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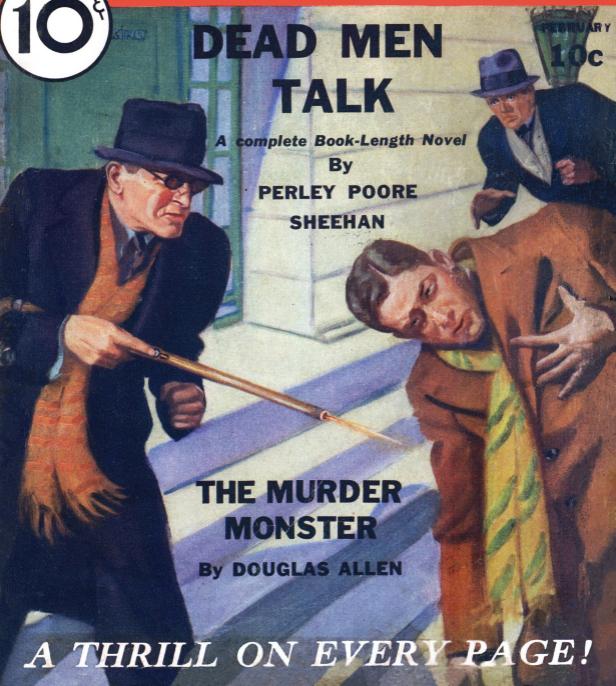
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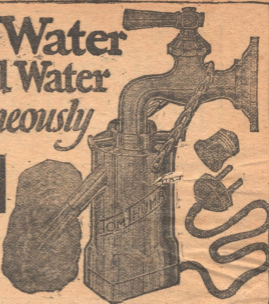
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THRILLING DETECTIVE

Vol. I, No. 4

HARVEY BURNS, Editor

FEBRUARY, 1932

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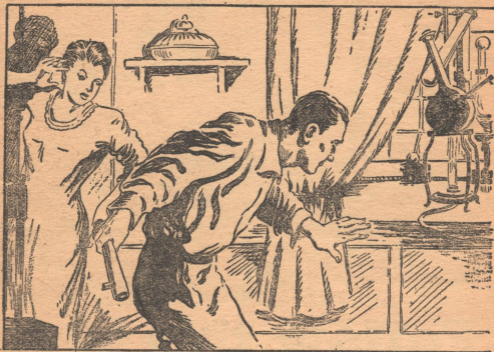
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DEAD MEN



*Slade Wyath Becomes Enoch Creighton and Emerges
From Prison into a Grim Labyrinth of Mystery,
Intrigue and Ruthless Crime*

By PERLEY POORE SHEEHAN

Author of "Those Who Walk in Darkness," "The Motto Man," etc.

CHAPTER I

THE SLEEPER DIES

THE cell room of the precinct prison—and even the eternal rumble of New York—had now gone comparatively quiet. But Slade Wyath could not sleep. He couldn't lie still. He twisted about on the narrow shelf of a bunk like a newly-landed bass on a hot sand-bank. He'd have to get out of here, his brain kept repeating over and

over again; he'd have to get out of here! But how?

It was too late for night-court. Anyway, he had neither money nor a defense. They'd hold him for some higher court. They'd send him away. He couldn't stand it. He'd have to——

He propped himself up on a bare arm and stared about him. Had there been anyone there to see, the splotched light that came through the bars of his cell would have re-

TALK

*A Complete
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Novel*



vealed a good looking youth—he was in his early twenties—but haggard, his dark hair tumbled about and a hint of fever in his brilliant dark eyes.

He shuddered with a fresh spasm of nightmare as he looked at the pile of clothing he had taken off and piled at his side. There was a showy red uniform that was like an added torture in his present predicament. A grotesque red hat, shirt, and necktie, were other features of the outfit.

Arrayed in these he, Slade Wyath, of the Kentucky Wyaths, had paraded Broadway to advertise a new night restaurant. As a matter of fact, the job had required that he put on an exaggerated facial make-up as well, of rouge and talcum powder. Pagliacci, the clown with the breaking heart!

Wyath sat up, his head on his

knees, his bare arms locked about his shins.

At least he'd been able to wash off the make-up. There was a water tap in the corner of the cell. But suppose he'd have to appear before the magistrate tomorrow morning in that clownish uniform! When the police arrested him they wouldn't even give him a chance to change. He'd have to get out of here—there it went again!

IN a side street just off of Broadway, tonight, he'd seen a woman struggling with a man. He'd butted in just as the man drew a revolver. He (Slade) had got the revolver. He still had it when, in about ten seconds, a cop had nabbed him and the man and the woman slipped away.

Talk about luck! In New York you could get a year or more for illegal possession of a gun. And

what magistrate would believe his explanation? Practically everyone who got arrested had an explanation. The cop had heard a woman scream. The cop had found him with a gun. . . .

He was aroused by hearing a drag of heavy feet on the cement corridor leading from the front of the prison. He heard a blur of thick voices. There were a number of people coming this way.

Wyath shrank back. The cell contained two cots, one above the other, and he'd chosen the upper one, not only because it was likely to prove the cleaner of the two but because its deeper shadow had seemed to offer some degree of privacy.

"Here," someone said, "we'll stick him in Number Six."

That was a different turnkey, Wyath noticed, from the one who'd locked him up. With the turnkey were three policemen, bulking huge and dark in the dusky corridor. The policemen carried a man in evening clothes.

Slade lay low as the door of his cell was unlocked and swung open. The lower bunk creaked as it received its burden. The policemen were panting.

"He's got a load on him that'd sink a ship," said one of them. "I thought first he'd been blackjacked, but an ambulance monkey says no. 'Just gin,' he says. So I calls the wagon."

"He's lucky," panted another, "to have kept his roll. He had a bunch of money on him like Rothstein's."

"He'll be giving a bit of it to the Pension Fund,"—and Slade again recognized the voice of the turnkey. "You know! He'll squawk, as soon as he wakes up, and we'll turn him out with a small cash bail. And then he'll be asking us to keep his name out of tomorrow's tabloids—"

The door clanged shut.

SLADE lay there listening to the sounds of the retreating voices and feet. From what he'd just heard there'd come to him the glimmer of a queer idea.

The idea was so queer that it fascinated him. He told himself that it was weirdly impossible. But even as he was doing this he leaned out over the edge of his bunk and looked at the man on the cot below.

The stranger slept. His breathing was irregular and slow. There was nothing remarkable about him, except that contrast of his evening clothes with these squalid surroundings. He was of average height and build, clean shaven—a man still well under thirty, perhaps. It was the stranger's hair that held Slade's attention for lingering seconds. It was hair that was dark and thick and rather long.

"Like mine," said Slade.

Half naked as he was, he slipped from his bunk and silently reached the floor. When this stranger waked, they were going to turn him out. Immediately he awoke they'd turn him out. But the man gave no sign of waking.

"Suppose I had his chance," thought Slade.

After a long interval, Slade picked up a flattened opera hat at the sleeper's side and tried this on. It fitted him perfectly. Slade could see himself in the rest of this outfit. If he should simply borrow what this sleeper didn't need! He could send it all back later, by a messenger, before morning. Before morning he himself could be far away. It was spring. The country was calling. . . .

Slade worked fast. Yet he was cool, he was deft. The sleeper made no objection as Slade undressed him—overcoat, coat, waistcoat, shirt. As fast as Slade removed these things from the other he put them on him-

self. It was a shuddering process. It was as if he were donning not only this stranger's clothes but his personality as well. It was as if this were his own former self who now lay there stripped.

Slade paused and listened. Prisoners snored. One groaned and sobbed. Another grumbled and told the weeper to shut up. The air stirred faintly, heavy and foul. And Slade heard again that cry in his brain. He'd have to get out of here. He was going to get out!

THERE was something that still remained to be done. He would have to get the sleeper into the upper bunk, else when the turnkey came his suspicions might be aroused. He lifted one of the sleeper's arms. The man was absolutely inert. He was like an oversized and misshapen sack of grain as Slade lifted him.

And it was while Slade stood there pulling himself together for a final effort with the stranger in his arms that there came to him the first chill creep of a premonition. After that, sheer panic nerved him. He was scarcely aware of the effort at all as he thrust the sleeper bodily into the upper bunk.

Slade stood there listening again. But now he heard nothing—nothing but his own labored breathing and the slogging beat of his heart. Apart from these it seemed as if the cell itself had become a vortex of silence, a silence that spread and spread—to the rest of the prison, to all New York; until it seemed as if the whole world had suddenly gone silent, and were standing still as he was standing still, listening and peering and panic struck.

His own breathing quieted, finally. But how long had it been since he'd heard the stranger breathe? That was what he was trying to remem-

ber. A while ago, the stranger had been breathing heavily. He'd heard it and noticed it. Now he was hearing it no longer.

Slade nerved himself. He put his hand over the stranger's heart. He held it there. No slightest response came to his straining nerves. The heart was still.

The man was dead.

Then a far door clanged, and once more Slade heard footsteps down the cement corridor. They were drawing near.

CHAPTER II

MYSTERIOUS MR. KNIGHT

SLADE'S mind was racing. He was caught. Of what had the victim died? Alcoholism, perhaps. But again perhaps from a fractured skull, as the policeman had intimated. In the latter case he, Slade Wyath, would be charged with the murder. In any case, he'd be charged with robbery. There was no time to change, no chance to hide.

Hastily he pushed the hat lower over his face. He muffled his chin in the borrowed overcoat and a silk scarf.

That was the turnkey coming along the corridor. He stopped in front of the cell—this was No. Six. He was fitting his key to the cumbersome lock.

Slade spoke softly. "Hello," he said.

The turnkey was surprised. "Well, well," he exclaimed. "And it's a quick recovery you've made. That's fine."

He pulled the door open. He stood there looking at Slade with an expression of smiling curiosity. It was evident that so far he saw nothing to rouse his suspicion.

"I want to get out of here," Slade said.

"Right for you," the turnkey re-

plied. "'Twas for that I came. I was afraid you'd have to be carried away."

"Yes?"

There was something here that called for an explanation. The turnkey gave it.

"It's a friend of yours who's calling for you."

Slade found support against the steel slats of the cell.

"I don't want to see anyone," he managed to say.

"Sure now," said the turnkey—he was used to the vagaries of those who'd drunk too much; "you don't want to go home in a taxi. He's got his big limousine. It's waiting for you now at the door."

"Send him away," said Slade. "I've got money. I'm able to take care of myself. I'll fix it up with you gentlemen."

"Well, I'll tell him," the turnkey said. "But come out, sir. You don't want to stay in that cell. There, can you manage it? Let me help you. There's a chair down the corridor a bit."

The turnkey closed the cell and locked it. Slade wavered—on his feet and in his mind. Should he elect to stay where he was? Should he declare the truth? Instead, he accepted the help of the turnkey's arm. Like that, at least, the turnkey wouldn't be staring him in the face.

SLADE ventured a question. It was information he needed.

"Who'd he ask for—this supposed friend of mine?"

"It was you, all right."

"Who?"

"Creighton. You're Mr. Creighton, ain't you?"

"There are a lot of Creightons."

"Well, Mr. Enoch Creighton. How's that?"

Slade's mind seized on the name. He was Mr. Enoch Creighton.

"You tell him, anyway, he's made a mistake," said Slade. "Send him away."

"I'll tell him," the turnkey said, patiently enough. "And now, if you'll just sit here until I come back."

They'd come to the end of the corridor. There was a wooden armchair in a corner. The turnkey went away.

"I am Enoch Creighton," said Slade to himself.

He felt as if he'd been through a nightmare, was in one still. He'd waked from one phase of that earlier nightmare to find himself someone else, confused and groping in an unfamiliar world. But his fear was leaving him. He was no longer that poor clown who'd walked the streets in an absurd costume to advertize a cheap restaurant. He was Enoch Creighton—a man who wore evening clothes, who had money, a man to whom even a jailer was polite.

A couple of paces from the chair where Slade sat was a grated door leading into the back room of the station. The turnkey had left this open. There was a rear exit from this room, Slade remembered, which gave on a sort of alleyway at the side of the prison.

He stepped through the door.

In a far corner of the room a couple of policemen were seated at a table in their shirt sleeves playing dominoes. They gave Slade no more than a glance as he entered and went on with their game.

Slade saw the rear exit he remembered. There was a water cooler near it. He strolled over toward this. The policemen were engrossed in their game and didn't even look up. Slade selected a paper cup and filled it. The knob of the

door was within reach of his hand. He put out his hand. In another instant he would have opened the door. But just then someone called.

"Oh, Creighton!"

Slade, taking his time, drank some water and tossed the cup aside, then turned.

There was the turnkey standing at the door leading to the front office and with him was another man and this would be that "friend" the turnkey had mentioned. It was, obviously, this latter who had just called out.

The newcomer, Slade saw, was a cripple, dressed in black, with dark glasses over his eyes, supporting himself with a heavy black cane.

Slade looked at the stranger without a word. In a moment—he expected—the man would be denouncing him, saying that this was not the Enoch Creighton he'd come to see.

BUT, instead of that, the man in black came forward. The thin lips of his dead white face were smiling. He had what looked like a shriveled leg, and he flung this forward at each step, but still there was a look of power about him. He was nimble. That heavy cane of his looked as if it might become a dangerous weapon.

"You don't recognize me," said the man in black as he swung close to Slade. "I'm Mr. Knight—Sylvester Knight. I happened to be at Mabel's." His dark glasses were now close to Slade's eyes and he let out a sibilant whisper: "Wise up, Snowy, you big stiff!"

There was a curious menace in that whisper. Mr. Knight's white face had become a mask of menace. At the same time he had thrust out a black-gloved hand and seized one of Slade's hands, which he began to

pump. While he did this he was whispering again, fiercely.

"Wise up, I'm tellin' you. I'm straight. I come from Mabel and the big Chink. Ain't that enough?"

"I don't recall your name," said Slade.

Mr. Knight laughed loudly for the benefit of the others. But to Slade he managed to slip out another whisper; and, this time, the whisper was like a poisoned needle.

"It's oke with us, Snowy. But they've got your little sister."

It was as if a bit of ice had slid down Slade's backbone. Knight saw the effect of his words. He turned to the policemen.

"If you gents don't mind," he said, "Mr. Creighton and I will sit down over there in the corner until I explain. It's something private concerning his family."

CHAPTER III

THIS—OR THAT

SLADE followed Knight to a far corner. "They've got your little sister!"—the whisper was squirming in his brain like a snake. So Creighton had a sister—a young sister—and something had happened to her! He'd have to find out. The policemen were shuffling their dominoes. Slade and the mysterious Mr. Knight sat down and put their heads together.

"The boys went off on a false alarm," said Knight. "They thought you'd been croaked. You can't blame them. They'd got their orders from the Doc."

"What Doc?"

"The big Chink. He wanted her. So they copped her. That's all."

"I'm still dumb," said Slade, sparing for time. "What's happened?"

"I suppose you know it was Benny the Twist that knobbed you," said Knight.

"What did Benny want to do that for?" Slade asked. He might as well play dumb as long as he could.

"Jealous," Knight replied. "He was afraid you and the widow were going to lam, which would have cut him out of both the girl and the money."

Slade was trying to get things clear in his brain. He felt Knight's shaded eyes on him from behind the dark glasses.

"Well, go on," said Slade. "What was the idea of dragging my little sister into this?"

A bitter smile returned to Knight's thin lips.

"Benny must have knobbed you for fair at that," he said. "You seem to be goofy still. Why, when Benny thought he'd dumped you, naturally he knew you wouldn't be signing any more checks. Get me? So he cops your kid sister. Anyway, he and the big Chink had been counting on that. As they figured it, you and Mabel were getting ready to blow. They tell me your sister's a good looking little dame."

"Cut it!"

"I'm just telling you, Snowy."

"Where do you come in?" Slade asked. "You don't even know me."

"Mabel! When Benny gave you the works she managed to stick around. She traced you to this Irish club house—got a hold of me to come here and get you out. She wants you up there at the place in the country."

"How about—my sister?" Slade asked.

THERE was a tremor at his heart as he asked it as if there was actually a little sister of his own involved.

"Mabel will help you. Isn't the kid already about like Mabel's own sister-in-law?"

A cold sweat came out on Slade's

forehead. He was in deadly danger any way he looked at it. If he lingered here in the police station it might be but a matter of minutes before he was accused of murder—murder and robbery, which would mean a verdict of murder in the first degree. There was also a danger, equally great he was sure, if he went along with this mysterious Mr. Knight.

Whoever the late Enoch Creighton had been he'd been mixed up with a mob of dangerous crooks. "Snowy" Creighton might well have been one of the crooks himself. Yet "Snowy"—now lying dead back there in the cell—had had a little sister—a sister who was "a good-looking little dame" and who had now fallen into the clutches of the gang.

"Suppose I wised the cops," said Slade.

"Stop!" said Knight in a hissing snarl.

"What's to keep me?"

Knight took a package of cigarettes from an inner pocket, and as he did so he managed to show Slade a glint of metal—knife or gun or just a bit of camouflage, the threat of death was there. But the cigarettes were real. Knight thumbed a cigarette from the package and slowly lit it, leaning forward a little closer to Slade.

"Don't try a squawk, Snowy," he warned. "Not now that the widow's got me dragged into the game. Don't, or I might have to dump you myself. Anyway, don't forget either that they've got your sister. And if anything cracks—you know what I mean—it won't be a slab in the morgue for her like it will be for you but she'll wish that it had been that."

For a moment Slade saw red. He wanted to hit Knight. But he controlled himself. It was as if he could see, far off somewhere in the dim

shadows of the great city, Enoch Creighton's sister—in need of a brother—and Enoch Creighton dead!

"All right," Slade said. "Let's go."

SLADE hadn't forgotten that the mysterious Mr. Knight was a cripple. Slade was ready to give him a hand. But Knight himself seemed to have forgotten for the moment that there was anything the matter with that leg of his. Knight was on his feet with amazing alacrity. It was only a moment afterward that he recollected himself, whereupon he was leaning on his cane again and his leg had the appearance of being withered and bent.

He and Slade were again face to face.

"So you piped the phony leg!" said Knight.

"Sure!" said Slade.

"And maybe you've piped me, too."

"Sure!" Slade said again.

"Who am I?" came the cold whisper.

"You? You're Sylvester Knight."

"See that you don't forget it," said Knight. "And, listen, Snowy!"

"I'm listening."

"It's this—or that. You play with me, all the way—and you make Mabel come across when you and her cash in on your sister's stake—get me?—or I and the boys throw you and the little girl to the dogs and go along with Benny. It's this way—me or Benny. Me, at least, I ain't even after Mabel. Both her and your kid sister, you can have them. With Benny, you don't get either."

Slade's head went round.

A squad of policemen, heavy-footed, padded across the room—some special detail just coming off duty and now ready to turn in for a

few hours' sleep. A few of them paused for a moment to watch the tireless domino players. Then they were trudging off again. A word would have stopped them.

Before Slade could decide to utter that word he saw the turnkey come out of the front office and start in his direction.

"I'm your front," said Knight crisply, meaning that he'd be the lawyer and do the talking. He himself addressed the turnkey as that officer drew near.

"Mr. Creighton and I are leaving," he said. "He wishes me to make you a little present."

But the turnkey seemed to have something of greater importance on his mind.

"Yes, sir," he said; "but it's another gentleman out there who says he'll be Mr. Creighton's lawyer."

"Who?" Knight snapped.

The turnkey produced a card. Knight reached for it, but the turnkey ignored him and passed the card to Slade.

"He says, sir," said the turnkey, "that you'll kindly speak to no one until you've had your interview with him. I think he said you'd be wanting to tell him something about your sister."

CHAPTER IV

DESPERATE PLAY

SLADE had taken the card but he was in no hurry to look at it. There for the moment it looked as if the whole world were against him—as if, no matter which way he turned, it was merely to find himself up against some new danger.

The card was embossed, suggesting style and wealth even before he looked at it.

"Cole Van Vranken," he read aloud, and as he did so he was aware

that the mysterious Mr. Knight, at his side, had given a slight start.

To Slade himself the name had a familiar ring. It was one of those names that appear often in the newspapers—not only in the papers of New York but in the papers of the country, as well. Cole Van Vranken—was the name of an eminent lawyer—a former cabinet officer and ambassador.

"Inquiring for me?" Slade stalled.

"Well, we might say," the turnkey corrected, "giving orders, now, if you don't mind my saying so."

"How do you mean?"

"He's a friend of the Big Chief. That's how he comes to be here. It seems that he got a private buzz from headquarters as soon as they got the flash down there that we had you here. And he says now that you're not to leave here unless it's himself that leaves with you."

The black-garbed Knight thrust out his hand—he did this with the speed of a striking snake—and seized the card. He looked at it in order to confirm what his ears had heard.

"Jeez!" he breathed. "It's your uncle, Snowy, all right. It's your sister's guardian. You can't see him. You know that."

"Where is he?" Slade asked the turnkey.

"At the desk, talking to the lieu."

"I'll go in and see him myself," Knight proposed. "I'm Mr. Creighton's lawyer."

"It ain't you he's inquiring for," said the turnkey.

"All right," Knight replied. "Tell him Mr. Creighton will be in there in just a moment."

The turnkey turned away.

Knight again faced Slade. His white mask of a face seemed to have gone whiter yet.

"Snowy," he whispered, "I've been holding out on you. Unless the Doc

hears from me personally inside of an hour that you're okay it's got to be—you know who. I'm telling you. You'd better stall that uncle of yours out there."

"Why, sure!" Slade whispered. "He don't even know any more what I look like. Come on."

THEY went on out into the front office of the station house together. As for Slade, he felt like a man who starts across a crowded avenue against the traffic lights. The turnkey and Knight were just behind him. The lieutenant was at the desk. In front of the desk was a distinguished looking man in dinner clothes—a man who was grave, worried, but physically at ease—the famous Cole Van Vranken.

These were not the only ones in the big square room. There were half a dozen others present—detectives, hangers-on, possibly a reporter or two. But these were in the background. Slade had his eyes on those at the desk.

The lieutenant, his first glance had told him, was not the same who had booked him earlier. That was one danger the less. Even so he could scarcely have been identified. He'd arrived here in that red horror of a uniform with his face covered with talcum and rouge. Like this he would have felt safe even if the cop who'd arrested him had been present. As for Creighton, he'd been merely a drunken dress-suit.

All of Slade's attention came to the man whom he knew to be Cole Van Vranken, uncle of Enoch Creighton, guardian of Enoch Creighton's sister.

Slade had barely passed the door before the lieutenant spoke up.

"There he is, sir. Is this the young gentleman you were looking for?"

Cole Van Vranken had turned

from the desk and was looking at Slade. He was a tall man, possibly going on sixty. If he'd been expecting a shock, or were shocked now, he gave no hint of it. His self-control was perfect. His intelligent face was grim yet kindly—touched, Slade perceived, with a sort of pity.

"There must have been some error," he answered the lieutenant, softly. At the same time he had remarked the card that Slade held and guessed that this was his own. He spoke to Slade. "Is it possible," he said, "that your name also is Enoch Creighton?"

THE crippled Knight saved Slade an answer. It was clear that he didn't trust Slade in this present crisis. He thrust his black shape forward.

"I am Mr. Creighton's attorney," said Knight. "He's been slightly under the weather. You'll excuse him if he isn't very responsive. He'll be all right after a little sleep."

Mr. Van Vranken brushed over Mr. Knight lightly with his intelligent eyes and brought his own attention back to Slade.

"There must have been a mistake," Slade said, fumbling the card.

"You are Enoch Creighton?"

Slade didn't answer. He heard Knight's cold voice at his shoulder.

"Sign for your things, and we'll be going."

A policeman was acting as a property clerk. He came from an inner office and placed a large flat envelope at the lieutenant's elbow. The lieutenant crooked a finger at Slade, and Slade was at the desk ready to sign. He felt that he was being looked at very closely by Mr. Cole Van Vranken.

"The coincidence is rather extraordinary," said Mr. Van Vranken, as if reflecting aloud.

The coincidence was to become more extraordinary still.

The lieutenant had shoved forward the property that had been taken from the late Enoch Creighton at the time he was searched prior to his transfer to a cell. Was it possible that there was something in the lot that Mr. Cole Van Vranken would recognize as having belonged to his nephew? The articles were individual, too costly to be common; they were of a sort easy to remember.

THERE was a cigarette case of platinum and gold, finely striped and monogrammed. There was an enameled lighter also monogrammed. There was a filigree money-clip of oriental design, made to hold small bills, and a Morocco fold for larger bills. There were other objects of distinctive appearance: a gold chain attached to a small gold knife and a bunch of keys, an octagonal wrist-watch worth hundreds of dollars.

Slade could feel that the quiet Cole Van Vranken was looking at all these things. The eminent lawyer hadn't shifted his position with his elbow on the lieutenant's high desk.

"I should like to see you—alone, Mr. Creighton," said Mr. Van Vranken.

"Yes, sir, tomorrow," Knight put in.

"May I have your card, Mr. Knight?"

"Why, certainly," Knight readily replied, and he brought out a card case.

"And one of your cards, Mr. Creighton?"

Slade's head was swimming—a little bit. He'd taken the property of the late Mr. Enoch Creighton and was now stowing it away. There was no doubt about it now. This was robbery—robbery compounded

with forgery and God only knew what other crimes.

For a full five seconds—it seemed longer than that, but it might have been less—his gaze met and answered the unworded questioning in the eyes of Mr. Cole Van Vranken.

"We'll meet each other again," Slade said. "*Trust me!*"

"Sure," said the crippled Knight. "But first we got to sleep this off."

He laughed. But there was no good feeling in the grip that he took on Slade's arm. The grip was as hard as steel as he conducted Slade toward the door leading to the street.

CHAPTER V

THE GREATER MYSTERY

IF Cole Van Vranken had remained a surprised but more or less inactive witness to this strange episode—when a complete stranger claimed not only the name but some of the property of Enoch Creighton—it was because a greater mystery was absorbing the former ambassador's thought. The mystery was this:

Where was Evelyn Creighton, Enoch Creighton's sister? What had happened to her? Didn't Enoch himself have something to do with her disappearance? And, in such a case, was it just as well to move with caution?

The name of Creighton—a great name in the history, both social and financial, of New York—had already been sufficiently mired by the scandals that Enoch Creighton had brought upon it.

Enoch Creighton had been going steadily to the devil ever since he'd been able to travel alone. He'd squandered his own fortune almost before he was of age—making a name for himself at home and abroad. With his own fortune gone,

he'd blackmailed his aunts out of all he could get. Here of late he had been turning his talents to Evelyn.

Suppose that Enoch Creighton had now kidnapped his sister—was holding her for ransom—as he'd threatened to a number of times?

The question was burning itself through Cole Van Vranken's brain as he stood there, apparently at ease, and chatted with the police lieutenant. That would make a pretty story for the papers! And Evelyn almost of age, one of the season's most popular, its richest, its most popular debutantes!

TONIGHT a strange car had driven up to the Creighton mansion on Fifth Avenue, where Evelyn Creighton lived with two of her aunts.

It was Waldeck, the Creighton butler, who'd reported this part of it; and clearly enough, although old Waldeck had been wringing his hands and having a hard time to keep back his tears.

It was a little past midnight that the strange car had arrived, just a few minutes after Miss Evelyn had returned from the Opera where she'd been the guest of friends.

Waldeck himself had answered the ring. There was a young man there whom Waldeck didn't know. And this young man had said that Mr. Enoch was down there in the car standing at the curb and that he wanted to see his sister.

"She's already retired, sir," said Waldeck.

"Take your choice," said the caller. "She can see him now or maybe tomorrow learn that he's dead."

Evelyn herself had been listening from the head of the stairs.

"What has happened?" she cried.

"He's had an accident," the stranger replied; "and he's down

there now in the car begging to have just one word with you."

That was enough for Evelyn. She'd run from the house and out across the sidewalk to where the strange car stood. There Waldeck had seen her seized and thrust into the car. Without a cry, without a struggle, so swiftly that it seemed as if the thing couldn't have happened at all, Evelyn Creighton had disappeared.

THERE were hundreds of such cases in New York and in every great city year after year, Cole Van Vranken knew. Ordinarily, in such a case, there would have been but one thing to do, and that was to cooperate to the fullest degree with the police. But in the present case, how could he? He was haunted by the conviction that back of this kidnapping—if Evelyn Creighton had been kidnapped—was the sinister shadow of that brother of hers.

It would be a pretty story for the sensational press if the news got out that Evelyn Creighton had been kidnapped by her own brother. As a matter of fact, it would have been almost as good if it had been known that Enoch Creighton had been merely accused of such a crime by Evelyn Creighton's guardian.

Cole Van Vranken, standing there at the desk in the police station could imagine the headlines:

**BROTHER KIDNAPS SISTER
HOLDS HER FOR RANSOM**

**MILLION DOLLAR DEBUTANTE
VICTIM OF BROTHER'S PLOT**

The prospect made him shudder. But he gave no outward sign. He was master of himself as he watched the strange "Enoch Creighton" sign the official papers and receive the real Enoch Creighton's property.

Lieutenant Heath, on duty at the desk, had an eye for all that passed. He could see that Cole Van Vranken was undergoing some strain.

"There has been some mistake, sir," the lieutenant said.

The former ambassador nodded.

"I needn't tell you that I'm at your disposition," the lieutenant went on. "In fact, those are my orders. I've had a tip from—the chief."

"Thank you, lieutenant." Cole Van Vranken watched Slade—the false Enoch Creighton—turn away from the desk with the mysterious, black-clad Knight at his side.

"Shall I hold them?" the lieutenant asked.

Cole Van Vranken considered. "It's common enough for two or more men to have the same name," he said. "This young man doesn't look like a crook. He doesn't look like a dissipated lad. We can't help it if he gets arrested after having taken a drink too many."

THE conversation came to a halt as a plainclothes man stepped swiftly and softly to the lieutenant's side and slid a whisper from the side of his mouth.

"Speak up, Kelly," said Lieutenant Heath. "This is Mr. Van Vranken's case, and he comes from the Commissioner."

At the same time the lieutenant gave a signal and a couple of the loungers in the room—precinct detectives, perhaps, although no one without experience would have taken them for members of the force—politely blocked the way to the door. Knight and Slade were stopped.

"What's this?" Knight asked softly, turning to look back at the desk.

"Just a moment, Mr. Knight," said Lieutenant Heath.

For a moment the lieutenant, Detective Kelly, and Cole Van Vranken were whispering together. It was

the lieutenant who imparted to Evelyn Creighton's guardian the tip that Kelly had just given him.

"Kelly thinks the man in black—"

"Knight?"

"Yes. Kelly thinks Knight is 'the Shanghai Black', international crook, killer—"

"Is there a charge against him?"

"None. But we could frame one."

There came to Cole Van Vranken a swift recollection of that look he had just exchanged with the stranger who was using his nephew's name. The look had been a call for trust, for confidence.

Cole Van Vranken shook his head. The lieutenant raised his hand. Almost with no delay at all Knight and Slade were once more headed for the door to the street.

Cole Van Vranken himself turned to leave.

"I'll see, of course," said Lieutenant Heath, "that this stays out of the newspapers."

"Good night, lieutenant, and thank you."

Cole Van Vranken started to pull on his gloves.

As he did so, there was a sound of confusion just outside the station house door. There was a muffled report.

For the rest, in the seconds that followed, it was tumult.

CHAPTER VI

UNDER THE GREEN LIGHTS

SLADE WYATH and the black garbed Knight had lost no time in making their way to the station house door. Each, in a different way, had felt the danger of this place.

Knight, for example, if there was nothing else on his conscience, had been the jackal in the presence of a lion—and of a wounded lion, at that—

while he was there in the presence of Cole Van Vranken.

So Slade himself had perceived.

Knight's bravado had been but the front put on to conceal a growing uneasiness. This also Slade knew: Knight's uneasiness had been equally compounded of suspicion and terror. But if the terror was a product of Cole Van Vranken's unexpected presence and that gentleman's undoubted ability to command the police to do his bidding, the suspicion had been aroused by Van Vranken's odd inability to recognize this supposed nephew of his.

Slade was conscious of that grip on his arm. It was as if Knight were holding a gun at his ribs demanding to know who he really was. Suppose Knight had become convinced that this man at his side was not Snowy Creighton, after all; but merely some stranger to whom he'd been spilling too much dangerous gossip. What then?

Even so, Slade could not feel that his own fear now was merely on his own account. Back there he himself had been afraid, but it was fear of a misplay—through his liking for Cole Van Vranken and his hatred of the self-styled Sylvester Knight—when this was no time for misplays.

They stepped into the outer air, while Knight still gripped Slade's arm. The night air of even this side street in the heart of the great city tasted sweet to Slade. God, how he hated a jail!

They were at the head of a short flight of steps. At the foot of the steps were heavy stone newel posts with standards on them bearing the green lanterns of the police department.

A polished, rather foreign looking young man suddenly appeared at the foot of the steps between the green lights. There was something exaggerated about his movements, as if

these were too swift, too graceful. There was even something exaggerated about his physical beauty or, at least, the smoothness of his get-up. In all ways, he suggested a panther.

"Benny!" Knight whispered, "Benny the Twist!"

Slade recalled the name. It was "Benny the Twist" who'd been jealous of Enoch Creighton—Benny who'd struck the blow from which Creighton had died.

All this in a flash. Then Benny had stepped up toward where they stood. It was to Knight that Benny spoke first.

"What were you doing here?" he asked smoothly.

"I came to get Snowy," Knight answered.

Slade caught a swift glint of coal black eyes.

"That ain't Snowy, you rat," Benny came back.

"Listen, Benny!"

"You'll squeal——"

WITH all that exaggerated grace and skill of his, Benny had twitched a gun from his breast—from a shoulder holster, most likely.

"Cheese it!" Knight implored. "Don't push that gun. I'll go with you, Benny. You can take us both along. But not here. Don't be a fool. It would spoil everything—for you—for all of us. It's like I said. I came here for Snowy. This guy said he was Snowy."

In the midst of the pleading, Slade made a slight movement to turn back. Quick as a spider, Benny the Twist perceived the move.

"Hold it, you!" he grated. The brief command had the vehemence of a curse.

Slade "held it." He did so with a sort of wonder—a sort of admiration—for Benny the Twist. Where was this, anyway? This was happening on the steps of a police sta-

tion. There were the green lights. Even at this hour between midnight and dawn the street was not particularly deserted.

Dimly, with a sense of movement about them, like waiting sharks, there were a couple of cars in the street. One of them must have been Benny's car. Gangsters like him didn't go on foot, not when their errand was business.

Benny himself turned slightly. He appeared to give a signal. His gun slipped out of sight, but his hand was on it, in the side pocket of his coat.

"Oke," said Benny; "you're coming with me. Who brought you here? Who you got in that car?"

"It's the Widow's car," said Knight. "There's nobody in it but a couple of angels she had hanging around. It's their car and her chauffeur."

"Forget 'em," Benny advised.

What followed was too fast for Slade to see. There was too much to see. It appeared that the astute Mr. Twist had been for a moment off his guard—a moment when his hand had strayed. He thrust it back but he got it no further than the pocket of his coat. For even faster and better prepared was the strange Mr. Knight.

