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SPIDER

A Doc Turner Story
IN THIS ISSUE

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by GRANT
STOCKBRIDGE
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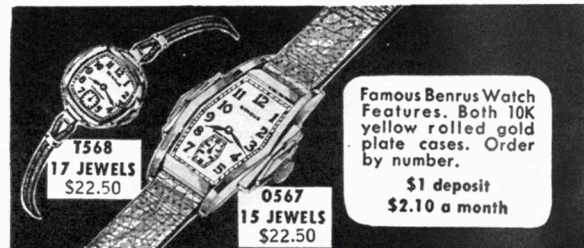


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THE MOST COLORFUL CRIME FIGHTER OF ALL TIME!

THE MASTER OF MEN! 10¢ SPIDER



Volume Twenty-Six

April, 1942

Number Three

for **L** Liberty

SLAVES OF THE RING

Book-Length Spider Novel

By Grant Stockbridge..... 10

The State of New Amsterdam, in the grip of a gigantic crime machine, was as fear-ridden as any Nazi-captured country! How could the *Spider's* little band of patriots, injured, starving and besieged by enemy mercenaries momentarily closing in, show the people the way to victory? It was at that grim moment when Richard Wentworth uttered words worthy of immortality: "PERIL IS OPPORTUNITY!"

CORPSES PAY DIVIDENDS

A Thrilling "Doc Turner" Adventure

By Arthur Leo Zagat..... 91

Honey Morse, glamorous night club star, went back to the slums to warn old Doc Turner of a new and vicious plot against his beloved people. But a killer's gun killed her in Doc's arms—as she uttered just one word!

—AND—

THE WEB..... Conducted by The Chief 6

Fagins fail, too!

THE SPIDER'S NEXT CASE..... 61

Music for the doomed!

STORY ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOHN FLEMING GOULD

MAY ISSUE ON SALE APRIL 3

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"LIFE WAS SLIPPING THROUGH HIS ICY FINGERS!"



A true experience of special policeman FRANK HAHNEL, New York, N. Y.



"IT WAS STILL DARK...and bitter cold on the waterfront...when I finished my night patrol," writes Mr. Hahnel. "I had paused for a moment to say hello to a couple of friends when above the dismal sounds of the river came a piercing shriek and a heavy splash. Then there was silence.

"WE RUSHED FOR THE WHARF. I yanked out my flashlight and turned it on the water. There in the icy river 14 feet below we saw a man struggling feebly...clawing at the ice-sheathed pilings as the out-racing tide sucked him away from the pier.



"QUICKLY I DARTED my light about and located a length of line on a nearby barge...and a life preserver on an adjoining pier. In an instant the preserver splashed in the water beside the drowning man. Dazed from shock and cold, half clinging to the preserver and half lassoed by the line, he was dragged to safety. Thanks to my 'Eveready' flashlight and its dependable fresh DATED batteries the river was cheated of its victim. (Signed) Frank J. Hahnel"

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ODDLY enough, instruction in the "art" of crime was commenced long before instruction in criminology—the science of dealing with crime. Police schools, and particularly scientific criminological laboratories are comparatively recent adjuncts to Society's ever present battle against those who seek to gain a living without honest toil.

One of the first cases of crime-teaching dates back to the years 1410 to 1435, during which period terror reigned in the neighborhood of a North Scotland town called Ballantrae. One Alexander Beane, known as Sawney Beane, eloped from a town only three miles from Edinburgh with the girl of his choice. They wandered north for three days, not eating a morsel, and finally, weak and exhausted, stumbled upon the mouth of a cave facing the seashore. The cave opening was visible only at low tide, and because of the nature of the jagged seacoast, no one had discovered the cave ever before.

They staggered in and fell into a long slumber. When he awoke, Sawney be-thought himself of food. Having no trade save that of ditch digger and hedge planter, which he had learned from his father (and which tasks he despised) he decided

to turn criminal. He had already picked a pocket or two, and stolen coins from stores and tap-rooms in his own village. But up in the wilds of Ballantrae, he decided to rob only travelers. He told his plan to his companion, and she agreed. That day he set forth and attacked the first lone traveler he came upon.

This was the beginning, for Sawney Beane, and the beginning of one of the earliest records of crime instruction. For Sawney and his grisly mate lived in that cave for twenty-five years before they were caught. They raised a large family which, in turn, intermated until the Beane clan numbered more than fifty children and grandchildren, and one or two great-grand children.

This tribe of robbers and killers existed as long as they did for three reasons. First, because of the freak manner in which nature had hidden the cave, no casual traveler or purposeful constable ever found it. Second, no victim of the Beanes ever lived to shed any light on the mysterious disappearance of travelers—save one alone; this last one was the cause of their ultimate capture. And thirdly, Sawney spent hours training each child in

(Continued on page 8)




GEE what a build!
Didn't it take a long
time to get those muscles?



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Makes Muscles Grow
Fast!


Will You Let Me PROVE I Can Make YOU a New Man?

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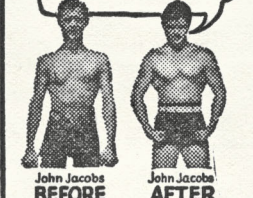
**5 inches
of new
Muscle**

"My arms increased
1 1/2", chest 2 1/2",
forearm 7/8".—C.
S., W. Va.




**What a
difference!**

"Have
put 3 1/2"
on chest
(normal) and 2 1/2"
expanded.—F. S.,
N. Y.




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did for ME!**

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BEFORE** **John Jacobs
AFTER**



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ress."—W. G., N. J.



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29
POUNDS**

"When I started,
weighed only 141.
Now 170."—T.
K., N. Y.

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ATLAS**

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ALL men who
would consent
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against him.

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I DON'T care how old or young you are, or how ashamed of your present physical condition you may be. If you can simply raise your arm and flex it I can add **SOLID MUSCLE** to your biceps—yes, on each arm—in double-quick time! Only 15 minutes a day—right in your own home—is all the time I ask of you! And there's no cost if I fail.

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(Continued from page 6)

various methods of attacking pedestrians, horseman or soldiers. The Beanes collected a large arsenal because, in those days, no traveler set forth without some form of weapon—either a dagger, a sword or a flintlock pistol. It was finally estimated that the Beanes killed more than a thousand victims. Accordingly, the Beanes' arsenal consisted of more weapons than the whole bestial family could carry at one time.

Sawney drilled his horrible progeny in leaping from tree limbs to the shoulders of unsuspecting horsemen. He taught the most effective manner in which to plunge the dagger into the throat; he worked out intricate systems of ambush; he demonstrated his method of slashing the tendons in a horse's legs, so that the rider would tumble to the ground to be the prey of a Beane lurking in the nearest bush. It is said that the victims' bodies were sometimes used as dummies upon which the blood-thirsty Beane children could practice.

Finally, one brave and stalwart traveler escaped after holding off fifty Beanes single-handed in a ghastly battle in which the man's wife was slaughtered. Due to his report, a picked body of four hundred of the king's finest soldiers was sent to exterminate the foraging cannibals of Balantrae. But the soldiery failed to find the cave entrance until blood hounds were employed. Then the king himself—James the First—led the company of soldiers into the cave and managed to capture the entire Beane tribe alive.

They were executed in three days in a manner deemed especially befitting the enormity of their crimes. King James himself—known as a particularly cruel monarch—planned the executions, and it might be said that a more horrible scene probably has never been witnessed by human beings.

IN CHARLES DICKENS' immortal *Oliver Twist* is a character whose name has been handed down until it occurs in most dictionaries and encyclopedae as the English term for one who instructs in the practice of crime. The character's name was Fagin. Most of you have read *Oliver Twist*, and if you have, you remember that Fagin engaged not only in the transfer of stolen goods, but he also taught children how to pick pockets, snatch purses, and so forth. Fagins are uncovered now and then in most of the larger cities of the world.

A crime school was discovered in Paris not so very long ago. Its equipment included dressmakers' and tailors' dummies fully garbed as men and women. Embryo crooks—kids from their teens on up—practiced snipping the straps of the handbags the female dummies carried, and picking wallets from the pockets of the male dummies. It was not easy to do, and the fagins who conducted this "educational" enterprise did not permit the trainees to work on live victims until each one passed a rigid examination designed to prove that the "operator" could snip a purse or take a wallet without its owner being the slightest bit aware of it. Such expertness was accomplished by electrically wiring the dummies so that the least error—a movement which would warn a victim—caused a series of bulbs to be illuminated! Imagine the time and thought that went into this device! Such ingenuity might well have paid far better dividends, and at the same time have been useful to society, in the field of honest endeavor!

In Chicago, just before the turn of the last century, two underworld families banded together for the purpose of creating a race of super thieves. Children of one family married the children of the allied family, and as fast as youngsters arrived they were "farmed out" to one

(Continued on page 104)

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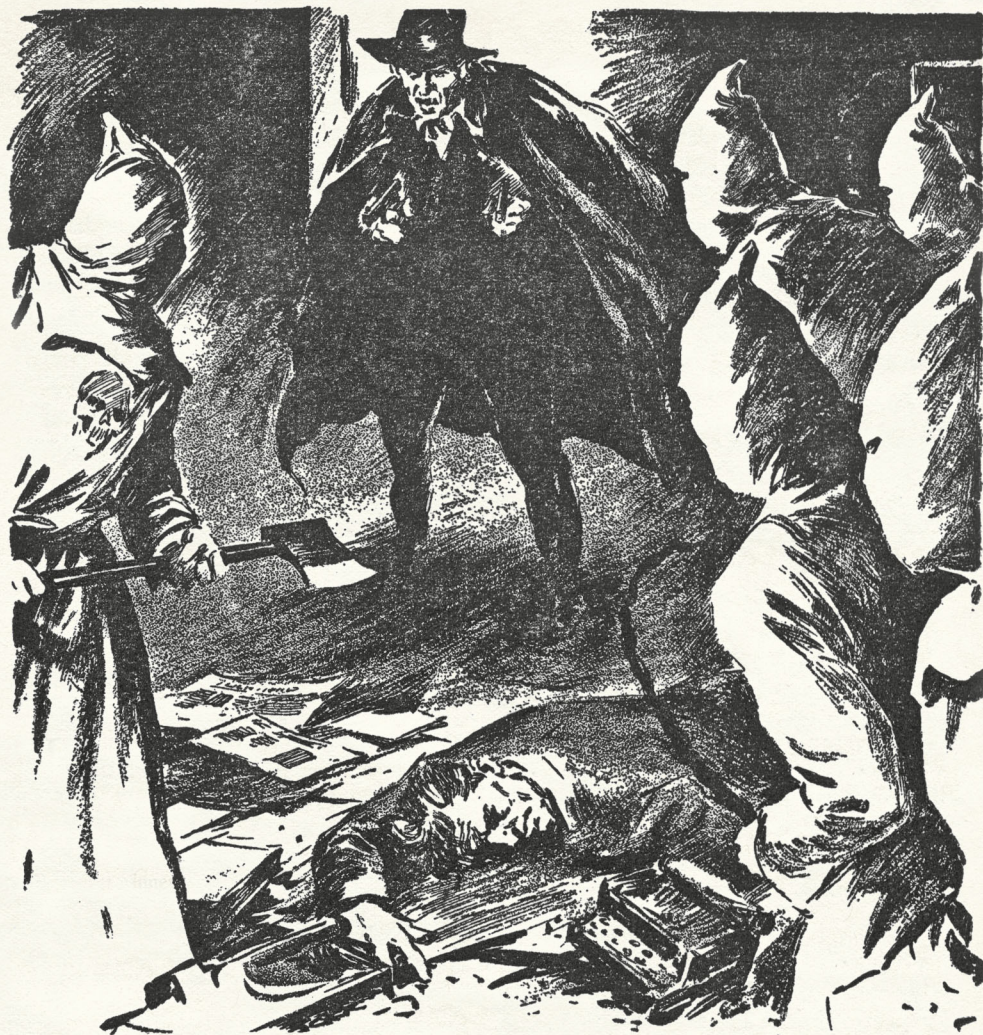
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Slaves of the Ring

103rd Book-Length Novel
Based on the Case Notebooks
of the Spider!

By Grant Stockbridge





"Gentlemen," came the Spider's steely voice, "try your lashes and your axes on me!"

An ill newspaper editor, his daughter, a hard-hitting reporter, and a tough news-truck driver — these were the tiny nucleus Richard Wentworth must build into an Army of Liberty, to save the fear-paralyzed people of the State of New Amsterdam from as powerful and ruthless a murder-clique as ever ruled a captured European province! Failure was certain, Wentworth knew, unless the Spider could soar to new heights of brilliance, valor—and leadership!

CHAPTER ONE

Death-Badge Hussars

THE girl was driving fast. Her lips were parted in an exuberant smile; the color was high in her cold-burned cheeks. She manipulated the wheel as she skidded on the glare ice of Maple Avenue. The skid was perfectly controlled, and her soft self-approving laughter tinkled out. It broke off in a gasp. She stabbed at her brakes.

Out of Twenty-fourth Street's darkness a coupé lunged into her path. It halted broadside across Maple Avenue.

The girl fought with brakes and steering gear. She stopped within a yard of the other car, batted open her own door. Out of the coupé, a man in police uniform squeezed ponderously. The corner light was brilliant on his badge, his cap ornament.

The girl snapped at him angrily, "Is it your job to cause traffic accidents? You police are getting more arrogant every day. You're supposed to protect citizens—not to endanger their lives at the orders of the political boss."

The cop said, shortly, "This street is closed to traffic."

The girl looked down the dark and empty width of Maple Avenue, then back at the policeman. "Why?" she asked.

The cop's flush was angry. "I've told you it was closed. Now turn around and get out of here before I give you a ticket."

She laughed at him. "For talking back to one of Boss Masse's stooges?" she jibed. Blonde curls peeped out from under a fur toque. Against the back-flung skirts of her fur coat, her figure was trim and shapely. "I'm Peggy Dean, of the *Sentinel*," she said. "The reason this street is closed might be news. I want to know why—and I want to get to the office which—as you know—is just off Maple Avenue, five blocks down."

The cop hesitated, then turned frowningly back to the coupé. His voice, and that of the driver, rumbled indistinguishably. Peggy Dean had a mocking smile on her lips, but there was a tingle of apprehension along her spine. She and her father, who owned the *Sentinel*, had been fighting against the increasing arrogance of the political machine that ruled the State of New Amsterdam. It was a lonely and unprofitable fight.

She peered along Twenty-fourth street furtively. For four blocks to the west and four to the east, there was a police car at every corner. Her apprehension turned cold. It looked as if the *Sentinel* were

the very center of the closed-off area.

The cop came back. There was a grin on his face that moved his thick lips derisively. The expression in his eyes as he looked at Peggy Dean's slim body was ugly, and somehow gloating.

"Sure, Miss Dean," he said, "you can go through. Go right through." He laughed. "I can't give you any news on account of it has to come from headquarters. But, maybe, if you go to the office, you can find out." He laughed without apparent reason. "Sure, you can find out."

Peggy Dean put a bright smile on her lips. "Thank you, officer," she said. She slid under the wheel, and the police car backed out of her path. As she drove past, she heard the policeman's thick guffaw break out.

"She thanked me," he bellowed. "She *thanked* me!"



EDITOR Frank Dean stood with his gray head bent over a newspaper-spread desk. His shoulders were stooped. His cheeks were sucked in, and his mouth was straight. There was no bitterness in its thin line, but there was a harsh, unyielding determination.

He was looking at a proof of the morning's front page. The headline was black and bold, and big type was doubled-up under it: a front-page editorial.

The headline read:

AMERICANS! Defeat Tyranny!

The slap of a hand, violent on his office door, jerked up his head. His eyes were a brilliant and piercing blue. He smiled at first as Peggy ran toward him.

"Look at that, Peggy," he gestured toward the page. "I've got the facts on them this time. They're trying to rig the election laws so they'll have a clean sweep.

We have to beat that new law. Bonlar's law."

"Dad!" Peggy's tight voice focused his attention. "Dad, the police have thrown a cordon around the *Sentinel*. It runs five blocks in every direction. They're stopping everybody who tries to come in. I identified myself—and the officer who let me through laughed at me. He was ugly. He said I could find out here why the streets were closed."

Frank Dean's face was suddenly pinched. He was looking past his daughter toward the door, and his hand lifted to rest on hers where it clasped his arm. The hand did not tremble, but it clamped down very tightly.

"They want to keep the circulation trucks from going out," he said, his voice odd. "I'll get my lawyers busy on it." He looked down at her and forced a stiff smile on his lips. "That means we'll have to spend the night here. Why don't you go up to the dormitory and try to catch some sleep?"

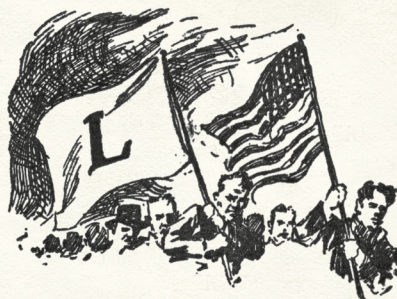
Peggy's eyes searched his face. "Dad, you're lying," she said.

"Tut, tut," he said, "the disrespect of the rising generation." He pulled one of her blonde curls. "Send Jonesy in to me, will you?"

The door punched open again, and a man stood on the threshold. He was big in the shoulders, looked more like a fighter than a newspaper man, except that his black hair was too long and sprawled down to strike a strong contrast to his blue eyes. His eyes were angry.

"Frank, I can't get a phone call through," he snapped. "Boss Masse must be pulling something and—Oh, hello, Peggy." He cut it short, laughed awkwardly. "I got Boss Masse in my hair. It's like people used to talk about Roosevelt, you know. The eggs are cooked too hard for breakfast, so it's Roosevelt's fault."

Peggy's voice was a softer imitation



of her father's, but it had the same forcefulness. "Little Red Riding Hood has grown up," she said, flatly, "or didn't you know? Who do you think you're fooling? Boss Masse is getting ready to take us over, with the help of the police force. Now stop playing around and drag out the muzzle-loaders. I'll be a good girl and mold bullets while you boys shoot through the chinks. And I'll save one bullet for myself, so the Indians won't get me. Listen, you two lummoxes, *get busy!* I tell you, Boss Masse is going to wreck this shop, and you stand there—"

Frank Dean said, "The cops let her through, deliberately, Jonesy. Get her out of here."

Peggy said, "Nuts."

Jonesy looked at her and a slow grin spread his mouth, but his eyes stayed worried. Dean was already on the telephone, snapping orders to the circulation department, to the stereotypers, to the printers. "Raid coming!" he rasped. "Lock all doors and close those steel blinds on the windows. It may be a fight, and—"

He broke off. There was a metallic crash in the outer office. Through the doorway, he could see a man with an axe raised over his head. He brought it down on another typewriter. The man wore a white gown that came to his ankles. He wore a hood over his head in which holes had been cut for eyes. There was a crude death's head sketched on his breast.

Frank Dean started toward the door, and checked. There were a dozen more men like that. They were coming toward him and each man carried something in his hand. Some had guns, and some axes, and some had ropes . . . and there were three who carried long whips of braided leather!

They didn't say anything, just came walking toward the office door where Frank Dean stood. Behind them, the axe crashed regularly, smashing typewriter after typewriter.

Jonesy let out a bellow of anger. He jostled past the editor and started forward. A whip uncoiled and lashed him across the face. An axe swung, and the flat of it caught him between the shoulders and drove him to the floor. A third man swung a brutal foot against Jonesy's jaw. He lay motionless. A little blood made a slow squirm out from beneath his face.

In a far corner of the room, the skeleton staff had been herded together under the muzzles of two shot-guns. The axe kept crashing as Peggy Dean thrust out beside her father. She had a tiny automatic in her right fist, and her hand was white as she lifted the gun and held it at arm's length. She squinted along the barrel and pulled the trigger.

The axe-man ducked, whirled around in a position suddenly awkward and frightened.

"I can shoot," Peggy said, and her voice was flat and hard. "I'll give you just one minute to clear out of here, the last man of you!"

No one answered her, but the man who had kicked Jonesy pointed a revolver downward at the back of Jonesy's skull. He tightened his finger on the trigger and the hammer came back slowly.

Peggy said, hoarsely, "*Drop that gun!*"

AT HER right, a man had a whip drawn to strike. There were three other guns pointed at Peggy and at her father.

Frank Dean turned his head slowly, "Put the gun down, Peggy," he said. "We don't want murder." His voice had a carrying vibrance and force. His shoulders were stooped and his head was not erectly held, but there was power in the man and stubborn resistance. He looked as strong and stolid as an immortal boulder that divides a rapids. But it was his will that was strong, not his body.

"We don't want murder," he said again. "Peggy, drop that gun and get out of here. I will settle affairs with these gentlemen." There was no irony in his voice; only calm assurance.

Peggy sobbed suddenly and her gun-arm sagged and she went toward Jonesy's unconscious body. A man yelped out laughter and seized her. He clasped her about the body, lifted her from her feet and flung her toward one of the steel posts that supported the ceiling. Others seized her and tore off her coat.

"Gentlemen!" Frank Dean's voice lifted harshly. "Your business is with me! Do men maul helpless girls?"

Peggy Dean was bound now, back to the steel post. A man stepped back and uncoiled a whip, but Peggy did not look at him. Her eyes were on her father and, slowly, she smiled.

Some one in the hooded ranks spoke. "Dean," he said. "Nothing you can say will avert the punishment that is going to be dealt out. We hope you learn the lesson well."

Dean said, sharply, "I have defended honest government. I have attacked crooks! I have spoken out against arrogant police . . . the same police who are condoning a crime tonight by letting you

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through and keeping everyone else out! I tell you, gentlemen, that dishonesty such as this ultimately destroys those who begin as its masters. Today, the police are crooked for you; tomorrow they will be crooked for themselves. And you, with the rest, will suffer. Gentlemen—"

A whip reached out and its lash bit into his cheek. Dean staggered back and caught the door post on each side of him with clawed hands. The blood trickled down to his throat.

He pushed out words with thick difficulty. "Do as you wish with me. Let my daughter go."

There was once more that yelping high-pitched laughter from the whip-man before Peggy Dean. He drew back the thick

hunched shoulders covered in the sweep of a long black cape. From beneath the broad hat brim, a ruthless face peered out.

One of the men in the white hoods spoke. The voice was no more than a whisper of horror.

"God!" he whispered. "God . . . *the Spider!*"

CHAPTER TWO

The Spider Speaks

AT THE whisper of the name of the *Spider*, panic struck through the ranks of the hooded men. All the world, and especially all criminals, knew his dread reputation. The *Spider*, lone

An amateur crime-fighter goes to town in MURDER IS MY SPONSOR! This gripping novel appears in the current issue of *Detective Tales*, our companion magazine—and Grant Stockbridge says it's a MUST on every mystery fan's list! On sale today!

leather lash. One blow of it could destroy her piquant face or tear her tender flesh with crippling lash. The man poised the whip. . . .

There was laughter again in the room, but it was laughter of a different sort. It was flat and mocking laughter; it was sinister and compelling.

From a far corner of the room, a voice whispered its challenge. "Gentlemen," it said softly, "I present you with a new victim. Try your whips and axes on me!"

Men whirled about with startled oaths, and they spread away from the spot from which the challenge had come. They divided as if physical force had rolled a path through them. At the end of that path there crouched a figure in black; twisted and misshapen it was, with

wolf of justice, appeared always where criminals sought to destroy the precious rights of humanity. He was jury, judge and executioner in one. When he had passed sentence . . . the guilty man died!

So, at the mention of his name, the hooded men broke apart as if a bomb had burst among them. One man dropped behind a desk and opened fire, but there was no courage among the others. Men who hide their faces and sneak out by night to flog helpless men and women are usually cowards.

They scattered, and the *Spider's* hands flicked beneath his cape. When they jutted into sight again, a heavy automatic filled each fist. In that single flicker of movement, he was armed and terrible. He faded sideways like a phantom and his twin guns crashed in answer to the

man behind the desk. Two long white gouges splintered from its surface, one to each side of the man's head. Another bullet smashed into the floor just short of where his knee showed beneath the desk.

The man's hands popped straight up into the air. His gun clattered to the floor beside him. "Don't," he quavered. "Don't kill me!"

He was the last. The others had already burst from the editorial room. Their cars were blasting in the streets and their voices lifted hoarsely, screaming out the news that the *Spider* had struck.

Peggy Dean's voice was sharp. "The whole place is alive with police," she said. "They'll be here within minutes, *Spider*."

The *Spider* laughed, and the sound was careless. "We'll provide them with a prisoner, Peggy. Dean, if I may suggest, a newspaper man ought to see the value of a photograph of this scene. Unmask our prisoner and give him a whip. We'll put him in the position that his underling held a moment ago, about to flog Peggy. Pull your reporter over where he'll be in the picture, lying face-down near Peggy's feet. A nice picture to spread across the front page, Dean!"

Dean let go his grip upon the facing of the door. His smile was one-sided because of the wound in his cheek, but his eyes were bold and shining. He whirled toward the newspaper people huddled in a far corner of the room and his voice rang out crisply.

The hooded man started desperately to his feet and plunged toward the door. A bullet fluttered the air before his face, and he jerked back on his heels. The

Spider reached his side in a leap and ripped off the hood. The face he exposed was pasty with fear. It was a thick-boned, brutal face. For an instant, he met the blue-gray coldness of the *Spider's* eyes, then he shivered and fell back against the wall, a beaten man.

It was not an empty name that had been given the *Spider*, who was known also as The Master of Men!

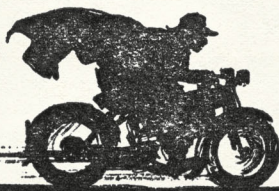
Frank Dean hurriedly made his arrangements and their prisoner was a limp and unresisting mannikin now in his hands. He posed with the whip drawn back, and the flashlight threw its white blinding light across the room.

At that instant, the door of the room hammered inward and police slapped heavy-footed into sight. A cry went up from their lips. Their guns were in their fists. They jerked into line on the *Spider* . . . and the flashlight gun let go again. Soundless, the brilliant light flared across the room. The police winced, covered their eyes. When they could see again . . . the *Spider* had vanished!

There was a wild furore of shouting and rushing feet in the editorial room as they hunted him. Frank Dean rushed a man away with the camera plates for protection, finally confronted the police.

"This man in the robe was the leader of the hooded men who broke into my office," he said harshly, then. "I'm charging him with mayhem, with assault with intent to kill, with trespass and assault and battery, with inciting to riot. And if any more charges are needed, I'll find them."

From the entrance door, a man called out cheerfully, "I say there, if you need





**RICHARD
WENTWORTH**

any farther charges, why not add the fact that the man is an escaped convict? His name is Mugsy Danagan."

THE police whirled toward the door and looked at the man who stood there, leaning carelessly on the ivory head of an ebony cane. His topcoat was laid across his shoulders like a cape, and his black *borsalino* was jaunty on his head. His face was keenly intelligent, crinkled now with amusement. His eyes were blue-gray.

He nodded, stepped back and ushered into the room a lovely girl who carried,



swung on her shoulders, a plate case and an expensive candid camera. There was laughter in her face also, and her violet eyes went immediately to where Peggy Dean leaned, still bound, against the post.

"You poor child," she said, and hurried forward to unfasten the ropes.

When the two moved into the room, there was a third figure that bulked hugely in the shadows of the hallway outside. It was a broad-shouldered and powerful man whose fiercely bearded face was capped by a tightly wound turban. He stood on guard, arms folded across his chest.

The man with the cane bowed jauntily before Frank Dean. "As soon as we can remove this unseemly clutter of police from the office, I'd like to talk some business with you," he said airily.

It was a lieutenant of police who confronted him, belligerence in every line of his uniformed body.

"Who in the hell are you?" he demanded harshly.

The man leaned on his cane, brows tilted inquiringly. At the doorway, the turbaned Sikh stepped forward and a scowl drew his brows into a knot.

"*Sahib*," he rumbled pleadingly. His hand wandered toward a knife in his sash. But a careless gesture of the *sahib's* hand stayed him. The man with the cane kept his eyes quizzically on the policeman's face.

"It is a legitimate inquiry, lieutenant," he said, "though somewhat crudely put. But it is not yet necessary to have a passport for entering this strange state of New Amsterdam, nor even Amsterdam City . . . though I've no doubt that Boss Masse would prefer it that way. So I'll merely tender my card. . . ."

He produced one with a movement of his hand so quick and deft that the lieutenant stumbled back a pace and clawed toward his gun. But there was only an oblong of pasteboard presented between two gloved fingers. He took it gingerly. He read it, "*Richard Wentworth*."

Wentworth bowed, "At your service. And your name, lieutenant?"

The officer scowled. "Brian," he snapped.

Wentworth nodded. "Lieutenant Brian," he murmured, and turned to the girl who had accompanied him. "My dear, may I present Lieutenant Brian? Miss van Sloan, Lieutenant. And my comrade . . ." he gestured toward the bearded Sikh. "The Rajah of Mydoran, Ram Singh."

The Sikh bowed his head stiffly and, taking the cue from Wentworth's sudden christening, stalked proudly forward, every inch a rajah.

"You may take your men away, Lieutenant," said Ram Singh, graciously.

"We no longer have any need of their protection."

Nita van Sloan and Peggy Dean were ministering to the still unconscious reporter. The editor confronted Wentworth with a question in his eyes, but it was a question with a smile behind it. He knew Wentworth's reputation, as did every news man in the United States. He knew that he was an amateur criminologist who frequently assisted the New York police. He could not know that Wentworth was also . . . *the Spider!*

ABRUPTLY, he turned away and gestured Wentworth into his private office, closed the door. "You've made a bad enemy in Lieutenant Brian," he said, quietly.

Wentworth nodded carelessly. "I intended to," he said. "The best way to confuse an enemy is to anger him. The best way to puncture arrogance, is with greater arrogance."

Dean stood very still. He said, softly, "You usually work with the police."

"I work with *honest* police," Wentworth said quietly. "Frank Dean, I have admired your battle against dishonesty. I'd like to indicate my admiration in some tangible way. You must be having a hard time financially, with the loss of advertising, and one thing and another. You've suffered heavy damage tonight."

He opened his wallet and fingered out a dozen thousand dollar bills.

Dean said, harshly, "Wait a minute! I'm not selling any man an interest in my newspaper! How do I know you're Wentworth? How do I know this isn't a trick of Boss Masse to get a finger on my paper? That little act with the police out there could be a trick."

Wentworth looked Dean fully in the eyes and the two men stood like that, one challenging, suspicious, cornered . . . the other quietly at ease, confident, strong. It lasted for a full minute and, into their

silence, there flowed the tramp of feet from the outer office and the harsh voices of the police.

Dean spoke first, slowly. "I apologize, Mr. Wentworth," he said. "I know honesty when I see it. What do you want in exchange for this . . . twelve thousand dollars."

"Honesty," Wentworth said quietly. "The knowledge that you can continue your brave fight. Nothing more. There is more when you need it. Wait, Dean," he said as the editor started to protest. "I was born wealthy. The money came to me through no labor of mine. Now, money brings power, and both money and power put an obligation on a man. Will you deny me the privilege of putting money to work in an honest cause? If you will permit me to help you, I will be able to feel that I am helping a great work. I know the danger you face, and the peril in which you walk. Let me share it."

Dean stood looking down at the money. His head came up stiffly. "For myself," he said, "I could not accept it. But for the sake of the fight itself . . . I accept, Wentworth!"

Their hands met in the solid lock of men who understand and trust each other. Wentworth turned toward the door. "Miss van Sloan has some pictures you might wish to use," he said. "They show the police turning back some cars, and allowing the hooded men to enter. The police are smiling, and one of the hooded men holds a whip."

From the window, a voice spoke with cold authority: "I'll take those pictures, now!"

Wentworth whipped about. There were three men on the fire escape outside the window. The one who had spoken held a sub-machine gun cradled against his hip. His finger was on the trigger, and his eyes held the hot flame of a premeditating killer!

CHAPTER THREE

Under Arrest!

FRANK DEAN'S lips shut in thin stubbornness, though he did not speak. Wentworth, at the door, waved a hand carelessly.

"Come in, gentlemen," he said. "If you have proper authority to take the photographs, I do not see that we can deny you."

The man with the machine gun sneered. His teeth were yellow and pointed like an animal's.

"We're police," he said, shortly.

Wentworth nodded equably and took a slow step toward him. It also placed him half behind the desk and put Dean to one side of the possible line of fire.

"Come in, come in," he said cordially. "You won't mind showing me your badge? I understand it's customary."

The machine-gunner said, "To hell with the badge. I'm talking, and you're walking the line." As he spoke, he stepped down over the window sill into the room . . . and his gun muzzle wobbled upward.

Those men who have seen the *Spider* go into action, and lived to tell about it, are invariably dazed by the speed of his movements. It was one of the reasons why criminals regarded him with a superstitious awe; why, the mere mention of the *Spider* could fill them with terror. They swore he could dodge bullets! He couldn't, of course; no man could. But he had trained mind and body to razor-edge keenness, and he invariably maneuvered his enemy into an off-guard position now—and the *Spider* acted!

