Then I laid him onto the settee, his face to the

wall, and pulled a blanket 'way up over him.

Just as I finished, the door opened. It was Bleeker, Landiss's assistant. He said, "The girl is ready, sir."

My masquerade was working! He took me for the doctor!

And I *had* to play the bluff through. I followed him into the next room. For just a moment, then, I stood rooted into my tracks, and fought back a sick nausea of fear that wrung me—that nigh turned me inside out, that choked me so I could hardly breathe.

This room was a huge, domed chamber, badly lit except for a center cluster of lights that poured a terrific glare over a surgical table.

Lying upon this table, senseless—under an anaesthetic—her slim white body covered with gleaming sheets, lay Anne. About her stood four men in dazzling white surgical aprons; the white caps on their heads and their surgical masks gave their faces the look of having grotesque snouts, so that they looked like a pack of uncanny white monsters standing, and staring—and waiting in a frozen silence for some awful blood-ceremony to begin. Nearby were racks of shining instruments, steaming sterilizers, and flasks of sterile gauze and sponges.

One man held her wrist in his hand, a watch in his other hand. He was the anaesthetic expert, I guessed, keeping track of her heart action. Another man stood opposite him, holding in his fist a glistening surgical knife—which he held out toward me.

"All ready, sir."

I had to take that razor-edged instrument. I stepped close. . . . And there I was, as handy with surgical tools as a wolf with a machine-gun, standing over Anne! Around me those four men stood waiting, waiting for me to work on Anne, lying there helpless and unconscious—

waiting for me to start hacking on her brain so's to make an idiot of her. And if I didn't do it, *they* would! . . .

I STOOD there like my blood had turned to ice. They began to stare at me. I made some sort of tentative, half-way gestures with that murderous instrument, and bent over Anne's lovely head as if deciding on the exact spot. . . .

They began to fidget, waiting for me to start. The cold sweat was prickling out all over my body as I racked my brain to figure a way out of this trap. Bleeker swore and cleared his throat. Another man gasped with sudden surprise, as if he couldn't believe what he just suspected, as if he'd recognized me—

I grabbed up a container of antiseptic solution as if to stick my instrument into it—and flung it full into the face of the man opposite me. And as those men stood petrified with surprise for a millionth of a split-wink, I whirled. I whirled on Bleeker just as he yelled, "*Grab 'im! He ain't the boss!*"

He lunged out of his tracks in a wolf-jump at my throat. I sank that operating instrument into him and, swinging around just in time, I met the anaesthetic expert as he swung a chair at me. I ducked in close: the chair bounced off my shoulder, and I swung my fist to the guy's chin so hard I felt bone crack to the blow.

The fourth guy didn't jump me—he was at the wall, pressing a button. And a gong like a burglar alarm was clanging through the house like a roll of thunder in a barrel. Calling the whole pack to gang me!

I grabbed Anne up in my arms.

I charged out the door, that fourth man tailing me and hammering at my back with his fists.

I tore down a long hall; and as I sprinted past, door after door yanked open and out boiled other men to join

in chasing me! A gun roared, blasting flame through the corridor; one slug whined past my head and another slashed my shoulder as I plunged right through a screen door, onto the big side porch.

I took the steps in one jump. I staggered on the grass, but caught myself, twisted around, and lunged down the cinder driveway as that mob came pouring down the porch steps after me.

Toward the street I ran, praying for a taxi to be passing, praying for a lucky break.

There! A bunch of men on the sidewalk!

"Help!" I yelled.

They saw me. They came running to meet me.

And then I recognized what they were. A bunch of cops!

The radio car men who'd chased me halfway across South Pasadena as I drove up here! They'd found my car, likely; and now they were searching the neighborhood for me. And I have to come running to meet them—me, spattered with blood, carrying a nude girl wrapped up in sheets in my arms!

From behind me came yells. "Catch him, Officers! *He's kidnaping that girl! He murdered Tom Bleeker!*"

CHAPTER FIVE

Life Sentence

I spun dizzily, and plunged off into the bushes lining the drive. Guns blasted out and lead ripped through leaves about my head. Behind me, men charged into the shrubbery, like a hound pack into a thicket after a fox.

"Got 'im!" somebody yelled.

Something struck me squarely behind the ear; and down I pitched, headlong, as if a lightning bolt had reached down and slammed me to the ground. And as I fell, I twisted around, trying to keep Anne

from hitting hard, to keep her on top of me, out of the dirt. . . .

I knew when they picked us up, and carried us somewhere but it was like knowing things vaguely through a fog.

It was morning before my head really cleared enough for me to think a little. Sunlight woke me, and the throbbing inside my skull. Lord, it felt as if a toothache nerve had been moved up inside my temple and set to work at double speed!

Looking around, I saw that the sunlight was streaming into a bare room through a barred window. I was in a jail hospital! . . . I thought of Anne. And I had a vision of her being back in her Uncle's place. I sat up, yelling, trying to climb off that cot—and over I keeled in a faint.

Voices woke me up. I opened my eyes, and swore to myself in sick hopelessness. A plainclothes dick was in my room, and with him was—Leigh Marsh! The skunk I'd taken that fifty grand from!

"That's him, officer!" fat old Marsh yawped. "He's the man who robbed me."

"Okay," said the dick. "He won't escape this time. . . ."

I jerked upright. "Say, cop!" I blurted. "What happened to that girl—Miss Landiss—"

"The kid you was carrying when they caught you?" said the dick. "She's back where she belongs, at home."

They stalked out. I slumped down onto the cot, so sick of myself, so broken up, that I wanted to die. It wasn't only that I'd muffed a dead-sure getaway with fifty grand in my pocket—it wasn't only that now I faced jail for that hold-up, and charges of kidnaping and murder—what hurt worst of all was that all this grief was wasted, *useless!* I had *not* helped Anne. She was right back in the spot she'd tried to escape! Back where her uncle could put the finger on her!

I guess I went kind of screwy. I yelled and raved. I swore at the attendant when

he came in with a glass of something for me to drink. I spilled the sleep-dope all over him and smacked him as hard as I could with my fist: and when he wouldn't knock me on the head, I begged him to shoot me. He went out; and I tried to get up, but I hadn't the strength. I was crazy. Honest, I wanted, I hoped and *prayed*, to fall back and die. . . .

JIM, darling! Try to be quiet. You've got to rest!" I couldn't believe it, when Anne bent over my cot.

It flashed into my sick brain that she must be dead—she looked so sweet and lovely. I reached to see if she was real.

I clung to her. My eyes blurred and my throat choked up . . . and her tears were warm on my face.

"Of course, I'm all right," she said. "*Shh*, honey; let me talk. Please, Jim! Listen. . . . After the police caught you, they took me back into the house. And inside, they ran into men whom Uncle Warren has been hiding from the law. Naturally, finding those fugitives, the police investigated the place, and did some rather forceful questioning. One gangster asked for leniency, and told everything he knew. So now, Jim, you're exonerated of charges lodged against you."

"No kidnapping?" I whispered. "No murder—"

"No *anything*, honey! Bleeker is badly hurt, but he'll recover—to go to the penitentiary with Uncle Warren."

"Then," I reflected, "there's only Leigh Marsh's charge of taking fifty grand from him—"

"Marsh won't prosecute you," Mary said, smiling.

"I promised him that the money would

be returned to him. You see, Jim, now that Uncle Warren has been jailed for his illegal practice, he no longer has guardianship over me. And since I'm twenty-one, now, my property is now under my own control. I own the controlling interest in a oil firm that Marsh is concerned with, so he was willing to listen to reason. So quit worrying, honey. That stolen money will be easy to return: it was found in your pocket and the police have it in safe keeping, along with your other belongings. It was stolen money, anyway, and one of the cops—a young one—said that you must be a sort of Robin Hood, stealing from crooked rich man like Marsh, and—"

"Good Lord, kid," I choked out, "you sure are wasting a lot of sympathy on a—a crook."

"Listen, Jim Donlon!" she said, her sweet face very earnest. "The police say that you have no criminal record. They're glad not to press charges against you. Should I be any less generous? Besides, I can't forget—I won't *ever* forget—how you helped out an utter stranger, as such and awful price to yourself—"

"Hush, kid!" I said, turning red. Then I grinned, I was so almighty relieved. "So I get off scot-free!"

"Not quite, Jim." Her lovely blue eyes turned very serious and her voice faltered as she said, "Darling, you—you get a life sentence."

I couldn't believe it; then I realized she meant it, meant it with all her heart.

"My God!" I moaned. "Now, just when I've found you—"

"Jim," she whispered, bending to kiss me, "you are sentenced for life to—to love, and to honor—and to obey if you want—a girl named Mary Landiss. . . ."

THE END

The Stirring, Warmly Human Detective Stories of
GEORGE ARMIN SHAFTEL
Appear Regularly in This Magazine!

KILLER'S TOY

By
Emerson Graves
(Author of "Murderer's Understudy.")



The girl screamed
and tore loose from
Bolson's grip.

Ageing Detective Bolson looked forward to retirement and peace after many years of faithful service. It was tough that his last case earned him the undying enmity of a man who could break him with a single word....

DETECTIVE BOLSON had just finished dinner when the call came. He was lighting one of his cheap stogies after an economical meal at the lunch wagon next to headquarters.

Captain Mansfield hailed him, from the headquarters door.

"The Rockery Building," he said crisply. "Office 919, lawyer by the name of Hartness, murdered. Hop it, Bolson. I'll get hold of the fingerprint men and the coroner."

Bolson sighed as he went toward his car.

Murder, holdups, assaults. Crimes for passion and crimes for money. He'd seen so many of them, and chased so many crooks and killers, that it sometimes seemed the whole world, without exception, was crooked. For thirty-two years he'd lived with violence. He was getting very tired of it.

He squared his solid old shoulders as he got into the car. Soon he'd be out of this. Eight more months, and he'd be retired on a pension that would enable him to have a little place in the country and fuss around with chickens and raise his

own vegetables. Eight more months. . . .

He drove toward the Rockery Building, puffing at the stogy though it was out, staring absently at traffic with harsh grey eyes and handling the wheel mechanically with his big, square hands.

Eight more months, and then rest. Rest for Alice as well as for himself. And Alice, his wife, certainly deserved a rest. For thirty-two years she had been a cop's wife. Not an easy job for a woman.

It would be nice for Alice in the country. Unless something happened within the next eight months.

Bolson felt a cold spot expand in his stomach. The bare thought of that was enough to give him a chill. He was getting along, an old man, really. And Alice was old and not strong. With the pension they could live their lives out nicely. Without it . . .

"Hell!" said Bolson to himself. "What could happen? I've got along for thirty-two years without any trouble. Why would I be fired off the force now?"

The entrance to the Rockery Building showed ahead of him. He drew up to it and stopped. He got out of the car, a heavy-set, square-built elderly man with hair, eyes and clothes the color of grey metal. Shiny, well-worn metal, in the case of the clothes.

He walked into the building, no longer an individual, but a law-enforcing, crook-detecting machine.

ON the door of office 919 were the words, William Q. Hartness, Attorney. It was the only door from which light shone. No one was around it. At seven-fifteen in the evening the building was practically deserted. In addition, the crime in here seemed to have been successfully hushed up, so that the few other tenants in the place did not yet know of it.

Office 919, lawyer by the name of Hartness, murdered. . . .

Bolson clamped the cigar tighter between his teeth and walked in on feet broken down from long years of pavement pounding.

The building manager was in the anteroom of the office. He got up shakily from a red leather chair as Bolson entered. He was a short, thin man with dark hair and eyes and a sort of bluish pallor to his skin.

"Thank God you've come," he said to Bolson. No need for him to see the detective's badge. Bolson looked like just what he was. "I've been going crazy in here. Murder! In my building! I've kept it quiet so far—used this phone to call the police after the cleaning woman found Hartness on the floor. But I suppose it'll come out in all the newspapers. Then—"

"Where's Hartness?" Bolson cut in bluntly across the man's babbling.

"In—in there," faltered the building manager. "I don't think I'll go in again. I'll wait out here. . . ."

Bolson grunted and went through the anteroom into the inner office.

Hartness lay behind his desk, under the one window of the little cubicle.

He was a young man, well under thirty. His face was ashen now, but it was a good looking face even in death, with a long strong nose and firm lips. His black hair was dishevelled; some of it hung over his face obscuring his left eye.

Bolson's face lost a shade of its bleakness. He had heard of Hartness. The man was a fine lawyer for all his youth, and an honest one. At the outset of his career he had gone in for reform rather than corporation or criminal law. A valuable man. The city could not afford to lose men like that.

With his cigar clamped so tightly in the corner of his mouth that it looked like a part of his face, Bolson commenced browsing around. He moved slowly, plod-

dingly, but his metal-grey eyes missed nothing.

A bronze-handled paper knife stuck out from Hartness' chest. Right through the heart, he'd got it. There was a deep jab in the back of his right hand, too, as though the killer had struck twice, failing the first time because Hartness threw up his hand and caught the blow on the back of it.

"Did anybody hear any shouts or commotion in this office before your scrub-woman found Hartness in here?" he called to the building manager.

"Nobody heard anything" the manager replied from the anteroom.

"Was anybody around when it happened?"

"I don't know when it happened," the manager replied, his voice sounding as if he were on the verge of being ill. "But the man two doors down the hall left his office just as the scrublady was finishing next door and getting ready to come in here. If he heard anything he didn't report it."

Bolson scowled at the jab on the back of Hartness' right hand. If he'd got that just before death, with a killer pressing him again to strike with a knife, he'd almost certainly have shouted for help. Even if he hadn't shouted, he must have scuffled with the murderer. And the sound of a fight to the death should have been heard over two floors in a building silenced by the desertion of the dinner hour.

He left the body, and went to a safe he saw in a corner of the office. The door was open a crack. It swung back, with no touch at the knob, as he hooked his fingers in the edge. The inside of the safe was a tumbled mass of papers and letters.

Bolson grunted. Simply robbery and murder, it seemed. But the jab on the back of the dead man's hand, and the fact

that no outcry had been heard, puzzled him.

He found something else that puzzled him, in a moment. He was examining the swivel chair next to the desk near where Hartness lay.

Across the back of the chair, just above the arms, were several horizontal marks where the varnish had been rubbed thin. That might have been done by Hartness habitually turning in the chair on the swivel with its back to the desk and rubbing against it. But there were several worn spots in the varnish on the under side of the chair-arms too. Those could not possibly have been done by the desk-edge. . . .