Again Knight had forgotten he was a cripple. But his cane was handy. He was no longer leaning on his cane. Instead he raised this, the moment Benny the Twist had appeared, as if the cane were a long-barreled pistol.

Which it was!

From the supposed ferrule of the cane there was a jet of fire and a banging report, and Benny was dropping—dropping with his wrist and his body crumpled.

WHILE this was happening, a big limousine had drawn up to the curb down there between the

green lights. Slade remembered, even in these flashing moments, that Knight also had given some sort of a signal as they left the station house door. From the limousine a couple of young men jumped out, leaving the door of the machine open behind them.

Slade was for drawing back. The shooting had touched him with horror. But there was to be no drawing back.

He received a jolt back of the head that sent him forward down the steps. He stumbled over Benny as he went. He would have fallen—he would have taken a dive to the sidewalk—if it hadn't been for the pair rushing forward from the limousine.

They grabbed Slade. He struck, right and left. But he was off his balance. Before he could recover himself he was seized. Again there came a jolt from the rear, this time behind his ear, and it almost put him out.

The four of them—Knight and Slade and the two from the limousine—now as if fell across the sidewalk and into the car. They were barely in it before the car gave a jump like a thing alive and was away.

Dimly, in a whirl, Slade caught an impression of a rush of policemen from the station. There was a series of swift explosions. But there was no telling whether these were backfires or shots—not so far as Slade was concerned.

All Slade knew was that he was fighting—fighting, he believed, for his life.

CHAPTER VII

STRANGE ALLIES

THERE happened to be one reporter hanging about the precinct house at the time Benny the Twist was shot. The re-

porter's name was Simley. He had a valuable knack for being places where things happened. Yet he was always broke; he was always out of a job. He had a bad squint in his left eye. Most of the time his lean face was adorned with a scraggly beard. He had a passion for poetry and was never very clean.

Simley had so far observed with interest the arrival of Mr. Cole Van Vranken. A police station was a queer place for a former ambassador and cabinet member to call. There was a story in that. It was one he'd dig out of the lieutenant later on. He'd watched with greater interest that strange confrontation of Cole Van Vranken and the man who had usurped the name of the Van Vranken nephew, Enoch Creighton.

But that spoiled the story. You didn't make stories out of the sorrows of a man like Cole Van Vranken. Simley didn't, at any rate, which may have explained why he was so often out of a job. He knew much about a lot of people—most families had black sheep—but he kept the knowledge largely to himself.

It was—so Simley told himself—a reward for virtue, though, when that shot was fired on the precinct steps.

They brought in Benny sagging between two plainclothes men. He was sobbing a little, like a child that has hurt itself. But he was drooling blood over an expensive necktie and there was a hiccough in his throat like a death rattle.

"You're going to croak, Benny," said one of policeman supporters as they laid him on the floor. "Who did it?"

"Go to hell," Benny sobbed, and passed into unconsciousness.

A heavy bullet had ploughed through his upper chest, but when

the police surgeon prodded him he expressed the opinion that Benny had a chance.

During the very first flush of the excitement, Simley, the free lance reporter, had ducked into the captain's room, back of the desk. There was a telephone there that he could use. And he used it—a flash to his favorite paper, which would give him exclusive rates, then to three or four correspondents of out of town papers who were wild for this sort of stuff. It was at an hour of the night when final editions were going to press, and chances were good for a beat.

"Gangsters battle at police station!"—this was first page stuff.

BENNY BARETA—otherwise Benny the Twist, sometimes known as the Dancehall King—arrested oftener than the police could count, on charges all the way from murder down, yet never convicted. On the station-house steps he had drawn his gun and tried to shoot either one or both of two men who were just leaving the station and who'd been quicker on the draw.

One of these men, a cripple dressed in black and pretending to be a lawyer named Sylvester Knight, had just called at the station and secured the release of a man in evening clothes, arrested a short time previously for intoxication, and booked under the name of a well-known young millionaire.

"Say, Simley, for God's sake get that name!" the editor came back.

"I can't," Simley responded to each demand. "The cops are keeping it secret."

As Simley turned from the telephone he saw that someone was standing just inside the door. He recognized the former ambassador.

"How do you do, Mr. Van Vranken?" he said.

"I apologize," said the older man, "but I overheard what you've been saying. You are Mr. Simley." The lieutenant had given him that information.

"Yes, sir."

And Simley made a move to surrender his place at the telephone, but the other motioned him to keep his place.

"I appreciate your withholding the name of Enoch Creighton, Mr. Simley."

"That's nothing."

"It's a great deal. Would I be imposing on your kindness to ask you for a little of your time as soon as you are at leisure?"

"I'm at leisure now, Mr. Van Vranken."

"But this story?"

"I've done all I can for the present. The regulars will be taking care of it from now on. They'll be picking it up from the reports that go into Headquarters down on Lafayette Street."

"It is true," said Mr. Van Vranken, "that I took steps to have my nephew's name suppressed, even before I came to this place. And now, of course, there is all the more reason for withholding it from the papers, and also the fact of my presence here."

"You're safe," smiled Simley through his scraggly beard, "so far as I'm concerned, Mr. Van Vranken."

SIMLEY looked like a tramp, but the former ambassador didn't misjudge him. Cole Van Vranken owed much of his success in life to his clear judgment of the men he met. He'd begun his career, moreover, in a Western mining camp, where such judgment had unusual opportunities for development.

"Suppose," Mr. Van Vranken sug-

gested, "we adjourn to a restaurant."

An ambulance had arrived and carted Benny the Twist off to a hospital with a detective escort. News of the crime and a description of the suspected criminals, together with a description of their car, was being flashed from station to station and post to post throughout the city and to neighboring counties. In a few minutes more the reporters would be assembling, as Simley had already indicated.

"This is certainly no place for you," said Simley with a smile, "if you want to keep out of the news."

Mr. Van Vranken evidently knew his New York. The restaurant to which the taxi brought them was a good one, but not so large or brilliant that Simley could have felt embarrassed, even had he been so inclined.

ANYWAY the place was almost deserted. It was at an hour not far from dawn when the last of the night prowlers and the first of the early risers—a scattering rear guard and a thin advance guard of what was both yesterday and tomorrow—were beginning to overlap.

"Simley," said Mr. Van Vranken, when they were finally at their coffee, "I was once a newspaper man myself, but my secret ambition always was to be a detective. Curiously, both these facts returned to impress themselves on my mind back there in the station, when I was hearing you telephone. It now happens that I am urgently in need of some detective work. Such a need has arisen from time to time at other periods in my life and I have employed some of the best detective talent available both here and abroad. I may do so still. But I've felt that where a member of one's

own family is concerned one might be and should be his own best detective—with proper assistance. Would you be inclined to furnish me such assistance?"

"Certainly," said Simley. "But may I ask what makes you think that I'll be of any use to you, Mr. Van Vranken?"

"Partly hunch," said Cole Van Vranken. "Partly also because you stood by me just now in the matter of the telephone to the papers when my name might have meant more money to you. And partly—well, wasn't your father Jack Simley, who used to run a paper in Butte?"

"Yes, sir."

"An old friend of mine," said Cole Van Vranken.

"I've heard him speak of you," Simley grinned. "You held off the mob that time they wanted to run my father out of town."

CHAPTER VIII

ALIAS, "THE WIDOW"

WHEN they'd tumbled Slade into the limousine, after the shooting of Benny Barreta, otherwise Benny the Twist, Slade landed on his face. But he'd kept on fighting. He kicked and clung. If he could break a glass—if he could open a door—then, there'd be a crowd, or at least a chase.

It was three against one. The two young men whom Knight, back there on the station steps, had described as "angels" revealed themselves as cunning and strong. Knight himself had thrown disguise aside. In the thick of the fight, Slade got a glimpse of Knight's face—still white, minus the glasses, a mask of envenomed purpose.

The cramped quarters saved Slade for a time. He was like a shark in

a crowded fishing boat, and the boat in a choppy sea. The car swerved, stopped, sprang ahead again. It seemed to plunge between recurrent breakers of sound. The breakers were made up of shouts, whistles, blasts from motor horns. But at some undetermined time the car got out of midtown traffic and was sailing free.

Part of the time Slade had fought with head and shoulders on the floor, part of the time bent double over the front seat—with the chauffeur there cursing him and mixing in.

Then one wrist was gripped with steel and twisted back of him. Someone worked on his other arm, pressing it back—until it was almost broken—and that wrist was handcuffed also.

"Fasten him," said Knight.

And Slade was choked. When he was so badly choked he thought his lungs would burst, a stiff and tarry bandage was drawn about his face and neck. He knew what that was. It was adhesive tape of the coarser sort. His face was as if burned and paralyzed. But at least he could breathe and he'd kept some shred of consciousness alive. After this they trod him to the floor again and kept him there with their feet.

FOR some time the car had been cruising without great speed. The chauffeur spoke. "What's it to be?" he asked.

The cripple replied: "We'll take him to the Widow's."

"Even if he ain't Creighton?"

One of the others put in: "He ain't Creighton. That's what I tell Winnie, here, the minute I see him. Didn't I, Winnie?"

"Naw, he ain't Creighton," said the one appealed to.

"What's it going to be?" the chauffeur repeated with steady pa-

tience. "The sooner we park this bus the better. Right about now is late enough after what Shanghai did to Benny, back there."

"Shanghai" evidently was the alias of Sylvester Knight. It was he who answered.

"Okay, park here, Gus," he said. "Winnie, go flag a taxi—a big one—while Eddie's shifting plates, just in case."

The young man called Winnie slipped out of the door and was gone. Eddie pawed something from under the seat and also got out of the car.

"This bird's going on to the Widow's," Shanghai went on, "whoever he is. Because, whatever he is, he's the bozo Mabel sent us to get. He's got to be. He can't be anyone else."

"But if he ain't?" the chauffeur persisted. "Suppose he ain't Snowy Creighton at all?"

"In that case," said Shanghai evenly, "I guess it'll be up to us to take him the rest of the way."

A big taxi pulled up alongside. There was talk of a friend who was soused and a car that was stalled. Nighthawk taxi drivers never look back in a case like this unless by special request.

There was no request, in this case, special or otherwise. Slade was shifted to this new car. The taxi rolled away and picked up speed. It was late. There was little traffic.

The two young men, Eddie and Winnie, Slade eventually noticed, had been left behind. They'd probably gone to put through a telephone call for after an hour or so, the taxi lazied and was hailed by yet another car.

And again Slade was shifted—swiftly, without noise or scandal—from door to door.

THE car in which Slade now found himself smelled of sandalwood. The smell was persistent. It came and went but it couldn't be killed entirely by the cigarette smoke of Shanghai and Gus.

Slade sat propped between Shanghai and Gus on the back seat of the car. Some car, he judged. The upholstery was like that of an overstuffed divan. He was aching in a hundred places. He was on the verge of losing his senses altogether. Now and then he did pass into a sort of dreamy state when the pain, ever present, was lulled, and when the sandalwood smell and the upholstery made a composite that suggested the presence of a mysterious woman—the woman, he reflected, that Creighton would have married.

A woman named Mabel! The Widow!

And she was to give the word that might send him "the rest of the way."

The night was now taking on the deep blue transparency of early dawn. For a while the car had been speeding through what almost seemed like the open country, through fields and woods; but the ever recurring electric lights showed that this was still somewhat in the outer zone of the big city.

Shanghai, the one-time Sylvester Knight, addressed a question to the new chauffeur. "Fred, is your mis-sus sitting up?"

"Yes."

The single word had a peculiar foreign accent. Slade noticed that the chauffeur was a small man, Chinese perhaps.

The car dropped from the highway into the softer going of what appeared to be a private road. There was a smell of the sea in the air and also of misty woods. Except for the play of the headlights along a

narrow woodland road the darkness was almost absolute. Then, the headlights showed a flashing section of high stone wall with a window in it, after which the lights were turned off and the car came to a purring stop.

In the dark, one of Slade's captors—Shanghai or Gus, he didn't know which—snapped off the handcuffs.

"She might get sore," he heard one of them whisper.

Then they were dragging him out of the car. After which they walked him as they might have walked a dead man on to an invisible terrace before an all but invisible house.

HERE there was a sudden blaze of light, white and hard, from an electric globe over the door. Then the door swung open. The moment the door opened it seemed to release a wave of that perfume Slade had noticed in the car.

The woman of mystery was standing there.

She was young. She was slender and graceful. She had lustrous black hair that was banged across her forehead in a style that might have been Oriental or simply individual; but the Oriental note was accentuated by the fact that she was wrapped in some sort of Oriental robe—a kimono or a mandarin coat and very gorgeous.

But what struck Slade most of all was her perfect poise. He could imagine to some extent what he himself looked like. He must have been a sight to scare most women into hysterics. Not this one. She had given no start, uttered no cry.

She simply stood there—gracefully, like a wax figure in a museum—and all the life about her concentrated in her eyes.

At that, the survey couldn't have

lasted more than half a dozen seconds.

Slade made a final effort.

He put into it all that he could compel from muscle, nerve and spirit. He jerked himself free from the men who stood to either side of him. He was gagged. He was clotted with blood. But his own eyes were capable, perhaps, of conveying some message.

It was his only hope. He'd flung himself forward, he'd lurched against the jamb of the doorway and clung there.

Still she'd barely moved. His eyes met hers.

She spoke to the others.

"You boys go around with Fred," she said. "I'll see you later."

She drew Slade into the house and closed the door.

CHAPTER IX

STRANGE DR. LI

SHE may have been Chinese, she may have had no more than a quarter of Chinese blood in her veins; but, for the moment she stood there still looking at Slade after the door was closed, she had about her all the lure and also all the menace, he thought, that China has always had for the white man.

In any case, her English was faultless.

"This comes of not doing things yourself," she said, without apparent emotion.

She didn't raise her voice as she switched to what sounded like a Chinese dialect.

Immediately two Chinese serving men appeared from behind a silk curtain just back of the lady. They were sober-faced and keen, neatly dressed in dark American clothes. The servants had no eyes except for

her, as she gave them a few brief orders, without excitement, in the dialect that Slade could not understand.

If she was telling them to strangle him, Slade knew, with a gust of feeling, that the orders would be obeyed.

Herself, she'd given not so much as a glance at the servants. She'd continued to look at Slade—with what feeling he was unable to surmise. So far, she seemed to have been moved by nothing more than the merest curiosity.

There was no hint of feeling, one way or the other, as she spoke to Slade.

"These boys will help you," she said. "Go with them. I'll send up Dr. Li."

She called it "Lee." It was only later that Slade learned the spelling of the Chinese name.

THE Chinese serving men helped him up a broad and easy flight of stairs.

This was evidently some old country mansion. Except for the embroidered silks hanging about, a few bronzes, and the pervading smell of sandalwood, this might have been the home of Slade's own grandmother back in Fayette County, in the Middle West.

But there was a modern bathroom adjoining the bedroom to which they brought him, and here the Chinese servants not only stripped away the adhesive tape that gagged him; they stripped him also of his clothes and bathed him, swiftly and skillfully, before throwing a dressing robe about him and urging him toward the bed.

In the meantime Dr. Li had arrived—one of the largest Chinese Slade had even seen, with a huge round mask of a face that might have been a casting in pale bronze

if it hadn't been for the twinkling eyes. He was faultlessly dressed in an American business suit. It developed that his English also was faultless.

The first thing that Dr. Li did was to give Slade a large brown pill. The pill worked wonders. Slade lost all sense of fatigue, of pain, even of weight.

"Oh me, oh, my!" the doctor exclaimed as he began to apply the healing art. "What a wallop that was!"

But at the same time, just as deftly, just as skillfully, he was prodding for information.

Slade told him everything. He knew that it was no good to lie to this man. For the moment he was helpless, trapped. In any case, he needed a friend if anyone ever did, and he guessed that his only chance with the big Chinese was to come clean.

"So you are alive and yet you are not alive," said Dr. Li, at last, leaning back in his chair at Slade's bedside.

He offered Slade a cigarette and held the light before lighting one for himself.

"Your dead body, so to speak," he went on, "still lies there with your red uniform in the upper cot of the police cell, where it is likely to remain until it is discovered this morning. Officially, that is you. You say that you have no friends or relatives here in New York who will miss you?"

"None."

"How about the man who hired you?"

"I saw him only once. After that it was now one and now another of his employees who issued me that red uniform and held my own clothes in hock."

BUT you had a boarding house—a room?"

"Casually, now and then. At my last regular place my trunk was seized a month or more ago. I never went back."

"But you gave your proper name," the doctor suggested, "at the time of your arrest?"

Slade shook his head. For a moment he couldn't remember the name he had given. Then he recalled. It was simply "George Jones."

"Mm," the doctor brooded. "And now, when the police find that George Jones is dead in his cell, what will happen?"

"Yes; what will happen?"

"I will tell you. They will send his body to the morgue for an autopsy—what they used to call a post mortem. The examination will not be very thorough. I know. When I was just out of Johns Hopkins, your great medical college in Baltimore, I worked for a time as an assistant to what was then called the coroner. At the most, they will open your stomach. We know what they will find there. They will say, 'Acute alcoholism—another poor bum has died of gin.'"

It sounded like a joke, if a rather ghostly one. But Dr. Li was serious. He seemed to be going over the groundwork of a somewhat complicated problem.

"True," he added, "since George Jones was under arrest on a serious criminal charge, it is possible they will also fingerprint him. They will send his fingerprints to the bureau at Headquarters. That would not help them any, either; would it? They have no identical fingerprints on record there."

"That let's George Jones out," said Slade.

"It lets Slade Wyath out," Dr. Li corrected, with the hint of a smile. "It lets you—your old self—out be—"

cause Slade Wyath is dead. We could even send somebody around to the morgue—we might even send you yourself around to the morgue—to identify the body as that of Slade Wyath. You might be able to do it better than anyone. Get the point? You know him, know all about him—his family, his friends, what he did last and where he lived. See?"

THE suggestion gave Slade the shivers.

"I see," he said. "But I can't say that I exactly get the point."

"Very well," said Dr. Li, with steady concentration. "Suppose, then, you're not dead. We'll suppose that you're still alive and that you're Slade Wyath, the man who was arrested last night under the name of George Jones. In that case you're guilty, not only of the original charge of possessing a revolver without a permit; you're guilty of robbery and murder. You—murdered Enoch Creighton."

"I'd thought of that," Slade admitted.

"An airtight case, as they say," the doctor declared.

"Of course," said Slade, "I could prove my innocence."

"Could you? Let's see! In the first place, finding Enoch Creighton dead in a cell is not like finding the body there of a derelict named George Jones. Enoch Creighton—Broadway playboy, only son of the late Commodore Creighton, famous millionaire. That means a hullabaloo in the newspapers and the police on their toes to make a showing. Also, it means a different sort of an autopsy. It is found, for example, that it wasn't alcohol that killed him; it was a fractured skull."

"He had that when they put him in the cell," Slade reminded.

YOU forget what the policeman said. The victim had been examined by an ambulance surgeon and reported to be simply drunk. Drunk, they put him into a cell. With whom? With the man who shortly afterward stripped him, put on his clothes, claimed his property. The policemen who put Creighton in the cell swear he was all right, apart from some degree of intoxication. When they find him, the next time, he's had his head crushed in; he has been murdered and robbed. By whom? Naturally, by the only one who has been in contact with him in the interval—by the man who has just fled. Not only that, it will be shown that Benny Bareta was well acquainted with the victim. When Benny was on the point of denouncing you, an effort was made to kill Benny also—or so Benny will testify, if he recovers."

Dr. Li doused his cigarette and lit a fresh one. This he fitted to a long jade tube. He held the tube Chinese fashion, with thumb and forefinger, and the palm of his hand upward, instead of down as a Westerner does.

Dr. Li was becoming more and more Oriental as he talked, more and more the Oriental symbol of inscrutable, pitiless Fate.

CHAPTER X

DEAD OR ALIVE

WHAT'S the answer?" Slade asked, after an interval.

So far there was no hole in the Chinaman's logic. It was merely the confirmation, precise and inevitable, of what he had himself glimpsed, however vaguely, back there in the station-house.

Dr. Li didn't answer immediately. He let his cigarette burn unaided

for an interval. He breathed deeply. His eyes narrowed slightly.

"The answer rests with yourself," he announced. "It can be one of two things. You are the 'x' of the problem. Which of the two possible answers becomes the final answer is a matter of your own choice."

"What two things?"

"Your death or your life. We can even develop that a little. Let us say: Your death, in the electric chair at Sing Sing; or, your life as the rich young husband of a beautiful and talented woman, free to travel, see the world——"

"Good God, Doctor," Slade broke in; "what are you talking about?"

"Have I failed to make myself clear?"

"Your words are clear enough, but——"

"There is no 'but' about it," the doctor protested evenly, yet with a note of authority. "As I said before, the dead man in the cell back there at the station-house is one of two persons. He is either Slade Wyath, alias George Jones, or—he is Enoch Creighton. The circumstances are such that we can prove him to be either. Or, to put it in another way, the man who left the cell, when the turnkey came for him, was either Enoch Creighton himself or the man who murdered him. Which would you rather be?"

"Even if I wanted to go on pretending to be Enoch Creighton," Slade said, "I couldn't."

"Why not?"

"Have you forgotten what I said about Mr. Cole Van Vranken having been there?—that he was talking to the lieutenant? He knew I wasn't the man I was supposed to be. He said so."

"He is but a single witness. He might disappear."

"You mean—that he might be—made to disappear?"

"This is New York. Such things have happened."

"Are you talking of—another murder? A real one this time?"

A MURDER is real only when it's proven, as the murder of Enoch Creighton can be proven."

"Yes," Slade asserted, with a touch of stampede; "it can be proven that he was murdered by Benny the Twist, as he is called. There was a witness who saw him strike the blow."

"You refer to whom?"

"Mabel! The Widow!"

"Ah, yes! Miss Huang; or, if you prefer, Madame Huang, your hostess. It was to her I referred a while back as the lady you may decide, as the new Mr. Creighton, to marry. Just a moment! Don't excite yourself. Allow me to explain."

"You don't have to explain," said Slade, starting up. "This is preposterous."

Dr. Li was not excited. He appeared scarcely to hear Slade at all. The big Chinaman was engrossed in his own thoughts, it seemed. Through a long and silent minute he let Slade subside.

Slade sat propped up against the pillows. The brown pill the doctor had given him lulled his pain—it permitted him to forget his body entirely—but it had done nothing to dull his brain. On the contrary, it had given his brain a sort of crystal clearness. He stood at the fork of two paths, all right, and he could see where these paths led.

One way led to Sing Sing, to what they called the "death house," to the "little green door."

The other way led—to some region still nebulous but bright, a land of those who were alive and free.

Dr. Li began to speak again.

"I merely wanted to tell you that

you must not get a wrong impression from this American habit of calling people by familiar names. It happened that Madame Huang's late husband had a considerable following in the underworld. He was, as your tabloids like to say, a king. He was, it is true, merely the king of all opium smugglers. When he was shot, last December in Miami, Miss Huang naturally became known by her late husband's followers as 'the Widow.'"

SLADE'S answer to this was a slight shudder. He was about to speak when Dr. Li interrupted him.

"Wait! Even before her husband's death she was considering new connections. Among her many admirers was this young Mr. Enoch Creighton. But she never really loved him."

"She became engaged to him," Slade said, with a note of contempt.

"Enoch Creighton's father, the late Commodore Creighton, left a substantial claim on practically a half million acres of oil lands in Kwangtung, Southern China, in which I myself am interested. We need—a Creighton heir. The Commodore left some good and powerful friends in China—men who are at present in power. They'd give the son of their old friend a great welcome, especially if he came to them with a Chinese bride. There are many Huangs in that part of China. I'm really one of them myself. It would put us all on our feet."

"Why should I be dragged into this?" said Slade. "Why me?"

Dr. Li reflected. "Dragged in—by whom?"

Slade was silent.

"Creighton himself was never very satisfactory," the doctor went on. "He was a man of bad habits—an unhealthy mind in an unhealthy body. He was like so many others

—the lawyer who called for you at the prison, those gangster henchmen who accompanied him, Benny Baretta; highborn and lowborn. Let them die! Let them kill each other off! We're leaving them behind! You're a nice, clean boy. You're educated. You come from good stock. I take it, you've never been to China yet."

"No."

"Kwangtung, a natural paradise! Chung Shan, which is the garden of Kwangtung. You'll go out there and live like a mandarin, in a palace and a park, with a hundred servants. Not very far from Macao, China's Monte Carlo, where you can go to diversify your amusements; not very far from Hongkong, where you can mix with the high-toned English. But it's America and China that count. The sister republics. Chung Shan is like California, only better—older, wiser. You say you've studied to be an engineer?"

"Yes."

"You'll have a new empire to play with, to build."

SLADE felt as if he were being hypnotized. He took a fresh grip on himself.

"I tell you," he said, "it's wicked, it's absurd."

"In what way?" Dr. Li asked softly.

Slade couldn't answer. He felt submerged by a wave of his own helplessness. He'd been brought to this house a prisoner. He was doubly a prisoner now. In the back of his thought was that shadowy semblance of an electric chair, then a ghostly semblance—the composite of many young girls—of that little sister, Enoch Creighton's, he'd started out so bravely to save.

"I beg your pardon," Slade said. "It all sounds great enough, but——"

"We can't expect to settle everything in a minute," said Dr. Li, soothingly. "I've been bearing down on you. It is I who should apologize."

He leaned back in his chair and said something very softly in Chinese.

The door leading to the hall slowly opened.

Slade hadn't turned to look immediately. He was expecting one of the Chinese servants. He was distressed. But it was as if he'd been touched by an invisible hand—as if an unseen hand had touched his cheek and made him turn.

It was his hostess standing there: Mabel, the Widow, Miss Huang, Madame Huang.

She was an elusive looking creature; she looked as if even her name might slip away and appear again in some other form. She'd been standing there for a pair of seconds before Slade looked at her, absolutely silent, looking at him with the quiet yet intense absorption he'd noticed in the hall below.

Dr. Li seemed to sense her presence without turning, which would have been easy enough, either by way of the perfume she brought along or the sudden shift in Slade's expression.

Slade still looked.

MISS HUANG was wearing a different robe, of white and geranium red, very soft and becoming and indefinably Oriental like herself. There recurred to Slade the adjectives used by Dr. Li in his reference to this woman a while back: "beautiful, talented." This was she whom it was proposed he should marry—marry and be rich—free to travel—see the world.

When Miss Huang spoke it was with a slight drawl. Her voice was low pitched and soft.

"I sent your boys to bed," she said.

She was speaking to Dr. Li, but she continued to keep her eyes on Slade. It was as if, this being her first good chance to have a real look at him, she was making the most of it.

"I thought your patient would be hungry," she went on; "so I brought up something myself. It's at the door. Shall I bring it in?"

"Thank you, Mabel," said Dr. Li.

Still he hadn't turned. He seemed to be enjoying the play of expression he saw on Slade's face—studying this, drawing deductions from it, with his habits of a scientist.

She was slender, Slade noticed; she was graceful as a willow. What was the strange world, the world of mystery, that lay back of her dark eyes? She had looked at him as calmly as a young doe might have done, with the same detachment, apparently.

Slade brought his startled eyes back to Dr. Li. The doctor met his look with a faint smile.

CHAPTER XI

THE DOMINANT POWER

MAY I ask you something, Dr. Li?" Slade asked softly, before the lady's return.

"You may ask me anything you want," the doctor replied.

"Am I free to go?"

The doctor laughed—a bit too readily, a trifle too merrily, it seemed to Slade.

"Why, certainly you are free to go," he replied. "You are free to do anything." At the same instant Miss Huang was re-entering the room, and the doctor spoke to her. "Mabel," he said, "your guest intimates that he might wish to leave us."

At this, Miss Huang frowned a

little, whether at the doctor's levity or at the news he was giving her was impossible to say. She herself said nothing immediately. She held a silver platter. On this there was a crystal pitcher, clinking with ice, filled with a mixture of orange juice and beaten raw eggs.

In spite of his trouble, Slade felt a spasm of physical craving as he looked at the beverage. He was ravenous. He'd been starving.

There was a crystal goblet at the side of the pitcher. Perfectly poised, devoid of nerves, delicately framed but manifestly strong, Miss Huang raised the pitcher where she stood and filled the glass.

"I beg your pardon," said Dr. Li. "You have not been introduced. Mabel, this is—shall I say—the new Mr. Enoch Creighton."

"Don't say it," Slade put in, with a glow of heat. He looked up at the girl. "Miss Huang, I am Slade Wyath, late of Kentucky. You have been very good to me. You have saved my life. I want you to know how much I appreciate it. I am grateful."

Mabel Huang paused. There were many responses she might have made. That earlier frown of hers was gone. But she did not smile. She'd given Slade this time a fleeting glance that seemed to have a signal in it.

"Drink this," she said, presenting the glass. "It will do you good."

"He just asked me," said Dr. Li, "if he was free to go, and I told him that certainly he was free to go."

NOW Miss Huang's eyes met Slade's again for a lingering instant. Her back was to the big man. Slade took the glass and drank. As he did so, he sought Miss Huang's dark eyes again. But she avoided his glance casually, so it seemed. She

took the emptied goblet and refilled it. She handed it back to him.

"Drink more," she said.

He obeyed.

What was it he had seen in her eyes? Was she an enemy? Or was she a friend? In any case, now as before, there was nothing to be gained by concealment. He decided to appeal to her direct.

"Miss Huang," he said, "I was led into this adventure first of all on my own account. Perhaps you are familiar with what I've told the doctor."

She meditated her answer, but not for long. "I heard most of it," she confessed, in her even way.

"But it wasn't on my own account that I got so deep into it," Slade declared earnestly.

"What was the motive?" she asked in a voice that wasn't much more than a murmur.

"It was what the man called Knight said about a sister of Enoch Creighton's having been kidnapped."

Miss Huang took the glass and put it back on the tray with the pitcher. Without word or apology of any sort she turned to Dr. Li and spoke to him softly in Chinese. They spoke on and on. They seemed to be having some sort of an argument. But there was no high feeling noticeable on either side.

Slade watched and listened. At last they were silent.

Miss Huang still stood there with her tray and the weight of crystal on it. She appeared to sway slightly, as one might who is undecided which way to turn. She left the room. But there was an air about her, and also about Dr. Li, to suggest that she was coming back.

SHE returned with another tray, this time a larger one. On it were a couple of covered silver dishes, linen and other silver. The dishes

radiated heat and fragrance as she placed the tray on the bed. She deftly uncovered the dishes with slender hands and revealed chops and toast.

"Eat," she commanded.

But as Slade held back and she saw the insistent question in his eyes, she said:

"Dr. Li says that what becomes of her also depends on you."

Slade dropped back against his pillows. "I cannot eat," he said.

"Eat," Miss Huang coaxed. "I fixed this myself—for you."

Dr. Li spoke up, strongly but quite as if there was nothing unusual in the situation.

"The dickens!" he said. "It must be broad daylight. I'm off. I'll leave you young people alone."

Without another word he was gone.

"Go ahead and eat," said Miss Huang.

Was it an accident that a tip of one of her manicured fingers for a moment had pressed the back of Slade's near hand? The pressure, he decided, couldn't have been an accident. Another signal? If so, what was the meaning of it? It was a time for caution. Of that he was sure.

The doctor gone, Miss Huang, as if in recollection of what he had said about its being daylight, reached up and snapped off the light at the head of the bed. The room was filled with blue twilight filtering between heavy curtains. She crossed the room and drew the curtains back. The room was filled with early sunlight.

There were two windows in the room. Both of them, Slade noticed, were partly open. Through them he saw scattered trees bright with dew and budding foliage. There were no bars at the windows. If this was a prison in which he found himself, it

was different from any prison he had ever imagined.

Yet the feeling that he was a prisoner remained. Free to go? Why, certainly. To Sing Sing! And the electric chair!

Stronger yet was that final chain that had been forged just now to hold him where he was. The words—each word an iron link—clanked in his brain:

"Dr. Li says that what becomes of her also depends on you."

MISS HUANG had lingered at the far window. The strong young daylight was as kind to her as artificial light had been. She was a beautiful figure standing there—beautiful as certain wild animals seem beautiful, a part of fresh wild nature. Her black hair was shining. Her ivory skin caught a geranium reflection from her robe.

While Slade still watched her, lost in thought, admiring her, certainly, but too hard hit by bewilderment for any sense of pleasure, she turned and sauntered toward him.

"You've been kind," he said. "I haven't been unthankful."

He referred to the food. He picked up a chop. After all, she'd prepared this food for him herself. When he had finished chops and toast, Miss Huang, waiting patiently, picked up the tray.

"I'll bring you your coffee," she said.

Slade took his time over his coffee. He smoked a cigarette which Miss Huang presented him from a tortoiseshell case and helped him light.

All this time there had been a constraint upon them. They'd hardly spoken. Dr. Li's shadow was as if on them still—on Slade, at any rate. He felt that every word spoken would be overheard, every gesture noticed. How, he didn't know; but he had the feeling. There'd been no

hint, no other signal, if it was a signal, from the girl since that pressure of her finger on the back of his hand.

What he said, when he did speak, he was willing to have Dr. Li, or others, hear.

"Don't blame me if I seem to be slightly crazy," he said. "I've never seen Enoch Creighton's sister——"

Miss Huang broke in, softly.

"When you do," she said, "You're going to hate me."

"Hate you!" Slade cried. "Not me. You saved my life. Why should I hate you?"

"She's young; she's a blonde," Miss Huang announced, as if this cinched her preceding statement.

"Where is she?"

Miss Huang appeared to meditate. Slowly, still apparently debating in her mind, she turned and went to the door of the hallway. She opened this and listened, then peered out. All her movements were leisurely. But they were leisurely—the feeling came to Slade—with the leisure of the hunting wild animal.

CHAPTER XII

DR. LI PREPARES "A PATIENT"

I TOLD you that you'd hate me," Miss Huang whispered.

Slade's mouth was open. But he couldn't speak; he couldn't breathe. Lungs, heart, even brain seemed to have failed him. He could only stare.

In glass slippers and his Chinese dressing gown he'd followed Miss Huang into the hall outside his room, then back along a passage to a stairway leading to an upper floor. They'd come in silence. She'd led the way. She'd cautioned him to an even greater care and silence as they traversed a couple of cell-like rooms.

In the second of these rooms there

was a window that had once overlooked the flat roof of an extension at the back of the house. But the window had been painted over; the extension had been transformed into what might have been a winter conservatory or a sun-parlor, with glass walls and a glass roof. Whatever its original purpose, there was no doubt as to what sort of service it had been adapted now.

His first glance had told Slade that.

From one of the panes of the condemned window a tiny area of paint had been scraped away. Small as the objective was it commanded a view of the improvised room beyond. White paint, shining nickel—he was looking into an operating room. The whole place was flooded with early sunlight.

A little to one side of the room there was a wheeled operating table. And during that first glance of Slade's this had been partly concealed by the bulky form of a man swarthy in the white of an operating surgeon's uniform.

Even before this man turned, Slade knew that it was Dr. Li. There'd hardly be two surgeons on the premises with such a build as that. He was right.

DR. LI studied the light. He was like an artist getting ready to paint and adjusting his easel. Like an easel he swung the wheeled operating table to a better angle. And at the same instant Slade saw the patient.

Miss Huang must have noticed his tensing fingers.