As the machine gun muzzle jerked upward, Wentworth whipped out a revolver with a tapered barrel and a particularly heavy breech. The crash of his first shot was an instant behind the stammer of the machine gun. Plaster dust, chewed out of the ceiling, sifted down like powdered snow. Then the *Spider's* bullet drove through the shoulder of the machine-gunner!

The man was whirled like a top. Behind him, on the fire escape, a second man flung both hands high and reeled backward. He struck the fire escape railing, and his feet flipped up like an acrobat.* He made no sound as he plunged downward. The third killer leaped into the room with a revolver in each fist. At the same moment, Frank Dean caught up the telephone from the nearest desk and struck out with it.

Wentworth shouted . . . and had to get off his bullet fast. It was that, or allow Frank Dean to be killed. His bullet slid past under Frank Dean's upraised arm and caught the gunman dead-center in the chest. The man's leap was checked and he was slammed back against the base of the wall. He rolled over limply and did not stir.

Wentworth calmly flipped open the gate of his revolver and inserted two fresh cartridges. Frank Dean stumbled and brought up against the wall.

"We've killed two police," he whispered.

Wentworth smiled at him, and the curve of his lips was stiff. "We killed two men who claimed to be police, but entered like criminals and refused to show their credentials on our demand. Don't forget that, Dean. As a matter of fact—"

*AUTHOR'S NOTE: Richard Wentworth was constantly experimenting with firearms. The SPIDER had settled upon the weapon that suited him best, in the forty-five calibre automatic. This is not generally regarded as an accurate weapon, being intended for short-range shocking power, but the SPIDER had perfected himself in its use. The revolver which he used in this battle carried a .357 Magnum cartridge, the most powerful used in sidearms. It has a muzzle velocity of 1512 foot-seconds, and an impact of 825 foot-pounds . . . more than many rifles.

The door of the room was slapped open and Wentworth glanced over his shoulder. The gun was out of sight behind him, but he would not need to turn in order to fire. He could whip bullets with equal accuracy under his arm . . . but instead, he slid the revolver back into its holster without any movement of shoulders or elbows to betray the movement.

Four of the men in the doorway wore police uniforms, and the fifth, flanked by those men as guards, was plainly an official.

"What goes on here?" he demanded harshly.

Dean said harshly, "Three men tried to murder us, Chief Binder."

WENTWORTH turned about to face them, slowly, lest the four uniformed men use their guns. The machine-gunner was unconscious from bullet shock, and lay beside his dead

comrade on the floor. He would be safe for a while.

"I gather," he said, "that I am speaking to the Chief of Police of Amsterdam City?"

The chief's eyes focused sharply on Wentworth. They were small eyes, black and glittering, and they were too close to his thick nose.

Before he could speak, Wentworth snapped at him, "What are you trying to do, keep tourist trade away from your city? A man can't even visit a friend without criminals popping in at the window with a machine gun!"

A slow red flush swept up into the man's swarthy cheeks. "We can protect our citizens against murderers at any rate!" he snapped. "Those dead men are cops. And you're under arrest!"

"Balderdash," Wentworth said calmly. "A man can't be arrested for defending himself against a murderer!"

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He turned his back on the police chief and looked down at the motionless figures on the floor and, as he looked, he whistled softly. The tune he chose was "*Johnny Get Your Gun*." It sounded like a deliberate taunt, and Chief Binder reacted to it promptly.

"Disarm that man and put the cuffs on him," he ordered harshly. "He has killed police officers!"

Wentworth broke off his tuneful whistling with three long drawn wailing minor notes. Chief Binder did not recognize them, but most of the police in New York City would have identified them instantly. They were the signal call of the *Spider*!

Even as it sounded, a gun crashed in the outer office of the newspaper! A bullet drilled the wooden panel of Dean's sanctum high up near the ceiling and plaster dust sifted down. It was followed by a fusillade that filled the place with echoing thunder!



A woman screamed. It was Nita. "The *Spider*!" she shrielled. "Oh, the *Spider*!"

In a single concerted rush, the four police whirled and lunged from the office. Chief Binder started to follow them, but Wentworth sprang upon him. He whirled him about and slammed him up hard against the wall, so that his hat was knocked off and his breath jarred out of him. Before he could recover, Wentworth had the man's gun and had snapped handcuffs on the chief's wrists.

Wentworth's voice rolled out sonorously, "In the name of the law, I arrest you, John Binder, for trespass and for conspiracy."

Binder stared at him stupidly. "You arrest me?" he gasped in surprise. "You arrest *me*?"

"Exactly," Wentworth said, "I have the same power to arrest that you have. You can make an arrest only when a warrant is sworn out, or when you, personally, witness a violation of the law. I, as a private citizen, have the same authority. In this case, I am going to take my prisoner before the Chief Executive of the State, Governor Freeman, and demand his removal from office."

Chief Binder surged against Wentworth's grip, but the *Spider's* hand thrust him back sharply against the wall. His gray-blue eyes were like diamond chips.

"Do you want to resist arrest, Chief Binder?" he asked softly.

Binder looked into the eyes of the Master of Men and something like a whimper squeezed out between his thin lips. "No," he whispered. "No!"

WITH a jerk of his head, Wentworth signaled to Frank Dean and strode into the outer office, thrusting the dazed chief of police before him.

Nita van Sloan ran to meet him with a large manila envelope in her hand. "Here are prints of the photographs," she said. "They're good."

Wentworth accepted them with a crisp nod. There was warmth behind his eyes as he looked briefly at Nita. "Keep Ram Singh close to you," he said softly. "There is still danger. You know the rendezvous."

He strode on toward a swing door with Frank Dean at his heels, and they followed down a spiral iron stairway into the composing room, down into the pressroom and across that to the circulation department where a row of trucks was backed to the loading platform.

Wentworth flung quick words at Dean, "Haven't you some papers that you want

delivered in the capital, right away?" he asked.

Dean laughed sharply. "Sure! And I've got the driver who can get you there, fast. *Hey, Mike!*"

Wentworth tossed the handcuffed Chief Binder into the back of the truck, prepared to leap after him. "When the police return," he said softly, "just tell them that I went away with Chief Binder, and naturally, Chief Binder didn't tell you where he was going."

Binder started to shout, and Wentworth tossed a bundle of newspapers at his head. Binder subsided. Wentworth threw in another bundle. Dean came close to him, whispering, "You have some sort of working agreement with the *Spider*. That's obvious. He started shooting at the exact moment to help you." There was hope in Dean's eyes.

Wentworth smiled faintly. "That was not the *Spider*," he said. "I signalled to my chauffeur by whistling a tune suggestive of gun-play, and then using the *Spider's* signal to start him shooting. My fiancée, Miss van Sloan, recognized the *Spider* signal and so she cried out that the *Spider* was present. It created a very useful diversion."

A short, broad and spraddle-legged man in a black leather wind-breaker and leather cap came up at a run. He had a scarred and flattened face and his eyes went to Frank Dean's face with a look of almost idolatry.

Dean clapped him on the shoulder. "This is Mike," he said to Wentworth. "He'll take you where you want to go, faster than any other driver in the state, and more safely. And nothing will stop him, will it, Mike?"

Mike's grin was lopsided, and he spat a stream of tobacco juice on the floor. "Nothing never stopped me yet, Frank," he said.

Wentworth said, "Roll her, Mike. The Governor's house in Hickok."

Mike leaped to the wheel of the truck, and the motor coughed into a roar. The truck sprang from the loading platform and wheeled with a shriek of tires into the black street.

In the doorway, Frank Dean stood with his stooped shoulders pulled back and his gray-shot head flung back. For the first time in many months, he knew the thrill of hope.

With this new ally, he would win!

Frank Dean started suddenly and whipped about toward the room behind him. From upstairs came sharp rising shouts, and the angry voices of men. He heard the crash of an explosion and, soaring and terrible, a woman's scream!

CHAPTER FOUR

Hour of Trial

IN THE swaying, solid-sided truck, Richard Wentworth made sure of Chief Binder's bonds, jammed a gag into his mouth, and then climbed up beside Mike. There was a flurry of challenges and shots as they smacked through the police cordon, but Frank Dean had not exaggerated Mike's driving ability. In a few minutes, they had left behind all traces of pursuit. Mike rode the wheel easily, foot jammed on the accelerator. There was no speedometer, but Wentworth did not need one. He knew by the whistle and hammer of the wind that they were rolling close to seventy.

Mike cracked the window and spat accurately out into the wind. "That's Chief Binder back there, ain't it?" he asked casually. "First time I ever kidnaped a cop."

Wentworth laughed but made no other response, and Mike nodded gravely. "Not that you could really call Binder a cop," he said. "He's a crook." He spat again, carefully.

Wentworth swayed easily to the rocket-

ing of the truck; his thoughts were racing. He had known that corrupt government was rampant in the State of New Amsterdam, but even the *Sentinel* had told only a fraction of the truth. It had told as much as it dared. The truth was that, under a very thin veneer of legality, New Amsterdam was virtually a conquered province! Not even the steam-rollered small countries of Europe were more completely under the domination of criminals.

"Mike," he said quietly, "what do you think of Bonlar's law?"

Mike grunted. "The boss says it's no good."

Wentworth nodded. Most people thought like that, if it could be called thought. They echoed the opinion of some one whom they trusted. Bonlar's law would give the political machine complete domination at the polls, if it were passed. After that, there would be no political opposition in the state, and the criminal forces would no longer be checked. This situation was possible because the indifference of the people as a whole accepted political bosses and corruption as the established order in the United States. A similar situation existed in many places; in New Amsterdam, it was more blatantly criminal, that was all.

Out of the darkness ahead, headlights blazed suddenly. There were three sets of them, side by side, and they blocked the road.

"State cops," Mike grunted. "They're crooks, too. Want I should stop?"

Wentworth, for answer, reached to the holster beneath his arm and drew out his powerful revolver. Mike barked out a laugh. He whipped over the wheel and the truck lunged toward the ditch. There was a steep embankment of gravel beyond, for the barricade had been thrown up in a cut where the road had been scooped out of a steep hill. The truck rocked across the ditch, flung its wheels up on the em-

bankment. The angle was steep. Stationary, the truck would have toppled over of its own weight. But the truck was not stationary. It was still rolling at better than fifty miles an hour.

It was over in a brief swoop and jounce of movement. The truck cut a skidding turn on the embankment, slashed back into the road beyond the barricade and straightened out, rocking wildly. Mike doused all lights, spat again out of the crack of the window. There was suddenly a starred hole in the windshield, but the bullet had come from behind.

"They'll be on our tail," Mike said carelessly, "and if they got motorcycles they can go faster than we can. Ain't no car on four wheels can catch me."

Wentworth said, quietly, "I leave that in your hands, Mike. They won't do much shooting. They know Chief Binder is in the truck."

Mike nodded and, moments later, he slammed the truck into a right-angle turn. The car jounced wildly as it took a dirt road, soared around a hill, and eased into a shallow creek. The truck stopped in two feet of water and Mike managed to turn it around. They crawled slowly back toward the road. Three motorcycles swept past like comets. Mike tooled out into the road behind them and, lights out, raced in their wake.

Mike grinned crookedly, "First chance I ever had to drive with a motorcycle escort," he grunted.

Wentworth said, "It's all yours, Mike."

HE CRAWLED back into the rear beside Chief Binder and loosened his gage.

"Binder," he said curtly, "I know that Governor Freeman is Masse's man, too. But that isn't going to save you. Photographs of you and your men admitting the night-riders are already in the hands of out-of-state newspapers. One of them shows you grinning when a night-rider

shakes a whip. That does for you. Masse is going to throw you to the mob to save his own neck."

Binder said hoarsely, "You're lying."

Wentworth smiled and went on. "Also, there is a dictagraph record of you claiming that those killers were cops. Their fingerprints will identify them as men wanted by the F.B.I. No, Binder, you're done for."

Binder's face was pasty. An uncontrollable shiver jerked at his body.

Wentworth went on, "Masse doesn't like failures, does he? What will he do, murder you or let you commit suicide?"

Binder rasped, "Damn you, shut up! You can't scare me!"

Wentworth leaned back against the side of the truck and closed his eyes. The tires screamed on a curve, straightened out smoothly. "I gotta smash a parked car," Mike yelled. "Hold on!"

An instant later, there was a tearing jangle of torn metal and broken glass. The truck lurched wildly, hesitated, then roared on.

"We got two miles to go," Mike yelled back.

There was a spatter of gunfire. Four

bullets punched through the back door, and one of them dug into a pile of newspapers just beside the Chief of Police.

"Maybe Boss Masse prefers 'accidental death' for you, Binder," Wentworth said.

Binder said, sullenly, "All right, you've got me. Masse will bump me off all right, one way or another. And I got you to thank for it. But I ain't talking. It wouldn't do any good."

Wentworth frowned at him. "If you talked, I would guarantee to have you alive for your trial. And by the time that trial comes off, Masse will be on the defensive. By turning state's evidence, you could get off lightly."

"I'm not squealing!" Chief Binder snapped.

Wentworth shrugged and moved up beside Mike. The truck rocketed around three corners in swift succession, bounced over a curb stone, scraped through a great stone gate-way and rolled to a halt before a stately brick mansion.

"This is Governor Freeman's house," he said. "You'll have to move fast. There were cops at the drive entrance, only I came up the sidewalk instead."

Wentworth wrenched Chief Binder out

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through the door of the truck. "Follow me," he snapped at Mike.

He lunged up the steps of the mansion, and a cop jumped out of the shadow of a column. He had a gun in his fist. Wentworth strode up to him, his right hand locked in the handcuffed wrists of Chief Binder.

"Governor Freeman will see us," he said shortly.

The policeman's gun sagged — and Wentworth's left hooked to his jaw. He went down in a limp heap and Mike chuckled.

"That was a beauty," he said. "Golly, I got a good left-hook, but that was a beauty!"

They were before the white doors of the Governor's mansion, but the police were hastening up the sidewalk. A gun cracked. Wentworth had a slender instrument of surgical steel in his left hand. He used it on the lock, deftly, and the door swung open to his touch. The three entered, and Wentworth slammed the door.

He said, quietly, "I'm sure Governor Freeman is awake. His office seems to be at the end of this hallway."

A door stood open there, and a heavy-bodied man was on the threshold, gun in his fist. He pointed the gun.

"You stand right there," he ordered, harshly.

Wentworth said, quietly, "All right, but tell Governor Freeman that out-of-state newspapers, including opposition papers in New York City and in Chicago already have the story. If we're stopped now, there'll be a federal inquiry that will blow the roof off the state house and land Freeman in the penitentiary!"

The guard looked uncertainly over his shoulder and Wentworth moved steadily forward. Shadows moved within the Governor's office, and then the man was silhouetted in the doorway. He had a splendid pose, a leonine head.

"Let them in," he said impatiently.



HE LOOKED like a strong man. It was only when the self-indulgence of his mouth, the wavering uncertainty of his eyes became visible in the light that his weakness was apparent.

Wentworth's tone was respectful. "Governor Freeman," he said. "I came straight to the one man of authority in the state whom I knew to be completely trustworthy; the one man with the power to blow this whole rotten police conspiracy wide open: I came to you."

Freeman's head lifted. He looked at Wentworth and at the shaken police chief. He cleared his throat. "I'll hear you," he said arrogantly.

Wentworth laid the envelope of police photographs on his desk, and launched into a recital of the things that had happened in Amsterdam City. At the end, he turned to Binder. "The police chief had had a change of heart," he said. "He is willing to take his medicine and help you clear up the matter."

Binder looked up, startled, but fear was working in him. He said, heavily, "I guess I'm in for it. I'll talk."

Governor Freeman swallowed stiffly. He tapped the photographs with nervous fingers. "You have the negatives for these pictures?"

"In a safe place," Wentworth said quietly. "These photographs already have been sent to out-of-state newspapers. I know that, for the sake of your state's good name, you'd like to keep this quiet, but it is sometimes necessary to wash dirty linen in public. Governor Freeman, do you remember Coolidge, who became president? His first action, which brought him national reputation, was in the Boston police strike."

A startled light sprang into the Governor's eyes, and Wentworth knew that

he had planted a seed in this man's lust-for-power that would bear fruit . . . if only he could assure the man of protection and ease off the pressure that would be brought to bear upon him.

Before Governor Freeman could speak, the door of the office was batted open sharply. The man on the threshold had a stubby powerful figure. His mouth was savagely strong and the glare of his eyes was brutally direct. There were a half dozen state troopers behind him.

"Harper Masse," Mike mumbled in Wentworth's ear. "Boss Masse."

Masse stepped inside and slammed the door in the face of the police. Freeman started to speak, but a curt gesture with a thick hand froze the words on his lips. Masse looked only at Wentworth, but his words were to Freeman.

"Binder is a fool," he said shortly. "He'll have to go. Freeman, you'll remove him from office and start an inquiry. Binder's men got out of hand. They blew up the *Sentinel* plant."

The smiling curve of Wentworth's lips did not change under the shock of that news. He was estimating the man before him. Masse looked brutal and shrewd, but Wentworth was probing him for something more than that: for the mental power which could have reduced this state to political slavery. He weighed the man before him, completely calm, completely sure of himself.

What Masse had said would confirm Binder in his determination to talk, if Freeman could be prodded into taking charge.

Wentworth laughed softly, "So this is the man whose orders you take, is it, Governor?" he asked.

Masse did not look at Freeman, though Wentworth was aware of the Governor's stiffening under the prod of that goad.

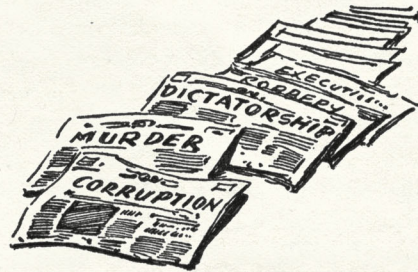
Masse said, heavily, "I have not yet given all of my news. Frank Dean and his daughter were kidnaped. You're

Wentworth. Your chauffeur tried to save them and was shot. I doubt if he'll live. Some one else was also kidnaped."

Wentworth's smile did not change, but his eyelids lowered a little. It made him look sleepy. The enemy had rallied swiftly and was striking back.

"The third kidnap victim," Masse said, smoothly, "was your fiancée, Nita van Sloan. I'm sure you'll want to hurry back to Amsterdam City, where you are wanted for murder, Mr. Wentworth. The state police will escort you."

He stepped backward and set his hand on the doorknob . . . and Wentworth knew that the men outside that door



were Masse's gun squad. It was suave but it was a death trap!

Wentworth bowed. "Thanks for your solicitude," he said. "I'll be glad to accept an escort of your state police."

Mike whispered, "They'll murder you!"

Police Chief Binder gazed at him with sudden contempt. Boss Masse and Governor Freeman wore the look of men sure of their way and of their position. If they had guessed that Wentworth was the *Spider*, they might have been more cautious. Those who knew the *Spider* always were most alert when the *Spider* seemed most submissive!

Nevertheless, Wentworth sauntered quietly past Binder, past Masse to the door and set his hand on the knob. He was smiling, sleepy-eyed, into Masse's face, and he did three things with lightning speed.

He thrust an automatic into Masse's right fist, and the man clenched it by reflex. Wentworth shouted, "Help! Police!" He whipped open the door with such force that Masse was driven, off-balance, against Freeman and the two men gripped each other as if in a struggle!

"Police!" Wentworth shouted at the state troopers. "Arrest that man! He's trying to assassinate the Governor!"

As the police poured past Wentworth, he drew his own long-barreled, heavy-breeched revolver. He leveled it at Masse.

"Drop that gun, you assassin!" he snapped. "Or I'll shoot!"

CHAPTER FIVE

To the Rescue!

BOSS MASSE did a thing then that the *Spider* could have told him was a mistake. He lost his head. In a fury of anger, he whirled around and flung down the automatic to shoot at Wentworth! State police were crowding in between them, and there was no time then to check the shot. The automatic blasted, at point blank range, into the face of one of the state cops!

The next instant, Wentworth had disarmed the political boss with a shrewd blow on the wrist. Governor Freeman, white-faced, shaken, shrank against the wall. The state police stared stupidly at their fallen companion and at Masse . . . and there were suddenly newspaper men at the door. One of them winked deliberately at Wentworth.

"I'm from the *Chicago Sun*," he said. "Could it be that there's a story here?"

Wentworth said, sharply, "There has been an attempt to assassinate Governor Freeman. This man, Masse, is a politician who tried to cover up a crooked police force. When Freeman told him off, he attempted to kill the Governor. Only

the Governor's quick thinking averted his death!"

The reporter's shrewd eyes took in Freeman's quivering face, winked again deliberately. "I hear my office got those photographs of the Amsterdam City cops," he said. "It looks like a big story."

He wheeled away, and other newspaper men raced after him. Masse turned to threaten Freeman and Mike slipped forward. He tried the left hook in the way that Wentworth had used it, and it worked just as well as it had for Wentworth.

Mike said, apologetically, "I thought he was going to hurt the Governor."

Masse was out cold on the floor, and the state police were still uncertain. They were Masse's men, but Masse had shot down one of their number . . . and Freeman was still governor of the state. Wentworth stood beside Freeman and whispered to him energetically.

"Now is the time," he said. "Seize this moment and you can boss the state yourself. Throw Masse in jail on charges of attempted murder and resisting arrest and killing a police officer. Then go on the air with a radio address and rip the cover off this whole thing. You'll be the biggest man in the United States!"

Freeman looked at Wentworth, then at the unconscious political boss. He shook his shoulders, got his head up. He whispered, "Arrest him! He tried to kill me!"

Wentworth did not rest. He got the state cops out of the office with Masse handcuffed in their midst . . . and Police Chief Binder with them. He thought that Binder could be depended upon to guard Masse well, since Masse had read Binder's own death warrant to him in person!

Then Wentworth faced Governor Freeman in his office, alone. "This is your chance," he said. "If you seize it, there's nothing can stop you. Fail, and you'll be used as a scapegoat by Masse. You take

care of the newspaper men. I'd take this slant, if I were you: You've been a blind fool, trusting your friends. Now you see your mistake and you're cleaning up the state, at all costs. Get that radio speech of yours on the air as soon as you can announce it. That will be self-protection. The solid citizens will rally behind you. You'll be the world's greatest reform governor! I'll be around to protect you, when you speak!"

He left Freeman with his head up, and a look of resolve on his face. The Governor already saw himself as president of the United States. If he cleaned up the criminality and found himself a man, who could say he would make a bad president? Many a man has been weak until the moment of decision was upon him. . . .

Wentworth raced from the Governor's mansion with Mike, the driver, at his heels.

"Back to Amsterdam City," Wentworth ordered, "and double your speed! Your boss and my fiancée are in the hands of Masse's criminals! If we are fast, we will save them, and save the state. If we are late. . ."

Mike answered that summons with a blasting roar of the truck engine. They careened down the driveway and took the first turn into the street at better than fifty. They bellowed through the city streets and Mike was grimly intent over the wheel.

"We'll ruin them, pal," he said, "if we can just get Frank and your gal away from those crooks."

Wentworth said, slowly, "I wish you were right, Mike. I wish you were. Freeman is a weak stick and the head man isn't in jail. No, Masse isn't the head man, or he wouldn't have come there in person that way, nor would he have been tricked by me so easily. The head man is the one behind Masse . . . and I have no idea who he can be."

Mike swore harshly, "But the Governor's going to blow his top."

"If the head man will allow him to live that long," Wentworth said softly. "We've got just one chance. Just one."

He did not elaborate and Mike said, doggedly, "We got to save Frank."

Wentworth said, "Yes."

But Wentworth planned much more than rescue. He knew the reason for the kidnaping of the Deans and Nita. That was a trap for the *Spider*, and he was very sure that the head man of this conspiracy, whoever he was, would be present at that trap to make sure it did not fail! So the *Spider* would take the trail, and walk into the trap, in the hope of destroying the Man-Higher-Up. That way, and that way alone, could he make sure that Governor Freeman would live to free the people of the state from the criminal tyranny under which they suffered! And Nita van Sloan was in their power!

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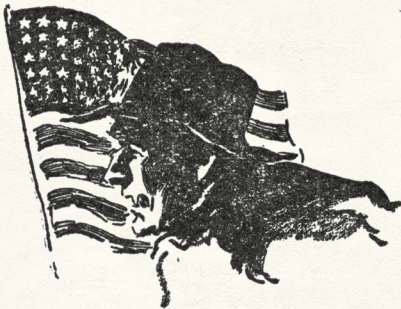
Wentworth shifted in his seat, feeling a sense of mounting tension. "Can't this truck go any faster?" he asked. His voice was muffled.



NITA VAN SLOAN lay, helplessly bound, upon the jolting floor of the truck. Beside her, Peggy Dean was dry-eyed and calm. She tried to talk lightly to lift the gloom that had settled upon them, but finally Peggy gave up the effort. Her father was flat on his back and his eyes, wide open, stared at the roof of the truck.

Nearby sat two men with drawn guns. There were four more on the seat of the truck up front.

Nita knew what despair gripped the two beside her. All their hopes were bound up in the newspaper through which they had fought the allies of crime, and political corruption. Now that paper and the plant in which it had been produced were wrecked. The hundred-thousand-dollar presses were smashed by explosions, together with the rest of the equipment. The *Sentinel* was dead. Nor did they have the ever-welling spring of hope in their breasts as Nita did. For she knew that her lover was the *Spider* . . . and he had never failed!



And Nita would not let herself think how slim was the thread of hope for their own lives. It was as slim as the evan-

escent scent of perfume . . . exactly that slim. In the office when she had been captured, she had sought desperately for some way to guide the *Spider* to whatever place was their destined prison. She had done the only thing she could. She had spilled a part of the contents of a slim phial of perfume in the office . . . and since then she had been dropping the perfume in slow dribblets through a hole in the truck floor. It would leave a trail that a man as clever as the *Spider* might follow.

But now the last of the perfume was exhausted and Nita gripped the glass phial in her closed fist behind her. As long as they continued on the straight road, she would hold it. When they turned off, she would drop the phial beside the highway. After that . . . well, after that, she must trust in the *Spider*.

Abruptly, the truck lurched to the right. The front wheels bumped off the paved road . . . and Nita dropped her phial. She thrust it down through the hole in the flooring. She could not hear its faint tinkle. She closed her eyes in a silent prayer. She dared not mention her hope to the others. They would, at any rate, have thought her insane to pin her hopes on such a slim thread. Almost, Nita's own faith was shaken. She did not even know whether Dick Wentworth would return to Amsterdam City. If he did, and went to the news room where she had been captured, would he notice the heavy odor of perfume? Or would it all have evaporated? He would certainly identify it as hers. And then . . . and then. . . .

Nita shook her head heavily. It had been the best she could do, but it was certainly futile. Dick Wentworth was only a human being, no matter how god-like he seemed at times. He would not know the meaning of that strong scent of perfume.

Once she had accepted that fact, Nita



The gasoline caught with a roar—scarcely three feet in front of Nita and Peggy!

van Sloan felt calmer. Somehow, depending only on her own strength, she would free herself and these others. She was the *Spider's* mate!

The truck was groaning up a steep, rough grade. It lurched into a sharp left turn, ground on for a distance and halted. The two gunmen got to their feet and focused flashlights . . . and guns . . . upon their three prisoners. The big doors at the rear of the truck creaked open and more men came in.

Nita stared into their faces, seeking to identify them. It encouraged her to think that there might be a reason for remembering their faces, an opportunity to use that memory and bring them to justice. She knew none of the men, but she knew their type well enough. They were criminals and killers. She knew that egoistic swagger, that snivelling brava-do. Men like these killed to increase their importance in their own eyes. They had no other vanity save crooked wealth. Such men were dangerous only when they listened to the promptings of shrewd leaders who knew how to capitalize on the weakness of others. But they were killers.

There was brutality, and worse, in the way the two girls and Frank Dean were hauled from the truck and dumped to the ground. The hoarse laughter of their captors was gloating. Two of them seized Nita by the ankles and dragged her to a shack squeezed in under an overhanging rock. Nita protected herself from the frozen earth as best she could, but ice and rocks cut her hands and back. She held her head up.

IN THE shack, the two men set leisurely to work lashing her in an upright position against one wall of the building. Her hands were stretched upward by a rope thrown over a rafter. Her ankles were knotted to the bottom beam of the wall. When the job was finished,

the men stood in front of her with ugly grins on their faces. Her clothing had been torn.

Nita van Sloan faced them with complete indifference written upon her countenance. Her eyes looked over their heads, ignored them. Whatever indignity they offered her, they would squeeze no more attention than that from her. But before they could molest her, a man's harsh voice rasped a command at them. The two started and stumped out of the shack, and presently Peggy and her father had been lashed similarly against two other walls of the building.

The men went away then, and the truck motor started up and rumbled its slow retreat. It was after the truck had vanished into the night that one man, alone, returned to the shack. In the center of the floor he built a pile of firewood and kindling. He set beside it a five gallon can of gasoline. He looked at the faces of the three helpless prisoners, then he laughed and walked out into the jet-black night.

Nita van Sloan drew in a slow, shuddering breath, held it for a moment. Peggy Dean's head was sagging and her father looked like a man already dead. Nita studied her ropes, and the bonds of the others. There was no possible way for her even to reach the ropes that held her prisoner. There was no escape. Pain began to crawl through her tormented body.

Nita's lips twisted. "Shall we sing?" she asked quietly. "It will help to pass the time until we are rescued."

Peggy looked at her with incredulous eyes. Frank Dean's head lifted heavily. "What?" he said.

Nita repeated her words and saw the pity in the editor's eyes. He recognized that there was no hope, but he glanced toward his daughter and then he forced a laugh. "An excellent idea, I think," he said. "Let us sing."

They sang until their voices were

hoarse, until the first feeble gray of dawn began to seep into the room. Then the man who had set the fire ran hurriedly into the shack.

He did not look at them. He upended the gasoline can over the fuel, flung down a lighted match and fled. The gasoline caught with a bellowing roar. In an instant, the flames leaped to the roof. The heat struck like a pile-driver. Nita winced, felt her skin crinkling in the assault of the fire. She twisted her head about, so that she could protect it behind an upstrained arm.

Nita closed her eyes and set her teeth on her lip. It would not last long, at any rate. Torture was not primarily the intention of the killers. Such heat as this would kill in a space of minutes. In a space of minutes. . . .

Abruptly, the heat was cut off from her. She twisted her head about, and she was looking into the face of the *Spider*, as he stood before her! It was his body that cut off the heat!

Nita rolled her head. This was illusion; this was a dream. It could not be Dick who stood there before her, could not. . . .

Wentworth's voice slashed at her. "Stand up to it!" he commanded. "You'll be free in a moment. Get out of here, fast!"

Nita cried out in sudden joy. It was—
it was the Spider!

CHAPTER SIX

The Brain

AS NITA VAN SLOAN felt her bonds drop from wrists and ankles, she stumbled toward the door . . . and became aware that Peggy Dean was before her, arms held out, helping her. She stepped over the sill and the coldness of the night air was both a tonic and a torment to her heat-seared flesh. She staggered clear, stood with her arm about Peggy . . . and saw the *Spider* spring clear with Frank Dean in his arms.

The *Spider's* head was up and his eyes were questing fiercely into the dawn dusk which clustered blackly under the trees, laced here and there with the red fury of reflected flames. It was only then that Nita realized something which, in her delirium of happiness over her escape, she had forgotten: No shooting had preceded the *Spider's* entrance. Their enemies were lurking about, stalking them!

Nita ran to Wentworth's side as he led the staggering editor toward the shelter of the trees. "What can I do?"

"Draw a gun and be ready," Wentworth told her grimly. "This was a trap set for me. The fire was not touched off until I was on my way toward the shack. Then I had no choice but to rush in . . . as the Brain of this outfit knew I would! We're undoubtedly surrounded."

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They were in a small cluster of oak trees now, none of them more than a few inches in diameter. Still, no enemy was in sight. The *Spider* was alert. He eased Frank Dean to the ground, motioned to his daughter to work over him.

"He isn't injured," he said flatly, "merely worn out . . . and giving way to despair. I thought he was a better fighter than that."

Peggy's head jerked up in anger. "He is the bravest man I know of!" she cried. "Because he gives up?"

As he spoke, Wentworth gripped Nita's arm, and with a glance, directed her eyes toward a rock cairn fifty feet ahead. The red fire light washed it. There was a glitter of metal there. He turned his head a quarter circle to the right, searching slowly. Peggy Dean was on her knees, bolt upright.

"If you had lost everything you ever loved!" she cried. "If you had labored for years to make a paper a success, and then have it blown up by criminals! If you had lost a fortune—"

"Then his courage was dependent on those things, was it?" Wentworth asked, harshly.

Nita touched his arm and whispered, "There are more on the left. There's a pile of logs there, men behind it."