Steps sounded in the hall outside. The steps of a woman. Her high heels clicked hollowly in the vacant corridor.

BOLSON went swiftly to the anteroom. The building manager was staring at the door. He looked at the detective and started to say something. Bolson hushed him and stepped to the wall so that the corridor door would hide his body when it swung open.

The door opened. A girl came in. She was about twenty-two, blue-eyed, with soft blonde hair. She was pretty, in spite of the fact that she was not too well dressed.

She stared at the building manager in mild surprise.

"Hello, Mr. Gavin," she said. "You're here late tonight, aren't you? Is anything wrong around the building?"

Bolson stepped out from behind the door, watching the girl's face closely. But it told him nothing.

"Oh!" she said, startled for a moment. Then: "You wanted to see Mr. Hartness? I thought he was here. . . ."

Bolson glanced at the building manager. "Miss Gregg," Gavin said, "this is a detective." He faced Bolson. "Miss

Gregg is Mr. Hartness' secretary. That is, she was."

"Detective?" repeated the girl, color slowly draining from her face. "Was Mr. Hartness' secretary?"

And then she screamed, and started for the inner office. Bolson caught her arm but she wrenched loose and went on in.

Bolson figured her for a fainting spell. But she didn't faint. She ran to the murdered man's side, and dropped to her knees in the blood beside him. But she did not touch him. She only looked at him, in a way that made the detective's face soften.

Her blue eyes told a story. Tragedy, hopelessness, despair. She'd been crazy about Hartness, all right. No mistaking that. But there were no screams, no hysteria, no fainting.

"Well," she said, her voice dry and rough, "they got him."

Bolson snapped to attention at that.

"They?" he said. "Who?"

She looked up at him, eyes blue wells of misery that hardly saw him.

"I don't know who. Some political crowd he has been after for four months. He wouldn't even tell me who it was. Said it might be dangerous for me to know anything. Now—they've got him."

Her gaze returned to the dead man. Bolson started to question her further, then stopped. His eyes had caught something he hadn't seen before.

The safe was of the type with legs. Under its iron overhang, Bolson saw a corner of an envelope. He went to the safe and fished under it. He held up half an envelope that had been ripped across.

There was only one mark on it. That was part of a name that had been pencilled across the face of it.

"... ayne."

The first part of the name was on the missing torn half. But Bolson's mind was clicking along with the letters he did have.

"... ayne." And the girl had said Hartness was after some political crowd. There was only one politician whose name would occur to a man, given those few concluding letters. That was Hayne—Big Frank Hayne, power behind the mayor, boss of half the city, without whose aid, it was said, no man could get a city contract or erect a building.

Bolson stepped to the desk. There was a telephone directory on it.

"Glance at the safe while I look up a number," he said to the girl. "See if you can spot anything missing in that mess."

He flipped through the H pages. Miss Gregg said, "As far as I can tell there are two long white envelopes full of papers gone, and three thousand dollars in cash. I don't know what was in the envelopes."

"Three thousand in cash?" said Bolson, looking around at the modest office.

"Marked money," said the girl in her dry, dead voice. "Bribe money, concerned somehow in the case Mr. Hartness was working on." She broke suddenly, like overstrained metal. "Oh God—"

Bolson helped her to the anteroom.

"Oh, God, if only I'd stayed right through with him," she moaned. "If only I hadn't gone out to dinner—"

Bolson patted her shoulder and lowered her into the leather chair.

"The phone book says Big Frank Hayne has offices in this building," he said to the manager. "What's the number?"

"Top floor, 2012," the manager replied. "Why—"

"Never mind." Bolson touched the weeping girl's shoulder. "Stick around a little while. I'll be right back."

LIGHT shone out the door of 2012, too. Big Frank Hayne, or some of his organization, it seemed, indulged in night work sometimes, just as Hartness had.

Bolson stood outside the door for half a minute. His face was very grim.

A man like Hayne had to be handled with kid gloves. He could make or break a detective by a word over the telephone. Bolson knew that. He'd have given a good deal if he hadn't found that half envelope with Hayne's name, or part of it, pencilled on it.

But he had found it. And this was murder, gravest of all charges.

He opened the door and went in.

Hayne had a suite consisting of five offices, all ostensibly for legal work. In the room beyond the one he'd stepped into, Bolson heard voices. He went into that room.

There were two men in here. One, sandy-haired, coarsely handsome, young, sat on the edge of the big desk in the center of the office. The other, fat, bald, middle-aged, with rolls of fat around his cautious, shrewd eyes sat behind the desk. The middle-aged man was Hayne, the politician. The young one was Ed Fritch, his nephew.

The two glared at him.

"Well," said Hayne at last, "what do you want?"

"I'm Detective Bolson," Bolson said. He made himself smile. Ticklish business, this. And he probably wouldn't find out anything in here anyway.

"All right, all right," snapped Hayne. "You're a detective. I'll believe you. You couldn't be anything else. So what?"

"I came up to have a word with you in connection with Attorney Hartness, in 919."

"What about Attorney Hartness?"

"He's dead. Murdered. Lying down in his office now."

Hayne's belligerence melted.

"Well . . . That's too bad. I was in here with my nephew—didn't know anything happened." His voice took on an edge

again. "But why are you up here about it?"

"I found this," he said. "Under Hartness' emptied safe. It has your name on it."

Hayne looked at the envelope without a flicker of expression.

"Even so," he said, "why come to me? In the first place, any man is apt to have his name on something meaningless in a number of offices. In the second place, that isn't necessarily part of my name. It might be Montayne, of Frayne, or lots of things besides Hayne."

"It could," said Bolson. "But I thought maybe you could explain how it happened to be there."

"You thought I . . ." Hayne's eyes snapped. "Listen—you try to link my name up with a murder in this city and see where you land!"

"Yeah," said Ed Fritch, getting off the desk and standing next to Bolson. "You'd better run along and sell your fish in some other market—"

He stopped. Bolson was looking at the desk where he'd been seated. There was a bit of paper there. Fritch had inadvertently been sitting on it, and it was revealed when he moved.

It was half a torn envelope. On it was Frank H—. And like a punctuation mark there was a spot of blood.

Hayne's face went livid as he saw the scrap of envelope. He glared at Fritch. "You fool—" he began.

Bolson's voice drowned his out.

"Sell my fish in some other market, eh?" he grated. "Sure I will. Like hell! I get the picture now. The marks on the back and arms of Hartness' chair, the jab in his hand, everything! He was after you and your bunch. He'd got evidence of graft and bribery on you that would have nailed you to the cross. You found out about it so you went down there tonight, tied him in his chair and tortured

him into opening his safe. You tortured him by jabbing a knife into the back of his hand. I suppose you said you'd kill him if he yelled, so he took it in silence. Then you took evidence and marked money from the safe, and killed him anyhow to keep his mouth shut."

Hayne smiled with his lips. His eyes were like ice.

"Now, now," he said. "You're talking like an insane man. In fact, I've got ten thousand dollars that says your insane."

"You can keep it," said Bolson, moving toward the desk. "I'm taking the two of you in for murder."

Hayne's voice was a purr as he said: "Be discreet, detective. You look pretty old. About due to be pensioned, aren't you? But if you got fired off the force tomorrow you wouldn't get a pension, would you? And I've got a lot of weight in this town—*Ed!*"

Bolson, moving steadily toward that damning scrap of envelope, turned too slowly. Fritch's body caught him like a cannonball. He went crashing against the wall of the office.

The door of the room he was in slammed shut on him. He heard the lock slide, heard Hayne snarl: "Burn that hunk of envelope, and come on."

The outer door slammed. He was alone in the suite.

IT TOOK him nearly three minutes to kick the door down and run through the next office to the hall. He went to 919. . . .

Hayne's voice came to him through Hartness' door. "What I can't understand, young lady, is how you had the nerve to come back here after doing such a thing. I'd have thought you would be on your way to Canada—"

An elevator door clanged down the hall. Bolson heard the steps of many men, and another voice that was familiar to him.

It was Captain Mansfield's voice.

He jerked Hartness' door open and plunged in.

Ed Fritch had the arms of Hartness' secretary in a vicious grip. Hayne was standing in front of her with his jaw thrust out.

"We've got you cold," Hayne said to her. As he spoke, his eyes slid toward Bolson, with cold menace in them, for a moment. "You loved Hartness. He jilted you. You killed him. Probably you wiped your finger prints off the knife handle, but that won't save you."

"The hell with that—" Bolson began hoarsely.

And then the door opened and Mansfield came in with the coroner, finger print men and a photographer. Mansfield looked at the girl struggling in Fritch's grasp, and at Bolson and Hayne.

"Hayne!" he said. "You here? But I forgot—your offices are in this building, aren't they? How goes it, Bolson?"

Bolson swallowed.

With the scrap of envelope burned that was in Hayne's office, he had not one definite clue to pin against the politician. It was the word of Hayne, who controlled half the city, against the word of an ordinary cop, in an important murder charge. And Hayne could break him like a dry match.

"Well?" said Mansfield, looking around again.

Bolson's lips moved, but no words came. He had three hundred and eighty-four dollars in the bank, and he and Alice were past sixty.

"Say something!" Mansfield snapped irascibly. "You—"

"I guess he feels sorry for this girl, or something," Hayne spoke, smiling. "Or else he's modest. Good man you have there, Mansfield. He tied this case in a bag in about two minutes. He came in here trapped this girl, found three grand

in marked money, taken from Hartness' safe, in her purse, and that was that."

"Yeah, here's her pocketbook with the bills in it," said Fritch, drawing a brown leather pocketbook from the red chair.

"You're lying!" the girl panted. "You two came in here and grabbed me and you—" she stared at Hayne—"took money out of your pocket and put it in my bag."

"That's the kind of lies she's handing out," Hayne said. "But it didn't throw Bolson off. I'd say a man like that was in line for a promotion, wouldn't you, Mansfield?"

"If you say so, Hayne," Mansfield said deferentially, "it's as good as done."

"Look here," Bolson mumbled. "Look here—"

"Tell them they lie!" pleaded the girl, her eyes wild on his. "You know! Tell them!"

Bolson looked around for the building manager. The man was gone; had left, perhaps, immediately after he had. As a factor in this grim game he no longer existed.

"Tell them they're lying!" screamed the girl. "It's murder they're charging me with! Don't you understand? Murder!"

"I don't get all this," said Mansfield. "Hayne says you solved this case, which is swell. It ought to mean a promotion for you, which would mean an increase in the pension you'll get soon. But you yourself say nothing!"

Bolson moistened his lips.

Eyes on him. . . .

The desperate blue eyes of a girl framed for murder. The icy eyes of Big Frank Hayne and his nephew Ed Fritch. The perplexed eyes of Mansfield and the others.

"For God's sake," entreated the girl.

Bolson stared at Mansfield.

"Hayne has it all straight," he said, "except for one little thing."

The girl's ragged gasp sounded over the silence of the office.

"I found the killer a few minutes after getting here," said Bolson. He was standing like a soldier backed against a firing wall. "But it wasn't that girl. It was—Big Frank Hayne himself. Helped by Ed Fritch."

MANSFIELD'S mouth opened, then clicked shut.

"Bolson," he said slowly, "you'd better have a lot of proof before you make a statement like that."

"Proof?" said Bolson. "I found half an envelope in here with part of Hayne's name on it. I went up to Hayne's office. I found the other half with Hartness' blood on it. I—"

"Where's that half?" said Mansfield.

Bolson blinked his eyes to try to clear them of the vision of Alice's face when he told her about the pension.

"Hayne and Fritch burned it," he said. He bit his lip as he made the next admission. "They locked me in their office, burned it, then came down here and framed this girl."

"You have no evidence against them at all?" said Mansfield. "It's only your word against theirs?"

Hayne spoke up. "I can't understand this. Unless pity for the girl has made him cockeyed. But I know this." His fat-rimmed eyes burned into Bolson's. "Whether this ridiculous charge ever gets to court or not—that man is done! He's off the force! And it'll be a rash man who will give him a job of any kind when I'm through with him!"

Bolson said nothing. He felt very tired, utterly empty. The girl's whispered, "Thank you," didn't go far to fill the void.

Mansfield spoke placatingly to Hayne. "We won't hold you on this—this

charge, of course, Hayne. A man of your standing—it's absurd! But we'll take the girl along, and her pocketbook with the marked bills in it. You, Bolson, go back to headquarters! You'll hear about this from pretty high quarters if I'm not mistaken!"

Bolson turned to go out. Bucking Big Frank Hayne on a murder charge with nothing but his bare word to offer! He laughed a little; a cracked, harsh laugh. Honor! Justice! Duty! Well, he'd had a fling at them. Now he could watch his wife's face go grey when he told her the result. . . .

And then the girl exclaimed aloud in a shrill, high tone that made all stare at her.

"The knife!" she cried. "The knife through his heart!"

All eyes were on her—save Bolson's. Bolson stared at Hayne. He saw the fat man's face tighten suddenly.

"Well?" snapped Mansfield. "What about the knife?"

With a tremendous effort the girl controlled the hysteria that had rung in her first cry.

"The paper knife that killed him," she said. "It's a kind of novelty advertising thing. The Hammer Paper Company sent one out to every attorney in the downtown section, I think. Anyway, I know at least fifty must have been given out in this building."

"All right? So what?"

"The knife that killed Mr. Hartness isn't his," said the girl. "He took his home last night—they only came yesterday afternoon. So that knife must have been brought here by the killer. Perhaps because he thought a thing so common could not be traced."

"So I'm supposed to round up the fifty lawyers in this building with knives like

that, and question them?" rasped Mansfield.

"No, no. Let me finish. Those knives have a little trick to them that I'm sure many who got them haven't found out yet. I know Mr. Hartness didn't for some time."

Bolson moved unobtrusively closer to Hayne. The fat man was half crouching as he faced the girl, eyes gleaming like the eyes of a ferret as he tried to guess what was coming next.

"The handles of the knives open," said the girl. "It's a sort of advertising stunt. Press one of the rivets and the handle opens. And inside is a celluloid strip with the name on it of the man it was sent to—"

A hoarse scream sounded out. Bolson sprang and caught Hayne, who fought to get in to the dead man.