"It is she," Miss Huang whispered, and she put a hand on Slade's arm.

But Slade wouldn't be moved. He was held by a sort of paralysis.

He saw a girl's delicate face. It was faintly flushed, serene yet suf-

fused with a lively expression, like the face of a child asleep. Only the face was visible. Even the head was bound in white. But at one side a strand of bright yellow hair, light as spider-web, became for an instant a sparkle in the sun.

Slade drew back. He was like a diver coming up for air. He hadn't been able to breathe these past seconds. For the time being he felt as if now, in turn, he were blind. He'd been gazing into the sunlight. This room where he stood was comparatively dark. But it was the picture still vibrating in his brain that was the principal cause of his blindness.

It was as if he were seeing the girl's face even more plainly now than when he was looking at her—detail after detail; the curve and the coral of her lips—her lips that seemed to smile; the bright long lashes of her closed eyes, how they made a faint shadow on her cheek.

Miss Huang's hand had slipped to his wrist. She was trying to draw him away.

Slade stood frozen. It was only gradually, although swiftly enough, no doubt, that the other image faded and Miss Huang appeared to him. Even so, Miss Huang was nothing but a pair of shining dark eyes in this shadowy room.

"What happened?" he asked.

The words may have been inarticulate—he was still strangled—but the question was plain enough.

"Nothing—yet," the answer came.

HE was demanding more. Miss Huang approached her face to his own and spoke in the merest breath.

"Dr. Li is expert. There is no greater expert. You have nothing to fear. Neither has she."

"I don't understand."

"Do you find me—so ugly?"

"No!"

"Once—once I was ugly; ugly even for a Chinese woman. Dr. Li—he changed me."

"Changed you!"

In the twilight of the room she put the fingers of her slender hands to her face. Her distorted features became a Chinese mask.

Slade recoiled a step. Again she'd caught him by the wrist, brought her face close to his. They stood there like that for a few panting seconds. Slade's thoughts were like a plunging, unruly team. He was trying to whip them into order.

"But why her?" he managed to ask.

"Evelyn Creighton?"

"Yes."

"She was Dr. Li's main card all along. Benny Bareta knew that. You—I mean Evelyn's brother, Enoch—didn't count except as a lure. He wasn't worth anything. He would have died anyway—even if Benny hadn't—hurried him along."

"As I'll be hurried along."

"You're different." She caught his other wrist. "Don't be a fool. Dr. Li likes you. You'll do. You're safe. In a little while—a year, two years—you'll be free even to take back your own name, if you want to. We'll get the properties in Kwangtung straightened out. We'll send back word to America that Enoch Creighton has died out there. That'll leave you free. You can be yourself again. You'll be rich. You'll have great friends. You'll have done no harm."

"But her! Her!"

Slade had raised his voice.

"Sh!" she warned.

SLADE jerked his hands free. He did this with such fierce violence that he was for regretting it.

Violence to a woman—that wasn't his style. In his world it wasn't done.

But a spasm of anger, swift yet calculated, had once again made a Chinese mask of Mabel Huang's features. She made a swift gesture toward her bosom. Her hand came back with a gleam of steel.

Slade backed away from her. His eyes were everywhere. Even as Enoch Creighton—his mind was telling him—he didn't matter greatly, his life was of no account. He'd had small experience with women, but instinct was enough to tell him that certain women—this one before him now—could turn from tenderness to murder far more quickly than any man.

He saw a wooden chair. He laid hold of this with both hands. He swung it up.

For a second or so they were confronting each other, motionless.

Then something like outright madness seized Slade. It was a sort of blindness, a cloud that blotted out Miss Huang entirely. It was what he'd seen in the other room that was back before his eyes again. And he swung the chair with all his might and struck. He struck and struck again—to a sound of shattering glass and wood.

For, even in his fury, it was at the painted window that he'd struck. He sheared that flimsy barrier away as if with hatchet and saw. Dragging the chair with him—or what was left of it—as a club, he was through the window frame and standing there in the improvised operating room.

The bright daylight there made him blink a little.

Then he saw Dr. Li clearly enough—Dr. Li standing over his unconscious patient. And on Dr. Li's face was a look of black rage—a black

and scowling moon of a face. While in Dr. Li's right hand was a glittering scalpel—a regular javelin of a knife—heavy, long and slender.

Without a word, without taking his eyes from Slade, Dr. Li pointed this weapon downward at the figure on the table—pointed it at Evelyn Creighton's throat.

Slade looked.

She still lay there, placid, smiling slightly—and death but an inch, or a second, removed.

CHAPTER XIII

"BLIND CANARIES SING"

THEY stood there confronting each other—Slade with his club of a chair-leg in his hand, Dr. Li with that deadly scalpel poised over the silent figure of Evelyn Creighton. Slade felt his strength and courage draining away. The big Chinaman had him at his mercy. By a simple movement of his arm he could have severed the life of Evelyn Creighton as he might have severed a silken thread.

Dr. Li's face still kept something of its dark wrath, but he managed a smile.

"You are reckless," he said.

"What is this crime you are planning?" Slade asked.

"I think Miss Huang may have told you—that it depends upon yourself."

"Would you hurt an innocent young girl?"

Dr. Li merely smiled a little more broadly. He was getting over his burst of rage. But this robbed him of none of his menace. He still kept this heavy steel point close to Evelyn Creighton's unprotected throat.

"I admire your gallantry," said Dr. Li. "I was counting on that.

There are a number of operations that I may be called upon to perform on this charming young patient. I perceive that you will wish me to perform the least of them, which likewise will be the least painful."

"What do you prefer to?"

"A slight operation on the eyes."

"I don't understand."

"There is much that you don't understand. Remember, first of all, that this girl, who is to become your sister, is the daughter of Commodore Creighton, whose dead hand still holds the rule over a section of China as large as one of your American States. I have been commissioned by my Tong to bring this legacy back into Chinese hands."

"And you'd do this by torturing a girl?"

A SAFE operation—or an easy death—since when have these been looked on as torture?"

"What do you want me to do to save her?"

"I've already told you. Are you ready to marry Miss Huang?"

"Why should I?"

"Because—if you live—it will be only as Enoch Creighton. Miss Huang must go back to China as Mrs. Enoch Creighton. Like this she will have a legal status necessary to our Tong."

"If I do this will you release this girl—send her back in safety to her people?"

"Your little sister?"

"Call her that!"

"No!"

"What then?"

"She'll be going with us to China."

Slade's muscles tightened in spite of himself. He could have flung himself at the big Chinaman despite the risk both to Evelyn Creighton and himself, but a swift movement

back of him—a change in the expression of Dr. Li's face—made him swing round. For the moment he'd forgotten Mabel Huang. He was ready for treachery on her account. But he was not ready for the surprise that was waiting for him there.

It was Sylvester Knight—the man called Shanghai—he saw standing there, still dressed in black but minus his dark glasses, his livid face now showing a sort of blackness in the sun.

Knight, or Shanghai, had a gun in his hand. He was no longer the cripple as he straddled through the crashed window. He had his small eyes everywhere. He was as agile and evilly alert as a spider.

"All of you hold it," he said softly. "Just so!"

Dr. Li spoke up.

"What do you want?"

Shanghai Knight's voice came in a whine.

JUST two things," he declared. "Just two things, because I'm getting ready to lam. I've got a tip that I'd better. A fly spotted me just before I dumped Benny."

"What two things?"

"First, ten grand. I've got that coming to me for bringing Snowy here—"

"I'm not Snowy," Slade put in.

"You keep out of this," Knight snarled, as he twitched his gun at Slade. "Do you want me to drop you?"

"And next?" asked Dr. Li.

"Her!" said Shanghai Knight, indicating the girl on the operating table. "I'll need her—to stall off the law—until I'm safe."

A glance had passed between Dr. Li and Slade. It was a look hard to explain. A moment before Slade and the Chinese doctor had been deadly enemies. They each must

have recognized that here and now they would have to declare a truce in the presence of one with whom there could be no truce. Or was it some glance from Mabel Huang who'd given Slade a signal.

Suddenly, before Slade himself was certain of his movements, Slade had swung the club of a chair-leg he held in his hand. He brought a glancing blow along the arm and side of Shanghai Knight just as that killer tried to bring his gun into action.

For a second after that the fight might have gone either way. Knight's gun-arm had been numbed for an instant—but it would have been for an instant only. There'd been no time for Slade to strike again. Instead he'd lunged and thrown his arms about Knight.

In that same instant, it seemed, Dr. Li had stabbed Shanghai Knight through the heart with that ready scalpel of his.

"Examine him," Slade panted. "He may not be dead."

"He's dead," the doctor announced, without another glance. "A clean thrust. Would you like me to teach it to you? No blood. A wound all but invisible."

Slade answered, "No."

"You're squeamish," said the doctor. "You'll get over it if you stay with your present company."

"I don't want to stay with my present company."

"Do you remember," the doctor asked, "what we were saying before this interruption occurred?"

SLADE tried; but his thought was still on Knight—still on the way that Knight had passed just now.

"When I told you that both you and Miss Creighton here were going to China, you misunderstood me. You asked me to let her go. You

can go. Presently you may—as Slade Wyath. But you'll find a policeman waiting for you at a certain place. You'll not escape."

Slade took three or four breaths—floundering like a spent swimmer until he found a rock that he could stand on.

"I'm not thinking of myself," he declared.

Dr. Li studied him. "I know you're not," he agreed. "That's why I'd hate to see you wasted. I will tell you something more. There is that great confraternity of mine in China—I suppose you would call it a Brotherhood—which is called the Ko Lao Hui, or, let us say, the Society of Elder Brothers. There are a few white men in it. They find it extremely useful. The late Commodore Creighton was a member. Hence his wealth. But he betrayed us. Hence," and he completed this part of his saying by a toss of his head toward the operating table. "But you are not the sort who betray. I see that. Do what I tell you and you may become a member of the Ko Lao Hui."

"And I repeat: if I do what you tell me—does she go back to her family?"

"She goes with us to China."

"Against her will?"

"Of her own will, gladly." He used a peculiar figure of speech. He smiled a little. "Even blind canaries sing," he said. "She'll go gladly because you'll be going with her. She'll be proud of the way you've changed. She'll think no girl ever had such a wonderful brother. She stuck to the original Enoch, bad as he was. Now, you'll justify her faith. You'll be a good Enoch."

"But the minute she sees me——"

"She'll not see you."

"I'll be masked?"

Dr. Li shook his head, slowly. He spoke with slow precision. "All that

is required is a minor operation and—she'll not see you—or anything."

"Good God! You'd put out her eyes? You'd dare?"

"Would you prefer," the doctor asked softly, indicating the dead man, "what lies at your feet?"

CHAPTER XIV

DEATH TALKS

SLADE dominated his feeling of horror. This was no time for idle emotion. Dr. Li's own absence of feeling, or any visible sign of feeling, aided him in this. This wasn't a man that Slade saw in front of him. It was a creature new to his experience—a rhinoceros with a thinking brain, something in human shape that a Frankenstein might have made.

"Surely," said Slade, "what you propose is not necessary."

"Isn't it?" Dr. Li withdrew a step or two—away from Slade, nearer to the form on the operating table. It was as if he'd read Slade's secret thought—his secret impulse to attack, however harmless and futile such an attack would be. Slade was unarmed; the doctor still held his needle-pointed knife, the point of which was stained red. "Is it unnecessary?"

Dr. Li was using his brain. Slade was using most of his own strength to master himself. But he also was trying to think. An attack, just now, was out of the question. At his first rush, the big Chinaman could again have that scalpel poised. It was for the girl Slade feared. Dr. Li was aware of this.

"If you'd let me talk to her," Slade proposed.

"We have no time to waste," said Dr. Li. "The way she was seized last night was stupid. Unless Bareta dies the police may make him talk.

In New York there are twenty thousand police. The stakes are too important to trust them to the whim of a girl."

"If you'll spare her, save her, I'll do anything you say."

"Until the next thing moved you to revolt."

"I'll help you. She'll help you, if you give me the chance to explain to her. Suppose you slip. You'll need a hostage."

HE was on the point of beginning to plead—of making an appeal to mercy, honor, justice. That would do no good. He'd have to stick to straight argument. He constrained himself. He threw all his effort into his effort to think.

"She'll be such a hostage," he said, "if—and only if—you keep her safe."

He heard a sigh, a faint murmur of speech. On the instant he thought that this came from Miss Huang. He hadn't forgotten her. He'd been conscious of her presence in the background ever since that episode with Knight. Now he saw Miss Huang, a mere slanting glance.

It was to her Dr. Li, standing solidly, feet apart, scalpel ready, spoke rapidly in Chinese.

Miss Huang had approached and was standing at Miss Creighton's side. Even while she did this Slade was hearing again that murmur he had heard. Realization dawned on him—it thrilled him with a fine tremor—even before Miss Huang spoke up in English.

"She's coming out."

Dr. Li ventured no glance at his patient. Again he spoke in Chinese. But he kept his lively black eyes on Slade. He and Slade were like fencers. Rather, it was another figure that came to Slade. There was a hypnotic quality in the big man's eyes. Dr. Li was like a mam-

moth cobra. Would the snake end by charming the bird?

Slade wrested his eyes away and looked at the figure on the operating table. Evelyn Creighton had turned her face in his direction, had opened her eyes. Her eyes, he noticed, were deep blue. In them he saw an expression of some fading dream. This expression passed. It was replaced by a look of vague wonder.

Dr. Li spoke softly to Slade: "Stand back!"

He didn't want Slade to be seen. Slade stepped back. As he did so, his foot—bare at the heel in its grass slipper—touched something that plucked his taut nerves with a macabre note. It was Shanghai Knight's dead hand that had come in contact with his heel.

IT was as if Knight had touched him of his own volition—as if Knight mutely were trying to remind him of something. The thought occurred to Slade that dead men were sometimes cunning, in their silent way, especially in the matter of those who had robbed them of their power of speech.

What was it that the late Sylvester Knight—Shanghai, as the boys had called him—was trying to convey?

All this as Slade watched what was going on there in front of him.

Evelyn Creighton was now looking at Dr. Li. Sight of him seemed to quicken her waking consciousness. It came as an added shock to Slade that she not only knew this man but apparently regarded him as a friend.

"Dr. Li!" she said, with a note of mild surprise. "Where did you come from? What has happened?"

Her voice was still soft and charged with sleep, but it was vibrant.

Dr. Li smiled slightly. "How much do you remember?" he asked, as any physician might speak to a patient.

Miss Creighton appeared to meditate. "The opera," she recited, trying to recall.

Suddenly she was aware that she was swathed in a sheet, that her head was bound. She struggled slightly. Miss Huang, standing at her side but as yet unseen, would have put a hand on her to restrain her. Dr. Li spoke a sharp command in Chinese and Miss Huang drew back. Miss Creighton had freed a slender arm—it was fluent ivory—and was feeling of her face and head.

"Don't be alarmed," said Dr. Li, softly, "and just lie quietly for a while. But you may talk. What else do you remember?"

"There was an accident."

"Yes. There was an accident."

"To Echo! Where is he?"

"He is all right. And you remember that they called for you?"

"I remember. I was seized—I struggled——"

DR. LI broke in with professional authority. "You were going down the steps—listen, now, my dear Miss Creighton—and you stumbled and fell. Just an accident! Fortunately, I happened to be calling on your uncle——"

"I remember that," Miss Creighton interrupted, troubled but somewhat pacified. "We wanted him to go to the opera with us. He told us that he couldn't because he had an engagement with you."

She went on speaking for a while after this, slightly incoherent, like the memories she was trying to put in order. While she still spoke, Slade heard Dr. Li speak to Miss Huang, again in Chinese. Slade saw Miss Huang reach into the breast of her

loose gown and produce what looked like a small bottle carved from jade.

Miss Huang seemed to protest, Dr. Li to insist. Their interchange whatever its import, was swift and intense.

Slade had stepped back still further, careful of his step—nerves tingling but master of himself. For this brief moment he seemed to be forgotten. Business of some pressing nature was developing over there by the operating table; that was clear.

"But where am I?" Miss Creighton demanded. "Is this a hospital?"

"Yes," Dr. Li replied. "This is a hospital. And, now, I think you'd better go to sleep again."

He'd taken the jade bottle. He'd laid aside the scalpel. His hand was on the stopper.

Slade had thrown himself to hands and knees faster than a man falls. All in a flash it had come to him what it was the dead man on the floor had been hinting to him. It concerned that unused revolver that Slade himself had prevented Knight from using.

"Useless to me now," Knight had seemed to say. "Use it yourself!"

And Slade had located the weapon with his foot, had timed and spaced every fraction of this present plunge of his. He came up with the weapon in his hand—so tense, so set for instant action, that Dr. Li himself let out a little cry for time and caution as he started to back away.

CHAPTER XV

HOSTAGES ALL

THE jolt, there for a second or two, had been too much even for Dr. Li's superb nerve. It was as if a fissure had been opened in that glacial surface of his, letting out a lash of flame and smoke. Miss Huang stood motionless. Slade him-

self was like so much T. N. T.—he was hanging fire, but at the slightest further jar there'd be an explosion.

Dr. Li must have known this. Neither did he move; but there was a sense of movement about him as he pulled his scattered nerves together.

The air was electric. It seemed to be this that galvanized Evelyn Creighton into action. With a sudden movement she was sitting up. She turned. Supported by that ivory arm of hers she sat there looking at Slade. Slade could feel the question in her startled eyes. But not for an instant—not for the barest fraction of a second—would he shift his own attention from Dr. Li.

"Sit still, Miss Creighton," Slade said. "You're all right. I'll explain. But not just now. Dr. Li," he continued, with hardly a change of tone or emphasis, "turn round." The doctor was laggard. "Turn!"

The doctor turned, still slowly.

"Walk away," said Slade; "and keep your back turned." The doctor took one step, then another. "Miss Huang," Slade said, "you join him, if you want to save this man's life."

He'd kept his eyes on Dr. Li, and the drill of his gun, as well. At mention of Miss Huang's name, Evelyn Creighton had swung round. At sight of the other woman she had a faint but sharp movement of recoil.

"You!" she exclaimed. "You—are Enoch's friend!"

Miss Huang was hesitant.

"I'll give you until I count three," said Slade. He knew that Miss Huang would understand. He began to count: "One—two——"

Dr. Li, still with his back turned, half a dozen steps on his way toward the other side of the room, slithered out some sort of a cry in Chinese—more of a command than a plea.

Even so, Mabel Huang hung back a fateful second.

Was she willing to let Slade make good his threat? There was no doubt that Slade would fire.

Was she counting on Evelyn Creighton for an intercession?

In any case, she moved.

It was almost with a feeling of liberty—a liberty long forgotten—that Slade found himself in this relative privacy with Evelyn Creighton. Here, at last, was that "little sister" for whose brother he had become the fated—the ill-fated—substitute. He couldn't forget that this brother was dead, and in what circumstances!

SLADE was remembering also that distinguished, that troubled guardian of this girl, Cole Van Vranken. There at the desk in the police station he'd made ar unworded appeal to that man, and Cole Van Vranken—at what cost!—what effort!—had allowed him to go.

He spoke softly.

"Miss Creighton, I am here to help you. Your guardian trusted me. So must you."

"Uncle Cole?"

"Mr. Van Vranken."

"Where's Enoch?"

Slade held his answer. But his decision was swift enough. "Safe!"

"Why don't you call him?—call my uncle?"

"There's too much to explain. For their sake, trust me and—be brave."

Slade felt himself being scrutinized. He risked a glance away from those he was watching. The wide blue eyes of Evelyn Creighton met his look. The look was brief enough, but it had a reverberation like the stroke of a bell.

"I'll trust you," she whispered.

"You were brought to this place a prisoner," he told her. "So was I. We're both in danger. Can you stand? There! Lean on me."

He kept his eyes on Dr. Li and Mabel Huang. They were standing close to each other a dozen paces away with their backs turned. Between them also there was some sort of an interchange. Slade was sure of that. But for the moment all his senses—his higher senses, while his primitive watchfulness stood on guard—were bringing him messages of the girl at his side.

THERE was a soft, firm hand on his shoulder. It was almost like an embrace as Evelyn Creighton slipped to the floor. She was clutching her sheet about her. He felt her sway.

"I'm dizzy," she announced.

"Take your time," he reassured her.

He himself was suffused by a feeling of new strength. He spoke aloud to those others.

"Stand apart," he said. "Dr. Li, don't forget that you've taught me how to kill."

Dr. Li spoke gently. "Mr. Wyath—"

"What?"

"I speak on behalf of Miss Huang, since she won't do it herself. She saved your life."

"I have no quarrel with her," said Slade.

"Miss Creighton is uninjured," the doctor went on.

The point was well taken. That, Slade couldn't deny. But there was an ugly backwash to the admission.

"Yes," Slade said; "she has even kept the use of her eyes."

"What do you suppose?"

"To get Miss Creighton away from here."

Dr. Li turned. He raised his hands slightly at Slade's responsive start. Mabel Huang also turned. There was a static moment.

Slade put out his left arm and brought it about Evelyn Creighton's

shoulders. He was conscious that she welcomed the gesture. She was shaken, groping. Her mental confusion had a reflex in a physical uncertainty. Here was reassurance.

"You'll need my help," said Dr. Li.

"I haven't forgotten your gangster allies," Slade came back.

It wasn't of the gangsters he'd been thinking only but of the servants in the house. These latter, he surmised, were potential killers also.

In any case, this was no place to linger. It was too remote from the rest of the house, too remote from any possible avenue of escape.

With a warning to Dr. Li and Mabel Huang against false moves, Slade shepherded them out of the room and down the stairs to the room he had come to consider as his own. There, holding Dr. Li as hostage, he sent Mabel Huang to get clothing both for himself and Evelyn Creighton.

ALL this time not for a second, nor a fraction of a second, would he let his attention be diverted from the big Chinese doctor. Yet, still, he could be vividly aware of that gentle presence at his side. Evelyn Creighton had promised to trust him, promised to be brave.

She was keeping that promise, he could imagine at what effort. Upstairs she had seen the dead man on the floor. What her own risk had been—what it still was—she must have begun to realize in all its stark brutality. Yet she had remained quiet, firm, asking nothing, lending strength rather than demanding it.

"There's a mirror in the bathroom," he told her, as soon as Mabel Huang was gone. "Please leave me alone for a little while with Dr. Li."

When Dr. Li and he were alone together, Slade searched the big Chinaman.

"I didn't want to do this in the

presence of others," Slade explained. "I do not like to do it now. You're a bad man, doctor, but I respect your dignity."

THE doctor was dignified, all right. "I've done nothing, contemplated nothing," he declared earnestly, "not in keeping with my sworn duty."

"To the—Elder Brothers?"

"Yes. I am the agent of the Ko Lao Hui. That society has also been called 'bad.' It has murdered, blackmailed, maimed. But the purpose was always high."

"Like yours—when you would have blinded Miss Creighton?"

"Yes. And as when I killed the crooked lawyer, Knight. You referred to them as my allies, those gangsters. They have been my enemies. They are now, as much as they are your enemies—thinking only of what they call the 'cut' the 'pay-off.' You heard Knight: 'Ten grand! Ten thousand dollars! The money wasn't mine. I have none, want none. It all belongs to the Ko Lao Hui.'"

The big man was so earnest, so manifestly sincere, that Slade found his respect for the man coming back. Whatever his moral perversion he was honest—honest as a cobra or a tiger is honest, fit to be loathed and feared, no doubt, yet still worthy of respect.

"You may also discover," Dr. Li went on, "that I'm not incapable of honor. If——"

He was interrupted by a shrill cry, a banging succession of shots. The sounds had come from the lower hall.

"Miss Huang!" the doctor exclaimed. "She's in danger—wounded, perhaps. For her sake, let me go!"

With only a pause—it was a pause that gave assent—Dr. Li was gone.

CHAPTER XVI

STRAINED RELATIONS

AS SLADE turned from the door through which Dr. Li had just disappeared it was another sort of vision that met his eyes, one so at variance with the brutality and panic of these past hours—and of this immediate present, as well, that he felt a little cry in his throat, audible or not he didn't know. Evelyn Creighton also had heard those sounds of fresh assault. She stood there startled—eyes wide, lips parted.

Slade looked at her as if he'd never seen her before. So far, at any rate, he'd been permitted but a glance of her. This was confirmation of all that he might have hoped for or imagined. She was no longer swathed like a mummy. Her fair hair shone. She'd draped her sheet about her into some semblance of a costume.

"Thank God!" said Slade.

"What has happened?"

"I don't know, except that you are here—and safe!"

He would have added that he was grateful that she had her eyes, her youth, her beauty, that she was just herself and that he was here to protect her. It was a confusing explosion of thought in his head—a gusher of thought to be capped, extinguished. He turned to the door of the hall with his revolver ready. He opened the door an inch and listened.

He heard a tumble of notes from a string of gongs, a babble of confused speech in the distance—Chinese or English, it was hard to tell. There was no more shooting, no sounds of fight.

He closed the door and put his back to it.

AGAIN he was facing Evelyn Creighton. No, his straining imagination had not exaggerated.

Here, he thought, was the quintessence of girlhood, of everything that women have ever meant to men. Eve! Helen of Troy! The belles and brides of Ol' Kentucky!

"I know that I'm awake," she told him, "even if I am a wreck. But what has happened? Where are we? And why? What is it? Have I died, or something?"

She was brave. But toward the end her soft voice had gone a little tremulous.

He explained as much as he could. She'd been kidnapped, probably on account of her money, most probably on account of certain interests she'd inherited from her father in China; and that was where Dr. Li came in.

"But you?" she persisted.

"I heard about it by accident," he told her.

"Then you knew these people?"

He shook his head.

"I see," she said. "You were a friend of Enoch's."

"That's right," he said. "Or maybe I'd better say, Enoch was a friend to me."

"You'd known each other long?"

Slade shook his head again. He found her steady eyes disconcerting. "I haven't been in New York very long," he told her. "My home's in Kentucky."

"You're concealing something," she informed him, without anger. "Is Enoch involved in this? Is that what you are trying to conceal?"

"No, ma'am," Slade answered. He felt the color mounting to his face.

"You know my name," she said; "but I don't know yours."

"Slade Wyath."

"Slade Wyath," she repeated. "No, I don't believe that you and Enoch were ever really friends. At least—well, I never met before any friend of Enoch's that I could possibly like."

"Oh, Miss Evelyn," Slade exclaimed, slightly suffocated; "could you possibly like me?"

He was aware that he was pinking up again. Evelyn Creighton treated him to a short, sad laugh.

"Yes, Mr. Slade!"

"My grandmother would sure love you," Slade declared softly as he resumed his listening post at the door.

He hadn't been standing there very long before he was aware again that Evelyn Creighton was standing near to him—so near to him that he caught something of the vibration and warmth of her presence. She also was straining to listen, to see. Slade heard her whisper.

"There must be a telephone in the house," she said. "We could telephone."

"I don't dare leave you alone," he said.

"I'll go with you."

"Come on!"

THERE may have been no necessity for it, but he took her hand. She seemed to find the gesture natural, just as when, upstairs, he'd placed his arm about her shoulders. Together they stepped out into the hall.

They'd thought this upper hall deserted. For minutes there'd been no sound to indicate that anyone was near. They were barely out of the door before a couple of shots crashed the silence, half-smothered by a riot of shouting.

In that brief explosion of tumult Slade had heard a nearer, smaller sound. It was a brief cry from Evelyn.

Slade himself had turned. He saw a shadowy form dodging for a doorway and gave it a shot. A moment later he'd caught Evelyn in his arms. They were back again in their deserted room.

"You were struck," he cried.

"I'm sure it's nothing," she said. "Only——"

Her eyes filled. Her voice refused to obey her will. She was like a hurt child.

She bared an alabaster shoulder. There was a red streak across the curve of it. The skin hadn't even been broken.

"A spent bullet," said Slade. "But a hot one. And what a narrow escape!"

There was no time to be lost. There was more shouting in the hall.

"They may try to break in here," Slade warned.

THERE was no key to the door. They listened. All they could hear was a blurred confusion of voices in the hall. With a common accord they pulled the bed around end-on against the door. It didn't cover the width of the room. The three chairs with which the room was supplied eked out the gap. But, at best, it was a flimsy barrier. They'd hardly completed their defense, such as it was, before there came a tap at the door.

"What do you want?" Slade asked.

He was hoping that it might be Mabel Huang or Dr. Li come back, but the hope, faint enough anyway disappeared.

"Hey, Snowy!"

"What?"

"You and your sister are safe."

He was standing against the wall at the hinged side of the door. That was the safest side, in case of a raid. Evelyn was standing with her shoulder against his arm.

He glanced at her. She didn't have to speak. He read her thought.

Yes, the speaker, whoever he was, thought they were brother and sister. This was but a minor mystery among greater mysteries.

Outside the door a gruffer voice

spoke up. Slade recognized it. This was Gus, who'd acted as chauffeur for Sylvester Knight.

"Quit your stallin'," Gus advised. "Hey, Miss Creighton!"

She didn't answer. She merely pressed closer to Slade.

"I'm tellin' you," came the voice of Gus, "and get this straight. We know that ain't your brother with you. Your brother was croaked. Understand? He was murdered—bumped off last night in a police cell while he was soused—then robbed and stripped. Got that? And the guy who done it is this bird who's with you now."

Slade faced the girl at his side. There was anguish in her face.

"It isn't so," he said.

Her eyes searched his.

"Oh, it isn't so!" came a mocking voice. "Well, watch this!"

There was a glass transom at the top of the door, as in so many old-fashioned houses. Something was tossed at the transom. It missed and fell outside. There was another try. There was a crash of glass and something fell on the bed.

Slade and Evelyn Creighton stood looking at it. Slade recognized that cigarette case, finely striped, of platinum and gold. So had Evelyn Creighton recognized it.

"His!" she whispered. "Enoch's! I gave it to him last Christmas!"

"Just to let you know," came the mocking voice. "In case——"

THE sentence was left unfinished. Out in the hall someone had profanely interrupted with the news that Dr. Li had disappeared.

The announcement was followed by a muffled explosion that shook the house. Immediately there was a blast of scorching heat, a drift of acrid smoke.

CHAPTER XVII

SEALED IN FLAME

SLADE had seen it happen before. When one of these old country houses—built of wood and saturated with a century of paint—did catch fire it was likely to go up like a keg of powder. Instinctively he knew that that was what would happen now.

"Evelyn," he cried, and sought to take her hand.

She drew back from him.

"Did you—did you kill Enoch?" she demanded.

He could read the horror and desperation in her eyes.

"Can you ask me?"

"If I thought so——"

The thought came complete without the words. Her meaning was clear—she'd die rather than accept his help.

"There's no time to lose," Slade urged.

She looked at him with tense and suspended judgment.

Both of them turned as a roaring reached them from the windows of the room. For a moment it was as if a huge red flag out there had been dropped over the windows—it was as if that red flag were now being shaken and waved by a swift hurricane.

"It's the fire!" gasped Evelyn.

"You'll have to trust me now," said Slade, and he caught her arm. "Our one way out is by the door."

He held his revolver in readiness. He still kept his hold on the girl as he kicked the bed aside preparatory to opening the door.

Evelyn snatched herself free. He turned on her with a movement of furious impatience. This was no time to be gentle and polite. But he saw that he had misread her gesture. She was helping him.

The door swung open. As it did

so there was a fresh burst of smoke and fire from the hall. They were almost strangled where they stood. Then Slade had swung the door shut again.

"Trapped!" came a sob from Evelyn.

But there was a new trust in her face now as she looked up at Slade.

"Trapped only if we stay here," said Slade.

He was on the point of asking her if she would trust him now—if she was ready to obey his instructions. But he saw that no such question was necessary. In an instant all misunderstanding was gone. It was gone even to the point that they were aware that they stood here together in the presence of death.

EVELYN CREIGHTON put up her hands. Suddenly, Slade had slipped his arm about her.

"We'll risk it together," he said.

"We'll risk it together," her voice came like an echo.

It was as if they were repeating some formula of a strange marriage vow—of a vow sealed by fire and perhaps destruction. Together they pushed out into the stifling hall.

* * *

"What's that?"

Cole Van Vranken, on the bridge of a small swift cruising yacht, jerked up his glasses and brought them to bear on a gray streak that flashed through the mist of the sound.

"Speedboat, sir!" said the skipper of the yacht who was standing at his side. The skipper was also using his glasses. "Man and a woman. Shall we chase them?"

Cole Van Vranken didn't answer immediately.

It would have been a hopeless chase anyway, the skipper knew. The haze was thickening off shore. The speedboat was already streaking out of sight with not much more than

its fin and its driving gear under water.

Cole Van Vranken let out an exclamation that was half anger and half exultation.

"Li!" He shifted his focus slightly. "And Mabel Huang!"

He'd made out the small crew of that meteor of a speedboat. He turned to the skipper with a blaze of excitement.

"No, Captain Bart! Trace back on their wake—get the bearings of the port they've just left."

SIMLEY, that vagabond reporter whom Cole Van Vranken this night had turned into a detective, now came up from a lower deck.

"There's a fire over there back of that wooded point," he said. "One of the hands just pointed it out to me."

"And that's where that Chinese couple just came from," the skipper put in.

From the power room of the yacht there came back a ripple of bells and the yacht fairly leaped into speed like a hound that slips its leash. The yacht had been running slow through the silvery fog. It was going to be full speed now.

Long ago, it seemed, the speedboat with Dr. Li and Mabel Huang had melted away into the midst. Somewhere, no doubt, here on the broad expanse of Long Island Sound, there would be a larger boat that awaited them. They could wait, so Cole Van Vranken decided. It was only Evelyn Creighton who mattered. Was she still safe? Was she still alive? What was the mystery from which Dr. Li and the Chinese girl were fleeing now? What would be the meaning of that burning house?

They were questions that Cole Van Vranken forbade his mind even to ask, let alone answer. So far, at any rate, his reasoning—and Simley's clever assistance—had led him

on the straight trail. Of that he was sure.

First, it was the identity of the so-called Sylvester Knight—"Shanghai" Knight; and that pointed the direction not only to Mabel Huang but to the formidable Dr. Li, representative of the Ko Lao Hui, the band of Chinese assassins with whom, Cole Van Vranken had reason to believe, Commodore Creighton himself had been associated.

In the late Commodore Creighton's papers had been found the clue to the murder tong's American headquarters on the shore of Long Island Sound—an old house, it seemed, in the midst of its own private park, with a beach of its own.

THAT column of smoke that went up in the misty morning air had also been noticed by a number of State troopers scattered over this section. Long ago they'd been warned to be on the outlook for a murder car. All roads were being watched. Tonight Benny the Twist had received mortal wounds in the glare of those green lights that were the very symbol of police protection. Then Benny, true to his kind, had died without comment.

But Simley, impromptu detective, had been able to slip his friends, the police, a valuable lead or two.

Even while Cole Van Vranken's cruiser slipped through the waters of the Sound toward that private landing-stage from which Dr. Li and Mabel Huang had fled, a police car with half a dozen detectives in it was speeding north and east from New York.

The detectives in the speeding car also picked up that column of smoke in time.

The smoke was like a beacon. Was it possible that Dr. Li, after all, had touched off that beacon on purpose?

It might have been.

Here and there both State Troopers and city police were picking up gangsters, white and yellow, who, later on, would undergo a lot of questioning.