"Same on the right," Wentworth whispered.

Peggy was struggling with anger and something she could not understand. This man had saved her life, and her father's. Now he was goading her with cruel words.

"He—he's a brave man," she whispered. "He is. Because he stood up alone against all those enemies. Single-handed, he fought them. He carried on when he didn't have a friend."

The *Spider* asked callously, "Was he doing it for personal profit, or for personal pride? Was he doing it because he hated somebody in the opposing camp?"

He was staring now at the rock hummock against which the shack was pressed. The shack collapsed amid a pile of leaping sparks and towering flames and illuminated the crest of that rock, and there was a steel gun-shield there, with the muzzle of a machine gun poked through it.

"Surrounded," Nita whispered. "There are machine guns in all those nests!"

Peggy was on her feet, gripping the *Spider's* arm angrily. "He didn't do it for any of those reasons," she said. "He did it because he's an honest man and he hates dishonesty! He did it because he believes in the ideal of American freedom and liberty and democracy, and those others didn't! He did it because he loves the people he serves!"

"Is he less honest now," Wentworth's voice was suddenly soft. "Is he less of an idealist now? Does he love the people less?"

Peggy Dean looked at him in bewilderment, looked down at her father. Frank Dean's eyes were open. He was peering intently toward the *Spider*.

"What is the source of that honesty, of that idealism, of that love?" Wentworth continued quietly. "Did it come from the newspaper plant, or from his work?"

Peggy said, "Of course not. It came—it came from—from inside of him! From his heart! His—his spirit!"

THE *Spider* smiled. His face had been deliberately designed to make that expression sinister, but because of the light within his eyes, it was not. It was, instead, warm and friendly.

Peggy Dean fell back a step. "Oh," she whispered. "Oh!"

Frank Dean fumbled to his feet. His movements were awkward, but his eyes were strong and clear again. "You're right, *Spider*," he said quietly. "No man has a right to despair, while his spirit and his conscience are still clean. I'm with you."

The *Spider* said flatly, "That's good. I'm going to need you. We're surrounded by machine-gunners, and they're intent on taking me prisoner. I'm going to let them do that, but I also am going to make an opportunity for you to escape with these two girls. It needs a man of spirit."

Frank Dean said, quietly, "I am a man of spirit. You may count on me, *Spider*. What I have done, I can do again. What I am, nobody can take away from me."

The *Spider* looked at him for a brief moment, nodded . . . and put an automatic into his fist. Nita had the *Spider's* other gun. The *Spider* was now disarmed, but he said nothing about that.

"I have a plan," he began, "which should work, and . . ."

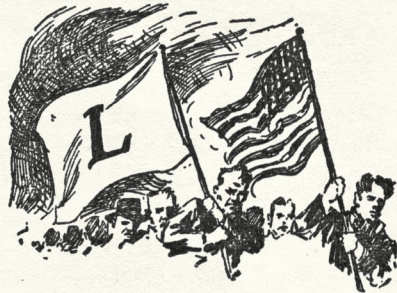
Lights cut him off, blazing blue-white lights that burned through their cluster of oak trees and blinded them. They came from four directions, so that no matter which way they turned, they were staring into dazzling brilliance. A machine gun sputtered and above their heads the small trees rattled and shook with the hail of lead. Branches and twigs showered down upon them. The machine guns stopped.

"*Spider*, come over here for a little talk," a voice called from the rocky eminence above the shack. "Come quietly, and it's possible you'll be allowed to depart the same way. It depends very much on you."

The *Spider* moved immediately out from the oak trees. His plan was futile while those lights blazed, while they were under the muzzles of those machine guns. If the speaker had only known it, nothing in the world could have suited the *Spider* better than to obey that command! For the *Spider* knew that now, at last, he was speaking to the Brain! To the man behind this entire conspiracy! This was the one man he must remove in order to make sure that Governor Freeman would carry out his "reform" program. It was

in order to find this man that the *Spider* had deliberately hunted up this trap!

Wentworth stood at the foot of the rock, a twisted figure in the cape, blackly silhouetted against the fire blaze, his face deathly white in the glare of the focused lights. His black cape fluttered stiffly in the fire draft. Even in this position, dwarfed below the rock, against the heat of the fire, there was strength in the figure. There was a strength that would endure despite all pain and difficulty; that would overcome all obstacles.



The *Spider* stood there, and waited. It was a long silence. Against the screen of dazzling light, he could see nothing at all. Not even the machine gun which he knew was aimed either at himself or at the three prisoners among the oak trees.

Presently, the man spoke again. The voice was not loud, but it had a quality of penetration. It reached Wentworth easily.

"You arrived a little before I expected you, *Spider*," the Brain said. "The man you were to follow back had barely reached Amsterdam City . . ."

THE *Spider* smiled faintly and did not answer. No need to reveal Nita's cleverness, nor how that the strong odor of perfume in the office, despite the fact that there had been no broken bottle there, had tipped him to the fact that it was a trail; nor the laboriousness of following the trail with a bloodhound until he found the perfume phial itself at

the turn-off, and discovered the hut.

The Brain's voice became slightly irritated. "You are not co-operating, *Spider*. I warn you, you will have to co-operate in order to win freedom for yourself and your friends!"

The *Spider* laughed then, harshly, and with mockery. He wanted to goad this man to anger, for an angry man cannot think clearly.

The Brain's voice lost its irritation, contained a certain respect as it continued. Plainly, the man had identified the *Spider's* purpose.

"You will not escape," he said shortly. "I require that you surrender to me the negatives of the photographs taken of the police and the night-riders. In exchange for them, I will give you your freedom."

The *Spider's* eyes narrowed. The pictures, made from those negatives, have been splashed over the newspapers of half the country. Either the man was lying, or else there was evidence in those negatives which had not yet been recognized.

"For myself," Wentworth said flatly, "I would refuse. But there are other lives to consider. I will consult with the others."

Without waiting for permission, he turned his back and stalked toward the group in the cluster of oak trees. The blazing lights made it almost impossible to see where he was walking, and he stumbled, purposely exaggerating the difficulties.

Dean said slowly, "I don't see what value the negatives have. I think the whole thing is a fake, for what reason I can't imagine."

Nita said, "We'll refuse."

Peggy Dean laughed nervously. "I'll admit I don't want to die. We have many prints from those negatives. But . . . whatever father decides is okey-doke by me."

Wentworth's smile was taut. The red sun was fighting its way up toward the

horizon and the sky above was becoming lighter. The efficiency of those blazing beacons was weakening a little.

"We will stall for time," he said softly, "until the sun is up . . . or as long as they will allow. You realize, of course, that there is no question of exchanging our lives for the negatives. They plan to kill us in any event."

Peggy shivered. Nita stood straight and smiling, her head up. Death had long ceased to hold any fears for her. She would cling to life with all her power, but if death came . . . she did not fear it! To Nita, death meant only release to a higher sphere of activity. She had consulted her soul and knew that death opened a door to . . . *eternal life!*

The *Spider* smiled at her briefly, and it was Nita who spoke for them all. "If it is death, then let it come . . . but at least let us fight for it!"

The *Spider* said softly, "We will fight!"

Dean looked slowly about them, at the blazing lights and the nested machine guns. His face gave no indication of his thought, though his eyes lingered on his daughter. It wouldn't be much of a fight. They would die too quickly.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Fight!

NITA VAN SLOAN'S smile was confident. She, alone, knew how many times the *Spider* had snatched life from the very jaws of death, though rarely had she seen those jaws as ugly—or as near as now!

"You have a plan?" she asked softly.

The *Spider* said, slowly, "You might call it a plan. It may work." He crouched down and began to build a small fire against the dawn chill and slowly, the others joined him. He talked for a few minutes, then looked at each in turn and asked a question. One by one, they shook

their heads. The *Spider* surged to his feet with every appearance of anger.

A voice called sharply from the rock crest. Wentworth merely gestured impatiently in that direction and went on talking to his companions. He swung his arms angrily, and, under cover of these motions, gave something clumsily to Peggy Dean. The sky was brighter now. The sun had pushed above the horizon.

Wentworth stood for a moment staring at the three who still crouched about the fire. There was a sag in Wentworth's shoulders. Finally, he shrugged. He

Wentworth raised his hands. His voice was bitter. "They already have my guns," he said. "I gave them up, trying to persuade them to trust me."

Dean and Nita tossed the *Spider's* guns carefully at the feet of the three killers, who picked them up and came on slowly, cautiously. They were careful not to get between the machine guns and the prisoners. At a distance of ten feet, they stopped. One of them came on, and singled out Peggy.

"The *Spider* gave you something," he said, harshly. "Shell out—right now!"

There's one gambler Dick Wentworth would admire! His name is Tom Kincaid—and he's honest. He's the hero of MURDER DEALS THE CARDS—a super-baffler in May *Dime Mystery Magazine*—on sale March 11th!

turned toward the rock and shouted:

"We accept!"

The Brain called an order: "Come to the rock and bring the Dean girl."

Wentworth started forward, and Dean came swiftly around the fire and put his hand on his shoulder, in restraint. Nita stood in front of him, gesturing. Wentworth shook off the restraint and went to stand by himself, back to the fire, staring gloomily toward the wreckage of the shack.

Wentworth finally called gloomily toward the rock: "They don't trust me to talk to you alone," he said. "You'll have to see us all at once."

There was a brief delay and then three men started toward them in a tight group. They came out from behind one of the lights and they had guns in their fists. Wentworth continued to stand alone, isolated, his back to the others.

A short distance away, the killers stopped. "Throw down your gun, *Spider*," the leader ordered.

Peggy Dean shook her head. "He didn't give me anything," she said. Her voice sounded scared.

"Shell out!" the man ordered again.

Peggy just shook her head and retreated a little way from his threat. It forced the leader to come toward her, and in so doing to turn his back on Nita who was, temporarily, cut off from the view of the others. She threw something into the fire!

The two killers who had stood back shouted a warning. They charged forward. "The negatives!" one of them yelled. "In the fire!"

As they reached the fire, the blaze exploded upward into their faces. Black smoke swirled out in incredible quantity and blotted out the entire scene like a curtain. The four prisoners and the three killers were invisible to the rest. In the darkness, a gun crashed twice. Then abruptly a man plunged out of the swirling blackness of the smoke. He had a long black cape on his shoulders and he ran straight toward one of the machine

gun nests—swerving not the least!

Behind him, another man raced. He had a revolver in his hand and he fired twice at the fleeing man. He was shouting at the top of his voice. The fugitive was yelling, too, but in the bedlam, there was no chance to understand either one of them. Only one thing was clear.

From the rock-crest, the Brain's voice rang out clearly: "*Kill the Spider!*"

It was not the machine gun toward which they ran that began to blast. That would have killed the pursuer as well as the man in the *Spider* cape. The bullets slashed into the fugitive from two sides. They beat him first one way and then the other. They chewed him into instant, bloody death. His pursuer hesitated, slipped to one knee. The guns ceased, and then he was staggering toward the lights, groping, a hand pressed hard to his side.

"They're dead," he gasped. "They're all dead, damn them!"

HE PASSED behind the blaze of the light . . . and suddenly, he was no longer staggering and feeble. With one tremendous leap, he reached the machine gun where it was nested amid piled up rocks. There were two men there, and they stared at him incredulously—then in stark fear. For they could see his face now, and they could hear the laughter that whispered from his lips . . . *the death laughter of the Spider!*

Before they could do more than recognize their attacker as the *Spider*, he was upon them. The gun struck across the skull of one, and the *Spider's* fist crashed against the jaw of the second. They spilled backward upon the rocks . . . and the *Spider* seized the grips of the machine gun!

In a single quick movement, he whipped the muzzle toward the crest of the rock where the Brain had stood, and opened fire! From his position, he enfiladed the machine gun shield on the rock crest. Three quick bursts, he flung into that covert, and he heard the death screams of men. A slight shift, and he enfiladed the second machine gun position on the right of the square of death. A single burst there, a second . . . and that gun was out of action.

There remained only the fourth gun, directly across the square from him, behind the black plume of the smoke screen. He called out a single word, his name: "*Spider!*" At the beat of his voice, his three fellow captives darted from the smoke pall straight toward him. They covered half the distance and, at his cry, flung themselves prone on the ground. Over their heads, Wentworth blasted bullets toward the machine gun on the far side.

Wentworth called again, stopped shooting, and the three reached his side before the opposite machine gun opened up again. Dean was crouched beside him, a

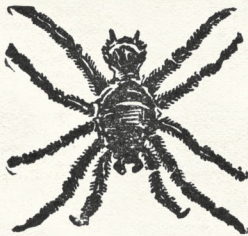




NITA VAN SLOAN

gun in his fist. He nodded, his eyes bright.

"I'll circle while you keep him busy," he said. "I'm a pretty good shot."



It was all over in a space of minutes, but when the *Spider* raced toward the crest of rock, at the first possible moment of safety for the rest, the Brain had already fled. For an instant, Wentworth stopped beside the slain men there. He pressed the butt end of a slim pencil to the foreheads of the dead, and when he had walked on, he left behind a scarlet signature which claimed these dead as the prey of his justice. On their foreheads gleamed . . . *the seal of the Spider!*

Swiftly then, the *Spider* assembled his company, hunted up the cars in which the killers had driven to this spot. He had two captives—the men he had knocked out beside the first machine gun. He tossed them into the back of one car, helplessly bound.

Dean held out his hand, "You're the bravest man I've ever known, *Spider*," he said. "Charging into a machine gun like that!"

Wentworth laughed. "There wasn't much danger," he said. "I put my cape around one of the killers as he ran to escape from me. Then I yelled so loudly they couldn't hear what he was saying. So they thought he was the *Spider* and killed him instead of me." He nodded. "I'm on my way to Hickok. Governor Freeman is going to make a speech and blow the lid off this conspiracy—if the Brain has allowed him to live. If he's still alive, it is my business to see that he doesn't die!"

He gestured toward the second car.

"You take that one, Dean, and get back to Amsterdam City. If you're wise, you'll keep out of sight. Nita van Sloan knows how to get in touch with Wentworth. He'll finance you, I imagine. He's a well-intentioned man with more money than is good for him. If you think you owe me any gratitude, use Wentworth's money to start up a new newspaper and continue the fight against dishonesty!"

Dean nodded crisply, smiling, but with determination. "I'll take backroads," he said, "and sneak into Amsterdam City about dark." They shook hands again.

The *Spider* looked at them with a faint smile stirring his lips. Nita van Sloan met his gaze gravely. She had her job—to guard and examine the negatives. She knew into what peril he went, but there could not be even a kiss of farewell lest her love betray the *Spider's* identity.

She whispered, "Good-bye, *Spider*. God bless you!"



WENTWORTH wheeled and sprang into the car he had chosen, sent it storming over the rise toward the highway. The motorcycle on which he had followed the bloodhound on this trail was hidden near the main road. He would leave it there . . . and meantime keep a sharp lookout for the Brain!

He hoped that the Brain would have been so angered by his escape that he would remain behind for vengeance. That would give the *Spider* a chance to avert the attack that he knew threatened Governor Freeman. But if the Brain had played wise, and gone on to Hickok, then the battle would be renewed there.

The *Spider* drove at a reckless pace. The car slewed and racked on the narrow road. It jounced frantically over the frozen ruts. If there was an attack, Wentworth was going to provide the enemy with as difficult a target as possible!

It was when he jounced over a creek bridge in the bottomlands and hurled the car at the sandy slope beyond, that the attack came. A bullet smashed through the top of the car, pierced the windshield and slammed into the engine. Above the hammer of the machinery, Wentworth heard no gunshot, but he knew that someone was firing on him with a rifle from a good distance off!

Swiftly, he glanced about him. The killer had chosen well his point of attack. There was no slightest bit of cover here. The small cliff that lifted above him was wholly exposed to fire, judging from the angle of the shot. He carried no weapon that could answer bullets fired from long range.

The *Spider* did the only possible thing. He pumped the motor to full speed, made the car weave as he fought to cover that hundred-yard stretch of exposed roadway. The sand shrieked under the clawing tires. There was another clang of the steel roof, and he heard the bullet sock into the body of one of his captives. Two more bullets smashed through the roof. The steering wheel broke under the impact of one, but he seized the horizontal braces and raced on. Another slug drove down through the instrument panel. The engine was missing badly. The reek of gasoline came back.

Wentworth battled on. He was almost at the end of the exposed stretch of road. The rifle probably carried only one more bullet, and four had already missed. There was a slow drag of time while the car bucked toward safety. The rifleman was going to be careful with his last shot; very careful. He. . . .

The steering post struck Wentworth in the chest. He was aware of that first, and only afterward of the immense tearing smash of the bullet that had struck him in the back. He tried to push himself erect, to control the car. There was no strength in him. He knew that the car

had stalled, and then that it was rolling backward down the declivity. He groped for the handle of the door beside him, and there was no feeling in his hand. He tipped his body toward the door, fighting, fighting. The movement of the car was nothing to him any more. Nothing meant anything except the effort on which he had concentrated his will—but to what avail?

Blackness was swarming into his brain, a blackness shot with the red fire of pain. Or was that fire in his brain? There was heat with it; the reek of gasoline. The car was ablaze! That was the *Spider's* last conscious thought. After that, the blackness was all-pervading.

The car trundled backward down the grade with increasing speed. The flames were blown forward over the hood. The sedan began to lurch and jounce on the sandy ruts, struck the cliff and caromed outward. For a moment, it teetered on the verge of the opposite declivity. It balanced . . . and then pitched outward. When it struck, there was a muffled explosion, and then the flames leaped higher, higher, hot and lurid and insatiably hungry.

Inside the wreck, a man screamed . . . for a little while.

CHAPTER EIGHT

A Slave Rebels

Governor WILSON FREEMAN had his audience assembled an hour ahead of time, and refused to admit anyone after that. Such were his orders: "Admit no one . . . except *Richard Wentworth*."

After the audience was assembled—all newspaper men and a few legislators—Freeman sent Lieutenant Governor Richards into the hall to conduct a personal search of every guest. He wanted no guns smuggled into that chamber. The plain truth was that Governor Freeman was frightened. He had been a servant, a slave, of the political ring ever since he had entered politics. He was used to taking orders, not to thinking for himself.

But it was more than that. He was acting exactly contrary to the Ring; moreover, he was exposing the Ring mercilessly for prosecution. The Ring had ways of dealing with men who tried to stand on their own feet. He would be ruined politically, unless he could unite the people solidly behind him.

Governor Freeman thought a little about the people. It was the first time

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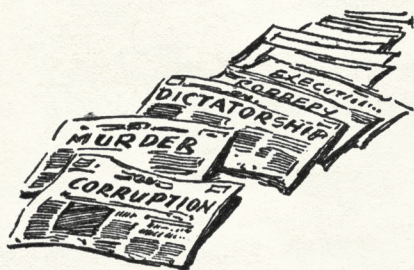
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he had ever thought of them as a force, as an entity to be considered. The Ring thought of people as suckers to be maneuvered into electing the right men, so that the Ring could line its pockets and take care of its adherents. And Freeman was a product of the Ring. But now, for the first time, he thought of the People as a potential ally, and it frightened him a little. Suppose the maligned and euchered people should weigh him and find him wanting?

Governor Freeman started to his feet in the private room where he sat alone, and started toward the window. He remembered then and stood in a protected corner instead. He took out his handkerchief and wiped the palms of his hands. Suddenly, he wasn't much interested in depending on the People. He would prefer to have the Ring behind him, the dependable and smooth-functioning Ring. He tongued his lips. He had forgotten. Last night, under the driving impact of that man, Wentworth, he had broken irrevocably with the Ring. He had to stand on his own. If he made a go of it, he would be president some day.

Wentworth had promised to stand by him.



Governor Freeman opened the door a crack and looked over the men crowded in the other room. There were a lot of newspaper men. He saw Senator Brown and Tom Marshall, the editor and owner of the *Amsterdam Tribune*. Lieutenant Governor Richards had almost completed his search for weapons, and apparently

hadn't found any. Perhaps he wouldn't.

That was all to the good, but where was Wentworth, who had promised to be here? Wentworth looked like a man who kept his promises.



ON THE sandy hill road, something black and crumpled that lay against the base of the small cliff began to stir faintly. The man threw up an arm; presently his head rolled.

He opened his eyes and looked up at the brassiness of the sun. His throat was cracked and dry. He moved a little and pain, like a hot sword, struck through his body.

He whispered, hoarsely, "Got to get up . . . Governor Freeman . . ."

With that word, Richard Wentworth struggled back to full consciousness. He lay there and thought, painfully. He remembered only that the car was ablaze, after he was shot, and that he had clawed for the catch of the door. He must have found it and fallen out of the car.

Wentworth pushed himself up on hands and knees and there was a hell of agony inside of him. He could taste blood in his throat. After an eternity of effort, he crawled up the wall and got on his feet. He began to walk. He took two steps and fell on his face.



GOVERNOR FREEMAN shut the door and put his back against it.

He had thought he heard a sound in the room, and his head was pulled back in strain that made cords stand out in his throat. His face was yellow. But there was nothing; and no one in the room. He couldn't believe that the Ring intended to allow him to live to make this speech, even though the boss, Masse, was in jail.

Freeman swore at himself, and slowly

his fears calmed. He had planned this all very carefully, and no enemy could reach him before he made his speech. Afterward, he would have the People solidly behind him. The Ring would be afraid to strike, then. He had pulled a good stroke in getting Tom Marshall of the *Amsterdam City Tribune* here. Marshall supported the Ring as a rule, but he was a strong man and he would be quick to take the side of a winner. If he could get Marshall on his side. . . .

Freeman had a sudden, happy idea. He would have Tom Marshall and Lieutenant Governor Richards in to hear him rehearse his speech and ask them for criticisms. He could count on Richards. He was an honest man who had been picked to give the ticket a color of decency; an honest man, but weak. But first. . . .

Freeman caught up the telephone and swiftly put through a call to Amsterdam City. "I want Miss van Sloan," he said, and gave a number. "Miss van Sloan. This is Governor Freeman. Can you tell me—has Mr. Wentworth left yet to attend my address?"

Nita van Sloan, at the other end of the wire, looked at her watch. Slowly, a pallor crept over her face. But her voice was steady.

"Why, yes, Governor Freeman," she said. "He left some time ago, and said he would be with you. He said it was a promise. And, Governor Freeman, Mr. Wentworth always keeps a promise."

Nita hung up then and there was fear dark in the depths of her violet eyes. It had been three hours since Wentworth had left her in the hills. He should have reached the governor in one third of the time. Had something happened?

Nita looked at the door which led to the street. She walked toward it. She began to run. . . .

Governor Freeman turned away from the phone and felt fine and a little boisterous. Wentworth was a man who kept

a promise. . . . That was a comfort.



A LONG a sandy road, a man was crawling on his hands and knees. Each movement was against intolerable weight and his face was twisted into a knot of pain. Now and again he paused and his head hung and his breath came in long, rasping heaves. He did not rest long.

The sandy hill was behind him though there were tinges of red on the frozen ruts. Ahead was the shrubbery where the motorcycle was hidden. After an eternity, he reached it. He had trundled it so energetically into the shrubbery. For any man, or even a strong boy, it would not be difficult to roll it up to the road again. But now, the *Spider* could not push it two feet over the rough ground. He finally propped it upright and crawled into the saddle. He lifted a foot and strained down on the crank. At last he summoned the strength to kick it down, but the motor didn't start. It was a long time before he could kick it again.

Ultimately, the motor started. He slipped it into gear and the motorcycle skidded and fought the short, sharp grade. The big bike lunged into the underbrush and the *Spider* slumped over the handlebars, barely hanging on, while the machine ran wild. Desperately he managed to right it and guide it up onto the sandy road. But it was headed the wrong way. It was some time before the *Spider* realized it, and turned around.

The motorcycle took the highway in a broad, ragged swerve, straightened out toward Hickok. The *Spider* reeled in the saddle and the motorcycle reeled with him. It skidded wildly, and a car stopped with screaming brakes, the driver white-faced, frantic.

The motorcycle wheeled on, faster, fast-

er. It wobbled and wove. It careened around a curve and slipped off the concrete, almost threw the *Spider* as it skidded back. The speedometer rolled up to sixty, wavered back to thirty, pushed up to fifty again.

A roadside sign read: *Hickok 10 m.*



G OVERNOR FREEMAN finished his rehearsal speech with a grand flourish. "I proclaim myself the champion of honesty and decency in government. I will clean up the State of New Amsterdam and make it the pride of the nation! I can do this only if you, the people, stand behind me. I am counting on you. I am your servant, and your champion, so help me God!"

Tom Marshall took his cigar out of his mouth and sucked at his teeth. "That's nice sucker bait, Freeman," he said. "Put that over and the *Tribune* will back you. Shooting for the presidency, aren't you?"

Freeman said, belligerently, "Why not?"

Marshall smiled slowly, "Nothing. I like to back a winner. You can count on me and the *Tribune*."

Freeman said, "That's swell, Marshall. That's swell."

Lieutenant Governor Richards said gravely, "I will support you to the end, Freeman. You need fear no guns among the audience. There aren't any."

Freeman laughed hollowly. "That's swell," he said. "Swell."

A man knocked on the door. "Ten minutes, Governor Freeman."

Governor Freeman went to the door with a little swagger, but his glance over the room was nervous. It was good to have men like Marshall and Richards behind him, but what he needed was somebody like Wentworth, quick of brain, and quicker with a gun. And Wentworth wasn't there.

Three miles out of Hickok, on the main highway, a motorcycle lay on its side, the motor still chugging. There was a group of men standing around looking down at it.

In the broadcast room, Tom Marshall spoke in Governor Freeman's ear. "You think the Ring is going to let you make this speech?"

Freeman said, emptily, "They can't stop me with anything short of murder!"

Marshall chuckled. "What's wrong with murder?"

The radio man said, respectfully, "One minute, Governor."

Freeman took his place in front of the microphone and rustled the papers of his speech.

There was a guard of state police outside the door of the broadcast room. The officer at the outer door spoke sharply: "You can't come in. Governor's orders."

A voice spoke, thin with strain. "He'll admit me. I'm . . . Richard Wentworth."

The officer hesitated. "Guy says he's Wentworth," he called.

The sergeant answered, "Pass him."

The door opened and Wentworth came in. He walked with the slow step of an old man. His shoulders were braced back rigidly, and there was a deathly pallor in his face. He kept dabbing a handkerchief at his lips.

The state police fell back from his path, and one of them hurriedly opened the door of the broadcast room. Wentworth walked in, and stood just inside the door. Governor Freeman looked up and saw him and relief relaxed all the tautness of his body. He seemed suddenly larger, and more vigorous.

A radio announcer said, submissively, "Ladies and Gentlemen, the Governor of New Amsterdam."

Governor Freeman cleared his throat. He picked up his speech . . . and a stunned look crossed his face. He half-turned his

head, and then he pitched forward across the table. The microphone turned over with a crash.

A man said hoarsely, "Good God—he's dead!"

CHAPTER NINE

Triumph—For Crime!

AS GOVERNOR FREEMAN toppled forward, Wentworth's hand snapped to a gun beneath his arm and he flipped it into sight.

"Let no one move!" he ordered harshly. "Governor Freeman has been murdered by the Ring because he was going to expose it. Senator Brown, have you the courage to read his speech to the people?"

Senator Brown swung toward the gaunt man by the door, the man who looked like a walking corpse. There was a thread of blood at the corner of Wentworth's mouth.

Brown said, hoarsely, "Freeman was going to expose the Ring?"

Wentworth nodded stiffly. It was as if he dared do no more than that. As if his neck were fragile. His eyes probed those of Senator Brown, who was a member of the opposition party . . . its leading member in the Senate.

Slowly, Brown's face hardened in resolve. "You bet your life I will!" he said harshly. "Give me that speech!"

Wentworth's voice lifted: "I'll shoot

the first man who stirs! You must pardon this urgency, but Governor Freeman has been murdered. You will understand why. And you will understand that I will not hesitate to shoot!"

The newspaper men, the entire audience stood rigid. A few eyes stared angrily, or in fright, at Wentworth. One newspaper man dared to wink. Senator Brown cleared his throat, said harshly, "Announce me!"

The radio man's voice shook a little. "Due to an unforeseen emergency," he said rapidly, "Governor Freeman was unable to make his speech. It will be made instead by Senator Brown. Ladies and gentlemen, Senator Brown!"

Brown moved to the microphone, and the glass of a window smashed. Senator Brown's head jerked over on his shoulder. For an instant, he stood that way, his head wrenched awkwardly out of line. Then, as if the weight of it were too much, he toppled over in that direction. One leg lifted stiffly. He jarred the floor as he fell.

There was no holding the crowd in that moment. A thrust hurled Wentworth to the floor. Against the trampling feet of panic-stricken men he fought toward the table where the speech lay, where the microphone stood. He reached it after an eternity of struggle.

The speech was a charred heap of ashes. The last flame was just flickering out.



NO FINER DRINK ON SHIP OR SHORE



In the doorway, there was a sudden harsh order. "Arrest that man! He killed Senator Brown!"

Wentworth turned about and saw Boss Masse standing beside the door, directing the state police toward him. A fist struck him in the chest, and he coughed violently. His mouth was suddenly full of blood. He fell straight forward.



OUTSIDE the building, Nita van Sloan waited behind the wheel of the car she had driven at frantic speed over the Amsterdam City-Hickok highway. She had found Wentworth just after the motorcycle had fallen beneath him and had snatched him to safety.

But Wentworth had insisted on coming on. He was a man who kept his promises . . . but more than that, he had known that there would be an attempt to kill Governor Freeman. He had hoped to save him, though he himself was on the brink of death. Nita had done the best for him that she could, but the wound was grave.

So Nita clenched the wheel with white-knuckled hands and waited . . . and waited. She started at a sudden rush of men from the doorway of the building. There was terror in their faces. A newspaper man she identified by sight darted into a drug store. There was a mingled roar of starting cars as men raced away from the scene.

Nita beat her fists lightly on the wheel. No doubt what that meant. Freeman had been killed in spite of Wentworth's presence, and . . . but what could Dick do then? He had staked everything on this one move, and it was a failure. Nita pushed out from under the wheel, started resolutely toward the entrance of the building. She checked there. Three state police were striding energetically forward and they carried Wentworth among them, a Wentworth whose shirt front was

stained red, whose feet dragged the floor. The faces of the state police were cruelly set. The leader carried a gun in his hand.

Nita looked swiftly about her. There was a state police car at the curb. Without a moment's pause, she ran behind it, crouched there with a gun in her fist.

The state police came straight across the walk. The leader opened the door of the tonneau.

"Chuck him in," he said brutally. "It doesn't matter if he dies, the louse."

The two who were carrying Wentworth threw him into the back of the car. Nita gasped, and went into action. With a quick jump, she was behind the wheel and kicking the motor to life. The sergeant of the state police whirled about with his gun lifting, and Nita squeezed the trigger of her automatic. The sergeant's hat leaped on his head, and he sagged to his knees. Fear was quick and white on his face.

Nita slammed the car into gear and whipped it out from the curb. There were three shots behind her. Once she heard the clang of a bullet on steel, then she was around the corner and flying with mounting speed down the back streets of Hickok.

Nita raced for three miles through the city before she shook off the pursuit and all that time, she could not look after Wentworth . . . and he did not stir. She doubled again on her trail, and saw a doctor's sign in the window of an apartment house. The name was Leiboski.

Nita bit her lips and tried to find within herself the answer to her problem. But she had to trust some one. She had to. She looked again at the sign in the window. She sobbed and flung open the door, rolled Wentworth's heavy body to a sitting position on the cushion. Somehow, she got him on his feet, and drew his arm about her shoulders. Somehow, she made the twenty feet to the door of the doctor's office and leaned against the wall while she rang the bell.

The door opened a narrow slot, and a man's eyes, behind thick glasses, peered out at her. His hair was black, streaked with gray.

"Please," Nita whispered. "He's dying."

The eyes blinked; abruptly the door was whipped open. "You're probably criminals," the man said harshly, "but I can't let him die on my doorstep. Bring him in."

He helped Nita carry him into his surgery. They stretched him face down on the operating table. The doctor looked up at Nita. There was fright and a question in his eyes.

"I'll have to call the police," he said.

Nita looked at him and saw the lines that were chiseled into his face, and the kindness that was in his eyes . . . and the fear that had loosened all the muscles of his jaw.

She said, slowly, "Tend him first. Then, if you must call the police, you must. This man was fighting the political ring in the city. He is not a criminal, except that he was fighting Boss Masse and the rest. You know what the police will do to him, if you call them."

Dr. Leiboski straightened and took a slow step back from the table. His tongue touched his lip. "*Gott*," he whispered. "Here, too! Here, too!"

Nita tugged at Wentworth's coat, caught up a pair of surgical scissors and sliced his shirt and under-shirt, cut away the bandage she had improvised.