"By God, I'll bet she's tripped you!" boomed Bolson.

He hurled the fat man aside, sprang into the inner office and got the knife.

"Listen," panted Hayne hoarsely. "Listen—"

But no one was listening. Bolson pressed the rivet the girl indicated. The handle slid apart, with a click that sounded loud in the stillness.

"Ah," breathed Bolson. It was like a one-syllabled prayer. He showed the opened handle to Mansfield.

"Compliments of the Hammer Paper Company," Mansfield read. "To Frank P. Hayne. . . ."

Mansfield drew out handcuffs. "Not compliments of a paper company," he said grimly. "Compliments of the electric chair. Compliments of Death—to Frank P. Hayne." And then he added: "Bolson, you'll get that promotion before your retirement if I have to go personally before the commissioner, the mayor and the city council to plead your case!"

HIDEAWAY IN HELL

By
**ARTHUR LEO
ZAGAT**

(Author of "Damn the Law!" etc.)

*He was running from the law
—not knowing that he carried
Death with him as a
passenger!*

DAN (Weasel) Walsh
hunched his scrawny
body lower into the
clammy shadows lying along the
rust-streaked bricks that
formed one side of the
alley. His narrowed eyes
peered at a pale-yellow slit
where street lamp lumines-

.... Hogan
starting down
the alley with
his flash—

lib

cence had momentarily silhouetted a bulky, tensely expectant figure. That was Marty Hogan, the precinct dick. He was out of sight now, but he was waiting to grab Weasel and send him back up the river. . . .

Hogan wasn't coming in to take Walsh. He didn't have to, damn him. He had plotted the frame-up far too slickly for that. There wasn't any way out of here—no escape—except past him. The windowless wall of a warehouse made the other side of the passage and elled to block off the rear. The window above Walsh, out of which he had just dropped catlike, was too high for him to get back in again. A fire-escape platform projected from it, but it was not equipped with a ladder. Even from Squint-Eye Mocksy's shoulders, Weasel had had to chin himself up, had had to crouch on the platform while he diamond-cut the pane and worked open the lock.

Cords at the corners of the trapped man's nose drew his lip up and away from nicotine-stained, rotten teeth in a wolfish, soundless snarl. He fingered the greasy haft of a dagger in his pocket. If he ever got out of this, Squint-Eye would feel that steel. The lousy stool-pigeon . . . !

Marty Hogan was a cop and it was his job to get Weasel, no matter how. There was no quarter in the war between them—but there was no hate. Mocksy was different. Mocksy was a rat, a traitor to his own kind. Walsh knew that now, when it was too late, but he hadn't known it when Squint-Eye had mush-mouthed him into this lay. It was a pipe, he had insisted, a cinch. An old-fashioned tin-can Weasel could open without nitro—and five grand waiting to be picked up! The alley window was the only entrance not wired, but once inside Walsh could shut off the alarm and open a back door for a quick getaway in case Mocksy, playing lookout, whistled *Cucuracha*.

That back door was open now, but that's all the good it was to Weasel. Squint-Eye hadn't whistled. He had signaled Hogan and scrambled. If Walsh hadn't been quicker than the dick had expected, if he hadn't glimpsed the officer before he had a chance to get hidden, the prowler would have walked right into the cop's arms with five grand, hot, in his pocket. Not that it helped much. Marty would get tired waiting in a little while, would snap his flash down into the alley, and there Weasel would be. . . .

Walsh jumped as something slapped him on the shoulder. He flailed out a frantic hand and something snakelike writhed around his wrist. His fingers closed on a rope. A rope! It was dangling from the platform of the unreachable window, and as he pulled on it, it came taut. Hell! He was all wrong about Mocksy. Squint-Eye had ducked around the corner, had come in through the get-away door. He had taken an awful chance to get Weasel out of this mess. . . .

Thinking all this didn't delay Walsh. He was shinning up the rope even as he figured it out, reaching for the iron-work with fingers that trembled a little. His shoe scraped against the brick and he was motionless, his scalp tightening. . . .

His staring eyes saw no movement at the alley mouth. Naturally. If Hogan had heard that sound, he was thinking it was Walsh coming out, was ready to jump him. Weasel squirmed into the opening. His groping toes found the floor. Looking back, he saw Hogan starting down the alley with his flash on. . . . Just in time. . . .

"Gees, Mocksy," he whispered to a vague apparition, formless in the darkness. "I thought. . . ."

"It isn't Mocksy, Dan! Hurry. . . ."

Walsh whipped around to a fear-shaken husk. "*Jimmy!* What the hell!"

"Hurry! Oh God!"

Weasel was noiseless, running after the

light patter of the shadow that flitted through the office gate and dodged among high-piled crates in the shipping room behind. Jimmy! His kid brother! How in Heaven's name . . . ?

I HEARD you sneakin' out and I got up and followed." Jimmy Walsh was shaking, his peaked, hollow-cheeked face was pasty in the glimmer of the turned-down gas-jet. "I wanted to stop you but I was scared. I hid in a vestibule across from the alley—then Hogan came out from the one next to me. He and Squint-Eye were right in front of me and I hear Mocksy askin' him did he have the back door watched.

"Hogan says 'no,' he's goin' to make a solo arrest. Mocksy says he's a damn fool and Marty boots him one. I get a chance to beat it when the dick goes, but you're already out when I get into the place. I squint you down below, and throw the rope down to you."

"Gee, kid, you'd make a swell prowler!" Weasel, sitting on the frowsy bed, tossed down a slug of whiskey, gulped, went on. "Whyn't you let me teach you to rip a safe . . . ?"

"Dan!" The youngster put a clawed, grimy hand on Weasel's arm. "You promised me you'd quit. You promised me you'd go straight. Cripes, Dan. Don't you know you can't always beat the game? Hogan'll get you, sooner or later—Hogan or some other cop. And it'll be life this time. The fourth time it's life."

Walsh batted Jimmy's hand away with a hard fist, lurched off the bed. "Hell," he said, talking out of the corner of other-wise motionless, thin lips. "The cop don't come smart enough to get me." Alcohol heat curling in his brain made him forget the three stretches he had already done. "Not when there's no rat to frame me. And Mocksy's not gonna frame me

no more. Mocksy's not framing nobody after I get through with him." His feet pounded on the rugless floor as he went toward the door.

Jimmy slid in between him and the paint-peeled panel. "Dan," he wailed. "No! Please. I—I won't let you do that. I won't let you!"

Weasel's face was a livid, expressionless mask, but his beady eyes were two tiny pits of hell-fire. "You won't, huh?" he lippled. "You sanctimonious, prayer-gabblin' pup. Git away from that door!"

"No!" The boy's shabby-sleeved arms were outstretched, his fingers clenched the jamb on either side. "You can't go!" His teeth chattered so he could hardly get the words out. But something stronger than the fear shaking his slight body held him there. "You can't."

Walsh's fingers bunched. His muscles unleashed and his fist crashed into the youngster's jaw. Jimmy slumped away from the door. He hit the floor so hard he seemed to bounce. Then he was a flaccid, quivering, pitiful heap—and there was no one else in the room. . . .

The boy came up finally out of a welter of sick blackness. He sobbed with the pain that numbed all one side of his face, that whirled inside his throbbing skull. Somewhere a deep-toned bell sounded. Bonnnng! It seemed to hammer his head. Bonnnng! Bonnnng! *Bonnnng!*

Four o'clock! He had to get started. He had to get down to the Municipal Market. The farmers would be arriving at five and it would take him an hour to walk down there. God! The way he felt, it would be torture wrestling those heavy baskets around. But he didn't dare not show up, first day on the job. He'd be fired. After weeks and months pounding pavements looking for something do. . . .

WEASEL WALSH stood spraddle-legged, looking at Squint-Eye Mocksy—at what was left of Squint-Eye rather. That wasn't anything very pleasant. Even Weasel's stomach turned over a little and his throat was dry. Maybe he shouldn't have put the mark of the squealer on him. Maybe he shouldn't have split his tongue. That would tell Hogan who had made the kill. Marty Hogan would come for him and—Hell! Nobody had seen him come here. Nobody had seen him climb the fire escape and get in through the window. Nobody could know he had been here except Mocksy, and if Mocksy did any more squealing it would be to the devil.

There was plenty of blood around, but there was none on Weasel—only on the gloves he had worn against finger-prints. And those would go down the first sewer. All he had to do was get home and he could tell Hogan to go to hell. That was easy. There wouldn't be anyone in the streets for an hour yet.

One of Mocksy's eyes stared at the ceiling, but the other one peered at Weasel. It was looking at him, laughing at him. It seemed to be saying: "You can't beat the game, Weasel. Hogan'll get you. . . ." Cripes! It wasn't Squint-Eye that was saying that. It was Jimmy. No! Jimmy *had* said that, he wasn't saying it now. Jimmy wasn't here. Jimmy was in the room, waiting for him to come back.

He hadn't ought to have hit the kid. He was a whining brat but he was a good scout at that. Look at what he'd done for him before. Only trouble with Jimmy was that the Salvation Nells had gotten hold of him and ruined him.

"Hogan'll get you!" Who said that? Walsh whirled. There was no one in the room. But he'd heard it! He could swear he'd heard someone saying it. God Almighty! He had to get out of here. He

had to get away. What was he waiting for?

The back yards were still dark and the fire escape didn't make any noise under Weasel's skilled feet. But his insides were cold and quivery, even when he got into the street and saw the sidewalks grey and empty. Even the couple of cars, parked all night against the curb, were lightless and asleep. Home! Somebody might see him on his way home. And when he got there, Jimmy would look at him. Jimmy wouldn't say anything but there would be a black and blue mark on the side of his jaw.

Bonning! That was the clock in Misericordia's steeple. Half-past four. A burring roar in the sky and two drifting lights, red and green, told Weasel that was right. It was the mail-plane for Halifax. It stopped at the airport for thirty minutes, then took off again—took off for Canada, where Hogan wouldn't be able to find him! And he had five grand. Twenty-five minutes to get to the airport. He could make it in one of these cars. This Wabash was a fast job. . . .

Weasel's mouth twisted in a humorless, silent laugh. Door lock, ignition-lock—they were jokes to a guy who could beat the best safemakers. He was in the seat and the starter was whirring under his foot. The car leaped away from the curb.

No lights. No cops. No traffic. The car poured itself down the long street, careened around the corner. This was East Boulevard. Nothing now between Weasel and the airport except the big market. He'd have to slow down when he passed that because the farmers' trucks would be coming in. But he could make speed here.

HOUSES whipped past, petered out. No headlights. No horn. Just a grey ghost of a car eating up road-ribbon.

Running away from Hogan and from Jimmy's accusing eyes. From Jimmy's.

Jimmy was looking at him, over the leaping hood of the car! Plunk! He'd hit someone. He'd hit Jimmy. Jimmy was back there, a crumpled heap in the gutter. Mother of Mercy! He couldn't stop now. He couldn't go back. He'd miss the plane. He'd miss the plane and Hogan would come for him and take him away to burn. Hogan! Squint-Eye! Jimmy! *Jimmy!* JIMMY!

The car slewed around. Weasel hadn't done that. God knew he hadn't done it. It had gone around by itself. It was stopping by itself, alongside a dark, twitching mound in the emptiness of the Boulevard. But it was Weasel who was gathering a broken, bleeding body into his arms. It was Weasel who was putting Jimmy into the seat and who was back under the wheel. It was Weasel Walsh who was sending the car flying like a bat out of hell back to the heart of the city, back to Misericordia Hospital. . . .

"God!" Weasel Walsh prayed, fumblingly. "Please don't let Jimmy die. Please don't! He believes in You and it isn't right that You should let him die. And while You're about it, God, maybe You could do something for me. Maybe You could keep Hogan from getting me. I don't want to burn, God. I don't want to burn in the chair!"

White-coated men came out of a dark door and took Jimmy away. Walsh whirled the starter, twisted the wheel and was driving across the courtyard to the big gate in through which he had come. But the gate didn't open.

Walsh had to brake. "Hey!" he yelled. "Open up. I'm in a hurry."

The gateman shook his head. "You've

got to wait, mister," he said in a whining voice. "You've got to wait till the cops get through with you."

"The cops hell!" Walsh snarled. "I just picked the kid up in the road. I don't know nothin' about how he got hurt."

The man grinned, pointed at the roadster's bonnet. Weasel, craning, saw that the radiator was splashed with blood. "I guess they'll hold you anyway," the gatekeeper said. "For investigation."

Walsh's foot went from brake pedal to accelerator. The Wabash leaped forward, smashed into buckling, flimsy iron filigree. It went through. But it didn't turn into the roadway. It rocketed on ahead and exploded with a tremendous roaring crash against a wall of thick masonry that was a buttress of Misericordia Church.

High up in the steeple a bell boomed. Bonnnng — Bonng — Bonnnng — Bonnnng — Bonng! The dying clangor was taken up by a burring roar from the distant airport, and a red-and-green light climbed into the sky, veered and vanished toward the North. In the hospital's emergency operating room, a sleepy-eyed surgeon said, "The boy is pretty well bunged up but I think we can pull him through."

Miraculously the wrecked car had not taken fire. The shaking gateman, first to reach the wreck, retched, glimpsing the welter of splintered bone and pulped brain where Weasel Walsh's head should have been. But even in his nausea, his shaking hand touched forehead and breast, shoulder and shoulder, as he saw the piece of black iron that jutted out of the mess. The piece of black iron, before it had entered the heart of the murderer, that had been a cross in the filigree of Misericordia's gate. . . .