CHAPTER XVIII

DAWN AND DUSK

WAS this death?"

It was a question that was in the mind of each of them—of Slade Wyath and Evelyn Creighton—as they fought their way through the stifling dank of smoke and blinding heat.

The way seemed endless—forward, back, a groping into closed rooms that seemed to be traps set to catch them and kill them by suffocation.

Gradually, Evelyn had felt her strength fail her.

"Go—alone!"

That was what she tried to say, but her dry throat was choked. Still she knew that he had tried to cheer her up. She had tried to remember when it was that he'd put his arm about her. Later she was to try to remember when it was that he'd started to carry her.

The thought came to her—this was the man that she had doubted—the boy she hadn't meant to trust. She was trusting him now. She would trust him always. But the "always" might be measured in minutes now—measured in minutes that would be long with agony.

Then he was climbing. He had found a stairway at last that brought them into an attic. Half of the attic already seemed to be a roaring furnace. He kicked his way through a dormer window.

They were in the open air.

"Wake up!" he told her roughly. "Arms around my neck—and cling for life!"

They swung out over empty space

on wires that she couldn't see—a brace of wires that may have served radio or telephone in the doomed house but which were now ending their career in heroic style.

They were on a driveway under the only portion of the house not yet demolished. Together they ran across the driveway and into the shelter of trees and shrubs. They went on and on, like fugitives from a burning city; and when at last they turned to look back it seemed as if they couldn't possibly have escaped from that place alive.

THEY looked at each other and read each other's thought. They had been through death together, all right. Shouldn't they, therefore, decide to keep on and go through life together as well?

Evelyn Creighton raised her face to Slade Wyath's.

They were in the woods between the house and the beach a little later when Cole Van Vranken found them.

* * *

Cole Van Vranken, although a bachelor, lived in grand style. His duplex apartment overlooking Park Avenue was famous. He was a man of wide connections and he liked to have his friends come and stay with him as often and as long as they pleased—ambassadors, miners, soldiers of fortune. They found this modern New York home like a section of medieval castle suspended in midair over the center of New York.

Simley, the former reporter out of a job, had been ushered into this magnificence, where he'd come to tell Cole Van Vranken goodby. Simley had got a correspondent's job that would take him to Paris.

"I'm keeping you here to dinner, Simley," Mr. Van Vranken announced. "Slade Wyath's coming—and Evelyn."

"Has it come to that?" Simley asked.

"It looks that way. Wyath's going out to China to look after our Kwangtung interests—and Evelyn's going with him."

"How about Dr. Li and Mabel Huang?" Simley asked.

SLADE WYATH himself answered, as he came into the great drawing room looking fit.

"They're all right," said Slade. "They've written to Evelyn asking her blessing and—ah, there's Evelyn now."

As a member of the family she didn't have to be announced.

The Van Vranken apartment had a terrace that had been transformed into a garden. It was a real garden, with winding paths through beds of flowers and massed shrubbery. A fountain made soft music near a parapet overlooking miles of land and ocean. Up here the sun still shone. Far, far below in the city streets it was getting dark. A shimmering tide of lights was rising with the night.

For the time being, waiting for the summons to dinner, Slade and Evelyn were alone.

THERE didn't seem to be very much to say. But presently Evelyn spoke.

"What are you thinking about, Slade."

"That I love you," he said.

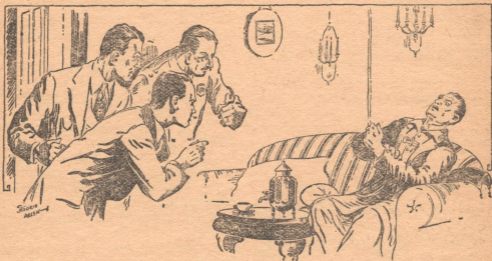
"What else?" she asked.

"I'm thinking," he said, "how it's dusk for the rest of New York, down there, but it's the dawn for me."

"Quick," she whispered. "They're coming to call us."

Only the satyr in the fountain saw them as they stood for a lingering moment close-locked in each other's arms.

Through Prison Walls



Four Men Murdered—and the Logical Suspect Safely Stowed Away in Jail All the Time! An Amazing Story of Crime

By A. C. McROBERTS

Author of "Scarlet," "Thick and Thin," etc.

JUDGE CAVERLY was murdered sometime late on Sunday night. Successively on the three following days three more killings were reported to Police Headquarters. At noon Thursday, the frantic chief, squirming under the devastating criticism of the newspapers, sent for Larry Donovan.

"Listen," he began the interview. "You're the guy that's always squawking that a detective's life is dull as hell. You're the guy that claims that all the glamour and master minding is only done in

books; that the real work is as dull and routine as bookkeeping. Isn't that right?"

Larry grinned at him. His attitude toward his work had always nettled the chief.

"Sure, that's right," he replied. "What else is it? It's only luck and hard work that gets a crook—or maybe a little gun play, but I wouldn't give you a dime a dozen for Sherlock Holmes in real life."

"Then," said the chief with heavy irony, "you're just the guy I want. Try a little of your hard work, your

luck, your gun play and bring me in the murderer of Judge Caverly."

Larry raised quizzical eyebrows. "Is that all?"

"No," barked the chief. "That isn't all. When you've done that, get me the killer of Herman Streeter, Joseph Piazza and Frank Weil, and if you have any time to yourself, you might handle this too."

He tossed a slip of paper upon the desk and pointed a stubby finger at it. Larry leaned over and perused the scribbled words upon the paper.

To Harry Linde:

At midnight you will be dead.

Larry digested the words, then lighted a cigarette. "You think all these killings have something to do with each other?"

"Of course. They've all happened on successive days. All the victims have had warnings such as these. Of course, they have something to do with each other."

"Then," said Larry. "What is it that the victims have in common. There must be something."

OF course, there's something," roared the chief. "The department isn't as dumb as you think it is."

"Well, what is it?"

"This," said the chief impressively. "Judge Caverly was the man who sentenced 'Big Red' Reilly to the penitentiary two weeks ago. The other four men were members of the jury who found him guilty."

Larry shrugged his shoulders. "Then," he said with the air of a man blessed with a happy inspiration. "Then, Big Red is the murderer."

The chief selected an insulting noun, prefixed it with a more insult-

ing adjective and threw them at him.

"If you paid the slightest attention to your business," snapped the chief, "you'd know damned well that Big Red Reilly is in State's Prison and has been there for well over a week."

"Sure," said Larry affably. "I know."

"Then how the hell did he commit the murders?"

"I don't know," said Larry. "But I still believe he did."

The chief made a helpless gesture which indicated that he considered Larry too feeble-minded for further conversation.

"Well, anyway," he concluded the interview. "Get on the case and see that this Linde guy is well protected tonight. Use as many men as you need. And God help you if you don't do any better on the case than I did."

Larry grinned as infectiously as ever as he left the chief alone with his brooding wrath. But once outside his superior's office an unaccustomed puzzled frown came over his merry Irish brow.

There was no doubt of the fact that Big Red Reilly was safely away behind the bars more than two hundred miles away. Yet it seemed incredible that these men were being killed by someone else. The one single thing that held them together, the one thing that provided motive was the fact that the dead men had all been instrumental in the punishment of Reilly. And try as he would, Larry Donovan could see no further than that.

AT headquarters he was considered prosaic, accused of being able to see no further than the end of his blunt Irish nose, but thus far this method had carried him far in his profession. He left the weird

psychological theories of crime to others, while he depended on sheer common sense. And common sense told him that Reilly had killed these men. How? He did not know. But some sixth sense which was no less certain because he could not explain it, told him that Reilly was his man. The criminal had never worked with a gang. Perhaps he had one or two confederates, but no more and they certainly were not of such first rate criminal calibre as Reilly himself. No, Reilly was his man. But, how to catch and convict a man that was already caught?

As he walked into the detectives' room, he said carelessly to Kelly: "Who's the new warden at Waterville?"

Kelly looked up and grunted. "Do you ever dig up your own information?" he asked plaintively.

Larry smiled at him disarmingly. "Not unless I have to," he admitted.

Kelly sighed. "All right," he said. "It's Lanney."

"How long has he been there?"

"A week or so. Ever since this reform Governor has held office. By God, there's not a man left of the old party machine. Everyone's job is in danger with that psalm singing mug in the governor's chair. It's a shame that—"

"Yes, yes," said Larry, hastily waving him to silence. He had heard all this many times before in the past few days. Since the regular party's candidate had been defeated by the Fusion Reform governor, all the city's politicians were in a panic. The executive's new appointees were men unknown to the regulars. They were the governor's friends selected for their strict views rather than for their ability. The warden, Larry remembered, was an obscure student of criminology drafted from an upstate university.

Something clicked in his brain as

he considered this. Was it possible that the new warden had something to do with the killings that he so firmly believed had been committed by Reilly? But, his famed common sense rejected this almost immediately. The coincidence of the new warden's arrival with that of Reilly could be nothing more than a coincidence. No matter how much the local machine may have disapproved of the new Governor's appointees, it certainly did not consider them dishonest. On the contrary, they were rather entirely too honest for the liking of the professional politicians.

LARRY DONOVAN shrugged his brawny shoulders and gave it up for the time being. The immediate matter in hand was the protection of Linde. He decided to ask Kelly, and a good natured harness bull called Graham, to come along with him. The latter, obeying Larry as a superior, was ready immediately. Kelly, true to his nature, protested that Larry was once again getting his work done for him, but eventually the three of them found themselves whizzing toward the suburbs in a natty police Ford.

Harry Linde was a prosaic enough married suburbanite. But when the detectives arrived they found both Linde and his wife in an alarmed condition. Larry found himself flushing uncomfortably when Mrs. Linde clutched him by the arm as if he were some Heaven-sent savior and said: "Oh, thank goodness you're here, Mr. Donovan. You must protect my husband. You won't let him get killed or hurt. Will you?"

"Not if we can help it," said Larry.

Kelly grinned at him. It was a little after six o'clock when the detectives arrived at the Linde home and the first thing that Larry did

was to order a thorough search of the house from cellar to garret.

Two hours later he joined Graham and Kelly in the dining room where Mrs. Linde had prepared coffee and sandwiches for them.

"Find anything?" asked Larry.

"No, sir," said Graham.

"There isn't anything here," said Kelly wearily. "I don't know what you brought us along for. All you got to do is sit by Linde's side all night with your gat handy. What can happen to him?"

Larry shrugged again. "Maybe nothing," he said. "Let's hope not."

And the gigantic bite of a sandwich forbade any further words at the time.

Five people sat silently and tensely in the Linde living room. The night had ticked past slowly and despite Kelly's reassuring words earlier in the evening, it was apparent that a vague apprehensive shadow had cast its invisible shadow.

Harry Linde sat alone in an armchair in the far corner of the room. The chair had been deliberately placed in the center of a wall that was entirely solid. From where he sat he could watch both entrances to the room. To his left was the door to the street, and on the other hand a swinging door led to the dining room. His wife sat opposite on a long divan, rarely removing her troubled eyes from her husband.

Graham had taken up his vigil silently to the left of the inner door, and Kelly and Larry stood chatting idly less than four feet from the only other entrance to the room.

THE ticking of a huge grandfather's clock up against the wall near the divan reverberated through the room. It was intensified by the atmosphere. Larry

jabbed out a cigaret in an ash tray and glanced at his wrist watch. The hands showed seven minutes before midnight. He exchanged a significant look with Kelly.

Neither of the detectives appeared to be conscious of the fact that a murder was scheduled to occur before their eyes within the next few minutes. Kelly never lost his lazy, insouciant pose, while Larry's good-natured grin was in no whit diminished.

However, beneath their casual attitudes they were tensely alert. Their steel-like muscles were ready for whatever command their active brains might telegraph. Their hands were within easy reach of the revolvers which nestled in their holsters. Even the stolid flatfoot, Graham, was prepared.

In direct contrast to the manner in which the detectives awaited whatever adventure the gods of chance might bring was the appearance of the Lindes. The woman sat silent, her hands clutched to her breast and her eyes dilated with fearful apprehension.

Linde himself was standing the strain but little better. His fingers twined and intertwined nervously, and his eyes darted swiftly toward every moving object in the room, as if he more than half suspected that it would suddenly evolve into a murderous fiend who would crush the life he loved so well from him.

The clock ticked on. There was a faint whirring sound as the mechanism wound itself up to strike. A soft muffled chime emanated from the timepiece. Larry's gaze met Kelly's and mentally they both counted off the tolls of the clock.

The Lindes seemed frozen with terror as the seconds were counted off by the muffled bell. Then, when the sound finally stopped and died away, Linde drew a deep breath of

relief. But the detectives did not relinquish their vigilance.

GRAHAM was the first to speak. "Well," he said, "that's that."

"Don't be too sure," said Larry. Then as he spoke the last word the whole room froze into immobility. Linde gasped. Graham turned quickly and faced the front door. Even the weary Kelly suddenly lost his lazy pose and his hand fell to the butt of his thirty-eight.

Tap-tap-tap.

Three staccato knocks came upon the door. For a single fleeting second ten eyes were turned upon the panels of the front door. Kelly turned his glance to Larry and raised inquiring brows. Larry nodded silently. Kelly reached the door in three hasty strides and flung it open. The five people in the room stared into the doorway to see a uniformed messenger, a huge wreath of flowers hanging on his arm.

"What's that?" said Larry quickly.

THE boy read a label which dangled from the wreath.

"Flowers—a wreath for Mr. Linde, sir."

Larry snatched it from him. "Flowers," he muttered. "Why—what—"

A sudden thought struck him. "Kelly," he yelled. "Linde!"

Kelly turned swiftly. Together the two detectives raced across the room toward Harry Linde. He was sitting in the armchair quietly, calmly. A stream of blood trickled crazily down the arm of the chair. And the light from the chandelier overhead was reflected dully in the ebony handled knife that protruded from his heart.

Harry Linde was dead!

Larry flung the wreath from him with a curse, as Mrs. Linde broke

into a hysterical sigh, then swooned dead away.

"Search the house," cried Larry. "Where's that messenger?"

But the messenger no longer stood in the doorway. Spurred on by his words, Graham and Kelly leaped to obey. For the second time that evening the trio of them ransacked the Linde homestead from roof-tree to floor, and for the second time that night they searched in vain.

When the chief sent for Larry Donovan the following morning he walked into the other's office with something more than slight trepidation running up and down his spine. A single glance at his superior's face was enough to convince him that his fears were indeed well founded.

"Well," began the grizzled veteran of crime detection. "You made a sweet mess of things last night, didn't you?"

"As a matter of fact," replied Larry, "I didn't do anything at all."

"No," roared the other. "That's just what I'm squawking about. Three cops in a room with six hours warning that a certain man is to be murdered. That man is also in the room. And by God, that man is murdered, right before your very eyes and still you haven't the slightest idea who did it."

"Oh, yes, I have," said Larry. "In fact, I'm sure I know who did it."

The chief's eyes lighted up for a moment. After all, Larry had sprung surprises on him before this.

"Who?" he asked, the ire for a moment gone from his voice.

"Big Red Reilly," said Larry mildly.

"What!" The chief regained his former anger at a single bound. "My God, man, are you still playing with that theory? Don't you know Reilly's in jail? Do you think he

escapes every night and returns for breakfast? Are you crazy?"

MAYBE," said Larry. "But listen, chief. We all know that the very fact of the selection of the victims points to Reilly. Further, we know that Reilly had few confederates. Certainly none clever enough to pull a job as neatly as that of last night. Then again, we know that Reilly's favorite weapon is the knife, and that he's an expert thrower. Everything points to Reilly. That's common sense."

"Is it common sense to suppose that Reilly comes out of State's Prison every night, and then goes back again. Is it?"

"No," admitted Larry slowly. "It isn't, but if you'll give me permission to go up and see what I can see at the prison, I might make it common sense."

The chief considered this in silence for a moment, then he snapped: "All right, go ahead. What the hell! We can't do any worse than we have been doing. The papers are on the commissioner's neck, and he's on mine—"

"And you're on mine," said Larry with a grin, then hastily escaped from the office before the other threw another explosion at him.

Late that afternoon, Larry Donovan found himself sitting in the smoking car at the Waterville train. He smoked interminably and gazed preoccupiedly at the passing countryside. He had no plan of action and had not the slightest idea of his plans when he reached his destination.

As a matter of fact, his departure had been so sudden that he had not even armed himself with the proper authority. He knew that he had no right to visit Reilly save as an ordinary visitor during the fixed hours, than had any other citizen,

but he figured on being able to impress the warden with his strange story.

He sighed and characteristically shrugged his shoulders. What a hell of a fine fix he would be in if he was wrong: Suppose he demanded to see Reilly, was given permission, and after identifying the criminal was assured by the guards that he had been securely locked in his cell all the time the murders were going on?

His vaunted common sense told him, too, that this is exactly what would happen, but still a vague hunch persisted. No, it was more than a hunch. It *had* to be Reilly. Who else could have perpetrated the killings?

DUSK was falling as Larry climbed down on to the small Waterville station platform. The town was quiet and peaceful. The prison was its chief industry and at this hour the people of the village were all home busy with their dinners.

Larry looked toward the river and saw the huge gray bulk of the State Penitentiary looming up before him.

Slowly he commenced the short walk which would bring him to the massive iron gates of the solid granite structure, and as he walked through the soft Spring evening, his brow was still furrowed in deep thought.

Somewhere, he knew there was a loophole in the case. Somewhere—just some slight thing probably, but try as he would he could not approach the weak link in the chain of murders.

He was admitted to the prison when he made known his identity to the guard and a few moments later he was ushered into the large reception room outside the warden's

office. He requested the convict clerk there to announce him to the warden. The man seemed dubious.

"I'll send your message in," the man told him. "But I doubt if you can see the warden. The Principal Keeper's handling most of the business."

Larry looked up and fought to conceal the eagerness in his eyes.

"The P. K.?" he said, casually. "Why?"

"The warden's been laid up with a bad attack of grip," said the clerk. "We haven't seen much of him since he came up here."

Larry nodded as though the information was of no moment, but something had started his active brain to clicking all over again. The clerk left his room, and entered the warden's office. A second later, he reappeared again.

"The P. K. says to go right in."

LARRY walked through the door. The P. K. was a massive Italian of about fifty who had little use for the metropolitan police force. Larry knew him and realized the antagonism that the man had for what he contemptuously termed "a dick." Yet, as he entered the room, his greeting was cordial enough.

"Hello, Getti," he said. "And how's prison life treating you?"

Getti merely grunted and came to the point at once.

"What's on your mind?" he said abruptly. "I don't suppose you came in for tea?"

"As a matter of fact, I didn't. I came in to see the new warden."

"Well, you can't see him. If it's business, you can see me."

"It's business," said Larry, studying the other's face gravely. "But it's such important business I'd like to see the warden."

"You can't see him," snapped Getti. "I've told you that."

"Why can't I see him?"

"He's sick and he's left orders that he musn't be disturbed. I'm not the guy to put my head in a noose for you."

"Why is it putting your head in a noose?"

"You don't know this warden," said Getti. "He's raised enough hell with me and I'm not disturbing him when he's given orders that he's not to be disturbed. Now, what's on your mind?"

"Well," said Larry. "If that's the way it is, I suppose I better see you. I want an interview with Big Red Reilly."

"These ain't visiting hours."

"I know," said Larry patiently. "But this is important business for the department."

"Have you got a court order, or an okay from the D. A.?"

"No. This was very sudden. I figured you guys up here would waive formalities when I told you it was an emergency."

"Well, we won't," said Getti. "Besides, Reilly's in solitary and you couldn't see him without a special permit from the warden."

"What's he in solitary for?"

Getti shrugged. "I don't know. He's been there every day since he came here. Warden's orders."

Larry rose to his feet realizing the futility of continuing the interview. "Warden seems to be giving a hell of a lot of orders," he remarked meditatively.

"A hell of a lot," snapped Getti.

"Too many for my nerves."

"Okay," said Larry. "Well, good-night and thanks."

HE walked thoughtfully into the anteroom. But below his corrugated brows his eyes held a flaming light as a brilliant and daring idea flashed into his mind. He had come up to see Reilly, and by God.

by hook or crook, he *would* see Reilly. His hand felt the butt of his service revolver in his pocket, and Larry Donovan decided to gamble.

If he lost he would be the laughing stock of the department, he would be relieved of his shield and God only knew what the courts would do to him. However, his mind was made up. He nodded a farewell to the clerk and stepped into the corridor that led to the outer gate.

Once outside the reception room he reached for his gun and continued down the hall with his thirty-eight held firmly in his hand. For Larry Donovan was about to reverse the usual order of things. He was about to break *into* the State Penitentiary.

Fortunately, he knew the ins and outs of the prison fairly well. He had been all over the building and his memory was excellent. Halfway down the hall was a long hall that led to the interior of the prison.

Most of the guards knew him, and being more friendly than Getti would let him by with but little information—at least they would let him by the outer barriers.

But when he reached the grilled door that led to the first tier of cells he was stopped. Mullane, a keep who knew him, said:

"Sorry, Larry, but you'll have to have an okay from Getti or the warden to get through here."

Larry looked at him seriously. "Listen, Mullane," he said gravely. "You know me fairly well, don't you?"

Mullane nodded. He looked rather surprised.

"Well," said Larry. "You know I'm not a liar. You know I wouldn't make a threat or a promise I wouldn't keep. Don't you?"

Mullane nodded again. "So what,

Larry?" he asked. "You sound mighty serious tonight."

"I am mighty serious," said Larry putting his right hand into his coat pocket. "Mullane, I have you covered, and if you don't do exactly as I say, I'll shoot you down. I promise you that no harm can come of my actions. If I'm wrong I'll take the rap alone, but I want to make sure I'm wrong first. Do you get me?"

MULLANE looked down at the outline of the revolver which showed through the fabric of the detective's coat. For a moment he hesitated, then something cold and compelling in Larry Donovan's blue eyes decided him.

"All right, Larry," he said quietly. "What is it you want?"

"Let me through. Then escort me to the solitary block. Tell anyone that stops us that the warden has told you to take me to see Reilly. After that, it's up to me."

Without a word the guard pushed back the sliding gate and Larry walked through. He walked slowly at the side of Mullane, and the latter could feel the hard steel of Larry's gun pressing up against his side.

The keeper at the entrance to the solitary confinement cells made no protest at their entrance when Mullane spoke the little piece that Larry had taught him. In fact, the former most solicitously accompanied them down the tier and unlocked the door for them. Larry stood in the doorway of the pitch black cell and called into the darkness.

"Come out Reilly!"

There was a faint shuffle of feet from within and Larry shifted his position so that he could keep his eyes on Mullane and at the same time shot a swift glance at the man who was walking toward them out of the darkness. There was a tense moment of silence, then a man's fig-

ure suddenly appeared framed by the granite oblong of the cell's entrance.

Larry's heart gave a sudden leap as his eyes swept over the convict. A wild sense of exultation swept him. It seemed impossible but then—carefully he scrutinized the man again. That was Reilly's red hair. Those were Reilly's flickering eyes. That was the Reilly jaw.

But the man was not Reilly!

Larry turned to the solitary keeper. "Okay," he said. "Put him back. Let's go, Mullane."

THEY walked from the tier and outside Larry thrust his rod hard against the other's ribs. "You've done great so far, son," he said. "Now, come with me to the warden."

"The Warden?"

"Yes," said Larry grimly. "That bird we just saw is not Red Reilly. There's something lousy going on here. Anyway, the warden's got to know about it. Come on now, get me through these screws."

Once more Mullane prompted by the pressure of the hard weapon in Larry's pocket let him safely through the iron doors and their keepers. This time they emerged into the prison yard and slowly walked across the quadrangle toward the lights of the warden's house which flickered between the trees on the other side of the yard.

At the door they were met by a convict servant.

"The warden," he said in answer to Mullane's inquiry. "Yeah. He's in. He's in bed. He'll raise hell if he's disturbed."

"Yeah," said Larry grimly. "Then let him raise hell."

They entered the house.

"Where's the bedroom?" asked Larry.

"Second door on the right, upstairs."

They went on up the stairs.

Larry tapped loudly on the door. There was no answer. The servant stood nervously behind them.

"He must be asleep," he volunteered. "And he always raises extra hell when somebody wakes him up."

"Yeah," said Larry again and pounded on the door harder than before.

Still there was no answer. The detective put his hand on the knob and pushed. The door did not yield. He stepped back a pace, then rammed his shoulder against the wood with all the force of his two hundred pounds. The door flew open.

Before then a disordered empty bed occupied most of the room. Larry heard the servant gasp in amazement: "He's not here."

Mullane swore softly. Larry said: "My God, it's too late," as a blinding flash of an idea illumined his consciousness.

"Quick," he yelled, and it seemed that he spoke to himself rather than anyone else, for he turned on his heel and ran like a maniac from the house, leaving the astounded Mullane staring stupidly after him.

LARRY DONOVAN raced like a madman down the prison road into the town of Waterville. He rushed into the first store he saw that had a telephone booth sign outside, and a moment later he was connected with the Chief in the city.

"Listen," he yelled frantically into the receiver. "Who was number five on the jury that convicted Reilly? Give it to me quick."

The chief had the answer ready. "Murphy," his voice trickled back over the wire. "Thaddeus Q. Murphy, and he's just received a murder threat like the others. What do you know?"

"Surround his house," cried Larry. "And wait for me. I may

be able to pick up the killer before he gets there."

He slammed the receiver back on the hook and returned to his imitation of Charlie Paddock. This time, however, he pulled up at a garage.

"The fastest car you've got," he said. "Never mind the cost." He showed his badge to the startled proprietor.

Five minutes later Larry Donovan was speeding down the road toward the city. His cutout was wide open and the powerful motor purred a potent song as he rolled along through the country night. The wind bit into his face but he did not mind. His eyes ached as he peered ahead into the night in search of the red gleam of the tail light that he hoped to see before he reached the end of his journey.

One mile after mile unreeling beneath his tires on the deserted country road, then, of a sudden something flickered weakly before him.

He strained his eyes to make sure, then with a swift gesture, he whipped his thirty-eight from his pocket and at the same instant his foot jammed down all the way on the accelerator. The speeding car developed even more speed. With a tremendous jerk it fairly leaped along the road. The faint flicker before him evolved into the dull red glow of a tail light.

Larry's hand gripped the thirty-eight tightly, but he held his fire until he was absolutely sure. Yard by yard, he gained on the car ahead. His front wheels were less than ten feet from that tail light now. He blew his horn. The car ahead moved over to permit him to pass.

AS he shot by Larry turned his head and gazed squarely at the single occupant of the other machine. Then, in one flashing instant he knew that his hunch had not

failed him. For the driver of the car that he had pursued so madly was none other than Big Red Reilly.

Their recognition was mutual and instantaneous. Even as Larry slowed down slightly and jerked his thirty-eight into play, the other whipped an automatic from the seat beside him and split the air with three shots.

Larry heard something whine over his head. He sighted the thirty-eight and pulled the trigger once. Reilly lurched forward. There was a horrible grating of metal upon metal as he jammed on his brakes. The car slowed down. Cautiously, Larry stepped on his own brake. Then he turned his gaze back to Reilly's car.

The crook was leaning forward over his steering wheel, blood dribbling from an ugly wound in his head. Larry sprang from his car and with his gun held ready for a trick approached the other machine. Reilly raised his head with an effort as the detective came up and said: "Put the rod up, flatfoot, I'm done for."

Larry examined the wound with a critical eye, then put his gun away. Gently, he moved the wounded man over in the seat and climbed behind the wheel himself.

"I guess we better go to town, Reilly. There's no hospitals around here."

"Hospitals," said Reilly. "Find a morgue. But before I knock off, tell me how the hell did you get wise?"

"Common sense," said Larry. "But I haven't got it figured all out yet. You can tell me on the way down to town."

LARRY walked debonairly into the chief's office. "You can take your men away from Murphy's house, chief," he said. "He won't

be bumped tonight. I've got the killer in a car outside. He's dead."

The chief sprang out of his chair. "Who is it?"

"Reilly," said Larry revelling in his triumph. "But never mind that now. Send out word all over the State to nab Getti."

The chief stared at him. "Getti?"

"Yeah," said Larry. "Getti, the P. K. of the Pen. He's had a good hour's start by now, you better get on his trail quick. I'll explain afterwards."

Controlling his curiosity, the chief picked up his telephone and barked orders into the mouthpiece. Then he hung up and turned to Larry.

"All right," he said. "Tell me. How did you figure it. How the hell did he swing it?"

"Well," said Larry. "I figured most of it and Reilly told me the rest before he died. It cost him ten grand to buy Getti, but he did it, and after that it was easy."

"He's got a brother, Reilly has. Younger but they look alike. The brother waylaid Reilly and his escort in their compartment on the train. Reilly then impersonated the officer and took the brother to the Pen, saying that the kid was Reilly himself. Then Reilly stayed in the jug and got to Getti. He paid cash on the line and the sight of so much dough all at once overcame whatever scruples Getti might have had."

"Between them they trussed up the warden and hid him in a cell, Reilly stuck in the warden's bedroom impersonating him but staying out of sight, saying he was ill and mustn't be disturbed. He sneaked out at night to attend to his revenge."

The chief mopped a sweating brow. "Good God," he ejaculated, "and where's the warden now?"

"He's out by now," grinned Larry. "I just wired the prison to release him."

"And Getti?"

"He probably flew the coop when he knew I had gone out after Reilly. You'll probably pick him up on the border somewhere."

"My God," said the chief again. "Reilly sure had the nerve!"

"Sure," said Larry. "He's a nervy guy, or he was till he stopped a bullet a little while ago."

"He damned nearly got away with it. But what about Linde?"

Larry grinned. "We were all suckers there," he said. "It was so simple. Reilly came along about eleven o'clock and climbed in through the cellar. He had already arranged for the flowers to be delivered at midnight. At a few minutes before, he sneaked into the kitchen. He knew damned well that we'd all be under such terrific tension by the time that knock came on the door that we'd all turn our eyes that way for the fraction of a minute. That fraction was long enough for him to throw a knife. We were just suckers. That's all."

The chief stood up and extended his hand.

"It's damned good work, Donovan," he said. "Shake on it. You're a credit to the force."

Larry took the proffered hand. "What the hell," he said deprecatingly. "It's only a little common sense, a little luck, and a little gun play. That's all."

"That's enough," said the chief with a grim smile.

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The Murder Monster

A Three-Part Serial

By DOUGLAS ALLEN

Author of "The Luminous Face," "Marked Confidential," etc.

PART ONE

CHAPTER I

NO ONE COULD HAVE ENTERED
THAT ROOM!

AN exotic, heady fragrance was wafted to John Waverley as he stood in the center of the wet, tiled floor of his tropical conservatory, intently gazing at something bright in his hand—a gaudy-hued cocoon or a glittering chameleon. His eyes were gloating

as the dim light caught and reflected the bizarre glitter.

He frowned as he glanced upward and saw that the gauze that hooded one of the lights was hanging loose and that one of his cherished moths, as big as a sparrow, was futilely trying to batter out its frail life against the brilliant electric globe. He took a step forward and his hand reached upward. *But it never reached the light!*

One sharp exclamation escaped him as all the lights went out in the

Events, Sudden Deaths and Miraculous Escapes



bat of an eye. Through the hot, damp air echoed the cry of a man in mortal agony—a wail that was choked off to a weird gurgling, a rattling effort at words.

“Than—tha—tha—Forgi-i-i—”

Then the moan of a soul in anguish, the dull thud of a falling body. That was all.

It was a full ten minutes before the lights clicked on again to light the tropic scene. They fell on the contorted body of John Waverley that lay crumpled on the wet tiling, his head twisted wryly back, his face fast purpling into the gruesome horror of a man who has been choked to death.

On his fully exposed throat that lay turned to the light were the marks of five cruel fingers, fingers that must have been as strong as iron, and had crunched through flesh into bone.

There was no sound. The place

was as deadly still as the jungle spot from which it had been reproduced. There was only the slight flip of the tail of a small, bright-hued, green lizard as it skittered across the damp tiles and disappeared behind a mossy stump.

A weird, dank heat with the smell of the tropics hung over all. It arose in clouds to the high-domed roof, obscuring it like cumulus clouds, and swirling in moist opaqueness about the topmost branches of the magnificent palm that reared itself majestically in the center of the room. Garish butterflies flitted through the half light afforded by the few shrouded electrics, and great, batlike moths hurled themselves against the protecting gauze.

Huge lianas and drooping tree ferns hung from the walls, and flaunting orchids in full bloom trailed sheafs of blossoms from mossy baskets. Tier upon tier of shelves were loaded with pots of strange blossoms. They were as safe as they had been in their own humid, native tropic heat. No single blast of heat could ever enter that double-glassed, windowless room. There was but one doorway through which to enter it.

On the floor of this room—a bit of his beloved Amazon brought to New York—John Waverley, the famous explorer, lay dead.

THE rustling, pattering, splashing drops of lukewarm water that dripped incessantly through the room and on to the gleaming white-tiled floor fell upon his unheeding distorted face.

Jenkins, the Waverley butler, stopped outside the outer door that led to the tropical conservatory, and listened intently.

"Did you hear anything, Simpson?" he asked the footman who stood further along the hall. "I thought I heard a shout—or a scream or something."

The footman shook his head.

"Probably one of them wild orchids squealin'," he remarked with an attempt at facetiousness. "Or maylike the boss fell into one of them cactus things. Whatever he can find so interestin' in that place beats me. Not for mine—not if you give me the whole house."

The butler did not laugh. His brow was drawn into a worried frown.

"I say I heard somethin'," he insisted. "And it wasn't any sound like that. I'm wonderin' . . ."

"Whyn't you go in and see, if you're so worried?" asked Simpson nonchalantly. "You, not me. I hate the place."

"You're askin' that? And you know well enough Mr. Waverley locks both doors after him when he goes into that conserv'tory."

JOHN WAVERLEY had indeed further protected his tropical collection and guarded against the escape of his famous moth and butterfly collection by having two doors to the room, one beyond the other, with a small anteroom between.

"I'm not sayin' I like the place meself," added Jenkins, "but . . ."

He leaned against the doorjamb and listened intently. No sound, not even the drip of water or the swish of palms could be heard with those two doors between.

"What is it, Jenkins?"

A soft, well-modulated voice reached him and he glanced toward the stairs.

Half-way down a woman had halted—a woman of dazzling beauty, an orchid of femininity herself in her dark loveliness. In her eyes was

a look of anxiety, but also one of fatalism, as though already she knew the answer to her question.

"I thought I heard the master scream, Mrs. Waverley," the butler said haltingly. "Probably only my imagination, but . . . The door's locked, madam, and . . ."

"Break it down!" said Nalda Waverley firmly and steadily. And she came on down the stairs.

"Here you, Simpson," ordered the butler. "Lend a hand!"

Simpson obeyed laggingly, muttering as he reached the side of his chief: "I don't like it! How do we know a big boa won't meet us t'other side of the door?"

Twice, three times, the two men rammed their strong shoulders against the outer door before it fell with a crash. The inner one was not so difficult. Jenkins swung a chair against the glass and it splintered into fragments, falling with a tinkle upon the tiled floor of the tropical room.