"Four thousand miles I come," the doctor whispered. "In America, I say, I will be free. And now . . . here, too. I tend to my own business. I do not bother people and I think, they should leave me alone. And now . . ." He reached for instruments in the sterilizer.

Nita had laid Wentworth's back bare. She looked directly at the doctor. She began to speak softly, and harshness crept into her voice. "Have men ever had

liberty without fighting for it?" she asked. "Can you run away from the tyranny in your own heart? Are people different in different parts of the world? There are always those who are brutal and greedy and who will seize power if the people permit. The difference is that here in America we can preserve our freedom if the people really wish it. It's fight, or be ruled! We do what our heart tells us is right. We are fighting Boss Masse. You must do what your heart tells you is right . . . but first, save this man's life!"



NITA strode out of the surgery. She ran out of the apartment and to the state police car in the street. She sprang behind the wheel and drove it wildly through the city. There were hot tears on her cheeks, but she brushed them aside. A patrolman shouted and fired after her, but she ignored him. She swept on until she reached the river docks. Then, she waited until the street was clear. She started the car rolling across the street, yanked the throttle wide and leaped to the pavement. She spilled to her knees, and saw the car leap high over the stringpiece of the wharf and plunge with a larruping splash into the river.



She picked herself up and ran to the shadows of the nearest building. A hundred yards up the street, she saw a man duck out of a restaurant. He peered up and down the water-front, saw nothing and turned slowly back again. Nita began to run along the shadows of the warehouse. She had driven more than a mile

and she was afraid to summon a cab or to show herself. She dodged along back streets, hid when anyone came in sight. It was a half hour before she found her way back to the doctor's office.

The window and the sign were dark now and Nita knew a stab of fear. She darted into an alley that ran beside the apartment building, and she saw then a sliver of light in the surgery. She peered through the slit, and the operating table was empty . . . but on his knees beside it, the doctor had his head pillowed on his forearms.

As she looked his head lifted, and there were tears coursing from his eyes. His face was gentle and resigned, and proud and strong, all at once. Nita's fears left her. She knocked softly at the door and presently the doctor opened it.

He shook his head at her. "It iss a bad wound," he said. "It iss a very bad wound. But his heart . . . like a ox, it iss. So strong. I do not know. I do not know." His voice became bitter. "I have put him in my son's room. In the room I had for my son, but which he will never occupy now. You talk words about freedom and liberty. My son . . ." He choked it off. "Come," he said brusquely.

Nita walked beside him, and her hand touched his arm, gently.

The next morning, the newspapers screamed, with black ink.

**GOVERNOR FREEMAN SUICIDE!
SENATOR BROWN ASSASSINATED!**

Chief Executive
Dies To Escape
Graft Expose
Senator Slain
As He Speaks
On Crime Ring

The front page was smeared with death. The Police Chief of Amsterdam City was declared to have committed suicide also

to escape the pending charges of corruption against his department. The *Amsterdam Tribune* was demanding loudly that the state be cleaned up . . . and naming Lieutenant Governor Richards as the man to do it.

Nita van Sloan read those stories with a lift of her breast, for it seemed to her that, even wounded, Richard Wentworth had accomplished the thing for which he had risked his life. There was a little doubt in her mind. The police chief had not seemed the sort of a man to kill himself; and she saw no reason for the Governor's suicide, since he was in a position to dominate the state and, himself, cleanse it.

Then Nita read another headline, a part of that concerning the assassination of Senator Brown, and she knew the truth. She knew that the whole picture had been deliberately falsified, and that the forces of evil were deliberately re-organizing for greater strength . . . as a reform government! Now, they would have the people solidly behind them, and would be more powerful than ever. Now, they would be able to do many things, in the name of law and order, that had been impossible before. Now, they could ride rough-shod over honest men and label them criminals, or crooks. Now, there was no one to oppose them. For Richard Wentworth, the *Spider*, was terribly wounded and, according to the newspapers, the police were hunting him for the assassination of Senator Brown!

Nita looked up suddenly as Dr. Leiboski came into the room. He smiled at her wearily. "Maybe, if he keeps on fighting, you can take him away in a few days, yes? I do the best I can for him, but I am tired of fighting and of running away. You understand?"

Nita said, "Yes, of course. I understand."

Her heart was heavy within her. Where could a helpless fugitive from the all-

powerful government find refuge? How long would this shelter last if his true identity were known? What penalties would not be inflicted on these good people if they were discovered?

Nita's head bowed into her hands. For a while, despair had its way with her. But not for long. Her spirit was too brave; she had been too long associated with Richard Wentworth to weaken now. Nita's head came up. She knew that she was alone and terribly handicapped but, somewhere within her, she would find the will to fight. Her lips set in a determined smile.

After all, she was the *Spider's* chosen mate!

CHAPTER TEN

From the Ashes

NITA VAN SLOAN almost walked into a police trap at her hotel room in Amsterdam City. She had to run for it with bullets whining about her ears. After that, she heard her description go out on the radio as "accessory in the murder of Senator Brown." Her lips twisted bitterly at memory of her brief thought that Wentworth had triumphed. The machinery of government was being used for personal vengeance!

Nita shivered a little as the night wind prodded her and pulled her light-weight coat more closely about her throat, pressed closer in the shadows of the buildings beside which she walked. She was almost penniless, without a change of clothing. She had dashed out hurriedly when the phone call from Governor Freeman had tipped off Wentworth's peril. She did not even know how to locate her one friend in the city, Frank Dean. As if he could help now! . . . Ram Singh still lay wounded, hospitalized. His wound was serious.

Nita shook her head. She was not look-

ing for help for herself, but for a safe place to hide Dick Wentworth until he was well . . . and for a way to carry on the fight against the corrupt men who had seized the reins of government!

Abruptly, Nita's head lifted. As soon as she put out of her mind her own plight and thrust aside concern, her brain had cleared. She was remembering what Dick Wentworth had said about the news-truck driver, Mike. He had seemed to be on easy terms of intimacy with his employer. Mike could help find Frank Dean!

Nita laughed softly to herself. In a telephone book, she found the address of the Teamsters' Union to which Mike belonged. She knew she would be under suspicion, asking questions about a member, and the fingers of the crooked government might very well have thrust into the union, too. That was a chance she would have to take.

In a store window, Nita altered her appearance. She over-roughed her cheeks and used burned matches to smudge beneath her eyes. She shortened her skirt, opened her blouse an extra button at the throat. She loosened her curls, made them wanton and bushed them about her face.



She drew her coat tightly about her hips. When she stumbled into the doorway of the union headquarters, tears were rolling down her cheeks.

There were a half dozen men lolling about the big room. When Nita saw them she hurriedly, and obviously, mopped

away her tears. She put on a bold smile and two of the men jumped to their feet. One shoved the other back into his chair, and sauntered forward to the tune of raucous laughter.

"Won't I do, sister?" he asked.

Nita's smile turned timid. She stood awkwardly and balled the wet handkerchief between her hands. "I want to find a man who belongs to the union," she said, and looked down at the floor. "I'm not going to make any trouble for him, if he's got a wife. I'm not that kind. But I want to see him again. He ought to—he ought to know."

The man thumbed back his leather cap. "Well now, sister," he said. "What's wrong with me?"

Nita looked at him, and there was an unguarded innocence about her suddenly wide-open eyes, about the submissiveness of her face, that disarmed even the jeering man before her. She looked him straight in the eyes.

"I ain't a bad girl," she said simply. "I—I love him."

The man mimicked her, but the jeer was half-hearted. "Who's this guy?" he asked roughly.

Nita said, humbly. "His name is Mike and he drives—he drove for the *Sentinel*. That's all I know." Her voice died out in a whisper.

The man seated against the wall laughed again. One of them got up and came over. "Imagine Mike getting tangled up like that," he threw back at his fellows. "She means Mike Karoli," he said. "A little short guy, tough as hell, talks big and tough."

Nita nodded eagerly. "He isn't really tough," she said. "He just—talks that way. You do know him. You'll tell me how I can—just see him?"

The man looked at her in wonderment, shook his head. "I didn't know Mike had it in him," he said. "Look, Mike ain't married. He lives over in a dump in

hunky-town. Look, I'll tell you. . . ."



WHEN Nita left she took a street-car that jangled and bumped across the dark, wind-swept city. There was a small smile on her lips, not for the deceit she had practiced. Mike Karoli would not be harmed by that. She had appealed to the strength of those men, and they had responded . . . as men always respond ultimately when the good in them can be touched. Nor were those men harmed. They would feel stronger inside; a little cleaner for helping the helpless.

Presently, Nita was stumbling up a steeply climbing street where the never-cleared slush of the winter's snows made icy hummocks on the unpaved road. The houses that flanked it were wooden shacks, unpainted and dreary . . . the homes of workers. As always, when she saw such places, Nita felt a rising anger within her. People should not be compelled to live like this. There was something wrong with a world which compelled it. The saloon on the corner was the one bright spot. Tinny music came out.

Finally, she knocked at the door of a gaunt, rattle-trap cottage. The light inside was dim and, standing before the door, Nita shivered in the rising wind. There was a sudden red flare of light in the street and Nita looked up, startled. Beyond the crest of the hill, a spear of red and yellow flame licked skyward from the vent of a blast furnace. It roared for a few seconds, and died down, making the night blacker than before.

Nita looked back to the door and was aware that the shade drawn over the window was dropping back into place. Some one had peered at her out of the slit. Presently, the door opened and a blunt belligerent figure stood on the doorstep. She knew at once, looking into that set

face with its battered nose and scarred eyebrows, that this was Mike Karoli.

Nita did not smile at him, nor speak at first. She merely stood and let him feel the impact of her honesty and sincerity. Then she said, "I am Nita van Sloan. You drove for Richard Wentworth, my friend."

Mike nodded, suspiciously.

"He is terribly wounded," Nita said. "At the home of a doctor in Hickok. I need help."

Mike said, harshly, "Me, I'm in a spot to help somebody, I am! What do you expect me to do?"

Nita said, "You misunderstand me. I didn't mean that I needed help for him. I need help to fight Boss Masse and the rest. Mr. Wentworth can't fight right now. I'm not as good as he is. I can't go it alone. So I need fighting help. Mr. Wentworth said you were a fighter."

Mike looked at her incredulously, and then slowly, sourly, he grinned. "You're

really looking for Frank Dean," he charged.

Nita said, "He could fight, too."

Mike stepped aside. "Come on in. He's here."

Nita felt an upsurge of happiness. She went eagerly past Mike and into the room to the right of the hallway. She stopped then. On a slattern couch, Peggy Dean lay with an arm flung over her eyes. Nita sensed that she was awake, but she did not look up. Frank Dean sat slumped in a chair, his head hanging.

"Look, boss," Mike said cheerfully. "I brought company!"

Frank Dean turned his head slowly then. He looked old, beaten. Lines had turned into gullies in his cheeks. His eyes were shallow and pale. His hair seemed grayer. He moved a hand in a pale gesture that might mean anything. Then his head swung forward again. He did not speak. Nita felt their hopelessness like a



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weight upon her spirit. She did not try to laugh them out of it, nor lift them with her own enthusiasm. They had to lift themselves.

She said, cheerfully, "We've got a job ahead of us. The Boss and his crooked friends won the first trick. But we can take all the rest."

DEAN'S head pulled up. He frowned as if he had difficulty in hearing her, or in understanding what she said. Nita went on talking quietly, forcefully.

"Masse and his crowd are pretty smart," she conceded. "They'd have to be to get control of the state in the first place. They murdered Governor Freeman before he could speak, assassinated Senator Brown and blamed it on Dick Wentworth . . . and now they're shouting reform. They'll fool the people, too, unless somebody tells the people the truth."

Dean said, thickly, "The people want to be fooled. To hell with them."

Nita laughed. "Many great men have felt the same way," she said, though despair was eating at her. She felt so alone, so helpless against this inertia. Wentworth would have blasted them out of it with the sheer vitality of his personality. Nita had to use the methods he had taught her: the appeal to strength. "The People seem pretty foolish some times. They follow foolish leaders and make silly mistakes, but somehow, in the end, the right thing comes to pass. I believe their own honest intentions force crookedness out into the open, and compel wisdom in the end. They need leaders of course. Men who will fight with their bare hands for liberty."

Dean shrugged and looked away again and Nita clenched her fists upon her knees. Alone . . . alone, and despair had destroyed her only allies. But she had to succeed! They were the one hope of this state, of a million and more people!

"Are you a coward, a quitter?" she demanded, harshly.

Dean said, "I am."

Peggy said up suddenly. "He's not a coward and a quitter! No coward and quitter would have fought as he did, but . . . well, there just isn't anything to fight *with*."

Nita said, scornfully. "A man fights with only one thing . . . his heart. Of course, when you lose that, you're licked. Well, I'll have to carry on alone, I guess." She got to her feet.

Dean said shortly, "What are you going to do, assassinate Masse?" His voice was bitter, angry.

Nita turned with her back against the door. "That would do no good," she said. "You can't kill tyranny by killing the tyrant. You have to first conquer the submission of the people. No tyrant can rule over an aroused people for long. No, it wouldn't help to kill Masse, any more than it helped Masse to kill Freeman. Freeman was only a voice for the people. They will find another voice."

Dean said, "That's foolishness. You're talking metaphysics, or mysticism or something. The people don't have a voice. They only have a rear-end—to be kicked. And I'm tired of receiving the kicks for them."

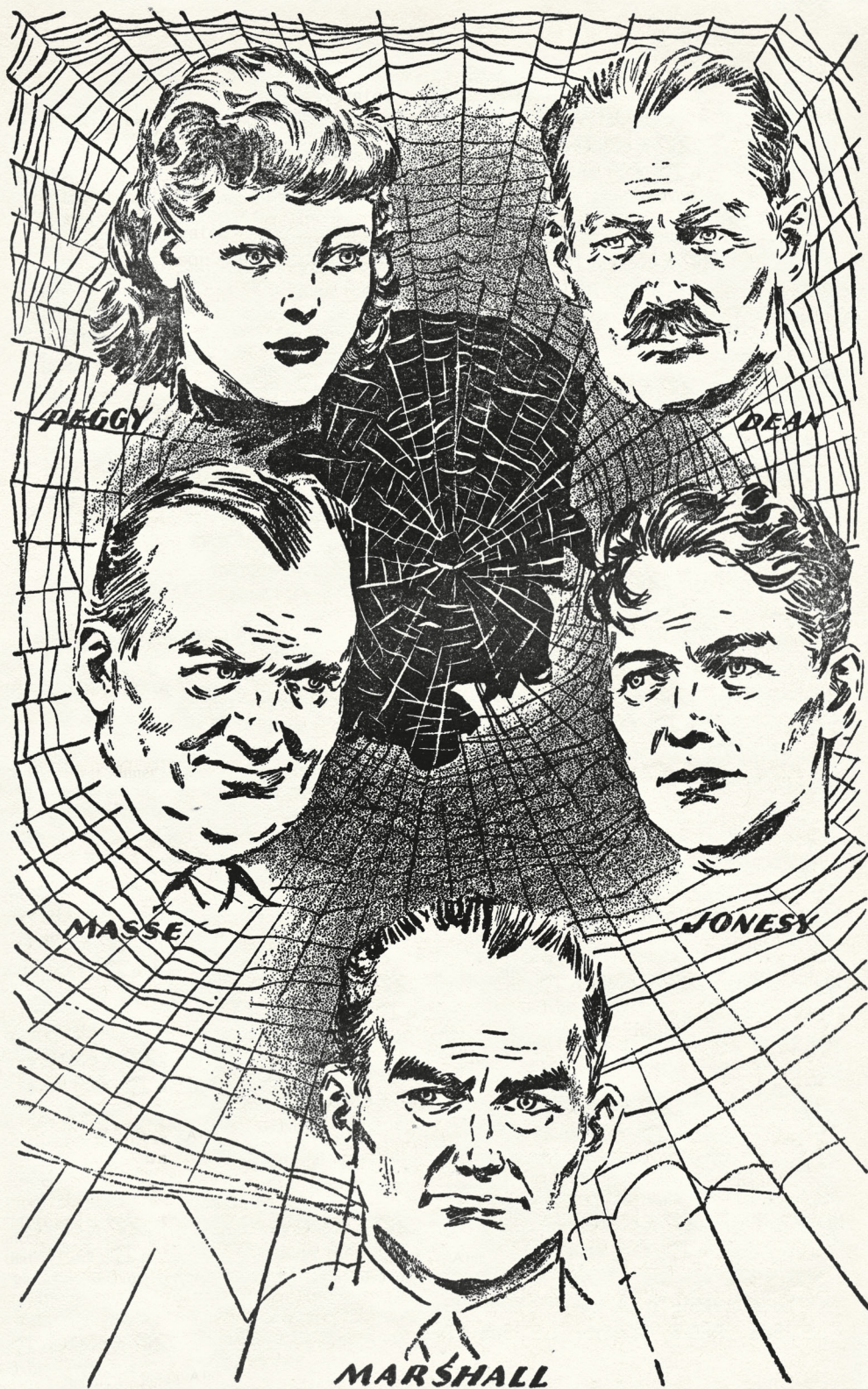
"Then be the Voice!" Nita cried to him. "Speak for them! Tell them the truth! Tell them what Masse did and is trying to do! Tell them how he hides behind a false front of reform while he robs and defrauds them and strips them of honor!"

Dean laughed and spread his hands. "I did that."

"Keep on!"

"With what, will you tell me, Miss van Sloan?" Dean was irritated. "Even if I had the money to operate another newspaper, how long do you think I would be allowed to publish it? I tell you, it's no use. I'm knocked out in the first round."

Mike Karoli snorted, "They can't do it,



boss. They can't knock out a man like you in the first round. Me, they never did that to me. They knocked me silly, sure. Hey, look, boss, she's right. The people are dumb, sure. But you ain't dumb. You tell them. They gotta have somebody to tell them. Hey, by golly, if I knew what to tell them, I'd do it. Just get up on a soapbox and tell them. Sure! And not nobody would stop me, neither!"



Mike stood up against the wall, with his head pulled up and a smile on his face.

"Not nobody!" he muttered.

Dean said, heavily, "It wouldn't do any good. They'd kill you."

Mike Karoli got angry. "What the hell, boss, this is America. They can't do that to you here." He came over and stood over Frank Dean and threw his fists around. "Back home, they do that to you. sure. They do it to my old man. They shove a bayonet in his belly because he talks back. So we come here, me and the old woman. Me, I'm an American." He thumped his chest. "I got my papers, see, and no—no punk is going to push me around. But, hell, boss, I don't have to tell you all this. *You* didn't have to take out papers. *You were born here. You're* the guy who should be telling *me* about America!"

DEAN looked up at him and, for a moment, the fire of Mike's belief inspired him. Then he shook his head. "It's no use, I tell you! It's no use!

What you say used to be true. But the people don't care any more. They just don't care. They want to be pushed around."

Mike Karoli's face was shocked. "Aw—aw, nuts," he said. "Nobody wants to be pushed around. Hell, if you don't tell them. I will! I'll tell them! You just watch!"

He wheeled around and went across the room and the door banged shut. Peggy Dean was on her feet. "He'll get himself killed!" she cried, and twisted her hands anxiously.

Nita said, shortly, "There are worse ways to die! You can die from the heart out."

She went out the door. "Hey, Mike! Wait for me!"

Mike Karoli didn't hear her. He was striding toward the saloon at the foot of the hill. He waved his clenched fists about his head. She could hear the hoarse mutter of his voice but not his words.

Nita ran after him, frantically. Mike was right, but he was wrong, too. This wasn't the way to do it. He'd get himself killed—and, she needed his staunch support. They all needed it. Mike didn't heed her. He went into the saloon and slammed the door.

As Nita ran toward the place, she heard his hoarse shout lifted. "Hey, you mugs!" he yelled. "Hey, you polacks, you hunkies. you wops. Hey, you micks and you squareheads. I got something to say."

The bartender yelled, "Get down off that table, Mike!"

"I got the right of free speech, ain't I?" Mike bellowed. "I'm going to use it. Shut your trap or we'll take the place apart. Now, look, you guys. There's a crook running this state, see? He's trying to stop us Americans from doing what we gotta right to do. Us guys know something about that, hunh?"

Nita squeezed inside the door. There were a half dozen men around Mike, most

of them holding glasses of beer. The others were looking at him, from a distance, glasses suspended. An oldish man with a drooping blonde mustache stood close to him. He nodded gravely, downed a glass of Pepsi-Cola, and, dried his mustache with a brusque fist.

"All right," Mike said. "All right! Look, this Boss Masse, he's pulling the wool over our eyes. He bumped off the governor and called it suicide. Now he's got a fake reform government. He's pushing us around. Maybe they could do that in the old country, but they can't do it here. We're Americans, ain't we?"

The bartender looked worried. Quietly he maneuvered to a telephone. There was a small, broad-shouldered Italian just in front of the table. He lifted his fists. "What we should-a do, hah, Mike?"

"Tell people!" Mike shook his fist. "Tell them and make them listen! Don't let that louse, Masse, put over a bunch of lies. Tell people the truth, and make them listen!"

The bartender was back at his place, looking happier. Nita caught the faint, distant whine of a police siren.

"The cops are coming!" she shouted.

Mike swung his fist. "To hell with them! This is America! We gotta right to talk! Look, you guys. Tell people about it! If enough people know about it, we're going to win, see? They can't stop *all* the people. I'm telling you—"

The door slammed open and two uniformed men, flanked by two detectives came into the room. The dicks had guns in their fists, the uniformed men carried clubs. They shouldered through the crowd toward the table, and the men gave way sullenly.

"Come down off that table, you!" a cop ordered Mike.

Mike scowled at him. "What for? Any law says I can't stand on this table and talk?"

"A wise guy!" the cop jeered. He slammed his club against Mike's knee-cap.

Mike's leg gave under him. He fell off the table, and the other cop slammed at his head. He missed because Mike ducked, but the blow caught his shoulder. Mike swore, and lashed out. The clubs smacked again.

The sombre-faced oldish man with the blonde mustache stepped forward deliberately. He lifted a fist like a ham and

"D" — AS IN DEAD

THROUGH the pitch of the storm-lashed night they raced—a rock-fisted dick from the wrong side of the tracks, and a jaded deb half-crazed with terror—to keep an ill-starred rendezvous with a luckless pawn of fate, a merchant who dealt in secrets of stolen wealth—and whose asking price was Murder!

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brought it down on top of a policeman's head. The policeman wheeled about. A detective leveled his revolver and shot. The man looked at him without any expression on his face at all. He sat down on the floor and coughed, and blood came out of his mouth.

MIKE was on his feet. There was blood on his head, and his left arm hung limp. He snarled out an oath. "What's the matter?" he yelled. "Think you're back home? We ain't done nothing wrong. These cops got no right. We're—we're *Americans!*"

The Italian yelled, "Ha!" He wove in under a cop's arm, and there was suddenly a knife in his fist. He used it, slashing with the needle point. Mike's fist landed solidly on another man's jaw. A detective's gun spoke once more, and then the crowd of men rolled the cops under. There were stomping feet and fury-reddened faces. Fists lifted and fell.

Nita shouted at them until she was hoarse, and finally a few heeded her.

"Don't!" she cried. "Oh, don't! This isn't the way! They will destroy you if you give them the chance to arrest you and throw you into jail! Listen to me, please! Please, listen!"

Three of the police were unconscious. The fourth crawled out the door toward the car.

"Stop him!" Nita ordered. "He'll get a machine gun and kill you all."

The Italian ran out and, presently, came back smiling.

Nita stepped on a chair. "Mike, you were foolish," she said. "Tell people, yes, but don't give our enemies a chance to maul you around like this. Don't kill. They have so many more weapons than you have. And you have only one—courage and the will toward freedom! Some of you will die for what happened tonight, if you stay here. Run! Scatter! Spread over the state and tell what is happening.

But when you see a policeman, avoid him. Live to conquer!"

There were police sirens wailing again. Mike walked over to the bar-tender. "You talk, and we'll pull this place to pieces and burn you up in it, see?" he said. "If they get us, there'll be others to do the job."

Other men moved toward the counter. The Italian had a beautiful smile on his lips. "Should I cut-a his throat now?" he asked. "Me, I cut-a a few throats back in Italy. That Mussolini! He ruin my country. I cut-a few throats, so I come here. But no Mussolini going to run the state where I live. Me, I'm American!"

The bar-tender was white, pressed back against the shelves behind him. "Sure, Mike," he whispered. "Sure, I won't talk!"

"Scatter!" Nita cried urgently. "They're almost here!"

They scattered then, and they carried their injured with him. There was blood on the floor, and the limp bodies of the police, but nothing more. Three men went home with Mike, carrying him. His shoulder was injured, his leg stiff and useless. There was blood on his face, but there was also a smile there. He winked at Nita.

"You're right," he said. "I'm a fighter, I am. I like it."

The three men laughed at him. "You play hell, Mike. That's what you do. You play hell."

Mike twisted his head around. "You're going to fight, too, louse, or else fight me!"

The man laughed, and his face was stern in spite of that. "Sure, Mike," he said. "Sure."

No more than that. They went into the house with Mike and Frank Dean came suddenly to his feet. His voice rang out harshly in inquiry, and he was told what had happened.

Nita spoke softly. "This is what happens when men try to lead without the knowledge that should go with leadership.

Mike is injured. Men have died, and will die because of what happened tonight. This was the wrong way, but it was the best Mike knew! He's a bigger man than you are, Frank Dean. You set your hand to the plough, and then turned back! You quitter!"

Frank Dean said, impatiently, "That's enough."

Nita looked at his eyes and saw light behind them and fire in their depths. She heard the tone of his voice as he began to issue crisp and positive orders.

Nita smiled and knew that her body was tired in spite of the high exhilaration of her spirit. She whispered, "Yes, that's enough."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

L for Liberty.

IT WAS a slow and difficult task to organize their resistance, especially since it began with flight from the district where the saloon fight had taken place. They determined what they wanted to do, and it sounded simple. They wanted the people to realize that the government of the state was in the hands of criminals.

Until they could accomplish that, it would be a lonely battle. Even afterward, the enemy still would have all the weapons on its side. But a step toward the overthrow would have been taken.

Dean said, crisply, "We can spread our knowledge by word of mouth, but it would take a long time and it is dangerous. We need a newspaper."

"And a radio station that can be moved from place to place," Nita added. "If I had access to Richard Wentworth's funds, both would be simple. But you can't draw

on the funds of a man accused of murder without running the risk of bringing police to us. I'll get a job. Perhaps, I can land one on the *Tribune*. Then I would have sources of information that would help us. I'll contribute my salary to the work."

Mike Karoli growled, "I'll get some fellows to chip in every week."

They were silent then for a while, and Nita van Sloan's eyes strayed toward the narrow bed on which Richard Wentworth lay, unconscious, skeleton-thin, against the farther wall. She found strength there despite his physical debility.

She got to her feet, abruptly. "We'll have to mimeograph the first newspapers," she said cheerfully. "I have a name to suggest for it. Let's call the paper, *For Liberty!*"

They got out three editions of the newspaper and spread them broadcast through the city. They told the truth about the death of Governor Freeman and the murder of Senator Brown, and about the "reform" government. People glanced at them curiously. Some read them. Some did not bother.

"A new yellow sheet," a man might say. "Looks like communists might run it."

"Say, did you see that scandal sheet about the Governor? Wonder those guys wouldn't get arrested. Say, wonder if there's anything in what they say?"

Here and there, a man would read with thoughtful eyes and afterward even think about it for a while. Every effort had been made to keep the writing conservative. There was no name calling; no venomous editorials. The newspaper *For Liberty* stated its case in the calm and dispassionate phrases of truth.

Three editions were published and then

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a swarm of health officers, supported by police, descended on the area from which the paper stemmed. Somehow, they had narrowed the search by that much.

"Typhoid," the health officers said. "This district is quarantined. We'll have to inspect all the homes."

Here and there a man was packed off "to the hospital" and information was refused to the families. The police were curiously brutal with these "sick men."

Eventually, the police found a deserted basement where there was an odor of ink; where a few crumpled sheets of mimeograph paper were found. But the basement was empty. One of them picked up a copy of the *Amsterdam Tribune*. It was open to the woman's page. He didn't notice anything curious about the drawings of fashion models on the page; nor did the positions of the women in the drawings mean anything to him. He knew only that the big birds had escaped . . . and that somehow they had been warned. He might have been more interested in the newspaper had he known that Nita van Sloan was the artist who had drawn the fashion plates!

After that, the distribution of the fugitive newspaper was more carefully handled. It was apparent that it must have been the way in which the circulation spread from one hub that had betrayed the hide-out. They were better hidden this time, too, in the guest house of a wealthy estate near Amsterdam City. Frank Dean had found a friend and supporter in the lawyer who once had handled his newspaper's accounts.

But they had to move very carefully. Five of their adherents had been picked up in the "typhoid" raid and, afterward, their families were told they died in the hospitals. The newspaper told the truth about that . . . and people were reading the paper with interest these days, but they had fewer open supporters. Boss Masse was wielding the club of fear.

And Wentworth still lay unconscious upon his bed. He was wasted by a slow fever that would not leave.

That night, Nita van Sloan herself brought the warning. "They've spotted you again," she said steadily. "Not exactly. Only that you are somewhere on the western environs of the city. They can't use the typhoid raid here. I don't know exactly what new sort of menace threatens."

FRANK DEAN stood on spread legs in the middle of the room that was their office and print-shop in one. There was a smudge of ink across his face, but the flesh was taut and alive, and his eyes were fiery. The reporter whom police had beat up long ago in the *Sentinel* office—Jonesy—came over beside him. He was thinner, but he still had a grin. His rumpled black hair hid a deep whip-scar across his forehead.

"We can always move on," he said cheerfully.

Peggy Dean stopped turning the crank of the mimeograph and came over to join them. "We can't, Jonesy," she said. "You know how weak Mr. Wentworth is getting."

Nita looked toward the door which shut him off from the work-shop, and her lips grew grim. "You can't keep on protecting him," she said quietly. "He wouldn't want to handicap you. You move. I'll stay with him."

Mike twisted about on his stool by the mimeograph. His arm was in a sling. "Look, I'll stay, too. We can lick fifty cops, me and the girl."

Nita felt her eyes sting with gratitude. She turned quickly away. Jonesy said, lazily, "I'm getting tired of running away, too. I've just about talked Brookside into financing a radio station that we can set up in a car. That's better than a newspaper anyway."

Nita swung about to face them again.

"This is madness," she said. "The fight is more important than any one man. We've got to keep on running away. If you won't leave him, he'll go with you. That's final."

But they didn't move that night. They waited . . . and the night was full of alarms. In house after house along the street, the lights flared on during the night. There were shouts and angry walking back and forth along the street. They learned the truth of it when a group of men called on the lawyer in whose guest house they were staying. There had been more than twenty robberies in the neighborhood, and the police said they would send men . . . and had failed to do so.

"Not a single policeman showed up," the outraged residents stormed at Brookside. "We're going to the Mayor about this, and if that doesn't work, we'll call on the Governor. We're taxpayers. They can't do us this way!"

Brookside said, quietly, that he would take the case. Afterward, he went out to the guest house and told them about the little band of rebels. "You know what it means, of course. The police sent criminals out here to prowl the houses and find you . . . and promised them there would be no interference. Maybe you've been spotted; maybe not, but this is anarchy. I'll finance that radio transmitter!"

It was the next night that Brookside's home caught fire and the fire department failed to answer his call for help. Brookside hurried out to the guest house, his face flushed and angry.

"No question about it now. You get out. Take my car," he spoke briskly, bitterly. "I'll join you as soon as the fire is out. I'm in this thing to the end."

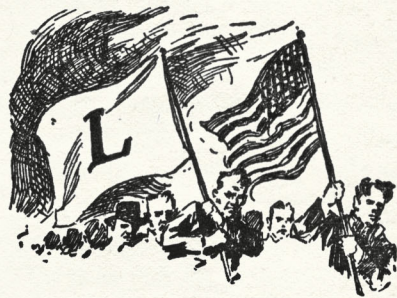
They got out, carrying Wentworth gently to the car, stacking it high with their printing paraphernalia. It was at the next corner that they ran into the police barricade! But Mike, one-handed though he was, was more than a match

for that barricade. He slammed the loaded car into a private driveway, crashed through a hedge into a side street and was roaring away through the city.



TWICE more, before they found sanctuary, they ran into such traps as that. Finally, they found haven again in the basement of a workingman's home. His name was Ian Strunescu and he was a puddler in the steel mills. He was bitterly calm about it. "Sure. Come in," he said. "I fight the Iron Guard back home. I fight these killers here. I thought I run away. That was wrong. I should have stayed and fought. I fight here!"

So, hurriedly, working by candle light, they prepared the latest edition of *For Liberty*, and Wentworth tossed in fever upon his bed. There was plenty of news for the paper: the fire at the Brookside home, and the increasing use of terroristic practices throughout the state. The "quarantine" was being used as a weapon against a group of workers. There had been "licensed" robberies in another large city.