ARTHUR LEO ZAGAT

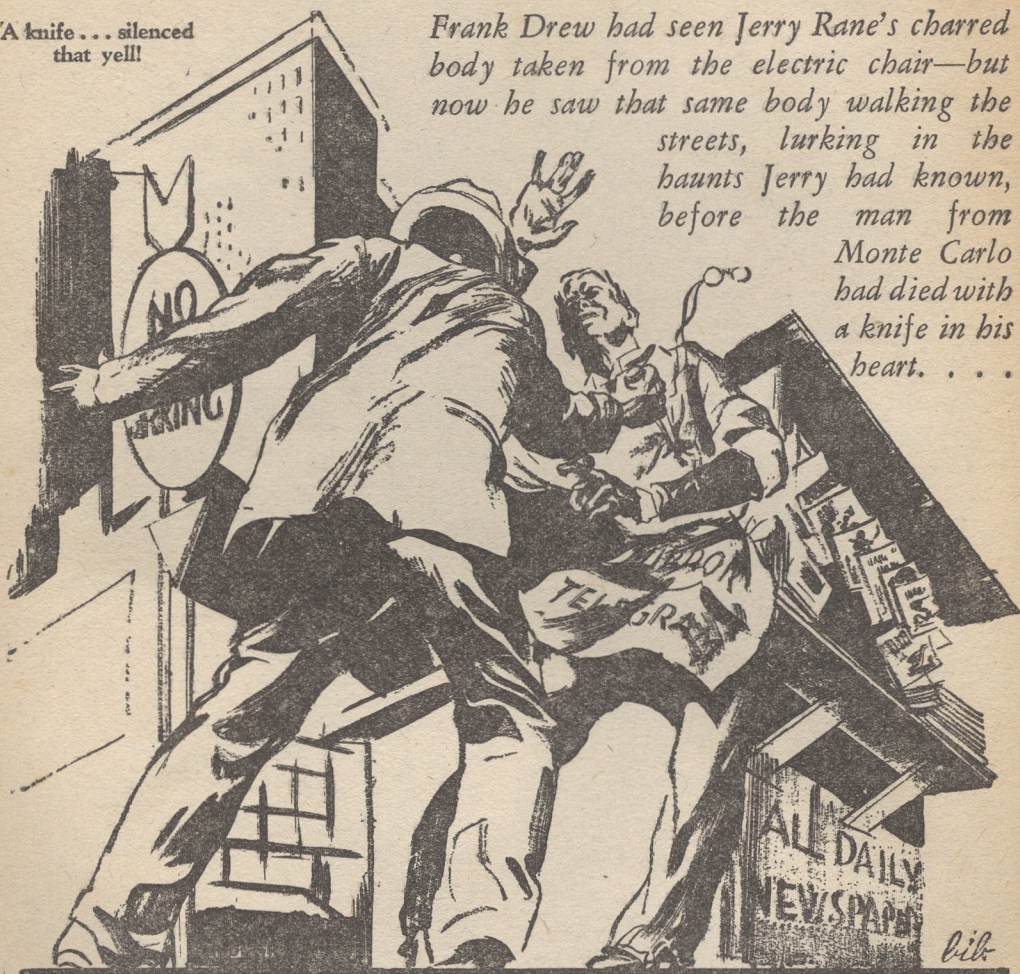
**Is a Regular Contributor of Heart-Gripping, Fast-Action Stories to
DETECTIVE TALES**

DEAD MAN'S SHADOW

By KENNETH L. SINCLAIR

A knife . . . silenced
that yell!

Frank Drew had seen Jerry Rane's charred body taken from the electric chair—but now he saw that same body walking the streets, lurking in the haunts Jerry had known, before the man from Monte Carlo had died with a knife in his heart. . . .



THE HANDS trembled a little as they pushed aside the frayed, yet crisply clean curtains and placed the flower pot on the window sill. Tiny hands they were, and wrinkled—they had the pallor of chalk. Frank Drew, watching as he polished apples at the stand across the street, choked back something. He'd have been the last guy on earth to admit that it was a sob . . . but it was.

Why did she keep putting that geranium on the sill every night? Jerry Rane would never again see that signal which told him his dinner was ready. He would never again climb the dingy stairs to the

room where his mother was now slowly starving. Two weeks ago, tonight, they'd strapped Jerry Rane in the chair. . . .

There had been evidence enough. Dedderby, the queer little man who had sold papers on the corner, kept showing folks his diamond. One night, somebody grabbed it. Dedderby yelled—a knife, plunging into his heart, silenced that yell. Harnigan, the flatfoot on the beat, grabbed everybody in sight, searched them all. The diamond was in Jerry Rane's pocket. Jerry couldn't explain how it got there; neither could he explain the fact that the death weapon was an old hunt-

ing knife that he had bought years ago, when with Perk Williston and Frank Drew, he made a trip into the north woods.

Suddenly the apple which Drew was polishing slipped from his fingers. He swayed. All the world seemed to melt away, leaving only his aching, staring eyes and that second-floor window across the street.

There were *two* shadows against that window. One was the shadow of Mrs. Rane; the other, the shadow of a dead man—Jerry. No mistaking that broad-brimmed hat, nor the slightly stooped posture, nor the unruly shock of hair that was revealed when he took off his hat.

Icy prickles danced on the back of Frank Drew's neck. He pulled a breath through set teeth as a man's hands reached through those frayed window curtains and lifted the geranium back into the room—exactly as Rane had always done when, after getting off work at midnight, he went up to eat dinner with his mother.

Drew's knees felt like they were made of thin, watery jelly. Desperately he wished that Perk Williston were here—Perk knew all the answers. But Perk was in jail. He'd been arrested a month ago, in Sad Sam Beeler's card room where he worked. A square guy, Perk; but, in a desperate attempt to get money to finance Jerry Rane's appeal, he had rung a few cold aces into a game he was dealing. . . .

Steadying himself against a fruit-rack, Drew tore his glance from the second-floor window. The street was deserted, except for George Sarley, ticket-taker at the Bird Cage, who was putting up neon letters for tomorrow's picture. Sarley was half-turned on his ladder, and was staring at Mrs. Rane's window.

A swift, purposeful tapping of heels on the sidewalk jerked Frank Drew

around. Willa Martin, Jerry Rane's girl, had just rounded the corner.

"A quarter's worth of apples, Frank. I'm taking them to Mother Rane."

Automatically, Drew put the apples in a paper sack.

"Willa! I saw—"

"Frank, no matter what happens tonight, act natural!"

She had opened her handbag, and was fumbling for change. For an instant the display lights of the fruit stand beat down on the knife that lay in the handbag. There was still a brown stain on that blade—Drew had last seen the knife in court, where it was State Exhibit B. The knife that killed Dedderby. . . .

Drew's jaw sagged—but already Willa was crossing the street, carrying the apples. A quarter nestled in his palm, cold, unheeded.

He started forward, looking up toward that second-floor window. But, getting hold of himself, he backed slowly to the stand. He wasn't due to close up for an hour yet—and if Wienstein found out he'd left the job a minute too early there'd be a new man selling fruit tomorrow. Drew couldn't let that happen—he owed everybody in town, having borrowed to get money for Jerry's attorneys. He had to keep working.

A STRANGE thing, Life. It walls folks in, throws up bars between them and the things they love—then it draws aside to smirk at their frantic, futile struggles against those bars.

Take Dedderby. A queer little man, with ragged spats, frayed cuffs, and eyes that somehow retained dreams of glory. Nobody else could possibly have made a go of a newsstand on this corner. But folks came blocks out of their way just to see Dedderby, to hear him talk, to have him show them the diamond that he had won from the Czar of Russia. Once

Dedderby had been an internationally-famous gambler, looked upon with admiration and awe in London, Paris, Vienna, Monte Carlo. Life shuffled the cards—and dealt him an armful of newspapers. But he clung to his diamond—perhaps because it formed a tangible link with his memories. . . .

And the diamond, when examined by police experts, turned out to be only a cheap imitation, worth about a dollar.

The sob-sisters had gone wild over that. Dedderby's diamond a fake. His last great treasure, the thing to which he had clung so desperately, even when he was starving, a worthless bauble! He had displayed the diamond with almost childish pride—perhaps it was best that, in death, he was spared the bitter irony of Life's last jest at his expense.

Oh, they'd made a great story out of it. They'd told how he kept his clothing spruced up—was it because he wanted to be worthy of the diamond? How he'd kept a can of shoe-polish in his stand, using it a dozen times a day. In fact, he had been polishing his shoes when he died. . . .

That second-floor window seemed to pull Frank Drew's eyes like a magnet pulls iron. He had a painful, awful sensation that his eyeballs were being pulled from his head.

Willa was up there now—there were three shadows against the curtain. But only for a moment. Then there was only Mrs. Rane's shadow left; and, a moment later, Willa and Jerry rounded the corner.

Just like that. The same old Jerry—Jerry, whose burned body Frank Drew had seen lowered into a coffin. The same slight stoop, the same careful walk, the same pale features.

George Sarley dropped an armful of neon letters—they burst on the sidewalk with a tinkling crash that Frank Drew

hardly noticed. Willa was steadying the figure of Jerry Rane, helping him across the street. Drew was rooted in his tracks, staring. He sensed that Sarley, with his head turned to watch the strange pair over his shoulder, was coming slowly, jerkily, down his ladder.

Willa and Jerry stopped at the old, locked-up newsstand, poked at it with their fingers, inspected it from different angles as if looking for something.

Frank Drew, though, was a pretty hard-headed guy. Too hard-headed to believe that this was Jerry. It *couldn't* be Jerry.

A police whistle shrilled, somewhere in the block. The piercing sound of it seemed to shatter the icy bonds that gripped Drew. Yanking off his apron, he bounded toward the newsstand.

Willa saw him coming, and yanked the man's arm. The two of them darted past Drew, raced to the alley, and dived into its pitchy darkness. Swerving, Drew followed them.

To his surprise, he found the two of them waiting just inside the alley—they hadn't tried to make a getaway.

"Frank," Willa pleaded, her face white and set. "Please—"

Drew grabbed for the man. This was Jerry's suit, Jerry's topcoat, Jerry's hat! The man's face was covered with some sort of powder to make it look like Jerry's. The man had even shaved off his moustache to carry out the grim masquerade, but—the man was Perk Williston!

FRANK DREW went back on his heels, gasping like a winded deer. The cold night air hurt his throat—but he kept right on gasping.

"Perk!" he snapped. "What the hell! You're supposed to be in jail—"

Perk's mouth was a mere slash in his

face. "Shut up!" he hissed. "You'll spoil—"

Willa's hands caught Drew's arm. "Please, Frank! Get back to your stand! And stay there! Don't tell George—"

Perk gave Drew a sudden, savage push that sent him staggering out of the alley.

George Sarley was coming on the run. His thin face was set, grim. Why shouldn't it be, with a dead man apparently walking in Regent Street?

"Where are they?" Sarley yelled. "Who—"

Feet pounded in the alley. Willa and Perk were running for it, now. Making a getaway. And suddenly Frank Drew understood. They wanted him to get back to the stand, to cover up for them, to keep Harnigan from following them into the alley.

Without realizing what he was doing, he ran back to the stand, pushing Sarley out of his way. His brain was reeling under the trip-hammer impacts of the happenings of the past few minutes. Jerry Rane, Perk Williston, Frank Drew—they'd all been mighty good pals. And Willa, Jerry's girl. Well, Jerry was gone, now; why not help Willa and Perk?

But something awful and ugly reared itself in Drew's mind. Perk was supposed to be in jail. Willa had the knife that killed Dedderby. Had *they* killed Dedderby? Were they here now to get their hidden loot? Drew had never believed that Dedderby's diamond was a fake. The real one was a around somewhere—yet the police had searched Dedderby's room, his belongings, and the paper-stand without finding anything. . . .

Harnigan came lumbering and wheezing along, his thick-soled shoes crunching the shattered glass under the Bird Cage marquee.

"Where are they at?" the bull demanded.

Frank Drew did not answer. He was

staring at Dedderby's paper stand. No, not at the stand itself—at the knife which had been dropped near it. *The knife. . . .*

All sound seemed to flow out of the night, leaving yawning emptiness. Into Drew's brain leaped a blazing picture of a man in the electric chair—executed for a crime he did not commit.

Abruptly Drew looked up, toward that second-floor window. A tiny, frail old lady was in that room, growing more and more frail with the passing of the days. Not once since Jerry had been taken to prison had she left that room. Not once had the light gone out, at night. It was awful. . . .

A sob welled up in Frank Drew's throat. He had loved Willa for years. But of course he had never peeped about it. It didn't seem right for a guy to fall in love with a pal's girl. And now that Jerry was dead, he felt more guilty than before, even. . . .

Harnigan was tapping him on the shoulder with a night-stick. The cops red, beefy Irish face was close to Drew's, yelling:

"Are yuh shtricken dumb? Which way?"

Perk and Willa against Mrs. Rane and the memory of Jerry. There it was. Frank Drew's lips trembled violently.

"Why, yuh're afther cryin'!" Harnigan yelled. "Whatever ails—"

"Down that alley!" Frank Drew bawled.

HARNIGAN wallowed to the alley, vanished into its darkness, roaring something about "name o' th' law!"

But, an instant after the copper disappeared into the alley, George Sarley came spurting out of it. Sarley, then, hadn't followed Perk and Willa at all—he must have been hiding just inside the alley entrance. Why?

Sarley's face was twitching, his eyes

were wild. His hands made little clutching movements as he darted to the paper-stand, pulled a screwdriver from his pocket, and started to pry the locked stand open.

Drew yelled, "Hey, there!" and lunged toward Sarley.

Everything happened at once. Sarley whirled, baring his teeth. He had the stand open now—with one hand he was fumbling inside it. In his other hand was a snub-nosed automatic.

The gun barked. Something unseen, terrific, struck Frank Drew, spinning him partly around. Yet he kept going. . . .

A large-caliber gun went into action behind him. Harnigan. . . . With a yell, Sarley was on his feet, pumping shots at the copper, swerving to get away.

In his hand Sarley clutched something. Dedderby's shoe-polish can!

Drew launched himself into a flying tackle, gritting his teeth against the pain that was welling into him from that hole in his side. It was a bullet-hole—sure it was! Sarley had fired the shot. But it felt like a red-hot iron that was swelling, tearing and burning the quivering flesh. . . .

Sarley was five feet away, now. Got to stop him. *Got* to stop him. Why? To save a ten-cent can of shoe-polish. God, it was funny. . . .

Drew's clutching arms closed about Sarley's legs. For an instant Sarley struggled: then he toppled. There was a terrific impact as they two of them struck the concrete, then. . . .

THE smell of ether was insistent, unshakable. Drew stirred, rolled his head, trying to get away from the awful stuff. Each time he breathed out, a sickening gust of it choked him. Why, then the ether must be in his lungs. . . .

He opened his eyes. Willa Martin was sitting at one side of the high hospital

cot. Perk Williston, flanked by a couple of grim and beefy coppers, was on the other side.

"He's out of it," a nurse said briskly. "Keep him quiet, please."