A sickening, dank odor of jungle heat floated out overpoweringly in the hall. Simpson backed out, gasping for fresh air as Jenkins slipped his hand through the opening, turned the key and flung the door wide. A big gray-and-white-striped moth flitted out through the opening like a bird ghost.

THE butler took one look into the dimly lighted conservatory.

"Gawd!" he choked, as he, too, backed away. "Don't come any closer, Madam, please!" he cried, as Nalda Waverley crowded in close behind him.

Her great brown eyes widened with fright . . . and something else.

"Then he's . . ." she choked.

"Yes, Madam," said Jenkins somberly, "the master's dead! Somebody's killed him! We'll have to . . ."

Nalda Waverley staggered back into a chair.

"Dead!" she muttered, in an awed voice. "Dead! The hand of Than . . . No!" she screamed as she leaped to her feet. "No! They've killed him! The devils have killed him! They've got to pay!"

"Then you know, Madam," began Jenkins, but she swept him aside.

"Get a doctor!" she cried. "He may not be dead yet! Get the police! Get everybody! They shall not get away from me!"

Her hands were clenched, her eyes blazing. But as she uttered her last word, she caught a quick breath and sank to the floor.

Jenkins lifted her gently and carried her upstairs, calling for her maid as he went. Simpson was already at the telephone in the library.

But John Waverley was dead—quite thoroughly dead, as the examination of the doctor who was hurriedly summoned proved at first sight. No man on earth could have lived more than a few seconds after that hand, that human hand, though it had crushed with the fierceness of a gorilla, had bitten into the neck of the botanist-explorer.

That John Waverley had plainly been choked to death was all that the lay doctor could tell the physician when he followed close on the heels of the first uniformed policeman to arrive.

THIS is a case for Headquarters," was Officer McCauley's ultimatum at his first glance at the distorted body on the conservatory floor. He whirled on Jenkins. "Who was in here with him?" he demanded.

"Nobody, sir. He was quite alone, as usual. He never let nobody in the tropic room with him."

The officer's eyes searched the glass walls and noted the lack of

windows. They went to the splintered doors.

"And you mean to say those doors were both locked when you broke them down?"

"Yes, sir. Quite so, sir."

The big policeman scowled, then laughed scornfully. "I suppose the next thing you will be trying to tell us is that one of them butterflies there, or maybe an orchid or something come to life and reached out and crushed him with a man's hand, eh? Here's Dugan from Headquarters. Tell it to him."

Jenkins did. The same story.

He was quite sure that no one could have got into the locked room, and equally as sure that no one had passed him and Simpson after they had broken it down.

The most intensive search of the flower-draped, moss-and-liani-hung room did not disclose any hiding-place, where a man could possibly have lurked without having been seen by John Waverley. Nor was there any slightest sign of disturbance.

Waverley lay where he had fallen, his own footprints plain on the wet tiling, beside him the muddy smudges that had been made in the dampness from his dusty shoes in falling, but there was no sign of other footprints. It was equally as plain that Waverley had fallen without a struggle.

"It beats me," Dugan confided to McCauley, the uniformed man, after he had searched every nook and cranny of the place. "Of course somebody got in, but how . . ."

"Madam said . . ." hesitated Jenkins apologetically, "she said something about some hand . . ."

Dugan laughed. "Trying to hand us out some bunk about a ghost hand, huh? The hand that done *this* job wasn't any ghost hand, me lad.

It was a human one, and as strong as hell at that!"

THE butler faded away without any more remarks. Dugan turned to the officer.

"Guess the fellow's honest enough. But he's like everybody else in excitement. You can take it from me the guy that did this job slipped by those two servants somehow after they broke down the door, and they were too flustered to see him. Probably when Mrs. Waverley did her fainting act."

He would not admit that his most intensive search had not disclosed one single clue that would point to who had murdered John Waverley. He set about the routine work of investigation with a puzzled mind.

"Lend a hand here, McCauley," he asked, "while I chalk out the position of this body. Then send the Headquarters photographers in to get some pictures before every newspaperman and picture-taking machine in New York gets on the job. Get anything yet about who and what these Waverleys are?"

THE officer shook his head. "Nothing that everybody don't know. This John Waverley's picture's been in the newspapers often enough for everybody to know about him. Explorer, nuts on equator flowers and things—botany, don't they call it? His wife's a darb, too, good lookin' as they come and plays society. Sort of Spanish or something—comes from some place in South America—mysterious type, all that."

"Uh-huh," said Dugan, as he rose and wiped his brow. "Gosh, this place is torrid! Don't see how he stood it with the doors fastened." He glanced around at the wondrous tropic blooms and the gorgeous flitting butterflies that vied with them. There was only the tinkle of the

warm water in a fountain at the end of the room. "Some place, though, aint' it?" he asked.

"If you like purgatory," snorted the uniformed man. "I'm gettin' out!"

Dr. Martin, who had been the first physician to arrive, was upstairs with Mrs. Waverley. He had revived her, but was deeply concerned with the trembling that had seized her and the look of horror on her face, a look that was not entirely explained even by the knowledge that on a tiled floor beneath her, her husband lay murdered.

Dr. Martin had been in touch with the victims of the sudden death of another before, but he had never seen even a totally collapsed woman quite so horrified as Nalda Waverley.

"I don't think she should stay here tonight, do you, Doctor?" he asked the physician who stood near.

The other shook his head. "Quite right. She's had a shock—of the severest. She had better be with some one other than the servants."

ISN'T there someone you could stay with tonight, Mrs. Waverley?" Dr. Martin asked her, and Nalda Waverley nodded her glorious head dully.

"With the Smythes on Long Island," she murmured, then in a half whisper to her maid: "Call them, Natalie."

Then the newspapermen and photographers had come, swarming all over the house, asking a million questions, poking into every corner, hunting for clues that the detective might have overlooked, and had gone, mumbling complaints at having missed Mrs. Waverley who was hurried off to some place—where, they could not discover—before their arrival.

The servants who had not fled at the first knowledge of the murder and who were allowed to go by the police, were safely in their rooms on the top floor of the house when Inspector Dugan of Headquarters was at last left alone in the house of murder.

Alone, except for the sheeted body in the dank conservatory, which the physician had ordered not to be moved before morning.

WITH the knowledge that the murderer or murderers had quite thoroughly escaped, Dugan's remaining in the house was nothing more than a matter of routine. He grumbled a little when he was left alone.

What was the idea of the Chief in leaving *him* there? That matter could as easily have been attended to by a uniformed policeman. It was hardly likely that the murderer of John Waverley would come back in the night to see if he had done a thorough job.

For a time he wandered about the empty rooms, hoping against hope that he might run across some clue that had been overlooked in the search he knew in his heart had been as thorough as any search Headquarters had ever made. He noted the exquisiteness of the rooms and reached the conclusion that John Waverley's predilection for the exotic had not ended with his love for plants and butterflies.

For quite a time the long rows of books on botanical subjects, that occupied an alcove of their own, and the brilliant prints of things tropical held his interest. When that began to wane, he moved about restlessly, becoming conscious that he was in for a night of boredom.

The telephone in the library rang and he answered it. It was from Headquarters.

"All set," he replied to a question. "Nothing stirring. Say, why couldn't . . ." But the man at the other end had hung up and did not hear his complaint.

Dugan yawned and marched from window to book shelves and back again. A newsboy's raucous yell came from the street to his ears.

"Guess I'll get myself a paper," he muttered. "See what kind of yarn the boys got out of nothing. Pretty soft for them—I'll say. Nothin' to do but imagine what might have happened, and . . ."

He slammed the door after him and was back in a moment or two with the morning papers—on the streets ten hours before morning. He settled himself to read. There *was* some interesting matter he had not known. The "morgues" in newspaper offices weren't too bad.

They told all about John Waverley's career, and brought out in detail the romance of ten years before that everybody had twittered over at the time, but that a stolid policeman like Dugan had long since forgotten, if he had ever taken the time to read it at all.

There was a lot of the usual drool about the murder. Dugan's lip curled as he recalled that he had read that same sort of "junk" a hundred times before. What interested him was further down in the body of the story:

"The romance of John Waverley is one that a few years ago startled the country. In his travels, he paid especial attention to the Amazon country. It was there, in a flooded Amazon forest, that he found and rescued the beautiful girl who later became Mrs. Waverley. She was a girl of about sixteen at the time, and was almost dead from exhaustion when rescued. She could speak only in the dialect of the forest Indians, though she was a white girl, without the slightest trace of Indian blood.

"On his return to this country, there were interviews with John Waverley in which he spoke vaguely of Aztecs and Incas, and of a pure white race which

still existed in the depths of the steaming, fever-ridden forest, or in some higher and healthier district as yet unreached by any explorer. It was this mythical race that Theodore Roosevelt, on one of his expeditions, would rather have discovered than become President of the United States. He reached the latter ambition without ever having come near the first.

"Waverley brought the beautiful, dark-haired girl back to New York with him. For some years she was studying in this country and in Paris, and then the friends of the explorer, who had come to look upon him as a set bachelor, were astonished to learn that he had married the girl he had so romantically rescued.

"Besides his widow, John Waverley leaves a young son of eight. . . ."

It was all interesting, but it takes more than a romantic tale to keep open the eyes of a hard-boiled Headquarters man who has had a hard day. Dugan's eyelids snapped up and down as he tried to keep himself awake and interested. After all, what was the use? He was watching a dead man in an almost tenantless house and it was pretty certain John Waverley wasn't going to come into the room and do a tap dance. . . .

THE yawn finished itself, and Dugan's jaws came together as his head sagged down. The next moment he was asleep, the paper draping itself over his knees.

How was he to have told how long he had been asleep, when he suddenly awoke and sat up with a jerk as his policeman's sixth sense warned him that something was doing. It might have been hours; or minutes. But Patrick Dugan was most thoroughly awake when he did sit up and found himself staring into a collection of eyes behind masks.

His gathering senses told him that there were six eyes—three pairs of them—but they looked like hundreds, staring at him out of

black holes. Instinctively he reached for his hip pocket, only to find that someone was holding his arms in an iron grip.

"Don't make a sound!" a voice came to him. "Keep quiet and you won't be hurt!"

He had no chance to make a sound, for the next moment something black settled down over his head, and then he felt himself being silently borne along through the halls, his indignant protests smothered in the bag-like arrangement that made everything night for him.

CHAPTER II

THE THREAT OF THE MURDER MONSTER

WILLIS DRAKE, who loved to refer to himself as "the pride of the Morning Star-Telegram," opened his eyes uncertainly and mechanically reached for the glass of tomato juice that ought to have been on the table beside his bed. Lord, what a night! What had happened, anyhow? He had a vague memory of a circum-ambulating round of "places" and a final round-up at the office without a line of the story he had been sent out on, but . . .

Still, that was no reason for so much shouting! It had been an old story they had sent him after; he had been tired of it, and . . .

He lifted himself carefully out of bed, wondering if he shouldn't get a derrick for his head part, and got to the bathroom. The tinkle of the shower had a cheerful sound and almost brought him out of his melancholia. Life might be livable, after all, if . . .

Suddenly it all flashed down on him. He stopped stock still in soaping himself and muttered:

"Fired, bounced and given the

air! At my time of life! Lord! And all because the big boss didn't like the color of my tie!"

Drake could have added a good deal more, if he had cared to. The "boss" had disliked quite a few other things, but Willis Drake, like too many newspapermen, had come to the point of believing himself indispensable to the Star-Telegram. He had said as much the night before, and now, on the morning after, he was beginning to get an inkling that he might, sooner or later, be sorry.

"Just one thing to it," he told himself, as he came from the bathroom, his black, curly hair glistening with the drops from his shower bath, "I've got to start all over again—show 'em how good I am—something. Wonder what they'd like to have explained to them today?"

He glanced down at the scattered sheets of the morning paper he had brought in with him somehow or other the night before, wondering if he had ever read it at all. He must have. Newspapermen always read the next day's paper, no matter what happens.

HE picked it up, carefully sorting out the sheets and glanced at it. His eyes caught the "played-up" headline on the first page and he studied it with business-like accuracy.

A murder again, uh? Who, this time?

The keen brown eyes of Willis Drake began to grow large and speculative as he took in the story he saw. There hadn't been a good story for some time. Here *was* something . . . explorer . . . mysterious wife . . . mysterious murder . . . all the setting.

And so far not one single clue to the murder!

"That's my meat!" said Willis

Drake to himself, and pounced down on his clothes, hurrying to get out and to work. "Fire me, will they? I'll show 'em! Here's where the pride of ex-Park Row gets into action!"

Nobody knew better than Willis Drake that his "firing" from the Star-Telegram meant nothing. It was all in the day's work, an incentive to urge him on when he would get one of those dull spells of his and they could get nothing from him.

Always he reacted the same, knowing in his innermost mind that it was being done for that purpose, but always showing up at the office after a "spell" with some story or other that, the mere drawing of a salary could never have got from him.

Now his eyes were glittering as he pored over the few details of the Waverley murder.

"And they haven't got a thing!" he gloated. "Not a thing! *They* wouldn't! Leave it to the police to fail to find out how a man got into a windowless room, killed a guy, and then got out without being seen! Boy, something seems to tell me I'm threatened with being forgive!"

Almost as if it were part of his reverie, the telephone rang.

"Yeah?" he called as he lifted it, letting the papers fall until they draped in a black and white mound at his feet. It was his office calling. He thought it would be.

"Hey," came over the wire in a peeved voice, "what's the big idea? This newspaper office works on schedule, Drake. How about reporting on time instead of three days later? It's one-thirty now."

I'M fired," said Willis Drake and grinned.

"Oh, yeah? For cripes sake, cut the comedy and get on the job!"

Listen! You read the papers? Got that Waverley dope?"

"More or less."

"Well, make it considerably more. Hop to that yarn, kid. Some dumb ox let that dame get away from that house last night and nobody's found her. She's probably got the whole little murder sewed right up in her vanity case along with the lip stick. Get busy! Find her . . . and report in here, *on time* . . .!"

Drake's grin was broader as he started to hang up the receiver. As a last reminder, there floated across the wire to him: "And listen, Drake! Send yourself a nice long telegram to lay off the juniper juice."

Willis Drake was not even thinking of parties, as his face grew grave when the phone clicked down and he reached to the bureau, yanked open a drawer and pulled out a fresh shirt.

IF ever there was a man born with the detective instinct, that was Drake. That he had found an outlet for the use of his peculiar nose for news by being a reporter was more or less a matter of chance, but so uncanny was his deductive power and his ability to discover clues and run a story to earth, that even Police Headquarters had long since given over speaking of him as "only a reporter" and taken instead to affording him first the grudging, then the positive admiration due to a man who can solve a crime that seems unsolvable.

Less than an hour after he had opened his eyes, Willis Drake was leaping up the steps to the Waverley home and was, a moment later, facing Jenkins, the butler. And with his usual luck, which had become a tradition in the newspaper game. "Drake luck" was still with him as he asked Jenkins to let him speak

with whoever was home, or at least to the police who had been left in charge.

"You are a newspaperman, sir?" asked Jenkins anxiously. "I'm glad to see you, sir. I am badly in need of advice. Will you please step in, sir?"

Willis Drake stepped, and in a shorter time than he had imagined any butler could make himself coherent, he had a resume of what had occurred in the Waverley home since John Waverley had been discovered dead.

"What's worryin' me, sir," said Jenkins, "is that that policeman who was to have spent the night here has disappeared."

"Disappeared?" said Drake and grinned. "The plot thickens. Where's the nearest speak about here?"

"I beg pardon?"

"I mean it looks a little like snow, don't you think?" asked Drake, and Jenkins did wish he knew how newspapermen seemed to know about everything in the world. "Listen here, old timer," Drake added, and all his facetiousness dropped from him, "let me take a look into that conservatory, will you?"

Jenkins was uncertain. Still, nobody had told him he should not open the door, and John Waverley, lying on the floor inside, could not say to him that he had broken any rule or law. He led Drake towards the door at the end of the hall.

"The door is, as you might say, sir, in a manner of speakin', a bit broken down, sir," he apologized. "It was quite necessary."

"It would be, wouldn't it?" agreed Drake. "A man can't lie dead alone too long."

THE same hot blast of air met Drake and the butler as the door was opened. The lights in the conservatory were still as dimly lit. On

the floor, a weird bundle in the shrouding blanket that had been thrown over him by the police, John Waverley lay. Beside him lay a second shrouded bundle.

Drake moved over and gingerly touched it with his foot. It moved! Then he bent down and pulled the woolen bag from the head of the man on the floor.

Dugan of Headquarters, sat up and blinked.

"Show me the you-know-what that tied me up like a sack of potatoes!" he spluttered, and did not even smile as he met the appreciative grin of Willis Drake of the Star-Telegram. He whirled on Jenkins.

"What's the big idea?" he growled. "What's happened?"

"A great deal, sir. I've been . . ."

In one bound Dugan was out of the conservatory and back in the library where he had been sitting when his mysterious nocturnal visitors had arrived. Everything was plain enough then. The library was ripped open from one end to the other as though by a cyclone. Books were tossed on to the floor; desks had been emptied of their contents and papers were scattered to the winds.

DUGAN did not even stop to answer a question of Willis Drake's as he raced to the second floor. There was quite as much confusion in the bedroom of Mrs. Waverley and of John Waverley, next to it, as there was in the library and other rooms downstairs. The small wall safe in one corner of Mrs. Waverley's bedroom stood hanging open, lopsided from the rending it had been given.

Dugan thrust his hand inside the yawning safe and brought it out with a handful of jewel cases and papers. He dumped them on the

nearest table, and Willis Drake caught his breath as he saw the pile of emeralds and diamonds and rubies that piled up like so many grains of corn.

"Looks like they were all here!" Dugan grunted. "What the heck were they after . . ."

Drake took time to light a cigarette as he said:

"Has it occurred to you, Dugan, that Mrs. Waverley might have an inkling about what this is all about?"

Dugan whirled on Jenkins. "Where is Mrs. Waverley?"

"She went with some friends last night, sir, I'm not quite sure."

"Where is she?" again demanded Dugan.

"I just can't say, sir . . ."

The slow smooth voice of Willis Drake cut in.

"Sorry to interrupt, old chap," he said to Dugan. "But it has just occurred to *me* that it's a pretty swell time for me to blackmail *you*! You may not know it, but you're going to have the pride of the newspaper business as your little side-kick from now on. There's been murder and a robbery—that's certain. It's quite as sure that an unnamed party from Headquarters was left in charge and, as our friend here would say, in a manner of speakin', he's had the boots put to him. Want to play with me, old timer?"

Dugan whirled on him, angry; then he grinned sheepishly.

"You win, Drake. Where do we go from here?"

As suddenly as the click of a clock's second, Drake became the serious-minded investigator.

He asked Jenkins, as Dugan had done:

"Where is Mrs. Waverley?"

"I heard her say she was going with friends," began Jenkins,

thoughtfully, then he had an idea. "I quite agree with you, sir, that Mrs. Waverley should be informed. We were told to deny all knowledge of her whereabouts, and indeed, sir, only her maid actually knows. I think she will tell me, though, sir."

"Jenkins," commended Willis Drake, "you're threatened with being a great help."

AN hour later, Dugan of Headquarters, surprisingly meek for him, and Willis Drake stood before Nalda Waverley in the home of the Smythes in Long Island.

Mrs. Waverley's dark eyes were accusing as they were turned on the police officer. She was pale and the dark shadows under her eyes showed what the night had meant for her, but that she was spirited was proven by the way her nervous hands pleated and unpleated the handkerchief in her hand.

"I had thought," she said, "that my affairs were quite safe in the hands of Inspector Dugan. Of course, I know nothing of their excellence, but they certainly seem large enough and red enough."

That was the only bit of spite that Drake ever heard from Nalda Waverley, but he felt he could hardly blame her. She went on:

"You have been telling me about a robbery of my home while my husband lay . . . while he . . ." She glanced up at Drake with a deep mystery in her dark eyes, as though she had suddenly come to a conclusion. "You're a newspaperman, Mr. Drake. You want your 'story', as they call it. Shall we make a bargain? I'll help you . . . but I want you to help me! I need help!"

DRAKE glanced at Dugan—Dugan not yet quite recovered from the shock of having his red hands called inadequate—and there

was a world of meaning in the look.

"Anything I can do, Mrs. Waverley," he said.

"Perhaps it is only a silly prejudice," she said, "or I would tell this to Inspector Dugan alone. As he has failed in one thing, how can I trust him with another? That is why I want *you* to see . . . this!" She held out to the newspaperman a crumpled letter. "It has added terror to my great grief. It was handed to me by one of the servants as soon as I arrived here last night. The servant knew nothing of it except that a man had driven up, left the letter and gone at once."

Drake took the letter and read:

Madame:—

"This is to inform you that if the Golden Hand of the Great God, Thanalpl, stolen by your husband, is not returned to us without delay, your son will be taken by us and held as hostage."

There was no signature; only a rough drawing of what appeared to be a gauntleted hand.

"And who is the Great God, Thanalpl, Mrs. Waverley?" asked the newspaper man.

Mrs. Waverley covered her eyes with her slim white hand for a moment.

"He is out of the past," she said dreamily, "the far-off past my husband wanted me to forget, never wanted me to speak of. You newspaper people know my story. You have not spared me a resume—a recital—of it."

An incidental word could not sidetrack Willis Drake's one-track mind.

"Yes, Mrs. Waverley, but this Great God Thanalpl, and his Golden Hand your husband is supposed to have stolen?"

For one moment Nalda Waverley's eyes flashed fire.

"It's a lie!" she cried. "To accuse

him of theft—and of such a theft—is monstrous! He would never have done it—if for nothing else than my sake.”

“For your sake? I don’t understand, Mrs. Waverley. Please explain.”

She moved her hand tiredly over her eyes.

“I—I suppose I must,” she said. “I am willing to, if it will keep my boy safe, or avenge the death of my husband. It’s all so vague to me, Mr. Drake. . . . I hope you’ll understand. . . . about my childhood life before I was stolen by the forest Indians. I do remember, beyond the time I lived in the palm-thatched huts of the Indians on the banks of a muddy river, back to a time of stone houses and wide streets and hills and cultivated fields. . . and white people instead of Indians. And the great temple. . . the Temple of Thanalpl, the God of my youth I have never been able entirely to abandon in spite of all my husband’s desire that I accept the faith of his race in accepting him. People do not forget Thanalpl, the mighty and the merciful, but the avenging, Mr. Drake. You may think what I say nonsensical, but——”

YOU don’t mean to say that you think some heathen god has a hand in this murder and robbery and threat of kidnaping, do you, Mrs. Waverley?” almost shouted Drake, and Dugan looked his blank amazement.

Nalda Waverley smiled wanly.

“I told you you would not understand, Mr. Drake,” she said. “You cannot understand that I might believe as implicitly in my god as you do in yours—or have you one?” She smiled again, then grew deadly serious. “I must admit, and I have good reasons for that belief, that for one moment last night I

was afraid—*afraid*—that in some mysterious way the Golden Hand of Thanalpl *had* fallen into my husband’s hands, and I knew the desperate seriousness of anything of that kind.”

“You mean?”

“That Thanalpl himself would avenge! The next moment, though, I knew that could not be possible, for I knew—*knew* that my husband could never have stolen the Hand. I knew that it was not Thanalpl who had slain my husband, but a very human person, who may have thought he——” She stopped as if fearing she had said too much.

“Mrs. Waverley,” put in Dugan for the first time, and using the note of authority of the Headquarters man, “I don’t know what all this talk of heathen gods has got to do with anything, but I do know that if we are to help you, to turn up the man who did for your husband and now wants to kidnap your child that you’ve got to be frank with us. Whom do you suspect murdered Mr. Waverley?”

Nalda Waverley turned her dark accusing eyes on the inspector.

“Do you think for one moment if I had the slightest idea or any suspicion of any one person that I would not have shouted it out the moment I knew my husband was gone? No, it is far more complex than that, Inspector Dugan. It might be any one of hundreds of people. I suppose I must explain that.

“My husband and I were much to each other, Mr. Drake,” she turned to the newspaper man. “I loved him—was always with him. I acted as his secretary. That is how I know of the threat that came to him, and even knew that any one suspected him of having the Golden Hand of Thanalpl. A letter came to him one day demanding it. He told me—and

I believe him—that he did not have it, never had had it.

BUT those people who wrote the letter were convinced he had, and I was in deadly fear. I knew then, you see. They would not come out openly, but there might be one, two, or a hundred people sent from that lost city where Thanapl is the mightiest god, to regain the Hand if it were missing, and they thought they knew where it was.

"Those followers of Thanapl are deeply religious, Mr. Drake, and would stop at nothing to regain the Hand, if Thanapl himself so bade them. They are subtle and wary, too, and know how to keep themselves hidden. The next man you pass in the street might be one of them, or the man at the next table to you in a restaurant. You would never know.

"My husband answered in the personal columns of the newspaper that he did not have it. They did not believe him. That is obvious. And now he is——" A sob caught in her throat and a film came over her eyes.

"How they accomplished it, I cannot say. I do not even know—and you'll think I'm mad for admitting this—that Thanapl himself did not do it. I do know that those people are somewhere in New York and that they have threatened to take my boy from me. You'll help me, won't you? And you'll try to understand?"

"Perhaps I understand better than you think, Mrs. Waverley," said Drake slowly. "All I ask of you is that you'll give us a free hand. Will you?"

"Of course. Thank you. I understand."

Nalda Waverley lifted her hand gently and brushed away a tear.

Dugan and Willis Drake rode

along for a short time in silence. Drake managed to stop for the red light just in time as he said to the Headquarters man:

"What do you think of the Nalda woman, anyway?"

"I ought to say she's nuts," sniffed Dugan, "but I guess we could get a lot farther if we knew South America as well as we know Broadway. That's the way it is in this game—you never know where you're going from here to there."

"You—when did Headquarters ever know where it was going? With us it's different. The pride of the newspaper world has got to know where he's headed every minute. The answer is, where does Nalda Waverley head in? Has she told us the truth, or is she holding out on that Golden Hand thing, or on some of her little playmates in the Temple of Thanapl, or afraid of them, or is there really a mysterious band of the fanatics loose in New York, or what?"

"You tell me. You're the little boy who saves the day, aren't you?"

Drake's face grew serious.

"No kidding, Dugan. We've got to run that gang to earth. Some one of them gave Waverley the works, and if they're going to try any kidnapping stunts, we ought to get a lead on 'em somehow. It looks like we're elected for quite some considerable snooping, what?"

CHAPTER III

CAN SHE BE PLAYING DOUBLE?

ALITTLE more information from Jenkins was plainly indicated in Drake's mind. They shot up Queens Boulevard and across the bridge in record time.

Jenkins was being as routine as any well-regulated butler when they drew up before the Waverley house again.

Drake dashed up the steps and faced Jenkins as accusingly as if he were the District Attorney himself.

"Where the hell were you last night that you didn't see this thing happen?" he demanded. "You let somebody bust into the place and you don't know a heck of a thing about it, uh? Tell me!"

Jenkins showed his training by not flinching; he faced Willis Drake and said:

"If my lady has told you that I was derelict in my duty, sir, I am sorry. I never imagined for one moment that the people who did for my master would come back the same night and rifle the place."

"How do you know they were the same people?" shot out Drake.

"I didn't, sir. I was just imagining."

"What did you hear?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Like heck! I suppose you had the radio on. What would you have thought if they had got away with the family silver?"

"They didn't, sir."

"'S funny. Not a darn one of the family jewels did they want, either. What do you think, Dugan?"

"I think that none of this robbery talk's got anything to do with that man being dead on the floor. I haven't got any time to psychoanalyze any robber's motives. What I want to know and what's up to me to find out is who the devil killed him, and why? Do you think that Mrs. Waverley has given us any real kind of an answer with her talk about South American doodledads and Incas and whatever they are?"

Drake lifted a shoulder.

"You'd be surprised. You often are, aren't you? Listen, Dugan, is that body *exactly* where it was when you found it?"

DUGAN nodded his head. "It hasn't been touched. It's been saved for you and the rest of the newspaper business. He's not only there, but he's got chalk marks all around his feet where they would have been if they'd been there. What are you looking for now?"

Drake turned to the butler, who still held the door uncertainly open.

"We're going into that conservatory again. I'm thinking of something."

They went into the humid, tropical place with a sniff of distaste. The butterflies fluttered and the moths looked as gray and white as ever. The tropical plants and trees were all about, and there was no spot where a man might hide.

Drake walked over to the body that was such a breaking note in the tropical beauty of the place and idly lifted back the sheet. Then he fell backward.

"Did you say this guy was choked?"

"He was," said Dugan.

Drake lifted his eyes with a serious expression.

"Did you notice the necklace of blisters around this man's neck?" he asked.

A wreath of blisters had indeed wrapped themselves around the neck of the corpse.

Dugan's eyes lifted from the blistered neck to Drake.

"We're up against *something*, Mr. Van Dine," he said. "Do you know what it is? I'm damned if I do."

That was a challenge to Willis Drake, the demon newspaper man, as he liked to call himself.

"No," he said, soberly, "but I'm going to find out."

WILLIS DRAKE walked into the Astor Hotel. He liked to have coffee in the busy café and watch the people. The *maitre de hotel*,

Pierre, himself, strolled over to remark:

"Ah, M'sieur Drake, it is so long since I have seen you. You have not sup, I think? I am joyful to see you."

Drake laughed. "You would be. They all are, aren't they, Pierre, these days?"

"You must not neglect my café, M'sieur Drake," laughed Pierre. "You miss much. So many people, such interest. . . ." He stopped, glanced up at a woman passing from a table to the doorway. "Look, M'sieur, is not there the most beautiful woman you have seen in a long time?"

Drake lifted his eyes languidly. Beautiful women were no rarity on Broadway. He lifted them *to look straight into the eyes of Nalda Waverley!*

Mrs. Waverley moved by with her escort, a South American man, and walked right by Willis Drake without any sign of recognition.

"Well, I'll be damned!" muttered Drake. "She's good! Wonder what that was for?"

He turned eagerly to Pierre.

"Who is she, Pierre?" he asked.

"Do you know?"

"So many beautiful women come to my café——"

A bellboy, hurrying through with a shouted message, pulled Pierre's attention. He hurried away, leaving Drake's question unanswered, but leaving the newspaper man with some puzzled queries for himself.

Why was Nalda Waverley, in beautiful evening clothes, in the Hotel Astor with a man one day after her husband had been brutally murdered? Why had she refused to recognize him, Drake?

Willis Drake had seen her face clearly as she turned to him. She had looked at him unwaveringly, and there was no sign of the trag-

edy through which she had passed. There was little more than time for him to admire the furs she wore than she was gone. He only had time to see the beauty of her, in her filmy gray gown and the diamonds which flashed from wrist and neck before she was out of sight.

He made a dash for the doorway. There she was! Saying something to the man with her. Then she turned and went to the elevator alone. The elevator shot up before Drake reached it. He waited for it to come down.

"If I'm not too curious," he said to the elevator boy who knew him well, "what floor did you take the beautiful South American woman to who just went up with you?"

"There was no lady went upstairs here, sir," said the elevator boy with all seriousness.

Drake lifted his shoulder and laughed.

"No? Now isn't that just too bad?"

CHAPTER IV

THE MURDER MONSTER STRIKES AGAIN

INSPECTOR DUGAN, bored to death because he was alone, was waiting for Drake to come back to the Waverley house after he finished his night's story. He would have felt better if Krote, his side partner at Headquarters, was there to talk to him, but Krote had orders to stay outside the house, to stroll around, front and back, on the off chance that the murderer of John Waverley might run true to form and return to the scene of his crime.

Jenkins dropped in to say:

"There are cigars and cigarettes in the cabinet, sir."

That was not tremendously inter-

esting and Dugan was beginning to wonder if he would ever be relieved when the bell rang and Willis Drake was shown in.

"Anything new, Dugan?"

"Just waiting for you to come back. Krote's walking around outside. You said you were thinking about this conservatory place, but I guess you got off the track, didn't you, when you found those blisters on Waverley's neck? He's not there now, so what's on your mind? The place was too damned hot for me, and I'm not crazy about orchids anyway."

Drake strolled along toward the conservatory as if the Waverley house belonged to him.

"I've got a hunch there's something in there will give us a clue to this murder," he said, and to the butler: "Mr. Waverley was fond of his hot-house, wasn't he, Jenkins?"

"Indeed he was, sir; the moths he raised from the eggs himself, sir."

HE switched on the light as he spoke and they all choked back a breath as the hot, dank air came out to them. Willis Drake glanced at the panting, fat Headquarters man.

"How long do you think you can stand this, Dugan?" he asked suddenly. "I've got a reason."

"You mean this air? I guess as long as anybody not born on the equator. What's the big idea?"

Drake waited until the butler had passed out of sight.

"Listen, Dugan. I've been thinking about those blisters on that man's neck. I want to try something. Get a chair and sit down there—about six feet away from me. Keep your flashlight ready. And keep still."

"We gonna sit here in the dark?" asked Dugan.

"Yeah. There's something here,

Dugan. I want to find out what it is."

"Do you think it's some kind of funny snake that got packed up with this outfit and come over here by mistake?"

"No," said Drake, very seriously. "I never heard of any kind of snake that makes marks like that, did you? If you ask me, it's some sort of centipede—a hell of a big one, too, with poison in every claw, and a bite like a pair of scissors. Probably one of the kind that only comes out in the dark, but if we can only pin it down, it will put a stop to a lot of foolish questions and answers. You game to turn the light out?"

"Just a minute, just a minute. Let's talk sense about this thing." Dugan was as serious as Drake could have wished. "If there's anything in this world I don't like, it's a damned centipede, even a little one. If you really mean you think it would do any good for us to stay in this smelly Turkish bath in the dark and wait to get bit by fifteen or twenty inches of banana pest just to keep somebody from asking a few questions that don't amount to much anyway, I'm vetoin' it. If you think you know any way to get bit yourself and not me, I'll stick around; otherwise no deal."

Willis Drake looked at Dugan's moist and serious face and laughed.

"Nobody's asking you to take a chance," he said. "I'm not ready to commit suicide any faster than you are, but I have an idea—honest, I have—and I'd like to try it out. Stand up on that chair, there, or sit on the back of it with your feet up. You'll be safe enough then. I'm looking for something, and I want us both to see it. Let's give it a fifteen minute chance in the dark here, and then we'll both turn on our flashes and I'll make for the

switch. If there is such a horror about any place and it comes out to forage as they say such things do, we'll both be sure to see it before it scuttles back."

DUGAN settled himself on the back of a chair with both flat feet firmly planted in the center of the chair seat. The conservatory was steeped in darkness except for the flicker of the flashlight with which Willis Drake guided himself back to his own chair. Then, that, too, went out.

So far as they two were concerned, that particular spot of Manhattan might have been the Amazon. From leaf and twig fireflies took wing and flitted from spot to spot in the gloom.

Those ghostly moths that were the pride of John Waverley's heart flew about and the faint flutter of their wings melted into the sound of the rustling and splatter of damp drops. There was no other sound in all the world as far as they were concerned.

The moist heat, with the clothing they wore, became almost unendurable. Dugan was not sure whether it was the heat or his fear of the twenty-inch centipede that was somewhere about, many-legged and dangerous, that made his clothing cling tightly. Did an abomination of that sort ever climb chairs? He had seen centipedes in daylight; he didn't like them, and the thought of tackling one in the dark with the advantage all on the side of the centipede was rather hair-raising.