It was in the midst of their "dead-line rush" as they called it, that Wentworth opened his eyes. The sheen of fever had left them and there was sanity and strength behind them. He watched for fully fifteen minutes before Nita van Sloan lifted her head from a typewriter at which she was working and looked

toward him. She sprang up then and flung herself down on her knees beside his bed.

She said nothing, but Wentworth's bone-thin hand reached out to rest on her head. About them, the work rushed on. Dean came to scowl down at him with kindly eyes and Mike lifted a clenched fist in salute.

"It's going wonderfully," Nita told Wentworth and sketched what had been done; what was being done. But she did not tell him how they had been tracked and driven from refuge after refuge; nor by what narrow margins they still kept alive.

"You sleep again now," she ordered, "and tomorrow . . ."

A big voice boomed outside the building. It had been magnified many times and, plainly, was thundering from a portable loud-speaker system. There was menace in the voice.

"Attention!" It called. "All residents, attention! Criminals have been traced to your district of the city. They are the following persons: Richard Wentworth; Nita van Sloan; Frank Dean; Peggy Dean; Robert Jones and Michael Karoli. You who are sheltering these criminals know them. The entire district is surrounded and, until they are surrendered, no one will be allowed either to enter or leave this district!" To show you that we mean business, all water and all gas and all electricity has been cut off in this district, and will remain off. Don't force us to use other, more drastic methods. Surrender these criminals!"

The sound-truck rolled on and they could hear the voice rasping at a distance. Now and then a word, or a phrase came through. Wentworth lay staring steadily up into the face of Frank Dean.

Wentworth said, faintly, "We are living in a conquered province. No place in Europe could be worse than this. It will be two weeks before I can get up."

Dean said nothing, but he thought, "More like two months!" He waved a hand. "We can hold out like this for years."

Wentworth said, "No one comes in, or goes out. You'll have trouble smuggling through your paper. No food will be allowed in. Cutting off water means clogged sewers and drains and disease. No gas means no heat in many places, and no fresh fuel coming in. This is siege."

Dean laughed sharply. "That's right. We're used to it." He turned away from the cot. "New lead on that chase story, Jonesy," he said. "Mr. Wentworth dictated it: *'We are living in a conquered province.'*"

Jonesy said cheerfully, "I got a better one: 'We who are about to die, salute you!'"

CHAPTER TWELVE

Under Siege

RICHARD WENTWORTH, rid of the fever now, forced himself to patience while he built the strength necessary to take up the battle against the forces of evil which controlled the state. The work of disseminating truth went on doggedly. The papers were mimeographed and people of the neighborhood volunteered for the task of smuggling them out. Sometime they got through; more often they were caught. One of them was tortured, and the screams were heard within the siege lines drawn by the police.

It was after a week that Nita van Sloan, without letting Wentworth know of her intention, carried out the papers and returned to her job on the *Tribune*. They knew about it next day when they saw the newspapers and identified her drawings on the fashion page. There was no message in them this time.

The plight was already desperate.

Three days later, it was worse than that. They had had a snow, and so there was drinking water. But the last of the fuel had been burned. The poor buy their coal in small quantities, by the hundred pound bag, or the half ton. It costs more that way, but if you haven't the money to buy more, and there is no credit for you. . . . It was growing cold in the houses on the hill above the steel works. In the daytime, people went outdoors and, when there was sun, pressed close against the sunny sides of buildings. There was no sun at night, and there were never enough covers for the coldness of those houses.

Also, there was no food.

It was when they discovered that the people of the district had been stinting themselves on food in order that Wentworth's little band should be fed, that Frank Dean called several of the men into the basement room where they worked and lived. There was no question that these were the leading men of the district. One of them ran the grocery store and people respected him because he owned the building in which it stood, and lived on the upper floor. His name was Gustave Einarson. Then there was Jon Bronski who was a foreman in the steel works, a man big with bulk and muscle, and a deliberate way of speaking and spitting that made people listen to him. And there was the thin and twisted son of Giuseppe Marsogni, who had worked in the steel plant until a load of pig crushed him. Since then he had found ways to improve that shrewd brain of his, and sharpen his tongue. He had learning, and so he was needed, though he was young.

These were the three men whom Frank Dean summoned to the basement. They stood in a slightly uncertain group near the door, hats in their hands save for Gustave Einarson. He kept his on.

Dean said to them, angrily, "Are we

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women? Are we children? Why do you go without food so that we may have plenty?"

Einarson smiled and pushed his hands into his pockets. Jon Bronski looked for a place to spit. It was Giorgio Marsogni who spoke.

"The officers in any army are well cared for," he said. "They have to be. You are our officers. This is war."

Dean scowled at him. "And suppose your officer orders you to surrender, what then?"

Marsogni grew pale, "You can't do that!"

Einarson scowled, and Bronski spat and said, "Like hell we'll surrender."

WENTWORTH pushed himself up from his bed and swung his feet to the floor. It was the second time since his injury that he had felt the earth under his weight, and the room still spun dizzily when he made the exertion. He waited until the dizziness subsided.



Dean was waving his fists in the air. "Listen, you! I'm not going to let a whole section of the town go hungry so that I can write things on paper and spread them to the winds. Half the time, the papers don't even get out. We'll surrender ourselves, then they'll have to lift this siege!"

Marsogni moved toward him. His left shoulder was half normal size and he dragged one foot. He clenched a hand under Dean's nose. "You can't!" he said.

"You can't! Have we sacrificed for nothing? We only ask you to lead us, not to deprive us of the right to fight! We are fighting for something! Hunger doesn't matter. We won't let you do this! You have to lead us! You have to keep on fighting."

Einarson nodded. Bronski grinned and spat. He stood in front of the door and took off his coat. He rolled up his sleeves and showed the brawn of his burn-scarred arms.

"How you get out, hanh?" he asked. "How you get out to give up?"

He balled up his fists and looked at everybody. He nodded, well satisfied with himself. Einarson looked at him and suddenly grinned.

"That is right," he said slowly. "We will keep you here. You will lead us."

Marsogni swore. "It's a hell of a thing when you have to force a leader to lead. Listen. . ." He threw back his black hair from his pale forehead, and it seemed that he himself was listening. "Listen—I will tell you. This is not new. This has happened before. We are not afraid of hunger. We have known that! We are not afraid of persecution and death. We have known that! We are not afraid of police who shout at us and beat us. We have known that!"

Bronski growled. "Ahr, that!"

Marsogni gestured at him imperatively. "Listen, we have lived through this before, and we know there is only one way to survive. We stand together! If we die, it does not matter, so long as we stand together!" He glared at Dean, at the others in the room. He looked at Bronski and at Einarson. "Hell," he said. "Why do you think we came to America!"

Wentworth pushed to his feet and moved toward the boy. He was terribly thin. The bones stood out in his cheeks, but only made his face stronger.

"Listen," Marsogni's voice went on, impassioned, stronger than himself. "Lis-

ten, we came to America to be free. And America *is* free! Do you think this bunch of crooks can stop that? All we have to do is to let Americans know. Look, *we are Americans! Who is going to take our freedom from us?*"

Jonesy slapped Dean on the shoulder, "I'm going to resign and give this boy my job," he said. "He's got it!"

Marsogni was silent, suddenly embarrassed. Wentworth was beside Dean now. "There is another way," he said quietly.

THEY looked at him and Wentworth could see the doubt in their faces, and the intention to humor him as people always behave toward the very sick. Then their eyes met his, and it was as if an electric shock had galvanized them. His body might be that of a sick man, but it was not his body that looked through his eyes—it was the soul of the *Master of Men*!

Wentworth smiled and the expression was gentle, but it carried the weight of his will.

"There is another way," he said again. "A way other than dying in protest, starving quietly in your freezing homes. There is another way to use this unity of yours, this American freedom of yours. I will tell you of that tomorrow. But tonight, we shall bring in food and fuel for your people. I need you, Bronski."

The Pole looked into his eyes for a while. Slowly, then, he smiled. "Sure," he said. "You bet. All the way!"

"Marsogni."

"I'll die. . ."

Wentworth shook his head. "It is better to live. It's vanity to go looking for death, Marsogni. If death comes to you while you fight for the truth, that is regrettable, but justified. But it is much better to live for a cause, than to die for it. I'll need you."

"Yes," the boy whispered, and his eyes said that he had found his leader.

"Einarson," Wentworth's voice was crisp now. "You will go from house to house and tell the people to be ready. We will have to unload the truck swiftly when it comes in. Dean, I want your latest edition. Bronski will carry them."

Dean said, furiously, "Damn it, man, you're mad! This is the second time you've walked as far as the door. Ten days ago, you were dying with fever and a gun-shot wound. That wound still isn't healed. And you talk about breaking the siege with one man and a . . . a cripple!"

Marsogni flushed, and his hand crept up to his twisted shoulder, but he knew that Dean had not meant to be cruel. He did not speak.

Wentworth was drawing on an overcoat. It was his, but it hung on him in folds. His breath came pantingly, and there was pain through him like a knife.

He said, slowly, "Dean, I wonder if you have ever seen a painting called 'The Spirit of '76'? If you haven't, these others have. These people only need someone to carry the flag. I can do that. It's my job. You get out your papers." He moved toward the door, and Bronski opened it with a sweep that was awkwardly ceremonial. He shouldered a bundle of papers. Marsogni scuttled after them.

Wentworth paused, "Einarson, have the people ready."

He was gone.

Dean waited until Einarson had left, and then he slowly moved over to Wentworth's bed and sank down upon it. "He's the smart one," he said quietly. "He's going to surrender us to the police so the people can be fed. I wouldn't have thought of doing it that way. I hate it, but I'm ready. It's the least we can do for these people who have been so kind to us."

Peggy looked at Jonesy and moved toward him, almost without being conscious of it. Their hands twined. Jonesy said, "Hell, they can only kill us."

Peggy gripped his arm. "Promise me, Jonesy!" she whispered. "*Promise me!*"

Jonesy's face was suddenly haggard. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said, his voice muffled.

"*Promise me!*"

Jonesy took her shoulders. "Okay, kid," he whispered, and kissed her.

Dean stared blankly at the wall.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Break-Through

OUTSIDE on the steep street, it was hard for Wentworth to walk.

He leaned on the shoulder of Marsogni, and the boy bore up eagerly. When they came in sight of the picket lines, he gave the boy a pistol.

"It's empty," he said.

Marsogni stepped back a little and pointed it at Wentworth. Bronski was behind him, too, with the papers on his shoulder. They moved toward the police picket line. An officer in uniform challenged them, and two more came out of a lighted hut beside the road.

Marsogni lifted his voice, "Be quiet!" he called piercingly.

There was a sudden muffled shout from one of the dark houses they passed. A man yelled, "*Traitors! Trattores!*"

Marsogni jostled Wentworth with the gun. Bronski closed up and they hurried toward the police. The door of the house they had passed slammed open, but one of the police fired a shot. No one came out of the door.

"A prisoner for you!" Marsogni called sharply. "We have caught one of those with the papers. If we turn him over, will you let us out?"

The cop who had come out of the hut called back, "You bring him here to us, and we'll see about letting you out."

They were almost up to the police line now. There were those three police in

sight, and others inside the hut. There was a police car at the curb, jammed into a snow bank. Wentworth slipped to his knees, and Bronski jerked him to his feet again. They were almost upon the police, and the three men in uniform waited suspiciously. One of them had a gun in his hand. When they were a yard away, Bronski threw the bundle of papers into that man's face.

As he went down, Bronski jumped past him. He kicked the fallen man in the head. His great right fist covered the face of another policeman. The third policeman got his gun out, and Wentworth hurled a jagged chunk of ice. It struck the man across the forehead. His gun crashed, but Bronski swung his great fist again, deliberately.

Marsogni was at the wheel of the car, fighting the cold engine to life. Wentworth gathered the guns of the fallen police. Bronski picked up the bundle of mimeographed newspapers. They all got into the car. The police inside the hut were swarming out of the door now, but they tried to get out all at once. Two of them wedged there for a moment.

In that moment, Marsogni got the car going. He whirled it out of the snowbank and charged it straight at the door of the hut. The police howled and fought to get back inside. One of them didn't succeed. . . . Then Wentworth and Bronski were in the car and it was rolling at top speed down the rutted street with Marsogni fighting the wheel.

"That was wrong," Wentworth said quietly. "There will be reprisals. Why did you think I gave you an *empty* gun?"

Marsogni said, violently, "They starve us out!"

Wentworth said, "No, they are men who take orders. They are men with jobs to hold. To them, we are revolutionists. I am charged with a murder I did not commit, but that is not their concern. They only know that their boss-

es say I committed murder. They are men with families and jobs to hold."

Bronski spat. "Me, I have a family."

Wentworth nodded. "You are a strong one. Would you strike this boy? No. There are weaknesses of spirit as well as weaknesses of body. We do not kill men because they are weak."

Marsogni said, savagely, "I do not care. I wish I could shoot that Boss Masse!"

"Masse is no more the boss than that policeman whom you probably killed," Wentworth said shortly. "I doubt that even the death of the Brain would end all this. You must destroy tyranny in the hearts of the people!"

Bronski grunted and looked at Wentworth with sudden respect. "That is right," he said. "Some people are slaves by nature. They throw off one master and, right away quick, they get another. We will never be free until we are no longer slaves in our hearts."

THE business of stealing a truck load of food was not difficult. It was the time of night when many chain groceries were receiving their week's supply. Marsogni was once more at the wheel, but this time of the truck.

Wentworth stood by the window and talked to him quietly. "Bronski and I are going to create a diversion," he said. "I want you to park this truck five blocks away from the lines and when you hear a police siren give three quick yelps, drive like the devil were behind you! Drive up three blocks past Einarson's store and stop. Then, your job will be done. Go to Dean, instead of to your home."

Wentworth turned back to the police car, which had been useful in stopping and taking over the truck. Bronski grinned at him. "Now I know we will win," he said. "Food in a man's belly, and a *man* to follow."



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The streets were alive with police cars hunting for them and it was necessary to double and twist upon their track many times to avoid detection or to escape pursuit. Finally, they were close to the police cordon.

"This will be dangerous," he said. "We are going to provoke men to fire upon us, and we will not shoot back in such a way as to injure anyone. When I call to you to stop, I want you to get out and kidnap an officer. Then drive on, at top speed . . . but not so fast that you will not draw pursuit."

Bronski puckered up his eyes and looked toward the village roofs, lifting above them on the hillside. He spat out the window. "Okay," he said.

Wentworth nodded, "Roll her!"

He weighed the revolvers in his hands, testing their balance. He nodded. The police car spurted from the shadows of the side street where it had hidden, raced toward a police hut. Wentworth twisted sideways in the seat and fired four bullets. The first one smacked out the light in the police hut. The next two shattered two windows. The third broke the light over the door. They raced on. At two more guard houses, Wentworth repeated that process, and now there were police cars roaring in their wake. At the fourth guard house, Wentworth indicated the three police who had run out in response to the shouts and shots behind them.

"One of those, Bronski," he said. "Drive straight toward them, and cut one off from the rest. I'll keep them from shooting straight!"

The police car smashed straight toward the three police. They fired once, and lead whanged into the metal of the body. Then they scattered. Bronski whipped over beside one of them. His long arm reached out and clamped about the man's body, hoisted him to the running board as the car bored on into the night.

The policeman screamed. Wentworth

took his gun out of his hand, and he screamed again. They whirled a corner.

"Three blasts on the siren," Wentworth directed, and the signal to Marsogni screamed out into the night.

"Now," Wentworth directed. "Circle and follow the truck into town. Lose the police first, quickly."

The policeman had slid down in a heap on the floor at Wentworth's feet, where, with a gun prodding his neck, he was very quiet. From time to time, he shivered, but gave no other sign of terror.

"You will not be harmed," Wentworth told him quietly. "This was done only so that we could run a truckload of food into the people. Women and children are starving inside your lines."

The cop turned his head around slowly. He had a broad, homely and kindly face. He muttered something, and Wentworth bent toward him . . . but the gun kept guard.

"What did you say?" he asked.

The cop said, violently, "I'm damned glad of it! I didn't sign up with the police force to starve women and kids!"

Wentworth smiled, "I hoped for some such sentiment among you. That will make our job easier."

BRONSKI whirled the coupé around a corner and the big red truck was trundling, unobstructed, past a deserted police hut. They followed it uphill until it turned a corner and presently halted, and then they were in the midst of a swarm of people. They hauled food out of the truck and some were laughing and some were crying, and a woman held a child up beside the car.

"That's him," she said. "Don't ever forget him! He's the man who saved us!"

Wentworth touched the child, climbed out laboriously. "In an hour," he ordered, "let this policeman go. He will drive the car back through the lines.

Bronski, you will see that he is protected."

Bronski nodded. "Sure," he agreed. He knotted his fists and stood beside the police car. Wentworth plodded toward the basement where Dean was hidden. Children danced about him, and men called greetings and an old woman sobbed a blessing and tried to kiss his hand. And Wentworth pushed brusquely on, feeling tightness in his throat.

Marsogni scuttled up out of the basement to meet him. "Say, did I do all right?" he asked anxiously.

"Perfectly," Wentworth put his hand on his shoulder. "Now I want you to spread the word through the village. We go out of here tonight, as soon as the people are properly fed. Say, an hour. Make it fast. We will march out without violence and without interference. Once we have left the village behind, we will scatter and each man will tell what he knows, and each woman will spread the word of what we have undergone, and the reason. This group will be the nucleus of the army-without-arms that will destroy tyranny in this state. Tell them. And, Marsogni, can your mother sew?" Marsogni frowned in bewilderment.

"Sure, but what . . ."

"Have her make a big flag, out of a sheet," Wentworth told him. "And sew on it a big black L. L for Liberty, Marsogni."

He went down into the basement and Dean came toward him and Peggy put her arms about him to help him toward the bed. He laughed and eased himself down on it.

"Jonesy," he said to the reporter, "I've taught you how to make smoke bombs. Make a big one, a monster, and plant it in the back of the police car up on the hill. Light a fuse to it when that car starts out of here. Bronski is on guard. Speak to him gently."

Jonesy said, softly, "Sure."

Dean stood beside him, and Peggy had her hands clasped whitely before her, and there was pity in her face. Wentworth frowned.

"What's the matter with you two?" he asked, gruffly. "The job is done. We're going out of here tonight."

Peggy suddenly burst into sobs, turned and ran away. Dean stood closer and put his hand sympathetically on Wentworth's shoulder.

"We have some bad news for you, Wentworth," he said steadily. "Brace yourself."

Wentworth felt his body tightening, and impatiently forced himself to relax. It was not with his body that he would withstand shock, or peril, or despair, but with his soul. . .

He said, quietly, "It's Nita, of course. What is it?"

Dean's face twisted. "Yes. She's been identified and caught. She has already been tried and condemned."

Wentworth lay perfectly quiet upon the bed. "Condemned," he asked in a muffled voice. "Condemned!"

"As accessory in the murder of Senator Brown," Dean pushed out the words with angry effort. "She has been sentenced . . . to be hanged!"



CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Through the Night

IT WAS just before the expiration of the hour he had set that Richard Wentworth stalked out from the basement and moved along the street toward where the big truck was parked. The

police lines had reformed, but nowadays the police did not penetrate inside their own cordon. There weren't enough of them when every woman and every child was an enemy intent upon pulling them to pieces.

Wentworth found them waiting. Men and women carried sheet-wrapped bundles over their shoulders or piled high upon baby carriages. There were children in arms, and others who clung to their mother's skirts. The older children were curiously silent and grave. It was a multitude of refugees. They might have been in any land . . . the people whom war drives from their homes and scatters like dried leaves before a storm. Old faces and young, resigned and grim, gentle and bitter looked up toward the *Spider* as he mounted the tail gate of the red truck.

He carried a long staff of wood wrapped in white in his left hand and he leaned on it. He was strangely gaunt, but the weakness had departed. He burned with inner fire.

He lifted the staff, and silence fell like a blanket over the crowd. Only one childish voice spoke. "Mommie," it said. "Mommie, he looks like that picture in the Bible. Moses."

The crowd stirred. Wentworth began to speak.

"We are going out of here," he said. "I promise you no miracle. There will be opposition. It will not endure. The police are heartsick over the treatment that has been given to you. Some of them may be hard-hearted and ready to kill. Some of you may die. The rest will march on. I will go before you. And the police will give way before us, for they, too, are Americans.

"People who stand together fearlessly, at all costs, are invincible. You have stood together and no one has dared to come among you. Stand together now. March together. Nothing is as strong as the united will of a free people."

A low rumble of voices rose from the crowd. A man shook his fist in the air. Some one swung an axe.

"No violence!" Wentworth's voice rang like a trumpet. "No violence! You must live to spread the lesson you have learned here. You must scatter throughout the city, throughout the state and spread the word. But do not oppose violence with violence. You will be destroyed before you have gathered strength. No weapons. No opposition to force. Just march together. Be ye gentle as doves and wise as serpents. Spread the doctrine of freedom, and the people will rise to conquer. A great man was killed trying to help you. Senator Brown. His spirit marches with you. He died for you as surely as any soldier in the trenches. Keep his spirit alive and strong and go marching on.

"Your symbol, men and women of America!"

He lifted the staff and whipped it before him and a great white flag unfurled from it. Across its face was a great black L.

"L for Liberty!" he cried.

Somewhere in the crowd, a boy's voice piped up. "Hooray! Give 'em L."

There was the sound of a slap, and the crowd laughed. Wentworth sprang down from the truck's tail and walked through the people and they parted to make way for him. He took his place at their head, and Marsogni ran beside him to carry the flag.

"Forward!" Wentworth cried. "Bronski, send that policeman through the lines . . . *on the other side.*"

THE police car sputtered into life and trundled away, and there was a faint haze of smoke from its luggage compartment. The big smoke bomb was working. The people strung out behind the *Spider*, walking strongly, striding vigorously. If there was fear, it had

been burned out in the enthusiasm and the courage that the *Spider* spread like sun-heat. They rounded the corner, and a woman's voice began to sing softly, a hymn.

Another voice caught it up, and another. Its volume mounted, not tuneful, but unanimous and strong and mighty . . . like surf in the distance. Irresistible, thunderous . . . and patient, terribly patient and sure of the inevitable conquest over oppressors.

Wentworth was aware that someone walked beside him on his right and he turned his head. A young mother was striding there, head flung back and joy on her face. Her son was on her shoulder. Her throat swelled with song and there was divinity in her eyes. The boy sat staring straight before him. His face was grave and smiling.

"Go back," Wentworth said, and his voice was strangled. "Go back! Here is danger!"

The girl glanced at him with a smile. "This is our place," she said. "What God has appointed, will be."

She sang, and the boy's hand rested on her head and the march was wholly in the hill street. The surge of the hill was under their heels. It thrust them forward resistlessly. From the opposite side of the town, there was a shout and a blast of gunfire. Men in police blue came grimly out of the hut ahead of them.

They stood across the street and waited, and the hymning voices of the multitude beat at them.

One of them fired a revolver, sending the bullet high. A boy's voice piped again, "*Give 'em L!*"

The crowd laughed and surged on more strongly, more swiftly. Another man ran out of the police hut. There were gold glints on his badge. He was the officer. Wentworth looked over him, and marched on.

The police voices were thin against the thunder of the multitude. Then there was a louder voice from the police. It was spoken by guns. Behind Wentworth, a man swore in pain. Marsogni gasped, staggered a few steps. He lifted the flag higher and began to run, and the guns blasted again. He went down. Wentworth caught at the falling flag, but the woman with the child was before him. She caught the staff in her left hand and held it high, like a spear.

"Forward!" she cried.

The child on her shoulder lifted his arms high . . . and there was another blast of shots. The child swayed backward on its mother's shoulder. Arms and legs kicked violently, and were still. The child's body sagged against the head of its mother. For an instant, the woman stood still, the flag still lifted high.

She twisted her face toward her son, slain in her arms. Then she lifted her

MIGHTIEST . . . TIMELIEST! of all CHAPTER PLAYS!

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DON'T MISS A SINGLE CHAPTER!

voice again, to cry, "*Forward!*" It was a terrible cry. Grief was in it and stricken pain, and courage beyond mortal belief. "*Forward!*"

The hymn was rolling dynamite now. The march did not quicken, but it flowed on without ceasing, without slackening, resistless as an ocean tide. The police lifted their guns again, then one of them turned and hurled his revolver to the ground. The officer whipped his gun toward the man, but the other cops suddenly swarmed over him and struck him to the ground. For an instant after that, they stood in the path of the march. Then they moved to the side of the street and, when the multitude went past, it sucked them into its outskirts. The chorus swelled.

Before them marched the *Spider*, and a woman with her son dead upon her shoulder and a great white flag above her head. *L for Liberty*. . . .



IT WAS the next night that a strange voice began to speak over the air to the people, coming from a radio station that no one had ever heard of. It was called the L for Liberty station.

The man who spoke said, "This is the voice of Liberty. This is the voice of America. I speak to the hearts of Americans. Be strong and nothing can destroy you."

And he told of the march out of the village. He told it simply without heroics, and mentioned a woman and a smiling child and how that child had died.

"That child died for the freedom of men, for Liberty," the voice went on. "Afterward, three of the police joined the march. This morning, those three policemen were murdered at the orders of the man who controls this state. That man is growing frightened. He must prevent his police from having souls. For if they have souls, they believe in Freedom

and Liberty! Woe to tyranny, when Liberty is born in the hearts of men!"

A man slipped along a dark street to a police station. He climbed up on a stone ledge and, with a wet paint brush, he drew a huge L across the building wall.

As he jumped down, a policeman turned the corner. He shouted at the man and, as he ran, the cop drew his revolver and fired. The man fell to the pavement and lay motionless and the policeman ran up and stood over him.

He looked from the fallen man to the wall, and he saw the L. He was still looking at it when the men came out of the alley in a compact mass. They struck the policeman down before he could take alarm . . . then they used the paintbrush to place an L on his blue breast.

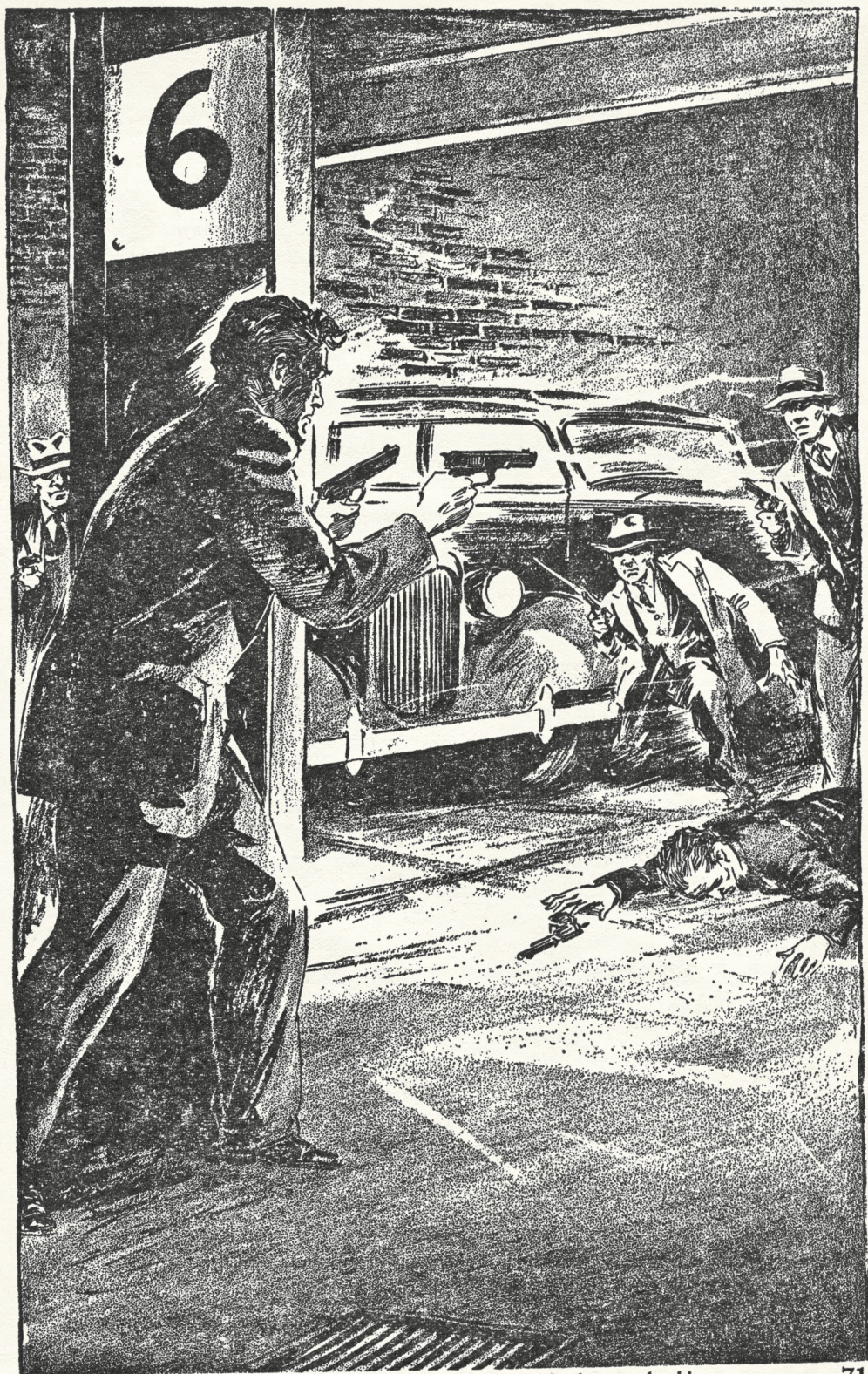
They carried off their dead.

It was in a motion picture theatre and there was a news film on the screen. It showed Lieutenant Governor Richards making a pledge for reform and clean government. The crowd was dead quiet. One man applauded, and a woman spoke to him fiercely. He was quiet.

Suddenly, the black shadow of an L fell across the picture. Someone in the balcony had slapped a silhouette on the lens of the projector. There was an instant of silence, and then the theatre broke into a prolonged cheer that changed to a song. It was a song that the *Spider* had ordered distributed. "*Senator Brown's body lies a-mouldering in the grave, but his soul goes marching on!*"

Police came charging in through the doors. For a few moments, they were angry and belligerent and gripped their clubs threateningly. But the crowd was marching out of the theatre, singing. The police stood aside, and did nothing. One of them turned and ran.

The execution was public. It was a



Wentworth leaped behind a steel column, both guns bucking.

hanging in front of the capitol—from a window of the capitol in fact—and it was supposed to be a lesson to the people. The man, standing on the platform against the wall of the capitol, had a sign about his neck.

The sign read: "*I am a traitor to my state.*"

There was a great crowd of witnesses. Police had herded the people from their homes, stopped them on the street and driven them to the plaza so that they could learn their lesson.

Lieutenant Governor Richards stood on the platform and made a speech from beside the condemned man who stood against the wall, with his hands behind him.

"When law is destroyed," said Governor Richards, "there is no safety for anyone. I am wiping out corruption, and I ask the support of the people. I urge you to learn your lesson . . . *from this!*"

He flung out his hand and the trap was sprung with a hollow boom, and the man's body jerked at the end of the rope. A shout lifted from the people. It had anger in it, but it had an ironical laughter that was like a threat.

Richards turned his head a little and looked where he was pointing. On the wall, the doomed man had scrawled a huge L. *L for Liberty!*

Lieutenant Governor Richards left the platform hurriedly.

The Voice of Liberty told the people about that. "This is the way," it went on. "Not by violence, but by courage will we conquer. By the courage of a woman who carried her dead son on her shoulder to victory. By the courage of a man with a rope around his neck who still could shout his message of Liberty! Already, the tyrants are shaken and doubt is beginning to work in them, and fear is beginning to work in them!"

There were four men in a small living room listening to that voice over a radio.

They were quiet men. Two of them pulled at pipes; one sat still, and the fourth was on his feet. His fists were clenched, but he did not speak. A desperate courage was being born in the others, too.

Suddenly, there was a crash at the door, and a policeman in blue stood on the threshold. "It is forbidden to listen to that station," he said harshly.

He stalked to the set and caught it up, ripped loose the plug from the wall. One of the quiet men rose to his feet. He picked up a vase and threw it and it struck the policeman on the head. He went down.

The man who had thrown the vase said, calmly, "We'll have to leave here now, but we might as well hear the end of that talk."

They plugged in the radio and it hummed into sound. The Voice of Liberty was signing off.

"L for Liberty," he said. "Give 'em L."

The man chuckled. "We did, brother," he said.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Tramp, Tramp, Tramp

THE black enclosed truck labeled "Laundry," carrying bundles of clothing on top, reeled through the snow-bound streets with two police cars in pursuit. Mike Karofi crouched over the wheel with a grim smile on his mouth. Beside him, Jon Bronski swayed stolidly to the heel of the car.