"Hi, hero, Perk said. "Lie still—they had to do some fancy whittling to get that slug out of you. My fault, too—Willa told me we should let you into the play. But there wasn't time to coach you for your part, with these guys closing in on me."

"What—who—" Drew said.

"The diamond, fella. Dedderby's diamond, worth a couple of hundred thousand. Mrs. Rane finally consented to selling it. Willa is taking her to the country, on the dough."

"Mrs. Rane consented—say, are you crazy, Perk?"

Perk grinned. "That's not the point, old son. Mrs. Rane told us the whole story. Dedderby was her husband—Jerry's old man. Got it? Sure, it had me blinking awhile, too. When Jerry was two years old they were in Monte Carlo. Dedderby got the idea his wife and kid were bringing him bad luck. His mania for gambling had such a grip on him that he kicked them out, flat. Somehow Mrs. Rane got back to America, raised Jerry. She changed her name to Rane. You can imagine the hurt of what she went through—she could never forgive Dedderby. A year ago he located her, started selling papers on the corner to be near her. She was—nearly ready to forgive him when he was killed. It's pretty awful, Frank."

"But I thought that diamond was a fake—"

"The one they found in Jerry's pocket was. But Sarley was smart—he had the whole thing planned, even to stealing and using that hunting knife. He had the imitation made, and dropped it in Jerry's pocket."

"What? How'd you get out of jail? Why'd you pose as Jerry?"

"I broke out of jail, old son—only wish I'd had a ghost of a chance to make the break before they—before Jerry— Mrs. Rane knew the diamond was real, knew that, since everybody was searched, the diamond must still be in the stand. When the cops couldn't find it there she asked them to leave the stand just as it was, and lock it up. Then she started her vigil—twenty-four hours a day, watching that stand, waiting. . . . She kept putting out the geranium on some idea that Jerry would come back.

"The cops told me about that—and it gave me my idea. With Mrs. Rane watching as she was, the guilty guy couldn't get the diamond from wherever he had cached it. He'd be as nervous as a cat, wanting to get his loot and make a get-away, but unable to do it without being caught. I figured that if I showed up as Jerry, and dropped the knife just to add to the effect, the killer would figure some-

body was wise to him. If we gave him a chance, he'd make a desperate try to grab the diamond and get clear."

"Then you didn't run down that alley—"

"Only a little way. When Harnigan came blundering in there, we grabbed him, told him what we could. Then Sarley shot you. We sure didn't figure Sarley would be packing a rod."

"But where was the diamond?"

"That's the funny part of it. In the shoe-polish! Sarley had it all figured—he simply pushed the diamond into the black polish and closed the can, and left it in the stand! Well, old son, I got a conference with the warden. See you in five years."

"Perk, you're—one swell guy," Drew said, softly.

Willa's hand touched Drew's, for an instant. "Frank," she whispered. "I'll be back, just as soon as I can get Mrs. Rane settled in the country. . . ."

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January Issue

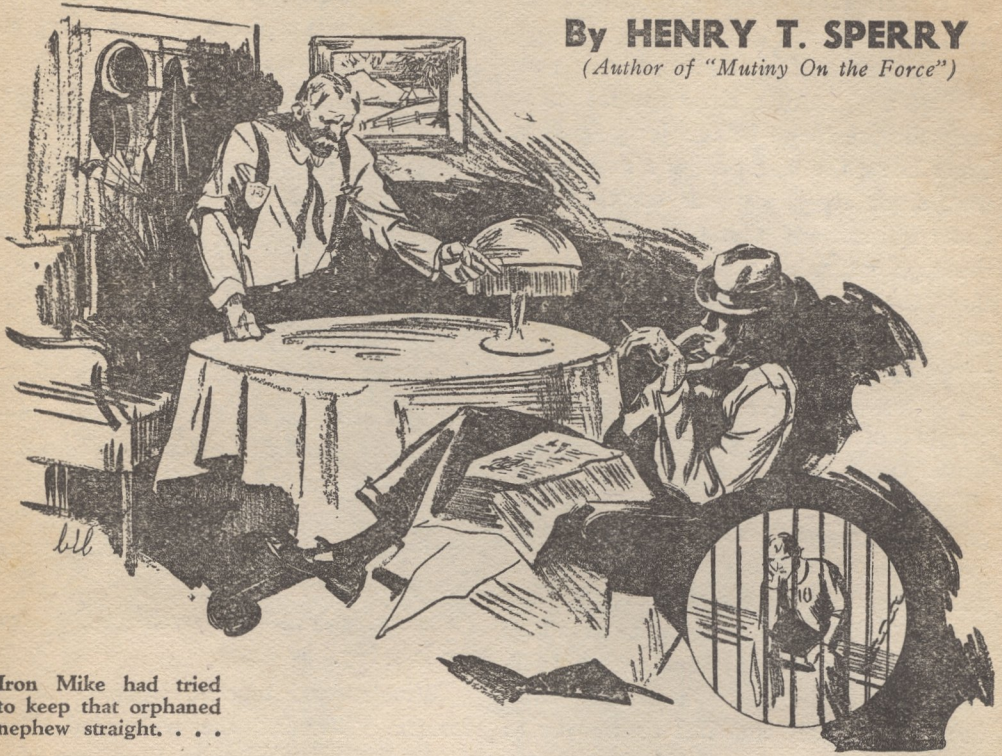
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Out Nov. 22nd!

GUNLESS COP

By HENRY T. SPERRY

(Author of "Mutiny On the Force")



Iron Mike had tried to keep that orphaned nephew straight. . . .

Young Cliff was headed toward the last mile—old Iron Mike knew that—but he didn't think his nephew had fallen so low he would bait a death-trap for the man who had raised him from a kid. . . .

CLIFF BURNELL glanced up from the newspaper he was reading as his uncle came into the room. His eyes crinkled with the expression of sardonic amusement that was usually in them when he looked at Iron Mike Burnell.

Iron Mike, "The big detec-a-tive!" Cliff laughed inwardly whenever he thought of it. Mike looked so much like what he was that it was funny. Big, tall, paunched, grizzled and flat-footed—a typical dick. Not the dapper, smart-looking modern kind of dick whom Cliff admired—except that anyone had to be a mug to work for a cop's salary—but an old-fashioned flat-foot right out of an 1890 mystery.

"Hello, Iron Mike!" said Cliff, and grinned.

His uncle grunted and hung his derby hat on the hall tree. When Cliff called him by his nickname it was a jeer. But Detective Mike Burnell was secretly proud of it. He was a hard cop—he never denied that. He knew what they said about him on the force: that he was so tough he'd pinch himself, if there was cause. He never denied that, either.

Ponderously he walked in from the hall, sank with a wheezing sigh into his old morris chair and started loosening the laces of his enormous brogans.

His eyes were on his thick, hard fingers fumbling at the shoestrings, so he wasn't looking at his nephew's face when he started talking.

"Heard something I didn't like today,

Cliff," he said, "something I didn't want to believe. . . ."

"Yeah?" said Cliff easily. "Guys with ears as big as you've got hear a lot of balony. What was it?"

Iron Mike finished with the first shoe before he settled back in his chair and went on. "You're not hangin' around that Cleek gang any more, are you, Cliff?"

Cliff's eyes shifted momentarily, then came back and returned squarely to his uncle's gaze. "No."

Mike Burnell sighed and fished a cigar out of his pocket, bit off the end and lit it.

He knew—knew beyond a shadow of a doubt—that his nephew was a liar. He had been fighting for years to keep that orphaned Cliff from the bunch of hoodlums who had been his school companions. And that was Iron Mike's own fault.

Years ago he had seen in what direction those youngsters were heading. When you've had as much experience as old Mike, you can pick out the instinctive criminal at a pretty tender age. . . .

He blew out a cloud of smoke and settled back in his chair. He watched it roll toward the ceiling. "I'm glad to hear that you ain't trailing with any of that bunch," he said quietly. "Because—"

He was about to say, "—because most of them will be caught by tomorrow night." But he checked himself. He couldn't trust Cliff, he realized bitterly. If he let it out that he had gotten a tip that Cleek and his pals were to pull off that warehouse job tomorrow night, Cliff—the kid he'd tried to bring up straight—would warn them.

But Detective Mike Burnell wanted to warn Cliff, too. He wanted to be sure the lad wouldn't be caught in the bloody pay-off that was bound to come. Damn it—somewhere in that kid was good stuff—Mike, was sure of that. It was

Mike's responsibility to find it, to bring it out, as he had promised his widowed sister on her deathbed. Somehow Mike had to save the kid. . . .

Cliff interrupted his thoughts. "Listen," he said. "When are you going to lay off this guardian stuff, Mike? I'm nineteen years old. You never seem to realize that I've grown a day since I came to live with you, fifteen years ago. I'm a man. I can take care of myself—and I don't need a moss-backed old fogey like you to tell me where to pick my friends."

Cliff's face was suffused with sudden, reasonless anger. He glared at the old man. Damn it, that grey-haired cop was always butting into his affairs; acting as though he didn't have any judgment or sense enough to think for himself. The blighted old fool! What had his sense and judgment gotten him? He had been a slave on a pauper's pay for thirty-five years . . . and he was dumb enough to like it!

He whirled suddenly, and stalked out of the room. Why argue with a thick-headed cop like Iron Mike Burnell? Some day—and soon, too—he'd have money enough to get out. . . . And if he ever saw that old flat-foot again, it would be too soon!

LATER that night, Cliff was chuckling to himself as he walked down the rickety stairway from the headquarters of the Waterfront Club—of which one Pudsy Cleek was president. Cliff's chuckle was silent, for Pudsy Cleek had just outlined a certain plan—a plan that, if it worked according to schedule, would give Cliff something to laugh at for a long time to come. No one but a smart bird like Pudsy could ever have thought it up.

But that was just the start of Pudsy's planning, because Pudsy was a real

brain-guy. After Cliff left, Cleek winked at his chief lieutenant, Max Schiff, and he also winked at his third in command—The Smoother.

"That dope fell for it," chuckled Pudsy, "and he'll take care of his end of it, all right. Cliff is a born stooge. Now, you guys, here's the lay: Greasy and Chink will back the truck up to Merrill's Warehouse at twelve sharp. Before that, Max and I will take the watchman. The cop on the beat is fixed. We got nothin' to worry us, and it'll go off like soup through a tin horn. After that—the real fun begins. But remember: We don't want to raise too much hell. Lip is the gun-guy. Nobody else is to touch his gat unless somethin' goes screwy. Lip, you'll be in that areaway on the north side of Blair's drug store. Wait until this ham cop, Iron Mike, is close enough so you know you can't miss before he gets it. Then—right through the old conk—and be damn sure his yella brains is comin' out the back of his dome before we scam."

OLD MIKE BURNELL was down in the basement of his apartment. Now he stood with his thick legs spraddled out, and sighted, with one eye tightly closed, down the barrel of his service revolver. He pulled down on the target and watched the bull's-eye waver crazily over the front sight, like a tiny balloon on a string. After a while he squeezed the trigger, but he didn't have to walk down to the target to know that he hadn't come within a foot of its center.

Iron Mike was beginning to regret having wangled his way out of pistol practice, during the past five years. During that time he had hardly had a gun in his hand. His precinct captain, by almost imperceptible degrees, had shunted Mike off onto routine tasks and paper work. The result had been that, while still nomi-

nally and officially on the active list, Mike had actually almost been retired. But now Mike had need of reviving his lost art of marksmanship.

MIKE had watched the Cleek mob develop from twelve-years-old hoodlums into one of the toughest and most menacing bunches in his neighborhood. And because they were in his precinct, he had tried in his own stiff-necked way to keep them within the bounds of the law. He didn't want to put them on the books any more than was absolutely necessary. More than once, members of that gang had gotten off with a few black eyes and swollen noses. Mike knew, as well as he knew his own name, that he could have sent them up the River.

But Iron Mike had had a show-down with Pudsy Cleek a few days before. The gangster, for the first time, had openly rebelled against his belated show of authority—just as Mike's nephew had the night before.

"Get this, you old fool," Pudsy had shouted. "We're not a bunch of kids you can bully-rag! We've got connections—see? You get heavy with us, and you'll be wonderin' where you'll get your next job!" Then Pudsy had added pleasantly, "if you're lucky enough to need another job!"

There had been murder-lust in young Cleek's eyes—Iron Mike knew that look—and he caught his breath in the realization that these kids, in spite of all he could do, had started flirting with the chair. They were killers now—in thought and intent, if not actually in deed. They were hard, dangerous men—and as vicious as maddened snakes.

Once they couldn't come tough enough for him. Iron Mike—that's how he'd won his nickname—had gone up against the worst of them; traded lead for lead with a gun-hand that never wavered and

nerves like chilled steel. Now. . . .

Mike cursed deep in his throat and sent five shots smashing toward the target as fast as he could trigger his gun. They all went wide. And it wasn't all due to his lack of practice and advancing age. . . .

Mike would never admit, even to himself, that some of the unsteadiness of his old, thick-fingered fist was due to jumpy nerves. No, he'd never admit that.

GIVING it up, he wearily climbed the stairs to his apartment. He went in and tossed the gun on top of the library table, then clumped heavily back to the bathroom to wash up for dinner.

Cliff was there in the living-room, as usual, his leg thrown over the arm of his chair, newspaper in his hands, cigarette pasted to his lower lip. The corners of his eyes crinkled with amusement as he watched the thick-set, ungainly figure of his uncle clump into the bathroom. Cliff looked back to the pistol on the table, and his grin deepened. But it had disappeared by the time his uncle came back to the living room.

Mike sank into his morris chair, and bent over wheezingly to loosen his shoelaces. His feet weren't standing up the way they used to, back in the old days. . . .

"Supper nearly ready?" he asked, with a slight wheeze in his voice.

"Yeah," grunted Cliff. Two two of them were fed by a housekeeper, who likewise made some attempt to keep the small apartment in order.

Cliff was silent a few moments. Then he cleared his throat. "Say, Unk," he said suddenly, "just to show you that I'm straight when I tell you I'm not in with Pudsy any more, I'm goin' to tell you something. I heard today that his bunch are breakin' into the drug store on Barrow and Sixth, tonight. . . ."

Mike lifted his grey head.

"You think I'd be rattin' on my pals like that—if they *was* my pals?" Cliff said.