Dugan's apology for a seat was beginning to feel more or less like the edge of a knife. All about them night-loving, dark-loving blossoms were opening and pouring out pungent scents to attract the moths. Dugan did not know that Willis Drake had his eye on his radium-faced

watch, and the fifteen minutes was beginning to feel more like fifteen years.

IT must have been a second or so before time-up when Dugan's blood-curdling yell tore through the darkness. With a crash he toppled off his chair as some new and unknown thing clutched his left wrist.

"Good cripes!" was all that Drake heard as Dugan tumbled and his own flashlight gleamed.

A second later he had reached the switch, turned it on. Dugan was on his feet, his eyes glaring wildly, as he held on to his burning wrist. His perspiring face was deathly white.

"Did you see it?" shouted Drake.

"Hell, no! But I felt it! It got me! Lookit!"

There was a thin red circle around Dugan's wrist. Small white blisters, blisters like those that had been around the neck of John Waverley, were beginning to form around Dugan's wrist.

"What got you, Dugan?" said Drake, eagerly. "Was your hand hanging down?"

"Nope! My nose was tickling. . . I was just putting out my hand to rub it when something like a hot whiplash went around my wrist. Cripes! It didn't sting so much! It pulled like hell, though, and I'm telling you something."

Drake moved over toward the door.

"I'll get Jenkins," he said quickly. "He's sure to have something for insect bites. Sorry, Dugan."

He stopped just a moment, though, before he reached the door. His puzzled eyes glanced upward at a thick clump of tree fern. It seemed impossible that the centipede or whatever it was could have reached Dugan from the ground. Was it some venomous creature that could

let itself down on a thread, sting, and then wind itself up quickly into hiding in the space of time between his glancing at his watch and switching on the light? He hurled back at Dugan as he ran for the door:

"You'll get your revenge, old man. While you're getting your wrist fixed up I'm going to find the thing if I have to move every plant in this place!"

HE was turning the corner of the pool before he reached the door, when suddenly the light went out! A rush of cool air swept into his face as the door was burst open in the darkness. Then from outside it came a wild scream, the scream of a man who might be being murdered, but whose voice was frightened to death. Jenkins' voice! Then a dull thud in the hallway outside and a groan.

His flashlight playing, his hand feeling for the switch, Drake was only a jump ahead of Dugan as they piled through the doorway. On the floor outside lay Jenkins, moaning, but as he bent over him Drake quickly saw that the man was not killed as he apparently thought he was, nor even knocked out.

"What happened? What is it?" barked the Headquarters man.

Jenkins sat up, whimpering. "A tree," he croaked. "It blew through the door and knocked me down."

"Get up," said Drake. "Try to get your wits and tell what did happen. Maybe your own imagination was playing you tricks for spying."

Jenkins shook his head and his eyes roved wildly.

"I tell you I saw it in the dark," he insisted, as he got to his feet, trying to catch his breath. "I felt the leaves, the moss. . . it went toward the back hall window——"

One wild shriek from the area

outside the back hall window cut the butler short. There came to them the moan of a man in dying agony, then the sound of a body falling.

Drake was again just ahead of Dugan by one step as he hurled himself through the window and dropped to the areaway outside. It was dark as pitch, but the playing flashlights picked out the huddled body a few feet from the window.

AND there, *staring up at them from seeingless eyes, a wild horror still in them, lay Inspector Krote of Headquarters*, the light glinting back from his badge as his coat was pulled back. But more! Across his twisted, tortured neck were the marks of five cruel, gorilla-like fingers, fingers that had crushed through flesh and bone! Fingerprints that were blackening as the man stared.

"God!" shrieked Inspector Dugan, as he dropped on his knees beside the dead man. "It's Krote! It's my buddy—my pal!" He was whimpering, and mouthing through the choke in his throat, trying to find some sign of life in the body of his friend. "The devils! I'll get 'em! I'll get 'em!" He arose to his feet and bounded toward the rear fence.

Drake caught him before he reached it.

"It's useless now, Dugan," he said solemnly. "Not a chance on earth of our catching that hellish murderer now! Don't think!"—and there was a bitter determination in his tone—"that I don't know how you feel. Krote was my friend, too. We'll both get them, but maybe not right this minute. Pull yourself together—you've got to call Headquarters. We're going to need a lot of help."

Reluctantly Dugan quit struggling to get away. His head was drooping and there were tears in his eyes

as he gave another shuddering look at the wryly twisted body of Inspector Krote. He moved like a man on the verge of death himself as he went back toward the house.

A pile of leaves and green twigs at one side of Krote's body—the body on whose neck were the marks of the identically same fingers that had crushed the life out of John Waverley—caught the eye of Willis Drake. Odd, that. They were green and this was winter. He started to pick one up. The whole mass came up in his hand.

It resolved itself into a sort of garment made of moss and vines and twigs. Willis Drake stared at it unbelievably, then with a dawning consciousness of what it was.

“U—M—M,” he said between compressed lips. “Jenkins’ ‘trees.’ Somebody has been making free in the conservatory for some time, spying on everything that went on, to see if anybody found that Golden Hand they couldn’t, and this cape is certainly an idea. Wrapped about a man who *wouldn’t* think it was just one of those stunted tropical things? I see! I see! When he heard me say I was going to move everything in the conservatory, it was time to vanish. *That* was why the lights went out—the ‘tree’ was close to the light button.” He glanced down once more, with horror in his

eyes at the body of the policeman.

“And *that* was why poor Krote had to pay! That damned murdering thief doesn’t intend to let anybody ever get a flash at him if he has to kill for it. God! What a hand he must have! But *how* did he ever get into that conservatory to murder Waverley? Not even a ‘tree’ came out of the place that night—not a chance!—and not one leaf or twig in that place was overlooked in the search.”

But neither Drake nor Dugan could guess how near they both had been to death themselves in that darkened conservatory just a few minutes before!

Who was this Murder Monster who went about crushing and killing and leaving no trace behind? What manner of terror was abroad in New York when no man might be safe from the devilish claw that tore and ripped and crunched into the flesh and bone?

Drake’s blood ran cold, the prickly flesh rose and shivered with horror as his eyes reluctantly went once more to where harmless old Krote lay with the blood-red marks of those tearing fingers across his dead throat.

Then he turned and rushed into the house and out into the street, hell-bent for the office, with an idea in his mind that must be instantly obeyed.

Who Is the Mysterious Murder Monster Who Kills Without Leaving the Slightest Clue? How did Krote Meet His Death? The Answer to These and Other Exciting, Astounding Questions Will Give You Many Breath-taking Thrills. Read the Second Installment of “The Murder Monster” in next month’s
THRILLING DETECTIVE

The Cowled Cobra



*A Gripping Story of a Strange Death That
Mystified the Police of a Great City*

A Complete Novelette

By ARTHUR J. BURKS

Author of "The Dagger of Death," etc.

CHAPTER I

DEATH STRIKES

SOME two hours after Carl Henderson had retired, he was wakened by his own coughing, and rose hastily, to find his room filled with acrid smoke. There was the screaming of hysterical women in the hallway outside, and from the various rooms on his landing.

From the court rose the shouts

of firemen and neck-craning folk who had rushed out half clothed to see where the fire was. For a moment excitement gripped Carl Henderson, and he was almost through the window, on to the fire-escape, when he regained control of his fuddled faculties.

He was in no danger, despite the smoke, else somebody would have been in his room long before now, dragging him to safety. He opened the hall door and peered out. Men

and women in lounging robes and pajamas were reeling about in the smoke.

A man in slicker and helmet was climbing the ladder to the skylight with an ax in his hand.

"I say buddy," yelled Henderson at the fireman, "where's the fire?"

"Next door, but it's just a smudge. Somebody started it in an empty apartment. No danger. Cough a little, keep your door open to blow the smoke out of the window, and go on back to bed. No, wait a minute! I want to look around in there when I get back from the roof, so leave your door open."

HENDERSON grinned cheerfully, wiped the tears from his eyes, and stepped back to the window. He peered down at the firemen and the neck-craning gentry, and understood why folks went mad when there was a fire near them. It *had* given him a turn when he had opened his eyes to find his room full of smoke.

"Well, feller," came a voice from the door, "let's have a little looksee, then I'll stagger along and won't bother you."

The fireman peered under the bed.

He looked into the bathroom, prodded around a bit, came out again, and glanced casually at Carl Henderson. Smoke was billowing into the door from the hallway, and ballooning out the window near which Henderson sat.

Funny where it all came from. The fireman had said the fire was in a neighboring apartment, which was empty. That sounded like spite work, the work of a firebug, or . . .

For some reason a vague uneasiness seemed to have been wafted into his room with the smoke, so that Henderson caught himself peering at the door toward which the fireman was slowly walking, and

wondering what caused that restless feeling. The smoke, probably.

Yet Henderson believed in the vague warnings which sometimes came to him at the strangest moments. Once, in India, he had had such a warning, and had jumped ahead on a jungle trail with all his strength, leaving the native behind him to receive the bite of the cobra which otherwise would have slain Henderson.

Now why, he wondered, should he have recalled that striking cobra—and the dead native, bloated and horrible on the trail a few minutes after the snake had struck—at this particular moment? And in Millegan Place of all places.

It was silly, that urge, but he almost raised his voice in a shout to the fireman. If he had, he would have shouted:

"Hey, wait a minute! Don't go out that door just now!"

But it was absurd. Probably his nerves were beginning to wear raw from the awful strain of his job. The fireman would think him crazy. So he did not shout to the fellow, a fact which he was to regret the rest of his life.

THE fireman walked to his death as calmly as he had crawled up that ladder to the skylight, as casually as he had peered under Henderson's bed for chance smouldering embers, as quietly as he had prodded about in the bathroom.

He stepped into the smoke which billowed through the door. As he paused for a second on the threshold, it was difficult to make sure that he was a fireman in helmet and slicker—if one did not know the facts. He might have been Henderson himself, emerging slowly from the smoke filled room, wrapping his dressing gown around him.

Henderson watched him.

A blurred figure in the smoke, carrying an ax. Then the man suddenly pitched forward, his ax clattering to the head of the stairs, hesitating there for a moment, then thumping down to the first landing, bumping back and forth as it rattled down the steps.

From the lips of the falling man came a strange gurgling moan, and one word which, strangely, did not sound like an oath.

"Hell!"

Then Henderson, cursing himself for his failure to heed the inner warning, for his failure to call out to the man, ran to bend above him. He forgot the smoke which filled his eyes with tears, gripping at his throat and nostrils and racking him with coughing.

HE forgot everything—save that the man before him was dead, and that he might have saved him by shouting a warning.

"Damnation!" he said aloud, "I've just as good as killed this poor devil! But what . . .?"

"What, is right!" snapped a stern voice at his side. "What's coming off here?"

Henderson raised his blurred eyes to note a sergeant of police in uniform, his face filled with suspicion, peering down at him.

"This man was in my room, looking for sparks I suppose. He left, and fell right here. I had a hunch . . ."

"You had a hunch, eh?" snapped the officer as he knelt down and hastily examined the prone fireman. "You had a hunch he was going to get killed, eh? Why? Young man, come and slip on some clothes. The Chief will be glad to have a talk with you."

"So he is dead and you think I bumped him?" demanded Henderson.

"What earthly reason could I have for doing it?"

This was going to be awkward.

"What earthly reason could anybody have? Jerry Malone was one of the best loved smoke-eaters on the force. He's saved more lives and collected medals for it than any other two men. That's what'll make it tough for you. He has plenty of friends who'll be yelling for justice, fella!"

"But why not find out what killed him?"

The denizens of Millegan Place, forgetting the thrill of a fire for the thrill of what appeared to be a death by violence were milling all around Carl Henderson, the sergeant, and the dead man.

One man, whose feet were shod with heavy-soled slippers, cursed as he stepped on an oily piece of paper and stumbled against one of the women of the Place, who swore back at him with great fluency.

"That black ape never does keep the halls clean!" growled the man.

He stared down at the dead man, then slipped into a room two doors down from Henderson's. Inside, the door closed, he raised his foot and carefully removed from the sole the oily bit of paper, which he burned to crisp in an ash-tray on a table just inside the door.

Then he stepped back into the hallway, just as the sergeant, leaving two men in uniform on guard over the dead fireman, now removed to Henderson's room, strode away with the hastily dressed Henderson, a firm hand at his elbow.

The man grinned.

Henderson did not look back. His brain working with lightning speed. This was going to be awkward, indeed. How would he explain if . . .

But when he faced the Chief half an hour later, he was his usual calm self.

THE face of the Chief was a picture of puzzlement.

"I've just had a gabfest with the coroner, Cluny," he told the arresting officer, "and this is the most absolutely senseless thing I've ever heard of. You say this bird said some things that made you think he should be pinched?"

"Yeah. Found him bending over Malone. Malone had just left his room. Malone was dead. He looked like hell, Chief, by the time we finally got away. There's no sense to it, but I had to begin somewhere, so I brought this guy in."

The Chief whirled suddenly on the detained man, and his narrowed eyes took in Henderson in one swift survey.

"Humph!" he said. "You seem to know a lot about this. Maybe you can tell us what killed Malone?"

Henderson smiled easily.

"I'd say that Jerry Malone died of cobra venom. And, incidently, I didn't administer it, and do not keep cobras as pets. In fact, sir, I believe that it was myself whom the murderer really intended to kill!"

THE police official leaned forward. "How was the poison administered? Millegan Place has been scoured for one of the reptiles since the coroner stated what happened to Malone, and there ain't even a hint that such an animal ever even heard of Millegan Place!"

"Probably none of 'em has heard of Greenwich Village," said Carl thinly. "And I don't know how the poison was administered."

"Yeah? What made you say the poison was intended for you?"

"For the moment, Chief, that is my secret. I can work better if it remains a secret for the time being. I assure you I did not kill Malone. That will have to suffice, or you can lock me up."

"I haven't enough to hold you on—though mark this: there'll be shadows on you every move you make until we find who did it, and how."

"The more shadows," replied Henderson, "the better I'll be pleased. I hope they keep close to me to see I don't get what Malone got. Chief, you've never enjoyed a real thrill until you've seen a hooded cobra rearing on his hinderparts, his cowl all flattened out, murder in his eyes, tongue licking out—no, you haven't. And when you see that, jump fast, far, and forget to come down!"

Patting his hat into place on his unruly hair, Henderson stepped from the headquarters building—and not until he was outside on the pavement, deserted almost at three in the morning, did he allow the fear which possessed him to show for a moment in his eyes.

Then it was gone, and he was striding homeward—keeping within a foot of the curb, edging in toward the silent buildings only when fire hydrants barred his straight path—swerving exactly what he was compelled to swerve, and not an inch more. From under his hat cold perspiration ran down his face and made it ghastly.

He was thinking of something else the Chief had said.

"If a cobra did it he must have been a monster, and with only one fang—for the poison went into Malone through a tiny abrasion of the skin just below the right cheekbone!"

CHAPTER II

GRIM WARNING

CARL HENDERSON choose a queer way to re-enter his room in Millegan Place. The dead Jerry Malone had been re-

moved, he knew by this time, but other horrors might lie in wait for Carl at home. He waited on Sixth Avenue, moving aimlessly back and forth—but always well away from the buildings to right and left—until dawn was near, before going back to Millegan Place.

He passed through the court swiftly, leaped high to catch the fire-escape ladder, and went up as rapidly as he could, cursing under his breath the squeaking of the rusty ladder below as it swung back into place when relieved of his weight.

He paused for a moment outside his own window and peered in. The door had been swung shut, and he knew that the springlock had secured it. He listened carefully for a moment or two. The odor of smoke still hung over the place, but the firemen were gone, and Millegan Place was regaining its lost sleep.

Warily he lowered himself over his window sill, first looking at the floor where his feet were to rest. He shuddered as he glanced toward the door, and toward the closet where his clothes hung.

"A fine place for one of those cowled beggars to hide, and take a whack at a fellow when he opened the door. Only there isn't any snake, I'm sure of that. A man could hide in there, too. I wonder . . ."

CARL HENDERSON doffed coat and scarf, dumped his gloves in his hat, and piled them all on the table, where he had snapped on the single shaded globe of an electric reading lamp. Then he sat down on the bed—after first running his hand over the covers, which had been smoothed out after Jerry Malone's body had been taken away—and stared at the closet door.

"Rats!" he muttered. "I know a cobra didn't do it. At least, not the

usual kind of cobra. This one has legs, a maggotty disposition, and a desire for revenge that's a honey! And there isn't a cobra in that closet, though if the door opened and one crawled out I wouldn't be surprised in the least! Now, let me see . . ."

There was no reason why anybody should have wished to kill Jerry Malone. Everybody had said that, and Henderson knew it to be the truth. No! The—whatever it had been—that had killed Malone, had been intended for Henderson himself.

If he had gone out when he had first thought of so doing, while the smoke billowed in the hallway, he himself would have been dead this very moment—and Jerry Malone, perhaps, en route to some other fire instead of to the cemetery.

Henderson lighted a cigarette and inhaled deeply as his jumbled thoughts whirled through his throbbing head. The fire had been started in an empty apartment, in order to create excitement, and force Henderson to come out of his room. Then, blooey!

But the slayer had got Jerry Malone.

There was a door within two feet of Carl's leading into another apartment. The man who occupied that room was a Persian bookbinder—a fact which lent color to the idea of Orientalism in connection with the killing. But that meant little, either. There were all sorts of queer characters in Greenwich Village. Arabs, Indians, Chinese students, Syrians—a little of everything, all drawn together and mingling helter-skelter to study and dawdle over the arts—but mostly to dawdle.

"I wonder," he asked himself, "if somebody has discovered my secret connection with the police? Who's got me marked 'lousy' and ready for

the morgue? Nobody, I thought until a couple of hours ago, knew anything about my activities except myself and the Commissioner."

Henderson went to the door and listened carefully. No sounds came from the hallway, save the sound of snoring.

THAT would be the Persian book-binder who slept with his mouth open.

Carl grinned. No danger there, at least.

Slowly, cautiously, he opened the door a crack and peered out at the spot where Jerry Malone had dropped in a dying condition, his body writhing horribly, while his ax went clattering down the stairs.

"Now let's see. That barb, or whatever it was, that struck Jerry, got him under the right cheek-bone. It must have struck squarely. He was facing the stairs when he was hit, so he was looking in the general direction of those two doors yonder. That one on the left is occupied by an old maid who writes 'mother' songs, and the one on the right by a little Syrian girl who writes poetry. Both of 'em harmless.

"The punk who pulled this probably doesn't belong in Millegan Place at all. He may have come in here after he'd started the fire, and waited for me at the head of the stairs. He could have done it, and slipped out unnoticed when the fire got under way and the crowd gathered in the court."

There was nobody in the hall.

BUT Henderson was acutely conscious of the possibility of any one of the several doors opening if he stepped into the hallway—opening to allow the hurling of a dart of some kind which would do to him what had been done to Jerry Malone.

"No, not a dart, either. The cop-

pers would have found a dart, or it would have remained in the wound. What the devil, then? I'll have to look for something else."

Taking a deep breath, Henderson stepped into the hall, alternately darting glances at the closed doors, and at the floor near where the head of Jerry Malone had rested after he had grown still. There was no blood of any kind, nothing to show that a man had been murdered at this spot.

The hall floor was uncarpeted, and the black man of all work was in the habit of giving it a coat of oil once a week to keep the dust laid. The oiling would probably take place today, if the black man got around to it.

Henderson whistled softly.

He stooped over, forgetting the closed doors for a moment, to stare at the floor.

Near the spot where Malone's head had rested there was a fresh smear of oil. Almost impossible to see, had not Henderson been looking for exactly that. It looked as though a bit of oil had accidentally been spilled at that spot. But Henderson thought otherwise. He darted back into his room and to his bathroom, where he gathered up a sponge.

Back to the door. Then, on second thoughts, he caught up one of his gloves, slipped it on his right hand—grasped the sponge in that hand, and passed back into the hall. He dropped to his haunches over the oily spot, and carefully rubbed it dry with the sponge. His eyes were alight with excitement. He felt sure he was on the right track now.

Handling the sponge gingerly, he rose, made sure that all doors were still closed, and turned back to his door.

There he paused, and his eyes widened.

ON the door, at the height of his eyes, he kept a pad and pencil. The pad was tacked to the door, and the pencil hung from a string fastened to the same tack. The pad was for use of callers who came and, not finding him in, desired to leave a message.

Someone had left such a message now, written in red, while the pencil he had supplied was of ordinary cheap lead. Cold chills ran along his spine as he studied the pad.

It was a wordless message and needed none.

Just a cobra poised, tongue lolling out, hood spread wide on either side of the venomous head—a striking cobra done in red!

Nothing more, yet that red drawing gave Henderson a queer turn.

It had been sketched swiftly by the hand of someone accustomed to sketching swiftly and accurately.

Perspiration broke out again on his body.

"It was done when the mob crowded around Jerry Malone! He must have been close enough to have touched me!"

Henderson re-entered his room, wrapped the crimson warning and the oil-smudged sponge in a piece of newspaper.

Then, cursing himself for a fool even as he did so, he once more made use of the fire-escape. He knew the shadows which always hung in the stairwell, even in the middle of a sunshiny day, and feared them. He wasn't really ashamed of his fear. A man who bulled deliberately into danger was not a courageous man necessarily—he might simply be a fool. Carl Henderson was no fool.

He took a taxicab.

"Just drive for an hour, and don't bother me!" he ordered. "I've some serious thinking to do."

CHAPTER III

THE SHADOWERS

THE car slowed down and Carl Henderson looked up irritably. He saw instantly that the driver had taken him into the Bowery, and that he had slowed down to keep from running over the scores of kids who played in the streets.

"What the devil'd you come down here for?" yelled Carl. "I don't want——"

Then he looked up sharply and swore softly to himself.

"Stop!" he called. "Move over to the curb and wait for me a minute."

Henderson leaped from the taxicab and strode over to where a dirty-faced boy was sitting on the top step of a grimy ancient tenement house.

"Say, buddy," said Henderson, "here's a dollar for you if you'll sell me that shooter you were about to use."

The kid's eyes bulged at sight of the money. It was doubtful if ever in his life he had seen so much. He clutched at the bill, but left a slender reed cylinder in Henderson's hand. Then he was away like a deer.

Henderson strode rapidly back to the cab.

"Police Headquarters!" he snapped. "And don't waste time!"

Henderson was admitted to the Chief at once. Entering the building, he had looked back to see a touring car draw up behind the taxi, and knew that every move he had made, in accordance with the Chief's promise, had been observed by shadowers.

"Well?" snapped the Chief.

Carl dumped the newspaper containing the sponge and the "crimson cobra" message on the desk, and

brought forth the reed cylinder he had got from the urchin in the Bowery.

"Please have the sponge examined for cobra venom, sir," he said. "Give orders at once, if you will!"

The earnestness of his brusque command carried weight with the Chief, who immediately pressed a button. A man wearing thick lenses came in and took the sponge.

"Handle it carefully," snapped Henderson, "or you may get what Jerry Malone got. Better keep it in that paper, if you happen to have any abrasions on your hands!"

THE chemist's hand trembled as he gingerly returned the sponge to the newspaper, and carried the bundle away.

"This," said Henderson, tendering the crimson cobra to the Chief, "was fastened to the message pad on my door when I went back to Millegan Place about dawn. It's a warning, and I know exactly what it means. It means that I'm to get the dose Malone got, which was intended for me in the first place. This warning means business, and I may get mine any minute, even while I'm here talking with you. And I've doped out a way that Malone might have been killed. Look here!"

He brought from an inner pocket the hollow reed he had purchased from the kid in the Bowery. He leaned over the official's desk, tore off a slip of paper from a memorandum pad, thrust it into his mouth and began to chew vigorously.

"You act crazier'n a loon, Henderson," observed the officer, but he leaned forward and watched with interest.

"Remember when you were a kid, Chief, how you used to shoot spitballs at the teacher, and at sissies in classes that you didn't like? Well, it's not a new weapon, this gadget.

I've seen variations of it in other places—pretty darned terrible variations. The sumpitan, for example, which throws poisoned arrows."

"Malone wasn't killed by an arrow," snapped his auditor. "We'd have found a dart of some kind."

"No, he was killed by a spitball. Watch!"

Taking the pulpy wet mass to which he had reduced the bit of paper, from his mouth, Henderson thrust it into the hollow reed. He lifted the thing to his lips, aimed it at the wall—and expelled his pent-up breath explosively. The paper wad spatted against the wall of the Chief's office, clung wetly for a moment, then dropped to the floor.

WON'T do, Henderson," snapped the official. "Spitballs sting, but they don't puncture. And whoever got Malone had to make sure that the barb, or needle point, whatever it was, that struck Malone, struck him point foremost, and——"

"Once more, watch!" interrupted Henderson.

This time, his spitball finished, he kneaded it in his fingers until it was bullet-shaped instead of roughly circular. From the desk he took an ordinary pin, which he thrust through the ball from end to end. When he had finished, a tiny bit of the pin point was visible at one end of the wad.

He thrust the whole thing into the "gun", and once more aimed it at the wall.

This time the spitball struck, mushrooming slightly against the wall, to which the point of the pin had fastened it.

"But," objected the officer, "how could any cobra venom be ejected from the point of the pin?"

"The 'spitball' used by the killer was saturated with cobra poison. A

film of it naturally crept all along the metal of the pin point. Or the point, in Malone's case, might have been entirely imbedded in the wad, and thrust forward, venom-wet, by its own momentum when it was stopped suddenly by Malone's right cheek-bone! At least it's something to work on."

"Yes, but we would have found the wad, or the pin."

"You would have if, in the excitement of Malone's fall, a crowd hadn't milled around. The killer was in that crowd. He retrieved his 'bullet'—but left the venom ooze from it on the hallway floor, if that sponge I brought here produces the evidence I think it will."

Here the chemist, white of face, entered without knocking.

"I got some of the oil from that sponge on to a knife blade, Chief," he said diffidently. "Then I scratched one of my white mice with the blade——"

"What happened?"

"It died almost instantly!"

The Chief of Police whirled on Henderson.

I DON'T know whether you're on the right track or not, but I'm playing ball with you for the time being. You got any ideas?"

"We've no hint as to the identity of the murderer, but I can lead you to him—or her!"

"How?"

"He's got me slated for the next killing. Have somebody trailing me all the time. I'll be the lure. When he strikes, your men can nail him!"

"That may be too late to help you."

"Yes, but whether you have shadowers on my trail or not, that laddybuck is going to strike. I'm in a tough spot, but whatever happens when the killer strikes, I'd like to make sure that he pays for

it—for Jerry Malone if he fails to get me, for both of us if he doesn't!"

"You're a fool, but it's a good idea. I don't know that I have a right to take such chances with your life."

"You have nothing to do with it. I brought it on myself!"

"How?"

"Well, I think it's as well to spill the dope to you. I've been working under secret orders from the Commissioner—you can get his confirmation of my statement. I got the info that led to the solution of the Hankins murder, the Solenberger killing, and . . ."

Police Headquarters stirred into action. Orders were swiftly issued. Henderson was getting service at last.

An hour later he ordered his taxi to halt in the lower East Side. He bought an extra that brazen-lunged newsies were bellowing madly as they raced through the milling crowds.

He looked once at the headlines.

"Police closing on Cowled Cobra Murderer!"

"The reporters couldn't say 'hooded cobra' could they? Not enough alliteration," Henderson told himself. "Gee, I wish my friend the enemy would start the ball rolling!"

A LONG car rolled slowly past, drawing in toward the curb ahead of the taxicab. There were two men in the back seat, placidly smoking. But Henderson knew that they were efficiently on the alert, that their eyes missed nothing.

They were his official shadowers. . . .

But the men in the second car that now turned into the street on two wheels, traveling in the opposite direction, while they might have been shadowers, were not "official."

"On your way, driver!" yelled Henderson, jumping for the car door as he saw the wildly careening car swing over toward the taxicab.

The chauffeur jumped to open the door for Henderson, who had been standing for a moment on the sidewalk to scan that lurid headline.

CHAPTER IV

THE RACE WITH DEATH

CAREFULLY as they had tried to guard against surprise, Henderson and his chauffeur, and his police shadowers, were caught napping. They could scarcely be blamed, as nobody would have expected the enemy to act as he was now acting.

The car came on at top speed. The police car had drawn up to the curb, and was just now getting into motion again—too late.

Henderson shouted to the driver to get into the seat, grab the wheel and get away.

But now the charging car was right alongside, and the befuddled driver was standing holding the door for Henderson. The enemy car sped past. Instinctively Henderson ducked down. For he had seen the people in the back seat of that car, two of them. One was pasty white of face, almost cadaverous. The other was sun-bronzed, eagle-like—and just as Henderson looked he whipped a reed cylinder to his lips as a bugler raises his bugle to blow a call.

The car went past.

There came a shriek of agony from Henderson's driver. The opposite window of the car was open. The speeding missile from the adapted sumpitan passed through that window, aimed at Henderson. But fate had taken a hand once more to save him. He had ducked,

but he had not jerked the driver to safety.

The missile struck the driver on the hand which held the door open.

Had Henderson stepped into the car instead of dodging, the thing would have struck him in the face as he bent over to clear the door. He had escaped, but for the moment he was helpless. The driver was staggering away from the car, his face a mask of agony, his right hand grasping the wrist of his left. Then he collapsed.

Police were leaping from their car, racing back the half block to Henderson's now useless taxicab.

But the slayers were not yet through. Their car was slowing down with a vast squealing of brakes. It struck away to the right, rolled upon the sidewalk, continued on, swung left across the narrow street.

Then it was almost around, this time on the opposite sidewalk, headed for the rear of Henderson's taxicab.

"Run you fool, run!" shouted one of his shadowers in plainclothes.

His plainclothes friends were racing to him, and he now ran to meet them. The driver of the police car was turning his car around, almost as fast as the driver of the murder car had turned his. The police had their weapons out.

THE police car was swinging across the street, in position to go backward or forward to stall the murder car. A collision was unavoidable if the enemy continued his mad career.

"Run, you fool! Anywhere! Get into one of these buildings! Here's a gat!"

The leading one of the plainclothes squad dragged out a service revolver and tossed it to Henderson. Then, almost at once, the policeman

went down, while from the murder car came a stuttering, stammering of a Tommy-gun fired recklessly at top speed.

The murderers were intent on stopping all police interference before downing Henderson, that was plain. If they paused to get him, a lucky bullet might get their driver, leaving them in the hands of the police—now with two murder raps hanging over them.

So, logically enough, they were accounting for the police. One was down already, redly coughing his life away on the sidewalk. The murder car stopped with a squealing of brakes. The three men in it, including the chauffeur, piled out swiftly.

The man with the cadaverous face turned the Tommy on the police car. The police driver slumped over his wheel.

The remaining copper, his face white, whirled on Henderson.

"This way! Make it fast!"

Henderson glanced quickly up at the building before them. Five stories it was. They raced for the swinging doors of what appeared on the outside to be an apartment house. As they ran the Tommy clattered again, and the glass vanished from the door as though it had never been there.

The two were through, in the darkness of a hallway.

From somewhere aloft in the gloom came the screaming of a woman.

Henderson and the remaining copper raced for the stairs. They knew the danger. If the enemy closed on them while they were on the stairs, going straightaway, they would be mowed down without mercy. As they took the steps three at a time, Henderson was recalling every feature of the cadaverous one and the man of the blow-

pipe. He'd remember them again, if ever opportunity were granted him.

"Might as well wait and take it, Henderson!" came a hoarse shout from below. "I'm going to get you sure, coppers or no coppers! I'm not afraid to burn—so long as I get you first!"

BUT the two had reached the first landing of the stairs, almost falling at the unexpectedness of it, and were climbing the second flight, just now out of line with their pursuers.

"There'll be more officers along," muttered the cop. "For that shooting must have been heard all over New York City. But we've got to keep clear of these babies until help comes, and if we're cornered we've got to fight. Now—keep quiet, and we'll play hide and seek with 'em until we get a break!"

The stairwell was as dark as Erebus. Their pursuers were making no sounds at all, because a deep runner covered the stairs. Silence, ominous, grim and terrible, held sway in the gloomy building.

In the darkness like this, and the silence—the cobra, striking!

For Henderson had guessed now what the next move of the enemy would be.

They, Henderson and the sole remaining copper, would be followed stealthily up the stairs. Then their pursuers would listen at doors, move on after them, and slowly but surely drive them into the jaws of a trap.

There remained the roof, but up there two cats would be of little avail against the Tommy. They might kill the gunner, but the man had but to press the trigger to spray them both with lead.

No, it couldn't be the roof, even if they knew how to reach it.

But in the darkness, what?

Henderson recalled Jerry Malone, blurred of outline, stepping across his threshold through the billowing smoke—to meet death in a horrible manner.

He once more saw the chauffeur, who would never collect his meter reading now—staggering back, grasping his hand, then sinking to the sidewalk to die.

Then a sound beside him sent a shiver along his spine. It was the squashy sound a spitball makes when it strikes a solid substance.

Henderson had felt the wind of its passing on his face.

CHAPTER V

TERROR IN THE DARK

CARL gripped the shoulder of the copper.

"Tough spot!" he whispered. "What's your name?"

"Cleaver. Yeah, you're right. What'll we do? The racket of those guns will bring my friends, but they may not get here in time. Hear what 'Snake' Hopper said?"

"Snake Hopper?" Henderson gasped at the aptness of what was an apparent nickname. "Which one was he? The white-faced one?"

"Naw. The white-faced one is 'Dope' Farley. He doesn't count, except that when he's hopped up he'll do anything for the guy that gives him the stuff, and can shoot eyes out of gnats with his chopper! The brown-faced guy is Snake Hopper. His brother takes the hot squat day after tomorrow for croaking old man Hankins!"

Henderson cursed softly.

"So that's why this Snake Hopper's after me. I got the dope on his brother!"

"Jeez! Is that right? Well, he's bumped plenty to get you. They know it's the juice for them, Hopper and Farley, and won't mind killing

a couple more. We'd better move on, I can hear somebody. Bend over."

As Carl Henderson moved down the hall with Cleaver, his mind was racing at top speed. Hopper was after him with one of those blow-pipe gadgets, which he was using for several reasons. It was a morale breaker for one thing, and he wanted the man he was going to kill to squirm. And it was the only thing he had been able to think up that was worse than what his brother was to get in less than forty-eight hours.

Didn't dare use the Tommy any more, or gats, because they made a noise and brought people running. Besides, they made a flash, and the two Hopper was after could fire at the flashes, and maybe drill somebody.

Hopper wouldn't want to just bump Henderson off. That was too easy. Better to make him suffer like hell for a bit before he went.

"I'll bet his own nickname, and his brooding over what happened to his brother, made him concoct the cobra venom idea," thought Henderson. "Wonder where he got the stuff?"

NOW Cleaver and Henderson were well ahead of the two pursuers, one of them on either side of the hall, but holding hands across it in order not to lose contact.

A terrible, gloomy place this. A place of silent darkness, noisome with weird odors. A place where anything might happen. Cleaver slid over beside him.

"They'll close in, get to us sooner or later," he whispered. "The folks in this neighborhood won't tell coppers anything. And we can't whistle or shoot. That chopper of Dope Farley would get us sure."