In the back of the truck, Wentworth braced himself against the wild lurching of the car and spoke into a radio microphone.

"This is the Voice of Liberty signing off," he said. "L for Liberty Station. Give 'em L."

He threw a switch and cut off the transmitter. The clang of bullets against the steel sides of the truck came through

to him dimly. He steadied himself and moved forward.

"You can lose them now, Mike," he said. "The broadcast is finished.

Mike grunted with relief and whipped the car in a broadside skid around a corner. There was a scream of tires as the pursuing police tried to brake into the turn. That was the wrong way. One of the police cars cracked up. The other lost ground. Mike took another turn and bore down on the accelerator. Presently, he turned again and was out of sight of the police.

He rode the wheel like a living, sentient thing. Wentworth braced himself across the truck and smoked quietly. Every day or so, another of their members was picked up by the police, or murdered by the criminals allied with them. Still the organization grew by leaps and bounds. Everywhere, there were new friends.

The boom of the truck engine was suddenly hollow and echoing, and Wentworth stood up, climbed over beside Bronski. They were thundering up the ramp of a garage. The truck hesitated, and Wentworth dropped out. The truck roared across the building, down another ramp, and was gone. Wentworth hurried toward a coupé parked in a far corner. The owner of the garage had accepted the pledge of L for Liberty. A mechanic waved a friendly hand.

"All set, sir," he called.

As his shout rang across the hollow vault of the garage, men poured suddenly out of hiding. There were three different groups of them and they carried guns in their hands. *Betrayed!*

In three long bounds, Wentworth reached a steel column in the center of the floor. As he dodged behind it, bullets rang on the metal like great hollow gongs. Wentworth's guns somersaulted into his palms and he flung out three swift shots which blasted out the only lights in the garage.

Thirty seconds later, the headlights of the stored automobiles began to blaze. The guns kept up a ceaseless pounding. On the floor behind the steel post, lay something dark that quivered to the beat of the bullets. The men crowded in slowly, firing as they came. A hundred bullets pierced through the figure. Great shadows stalked across the roof and across the floor. Headlight fingers poked between the legs of men and turned them into grotesque gargoyles.

Suddenly, one of the attackers ran forward. "This ain't Wentworth!" he yelled. "This is the mech!"

He flipped the man over on his back, and it was true. This was the traitor who had signaled the attack. On the floor beneath him, in chalk, was scrawled a huge L.



As the men huddled and stared, in almost-superstitious fright among the shadows, a car engine suddenly roared. There were frantic shouts and men leaped aside as a black limousine charged forward toward their huddled mass. Then another car leaped from the ranks at right angles to the other and, a few moments later, a third was charging toward the killers. Their guns blazed wildly. Headlights were blinding in their eyes. They could see nothing clearly and they hurled their lead at the charging cars. They did not know that each car was running wild, without a driver behind its wheel.

Fighting those empty cars, dodging

when the juggernauts collided with steel columns or smashed together in a battle of steel titans, they did not notice the coupé that, without lights, rolled quietly from its position in the corner. They did not notice it until, suddenly, its motor blared wide open and it hurtled down the ramp to freedom!

They heard laughter float back to them then, thin and mocking laughter that stopped their wild charge for a moment, that sent chills striking through their hearts. While they hesitated, there was a sullen boom behind them, and a gasoline tank exploded. Gouts of flame leaped high over a rank of parked cars. An instant later, the fire was blazing furiously.

OUTSIDE, Wentworth sent the coupé coursing swiftly through the streets. He leaned back against the cushions, and his eyes were half closed. This was the first breach the enemy had succeeded in making in the ranks of the faithful. The *Spider*, who knew mankind's weaknesses so well, knew that there would be other traitors. It was a thing difficult to guard against, but he thought a lesson had been taught. He had not killed the traitor, but there was no question about what had happened to him.

Wentworth glanced at his watch, and increased his speed a little. He did not wish to be late for his appointment with the Liberty Men. Presently he left the coupé, and it was not now Wentworth who slipped through the shadows. It was a figure in a black, wind-flaunting cape. It was the *Spider*!

He stole between shadowed warehouses, and in the near distance switch engines tooted and puffed in the freight yard. Wentworth presently was crossing tracks and, after a while, he climbed a box car. He ran softly long the top of the train, dropped to earth, and surmounted an-

other long line of cars stationary on a siding.

He stopped still, listening. The wind made a low moan overhead. The toot of a switch engine was muffled and mournful. Wentworth nodded. He moved to the side of the box car and lifted his arms.

"Liberty is here," he said, ringingly.

In the darkness below him, a hundred faces turned upward. Men were there between the long lines of box cars, standing silently, waiting. The *Spider* was right on time.

He talked to the men briefly, strongly. "Sentiment is crystallizing everywhere. The position of the tyrants is being steadily weakened. It is time to organize, time to strike. The signal will be given by the Voice of Liberty. When it is sounded, all of you head for Hickok. Go separately, appoint your own rallying point and then converge on the capitol. You will know what to do then. I will be there, and so will a dozen other such groups as yours. We will win."

Wentworth looked over the waiting faces below him. There was no dissent, only a slow rumble of ready, strong men. He nodded. "The signal will be the famous words of Patrick Henry: 'Give me Liberty, or Give me Death!'"

As he spoke, there was suddenly a single gun-shot, and then men popped into sight at the end of the lines of freight cars.

"Don't fight!" Wentworth shouted. "*Scatter!*"

The guns blasted in a hot fusillade of death. Two men fell to the ground between the lines of freight cars, but the others already had plunged beneath them, into them, over them. There were sporadic bursts of gunfire, a few shouts and screams . . . and the Liberty Men had vanished into the shadows. The *Spider* was another shadow that glided in the darkness and presently regained his car and drove away. He glanced at his watch.

The time schedule was tightening. He drove furiously, and the line of his mouth was grimmer. More treachery, or else some one of the men had been followed into the rendezvous. If it were treachery, he could depend on the men to cleanse their own ranks. If it were the vigilance of the police . . . well, that must be beaten.

In an alleyway between two slattern wooden buildings, Wentworth left his coupé again. He slipped through the cluttered yard behind the buildings, pulled aside a plank in the fence and instantly was among the rusted bones of junked automobiles. As far as the eye could reach, they were sprawled out with their vitals exposed to the elements. Snow was grimy beneath them, and ice festooned ragged fenders. The *Spider* made his way more slowly now, watching cautiously for signs of a trap.



FOR a brief moment, as he slipped along, the thought of Nita van Sloan arose before him. Nita's date of execution had been set. With twenty-five others, she was to be hanged publicly

at the capitol in Hickok. Tyrants never learned. They used the same technique the world over. It was fear, fear, and again fear. Through that fear, they built their own destruction. But Nita . . . Wentworth stopped and his face lifted tautly toward the moonless black of the sky.

Nita was his own private grief, but his was typical of a thousand round about him. Men had lost their wives, and there were widows among the following of the Liberty Men. There was that brave girl whose son had died upon her shoulder. Tyrants thought of people in the mass, to be herded like cattle, or killed like rats. But they were wrong. People were not a mass. They were human beings, with courage in their hearts. When they united, they were not a mass. They were a force that nothing could check for long.

The *Spider* slipped on and, presently, there was another upturned sea of faces before him and once more he was appointing the signal. After his speech, Wentworth dropped down among the men. There were boys in this group. Their faces were as eager as youth, and as old as death.



"THIS ONE WILL KILL YOU"

HE was a tough private dick who knew all the answers. She was a blonde sunburst whose lips brought the touch of death. . . . For only one flaming night they met—to settle a grim wager. . . . because the game was gunplay and the stake was murder, and the winner alone would live to greet the dawn. . . . Read this feature-length novelette by Rex Faust, and you'll agree that it's the most dramatic, punch-packed bit of detective fiction of the year.

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"We're fighting the Revolution all over again," one told him rapidly. "We call this Camp Valley Forge."

Wentworth smiled at them. "I know the spirits of those brave men are with us, again," he said. "Your hearts are as great as theirs. You may have come from France or Spain or Italy or Germany, or from Brazil or Russia, but you are the sons of those men."

A small smiling man stepped forward, "I come from Nippon," he said. "We are sons of Washington, too. We fight for Liberty, too. Some of us. I am a martyr," he said proudly.

The boys grinned at him. "He's got a back like a profile map of the Rockies," one said. "He got it trying to fight the Black Dragon Society. He says they're just as bad as Governor Richards."

The Japanese was no longer smiling. "They are worse," he said. "They will destroy my country. It is our crime that we have permitted them to gain control over us. My country will pay for it, but in the end my people will rise. We, too, have a Fuehrer . . . *Damn him!*"

It was at that moment that brilliant lights suddenly speared into the mass of the men and motors coughed into life all around them. Armored trucks thrust aside their covering of rusted car bodies and machine guns frowned upon the assembled men.

"Surrender," a voice called coldly. "Surrender, and get away from the *Spider*. Let no man hurt him, for he is our friend!"

Faces jerked toward the *Spider* with horror and incredulity. The smile on the *Spider's* lips turned cold and hard. It was the old trick of tyrants everywhere. If you can't corrupt the leaders of the people, make them distrust their own leaders. Divide and rule. It was something no words of his could wipe out, for the doubt would remain . . . unless he proved himself to them here and now.

"Surrender!" Wentworth echoed.

He turned and marched toward the nearest police car. A pistol exploded behind him and the bullet whipped past his ear. He did not flinch. He was under the machine gun of the armored car.

"Open up and take me in," he called hurriedly. "You promised to protect me!"

WHATEVER the men in the armored car had expected, it was not this. Wentworth could hear their voices talking hurriedly as he ran toward them, shouting again for them to open up. It was a chance they would not miss . . . to capture the *Spider*!

The door of the armored car whipped open, and revolvers were thrust toward him, but the *Spider* laughed.

"For Liberty!" he shouted, and his guns thumped into his palms, solidly, strongly. He laughed, and the sound was mocking and thin and bitter.

The guns spoke at him, but the *Spider* leaped aside and the steel car protected him while his guns blasted death into the interior.

It was over in an instant, and then the *Spider* sprang inside the armored car and tumbled out the dead. He looked out the open door, and saw the Japanese outside, gun in his fist. Wentworth gestured to him sharply.

"Help me!" he said. "Before the other killers know what's happening! We can wreck the whole fleet. Here's the flag!"

The *Spider* flung his cape toward the Japanese, and it fluttered inside out. It was a blaze of white and across its inside had been sewn a huge black L. The Japanese bowed, sucking in his breath. "It is an honor," he said, "to carry flag for so-brave man!"

But he did not spring inside the armored car. He mounted to its top and flung the cape wide to the breeze. Wentworth swore softly at the foolhardy bravery of

the man, but he could not delay. He slammed the door of the armored car, wrenched about the machine gun and charged full-tilt at the nearest machine. There were seven of them spread about the junk-yard like the points of a crooked star. So swift was Wentworth's charge that he caught the vision flap of the armored car wide open. His bullets raked the interior and he was past, charging toward the second truck!

Above his head, the Japanese was braced on wide legs, flaunting the flag. "Banzai!" he cried, shrilly. "Banzai Liberty!"

For that breathless moment when the attack started, the men who were clustered in the blaze of headlights did not understand. They did not understand until Wentworth sent his truck crashing head-on into the third truck. Meanwhile, Wentworth's automatic was at work. Headlights popped out on the other armored cars. The gathered Liberty Men caught the idea.

Darkness clapped down on the scene—darkness, through which streaked the scarlet streaks of tracer bullets from machine guns. Men shouted their defiance in the face of death, and there were those who died. The crash of the *Spider's* charges continued. The Japanese long ago had tumbled to the ground, but fought on beside the truck. Wentworth could hear his thin shouts beside him and catch the white flutter of the flag.

"*Banzai! Banzai Liberty!*"

In the end, two of the armored trucks broke free of the junk yard and fled. Of the other five, two were beyond repair, but the Liberty Men now had three armored cars which they could use. When the battle was over, the *Spider* stood briefly atop the car he had captured. Beside him was the little Japanese, miraculously unhurt though the banner he carried was torn with hot lead. He held it proudly high, and smiled.

"Remember this," the *Spider* said shortly. "The enemy will seek to divide you and spread distrust. Trust each other, and trust your hearts. We will conquer. The signal is, 'Give me Liberty or Give me Death!'"

Wentworth leaped down from his place and the armored cars were raced out of the junk-yard and away. A police car challenged one and was smashed and, after that, they were hidden. Wentworth slipped away to his own coupé and, a little heavily now, he sped toward the hideout where Frank Dean and Peggy and Jonesy labored to turn out fresh broadsides of courage on their mimeograph. Wentworth was relaxed against the cushions. Only quick thought and quicker action had saved the loyalty of that group of Liberty Men. Nor would the attack against him stop there. The enemy would start to spread lying reports about him, strive to plant distrust in the hearts of his adherents.

The *Spider's* face grew grim. There was only one antidote. He had no more time to lose. Tomorrow morning, the Voice of Liberty would summon the people to battle and conquest. Wentworth shook his head. It was too soon, too soon. There were not enough Liberty Men; not enough people *believed*. But he could not wait, or the enemy would undermine the strength of the people.

It was decided. In the morning, the Voice of Liberty would pronounce. "Give me Liberty or give me Death!"

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Liberty—or Death!

IN SOME ways, Frank Dean had aged. In others, he was a younger man. There was a grim hardness in him that was beyond the touch of age or any other mortal weakness.

He flung a challenge as Wentworth en-

tered the loft where the paper was being printed now. "We have a report that the *Spider* is fighting on the other side now," he said.

Wentworth said, quietly, "I have a later report." He described the battle of the tanks, as a witness. Even these close fellow-soldiers did not know that the *Spider* and Richard Wentworth were one man. "He thinks, and I agree with him," he concluded, "that since the enemy has adopted these tactics, there is only one thing to do; *attack*."

Dean said nothing for a moment. "Tomorrow?" he asked.

Wentworth nodded, and Dean said, harshly, "I agree with you—on one condition. Tell me when Nita van Sloan is to be executed."

Wentworth looked at him in surprise, then he walked toward Dean and put his hands on his shoulders. "So they've been working on you, too, have they, Frank?" he said.

Dean said, violently, "I know, I know. We are to stand together, and trust each other. You are the man who has led us to this stronger position, who has rallied the people. And yet—"

"What do you require of me?" Wentworth asked quietly.

"An answer!"

Wentworth smiled at him. "I did not know there was any change in the date, until you spoke," he said. "It is clear from what you say that the date has been changed to tomorrow." His face grew grim and drawn. "Trust among us is the one indispensable thing," he went on. "Without that, we cannot win. So I will trust you, Dean, and Peggy and Jonesy. You will decide the hour of attack. I have given my advice. I will do no more."

He turned and crossed to the bed and threw himself down upon it. There was silence in the room through a long while. In the silence, a door was opened and Mike Karoli and Jon Bronski came in.

Mike was chortling. "Boy, are them armored cars something. Look, Mr. Wentworth, leave me drive one of those things when the signal is given, will you? Just give me a chance to drive one, and—Say, what goes on here?"

Dean crossed to where Wentworth lay. "I don't understand," he said. "Are you saying that you will allow the woman you love to die without lifting a hand to save her?"

Wentworth looked up at him. He could feel the waiting of the others and his heart twisted within him. How could he make these people understand? He loved Nita with a love that was beyond reasoning, beyond words. No man may say why he loves one woman. He may find excuses, but the truth is hidden even from him. But Wentworth knew that not the least of these reasons was the high courage that burned in her lovely body. His eyes went beyond Dean and rested on the high, shadowed ceiling of the room. When he spoke, it was not much above a whisper, but it carried to the farther reaches of the room.

"The woman who will be my wife," he said, quietly, "would never turn her back on me, because she would not judge me. But she would suffer forever if she thought that I allowed my love for her to alter by one hair the course of ultimate good for the people we have sworn together to serve. She does not want to die. No human being wishes to. But if I fail to make the effort to save her, she will die knowing that it was for the common good. If circumstances were reversed, I should expect no less of her."

Abruptly, he got to his feet. "I said I would leave the decision to you. I will not. I know, and you know, that the hour has come when we must strike! Therefore, we will strike! With your help, if possible. But regardless of that, it shall be done! Make your own decision. I have made mine, in all good conscience and all good faith and humility."

He stood confronting them, and there was torment on his face, but no wavering in its stern resolve. His eyes were lambent flame . . . and he was the *Spider*, the Master of Men.*

Dean said, slowly, "I apologize. I abide by your decision. I will support you to the last ounce of my strength."

Mike said, "Sure, why not?" There was wonder in his voice.

Jon Bronski spat.



THE mass hanging was set for high noon. Two hours before that time, the police began to herd people toward the Capitol Plaza. There were

machine guns in the windows of the Capitol and there were armored cars drawn up before the high gallows. Their machine guns were manned.

The wind was cold; even the sun was cold. The people huddled together and waited, a black lifeless mass to the eyes of Governor Richards who looked out at them, time and again.

"I do not understand it," he said petulantly. "They are like sheep and yet every now and then they rebel. Why will a man risk his life for nothing but a silly idea?"

He was alone, and no one answered him. He shrugged impatiently, but the answer was there in his mind nonetheless. It was simply: *Men do!*

***AUTHOR'S NOTE:** This was not a title which the SPIDER had chosen for himself. It was a fact. He was a Master of Men. When he chose to exert the inner strength, the inner force that was his will, his soul—call it what you will—men bowed before him. I asked Richard Wentworth about this fact once, and he brushed it aside, as great men always brush aside talk about themselves. But when I pressed him, he told me this: "It is nothing that I have sought. In the course of my work, it was necessary for me to master myself. It was necessary to abolish the consideration of self from my work. How could a man do the work I have chosen to do, and think of himself? This is the heart of the matter." I will add one line: Self-less strength is what men attribute to gods.

"I Talked with God"

(Yes, I Did — Actually and Literally)

and as a result of that little talk with God a strange Power came into my life. After 42 years of horrible, dismal, sickening failure, everything took on a brighter hue. It's fascinating to talk with God, and it can be done very easily once you learn the secret. And when you do—well—there will come into your life the same dynamic Power which came into mine. The shackles of defeat which bound me for years went a-shimmering—and—now?—well, I own control of the largest daily newspaper in our County, I own the largest office building in our City, I drive a beautiful Cadillac limousine. I own my home which has a lovely pipe-organ in it, and my family are abundantly provided for after I'm gone. And all this has been made possible because one day, ten years ago, I actually and literally talked with God.

You, too, may experience that strange mystical Power which comes from talking with God, and when you do, if there is poverty, unrest,

unhappiness, or ill-health in your life, well—this same God-Power is able to do for you what it did for me. No matter how useless or helpless your life seems to be—all this can be changed. For this is not a human Power I'm talking about—it's a God-Power. And there can be no limitations to the God-Power, can there? Of course not. You probably would like to know how you, too, may talk with God so that this same Power which brought me these good things might come into your life too. Well—just write a letter or a post-card to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 33, Moscow Idaho, and full particulars of this strange Teaching will be sent to you free of charge. But write now—while you are in the mood. It only costs one cent to find out, and this might easily be the most profitable one cent you have ever spent. It may sound unbelievable—but it's true, or I wouldn't tell you I was.—Advt. Copyright, 1940, Frank B. Robinson.

The massed crowd waited. Here and there among them was a man who kept his eyes resolutely on the ground. If he looked about him at all, it was out of his eye corners . . . to meet the eyes of another who looked in the same way. There were perhaps a thousand like them scattered through the twenty thousand people in the square. They looked down so that no one would detect on their faces the stern resolve that was planted firmly in their hearts.

It was at five minutes of twelve that three more armored cars rolled up the street behind the plaza and took their positions on the flanks of the guardian line before the building and the gallows. A runner left the command car of the guard and went to the first of the three cars. The men inside wore regulation uniforms. The driver was a big man. He looked down on the runner. "Look, buddy," he said. "We came here because we got orders. If your captain doesn't like it, tell him to talk to headquarters." He spat.

The runner swore at him and went back to the command car, and then was sent off toward headquarters. But it was five minutes of twelve.

It was a dozen blocks away from the Capitol Plaza that men walking along the sidewalks suddenly moved out into the street, formed deliberate ranks and began to march toward the plaza in a solid column. There were two hundred of them, and they marched with an awkward swing, but with a unison of purpose that could not be mistaken.

A policeman darted out from the curb with a sub-machine gun and stood in their path. "Break it up!" he commanded. "That's against the law!"

No one answered him. The men just kept swinging along. The cop jerked up the sub-machine gun, hesitated . . . and the men were marching past him. Their ranks divided and they went around him. They ignored him. No one even looked

at him. They marched on, and he was left behind, and he stared after them in bewilderment. It was as if a column of ghosts had marched past him.

He set a whistle to his lips and blew a shrill blast, and a troop of horse-mounted police trotted out of a side street. He motioned toward the marching men.

"Break them up!" he ordered.

The mounted troop wheeled at a trot and went after the marching men. The trot became a gallop. The riders had their riot sticks out. No face turned toward them, and they drove their horses on . . . but the horses shied aside from the marchers. The riders made their horses rear, so that they struck out with flashing hoofs.

Then one man from every other rank of marchers darted under the horses' bellies and pricked them lightly with the points of their knives. The horses screamed, and bolted with their riders. The men ran back to their places in the ranks. With their continued marching a curious thing happened. A greater rhythm came into their stride, and a greater resolution. And it was contagious. People filtered out of the houses along the street, and began trooping along the sidewalks beside them. A policeman darted out from a corner, leveled a sub-machine gun and opened fire.

Four men among the marchers fell . . . then the sidewalk crowd overwhelmed and beat to earth the man with the machine-gun. The ranks in the column closed in and marched on. The dead lay where they had fallen.

THERE were ten such columns as that, marching from the environs of the Capitol Plaza and their marching was nicely timed. They would hit the outskirts of the crowd at exactly high noon.

The shouts and the shots from the unseen marchers began to echo across the plaza where the crowd was and it stirred

restlessly. The thousand men looked toward their neighbors once more, and the glances ran through the crowd like an electric flash. The people around did not see, but they felt that telegraph of courage and readiness.

From the capitol, a command was shouted and the visor plates slammed into place on the armored cars. A machine gun hurled a screaming hurricane of lead above the heads of the people and demolished a neon sign on a drug store.

That was supposed to engender fear. Somewhere in the crowd, a man laughed.

"They can't kill us *all*!" he whispered to his neighbor.

The whisper ran through the crowd. It was like a strong wind in a wheat field and, before it, all the heads moved the same way . . . in the path of courage.

There was a blare of bugles, a rolling of drums, and Governor Richards stepped out upon the gallows platform.

"That's where he belongs!" a man shouted. "Hang him!"

"*Hang him! Hang him! Hang him!*" the whisper ran through the crowd.

A machine gun blasted again, and this time laughter was spontaneous. Jeering, fearless laughter.

On the gallows, a man touched Governor Richards on the arm. "Maybe we better clear the square, Chief," he said. "They sound ugly."

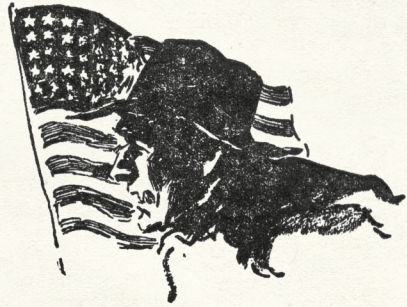
Richards said, harshly, "They have to have their lesson. Bring out that van Sloan girl!"

Nita was passed, hands bound behind her, out the window above the platform, and a rope was tossed about her neck. A shout welled up from the crowd. Not horror, not fear—*rage*!

Richards leaned over the edge of the platform. "The next time there's any of that," he ordered in a high, angry voice, "fire into the crowd!"

Nita van Sloan looked out over the crowd. She did not know what she was

looking for. She tried not to hope that Richard Wentworth would come to her rescue, for it was impossible that he could. More than that, Nita knew that her own life was unimportant. What was important was that the people should rise and throw off the yoke.



The executioner hung a sign about her neck. It read: "I killed Senator Brown!"

Nita looked down at it and laughed. "That is a lie!" she called clearly. "Is it L for Liars? —or L for Liberty!"

There was an answering roar from the crowd. It became a cheer and, suddenly, Nita realized they were not looking toward her. Every eye was focused high above her, on the facade of the capitol! She twisted up her head . . . and there, *flaunting* in the wind, was a huge white banner. The giant, black L was strong against the pure field!

She heard the blat of the machine-gun going into action. She heard screams roar from the crowd. The armored cars started to trundle forward, but even as they moved, the three cars on the extreme flanks spurted and cut across their paths . . . and flags were suddenly streaming in the wind above those three tanks, white flags each with a black L!

A thousand voices lifted from the ranks of the crowd! "*Give 'em L!*" they shouted. And, on the outskirts of the crowd, at ten different points, flags suddenly fluttered and there were marching columns of men wedging into the crowd, driving

forward to the attack! Into battle for the sake of freedom.

Men gathered in behind the armored cars and charged with them. The crews of the other trucks were thrown into confusion. One of them burst suddenly into flame. Nevertheless, the crowd wavered before the slaughter of the machine gun, wavered until there was a sudden, high-reaching, many-throated shout.

She saw the faces turn upward . . . and she saw the reason for the cheer. Slanting down at terrific speed across the face of the capitol building was a man with a cape fluttering from his shoulders! A gun was in each fist, and those guns were blazing death down among the defenders of the capitol. The executioner fell beside Nita. Governor Richards whirled to run. Nita wrenched free of the noose about her neck and tripped the Governor. He fell heavily to the platform of the gallows. The trap was sprung, and he was dumped down among the waiting ranks of the people thronged below.

And the heroic figure of the *Spider* was streaking toward Nita, a cape fluttering from his shoulders, a cape that was made up in equal parts of two brave flags: the Stars and Stripes and the white L for Liberty flag of freedom!

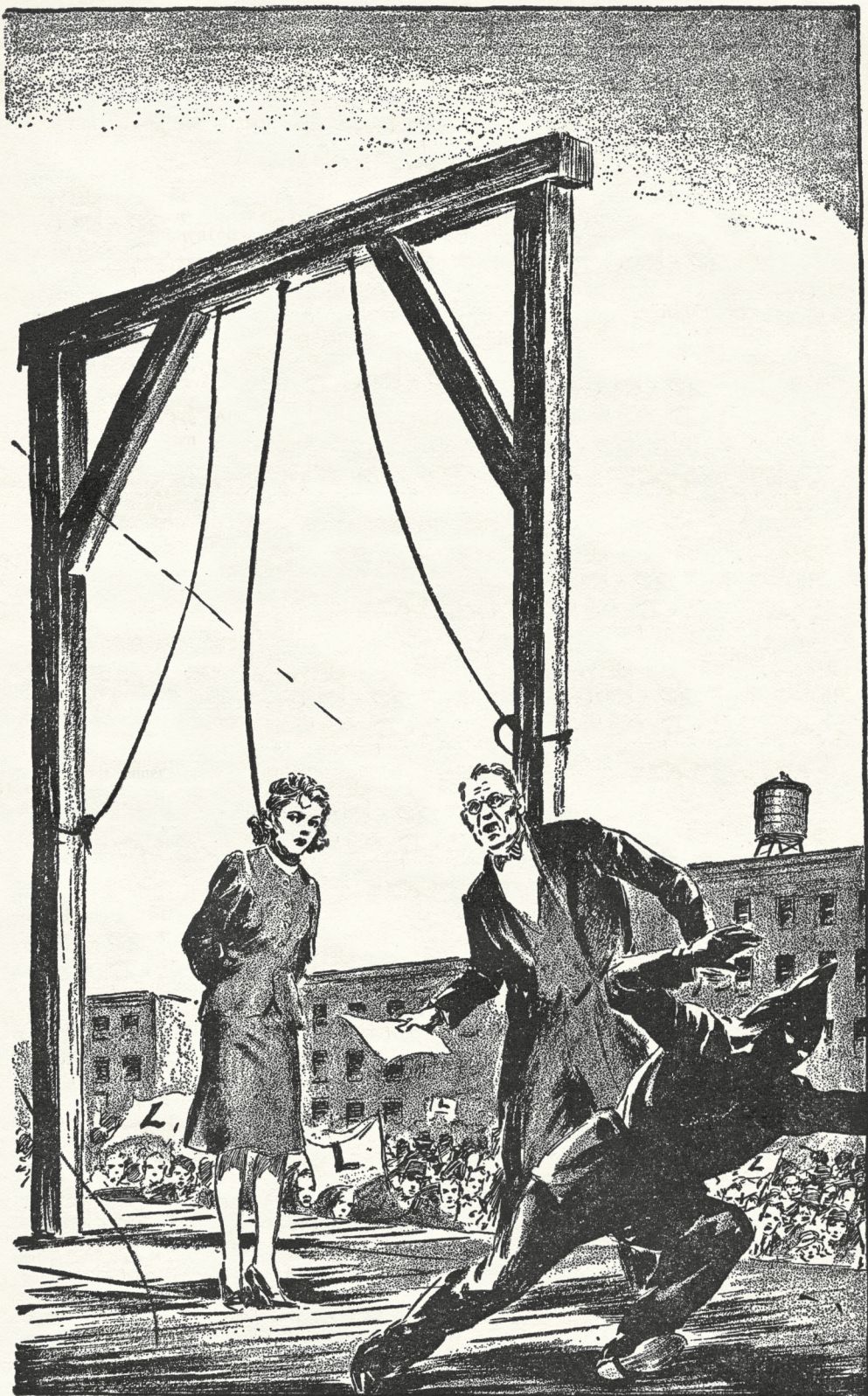
The shout of the people made sense now. It was one long drawn cheer, and the machine guns were stopped. The prolonged and mighty cheer was: "*The SPIDER!*"

THE next instant, the *Spider* hit the platform and was shouting to the people. Over his shoulder, he threw quick words at Nita. "Free the other prisoners. Tell them to get down inside and open the doors! Take the guards from behind!"

Nita van Sloan had felt the battle was won. She realized now that it was only starting. She caught the knife that Wentworth offered and slashed her own bound wrists, sprang through the window back into the capitol.



The executioner fell



and Governor Richards whirled to flee!

Wentworth's words were booming out over the loudspeaker system that had been rigged up for the Governor. "We are free people!" he cried. "Strike for Freedom! The watchword is, 'Give me Liberty, or Give me Death!'"

The crowd surged forward and the ten columns of marching men were striking through. The *Spider* whirled and sprang through the window behind him, Nita had already freed half the prisoners and, with a glad shout, they raced behind the *Spider*, who hit the door with his shoulder, hammered it out and jumped back inside the room. Outside, a machine gun hammered out its death-roll.

The *Spider* waited a split-second until the burst was finished. He leaped wide then through the doorway and, while he was still in the air, his two guns spoke . . . and spoke with authority. The machine gun did not chatter again.

Through the echoing hall, the *Spider* raced and now some of the men behind him were armed with the weapons of those whom the *Spider* had shot. He sent them to open the doors to the beating thunder of the crowd-tide outside. There were guards at the doors, but the blast of gunfire from behind ended their resistance. The doors were flung wide, and the tide flowed in.

At the junction of the halls, the *Spider* flung up his arms in signal. "This way!" he called. "To the Senate! Make them honest! Make them remember Senator Brown! Make them give us an honest governor . . . Frank Dean, the editor of *For Liberty!*"

It was nicely planned. At that moment, the back doors of the capitol were flung wide and, at the head of a column of men, Frank Dean marched into the building. The column and the crowd flowed toward the Senate Chamber, and Wentworth stepped aside . . . merged himself with the shadows. A hand touched his, and Nita crept into his arms.

"The fight is won," she whispered. "Oh, Dick, it's glorious."

"It is glorious," the *Spider* said grimly, "but the fight is not won. Now that tyranny is dead in the hearts of the people, there is a reason to kill the tyrant, so that he will never again stir up greed and envy and fear to the point where they can rule a great state!"

Nita stiffened, "But Governor Richards is dead," she said.

"A figurehead has fallen!" Wentworth said shortly. "Nita, go with Frank Dean. You'll be safe there while this mess is cleaned up."

"But where are you going, Dick?"

Wentworth said, softly, "I'm not sure, but I know the Brain will be there! Go, now!"

He turned and ran swiftly to the back door of the Capitol, sprinted across the plaza toward police headquarters. He went straight toward the doors, barricaded, covered by machine guns.

"Open up!" he commanded. "I am the *Spider* and I take command in the name of the people!"

"Burn him down!" a harsh voice ordered.

Another, calmer voice, interfered. "No, open up!"

The doors were thrown wide, and the *Spider* stalked arrogantly inside. The next instant, he was overwhelmed by a rush of policemen who clubbed at him with their guns and kicked at him with brutal feet.

"Hold it!" the same calm voice commanded. "We'll take him to the Chief! Maybe he can figure a way to use him."