Old Mike's fingers stopped fumbling with his shoelaces. Slowly he straightened until his steely grey eyes were boring straight into those of his nephew. For a long time he probed the face of his dead sister's son, and gradually a sense of lightness and relief flooded his heart.

By God—he'd done the boy an injustice, after all! Cliff's was really an honest face. Mike never doubted that, underneath, he had good stuff in him—he'd have to, to have been Mary's kid. . . .

Iron Mike lowered his gaze, suddenly fearful that his eyes were accumulating an undue amount of moisture. "Why—why—thanks, Cliff," he said in a voice that was a shade more husky than usual. "Any idea when they plan to take the joint?"

Cliff breathed a long, silent sigh. It had been a tough ordeal, looking innocent as a wet-nosed baby under those X-ray eyes of his uncle's.

"Why—yeah," he said. "I got all the dope from Chuck Willets—he hates their guts—and I figured, since you got the idea I'm still mixed up with 'em some way, I'd pass it on and let you do what you liked about it. That would give me an alibi, too, if they was to get caught. . . .

"They figure to crack the joint just after midnight."

AT eleven-thirty, as Iron Mike Burnell shrugged into his suit coat, his eyes were on his pistol, still lying on top of the table in the living room. He went over to the weapon, picked it up and regarded it with a gloomy, brooding expression. Cliff, standing unobserved in the inner doorway, was just able to make out what he said: "Never did like it—and I still don't. . . . Can't hit the broad side of a barn with it, anyway. . . ."

Iron Mike tossed the Police Positive back on the table, turned and ambled out into the hall. He caught up the derby hat that Cliff could never look at without grinning, and went out the door, slamming it behind him.

Cliff's gaze went back to the gun on the table. In his eyes was a faint, thoughtful smile.

Iron Mike was so damn dumb it was pathetic. . . .

SHADOWS cloaking Barrow Street were like layers of black gauze; static; almost physical. No noises penetrated here save an occasional rumble from the L structure five or six blocks east. It was silent in Barrow Street—as silent as waiting death.

Perhaps Iron Mike Burnell sensed the threatening quality of that brooding stillness. Maybe some half-awakened sixth sense whispered a silent warning to him.

He slackened his pace as he neared Sixth. He tried to walk a little more quietly, but his big brogans seemed to thunder and creak in the silence with a noise that must have heralded their approach for at least a block.

He was doing his best to creep along close to Merrill's Warehouse, his eyes fastened on the blacker blot in the gloom across the street that was Blair's Drug Store.

Suddenly he stopped and cursed under his breath. What the hell was the matter with him? Here he was, as scared as a rookie on his first tour—and all he was after was a bunch of young hoodlums he had been batting around since they were wet behind the ears. . . .

He straightened his shoulders and walked out boldly across the street toward the drug store.

If his old eyes had been sharper he might have detected the faint gleam of reflected light on black metal coming from

the north side of Blair's Drug Store. He might have seen other sinister glints at the alley entrance. But Iron Mike's eyes were fixed on that black blot of the drug store. He saw nothing else.

He was close now; very close to the little store on the corner . . . coming toward the cold-eyed killer who waited in those shadows with a gun.

IRON MIKE didn't hear the crack of the automatic. He thought, for a second, that someone had dashed a cupful of milk into his eyes—milk that was blindingly white, that was somehow cool and warm at the same time. He felt no pain. Nor did he know when he fell heavily to the sidewalk—he seemed to be falling a far greater distance than that—down a long tunnel that at first was starred with flashing lights, and afterwards was just inky black.

Barrow Street was roaring with sound when finally he came to. Flame was lancing out from around the corners of buildings, from area-ways and alleys—and suddenly one brighter flame flared directly above him. There were no more flashes from the north end of Blair's Drug Store, following that; and the next time that chatter and flare roared out, there was a terrible scream from across the street, near Merrill's Warehouse. Then, far in the distance, Mike heard the wail of patrol sirens—but Mike wasn't listening to that. He was listening to a voice coming directly above him.

"You were good to me, Mike," the voice was saying. "You used to scrimp yourself so's I could have new clothes and stuff. You bought that old second-hand motorcycle for me, when you didn't have hardly a change of socks. . . . And I let you go up against these yellow rats without even a gun on you. . . ."

The voice seemed to choke and then

it cursed. And once more the roar and flame flared out above the prostrate body of Iron Mike. . . .

"But I didn't know the lay, Mike," Cliff's voice continued. "Pudsy said it was just a joke; said he was going to put a smoke-bomb in the stove of the drug store. Then I was to get you down there and when the bomb went off you'd have busted in and shot up the joint—done a lot of damage all for nothing. . . . And I—I thought it would have been a riot—a laugh—"

Weakly Iron Mike rolled over on his side. His head pounded as if a thousand hammers were drumming on it, but there

was a sudden gladness in his heart.

"Listen," Mike said, grabbing out for Cliff's wrist and wrenching the pistol away from him. "You got no permit even to carry a cop's gun—let alone to shoot people. Didn't you ever hear of the Sullivan Law? I could send you up for—"

But whatever threat Mike had intended it was lost in the roar of the prowling cars that howled into Barrow Street just then. . . . And besides, old Mike couldn't talk so good with his nephew, Cliff, hugging him like a damn young bear and yelling into his ear at the top of his voice. . . .

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His new insurance policy; their quarrels; the burning suspicion that his wife was unfaithful—did those facts pin the guilt of that killer gun on his wife—the woman he loved above all else?

"No—no, Dave!" cried Esther frantically.

THE LOVE THAT KILLS

By NORVELL W. PAGE

(Author of "Like Father—," etc.)

THE telephone bell pulled me out of deep sleep and I cursed and groped for the damned thing on the table beside the bed. I couldn't find it, so I swung my feet to the floor and pushed open my eyes. I found the phone then and took up the receiver. . . .

The explosion of the gun almost blew me out of bed. I sprang halfway across the room, carrying the phone with me. The wires snapped, of course. There wasn't a soul in the room with me and the gun that had gone off was my own, the one I always shoved under my pillow

at night. It was wedged in under the cross-bar of the headboard, and . . . I began to tremble. The shaking crept up my legs and into my spine. I tried to make the receiver connect with the hook and they rattled. For a moment, I thought it was the sound of my knees knocking. Heat flushed over me.

I cursed and threw the telephone at the door. I took a long pull from a bottle I kept in the bureau drawer, then leaned my hips against the bureau and looked at the revolver on the bed. The bullet had burned through the pillow

where my head had been. Some of the linen had charred. . . . I laughed. It sounded crazy as hell.

It must have been a half hour before the shakes went out of my legs. I kept pulling at the bottle. Nobody came, of course. The house we live in—we being the wife and I—is a little bungalow that sets off at least thirty or forty feet from its neighbor. It was broad daylight. I was a night worker on the *Beaufort Press* and the wife—I began to wonder where Esther was. . . . I opened the bedroom door with slow caution, peeping around it—then I remembered. Esther had a date at a beauty shop at nine thirty. I looked at the Seth Thomas clock on the mantel piece. It was twenty after ten. . . .

I almost had to force myself to turn back to the bedroom. I caught hold of the revolver, laughing a little bit, and pulled it loose from where it had wedged under the crossbar. It was stuck there pretty tight. I sat down and looked at it and my hand was trembling. How in hell had the thing got cocked? What had pulled the trigger? I pried my eyes away from the gun and looked at the telephone lying on the floor—and a prickling cold crept up my arms and legs. By God, it couldn't very well be an accident, could it? And that meant . . . that meant . . . *murder!*

The mere thought of the word jerked me off the bed. I took another pull at the bottle and picked up the telephone. I stood there looking at the broken wires and something gnawed at the back of my mind. I couldn't think what it was I was trying to remember, but it was something connected with the snapped cord. . . .

Hell, nobody would want to murder me! I laughed a little at nothing at all, then began to fumble into a robe. I didn't shave or comb my hair—and I didn't have sense enough to leave the

whisky alone. I took it with me into the living room and flopped into the big easy chair in front of the radio. I sat doing nothing but lifting the bottle every now and then. The clock ticked, ticked. . . .

I DON'T know how much later it was that a knock at the front door pulled me to my feet, a funny knock, two little ones, a big one, and two more little. I frowned. That was Lily, blonde Lily Snyder from next door. It was dumb as hell of her, coming to the front door like that. She looked at me with her blue eyes, that hadn't been innocent for many a year, pulled wide open.

"What—what have you got that gun in your hand for?" she wanted to know.

I looked down at the gun, as surprised as she was to find it there, and put it in my robe pocket. "Superstition of mine," I told her. "Always go to the door with a gun in your hand, like knocking on wood."

I stepped aside for her to come in, but she didn't. She shook her head, her fuzzy hair fanning out behind pink cheeks. She was still breathless. Pretty? Sure, but she was a wise number, plenty hard and not too young any more. She didn't compare with my Esther even if I had given her a little tumble. Esther had been giving me hell lately and I hadn't thought it would make any difference to Snyder. He and Lily were separating anyway. . . .

"Esther called up," Lily said. "She's been trying to get you and can't. Says she left the hot water heater going and she's afraid it will blow up."

Lily smiled at me. "Esther went out awful early today, didn't she?"

"Uh-huh," I agreed, "Aren't you coming in?"

She shook her head. She looked at me, as if she wanted to come in, but she started off the porch. She said, loud enough for the neighbors to hear her if they were

listening, as they probably were, "I've got to run back and tell Esther that you're all right."

I closed the door and stood there in the hall trying to remember what it was I had to do. I remembered the hot water boiler and went and cut off the gas, but that still didn't seem to be everything that was on my mind. I went back and turned on the radio and a man was saying: "This delightful medication will be sent to you absolutely free. Just write care of the station to which you have been listening, or telephone. . . ."

I came to my feet with a shout that I barely choked back. "I've got to tell Esther that you're all right," Lily had said. It had been Esther who had telephoned earlier. . . . I remembered blindingly now what had gnawed at the back of my brain when I was looking at the broken telephone wire and now I had the answer to how the revolver had been cocked. . . .

Esther had tried to murder me!

THE thought was there in my brain, but somehow it didn't register. I repeated the words to myself, aloud. "Esther tried to murder me." I went over the reasons for thinking that, and recalled that just the other night when Lily and her husband had been over here we had been listening to a detective story skit on the air. In it, one man had killed another by fastening the wire of a telephone receiver to the trigger of a gun so that when the man lifted the receiver, he would shoot himself. . . .

I had turned, half-joking, half-serious as you will when you've had a few drinks and marital grievances are near the surface. "When you get ready to murder me, Esther, that way's as good as any other," I had said.

Esther had looked at me, deadily calm. The last three or four months had been

pretty much full of hell for both of us, raving and fighting most of the time.

"I'll bear it in mind, Dave," she had said.

And now. . . . And now. . . . Realization hit me like lightning.

I switched off the radio. It seemed to interfere with something inside my head. The clock was still striking and I looked at the hands pointing to twelve. That meant it was thirteen minutes of, I thought dully. It was always fast. It stopped striking and I dropped my forehead on my arms. It was silly of a hard-boiled newspaper man. I cried.

It didn't last long, a half dozen sobs that I couldn't hold down, then I lifted my head. It's foolish to drink so much before breakfast. . . .

Yet it was all diamond clear now. Despite our recent quarrels, Esther still waited up until I came home from the job. We'd been particularly late last night, the Snyders having been over, too. What had happened this morning was this: Esther, with the excuse of the beauty shop date, had got up much earlier than usual, put the gun where it would blow my brains out when I groped, half-asleep, for the telephone and lifted the receiver. . . . It wasn't our quarrels. They were the result, rather than the cause. Esther had been restless for the last year and recently, well, it was pretty bad, both of us screaming at each other, making wild threats. Once, I'd called home and Esther had been slow to answer and I had thought I heard a man's voice at the other end, in our bedroom. . . .

I was cold sober now. I'm pretty sure I was. I went to the kitchen and sat at the table, drinking cup after cup of coffee and staring straight ahead. I didn't see a thing. This murder plan, I saw, had one overwhelming advantage. It gave Esther a complete alibi. She downtown in a beauty shop, Lily coming over and

finding me dead. An abrupt question presented itself. Had that been deliberate? Did Esther know the pass I had made at Lily after that telephone call and the man's voice I was now sure I had heard? It would have been a nice, womanly gesture, sending Lily to make the discovery. . . .

But surely, Esther wasn't jealous, not the way she had been acting up recently? What was the motive? My lips felt stiff when they grinned. Plenty of motive. I had taken out a fifteen thousand dollar insurance policy, with a double indemnity clause that would become operative in case of . . . *accident!* If I were dead now, Esther would have money—and another man!

I PUSHED a laugh out between my lips, moving the dirty dishes to the sink. My cup smashed on the floor and I hurled the rest of the dishes after it, slammed the milk bottle against the wall.

"Damn you! Damn you!" I shouted.

And suddenly I couldn't stay in the house. I threw on my pants, grabbed my coat and hat and stumbled to the street. After that I walked. I had the revolver in my hip pocket. There was a madness in my brain that kept little spots of red exploding before my eyes. I reached the corner where I used to wait for the street car and a trolley came along and I didn't get on it. I just stood staring at nothing. I turned slowly and went back home.

A man's heart can't keep beating at fever heat for very long. Rage can't burn and burn in the brain without new fuel. So I became calmer after while. Abruptly, I knew that I must not betray myself like that. No, no there must be a better way. I laughed as I went to the drug store to call the telephone company. I had, suddenly, a swell plan. I'd fix everything the way Esther had left it, the

gun all set and ready to go off when anybody answered the telephone. I'd make her suffer a bit before she confessed and I killed her!

I had no doubt that Esther would come home. When Lily Snyder went back to her house she had told Esther that I was drunk, but alive. So Esther would know that her trap had failed and she would have to come home and try again. . . .

Well, it wasn't anything like I'd thought it would be, her coming home. She just walked in and smiled at me in the absent way she had sometimes.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Dave, getting drunk in the daytime, alone like that." She laid a hand on my shoulder as she went by to put her hat in the closet. "You ought to have waited until I got here."

Where was my practiced laughter now? My head sagged. I told myself *this is the woman who tried to murder you for another man, to collect your insurance.* But they were just words that didn't mean anything. All because she had put her hand on my shoulder in an old, familiar gesture.

"I was extravagant and got a steak for supper," Esther called, her voice fading toward the kitchen. "How'd you like some French fried?"