Silence on all sides, yet Hender-

son could picture what was going on behind the doors his groping fingers told him he was passing. Grim faced families of the shadows, waiting for other, human, shadows to pass. They wouldn't squawk. Nor would they let anyone in.

That gave Henderson an idea.

"Try the doors, Cleaver," he whispered when opportunity came. "Might as well come now as later on. They'll corner us anyway. Might as well make a stand and get it over with."

"Right!" replied Cleaver.

Now the two ran swiftly down the hall, hoping to gain a little on their pursuers. From outside, faint and far away, sounded the keening of a police siren. But there was a note of doubt in it. Both chauffeurs out there were dead, and the folks of the neighborhood wouldn't tell the police where to go.

They might even hinder them wherever possible, and the chauffeurs could tell nothing—save that the cab driver would be merely another sign pointing to the "Cowled Cobra."

"No," muttered Henderson, "it's up to us."

CLEAVER gripped Henderson's hand tightly, dragged him toward him.

"Door unlocked here," he whispered. "Room's empty. I can tell by the feel of it, and the smell. Let's try this one."

"We've been in the hallway ahead of those two for five minutes," said Carl, "why hasn't Dope Farley cut us down with the Tommy?"

"That's too good, and too easy for you kid. Besides, it will bring the coppers, and whatever Hopper said, he won't take the squat if he can help it. Come on."

The two slipped into the room,

stepped well inside away from the door.

Henderson whispered his disappointment.

"I thought we'd be able to see 'em against the open door when they tried to come in," he said. "But it's darker in the hall than it is in here."

Henderson gripped his companion by the arm.

"I'll take the left-hand corner, far end, going in. You take the right. Don't get right in the corner. Hopper may be wise enough to do a bit of probing there."

"Cheese it. I can feel 'em coming. They'll be here in a minute. They won't miss that open door."

Henderson darted for his place, dropped close against the wall in a crouching position, strained his ears for sounds from the hallway.

His heart was thumping so madly he felt that the enemy could almost hear it. He felt horribly alone. Cleaver might be miles away, for all the moral support his presence lent. In the darkness he fancied all sorts of horrible things; cobras with flattened hoods, tongues licking out, poised in the darkness to strike and slay in ghastly fashion. He could almost hear their slithering crawl across the floor.

And even worse was the thought of those wads. Snake Hopper must be a little mad. Fellow might get that way, if he was fond of a brother who was getting ready for the juice.

STILL, Joe Hopper had it coming. Justice had had its way. Old man Hankins had been a lovable old soul, and hadn't deserved killing merely because he was a miserly sort who hoarded money and jewels to tempt robbers.

Snake Hopper, whom report had said at the time of Joe's capture had

led his brother into criminal by-paths, was on the trail of the man he blamed for Joe's impending execution. Henderson wondered how Hopper had managed to uncover him. He had thought all along that his secret stuff was fool-proof.

Carl crouched forward, tensed. He felt that there now were others in the room besides Cleaver and himself over by the door.

Well, he couldn't wait for the enemy to come to him.

He heard a spitting sound in the corner. Lucky he hadn't gone directly into the corner. He'd out-guessed Snake Hopper there. But Snake was as venomous as the worst of his nicknamesake. He'd be content to take his time, and there was always Dope Farley to back his play. He could almost make out the hophead, there in the darkness, chopper in the crook of his arm—waiting to set it chattering if his pal failed.

An inch at a time Henderson worked his way toward the door, keeping close to the wall, yet not touching it. He did not want to make a noise that would bring one of those wads hurtling through the blackness with death at the end of its flight.

Henderson paused, letting his breath out with awful, grim slowness. Breathing could betray a man in here, where the sound of a pin dropping was like the crack of doom—where the spitting of that wad had been like the rattle of a gun going into action.

WHAT would he do if he encountered Hopper in the darkness? Could he reach for the man's throat, and grasp it, before Hopper could spout another one of those deadly barbs? No telling. He'd have to chance that.

He sucked in his breath again.

That was enough to hold him for a few more moments of the endless crawl.

He inched forward again. God, this was awful—this murderous game of hide and seek. He paused again, waiting a long time, tensely listening.

Was he really hearing the measured breathing of someone just ahead of him there? He was positive of it. Couldn't be Cleaver, either, for Cleaver would stay on his own side of the room. It was either Hopper or Farley, if his ears weren't playing tricks on him.

He tried to estimate the height of the man's throat from the floor by guessing about the breathing sound. He'd have to be sure about that, for if he missed when he lunged, the curtain would ring down for good for Henderson, and for Cleaver too, perhaps. Good egg, Cleaver. If he'd run away they probably wouldn't have bothered him at all. He'd played through this far with Henderson without grumbling.

Again he moved forward. He caught himself drawing far over to one side, away from the wall, carrying his head and neck as far from the rest of his body as he could hold it.

Hopper was playing with him, secure in the knowledge that he held the upper hand. Hopper knew he, and Cleaver, dared not fire—for if they missed it meant the end.

Hopper, seeking Henderson—while Farley stood back, ears tuned to the weird sounds in the place, finger on the trigger of the Tommy, ready to blast away at the first sound.

NOW Henderson could plainly make out the sound of breathing.

Then, almost in his face, came the grating words.

"We know you're in here, Henderson! Why don't you take a chance and let loose a bullet? Haven't the guts, have you? Never had the guts to come out in the open, did you? Pleased you to play the secret dick, with right guys as pawns who couldn't find you didn't it? But I found you out, all right. Your Persian bookbinder neighbor is a friend of mine, see? You talked to him—once, when you were drinking. Forgot yourself. Didn't know you were giving the show away."

Henderson knew that Hopper was merely saying whatever came into his mind, seeking to draw some sign from him. Then . . .

Hopper's arm would go up, lifting that blowgun as a bugler raises his bugle to sound a call, and a barb would speed on its deadly mission. It was grim, maniacal, but too utterly true. There was a touch of madness in Hopper's voice as he spoke.

Henderson gathered his legs under him.

Hopper was very close. He might be leaping right into one of those speeding barbs, but he felt he could stand the suspense of waiting no longer.

The man's head, by the sound of his voice and his breathing, was perhaps three feet from the floor. Hopper was on his knees, or moving forward at a crouch.

Henderson took a deep breath, held it tightly—and leaped ahead and to the left, swinging his arms down, reaching in the darkness for his mark.

His hands, talon-like, went straight and true to the throat of Hopper. He could hear Hopper's startled intake of breath.

Then, a strange thing happened. Hopper writhed and twisted in his hands, yet his hands did not fight back at Henderson—and an inkling

of the horrible truth came to the mind of Henderson. If it were true, nothing would stop Farley from letting loose with the Tommy.

He released his hold, leaped aside, away from where he guessed Farley to be standing in the darkness.

"Dope!" the voice, gurgling like the death rattle in the throat of a dying man, was Hopper's. "Cut down on 'em! Smoke 'em up! I'm going!"

A SOUND as of a man writhing and twisting in agony was followed by the frenzied tattoo of heels against the floor.

What did Dope Farley think? That his boss was in the hands of someone, being strangled there? Did he wonder why Hopper talked as though he had some obstacle in his mouth?

There was no way of telling.

But the Tommy began its murderous clatter, and pencils of flame reached out for the sound of Snake's voice. They were at a height which would surely have got any man who might have been kneeling above Hopper, if he were prone, with strangling hands at his throat.

Henderson would never forget the horror of that moment.

Through the chattering of the Tommy came the single, sharp crack of a police revolver. Instantly the chattering of the Tommy ceased.

"God!"

The Tommy clattered to the floor, to be followed instantly by the thudding of Farley's own body.

Then, after a long minute, silence, save for the frenzied breathing of two men—and the shouts of policemen racing up the darkened stairwell.

"I got Farley, Henderson!" gasped Cleaver. "Spotted him by shooting at the place where the flame came

from as he cut loose with the chopper. Let's get out of here, before I go nuts!"

THEY stepped into the hall. Instantly beams of light in the hands of the police spotted them. A copper was busy at the task of screwing light bulbs back into their sockets. They had been unscrewed apparently by the denizens of this ghastly place, because they were moles who craved darkness when death passed by.

The whole party, flashlights glowing, and the hall now fairly well lighted by electricity, entered the room of terror. They looked down at what was left of Dope Farley. Cleaver's bullet had taken him in the right temple and blasted its way through. Farley wasn't nice to look at.

But Hopper. . .!

Henderson knew what he would see, but it unnerved him, just the same.

Hopper had died as Jerry Malone had died, and as the taxicab driver had died—and by the same weapon.

But the sergeant hadn't discovered this yet—hadn't discovered the thing Henderson had guessed at

when Hopper had writhed and twisted in his hands, and hadn't fought back at him with flailing fists.

"Looks like Farley had cut down Hopper himself!" said Cluny.

"He didn't," replied Henderson dully. "Look here! But don't touch Hopper for a moment."

Henderson pressed his fingers gingerly to the bloated lips of Hopper, spread them wide. Between his teeth showed an ordinary paper wad, damp and oily, with the glistening point of a pin in the wad's center.

"Get the idea, Cluny?" said Henderson. "Hopper was getting ready to blow one at me, when I grabbed his throat. He sucked in his breath instead of blowing it out. If he hadn't, it would have been I, and not Hopper! Once the wad sucked back into his mouth, it was impossible to spit it out without sticking himself, especially as I had him by the throat! Just a scratch did it!"

Cluny dabbed at his glistening forehead with a handkerchief. "I'll be damned," he muttered in amazement. "His murder machine sorta back-fired, eh?"

Henderson nodded grimly.

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., required by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912, of Thrilling Detective, published monthly at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1931.

State of New York }
County of New York } ss.

Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and County aforesaid, personally appeared N. L. Pines, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the editor of THRILLING DETECTIVE and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 411, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business manager are: Publisher, Metropolitan Magazines, Inc., 570 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; Editor, N. L. Pines, 570 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; Managing Editor, none; Business Manager, none.

2. That the owner is: Metropolitan Magazines, Inc., 570 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; N. L. Pines, 570 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; M. A. Goldsmith, 570 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: none.

4. That the two paragraphs next above giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company, but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustees or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statement embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders, who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and that affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds or other securities than as so stated by him.

N. L. PINES.

Sworn by and subscribed before me this 23rd day of September, 1931. Harry Kaveesh, Commissioner of Deeds. Commission expires March 24, 1933.

Alias Mr. Death



*The First of a Series of Breath-Taking Stories Revolving
About the Nefarious Activities of the Murder Club
and the Adventures of a Self-Appointed
Avenger of Crime*

By G. WAYMAN JONES

Author of "The House of Hooded Death," "The Headless Girl," etc.

I.—THE MURDER CLUB

AT the age of twenty-four, James Quincy Gilmore found himself confronted with a pretty problem. He was unemployed and in love, and to his utter amazement he had just discovered that

these two things were not so completely unrelated as he had thought.

The matter of his unemployment did not mean that he was strolling up and down the Bowery in tatters asking strangers for the price of a

cup of coffee. Far from it. The fact that his father was the sole possessor of the Gilmore millions made that expedient unnecessary. Inasmuch as Jimmy Gilmore, Jr., had never been forced to labor with his hands or his brain, he had never even thought about it.

Thus it was, when he realized that he was in love and acquainted Sally Fortune with the fact that he intended to marry her, he received the shock of his young life.

Sally, slim, blonde and the owner of the most devastating pair of eyes in Newkirk City, heard his proposal in silence. She lit a cigarette deliberately before she answered, then spoke slowly as if she were choosing her words with great care.

"No, Jimmy," she said slowly. "We couldn't make a go of it."

"You don't love me?" asked Jimmy hastily.

Again she shook her head slowly.

"No, it's not that," she admitted. "I care for you more than I've ever liked any man. But, I'm a worker, Jimmy, and the man I love has to be a worker, too. He has to be able to stand on his own feet, not simply lean back against the solidity of his father's fortune."

"But," he objected, blinking his eyes in bewilderment. "Why work if you don't have to?"

"You see?" she said, as though this confirmed her argument. "We don't even agree on that."

Jimmy swore mildly, threw away his cigarette and settled down to the arduous job of convincing a woman that she was totally and completely wrong. He burned up a lot of energy and a lot more words. He cited the success he had made of his college career. He modestly intimated that he had been the best full-back that Yale ever had. He insinuated that if it became necessary, he would take off his coat and con-

quer the world for Sally. But, he concluded, why tempt fortune? Why make money when one's father has all the money in the world?

But she remained adamant, and it was a heart sore and puzzled young man who eventually walked home with the slow dejected step of the vanquished.

As he reached the threshold of the Gilmore mansion, a rich, courtly voice sounded in his preoccupied consciousness.

"Hello, Jimmy. I'm glad I ran into you."

Jimmy looked up to see a well-dressed middle-aged man smiling at him. Jimmy smiled.

"Hello, sir," he said respectfully, as he recognized Clyde Bates, his father's closest friend whom he had known since childhood.

"Yes," said Bates. "I want you to talk to your father. He's on the brink of a grave danger."

Jimmy's eyes flashed beneath the inquiring lift of his brows. "Dad?" he said. "In danger? How?"

"He's contemplating doing a very foolish thing," said Bates. "I've advised him not to. But he insists, he'll tell you about it, when you see him. But I want to warn you, Jimmy, that your Dad is my best friend and I'd hate to see him finish his life because of a foolish whim."

"You mean his life is in danger?"

Bates nodded gravely. "I mean just that," he said. "You go in and talk him out of what he intends doing."

And before Jimmy could question him further, Bates strode down the asphalt path that led to the grilled gate. For a moment Jimmy looked after the older man with puzzled eyes, then shrugging his shoulder he entered the house, and went directly to his father's study.

HIS father, he noticed, was unusually sober, as he waved his son to a chair. The customary merry twinkle in his blue eyes was missing and his jaw was set pugnaciously. His whole face was indicative of a grim, unwavering determination.

"Sit down, son," he said soberly. "I want to talk to you."

"Listen," said Jimmy. "Whatever it is, Dad. You're not to do it."

His father smiled slightly. "Ah," he said. "I take it that you've been talking to Bates."

"Bates was talking to me," said Jimmy. "But he didn't say a great deal. In fact he told me nothing except you were in grave danger unless you quit doing whatever it is you're going to do. He told me to talk you out of it. That's what I'm here for."

His father shook his head slowly. "You can't talk me out of it, Jimmy, and I don't believe you'll want to, when you hear what it is."

"Then, let's hear it."

"Have you ever heard of the Murder Club?"

"The Murder Club?" Jimmy ran through the pages of his memory. "I think I've heard it mentioned once or twice, but I thought it was largely legendary."

"It's not," said his father grimly. "Far from it. As you know just from reading the daily papers, this town is in the grip of the most vicious crime wave that ever has attacked a metropolis. The underworld and the politicians work hand in glove. The police flatly refuse to arrest men who are part of the organization. And if, by some chance the criminals are apprehended, a corrupt judiciary releases them.

Their powerful illegal machine brooks no interference. It has long arms which reach into every political office in the city. And back of it all is the Murder Club. The

Club has a small membership, yet they control the entire evil machinery. They are the brains, and more ruthless Machiavellian brains never existed. The men who make up its membership comprise a list of citizens whose names would astound you. They are prominent, brilliant men who have succumbed so entirely to the money God, that they have no morals, no scruples. Murder and pillage are the only laws they know. There is one way to break their hold and that is Exposure."

Jimmy's hand gripped the desk tightly as he listened to his father. He seemed intensely interested.

"And so," he questioned. "You intend to expose them?"

"I do," said his father. "I am in a position to do it. Through good fortune, I am in possession of certain papers which establish the identity of the Murder Club beyond all doubt. Even the name of their leader is known to me. Tomorrow I intend to use my knowledge. Now do you want me to give up this project?"

"No," said Jimmy Gilmore. "No. If danger is the price of fighting murder and corruption, let us pay the price. Only remember, I'm in this, too."

His father rose and smiled proudly as he slapped his son on the shoulder.

"Of course, you're in it," he said huskily. "All the way. Meet me here in my study at nine o'clock. I shall show you the papers and we'll plan the best method of using them. In the meantime I must dine downtown."

"Okay," said Jimmy as he left the room.

A FIGHTING light shone in his eye and his heart was filled with pride of his dad who at the age of sixty was still a fighter.

Jimmy ate his dinner alone in the huge ancestral dining room of the Gilmore house. Since his mother had died two years ago his father disliked eating in the room which held so many tender memories of the past, so Jimmy's prandial solitude was not unusual. His sober mien, however, was.

He ate slowly, and as he consumed the meal his thoughts were grave things. He remembered the warning that Mr. Bates had given him that afternoon, and he worried about his father. From what he had learned that afternoon, he knew that the Murder Club would stop at nothing to prevent its secrets from being betrayed. The best method, he decided, would be to work fast. To overwhelm the gang with the suddenness of the exposure. To have them safely behind the bars before they could plan a counter attack.

But little did he realize the speed, facility and deadliness of his unseen enemies. For even while he consumed his lonely meal, the master minds of the Murder Club were sitting in conference fully aware of their impending peril, and making dark, sinister plans to cope with it.

JIMMY finished his meal and retired to his own rooms to read until nine o'clock. At about eight thirty, he heard his father return and go to his study. He idly turned the pages of his book for a few minutes longer, and then went to keep his appointment with his father.

He stopped in the hall that approached the elder Gilmore's study. He heard his father's voice coming rather loudly through the oaken panels of the door. Thinking perhaps, that his father had a visitor he began to retrace his steps, when the words from the study suddenly arrested his retreat.

"No," he heard his father say angrily. "I don't care what you threaten. I don't care what you say. The die is cast and tomorrow the deed will be done. I——"

The sentence was shattered by the sound of a single staccato report. Gilmore's words envolved into a low agonized moan. There was a soft thud.

Jimmy galvanized to action. In three strides he was at the door. He tugged violently at the knob. The portal did not give. Jimmy knew better than to waste time in words. He retreated a short way up the hall and charged. His shoulder hit the door with all the force of his two hundred pounds. The wood creaked but did not give.

Twice more he threw himself frantically up against the barrier which held him from his father's rescue, and the third time the heavy door splintered slightly then flew open. Jimmy's eyes swept the room in a swift glance. His father sat slumped over on his desk. His right hand still grasped the telephone and the mouthpiece slowly dripped blood. The receiver dangled down at the end of its wire. There was no other person in the room.

Jimmy raced to his father's side and gently raised his head. But it was evident without examination that Gilmore Senior was dead. The Murder Club had struck, swiftly and cunningly, at the man who had threatened it with ruin.

LEAVING his father for a minute Jimmy made a hasty examination of the room. At the far end the French windows were open. On the threshold was the empty case of a cartridge. Outside the windows was a small ledge some ten feet above the garden. It was not a difficult climb for an athletic man.

For a moment Jimmy was tempt-

ed to leap to the ground and search the garden for the murderer but a moment's reflection showed him the futility of this. Those precious moments he had lost breaking down the door had saved the killer. Slowly he returned to the room and essayed to reconstruct the crime.

He deduced that his father had been talking into the telephone rather than to the man who had murdered him. The phone itself indicated that. Probably, the Murder Club had called and threatened him with death, while their killer had been planted by the window, with instructions to shoot, if Gilmore had refused their instructions on the phone. Yet how had the Club known of the impending exposure?

Then, of a sudden, Jimmy's brain refused to function further. In the excitement of the moment his emotions had been completely submerged. He had been active only with his brain which had at once sprung into action to try to find his father's murderer. He had hardly realized that he had lost his father.

BUT now it came to him overwhelmingly, that the man who had been his best friend all his life was gone, the victim of a ruthless evil machine. His father and pal had died as he had lived—fighting for the right against the forces of wickedness and hypocrisy. With his eyes moist with tears, Jimmy Gilmore stood by the body, and cursed his father's murderer, his sire, his grandsire, back to Adam, himself.

James Quincy Gilmore slept little that night. He laid still in his bed with his terrible thoughts as companions; and he swore by all the things he considered sacred that he would avenge his father's murder.

The police had been called in, but Jimmy knew that little effort would be made to apprehend the killer

when the Murder Club made it known that vigilance was not wanted by the police department.

No, he decided, it was up to him, Jimmy, to be the instrument that would destroy those that had destroyed the man who had been so close to him. He had never before known what a powerful force hatred was. Hate now consumed him. The lust to kill burned in his soul, and on that night, six hours after his father had been killed, Jimmy Gilmore swore by the God that he had been taught to worship, that he would kill every member of the Murder Club—kill them with his own hands, deal death as even they had never dealt it.

He would be death itself mowing them down with wide sweeps of his scythe. And it was then that he gave himself the name that was soon to throw Newkirk into turmoil, and became the most notorious cognomen of the police blotters of the world—*Mr. Death*. Jimmy Gilmore, *alias Mr. Death*.

Finally, he fell into troubled slumber.

But the following day when he made his appearance in his usual haunts, he gave no sign of the hatred which was seething within him. In fact, he gave no indication that he felt the smallest sorrow for his father's death. He was gay and debonair, smiling and apparently unconscious of the fact that a tragedy had occurred in his home the night before. For Jimmy Gilmore had set himself a part to play, and he was playing it to the hilt.

BUT he was not idle. By day he was the care-free clubman that he had been before. He moved in the most exclusive sets in town. He was always at the most fashionable tea dances. He was invariably found in the stiffest bridge game at

the club. And if Sally Fortune had once considered that he was a helpless playboy, he certainly was confirming that impression now.

But at night, when even his most enduring companions had retired, Jimmy was not idle. When he returned to his home after making the social rounds, he seemed a different man. His careless smile of the day was wiped off his face, and the gay attitude of a few hours before evolved to a bitter grimness as he burned the midnight oil over the tasks to which he had assigned himself.

Of course, he had never seen the papers with which his father had intended to destroy the Murder Club. He assumed that they had been taken by the killer on the night of the murder, but, he knew that somewhere there must be a clew—the same clew that had originally put his father on the trail of the club of scoundrels.

Meticulously he went over every scrap of evidence which had some bearing on his father's life. Every memorandum, every appointment book, every name he found in his father's papers bore his purposeful scrutiny. For somewhere along the line must be the clue, the clue that would send Jimmy Gilmore into the murderous action for which he longed.

FOR a month, he pored over the papers until dawn in his father's study, and while what he found there did not give him any conclusive evidence, it planted some suspicions in his mind. But he could not do what he had planned until he was absolutely certain that he had the right men. To know that definitely he must catch some member of the Murder Club red-handed. And so after three days intensive thought he concocted a scheme.

He had learned during his research of the past month, that one of the Murder Club's more lucrative lines of endeavor was blackmail. Now blackmail is a good easy racket when handled by skillful hands. It involves no bloodshed. It can be handled by the principals interested, which point renders it unnecessary to use mercenaries. It is swift, painless, and if the victim be selected with care, and the oppressor acquainted with the fundamentals of psychology, blackmail is the king of felonies.

Jimmy Gilmore resolved to get himself blackmailed.

It should not be difficult. First, it was evident that he, as the son of their last victim, would be under the Club's surveillance. And second, the circles he moved in were by no means averse to a little scandalous gossip.

The very next day he put his plan into execution. He let it drop casually at the Cavanaugh Club, that he was worried and upon being pressed for the reason, he reluctantly admitted that he had written some incriminating letters to a girl. He made this statement to three people and by lunch time, he was delighted to find that it was the principal talk of the club.

Clyde Bates approached him in the smoking-room. It was the first time he had seen his father's old friend since the day of Gilmore, Senior's, funeral.

"What's this I hear, son," began Bates, "about you getting in a mix up with a girl."

For a moment, Jimmy was tempted to tell this old friend of the family's of his deception and of the reason for it. But he recalled his oath. No one must know. Not even Sally. He was playing a part, and if he should ever step out of char-

acter the curtain might descend disastrously on the entire play.

"It's true enough," he lied with a rueful smile. "I guess I've let myself in for something that'll cost me plenty. It's going to stand me over a hundred thousand before I'm through."

BATES whistled. "A hundred thousand?" he echoed. "Is it that serious?"

Jimmy nodded. "It's pretty serious," he said.

Bates commiserated with him for a minute or so, and then walked toward the billiard-room. By dinner time the whole club was buzzing with talk of the smart girl who had got Jimmy nailed to the merry tune of a hundred grand.

After dinner, Jimmy called upon Sally Fortune.

"Hello," she greeted him. "What have you been doing? You haven't gone to work, have you?"

"Maybe I have," said Jimmy grimly. "Anyway, I want you to do me a favor."

Something unusually serious in his demeanor arrested her attention. She looked at him closely.

"Sure, Jimmy," she said, "anything you say. What's on your mind?"

"I'm working, Sally," he told her. "Maybe it's not exactly the kind of work you meant, but nevertheless it's a tough job. I'm trying to find the man that killed dad."

She nodded her head gravely. "Yes, Jimmy," she said quietly. "And if there's anything I can do to help you, I'll be only too glad to do it."

"Thanks," he said fervently. "I knew I could depend on you."

FOR the second time that day he was tempted to confess the rôle to which he had sworn himself, and

for the second time he thought of the oath he had sworn to himself and his God. Yet, it was necessary to the success of his plan that he confide something of what he was doing to Sally.

He told her briefly of his plan to apprehend his father's killer. He told her of his plan to permit the Murder Club to blackmail him in order to establish their identity. He told her a great many other things, some of them false, some of them true.

But one thing he did not tell her, and that was that the laughing care-free Jimmy Gilmore that she had once known was now a sworn killer, a Nemesis of crime—*Alias Mr. Death*.

"So, you see," he concluded his talk. "I'm going to write a number of sappy letters to you. In them I'll promise to marry you, and refer to our intimate relations in the past. Then I'll let it be known that you're the girl who has the letters. When that gets buzzed around, you'll undoubtedly hear from the Murder Club."

She nodded her head. "I see," she said. "But listen, Jimmy, when and if you find the man or men responsible for your father's death, what do you intend doing? Handing them over to the police or taking the law in your own hands?"

For a moment Jimmy hesitated. It is not such a simple matter to look the girl you love squarely in the eye and lie to her brazenly. But of what use to explain that the police would pay scant attention to the Murder Club's killer? Of what use to explain these things to a woman, even though she was the only woman in the world? No, this was man's work, and Jimmy Gilmore forced himself to another lie.

"Don't worry about that," he reassured her. "I won't do anything

I'm sorry for. The only thing is this. If the plan goes awry somewhere along the line, and people really take it seriously when it gets out, it won't do your reputation any good if the letters are really read by someone. I hate to let you in for that."

She laughed. "Don't worry about my reputation, Jimmy boy," she said. "It's a pretty good old reputation so far, but if it gets sullied, I'll know it's in a good cause, and I'll know I've lost it in a good cause."

JIMMY stood up, walked across the room and put his arm about her slim shoulders.

"You're a hell of a good egg," he said affectionately. "Even if we don't see eye to eye on certain things."

"Well," she said steadily as she held his eyes with her gaze. "We see eye to eye on this, Jimmy. And I'm right with you until you put all those killers behind the bars."

Jimmy patted her lightly on the arm, bade her good-night and hied himself homeward to create some red-hot love letters.

The next day he repeated his gossiping act at the Cavanaugh Club and before sundown it was well known to Newkirk City's pleasantly scandalized society that Sally Fortune was a girl who was about to take Jimmy Gilmore for a hundred thousand on a breach of promise suit. And before a second sundown Sally Fortune had a visitor.

She had retired a little after midnight. She relaxed thankfully on the restful linen of her bed and applied herself to a romantic novel. The only light in her room was a small floor lamp at the side of her bed. The light it shed was powerful but concentrated, and while the pages of her book held a radiant brilliance

the far corners of the room were shrouded in mysterious shadows.

SUDDENLY she raised her eyes from the book and stared across the room. A faint padding sound had come to her ears. It was not repeated, and not being a nervous girl she returned to the impossible but glamorous hero of the novel. Then it came again. This time she sat bolt upright and gazed steadily in the direction of the sound. A dim shadow in the corner near the door of her bedroom seemed to move.

Her eyes narrowed and her heart picked up a beat. Still she wasn't sure. Then came certainty and with it, fear. The shadow evolved into the figure of a man and a black form stepped within the circle of light shed by the lamp. Sally looked up into the sinister figure of a man with an automatic in his right hand.

On his face was a mask, and she noted the steady hand that held the automatic gleamed brilliantly as the light was reflected from a winking diamond set in the centre of a platinum ring. Sally fought the constriction that clutched her vocal cords, and with an effort spoke.

"Who are you? What does this mean? How dare you——"

The masked figure raised his left hand in deprecation.

"Madame," he said suavely. "Not so fast. Then again, some of your questions I can not answer. Some of them I can. Suppose you let me do the explaining."

Sally simulated a hauteur that she was far from feeling. "You have a lot of explaining to do," she said quietly.

The man bowed, but Sally noticed that the hand that held the pistol kept it trained dead upon her heart.

"Who I am, doesn't matter," began the masked intruder. "The point is I know who you are that's

why I'm here. You have a number of letters written by young Gilmore. You plan on suing him for breach of promise, and if possible, settling out of court. A sort of legal blackmail, for you know full well that he'll never let those letters be read in a court of record. He'll settle with you. But if you'll hand those letters over to me I'll guarantee that you get twice as much as you will in your own way."

For a moment a hot retort rose to Sally's lips, then she remembered the part she must play.

"Why do you say that?" she said calmly. "Who are you that you can handle my affairs better than I can handle them myself?"

THE man laughed softly. "Those whom I represent are specialists in the art of blackmail. Where you would sell the letters to Gilmore outright, our methods are more subtle. We'll promise him a great deal and give him nothing. We'll collect tribute from him as long as he lives. Will you give me the letters?"

"No," said Sally Fortune, "and I think you have a lot of nerve. Why can't you call in the day time without all this mystery business."

Again the man laughed. "The Murder Club is a mysterious business," he answered.

"The Murder Club?"

"Exactly."

Sally seemed to consider this. "Then," she said, "perhaps there's something in what you say. How much money can you promise me?"

"Twenty thousand down and five hundred a week for life."

"What'll you get out of it?"

"Plenty. We'll gamble on that if our terms suit you."

SALLY nodded. "They suit me well enough. When do you start your little game?"

"When can you produce the letters?"

"They're well hidden. But I can give them to you tomorrow at this same time."

"Good," said the man. "Let it go at that. I'll see Gilmore tonight and tell him our terms."

"Tonight?"

"Why not? The best business is done at this hour. I shall say *au revoir* then—until tomorrow night."

He backed silently toward the door, the automatic still held unwaveringly in his hand. At the door of the living room he bowed deeply, turned on his heel and was gone. Sally waited until she heard his footsteps vanish down the hall, then reached for the telephone.

Jimmy Gilmore's pulse raced at a hundred and twenty as Sally told him over the telephone about her mysterious visitor. From her description of the man he could not place him among those that he had come to suspect were members of the Murder Club, but the sparkling diamond ring on his finger seemed to be a potential clue that might eventually lead to the man's identity.

After he had hung up, he opened the desk drawer in what had been his father's study and drew forth a heavy thirty-eight. Placing it on the desk before him he sat back and awaited the nocturnal visitor.

After an hour or so, he became vaguely impatient, then of a sudden the telephone rang. Jimmy picked up the receiver.

"Ah, Mr. Gilmore?" A suave voice trickled over the wire into his ear. "We have in our possession some letters signed by you and written to a Miss Sally Fortune."

"Well," said Jimmy savagely. "What about it?"

"Plenty," replied the voice. "Tomorrow at three p. m. you will be

standing on the corner of Race and Fourth Streets. You will watch the curb closely for a taxicab. Some time before four o'clock a cab will approach you. The driver will take a green silk handkerchief from his pocket. The moment you see the handkerchief you will throw a package containing one hundred thousand dollars in small bills through the rear window of the taxi."

"Yeah," said Jimmy Gilmore. "And if I don't?"

IF YOU don't," continued the voice. "The letters will be published in every paper in the country. And if you communicate with the police in anyway, you will die. The Murder Club has delivered its instructions."

The suave voice stopped and there was a click at the other end of the wire.

Jimmy replaced the receiver on the hook, sat back, lit a cigarette and grinned happily for the first time in weeks. His plan was working better than he had expected. Thanks to the power of Dame Rumor, it had evidently reached the ears of the Murder Club that the letters were pretty hot stuff. They seemed perfectly assured that Jimmy would go to any lengths to avoid having them published.

Jimmy sighed and proceeded to concoct a scheme for the morrow. He sat there at his father's desk for a long time. Dawn was streaking the sky and a score of crushed cigarette butts littered the floor, when he finally rose and went to his bedroom.

HOWEVER he did not sleep long. He was abroad early. The first thing he did was to make a fair sized compact package containing strips of paper to the size of a Federal Reserve Note. After that

he sent for Turpin, his head chauffeur, and instructed him to park on the corner of Race and Fourth Streets at three o'clock, to keep the motor running, and to obey orders as quickly and unquestioningly as possible. Then he went back to bed.

At three o'clock, Jimmy Gilmore stood on the curb at the blackmailers rendezvous, and while he realized that he was their enemy to the death, he was forced to grin in admiration of their methods. He knew full well that they did not have the letters in their possession. And further he knew that they had not the slightest intention of returning them to him when they did get them. In fact, he recalled, that on the phone last night, he had been promised absolutely nothing. Except a speedy demise, should he attempt to protect himself.

At three o'clock, Jimmy Gilmore kept his appointment with the Murder Club. As the distant tower of the cathedral tolled forth the hour, he was standing close to the curb at the place which the mysterious telephone voice had designated. Some few rods up the street, Turpin sat behind the wheel of his speedy roadster. The motor turned over, and the chauffeur was set and ready to leap into action at Jimmy's first signal.

Jimmy stood still, keenly alert. His hands were in his pockets and one of them nestled caressingly against the cold steel of his revolver. His eyes wandered searchingly over every taxicab that came within hailing distance. Then, of a sudden, he saw it.

A bright green cab pulled over toward the curb. The driver glanced quickly at Jimmy, then turned his head slightly as though listening to someone within the cab. He slowed the cab down almost to a halt. When directly in front of Jimmy, he sud-

denly whipped his hand to his hip pocket and produced a flamboyant green silk handkerchief, which he passed ostentatiously under his nose.

JIMMY'S left hand flew from his pocket and with a deft gesture he threw the package of neatly cut brown paper into the open window behind the driver. No sooner had the package landed when he heard a staccato command from the interior of the cab. The driver swiftly stepped on the accelerator and the cab shot ahead into the maze of traffic which dotted the street. Jimmy turned and ran like a madman toward his roadster.

Turpin held the door open for him as he came up. Panting he sprang into the seat beside the chauffeur.

"Quick," he gasped. "Follow that cab. For God's sake don't lose it."

He was jerked forward suddenly as the trim car shot forward like a rocket, under Turpin's skillful handling. Through the city the cars madly careened, pursed and pursuer. Jimmy crouched down behind the windshield in order that, in the event of the occupant of the taxi looking back, he would escape recognition.

Soon they were out of the business section, and whizzing through the drab streets that lay near the waterfront. Children dotted the streets, but still neither car slowed down. Suddenly, Jimmy was jerked forward as Turpin jammed on his brakes quickly. Jimmy sat up and stared ahead. The green taxi cab had come to a halt before what appeared to be an old deserted warehouse.