Wentworth was hauled to his feet, his face bleeding, his head sagging . . . but with a triumphant gleam in his eyes. As he had figured, they would take him to the Brain! It was a perilous move, yet the *Spider* did not shrink from danger. He would either conquer or die! It was working according to his plan. Abruptly,

cold fear struck through him. He heard a cop ask harshly, "What do we do with the girl? She's the babe who bumped off Senator Brown."

Wentworth looked up and saw that they held Nita van Sloan prisoner. She had deliberately walked into the trap with him!

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Conquer—or Die!

THERE was some telephoning behind locked doors and then Wentworth and Nita were hustled into a police patrol with six armed guards and the car rocked through the streets. Sometimes, the patrol was pursued by angry citizens. Bricks were hurled at it, and the windshield was smashed in.

The police guards about Wentworth began to grow frightened. They showed it in their belligerent threats, in the brandishing of guns which they did not fire. Wentworth knew that he could overcome them in a single bold stroke. Instead, he lay flat on his back on the hard floor and got what rest he could. He was still bone-thin, and exertion drained his bodily strength.

His hands were handcuffed behind him and that helped. He could ease his still sore wound away from the floor. Nita lay beside him, similarly helpless. There was a smile on her lips. It came from two things: from her deep trust of the man beside her, and her deep love. She believed in him and his ability implicitly. If this could be accomplished, he would accomplish it. If it could not . . . still she would be with him. She was content to conquer, or die, so long as she was with Richard Wentworth.

The *Spider* felt the outflowing of her love and faith and trust like a physical force, and it gave him fresh life. He had no formulated plan. He preferred to rely

on the inspiration of the moment. A set plan, if defeated, left its author at a disadvantage. If one had no plan, then he could seize every wayward opportunity. He knew only that he was going to face the Brain, who planned to use him either for vengeance or as a hostage. And he knew that his guards were badly scared.

A brick, thrown with great violence, bent the wire grating over the door and wedged there, a brutal angle jutting into the interior. The police looked at it and finally, uneasily, one man got up and jarred it loose. He tried half-heartedly to straighten the twisted wire mesh, and could not. He sat down.

Suddenly, the patrol was in darkness and there were hollow echoes beating back at them. They ceased, and the police jerked him roughly to his feet. Wentworth saw that the Chief of Police had ridden beside the driver. His face was rigidly set. There was a cut from broken glass above his right eye.

The *Spider's* falsely lank hair sprawled over his forehead. His eyes held pale fire as he looked at the man.

"It's bad business to fool the people too long, Chief," he said. "They have their own ways of resenting it."

The chief struck Wentworth across the mouth and ordered his men roughly to follow. He strode ahead toward a door let into the brick wall of the garage, and there was a smile on the *Spider's* lips as he tasted the blood of the blow. Not vengeance. The *Spider* did not allow himself personal vengeance. It was a smile of secret knowledge. The chief, too, was frightened.

The *Spider* found himself thrust forward into a long room whose far end was a blaze of light behind which a man's figure was dimly visible. The chief stood at Wentworth's right hand, and there were guns thrust into the *Spider's* back. The chief said, harshly, "Here he is! The people mobbed us in the streets. They didn't

even know we had these prisoners with us."

THERE was no immediate answer from behind the lights. Wentworth could sense Nita's excitement and, suddenly, he smiled. He thought he knew the reason. The Brain had not spoken . . . Was it because he feared Nita might recognize his voice?

When the Brain spoke, it was in a muffled voice that was plainly disguised and the *Spider* was suddenly sure of his suspicions.

"I hear," the man said dryly, "that you have given us a new governor named Dean. He's a friend of yours, of course, but I don't quite see how to use you and your woman. I think the best thing to do is to kill you."

Wentworth nodded equably. "Dean is a man of integrity," he said. "You won't be able to use us as hostages. I think you're right. The best thing to do is to kill us."

The *Spider* heard the caught breath of the men on guard behind him, and was silent, waiting for his words to have further effect. Men who are frightened feel an inordinate respect for courage in others, especially those whom they hold for life or death.

"Will you kill us yourself," Wentworth asked courteously, "or will you skip out first and leave orders for it to be done by those you leave to face the music?"

The Brain laughed, sibilantly. "I prefer to do my own killing, *Spider*," he said easily, "as my men can tell you!"

Suddenly, the *Spider* laughed, too. So the Brain ruled his men by terror! No wonder they succumbed to the fear of the mob. The Brain was extremely blind if he did not realize that fear is a self-regenerative force . . . and that men who fight in fear of punishment can turn viciously on their leader when a greater fear strikes them! And the greatest fear in the world

was the age-old fear of the unknown!

"A good idea again," Wentworth said softly. "Who can say what method the mob would use to kill them if they found I had been killed by them. Mobs can be cruel. Yes, you'd better kill us, for your men would prefer . . . to be friends with the mob."

Nita van Sloan felt a burning confidence in Dick Wentworth, but she could not understand why he kept goading the man before them to the kill. Dick had no weapon. That she knew, for she had seen his weapons stripped from him. Yet he taunted the man to the kill, and she could hear the hard-breathing fierceness of the police behind her. They wanted to see her and the *Spider* die. All this talk of killing was bad. Nita looked toward Wentworth, but he was smiling into the dazzle of the lights. He looked confident, sure of himself. But then, he always did. He looked most confident when the danger was greatest.

"Peril," he told her, "is opportunity."

As Wentworth's confidence grew, Nita's own fears increased. She did not realize that she was falling an unwitting victim to Wentworth's attack; that she was picking up the fear of the men about her.

"There is another reason why you'd better perform the kill," the *Spider* said, softly. "I know who you are, and the knowledge has been passed on to Frank Dean—Governor Dean—by this time. You've played a very clever game, swaying with this wind and then that, and always working your own trickery. But you won't be able to scream with horror over your own deception again. Dean will not forget the fact that the *Tribune* was always on the side of the machine, do you think so, Mr. Tom Marshall?"

Editor Tom Marshall lurched savagely out from behind the lights. He had a gun in his right fist. "You're quite right," he said harshly. "I'll do the killing!"

He leveled the revolver at Went-

worth's breast—his trigger-finger tense!

"You shot me in the back last time, Marshall," he taunted. "Wouldn't you prefer it that way. Can you look me in the eyes and shoot?"

Marshall said, venomously, "So easily, so happily, *Spider*."

He sighted deliberately along the revolver's barrel.



MIKE KAROLI and Jon Bronski walked into the capitol looking for the *Spider*. They just wanted to be near him, a swell guy like that. They looked for him, and he had already disappeared.

Somebody said he had gone into the police headquarters and demanded its surrender to the people!

Mike Karoli chortled, "That's just like the guy. Let's go see the fun."

Bronski spat. "Sure."

They went toward police headquarters and guns spurted flame toward them. A Liberty Man, crouched behind a car, told them that a patrol truck had left after the *Spider* got in. "Some of the boys followed it," he growled. "Didn't know what funny business they were up to. They ain't come back."

Mike looked at Bronski and the big man nodded. Mike said, his voice tight, "Which way did that patrol wagon go?"

The *Spider* laughed at Tom Marshall's gun and turned around to face the men. His voice was low and swift. "Do you think he's going to let you fellows live, now that you know who he is?" he asked softly. "He's got his escape all planned. He'll leave you to face the mob . . . and us dead here for them to see. What will the mob do then?"

Marshall said, violently, "Turn him around. Damn it, turn him around. I want to see fear in his eyes when I shoot

him! I want to see him squirm!"

The police lifted their hands weakly to turn the *Spider* around and the *Spider* laughed. "You rule by fear don't you, Marshall?" he asked. "But it takes power to enforce fear, and you haven't any power left. You'll go to jail and hang for what you've done!"

"They won't catch me!" Marshall said harshly, then checked as he realized what he had said. He had confessed what Wentworth had charged that he would leave the men to face the music in his place. He tried to cover up. His voice rose. "Turn him around, and I'll shoot out his eyes, damn him!"

But the men were not looking at the *Spider*; they were looking beyond him at Tom Marshall and his gun. There was a taut silence in the room and into that silence, faintly, there came a muffled dry roaring sound. It was very faint, but it was unmistakable.

"The mob is coming for you," Wentworth said softly. "If you'll listen, you can hear them!"

The *Spider* whirled to face Tom Marshall. "They're coming for you Marshall," he said. "But you've got your escape all planned, haven't you, Marshall? So they'll kill your men instead . . . unless they present you to the mob as a prisoner!"

Marshall snarled and pulled the trigger of the revolver. But Wentworth had caught the intention in his eyes. He leaped backward between the two police who guarded him, flung himself to one side. As he went down, one of the men screamed and slumped to his knees.

"Wise man, Marshall!" Wentworth called. "Kill your men, and then you'll be safe!"

There was a wild flurry of gunshots in the room, but Wentworth did not heed them. Nita had pitched herself to the floor, and the *Spider* was moving toward the fallen policeman. It was the one who

had the key to his handcuffs. But it was going to be slow work, slow. Marshall had already laid half the men kicking on the floor, and he had the advantage that he was working from behind those blinding lights. It was a matter of close seconds . . . and the mob was too far away to help, even if it were heading this way!

Wentworth got his hands on the key and poked frantically at the lock of his handcuffs and was aware of sudden silence in the room. Silence save for the rasping breath of a dying man. He looked up . . . and Tom Marshall was coming toward him with a ready gun. And the police were dead.

Into the silence of the room, the mob noise came more loudly. Marshall stood just out of reach while Wentworth fought with the handcuff lock. It was stubborn.

"You're pretty smart, *Spider*," Marshall acknowledged. "You never would have found me out if I hadn't let my desire to kill you get the better of my good judgment when you surrendered to the police. But you calculated on that, didn't you, *Spider*?"

Wentworth turned the key, and the lock wouldn't budge. He said, deliberately, "Yes, of course!"

"And you were clever enough to work on the fear by which I ruled my men and turned them against me, weren't you, *Spider*?" Marshall's voice was mounting in fury. "You were clever enough to know that fear no longer governs when they think the leader has slipped. And you took care to let them think I had slipped, and that I was going to run away from them. And then you showed that you weren't afraid of me. Nice planning, *Spider*. You were clever."

Wentworth twisted the key the other way. It worked, but the racket was stiff. "Yes, of course," he said.

Marshall's curse was a shout. "Then see if you can dodge this bullet!"

He thrust out the gun at arm's length,

the muzzle almost against Wentworth's skull and pulled the trigger.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Crown of Glory

TOM MARSHALL made just one mistake. In his concentration on the *Spider*, he forgot Nita van Sloan. As he pulled the trigger, she lifted a foot and drove it into the backs of his knees.

The sudden blow threw Marshall forward, and his gun hand jerked upward. The blast deafened Wentworth, but the bullet missed. His hand jerked free of one handcuff and he swung the arm like a flail. The swinging steel caught Marshall a glancing blow on the gun wrist, drove the weapon from his hand.

Marshall leaped to his feet and ran!

Wentworth stumbled up from the floor and reeled dizzily. The blast of that gun had half-stunned him. But he staggered in the wake of the fleeing killer. As he neared the door, he saw Marshall hurl something past him. He caught a glimpse of it, oval and segmented, with a lever sticking straight out from one end. It was a Mills grenade!



With a shout of horror, Wentworth swept toward Nita. He snatched her up into his arms and leaped headlong through the big glass window and onto the terrace.

(Continued on page 90)

"What can I do?"



LIKE millions of other Americans, I've asked myself one question repeatedly ever since these fateful words popped out of my radio:

"Japanese planes have bombed Hawaii!"

"Daily, nightly, I've turned this question over and over in my mind—with the reading of every news bulletin on the air and the appearance of every epic headline.

"What can I do—here at home?"

"What can I do—while Americans are fighting and dying in the far reaches of the Pacific for freedom and for me?"

What can I do?

"I've looked in my shaving mirror for an answer—and found none.

"I've seen only the perplexed face of a middle-aged man—a man too old to bear arms.

"I've glanced at my hands, too,

a thousand times, only to learn a brutal truth.

"They are soft and white—strangers to the production line where only skilled hands are wanted now."

What can I do?

"Only last night I found the answer as my eyes fell on my wife's knitting bag and my ears caught the click of her knitting needles.

"I could give to the Red Cross. I could answer its urgent call for funds, now so sorely needed.

"I could give to the limit of my means to aid and comfort those who are giving so much more.

"Yes—I could do something. Not much—but something.

"And I have—today."

Give and give generously—to your local chapter—to volunteer solicitors. Give when you can, where you can, as much as you can.

SEND CONTRIBUTIONS
TO YOUR
LOCAL CHAPTER



AMERICAN RED CROSS **WAR FUND CAMPAIGN**

THIS PAGE CONTRIBUTED TO THE AMERICAN RED CROSS BY THE PUBLISHERS

(Continued from page 88)

The bomb let go in the same instant and glass showered outward. Plaster and rubble hurtled overhead. But the *Spider* was already on his feet.

Nita lay, white and pale and motionless where she had fallen. With a prayer that she was only stunned, Wentworth raced around the side of the building. He was without a weapon. The bomb had stripped him of that possibility. But Tom Marshall should not escape! As he ran, Wentworth heard the deep-throated bellow of a motor starting up . . . an airplane motor!

He shouted and flung himself forward in a swifter sprint. There was no room for an ordinary plane to take off. That could mean but one thing. Marshall had an auto-giro in his back court-yard. The newest models could leap sixty feet straight upward when properly handled. That would be more than enough for Tom Marshall's purposes! Wentworth whipped around the corner of the building, and Marshall was at the stick of the 'giro.

As the killer saw him, Marshall blasted power to the motor, and threw the lever which would engage the rotors. Plane and the *Spider* leaped upward at the same moment . . . and the *Spider* was swifter. His arms clamped over the elevator surfaces at the tail! The giro fuselage sagged, but the rotors had hold and labored the ship straight upward into the air!

Marshall twisted about in the seat of the plane. He had a small automatic in his right hand and he took deliberate aim at the *Spider's* head. There was nothing the *Spider* could do. His hand hold was slim, and the strain of long hours of fighting struck through him. But he did not falter. Instead of dodging, he jerked himself upward on the stabilizer.

Marshall fired, but the *Spider's* leap made the plane shy like a frightened animal, and the bullet missed. A moment later, the *Spider* was astride the fuselage in front of the tail-group. He began to

inch himself forward. Marshall pointed the automatic again. This time, there could be no missing. Marshall's grin showed that he knew it. Deliberately, he held his fire while the *Spider* inched himself grimly forward along the fuselage toward the cockpit where Marshall waited.

Marshall was seated in a cockpit beneath the base of the rotor axis. Thus Wentworth was at a higher level than the killer. The rotors swung closely over his head. Deliberately, Marshall thrust the stick forward, making the big blades whirl dangerously near. But Wentworth ignored that, ignored also the fact that they were a half mile above the ground and still climbing. He gripped the fuselage with his knees and inched forward steadily, eyes never leaving those of Marshall as he leaned out to make sure of his aim. The plane flew itself. If the motor were cut, it would merely drift down to earth. As it was, it soared at a steep angle, and the engine beat out its steady thunder.

Marshall's lips opened in a shout whose meaning was lost to the *Spider*. He thrust out the gun and, at the same moment, the *Spider* sprang at him! It was a mad thing he did, hurling himself forward like that. His only hope was to seize the open side of the cockpit and clutch it . . . and there was that gun staring him in the face!

But Marshall did what any man would do when some one jumps at him. He dodged, and the bullet went wild . . . and the *Spider's* body swung into the cockpit! He struck out once with the handcuffs, and the automatic vaulted into space . . . and then they were wedged into the narrow cockpit, fighting for life and death!

MARSHALL was heavier and stronger. He had not suffered a severe wound, and spent months in hiding and furtive fighting. He thrust upward and hurled his weight upon the *Spider*. Wentworth's head was driven

(Continued on page 103)

Corpses Pay Dividends

A "Doc Turner" Thriller

Lovely Honey Morse sprang to riches from the dregs of Morris Street. Yet when a nameless menace threatened the neighborhood of her birth, she rushed to Doc Turner, patron of the slums—unaware that her grim message would falter on lips sealed with lead!



By

Arthur Leo Zagat

SHE entered the ancient drugstore through the front door, leaving behind the raucous Saturday night tumult of Morris Street. Her tiny feet seemed to float above the gray and rutted floor.

"Honey!" Andrew Turner exclaimed. "Honey Morse!"

The years had frosted Doc Turner's silken mane and the bushy mustache that concealed his sensitive mouth. On his bony, hollow-cheeked countenance Time had written in fine lines his kindliness and twinkling humor, his long record of

The look of surprise was still on Dick Barton's face as he folded. . . .

service given. He was no youth to thrill to feminine loveliness, but a light shone in his faded blue eyes as Honey Morse hugged him and pressed a kiss on his dry old lips.

"Gosh, Doc!" she sighed. "It's swell to see you again."

"Let me look at you, my dear." His gnarled hands held her away so that he might do so. "How you've changed," he chuckled fondly, "since I last saw you and gave you a handful of jellybeans?"

"Why, the idea, Doc!" Honey's pout made a dusky rosebud of her mouth. "I'd have been insulted if you'd given me jellybeans the last time I was in here. I was a grown-up young lady of sixteen."

"All elbows and knees!" The old man smiled reminiscently. "Your cotton dress was patched and shabby and too short for your gangling frame. Now you are—let me, see . . . yes, all of twenty, lovely as a dream. The cost of your furs is more than your mother spent clothing you and your five brothers and sisters all the years I've known her."

A shadow crossed the girl's cameo features. "How—how is mother, Doc?"

"Don't you know, Honey?"

"You know I don't. You know she chased me out of the flat the day I took that job in the chorus of Gertie's Garter. She—she's never answered my letters or cashed one of the checks I sent her. Please tell me, how is she?"

"Aging, Honey, but still working hard at the factory." The old druggist's smile faded. "But you—you've changed in other ways, my dear. There was only happiness in your eyes the last time I looked into them, gaiety and young dreams. Now there is only disillusionment; and wisdom learned the hard way and—yes—and fear."

"Fear!" she cried. "How silly! What have I got to be afraid of?" But Doc felt a shudder run through her and knew he was right.

"Tell me," he said softly. "Tell me, Honey Morse, why you've come back, in your silks and fine furs?"

"Because I was born here." She pulled free from him, but her gloved, small hand reached to the heavy frame of a once-white showcase, as if for support. "I was born here and grew up here, and I know how hard these people work for the little they have, and I think it's a darned, rotten shame that— Look, Doc. *You* haven't changed, have you?" She peered anxiously at him from under artfully plucked brows. "You'd still go to bat for them against anyone who tried to kick them around?"

A new tenseness came to the old pharmacist's stooped, feeble-seeming body. "No," he said gravely. "I haven't changed."

"I didn't think you could have, and so when I heard—" Honey broke off and glanced over her shoulder to the door, and beneath her shell-pink ear the sudden, frightened flutter of her heart was plain.

Looking past her, Doc Turner saw only the usual throng of shawled housewives and their heavy-limbed, labor-weary men. Beyond was the glare of wire-hung electric bulbs on the pushcarts, high-piled with the bright colors of their oranges and tomatoes, scallions and green lettuce. The raucous shouts of the hucksters came in from Morris Street, the polyglot chaffering of their customers and the rumble of trucks, and the laughing screams of the children at dangerous play in the cobbled gutter.

There was nothing out there of which Honey Morse should be afraid. Nothing at all.

She turned back to him. "If they gave out medals for being a dope, I'd get one all platinum and diamonds." Her mouth twisted with a wry, impish grin, but between their long lashes her eyes were terrified. "Listen, Doc. There's a—"

It sounded like a truck's backfire, but it jolted Honey away from the showcase and into Doc's arms. Agony leaped into her eyes, a black flame, and twisted her mouth.

She muttered the word, "Triangle." It was utterly meaningless, but with terrible effort it was repeated. "Tri—triangle," and then the warm vibrance was gone from the frail form in Doc's arms and there was no longer any pain in Honey Morse's eyes, nor fear. Nor life.

He laid her gently on the floor and went to the door.

No one in the throng knew who had fired the shot. How could they? It had sounded precisely like a backfire and the marksman had needed to pause only momentarily in the doorway before he melted away into the crowd.



"I T HAS taken the police a week," the tabloid gossip column remarked, "to find out they can find out nothing about the fatal shooting of gunned dancer Honey Morse in that slum drugstore. A certain Cafe-socialite, however, thinks he can do better. He has let word get around that he will pay Ten grand for information that will break the killing."

"The guy is called Foster Starret, Doc." Barrel-bodied, carrot-thatched, Jack Ransom was in his own burly way as great a contrast to the old pharmacist as the flower-like Honey had been. "I got the tip from Gimpy Moran, who parks his hack in the garage where I work."

"Starret," Turner mused, absently leafing over the paper's pages. "Should I know him?"

"Not unless you've been spending your time hitting the night spots after you close up here."

"Hmmm." The druggist ignored his young friend's outre suggestion. "What

did this Gimpy know about him?"

"Nothing much. Starret always hangs around the Heron Club, midnight till closing. Honey Morse was— Well, you know. . . . He lifted her out of a cheap girlie show and got her the spot there at the club and a guy like that don't do things like that just to be a Santa Claus."

"No," Doc sighed. "I don't suppose so."

"Nobody seems to know where this Starret gets his dough," Jack went on, "but he's sure got it. He's a free spender, tips big and put out plenty on Honey, but— Hey! You ain't listening to me."

"Read this, Jack." Doc's acid-stained hands pressed the paper flat on the sales counter behind which he stood. "This ad."

In the center of a white page bordered with dollar signs, was this legend:

!! MONEY !!
You Need It. We Have It.
Come and Get It.

You don't have to PAWN your furniture!

You don't have to get your boss to SIGN your note!

You don't have to put out for a PHONEY service charge!

LOWEST INTEREST
in
THE CITY

PAY BACK \$1 A WEEK !!!

This is your chance to buy nice clothes, a radio, to take a vacation in the country, to get those eyeglasses or false teeth you've needed so long.

Pay the bills that have been worrying the life out of you.

Come and Get It!
!! MONEY !!

"Okay." Jack was puzzled. "So what about it?"

"It's couched in language simple enough for anyone who's literate at all to understand. The terms, especially repayment of only a dollar a week, are irresistibly tempting, and then there are those dia-

bolical suggestions of what the money so easily borrowed could purchase for the borrower."

"Yeah. Yeah, it's a swell ad. It almost makes me want to run right around and ask for a couple bucks myself."

"That, my boy," Doc said softly, "is precisely what you are going to do."

Jack stared. "Nix, Doc. I've got a radio and I don't need any false teeth, and if I owed any bills it's the guy I owed them to who'd be doing the worrying. What for should I start in with a bunch of loan sharks?"

"Did you notice the name at the bottom of this ad?"

"No. Why?"

"Look at it."

The youth read:

TRIANGLE LOAN COMPANY
345 Morris Street
one flight up

and looked up. "Triangle. That's the word Honey gasped out just before she died, and you think—Aw, no Doc. No. How could there be any connection?"

"I don't know." The seamed old face was bleak. "I haven't the least idea. But she fought off death for a terrible instant to utter that one word and so it must be the key to what she came to tell me—and the reason she was murdered." He pulled in breath. "She was shot down, Jack, in cold blood to keep her from warning me of some scheme against her people and mine, and that's a plain indication of what kind of scheme it is. Whatever life Honey Morse lived, she died for her own people. For her sake, and for theirs, I dare leave nothing untried that might keep her from having died in vain."

"Okay," Jack grinned. "Okay, Doc. I still think it's goofy but I'll go."

When he returned, a half hour later, he was still grinning—triumphantly, now. "If that outfit's not on the up-and-up," he

announced, "I'm a brass monkey. Cripes! I went to school with both the stenog there and the fellow who interviewed me. The worst thing either of them ever did was slip a slug in a subway turnstile."

Turner was not satisfied with this. "They're not the officials of the company, are they?"

"On the books they are, but not really of course. Look. Dick Barton told me the whole setup. Seems like some big bank figures a chance to make money in this sort of thing, but the law says they can lend only to business firms with assets, or to real estate owners or others that can give them security. So they set up this dummy corporation and go at the thing like it's a department store, cut prices, advertising, babying the customers and all like that.

"It's worked out swell, too. Once the word got around how decent they are, they started doing a whopping business. Why, in the six months since they started there's tenements—two of them right around here on Hogbund Lane—where every last family has a loan from the Triangle."

"You don't say."

"Why not, the way they treat you? They just ask you where you work and how much you get, and you sign a couple of papers and—whango—you've got your money. Cripes! They even pay for the insurance themselves—"

"The insurance?" Doc broke in, sharply. "In their name?"

"On your life, for the amount of what you owe them. Fifty dollars, a hundred maybe. Gees, Doc, not even you can make anything wrong out of that."

The old pharmacist smiled, faintly. "We've worked together so long that you can almost read my mind, can't you? But you're right. That is merely the sort of arrangement a bank would insist on, to protect itself against loss. What bank is it, by the way?"

Ransom spread his hands. "Dick don't know. The lawyers ain't sure the setup's quite legal and so as far as the corporation papers go, the Triangle Loan Company's just him and Jen O'Hare and a geezer named Chase who's the manager and the only one who's on the in. Well, Doc, I guess we can forget about that Triangle being the one Honey Morse meant."

"I'm afraid so." Turner sighed, and for a moment there was a brooding silence in the ancient drugstore. Then, "Jack. If you've a minute more to spare, I wish you'd drop in at Lapidus's tailor shop and tell Moe I'll want to rent a tuxedo outfit for tonight, complete with wing collar and black tie."

"A—" Jack could not have looked

sacred plush rope barrier were of the elect, those whom he shut out were forever damned.

His hauteur was at its dignified best as he fixed a frosty eye two inches above the little old man in an ill-fitting, obviously rented dinner jacket. "I am verree sorry," he said in a tone that meant he was not sorry at all, "but all ze tables are taken."

"My, my," Doc Turner murmured, "you've certainly grown up, Jackie Berg, since you used to run around Morris Street with the seat out of your pants."

Jacques looked down—and went dough-yellow around the gills. "Doc! My Gawd. . . !" He kept his voice down, but he could not keep the shrillness out of it. "Gees, Doc, if anyone heard you—

Arthur Leo Zagat, longtime favorite with *Spider* fans, is a frequent contributor to our companion magazine, *Ace G-Man Stories*. Read his outstanding story, **THEY ALSO SERVE, in the current issue—on sale now!**

more amazed if a Tyrannosaurus had come waddling down Morris Street. "What in the name of reason do *you* want with a tux?"

Doc Turner tugged at his mustache. "Oh," he said airily. "I might hit a few high spots after closing." There was an odd twinkle in his eyes. "You might also ask your friend Gimpy Moran to call around for me in his cab, as soon after midnight as he can manage."



JACQUES LA MONTAGNE'S tail coat was immaculate, his black mustache waxed to needle points. *Maitre de hotel* of the swank Heron Club, he was the city's arbiter of social distinction. Those to whom he opened the

I'm supposed to've come here straight from the Brussels Ritz—"

"Instead of Meyer's Dairy Restaurant," Turner chuckled. "All right, Jakie. I won't give you away—provided you take me to Foster Starret's table . . ."

The man who sat alone at the table was older than Doc had expected. There was gray at his temples and small wrinkles at the corners of his veiled eyes. But there were no marks of dissipation on his round, yet gaunt-seeming, countenance. His nostrils flared as the old druggist stopped beside him.

"Mr. Starret?"

"Yes?"

"My name is Turner. Andrew Turner. Honey Morse died in my arms."

Not a muscle moved in Starret's face, but it was abruptly a hard mask, ex-

pressionless as his tone. "Sit down." Jacques, hovering discreetly out of earshot, sprang forward to pull out the chair for which Doc reached. "*Monsieur* weeshes to dreenk, *ne c'est pas?*" he inquired.

"Of course," Starret answered. "What will you have, Mr.—er—Turner?"

"Nothing. Oh, a little sherry if I must." The headwaiter hurried off and the old man turned to his table companion. "Mr. Starret," he began, without preamble. "As she died, Honey gasped out a single word that I'm sure is the clue why she was slain. I understand that she was—well, that you were together a great deal and it has occurred to me that you might understand to what, or whom, she referred. The word was—Triangle."

If Doc had expected some reaction, he was disappointed. "Triangle?" Starret repeated, tonelessly. "No. It has no meaning for me."

The orchestra crashed into rhythmic cacophony and chairs scraped as couples rose to dance. "Have you," Doc persisted, "by chance ever heard of the Triangle Loan Company?"

That was the precise moment a waiter chose to come in between them and deposit on the table the sherry he'd ordered. When the servitor withdrew Starret's expression was still inscrutable. "Mr. Turner," he murmured. "Aren't you wandering rather far afield? How could a loan company have any possible connection with Honey's death?"

"I hoped, knowing how anxious you are to avenge her murder, that you could help me find out."

"You are not answering my question," the other pointed out. "Simply because the company's name includes the very common word she uttered—"

"And because its backers conceal their identity. Mr. Starret!" A note of steel crept into Doc's tones. "I intend to discover who those backers are if I have to

go to the State Banking Commissioner himself. You see," he smiled deprecatingly, "I have a queer idea, an old man's senile fancy perhaps, that when I find them, I shall also find those responsible for that girl's death. You would be glad of that, would you not?"

Starret's hand closed into a fist on the cloth. "Glad of it? If I thought—Look here," he broke off. "This is a fantastic notion of yours, but if it has any justification, an official investigation would warn the people you suspect. I happen to know someone who may be able to give us the information in confidence." He pushed up out of his seat. "I know him well enough to telephone him even at this hour. Will you excuse me please?"

He strode off. Doc's fingers closed around the stem of the sherry glass and raised it. His lips moved, as if he were making a silent toast.

Across the room, screened from him by the dancers, a bediamonded and besotted dowager mumbled incoherencies into a portable telephone that had been brought to her table and plugged in there.

Foster Starret did not sit down when he returned. "It looks as if I'll have to apologize for thinking you a bit off." His frozen calm now seemed like thin ice over a turbulent, boiling rapids. "My friend refused to talk over the 'phone, but he offered to tell us something very interesting if we'd come to his home. I told him we'd start right over. That suit you?"

"Naturally."

"Come on then. The doorman's bringing my car around."



THE hundred horses under the coupe's huge, gleaming hood champed in muted protest as a red traffic light held them in leash. "They

shouldn't hold traffic up at this time of the morning," Doc murmured. "There isn't another car on the street or a soul on the sidewalks."

"I agree with you." Starret put a cigarette between his lips and leaned over to reach for the dashboard lighter. "It's wise, however, to stop—oops!" The glowing little rod slipped from his fingers and fell between Doc's feet. "That was clumsy of me. If you don't mind, Mr. Turner. I can't reach it. . ."

The druggist bent to retrieve the thing. Something thudded against the base of his skull and he blanked out.

The room in which Doc Turner returned to painful consciousness, was very small. A huge safe took up most of the space. Other than this there were only a flat top desk and the swivel chair in which Doc slumped, and to the arms of which his wrists were lashed.

There was no window in the room, but one wall was a partition that did not quite reach the ceiling. The upper half of this partition was frosted glass and the yellowish light that sifted through it was bright enough for him to read the gilt letters across the front of the safe:

TRIANGLE LOAN COMPANY

Doc couldn't get out of the chair but he could swing it around with his feet, and it was well-oiled so that it made no noise as he did so. The partition door was closed. The lettering on the glass in it was reversed, but it was easy to make out what it said:

CLARENCE CHASE, Mgr.

The light on the other side of the partition laid on it a shadow Doc recognized. Foster Starret. He was standing and something about the way his head was thrust forward conveyed a sense of tense waiting, almost of dread.

The old druggist wasn't gagged. He recalled that 345 Morris Street was a two-story taxpayer building, with a hardware store on the ground floor and offices above. A clock on the desk told him it was three-seventeen. The store would be closed at this hour and nobody would be in the offices. He could scarcely yell loud enough to be heard out in the street.

Starret's breathing was distinctly audible over the top of the partition. It was like the breathing of a cross-country runner almost at the end of his wind. It cut off, abruptly. The rap of knuckles on wood came again, then there was a pause and then the knock was repeated.

Starret's shadow moved, dwindled, vanished as he went beyond the source of the light. Doc heard a lock click, a scrape of hinges, a couple of heavy foot-falls. The door thudded shut. The lock clicked again.

"What's up?" The low, rumbling voice was unfamiliar. "Why'd you 'phone me to meet you here instead of at the Heron Club?"

"The picture has changed, Jim." By what miracle of self-control Starret had regained the flat, unemotional quality of his speech Doc could not guess. "As I told you, you should have put a bullet into that druggist as well as into the girl."

"And I told you I couldn't get a clear shot at him without going in that store, which would have trapped me. So your ten grand bait has hooked him all right, hey."

"It brought him around, all right."

"She couldn't have spilled much to him. She didn't know much."