"Sure, swell," I croaked. I thought, *she's being nice to me to cover up on that other thing. She's trying to disarm me so that the next time she springs the trap.* . . . I wondered why had never doubted Esther's fidelity. I tried saying to myself now that Esther had been unfaithful to me and it made me physically sick. I got up violently and, waiting for supper, I kept walking up and down, looking blindly at books on the shelves, fiddling with the Seth Thomas and being careful to set it back just thirteen minutes. That clock was the first thing we had bought for our home after we

were married. . . . Would it be poison she tried next? I wondered. A wild courage came to me. I had imagined what had happened this morning. Esther hadn't tried to kill me. *For God's sake, Esther, hurry! Kill me and get it over with!* If only death would be quick so that I wouldn't have time to realize. . . .

I COULD hear Esther moving around in the kitchen, clanging a pan, clanking dishes. She came and leaned in the doorway, a cooking fork in her hand. I hadn't looked at her before. She'd got the works at the beauty shop, hair washed and curled and high-lighted with henna, nails, eyebrows. Something clicked inside my brain, something that sent me back four years to the night when Esther had first donned a red apron like that—to cook for me. Her hair had been crisp and close against her round, little head like this and her red lips had smiled at me in that self-same way, half mocking, half-inviting, as if we were lovers instead of husband and wife.

I went toward Esther with my hands groping for her. I put my fingers on her white, slim throat and shook her a little. She kept that smile on her lips. I . . . Damn it, *I kissed her!*

"For God's sake, Esther," I said, and my voice was hoarse in my own ears, "if you wanted to get rid of me . . ."

Her hands were pressing on my shoulder blades. She scratched my neck with the tines of the cooking fork. Foolishly, I thought that we were letting the steak burn. I could smell it. . . . We couldn't afford to burn up a steak. Not at fifty-nine cents. . . .

"What the hell are you talking about?" Esther demanded.

And I couldn't tell her. I hedged, muttered something about the way we'd been fussing lately. Esther said, "Wait a min-

ute." She went and lifted the steak off the stove, then she came back.

"I've been thinking a lot today, Dave," she said. "I'm not going to go on like this and we'd better have it out. Dave—" She set her hands on my shoulders. "Dave, I've been stepping out on you, but . . ." She went on so fast her words blurred. "Not what you think."

I dragged a hand across the back of my neck where it felt tired. "I'm not thinking anything," I muttered.

"This man has a lot of money—"

Then what did they want with my insurance, I wondered.

"—and he said he could show me a good time. I used to know him before . . . before I ever met you. I was lonely, Dave, terribly lonely at nights. I told you I was, warned you. . . . And finally, I went out with him. We were arguing about going one night when you called. . . ."

Esther's eyes were wide open, looking directly at mine, the irises shifting from side to side, looking first into one of my eyes, then the other. It sounds silly, but that's the way you do when somebody is so close. I didn't want to look at her. I was thinking about the fellows in the office and how they laughed about infidelity. Going home unexpectedly, they'd say, "I'm going to knock at the front door, then run around back and beat hell out of the son of a she-dog when he sneaks out. . . ."

I said, "I guess it's been lonely all right."

"Oh, it was, Dave, it was." Esther had hold of my coat lapels and I looked down at her hands, the finger nails pink and shining. Esther didn't hold with that business of making them look like they'd been dipped in blood. "Dave, you believe me, don't you. It wasn't anything . . . bad."

I muttered, "Sure." I felt dead inside.

Esther, who was so bright and shining, so different from those wives of other men who couldn't be trusted. Esther . . . I stumbled away from her, heard her feet, close and quick, behind me. I went into the bedroom and tried to close the door, but she blocked that. I whipped about.

"Get the hell out of here!" I yelled at her. "You and your rich boy friend! Leave me alone, for God's sake! I'll get out. I'll let you go free. You knew I would. You didn't have to try to kill me to do it!"

I FLUNG out an angry hand toward the bed. I'd made it up, neat as ever, hid the bullet-burned pillow, but I had the gun wedged where it had been before and the repaired telephone cord looped over the trigger. She looked where I pointed and suddenly I was cold and filled with hate. I watched her sharply, my fingers clenched against my thighs, my shoulders hunched a little. I realized that I was going to kill her. Not the way I had planned. I couldn't let the gun do the work that my fingers ached for. Esther looked at the bed, frowning. She turned toward me.

"I don't understand, Dave," she said gently. She saw my face and her breath sucked in. I could hear it hiss between her red lips, between her white teeth. "*Dave!*" she whispered.

I guess I looked pretty ugly. I felt that way. I reached out for her throat again, but not the way I had before. There was purpose now. I was going to squeeze that white throat until it popped. And Esther? She didn't look scared any more. She stared me in the eye and walked in between my hands, between my arms. I . . . I didn't touch her throat.

"What's the matter, boy?" she asked.

Her hands went to my chest in that old

gesture I loved. Her eyes . . . I . . . I told her then, told her all about the gun trap that had been set for me. She clung to me, trembling, a whimpering cry on her lips.

"No, no, Dave," she cried. "*No!*"

It didn't make sense, but she was frightened, not of me, but of the thing that had almost happened. I gripped her wrists and stared over her head and a curse came from way down inside of me. I went over and got the gun and put it in my pocket.

"Where are you going, Dave? What are you going to do?" Esther was frantic. She clung to me. "*Dave!*"

I patted her shoulder, grinning despite the rage that was inside of me. I was happy, happy.

"It's all right, darling," I told her. "I'm just going to put the fear of God into somebody. You can have the bullets out of the gun, if you want. I . . . I've got to confess, too. When you turned sour on me, I stepped out a little, too. When she tried to go serious on me, I told her it was you and me 'till death did something about it. I wouldn't marry her on a bet. . . ."

I left Esther like that. Queer, isn't it, what fright will do to you? I'd clean forgotten all this time that Esther usually slept late alongside me, and that, except for this appointment at the beauty shop, Esther, and not I, would have answered the telephone this morning, her head would have been on the pillow that the bullet went through.

By God, I'd have to be careful when I gave Lily Snyder hell, careful only to scare hell out of her and not hurt her. Lily Snyder who had set that death trap for Esther here in the house she had visited last night, trying to make death do something about me and Esther. . . .

SNOOPS

Flit screamed—



By
ARTHUR J. BURKS

(Author of "Prison Makes a Man," etc.)

*He was just a low-comedy
Scotty—but his twitching, alert
nose knew the bloody scent of
tragedy. . . .*

IT WASN'T because there was any sentimentality in me that I bought that blasted little black cuss. I just happened to have a pay day in my pocket, and to be passing the pet store where dogs were on display in a window. Now, I'm the sort of guy that gets a kick out of comedies. I can laugh myself sick over movie coppers getting knocked galley-west by blackberry pies. I like Mickey Mouse and the Silly Symphonies.

I wouldn't, probably, if my regular jobs didn't so often turn out to be heavy

melodramas and tragedies. I liked movies, but I didn't go in for a "busman's holiday" by watching movie dramas. Newsreels and comedies, those were my dish.

That's why the pooch got to me. He was a natural-born comedy actor, without even trying to be. But then, if you know anything about dogs, you know what a Scotty is like. He *looks* the part. Why Disney doesn't cast a Scotty in some of his comedies is beyond me. And I think one of the main reasons a Scotty looks so funny is because he takes him-

self so seriously. His eyes look out at you through black whiskers. He is underslung, covered with black hair. The only time a Scotty isn't funny, is when he's trying to be.

But if you don't know Scotties, this won't interest you, anyhow.

I went into the place, pointed at the Scotty, and said to the salesman:

He said: "Five dollars, officer."

"How did you know I was an officer?"

I asked him. I knew, all right, for my picture had been in the papers regularly, in the Blair kidnaping case. I had got the kidnapers, after which everybody seemed to be interested in what I ate, how long I slept, and what my favorite toothpaste was.

"Saw your pictures in the paper, Mr. Hirle," said the salesman.

Maybe my chest swelled a little at that. I'd never been really important before, and if the truth were known. I didn't really deserve it this time, because I wouldn't have caught that bunch except through blind luck. I'm no Sherlock. I can fight with fists and guns and knives, but clues can rub my nose and I won't even see 'em. I always thought that stuff was pretty much bolony anyhow.

I didn't swell my chest much, though, for the Scotty had come to the side of the glass kennel and was looking at me. His shoe-button eyes were shining. He knew as well as I did why people came into that store, and he was tired of being cooped up in that glass showcase. He wanted to be bought by someone, and he didn't much care whom, though he was looking everybody over and, maybe, for all I know, classifying them in his mind. I couldn't tell whether he liked me or not. If he did, it came to me, it wasn't because my pictures had been in the papers—though, by gravy, there it was, right there in the kennel, looking up at me from the paper that covered part of

the Scotty's floor. At that, he may have seen some vague resemblance.

One never knows about pooches, especially Scotties. I bought the comedy gag, tucked him under my arm, went up to my diggings, dropped him on the floor.

"THEY'RE the world's snoopiest dogs," the salesman had said, and now Scotty began to prove it to me. He looked me over, as though for permission, though he didn't care much whether I gave it or not, and began to take an inventory of my place. He smelled of the tobacco stand, of the coats on the coat-tree, of my magazines—detective and mystery stories—of my shoes. He nosed into the pocket of a coat hanging over a divan and nosed out a pocketbook I had forgotten about. He fiddled with the catch on the case which holds my liquor—which I keep for friends, being a teetotaler myself.

He stood on his hind legs to stare at a drape that hung on the wall. It was a figured thing, with dogs galloping over it, and maybe he wanted to play with 'em. Practising with him, trying to reach some basis of friendship, I took down a mirror and held it toward him. He barked and ran, then came back to lick noses with himself. Then he looked at me reproachfully and paid no further attention to his reflection, except to go behind the mirror to see where his new friend had gone to. Then He went on with his snooping.

That's what started me off on what began as playing, to pass the time. Scotty was more fun than reading, or going to movies, even when he just stood in the middle of the main room of my apartment and looked at nothing. It was a laugh, just to watch him. I christened him right off:

"Snooper, that's what you are. Your name is Snoops! Come here, Snoops."

He knew his name in a few seconds.

He was as smart as a whip. And he had been taught a few tricks by someone. He would bark at command, when he wanted something to eat. He would roll over when I told him to. He would do most of the usual, easy tricks.

I began working him out. It became absorbingly interesting.

"Where's my pipe, Snoops?" I would ask.

He soon knew he was supposed to hunt something, and he kept hunting until I was satisfied, and he was actually nuzzling my stinking pipe, which he didn't like a little bit, and I don't blame him.

"My coat, Snoops!"

In less than a week he could go unerringly to anything in the room that I named. He knew paper money, which wasn't so much, since money has a distinctive smell. I tried to fool him one day. I sent him into the bathroom for a shoe-brush, and while he was gone I put some dollar bills away under the carpet. When he came back I said to him:

"Money, Snoops!"

He ran all over the place. Then he stopped, sniffed the air in all directions, and finally began to scratch at the carpet—right over where I'd put the dough! 'S truth!

In two weeks he wouldn't make a mistake when I sent him to find something. He liked to snoop. When I brought home something new, like, say, a pair of hand-cuffs, he would look at 'em until I named 'em:

"Bracelets, Snoops!"

Then he knew what they were, and when I said "bracelets" he went skihooting around the place until he found them. I didn't take him around with me when I was on duty, not at first, because a dick has to have dignity, and Snoops didn't have a smidgeon, even when he was trying his best to look dignified.

I tried to arrest a mug for disturbing the peace. I got away with it, but I got a busted nose into the bargain, which, despite the fact that I smeared the mug's nose all over the place in return, didn't un-break my nose. I had trouble with it after that. It would start bleeding if I blew it. I had bloody handkerchiefs to experiment on.

"Blood, Snoops!" I would say, and he'd find a handkerchief, or some spot on the bathroom floor I hadn't entirely mopped up. I began to wonder if he couldn't almost be taught to count, but decided not to push him too far.

"Gat, Snoops!" I'd say, and he'd find my automatic, no matter where it was. If it wasn't in the apartment, he'd look at me with such an air of reproach that I'd take him in my arms and apologize all over the place. Snoops, as you may have gathered, was getting under my skin.

ONE evening my telephone rang. It was the chief.

"Mike Hargan, Boss of the Tenth Ward, has been murdered, Nate," he said. "Hop over and see what's what."

I was eager for that one, for I'd been wanting to get something on Hargan for a long time. I knew he was as crooked as a corkscrew, but had never been able to prove it. I forgot Snoops and hurried out to catch a taxi. I started off, when the cabby said: "That your dog, Mister?" I looked, and Snoops had followed me out onto the sidewalk, and was looking at me with that air of reproach. I didn't want to take the time to take him back. Time means a lot in fresh murders. I took Snoops into the cab with me.

He followed me up the stairs to Hargan's place. I took a look at Hargan. He had been stabbed through the heart. The murder weapon was gone, of course. There was a lot of blood around. Snoops,

in accordance with the best traditions, was gallivanting all around the place, hunting what he could hunt.

"Blood, Snoops!" I said.

He went to Hargan, looked at his bloody clothing with an air of distaste. I didn't like it either, so that made it unanimous. Snoops sort of trailed the splatters of blood, liking it less all the time, but true to his training.

Well, I turned that place upside down, looking for the knife. I didn't find it. I figured, when I did, that it would have fingerprints on it. Of course the murderer might have taken it away with him, but it didn't seem reasonable. If he happened to get caught, with it on him . . . well, he'd have had trouble getting out of it. Half absent-mindedly I said:

"Knife, Snoops!"

He started scurrying around the place. I forgot about him, while I looked for what I could find. Then Snoops started barking. I told him to shut up; he barked an answer, imperative, a bit excited. I went to see what was up. He had treed the knife, all right.

He was standing in the fireplace, looking up the chimney. He was covered with soot, I could see, though already so black it didn't make much difference—except to Hargan's carpet, and Hargan didn't mind, now. His eyes were as bright as tomorrow's sunrise. I knelt, looked up, began to feel around.

THE blade of the knife was still sticky with blood, so Snoops may have found it that way, I don't know. I don't know how a Scotty figures out things. But I took the knife down carefully, to save fingerprints, wrapped it in a handkerchief, and went back to headquarters, where I had the knife looked over. Yes, there were fingerprints.