"She said only one word, *Triangle*, but it was enough to make him smell something phoney about this set-up. He intends to ask the Banking Commission to investigate it."

A low whistle from Jim was followed by a moment's silence. Then, "Intends

to, you say. But he hasn't done it yet."

"No."

"So what's your sweat? It'll take that outfit a week before they start to begin to think about asking embarrassing questions. That gives us plenty of time to cash in and cover up."

"It would if it wasn't for the matter I called you about the first time. You thought I was being over careful, having our mail sent to a postoffice lock box instead of here so that I could look it over before our employees saw it. Well, that little precaution paid dividends tonight. I picked up some letters on my way home, as I usually do. This one was among them. Read it, Jim Gargan. Read it and weep."

PAPER rustled. Then Gargan's voice was reading aloud: "In checking the lists of assured under the blanket policy number so and so, of which your company is the beneficiary, we find a number of risks in the sum of fifteen hundred dollars each. Since these are so far out of line with your usual small coverages, we are regretfully compelled to enclose herewith formal notice that we are cancelling our liability with respect to the listed risks, effective five days from the date hereof—' Nice! Perfectly ducky."

"Isn't it?"

"But we've still got five days, haven't we?"

"Have we? Read that next paragraph."

"'However,'" Gargan started reading again, "'we can issue individual term insurance on the lives of these assureds at the same premiums as those under your blanket policy, provided they are able to pass a simple medical examination. In order that we may issue these individual policies before the effective date of this cancellation notice, and so that full protection of your loans shall not lapse, we have instructed our local agent to call

upon these assureds at once and have them sign new applications in the requisite amounts—' "

"Do you see, Jim? He'll find out immediately that we've insured for fifteen hundred apiece more than a hundred borrowers to whom we have loaned only twenty-five and fifty dollars. What chance do you think we'd have to collect for their deaths, after that?"

The skin was tight over Doc Turner's cheekbones. He knew now the full enormity of the Triangle Loan Company's apparently legitimate operations, the full horror of the plot Honey Morse had given her life to reveal.

Gargan had absorbed the impact of disaster. "We're washed up. We're all washed up tomorrow morning, soon as that insurance agent starts talking to those suckers."

"If, Jim," Starret's cold voice corrected. "If he starts talking to them. If there's one alive tomorrow morning for him to talk to."

"Got you," Gargan chuckled. "All I've got to do is run home in my flivver and get the stuff, and get it into the gas mains. About a half hour's work at the most and we're in the clear—Hey! Hey, wait. Won't the insurance company want to know how come all the big loans are all in those two houses?"

"They might, but I've already answered that question, in a letter I mailed so that it will be postmarked at seven tonight. We understand, I wrote, their action and approve it, but we feel some explanation is due them. They will notice that all the assureds referred to in their letter of the umpty-umpth live at either Two-twenty-six or Two-twenty-eight Hogbund Lane. These adjoining tenements are in such bad condition that they are about to be condemned by the authorities as hazardous to human life. Their tenants, however, have joined in a cooperative plan to purchase and rehabili-

tate them and we felt justified, as a contribution to civic betterment, in deviating from our usual limits to make the extraordinarily large loans that will enable them to do so. Does that cover us, or does it not?"

"Like a blanket." Gargan was awed. "If you weren't so crooked, Starret, that you could hide behind a corkscrew, you'd own half the U.S. by now."

One could hear the other's slow, cruel enjoyment in his tone. "I'm doing all right. This little transaction will net us—let's see. Fifteen hundred times a hundred and six is a hundred and fifty-nine thousand, less about thirty-five hundred we've actually loaned out that hasn't come back yet—say a hundred and fifty-five thousand, even, allowing for expenses. And we'll still have a nice little going business that will pay off our investment and a profit—Oh, by the way, there's a little job you have to attend to before you leave here."

"Yeah? What?"

"The druggist. Turner. We can't afford to have him running around loose—especially after what he's heard the last few minutes."

"The last—" Gargan vented a blistering oath. "What do you mean? Where is he?"

"Behind that partition, Jim, probably quite conscious by now. All you have to do is take him out with you—"

"All I've got to—Nix, Starret. Guess again. You don't put that over on me. I'm taking care of blasting the houses because I know how and you don't, and I bumped your gal because she'd have spotted you tailing her, but this nosenheimer's your headache."

"Listen, Jim." Starret was breathing

hard again. "Listen. I can't quite—"

"The hell you can't," the other man snarled. "That druggist's your headache, and you're going to take care of him, or—Well, there will be no or else, because I'm going out to do my job now and if you muff yours, you'll burn in the same chair I do. Okay, mister. You've got half an hour!"

Retreating footfalls pounded across the floor. The door opened, slammed shut. The lock clicked.

FOSTER STARRET was breathing hard. His shadow was growing on the frosted glass, black, menacing. The door in the partition was opening and he was entering the little inner office, and his hand was bringing an automatic out from under the flap of his beautifully fitted dinner coat.

Through the open door Doc could see into the bigger room. He saw a couple of desks, smaller than the one in here, behind a railing that ran the length of the room to windows that had black shades drawn tightly down. The light came from a shaded lamp on the farther desk and by its luminance Doc could make out, beyond the railing, the door to the public hall.

Starret was standing over him. Starret's face was no longer an imperturbable mask. Muscles writhed, like tiny snakes, under skin shaved so close it was pink and soft as a babe's. Thin lips were pressed tight, as though to repress nausea.

Here was a man who could plan wholesale murder, coldly, with the calm precision of an engineer drafting a bridge, but who was terrified at the prospect of having to carry his plans into action. He would, though. He had to. Unless . . .

Emile C. Tepperman's popular Masked Marksman, Ed Race, will be in the short story post for next month!

"You're going to kill a hundred and six families, Starret," Doc reminded him, "not only men and women but children." Horror had drained his voice of emotion. "Those who don't die in the explosion will burn to death, screaming. You'll hear those screams, waking, sleeping, the rest of your life."

Hysteria jittered in Starret's eyes, but when he spoke, he once more contrived to speak with sneering calm. "Wrong. I'll hear music and the pop of champagne corks and the soft laughter of beautiful women and the roar of speeding motors. But you—"

"You'll go mad," Doc broke in. "Hearing those screams, you'll go mad. You've still got time to save yourself. You still can stop Gargan—"

"No!" Starret grunted hoarsely, and the old man knew he'd lost. "Put your head down." The automatic was clubbed in Starret's hand. "Put it down so I can stun—"

He whirled to a sharp sound, the click of a key in a lock. The outer door was opening.

A young man stepped through, top-coated, blonde, sleepy-eyed. He turned to the sound of Starret's breathing. "Mr. Chase!" he exclaimed. "You—I—I was coming home from a party and I remembered some work I wanted to finish—"

Starret's gun pounded. The look of surprise was still on Dick Barton's face as he folded over the railing.

Foster Starret turned back to Doc. "That changes things," he panted. His eyes were slitted. They were the eyes of a slaver, hunted wolf. "It makes things easier." He shoved in between Doc's chair and the desk, bent to a drawer. "There's another gun in here—I'll open the safe." He was working it out aloud. "Barton came up here, found you at it. You shot at each other and both shots found their mark."

The drawer screeched open but Doc's right wrist broke free at last of the cords he'd frayed by patient, silent swinging of the swivel chair back and forth, back and forth, while he held them against the desk's edge. His wrist broke free and his fist struck at the spot just under Starret's ear where a man can most easily be stunned.

In the same instant Starret's head jerked up and the fist missed. Starret swung to the footfalls that had startled him, and Jack Ransom was vaulting the rail, mouth open to a shout.

The automatic leaped up, barked, but Doc's frantic grab at it deflected its aim. "Down, Jack," he yelled, "behind a desk," and went over himself, in the chair to which he was still lashed by one wrist.

The gun pounded again and Doc heard a heavy body thud to the floor and saw Starret's gun skitter to the partition. He got his wrist free, and came to his feet, and Starret lay at the base of the desk, his face black—literally black and glistening.

BESIDE him lay the heavy glass inkwell that had struck him on the forehead, hurled by the best speedball pitcher the Morris Street Tigers ever had!

But there was no sound from the outer office, and when Doc got to the partition door, he saw Jack a crumpled heap on the floor, blood matting his carrot-hued hair.

He wasn't dead. His pulse was strong under the old man's trembling fingertips. The wound cut his scalp deeply, but the bullet had only slightly scraped the bone.

Relieved breath hissed between Doc's teeth and then, as he straightened, he saw the clock on the desk and remembered a rumbling warning: "You've got a half hour!" How much of the half hour was gone? Too much!

Starret was livid, breathing, stertorously. He would not recover from that wound in his forehead in time to do any more damage tonight—if ever.

The heart of the Sahara Desert can be no more empty of human life than a slum street at four in the morning. The little old man in the rumpled tuxedo met no policeman, no one at all, as he ran towards Highbund Lane.

The tenement-lined gut was also empty, but in front of Two-twenty-six a battered sedan stood, its motor turning over.

Doc's feet made no sound on the broken stone steps that took him down to the cellar of that drab and unlighted structure. He went into dense blackness, paused and listened.

Somewhere far back there was a clink of metal on metal, a smothered oath.

He started towards the sounds, cautiously, straining to see and seeing nothing. The clink of metal came again and then a hiss, and the smell of gas drifted to his flared nostrils. Doc tried to hurry—and crashed into the coal-pile. The noise seemed thunderous!

He went down into the coal, and abruptly there was light on him, a flash-beam. He floundered to rise and the light went out. A form blacker than black loomed over him.

Bruising fingers grabbed his shoulder. He shouted, pulled away, floundered again, the coals rolling under his frantic feet. A blow numbed his arm. He went down with a whistle of expelled breath, groaned and lay still.

Somewhere there were questioning shouts, the sound of opening doors, but Jim Gargan's footfalls pounded across the cellar, towards the dimly pale oblong that was its entrance. A burly figure was silhouetted against that pallor. Then wood cracked—the scantling Doc had thoughtfully leaned across that door for a trap, as he had entered.

Gargan was tripped, but he shoved up

again as yellow light laid itself down a slant of wooden stairs from the hallway. Doc reached him, snatched at the muscular figure, flailed futile fists at it.

"Vot iss?" A sleepy, frightened voice called. "Vot iss going on down dere?"

"Help," Doc yelled. "Abe Ginsberg—help me!" and went down under a sledgehammer blow. He grabbed an ankle and was kicked away, but somehow he knew, as darkness welled up into his brain, that the night-shirted janitor had arrived in time. . . .



IT WAS easy enough for Starret to raise the amounts on the notes and insurance papers," Doc Turner explained. "The explosion that would have wrecked the two tenements would have been ascribed to faulty plumbing and what evidence to the contrary there might have been would have been destroyed by fire from the ignited gas."

"Yeah," Jack Ransom agreed, soberly. "There was a tenement downtown blew up things that way last year. There wasn't a soul left alive in it."

"That obviously is where Starret got his idea. Those two buildings suited his purpose exactly. They are, as a matter of fact, about to be condemned and it happens that they were built together, so that the same system of gas mains serves both."

"How'd you ever manage to catch on to the scheme?"

Doc rubbed an acid-stained thumb on the counter. "I didn't. Not really. All I had to go on was my tenuous suspicion of the loan company, and the notion that Honey could have been sent to me only by something that she'd overheard from Starret or while with him. That's why I went to the Heron Club to talk to him. If he were innocent, he might be able to help me trace the girl's source of information. If he were guilty, I might

chivvy him into an overt act that would betray him."

"You took an awful chance, Doc, tackling him alone."

The faded old eyes twinkled. "I knew I wouldn't be alone, Jack. I knew you would guess what I was up to when I sent you to rent a tuxedo for me, and would be right on my heels. You didn't think I recognized you, hunched down in the driver's seat of Moran's cab, but I did."

The youth's grin was rueful. "I fell down on the job, Doc. I hung around outside, watching, but when you came out, Starret's big car got away from that damn rattletrap of a hack. Gees, was I paralyzed then. The only thing I could think of doing was to rout out Dick

Barton and get him to let me into the Loan Company office with his key, on the off chance I might find something in the manager's desk that would hitch up to Starret and maybe help me learn where he could have taken you. Which was no favor to Dick. He would have been killed if the bullet hadn't struck that medal he always carries in his pocket."

"The medal he won in school, for outstanding character," Andrew Turner nodded. "Strange how threads spun in one's early days govern the fabric of one's whole life. I wonder," he mused. "I wonder if Honey Morse knows that her mother and her brothers and sisters live on the second floor of one of those two buildings she saved. . ."



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Note: This is a condensed version of an article which we published as part of the Web last month, at the suggestion of the United States Employment Service of the Social Security Board. We think it essential to keep this information before our readers.—The Chief.

(Continued from page 90)

against a steel strut and his senses reeled. And Marshall's fiercely powerful hands clamped upon his throat!

No strategy would serve here. There was no room for maneuvering. It was brute killing power against human strength, and the *Spider* was weak and tired. Yet there was no weakening in his will. It was that will which triumphed. He shut his own throttling hands about Marshall's throat and drove in his thumbs.

The eyes of Marshall, the killer, the conspirator, the despoiler of a state and a people, glared into the eyes of the *Spider*, who had been called a criminal . . . and Master of Men. Crook stared into the eyes of an honest man, while the hands of each sought the life of the other. Marshall sought to kill out of fear and hatred and violence. The *Spider* killed to execute justice and to protect a victimized people.

The *Spider* felt the pounding agony of onrushing suffocation beat in his ears, felt the pain of suspended circulation, and knew the crushing weight of Marshall's body upon his own. And he did not despair. His hands were locked about Marshall's throat and their chances were equal. Their chances, but not their wills!

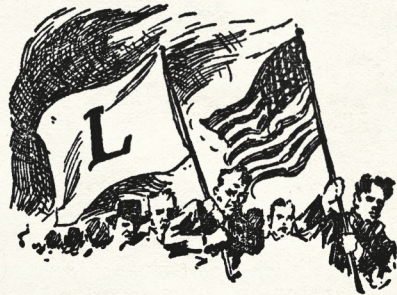
There was a time, after darkness had blotted out the *Spider's* vision, when Marshall jerked at him violently and tried to beat his head against the steel strut of the rotor support. There was a time when there was a great commotion in the narrow cockpit of the plane that seemed to come from convulsions. And suddenly, the *Spider* was sucking in great gulps of air and his swimming senses slowly began

to return. When he could see again, he still had Marshall by the throat!

The *Spider* smiled faintly and thrust the heavy body from him, peered over the side of the plane. The plane was now, ironically, approximately over the house of Tom Marshall, and a mob of people streamed in and out of the doors and their white faces peered upward toward the soaring plane.

Wentworth cut the motor and guided the plane downward toward the street, and presently men were thronged about him. In their forefront were Mike Karoli and Jon Bronski. They jerked open the door of the plane and helped him out, and Wentworth saw Nita's happy face through the thicket of heads.

"Pull that man out," Wentworth ordered quietly. "He is the man behind all the conspiracy."



Mike and Bronski pulled him out, and the *Spider* leaned over and did something with the end of his pencil to the forehead of the dead man. Mike grinned. "That would be the *Spider* seal."

"Now lift him up where every body can see him," the *Spider* ordered quietly.

Bronski heaved the man up against the

**TURN YOUR POCKETS INSIDE OUT—TILL OUR BOYS
COME HOME! EVERY BOND AND DEFENSE STAMP
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cowling of the plane, and the mob looked at him, and then a great shout went up from the crowd. It was not the *Spider's* seal which burned in scarlet upon the forehead of the dead man. Instead, the *Spider* had smeared a scarlet L . . . L for Liberty!

The crowd turned then toward the *Spider* . . . but while their attention was focused elsewhere, he had vanished. And with him had gone Nita van Sloan!

The crowd was not satisfied. They streamed into Marshall's house and searched there, and they hunted through the grounds. But they did not find him. They talked wildly. A guy like that ought to be a king, or a president, or something. He ought to be the head man and lead the people.

They talked like that and Frank Dean, the provisional governor, made a speech about it.

It startled him, and it startled the people when a radio loudspeaker in the auditorium boomed out suddenly with the voice they all knew and loved—the Voice of Liberty.

"This is the *Spider*," he said quietly, over the radio from they knew not where. "I have heard what you have said, and your faith is a beautiful thing in itself. But, listen to me, Liberty Men, people of New Amsterdam. You yourself wear crowns. You yourselves are the guardians of your liberty. No single man and no combination of men can trample for long upon your rights, as long as you realize that. You are free men. You are Americans!"

Mike Karoli stood close to the speaking platform of Acting Governor Dean. He looked up at big Jon Bronski. Mike nodded, "Sure," he said.

Jon Bronski spat.

THE END

THE WEB

(Continued from page 8)

of the elders to be trained. A certain aunt did the instructing, starting each youngster in turn by taking it on a shop-lifting tour. The aunt's skirt was wide and voluminous, and sewed to the under surface were large pockets. Her toddling nephew, or niece, would hide under the skirt and, as the aunt walked through a department store she would slyly knock to the floor certain small objects from counters she passed. The child was taught to retrieve these objects and place them in the pockets beneath the skirt.

How could children, hardened to crime at such an early age, ever learn to discriminate between right and wrong? How could such a child ever learn the meaning of the word "conscience"?

It is said that a child's character can be formed at the age of six or thereabouts;

that whatever standards of right or wrong impressed upon him govern his behavior from then on. The old proverb again: "As the twig is bent, so grows the tree." There are exceptions which prove every rule. One such case came to the attention of your Chief a few days ago.

FOR several reasons I had to consult my local draft board. The board meets in a high school auditorium at present, and when I entered I realized immediately that I would be obliged to wait some time. Benches were filled with other men also waiting, so I took a seat on the nearest bench with space for me. There were men of most every race present, and for a moment I thought about this America, made up of a hodge-podge of blood and creed; and I thought of Mike

THE WEB

Karoli and Jon Bronski, stout-hearted Americans in this very issue of *The Spider*, who are among the staunchest allies of Dick Wentworth in his fight against the Ring and the Brain. I must admit my heart warmed, and I thought: "I'm a lucky guy. I'm lucky to be an American."

I glanced at the fellow next to me. I seemed to feel that he had not long been a city dweller; that he was a Mid-Westerner or a New Englander. Then I noticed that he was reading a magazine. I grinned rather proudly. He was reading Grant Stockbridge's novel for last month—"The Gentleman From Hell." Frequently I run across *Spider* readers, on subways or in street cars or bus stations. Sometimes I ask them how they like the stories, or if they have any suggestions to make. But this time I said nothing.

Presently the fellow closed the magazine and looked up, turning his head to the right. He was listening to the two fellows on the other side of him. I listened, too.

I gathered that one of them had a criminal record and would be deferred on those grounds. Apparently he did not want to be deferred, and would much rather have forgotten his record for good and all.

The man on my right started reading again, but I could see that his mind was not on the magazine; he kept looking up and staring at nothing across the room, his thoughts in the past, his face worried. He looked at me absently once or twice. Finally I asked him if he read *The Spider* regularly. He said that he did—had for years. I remarked that I was one of the editors.

He gave me a very sharp glance then, and for a moment I thought he was going to open a conversation. Then he turned away. For some reason, I decided that I would be intruding if I started talking.

Ultimately we found ourselves standing in line before a long table at which were

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THE SPIDER

seated three draft board members interviewing men. My friend with the copy of *The Spider* was immediately in front of me; the chap with the criminal record was in front of him, and when the former was addressed by the available draft board official, my friend was all ears.

The official was brief. He informed the questioner that as yet Uncle Sam had not called upon men with criminal background, no matter how trivial had been the cause of the jail sentence. However, if any changes were made, the applicant would be duly notified. The ex-criminal (I say that because what I had previously overheard indicated that the lad had been going straight ever since his one offense) departed. His head hung down; his shoulders drooped. Both the *Spider* reader and I watched him walk sadly from the auditorium.

The official said, "Next!" two or three times before my friend heard him.

Suddenly he said, "I'll be back later. I—I just remembered something." He flashed me a look which carried an appeal, I thought, and I followed him out of the building.

On the sidewalk I said, "Did you want to speak to me?"

A sort of desperate expression came over his face. "I—I got to speak to some one," he said. "Maybe if—if you—work on a magazine like this—" he held up the *Spider*—"you might be able to advise me."

"I'll be glad to try," I said. There was a little restaurant across the street. "We could go over there and have a cup of coffee."

WE DRANK a bit of coffee and after a while the fellow began talking. He said his name was Eddie Harper, and as far as he knew the cops had never gotten either his fingerprints or his name. "For the last ten

THE WEB

years," he went on, "the cops have had no reason to bother with me—except I guess they still want me for what I did before that."

I didn't say anything. I just let him get the thing out of his system. And what he said gave me the idea for writing The Web this month.

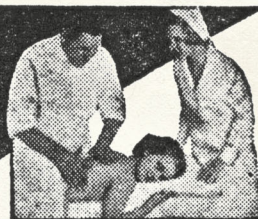
Eddie was born in a medium-sized manufacturing town in the east. He was always mechanically inclined even in childhood, and when he was fourteen he left school to help his widowed father in his small machine shop. Actually, his father was opposed to this step, and even gave him a couple of lickings to try to make him stay in school. But the kid had no interest in books; he just wanted to make things with his hands.

The father had a nice car and was comfortably fixed. In fact, he seemed to have more money than he could earn repairing lawn mowers, old safes, locks and other odds and ends which were brought to his shop on the outskirts of town. The modest Harper residence was a mile away from the shop. A housekeeper came in by the day to cook and clean up. Eddie had a few tools at home, but after he had worked in the shop a while, his own tools seemed pretty childish. One night, when his father was away, he went out to the shop to work on something—and that was the night he met Harry. Harry was a tough individual who was instructing a class in lock-picking—in Eddie's father's shop!

Harry was a fagin, all right. He had something on Eddie's dad, and the old man had to let Harry use the shop. Also, Harry gave old man Harper a cut on the property the kids stole, and Harper was too weak a man to break away from the tie-up. The promise of riches—plus the threat of violence—decided Eddie to join the school, and coast along with Harry's small gang of crooks.

Eddie, however, was an independent

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THE SPIDER

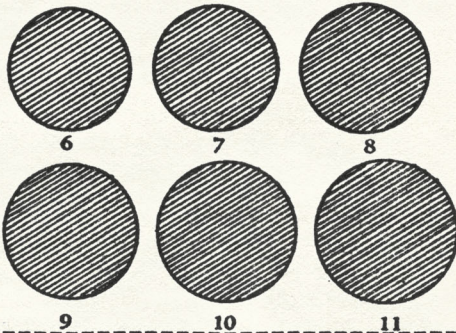
kid as well as a natural mechanic. He soon became an expert in safes and locks and window fastenings, and he got sick of giving Harry the lion's share of the small hauls he engineered. "Harry would drive out into outlying New England villages," Eddie told me, "and case a grocery store or insurance office. He'd give one of us the layout, and we'd do the work. It got so I did most of it. I kept a book," he smiled. "If Harry had even known that he'd have given me hell. I kept a list of everybody I robbed, and the amounts. I wanted to see how much Harry was making on the jobs I pulled. Soon I couldn't stand letting him rob me that way. So I

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4

THE WEB

scrammed out in the mid-west. I cased my own jobs, pulled them myself and paid nobody any cuts. My little book had the whole story."

He paused, and we ordered some more coffee. "In one town I came to there was a safe company with quite a payroll. I decided to have a crack at it. It was the biggest thing I had planned, so I thought I'd do it right. I got a job in the plant.

"I worked a long day, and I worked hard. And finally I got all the dope I needed. But a strange thing happened. I discovered that I liked working so much I hated to leave. The payroll lost importance compared my happiness at doing useful work.

"I got out my little book and looked over the list. Then I started saving money—honest money. In four years I had repaid every cent I had stolen—including Harry's cut—with interest. I sent the money back in cash, anonymously, with typewritten notes.

"I came to New York recently to work on a defense project, and I'm a trusted, useful man. And now the question is this—it came to me in the draft board room: Have I a criminal record?"

I couldn't help smiling, and I guess I felt a little like Richard Wentworth, for I was trying to weigh this matter as he would have.

"Actually, you have a criminal record, Eddie," I said. "Technically, referring to a written court record, you have not. You've contributed something to society which many people never accomplish. You've redeemed one good, solid citizen for the country." I stood up.

For the first time, he looked hopeful. "Then you think that, where it says 'criminal record' on my draft questionnaire, I can conscientiously say 'none'?"

"I wouldn't hesitate another instant," I said—and he clutched my hand. Then he raced across the street!

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THE SPIDER

So you see—despite the work of all the fagins in the world—an individual can overcome his background if he has the urge!

GRANT STOCKBRIDGE has received a lot of response from the last letter of his which we ran in The Web. He sent us another letter this month, and here it is:

Dear fellow *Spider* fans:

I posed a question in a letter to you in the centenary issue and, apparently, started quite a debate. The query was: Has the *Spider* the right to violate the law in order to enforce it?

And the response has been in the true American ideal: Any time the law isn't performing its task, it's up to the citizens to take a hand. Our forefathers did in the old West, and in the old East, too, if the truth were known along about the time when George Washington was praying in a white church in Alexandria, Virginia, before accepting command of the troops of the Rebellion against England.

It seems to me that, in this as in other things, Richard Wentworth genuinely typifies the American Spirit. He is fearless, and devil take the odds. He is honest with a fierce integrity that counts no cost to self. He is gentle with those who warrant a man's tenderness; and ruthless against those who merit punishment. But most of all, he is rebellious.

America is the land of rebels. Some of us were born that way, and others of us rebelled against foreign dominion—when we were at home in that foreign element—and came to America because it promised release from such oppression.

There is a parallel here between our own land and Russia. For scores of years, we Americans were tributary to powers that cared nothing about us, except as a means of wealth. Finally, we decided that we had rights and, when our pro-

THE WEB

tests went unheeded, we went to war and made people respect us. The Russians, too, threw off oppression and now they are proving to the world that they have a right to respect. We salute the brave Russians who fight so well, and promise that when our time comes, we will show them Americans can fight, too.

We hold our own traditions very close to us . . . the tradition of refusing to submit to tyranny. This is what makes us the cantankerous, resistant, stubborn nation we are. And these things are valuable, when we are cantankerous, resistant and stubborn for good, and for the rights of others.

That's the theme-song of the *Spider* in this story . . . Liberty, or Death! But, as always, it is for others that he speaks. He places the credit, and the power, where it belongs, with the people. He, and his sort, will ever do that. It is the duty of all true Americans.

And as it is the duty of all true Americans, so is it also the duty of America as a nation. We Americans know that only in the rebellious, strong, loyal and independent spirit of all the people is there any real freedom. That is the lesson we pass on to other nations. We are not alone in this respect, but destiny has made us the leading exponent of the doctrine. It has given us, also, the power . . . or we have given it to ourselves because we held the cause of freedom sacred and sought to spread it through the world . . . and so we must proclaim freedom to the world and guarantee it wherever the people are strong enough to demand it and sustain it.

This typification of the American ideal, I know, is what the readers of the *Spider* feel in Richard Wentworth, and it is why they approve of him and call him "one of the greatest agents for good in all literary history." I have tried sincerely to make of Richard Wentworth, not only

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THE SPIDER

the ideal American, but the ideal man. I'd like to hear from you about that. I'd like to know in what new ways Wentworth can serve in order more fully, to exemplify the ideal man.

In this *Spider*, it seems to me, he has done a new and strong thing, for he has given a pattern to the subjugated nations of the world. He has taught them that union, in the face of all tyranny and oppression, is unbeatable. We have learned that lesson here in America.

SO WENTWORTH, in this story, teaches the old lesson again. And he gives some of the "old" Americans a lesson which the "new" Americans already know. You can't maintain liberty by lying down and taking it. You can maintain liberty only by fighting for it, and keeping on fighting when every hope seems dead.

I'm going to quote from a letter that came in answer to that earlier message of mine to the *Spider* fans:

"Dear Grant:

I think the SPIDER is a great fighter and a swell guy. I feel like he's a real living person that I could talk to. It seems to me that there is one thing he could do that he hasn't done so far, and that is, he could find some way to help our brothers across the sea who are fighting the Nazis from under cover. I mean the people in the conquered nations who still remember when they were free and are going to keep on fighting until Hitler and his crew are licked.

Jack Devereux."

Well, that's what the *Spider* has done in this issue of the magazine. He has chronicled the pattern of resistance, and the glorious story of such a battle for freedom against terrific odds; against all the weapons of oppression that the Nazis

THE WEB

use. Maybe, a copy of the SPIDER may get into one of the camps over there, or at any rate our strong thoughts may reach out to them. At any rate, Jack, we're throwing courage and support and faith to those fighting men over there who refuse to give up.

And incidentally, Jack has a good old fighting name himself. A major name of Devereux was in charge of Wake Island, and commanded the marines there in their defense against the Japanese. He it was who made that statement which will, undoubtedly, go down in history. When asked what the defenders of the island wanted, he said:

"Send us some more Japs!"

The *Spider* is like that. The enemies he fights have many times had him close to defeat. He has been wounded in a score of battles and tormented in a score of others. But if anyone should suggest to him that he should take a less active part in the battles, I'm sure he would smile that well-known ironic smile of his and say: "Send on some more crooks!"

This is the stuff of which America and Americans are made. In the midst of the toughest battle when defeat seems certain, and the enemies multiply, they crack a joke and "Give 'em L!"

For me, Richard Wentworth is the grandest American of them all. If you can think of any way to make him more true to the pattern, just drop me a letter and I promise you Wentworth will find the way. He and his gallant comrade-at-arms, Nita van Sloan, send you all their love and devotion.

Cordially,

(Signed) Grant Stockbridge.

P.S. Did I tell you that Wentworth has taken a third of his immense fortune and invested it in defense bonds? That's another way of being a good American and rebelling against the forces of tyranny!

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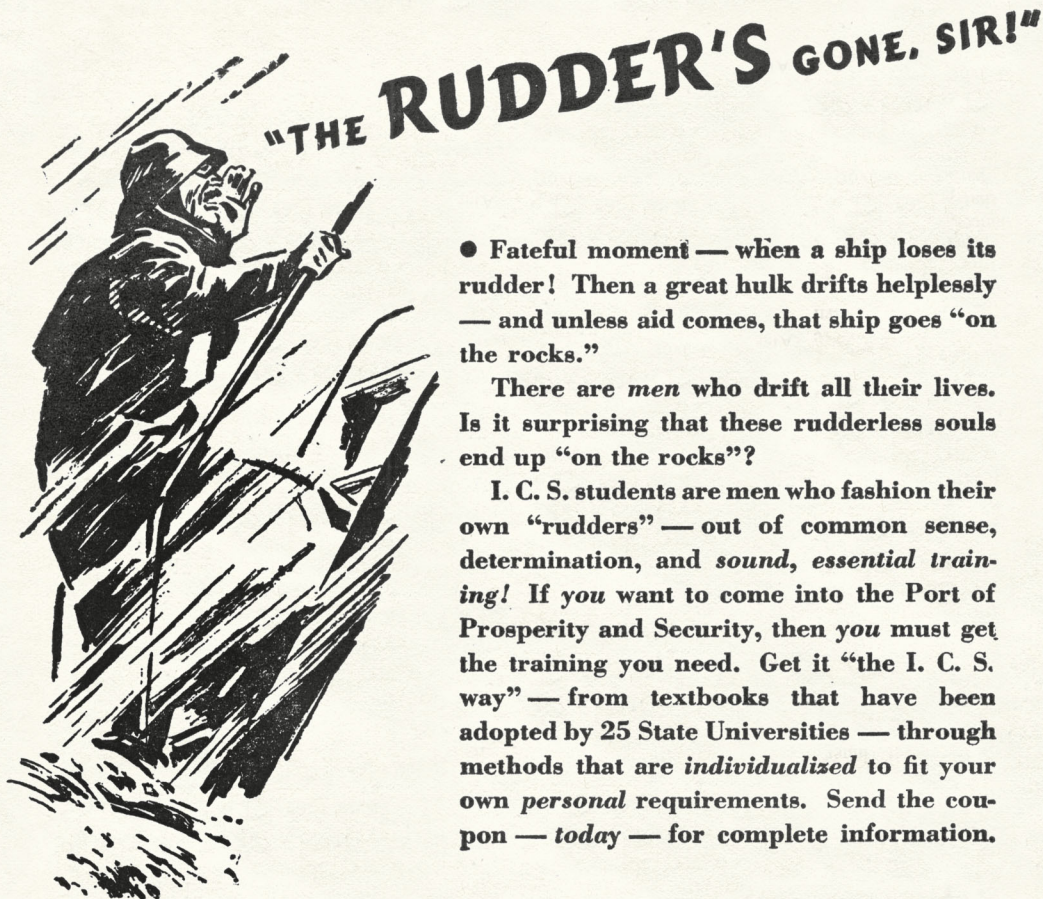


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