"Don't tell me, Nate," said the chief,

"that after all these years you finally found a clue?"

"Sure," I said. "I'm getting better—if that's possible."

No use mentioning Snoops. What good would credit do him, anyhow? And he couldn't squawk to the newspapers. So I took the credit myself.

The fingerprints were studied. The chief said: "Flit Casso is your man. And listen, Nate, there are forty thousand dollars missing, see? Part of the Blair ransom money."

"Yeah?" I said. "That's funny, what was Hargan doing with it?"

"That's what interested us," said the chief. "We were getting close to him. If he hadn't got himself murdered he'd have been in jail in another ten days, for all his influence, or would have bumped himself off. And listen, Flit Casso will have a cast-iron alibi, in spite of these prints. Juries are funny, afraid of making mistakes, and this means the chair for Flit Casso, even though he has it coming. But, if we can find the dough, and tie him up with it. . . ."

"I get it," I said.

I had lots of respect for Snoops after that. I took him places. Let my friends laugh. I didn't even tell 'em about how he'd broken the Hargan case wide open. We didn't find Flit Casso anywhere, but we knew we had him bottled up in New York City, so I knew that sooner or later some of the trails I followed, the regular routine ones, would cross with his. I investigated a chicken-stealing, a case of amnesia brought on by the desire of a henpecked husband to get lost from his wife, an automobile theft, a dockside brawl that cost a stevedore his life, the burning of a warehouse for the insurance, and I used Snoops in all of them. In the chicken-stealing case, believe it or not, he found feathers in the thief's mattress. I'd never have thought of ripping it open

otherwise. The guy pleaded guilty and took six months.

In the amnesia case—no, he didn't find the guy's right mind—Snoops wasn't of much use to me. But he did a lot of looking around, just the same, and finally ran into some papers in a suitcase that proved the guy was merely on a freedom spree. I was a little sorry for that guy, for when we sent for his wife she said:

"I'll show that little mutt he can't run out on me for a blonde!"

She was wrong, for the guy had had enough of women, but for the rest of his life he would be protesting his innocence without avail. I think even Snoops was sorry.

The automobile theft . . . well, Snoops found keys that fitted the stolen car.

In the killing he found blood that, analyzed, belonged to the guy that did the killing.

In the "touch-off" of the warehouse he found shavings with kerosene on 'em, the scent so worn off that only a dog's nose would have found 'em, though our chemists didn't have to spend much time, after Snoops had done his stuff.

SO, SNOOPS became famous before I ran into the cross-trail I had been looking for. Of course, he had my fame to start him off, which I trust the little cuss appreciated. A reporter with a nose for news as good as Snoops' was for snooping, guessed the dog angle that was turning Nate Hirle into a Sherlock, and wrote him up. He even had a story "ghosted" for Snoops, for his paper. He called it an "Autobidography."

I crossed the trail of Flit Casso. I didn't tell anybody. You never know, really, who you're telling things to. By this time, of course, we found, even without Casso's protestations of innocence, that he had an alibi that would have satisfied any jury. A dozen people accounted

for every minute of his time during the whole day of Hargan's murder. But Casso didn't come in, just the same. Maybe he didn't know he had an alibi. Maybe he had another one and was afraid they would conflict.

Anyway, I started hunting again.

Never mind how I did it. Snoops was no bloodhound. I asked a lot of questions. I used stool pigeons, same as all dicks do, because they have to. Clues, usually, don't amount to a tinker's dam. Juries distrust 'em.

Well, it took a week. During that time, every hour I was off, I was preparing Snoops for his job. And when it came time the mutt was ready for it.

It was a lucky break, that was all, though I could already see the headlines: "Homicide Dick's Persistence Brings Results."

I wouldn't tell 'em I just happened to see Flit Casso on the street while I was checking on a call from an Irish wash-woman whose estranged husband was peeking through her windows at night.

I followed Flit Casso. He tried to duck me, but couldn't. Finally he stopped, whined, said I had nothing on him, and agreed to let me frisk him.

"How about your joint?" I said. "We've got enough on you, Flit, to send you up for ninety-nine years and a day, and electrocute you besides."

"Then you won't need to see me dump," he said, sarcastic.

Smart egg, Flit Casso. Called "Flit" because when you put your finger on him, usually, he wasn't there.

But when I put *my* hands on him, they stayed put. I have big hands.

I had him by the elbow. Maybe he knew about his alibis now, for he didn't hand me the razzledazzle. He took me to a dump on Tenth Avenue. Two rooms. Magazines and newspapers everywhere. The guy had had a cosy hideout. He had

been stretching his legs, had picked a place where he was sure the coppers wouldn't be looking; but of course he couldn't guess that an Irish woman wouldn't want her estranged husband staring at her at night, so he got caught.

We sat down.

"Let's talk it over, Flit," I said.

He grinned. "Sure," he said. I had frisked him, had his gats in my pocket. I had looked the place over. Flit sat down, his hat on his lap, to stay all day if necessary. He was pretty sure of himself. He looked at Snoops, but I guess he didn't have the latest newspapers, for he didn't give the mutt a tumble.

Snoops started gallivanting.

"Sit down, Snoops!" I said sharply.

Snoops looked aggrieved, but sat down.

"Why did you kill Hargan, Flit?" I asked.

"I've got an alibi—"he said—"air tight."

"Yeah?" I said. "How about the forty grand that Hargan took from the Blair kidnapers to fix the case for 'em? What did you do with that?"

"Don't know what you're talking about," said Flit.

I looked at Snoops.

"Money, Snoops!" I said.

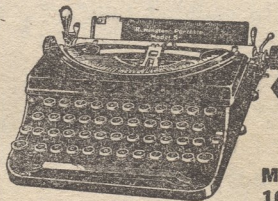
Snoops yipped and started snooping. Flit looked surprised. I began to tell him what a snooper Snoops was. I told him about the knife, the feathers, the blood, and all the rest of it. I added a touch that was ridiculous, but Flit didn't know that.

"I've drilled him for days," I said, "making him smell recovered Blair ransom bills. If the dough is here. . ."

I WATCHED Flit. He was watching Snoops. Snoops was whining. Flit began to lick his dry lips. Sweat began to break out all over him. His eyes were

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popping out. He was rigid, like a man hypnotized. Maybe I'd put it on pretty thick, but something was happening here. Flit didn't understand. He couldn't talk his way around Snoops, knew there was no use to try. He probably thought he had that dough tucked away where the coppers couldn't find it even if they tore the house apart.

Flit shifted. I grinned at him. But he didn't look at me. He couldn't take his eyes off Snoops.

"The pooch getting warm, Flit?" I asked.

Snoops had smelled the worn carpet, had put his paws on the door of a booze cabinet, had nosed into two closets, and now was apparently trying to read the titles on some books in a bookcase, books, I'd bet, Flit had never thought of opening. Snoops whined.

Then he started for the door.

Flit Casso screamed. He jumped to his feet. He caught me napping, but who'd have thought he had a gat rigged in his hat? It flashed out, came down, leveled, spat flame—and Snoops, without a bark, sprawled out tiredly on the floor and didn't move.

"That damned dog knew where it was all the time!" shrieked Flit. "And now, Hirle, you get it next!"

Flit whirled on me, but the gunman didn't live who could drill me, even with a gat in his hand to start with. Besides, he'd drilled Snoops. My insides turned over. Here I was a ruined man, with a swell career blasted, because Sherlock Snoops had been bumped off. I guess I saw red. I wasn't sentimental, understand, didn't have a heart—else how could I have plugged Flit so calmly and surely through the pump before he could blast me?—but life would be sappy without Snoops. I almost gave Flit, lying there on the floor, another shot, just for Snoops' sake.

FLIT was very dead. In the door, eh? I started for the door, but couldn't seem to get past Snoops. I refused to look at him, but then, I couldn't seem to see anything else. The room was dim—powder smoke, of course! My heart ached—natural enough—for hadn't I come close to getting croaked? Another second and Flit would have drilled *me*. That was the only reason. I looked down at Flit and said: "Rat! Rat! Rat!"

It didn't help.

I started to work on that door, as I would have started on Flit if he had been alive. I worked like a madman, trying to keep my eyes off Snoops.

Yeah, there was a false panel in it, which Snoops couldn't possibly have known about—though wherever he was right now, he *might* know—and a swell job of installing it had been done. Some time, long ago, Flit Casso had been a cabinet-maker, I remembered.

But I ripped the door apart, found the dough.

It didn't mean anything. I wished I hadn't broken down the door. I wanted, hating to admit it to myself, to close it, shut out the world, take Snoops in my arms and beller like a calf.

I guess, even with the door broken, and people crowding the hallway to see what had happened, I would have done exactly that, too—if the little comedy mutt hadn't taken the right moment to roll over, yawn, then sneeze—as though the open door had given him a slight cold.

There was blood in his black hair, between his ears.

Hell, I had to take him in my arms, then, didn't I? Couldn't a heartless copper rub the blood off his dog's head? How else could he make the mutt hold still?

THE CRIME CLINIC



THE little house was dark, except for a single light in the front room. The setup looked good to Finger Brady, and he was hungry enough not to mind much if there was even some risk to be run—so he sneaked up to the front porch and looked through the window.

The light from a kerosene lamp fell on the bent back of an old man who sat hunched over in a chair reading a newspaper. Finger couldn't see his face, but he knew the type well enough.

Quietly he crept to the front door, tried the knob experimentally. Sure—it would be open. These hicks never locked up anything. Softly he turned it clear around, unpocketing a snub-nosed automatic with his other hand as he did so.

Suddenly he stopped, and his jaw sagged. The old man had started from his chair, risen stiffly to his feet and turned around. He revealed a seamed, care-worn face. Finger cursed under his breath. "Jeeze! The old man! . . ."

For a moment the aged farmer stared at Finger near-sightedly. "Eh?" he said. "What's that? What d'ye mean—a-bustin' in like this . . ." Then he too, faltered to silence. "Why—why, it's Billy! Billy, my boy—gosh a'mighty I'm glad to see you!" As he came limping forward Finger hastily stowed his gun back in his pocket, breathing a prayer of thankfulness that the old man apparently had not seen it. "I was afeard you wouldn't know where to look fer me when ye came home," the oldster was going on as he pumped the youth's hand vigorously up and down.

"Yeah—yeah," said Finger nervously, his ears cocked for sounds outside the house. "Fellow down the road a piece told me where to find you. . . I—I thought I'd drop in for a chat. . . Ain't got much time, though. . ."

"No?" said the old man, "Why I was hopin' you was home fer good, Billy. Ain't got much

left here on this little farm—drought just about done me in. "Tain't like the other place. I had to lose it. . ." The farmer launched into a long story, while his son fidgeted in his chair.

Finger was getting desperate. He knew that state troopers were close on his heels. If there was any good left in the youthful bandit it centered about the remnants of affection he still bore the old man opposite him. Finger was not only afraid for himself. He knew that if the cops caught up with him they would shoot first and ask questions afterward. He bludgeoned his mind for an excuse to tear away. . .

Then he heard it—the slight sound of a footstep on the porch.

Finger waited a second longer. His hand stole to the pocket that held his automatic, closed about its grip. The old man rattled on.

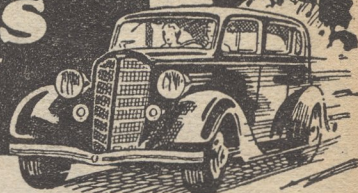
Suddenly Finger sprang to his feet. With one stride he was at his father's side. He reached down, yanked the old man to his feet with one hand, thrust his gun into his hand with the other. Then Finger raised both his arms. In a loud clear voice he shouted: "All right—you've got me—I surrender."

At that moment the door was burst violently open by a trio of gaping state troopers. Finger turned his head slowly, looked at the intruders with a wry grin on his face. "He gets the \$1500 on my scalp—not you!" he said.

There is a bit of good in every crook—or at least, in a lot of them. The struggle between their better and baser natures frequently forms the theme of stories in DETECTIVE TALES.



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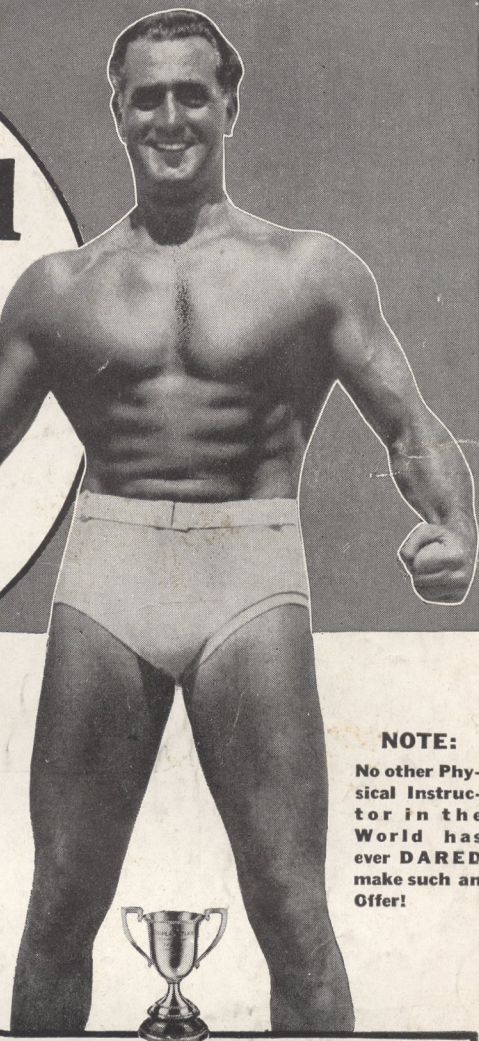
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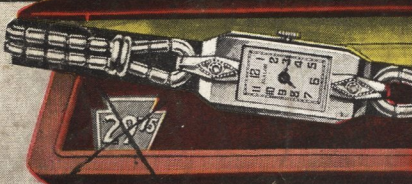
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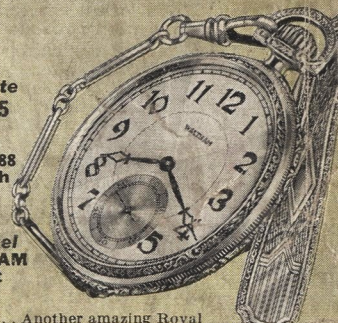


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