Jimmy sprang from the car. "Keep the motor running," he ordered. "No matter how long I'm gone. Wait for hours if necessary, and be ready for a fast getaway at any minute."

TURPIN nodded and Jimmy walked cautiously down the street toward the taxi. He flattened himself against the brick wall of a tenement as he saw two men emerge from the cab. One he recognized as the driver. The other, obviously had been the man who had received the package he had tossed in the window.

The pair of them walked up the short flight of steps that led to the warehouse and disappeared inside. Cautiously, Jimmy resumed his walk, his keen eyes taking stock of the situation and his alert brain hammering out a plan to gain entrance to the building.

On the side of the warehouse at the street level he saw a small iron-grilled gate. It was open. With a careful glance about him he made his way toward it, and a moment later disappeared up the small alley which it led to. Once within, he scurried swiftly along ere the enemy should spy him. Coming to the rear of the building, his heart gave a jump, when he saw a basement window half way open. He hesitated just long enough to examine his thirty-eight to make sure that it was in working order, then he took the plunge.

Through the window he went into a dark musty smelling room. He stopped dead for a moment and listened intently. Hearing nothing he struck a match. He found himself in a huge empty room. Water rats scurried across his path, alarmed by the first light they had seen in months. Slowly Jimmy walked around the room to orient himself.

At the far end he came across a splintered ancient staircase leading to the upper floors. The bottom step creaked frightfully as it received his weight. Slowly he ascended. He passed two floors which showed no signs of life before he heard the dim murmur of human voices. He

stopped dead in his tracks on the second floor landing and listened.

The voices, he decided, must come from the floor above. He crept half way up the last flight of stairs. A gleam of light shone upon the third floor landing. Like a phantom he ascended the remainder of the steps.

On the third floor he saw that the light came through a transom over the door at the stair head. He stopped outside the door. Now the voices came plainly to his ear. He stopped and applied his eye to the keyhole and what he saw caused his heart to beat with triumphant exultation.

For Jimmy Gilmore, alias Mr. Death, had tracked the Murder Club to its lair!

SEATED behind the table, behind the door, were nine men. Each of them wore a long hood which fell down upon their shoulders. Through the holes cut in the top parts of the voluminous masks, nine pairs of eyes glittered. At the head of the table sat a single figure, flanked on each side by four of his comrades in crime. This man, apparently the leader, was speaking.

"You've done well, Number Six," he said. "I expect that we can make a collection each week from young Gilmore. When do you get the letters?"

The man addressed as Number Six rose to answer and as he did so, Jimmy saw something glitter iridescently on the ring finger of his left hand. He recognized the ring from Sally's telephonic description of the night before. This, then, was the mysterious visitor she had had last night. And in all probability, the member of the Club that devoted himself exclusively to black-mail.

"I have done fairly well," the man was saying modestly. "There

is a hundred thousand dollars in the package. What disposition shall we make of it?"

JIMMY chuckled. "The hell there is," he muttered under his breath.

The leader at the end of the table spoke again.

"As usual," he said. "We'll split it up now. What about the girl's cut?"

"We don't have to give her anything," said Number Six. "I can promise her the earth until I get the letters. After that what can she do?"

The man at the end of the table nodded bravely. "Come, he said. "Divide the contents of that package, Number Six."

Number Six, with a gesture that made his magnificent diamond sparkle picked up the package which Jimmy had thrown into the taxi-cab a half hour before. While he was doing this the leader spoke again.

"Our next meeting will be in house six, zone seven. Following our usual practice of not meeting in any one place more than twice a year, I hereby declare this building unfit for our use for a six months period."

At these words Jimmy realized the cunning of the Murder Club. Just when he thought he had discovered their headquarters, he came to learn that he had only found them this one time. For a moment he contemplated charging into the room, confronting them with their crimes and blowing them all to hell. But a moment's thought convinced him that this would merely be suicide. Undoubtedly they were all armed, and undoubtedly they would shoot to kill. After all, they'd had enough practice, he reflected bitterly.

AT THIS moment, Number Six tore the string from the package and spread the contents upon the table. Jimmy chuckled for he knew that under the masks, consternation must have writ itself across those nine faces.

Number Six was the first to speak. A savage, staccato oath came from his lips. The leader was the first to recover.

"We have been double-crossed," he said seriously. "This must be attended to at once. Now we shall double-cross. Get those letters, tonight, Number Six. Later, we'll get in communication with Gilmore. We'll bleed him and then we'll publish the letters anyway. But get those letters!"

There seemed to be some secret cue between them for suddenly it was apparent to everyone except Jimmy that the meeting had been adjourned.

The nine members of the Murder Club suddenly rose to their feet and in a body marched toward the door that shielded Jimmy. Swiftly he turned and fled down the stairs. He did not dare take his time with the result that each step creaked and groaned protestingly under his weight.

Behind him the door opened and he heard a shout of alarm as the Murder Club realized that there had been a spy in their midst. The staircase was suddenly alive with racing feet. A sharp report sounded behind him, and Jimmy heard the angry whine of a steel slug sing over his head. He plunged downward into the darkness of the first floor. A voice cried from somewhere behind him: "Mulrooney, stop that man!"

He saw a dim figure in the darkness as a huge man lumbered along towards him from the direction of the front door. Evidently this was the door-man, posted at the entrance

to the building to prevent anyone, save members of the club, from entering. Not that Jimmy considered this point then. He only knew one thing, and that was that the man called Mulrooney was between him and the means of escape from the ruthless killers who were pouring down the stairs on his trail.

WITHOUT slackening his speed, he whipped the thirty-eight from his pocket. Mulrooney was almost upon him now. He pressed the trigger and even as he did so he heard the sharp report of the other's gun. Something bit lightly into his shoulder with such force that he staggered backwards for a second. But when he recovered his balance Mulrooney was no longer there.

He stared down into the darkness and as he advanced once more, his feet struck something soft and yielding. A man groaned. Evidently his thirty-eight had done for Mulrooney. But behind him now the racing footsteps and the alarmed voices sounded louder than before.

He sprang forward into the ebony dimness of the warehouse and in a moment found himself at the huge iron front door. Luck was with him for he found the heavy lock in a moment and a second later he swung the heavy portal open. Then slamming it shut behind him he raced up the street to Turpin.

He felt safe now. The Murder Club would hardly venture out on the street in those weird masks. He was safe, provided they had not recognized him. If they knew who he was, they would undoubtedly kill him before he had a chance to talk, but he was pretty certain that nothing had happened which would reveal his identity.

He sprang into the seat beside Turpin and gave him Sally For-

tune's address. Ten minutes later, still panting from his exertions, Jimmy Gilmore was admitted into Sally's living room.

She looked at the thin stream of blood that flowed from his shoulder and at the dust that grimed his face, then gave a little gasp of alarm.

"Oh, Jimmy, what *have* you been doing?"

"Lots," he said laconically, as he suffered her to bind up the flesh wound on his shoulder. When she had finished he said: "Where are those fool letters?"

"I have them here. Why?"

"You better give them to me. I was a fool to write them. We really didn't need any. We only had to say that the letters existed. We didn't really have to write them. I'm afraid that somehow the Club will get hold of them, and then your reputation's ruined. Because now they intend to publish them anyway. Better give them to me, and tell your visitor tonight that you've lost them or anything. I never should have got you mixed up in it at all."

SHE took a small package from the desk drawer. "But," she said. "You don't mean that you're going to cancel all your plans now. Do you?"

He shrugged his shoulders glumly. "Don't know," he said. "I'm disappointed. I slipped up somewhere. Now that my plan is in operation, it doesn't look so good. They'll be after my life for handing them the phoney money, and they'll be after you for the letters."

He picked the package of letters up. "Anyway, I'll destroy these."

"Oh, no, you won't," said a smooth silky voice.

The pair of them looked up into the steady barrel of an automatic. A black silk gloved hand stretched

out, and a voice emanated from behind a hooded mask.

"I'll take those letters," said the voice.

JIMMY GILMORE felt a horrible sense of futility envelop him, a futility mingled with a terrible hatred of the figure before him and the things that that figure stood for. For a fleeting second he contemplated fight, but he dared not risk harm to Sally.

Without a word, he handed over the package. The man stretched out his left hand to take them and as he did so Jimmy noticed a small bulge on his ring finger, beneath the black of the gloves which he affected. The diamond ring, thought Jimmy, though he reflected bitterly, little good it did him to know that.

"I'm beginning to see things in a clearer light," said the masked figure. "I'm beginning to suspect collusion. I'm beginning to think that you two children have actually tried to outwit the Murder Club—a commendable effort, truly, but fraught with peril and danger."

"Do you have to make speeches," demanded Jimmy testily. "You got what you came for. Now get out."

"I was just wondering," said the calm unruffled voice, "if I should kill you. What you have done calls for that penalty, but I hesitate to do that without first obtaining the opinion of my colleagues. I think I shall not do it. I shall await tomorrow's meeting and discuss it then. The Murder Club has so much power that it does not fear to give you warning. It does not fear what you may do between now and tomorrow. It does not——"

But the speaker was rather too carried away by the gifts of his own tongue. So intent was he on his own sentences that he permitted the

barrel of his automatic to drop some six inches from its target.

It was a moment that Jimmy had waited eagerly for. In the middle of the speaker's sentence, he suddenly launched himself across the room in a lightening-like flying tackle. His arms encircled the intruder's knees, and they both fell in a heap upon the floor.

Jimmy heard Sally's scream of alarm, then felt a steel hand clasp upon his throat. He swung his right fist wildly and felt a momentary satisfaction as it crashed up against the other's jaw. In the moment of impact the grip on his throat loosened, and with a desperate jerk he managed to free himself.

DURING the fracas, Sally stood undecided on the other side of the room. Under the circumstances she hesitated to call the police. Furthermore, she had absolute faith in Jimmy's ability to take care of himself in a situation like this. Then, she crossed to the fireplace, resolutely picked up a poker and prepared to enter the struggle herself, should it appear to go against Jimmy.

In the meantime the two men were locked in a death struggle. Jimmy had the edge on power slightly, but the other proved a wily and dexterous opponent. Jimmy had no opportunity to reach for his own weapon, and the automatic which had fallen on the floor at the moment of Jimmy's tackle remained well out of reach. Then came the break.

Jimmy shifted his body swiftly as he suddenly saw an opportunity for an advantageous hold. For a fraction of a second his body was underneath that of his adversary. His hands broke the other's hold and he was just about to apply a

strangle grip of his own when Sally interfered.

Seeing Jimmy underneath she assumed that all was lost, that it was time to rush to the rescue. Wielding the poker above her head, she ran forward and brought it down with all her strength on the head of the intruder. But when the iron weapon landed, the masked man's head was not there. Jimmy, fixing his hold, had suddenly come up upon the other's back. His rising head met the falling poker, and without a sound he fell an inert, helpless hulk on the back of his foe.

SALLY, realizing what she had done, screamed and backed away in horror. The hooded man rose painfully and brushed the dust from his sombre garments. He bowed gracefully.

"I have you to thank," he said. "Good-bye."

Then without a word he was gone.

Jimmy Gilmore regained consciousness to find himself looking into Sally's tear-stained face. "Oh," she murmured. "I'm so sorry. But I thought he had you, Jimmy. I'm so sorry."

"Don't worry," he said. "You couldn't help it. But we've got to work fast now. He's got those letters and when the Murder Club meets next they'll know that we tried a frameup on them. If they find that out we're both in grave danger."

"Oh," she said miserably. "What can we do? What can we do?"

"There's a fighting chance left," he said. "I can see one single hope. If it works, okay, if it doesn't, we lose. You stay here. Stick by the phone and wait for my call. Because if I don't manage to find that masked man who just took those letters before the next meeting of the Murder

Club, you're life's not safe in Newkirk City. Now don't stir from this house until you hear from me."

TENDERLY he bade her good-bye and staggered out into the street. The faithful Turpin was still waiting for him in the car, and he cursed wildly when Jimmy told him of the struggle inside.

Once again the fast trim roadster set forth on the mission of outwitting the Murder Club. This time toward the business section of the town. Termant's was the principal jeweler of Newkirk City and it was there that Jimmy hoped against hope that the single clew he had to the identity of the blackmailer would develop into something definite.

Turpin parked before a neat granite building, and an elegantly arrayed doorman stared at Jimmy's dishevelled appearance as he entered the building. Without much difficulty, Jimmy found himself admitted to the presence of Mr. Noble, the vice-president who had been a college chum of his father's.

THE older man looked at him with frowning disapproval. But Jimmy, noticing the look, explained before the other had a chance to reprove him.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Noble," he said, "to appear in public like this. But I'm engaged on a mission of life or death. I want to ask you a question. I want you to do me a great favor. And I must ask you to refrain from asking me any questions."

Mr. Noble regarded him suspiciously. "It's a peculiar request, Jimmy. But if you can assure me that were your father living he would give his approval to what you are doing, I'll say yes."

"He would," cried Jimmy sincerely. "He would give his approval more wholeheartedly than to anything else I have ever done."

"Very well," Mr. Noble nodded. "What is it?"

"I don't know much about the jewelry business," began Jimmy. "But it seems to me that you must keep a record in which you note any setting jobs you have. That is, if you receive an order to set a certain stone, you must have some record of the type of job it is, what sort of a stone you set, and what the setting consisted of?"

The vice-president of Termant's regarded him with a puzzled, but not unkind stare. "Well, we have," he admitted, "though for the life of me, I can't figure what you want to know that for."

"I want to see that record," said Jimmy. "Just for five minutes. That's all."

"Well," said Noble, "of course, it's highly irregular. But personally, I fail to see how that can bring about any harm."

He pressed a button on his desk and instructed his secretary to grant Jimmy's request. Jimmy thanked him effusively as he left the room and a few moments later found himself in a small office poring over a large battered ledger.

HE muttered an internal prayer as his eyes ran down the pages of the book seeking for a description of that diamond and platinum ring which had furnished the only possible clue to the identity of the man who had stolen his letters from Sally. For over an hour he read and read. His head ached from the blow it had received a few hours ago and his eyes ached with the strain of reading the minute handwriting in the book.

Then suddenly he sat bolt upright, and a light of triumph glittered in his eyes. Excitedly he seized the book and held it to the light. Carefully he read a descrip-

tion of a diamond set in platinum. In the next volume he saw the price of the job. Then far over on the other side of the page was the name and address of the person for whom the work had been done.

Surprise and grim rage assailed him as he digested this information. Swiftly he slammed the ledger shut and went out into the street.

"You can go home," he told Turpin curtly. "I'll walk."

The chauffeur nodded and Jimmy stood there for a moment watching the car disappear in traffic. Then with bitter resolution written indelibly on his face he started off in the direction of the most exclusive residential district of Newkirk City.

George Hobert, the leading banker of the town, sat in his study smiling contentedly to himself. Before him on his desk were a number of letters. From time to time he would read one, chuckle, then reach for another. He seemed to be thoroughly enjoying himself. As he turned the papers over a splendid diamond glistened on the ring finger of his left hand.

"Don't move, Mr. Hobert," said a voice from the window. "I should hate to shoot you in the back."

A moment later, he found himself gazing into the flaming eyes of Jimmy Gilmore, and beneath the threat of those burning eyes was the more practical threat of a thirty-eight. Hobert forced a laugh and essayed to temporize.

"Hello, Jimmy," he said. "What is this? A joke?"

"A hell of a joke," said Jimmy Gilmore bitterly. "A hell of a joke. Is blackmail a joke? Is theft a joke? Is murder a joke? Was it a joke to kill my father?"

"I—I——" spluttered Hobert.

"You—you——" mocked Jimmy. "How does it feel to face death, Hobert? You're the first, but there are eight others of you who will all feel the same way about it before I'm through with you. You're going to be the first man I've ever killed. I'll probably get used to it, though, and I won't lose my temper with the rest of them as I've lost it now."

"Wait, Jimmy," Hobert pleaded. "What's come over you? What's——"

"I'm not the Jimmy Gilmore you used to know any more," said Jimmy. "I'm a killer, sworn to drive the Murder Club to hell. I'm not Jimmy Gilmore. Look. Here's my card."

He threw an engraved pasteboard on the desk before the abject banker. In the corner was a death's head and written boldly in the center of the white paper were the sinister words, *Alias Mr. Death*.

"You're the only man who knows about that," said Jimmy. "But it doesn't matter now. Are you ready? Here it comes."

HOBERT'S face turned green with terror as the thirty-eight jerked suddenly in Jimmy's hand. A steel slug sped with invisible speed across the four feet that separated them. A crimson stain appeared over Hobert's heart. In silence he fell forward across the desk.

Jimmy scooped up the letters and thrust them into his pocket. "That's one," he said grimly.

And, running to the window, he vaulted over the sill into the garden. Behind him lay the body of George Hobert, the first of the victims that the murderous arm of Mr. Death had struck down.

Watch For the Next Story in This Thrilling Series

FAMOUS

ONE DAY IN 1922 WHILE HUNTING RABBITS NEAR LOS ANGELES, M.J. SWOLEY CAME UPON THE BODY OF A MAN LYING NEAR



A ROAD—HE IMMEDIATELY CALLED THE POLICE—BECAUSE OF DISINTEGRATION THE FACE AND FEATURES OF THE MAN WERE UNRECOGNIZABLE—THE CLOTHING HE WORE BORE NO



IDENTIFICATION TAGS OR LABELS—A GOLD CUFF LINK WITH THE INITIALS N.T.D. WAS THE ONLY ITEM OF IDENTIFICATION—THERE WAS NO GUN BESIDE HIM—NO EVIDENCE OF SELF DESTRUCTION—THE CORONER FOUND TWO .38 BULLETS IN THE HEAD—THE CASE WAS A MYSTERY FOR ABOUT A WEEK AND THEN THE HOLLYWOOD POLICE CAME FORWARD WITH A PLAUSIBLE SOLUTION.....

OFFICER CLARK OF THAT DIVISION HAD ENGAGED TWO BANDITS IN A GUN BATTLE A WEEK BEFORE AND FELT CERTAIN THAT HIS SHOTS HAD TAKEN EFFECT—SO A JURY ANNOUNCED A VERDICT



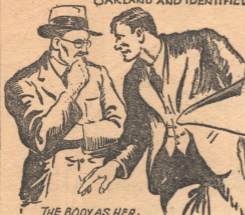
MRS. NICK DABELICH

"JOHN DOE, CAME TO HIS DEATH BY GUN-SHOT WOUNDS INFLICTED BY OFFICER CLARK OF THE L. A. POLICE FORCE."

INSPECTOR DWIGHT W. LONGUEVAN NOW BECAME INTERESTED IN THE CASE—ONE DAY HE VISITED THE HOLLYWOOD DIVISION AND HAPPENED ON OFFICER CLARK CLEANING HIS GUN—HE NOTICED THAT CLARK'S GUN WAS NOT A .38.

CRIMES

NEXT... MRS NICK DABELICH READ ABOUT THE CUFF LINK AND CAME DOWN FROM OAKLAND AND IDENTIFIED



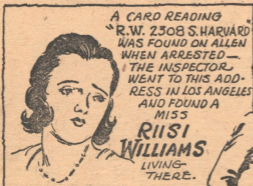
THE BODY AS HER HUSBAND—THE INSPECTOR FOUND OUT FROM MRS DABELICH THAT NICK ALWAYS WORE A VALUABLE DIAMOND RING AND THAT A MR ALLEN HAD LONG ADMIRERD IT. HE WENT TO OAKLAND AND QUESTIONED ALLEN WHO APPEARED TO GIVE A PERFECT ACCOUNT OF HIS WHEREABOUTS AT THE TIME OF THE MURDER—TO THE INSPECTOR IT WAS "TOO PERFECT", — HE DECIDED THAT ALLEN WAS THE GUILTY MAN AND HE SET OUT TO MAKE HIM CONFESS.



INSPECTOR OF DETECTIVES

DWIGHT W. LONGUEVAN

THE MAN WHO SOLVED THE "CUFF LINK" MURDER.



A CARD READING "R.W. 2308 S. HARVARD" WAS FOUND ON ALLEN WHEN ARRESTED—

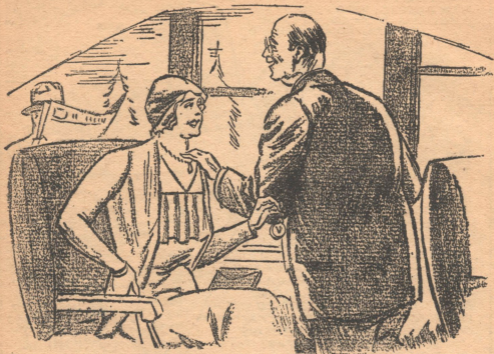
THE INSPECTOR WENT TO THIS ADDRESS IN LOS ANGELES AND FOUND A MISS

RIISI WILLIAMS LIVING THERE.



LONGUEVAN ACCUSED THE GIRL OF HAVING HELPED ALLEN TO KILL DABELICH—SHE, THINKING THAT ALLEN HAD TOLD ALL, BROKE DOWN AND CONFESSED THAT DABELICH HAD BEEN SENT TO HER BY ALLEN FOR A DATE. SHE HAD SUGGESTED THEY GO RIDING AND HAD STEERED HIM BY A LONELY SPOT WHERE ALLEN WAS PLANTED—HE HELD THEM UP—DABELICH HAD TRIED TO RUN AND WAS SHOT BY ALLEN—(CONFRONTED WITH THE GIRL'S STATEMENT ALLEN CONFESSED AND RECEIVED LIFE.)

The Game Goes On



Window Lillian, Super-Thief, Gets the Big Surprise of Her Life in this Unusual Short Story

By HAROLD DE POLO

Author of "Ollie Picks a Murderer," etc.

AS any detective will tell you, about the most pathetic fallacy in the game is the belief of the great general public that an enemy of the law can usually be spotted by bearing and appearance.

There was a perfect example of this assertion on the late afternoon train bound from New York to Hartford and points beyond. In the day coach, on the pleasantly sunny side, sat a woman who was known to the police of practically every fair sized city in the country, a woman

who bore the rather odd sobriquet of "Window Lillian."

The bets are a hundred to one—nay, a thousand to one—that not one human being in a hundred thousand would have taken her for a thief. Rather, one would have thought she was a distinctly successful and efficient business woman. She had that resolute chin and clear eye and "alive" face of the typical American woman who has made good in what was formerly considered a man's work.

She was outwardly garbed in a trim tailored blue suit that bordered on the severe, a plain yet jaunty cloche, and a pair of low-heeled, well-shaped ties. About her neck she wore a sapphire pendant, the only jewelry she showed. Incidentally, there was reason for this. It happened to be the gift of some one very dear to her—the husband and confederate who was to meet her when she reached Hartford!

Window Lillian presumably was absorbed in a popular weekly periodical—presumably, remember. Instead, she was watching every single move of every single male passenger in the coach. You could not have told this—and there is also another thing you could have told. Although her face was bland and serene, inwardly she was raging. Indeed it had been one of the worse afternoons, one of the worst trips, that she had ever experienced in her varied career.

NOT an acceptable victim had as yet come into sight, and the trip was nearly over. New Haven, in fact, was the next stop. Several men about to leave the train at various halts had seemed eligible, but in the end there had been some wrong little detail. She was an expert and cautious worker who never took a stupid chance. To add to her exasperation, she detested traveling in a day coach.

She preferred the Pullman, but that was hopeless when business was concerned. One could not ask a passenger, in such a case, to open a window; one must of necessity allow a porter to do the job. Oh, yes, she was telling herself, there were drawbacks to her task!

But Window Lillian, as the train sired out the fact that it was approaching New Haven, underwent a rise in spirits. The man opposite her exhibited signs of departure. He

fussed and fumbled and preened himself, and got down his two heavy bags from the rack above. As he turned and placed them on the seat Window Lillian spoke.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," she said, smiling that frank, honest, comradely smile that she possessed, "but would you mind raising this window? It's getting so frightfully stuffy in here, and these windows are always so stiff!"

The man, a prosperous, smooth-shaven and exceedingly jolly-looking person, immediately came to the rescue.

"Not a bit—not a bit, my dear lady," he replied with a jovial smile. "Pleasure, I assure you!"

Window Lillian smiled and murmured her thanks. The thanks she was murmuring in her inmost heart, however, were occasioned by the fact that his coat was left unbuttoned and his watch chain intimated that the time-piece on the end of it would be decidedly worth while one to possess.

The proceeding did not take long; it was over with marvelous quickness and simplicity. He leaned across her, stayed for an instant at the unruly window, and then pulled back.

"Bum windows—positively bum," he stated, with another of his likable grins.

"They really are, aren't they?" returned Lillian. "But you're so kind."

"Not a bit. Pleasure, I assure you!"

Then the train grinded to a stop, he secured his bags, and, with another friendly nod, was gone. And Window Lillian, as the engine once more got under way, covertly slipped an expensive gold watch into the neat purse in her lap!

AT Hartford she was met by her husband. According to their rigid rule, nothing that could even faintly be construed as suspicious

was uttered until they were safely in a taxi, off to their hotel.

"Well, girly," he whispered, "how's tricks, eh?"

"Oh, well," she replied with a humorous smile at him, "I guess I grabbed the car fare, Mac!"

"That so?" he muttered happily, knowing that she was prone to treat a good thing lightly.

They traveled along for a couple of blocks in silence, and then he showed his anxiety.

"Say, Lil, maybe a little more than car fare, what? Gee," he added glumly, "I've had one rotten time, I have. Everything on the blink!"

"Maybe, Mac," she chided quizzically. "Maybe I annexed enough even for return car fare—and the hotel bill!"

"Good stuff—good stuff," he complimented, looking quite satisfied.

Again, for several blocks, they went along in silence. Her husband was watching her—watching her with plain pride. Suddenly, however, he asked in surprise:

"Say, Lil, where's that sapphire pendant I gave you a short time

ago? Thought you always wore it?"

Window Lillian's poise left her. Her face seemed to tauten as well as whiten, and her two hands flew up to her throat. They groped there for a moment, and then they came down, doubled into fists, on to her knees. So she sat, staring into space with a grim twist to her lips, until her husband awakened her with the query:

"Well, Lil what's the dope?"

Window Lillian did not turn her head; only her lips moved. Her words came out slowly, dazedly:

"Well, I'll be—" She left the sentence unfinished, and began again. "It's one on us—it's one on me—I had that pendant just before we hit New Haven; I know that, for I felt it with my fingers! And there I go and pinch a watch—a watch worth maybe a hundred and a quarter or a hundred and a half—and lose a pendant that must have cost a cool half thousand! Mac, he must have been some good worker, take it from me! I never even dreamed of it! It's one on me, all right; it's one on me!"

DON'T FAIL TO READ THESE THRILLERS! **THE GALLOPING GHOST**

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IN NEXT MONTH'S THRILLING DETECTIVE

A Loaf of Bread

*The Fate of a Notorious Gang of Dope Smugglers
Depends on the Source of a Few Bread Crumbs
in this Story of Ingenious Detective Work*

By JOHN L. BENTON

Author of "Three of a Kind," "Soft Voices," etc.

COKEY WALSHE strolled nonchalantly along the busy city street, basking in his ignorance of the fact that he was being shadowed. Not that it would have bothered him much—had he known it. It was his total obliviousness of the fact which might prove dangerous.

His little shifty eyes wandered all over the street, resting for a moment on some feminine figure which looked good to Cokey, then casting a momentary sardonic glance at a blue uniformed keeper of the traffic corners. Cokey's contempt for cops was well known in the underworld.

But one cop that not even the supercilious Cokey held lightly was carefully tailing him as he made his way through the lunch hour throngs that packed the street.

Detective Sergeant O'Day paused for a moment to gaze into a shop window display. He found himself looking at a set of twin beds marked down to \$99.00. Now O'Day having married the only woman in the world a decade ago, was certainly not interested in marked down twin beds at this stage of his marital life. No. He had stopped because a short block up the street Cokey had stopped, too, and engaged himself in conversation with a nattily dressed

individual whose face was unfamiliar to O'Day.

After a short talk the stranger left Cokey and the latter continued his interrupted stroll. But this time with a difference. He walked faster. He took corners suddenly, and vanished inside the many-doored department stores that dotted the street.

O'Day swore softly as he noted the abrupt change in his quarry's behavior. Quite evidently, the neatly-dressed stranger of a minute ago had tipped Cokey off to the fact that he was being trailed.

O'Day dodged a woman of enormous proportions, who for a fraction of a second cut off his view of Cokey, and in that fraction of a second, Cokey, taking advantage of the breaks, had disappeared. O'Day swore again, rather more loudly this time, and doubled back on his trail toward Headquarters.

Less than a block away from his destination, O'Day noticed a huge shining black limousine pull up to the curb beside him. A swarthy head thrust itself through the open window.

"Say," said the owner of the head. "Which is the road to Wilmington?"

O'Day stepped from the curb and stood by the car as he gave his directions.

Suddenly he gave a half turn of his heel as he heard the rear door of the car open softly behind him. As he whirled around he saw two gleaming eyes staring murderously at him, and something black and solid descending at terrific speed upon his head.

HE was aware of an agonizing pain at the base of his skull. His knees buckled and he would have fallen had not a arm reached forth, encircled his waist, and dragged him roughly into the back of the car. A staccato explosion barked from her exhaust as the black limousine raced through the traffic guided by skillful hands.

O'Day groaned and opened his eyes. For a moment he lay still, then as his gaze traveled around the room in which he lay, he gave vent to a startled exclamation. He sat up slowly, fighting the terrible ache that pounded in his temples, and scrutinized his surroundings carefully.

He found himself in a large and luxuriously-furnished room. He was sitting on a softly-padded divan with its back up against a wall hung with expensive drapes and tapestries. For a moment he was aware of a vague impression that with all its luxury, there was something lacking in this chamber.

He stared vacantly ahead for a moment as his throbbing mind slowly oriented itself and began to function. Then, he nodded his head slowly as he solved the problem. The room in which he was held prisoner had no windows! Not even a skylight. The lighting was indirect, soft beams of electricity coming from cunningly contrived niches in the wall.

O'Day fished in his pocket for a cigarette, lit it, and called out at the top of his voice:

"All right, I'm out of it now. Whoever you are come out and do whatever you're going to do."

The calmness of his tones was not corroborated by the pounding of his steady heart. He knew full well that the dope peddlers, whom he had been assigned to watch, knew no mercy when a member of the law fell into their dirty hands.

O'Day heard a faint footfall behind him. He turned around slowly to behold a tall figure dressed entirely in black. The man's face was obscured by a purple mask which fell down to his shoulders. From two holes cut in the fabric a pair of greenish eyes stared down at the detective.

"Well, well," said O'Day with an ease that he was far from feeling. "This is mysterious. These are the sort of things that make a poor old flatfoot's life worth while."

"You are pleased to jest." The voice was oily, and tainted with a pronounced foreign accent. "But I do not mind. You will find, Mr. O'Day, that we are not difficult people to do business with."

"Oh," said O'Day, "are we going to do business?"

"But, of course. That is why you were brought here."

"Good," said O'Day taking a long pull at his cigarette. "Then let's hear what it's all about. I don't like the suspense."

The masked figure chuckled throatily. "Listen, Mr. O'Day," he began. "You are a newcomer to the narcotic squad. Heretofore your work has been in other lines. Has it not?"

O'Day nodded. "You're right so far. Keep on talking."

The other made a continental gesture with graceful arms. "Of course. Now, Mr. O'Day, you will find that we are not so bad as we are painted. We do not fear the police. No. Do

not get that impression. But we find that it helps a great deal if the police are on our side."

"I imagine it does," said O'Day with an expressionless face. "I can see that point easily enough."

Once more the other gave way to his throaty chuckle. "Of course," he said again. "So we are prepared to play fairly with you. Tomorrow morning a messenger will deliver three hundred dollars to your home. And, hereafter, each week you will receive the same amount. Do you see?"

O'DAY considered this in silence for a moment, then he said: "This is very generous of you. But I don't see what I can do that will earn that much money."

"Ah, it is not what you do to earn the money. It is what you *don't* do for which you will be paid."

"I see," said O'Day quietly—so quietly that had the other known his man better he would have realized the danger that the tone forboded. "I see. I simply shut my eyes and let your men peddle their dope as they please."

"That is right."

"I shut my eyes," went on O'Day as though he had not heard the interruption of the other, "and let your men drag their victims in the gutter. I shut my eyes while you dirty dogs fill the city with dope and broken bodies. I shut my eyes while——" He suddenly rose to his feet and towered over the masked figure. "No," he roared. "I'm damned if I do. I'm here in your power now, but I won't compromise with you. If I ever get out, I'll fight this dope racket with everything I've got and that's my answer to your three hundred dollars a week."

The masked man made a deprecating noise with his tongue. "As you please," he said coolly. "We shall

not kill you. We do not need to. We are far cleverer than the police. We were only trying to come to an amicable arrangement. You have forbidden that. Very well, you refuse our money. Now you can match your wits with ours."

HE suddenly gave a low sharp whistle, and O'Day felt himself seized from behind. His arms were pinioned at his sides by two men.

"Take him away," said his captor. "Blindfold him and make sure he does not know where he has been. That is all."

He turned and disappeared into the gloomy shadows that hovered over the corners of the room. O'Day was roughly dragged through a doorway. He made no protest as a thick bandage was bound tightly about his eyes. He was led along a long corridor, and a whirring noise and a sinking sensation told him that he was in an elevator.

A minute later he was bundled into the back seat of an automobile. He could feel the barrel of a pistol as it was thrust into his side. The car vibrated as it started upon its journey. It seemed to the detective that they had ridden for more than an hour when the car came to an abrupt halt. The gun was driven harder into his ribs.

"Now, listen," said a rough voice. "You'll get out of this car and count ten. If you take off that blindfold before you've finished counting you'll get a mess of steel in your lousy copper's guts."

The door was flung open, and O'Day was flung out. He stood where he landed, his arms folded before him and quietly counted up to ten. Then he removed the bandage. He glanced up and down the street, but saw nothing save a truck filled with furniture going by. He sighed

wearily and went in search of a cab to drive him back to headquarters.

The following morning O'Day awoke still conscious of the ache in his head, and went forth in search of Cokey Walshe. Cokey was easy enough to find, and so, for that matter were half a dozen others that were the dope ring's agents in the metropolis. But the ring itself was clever. It didn't go to any great lengths to protect the smaller fry of its organization.

It was of little use to the police to arrest the agents. They would find a small quantity of dope, send the seller up for six months, and that was that. It in no way hampered the gang's activities as long as the police were unable to find the source of these minor agents' supply. That was the task that had been assigned to O'Day.

He felt absolutely certain that the house to which he had been taken yesterday was the headquarters of the gang. Once he could find that house again, he had them. It was there that the dope was kept, it was from there that it was delivered in some mysterious way into the agents' hands.

O'DAY found Walshe at home in a small furnished rooming house on the West Side. The dope peddler greeted the detective with the easy air of a man who has nothing to fear from the law.

"Hello, Cokey. How's tricks?"

Cokey smiled at him. "Fine," he said. "How's it with you?"

"All right. I got a bit of a whack on the head yesterday, knocked me out for a while."

"No?" said Cokey. "That's too bad."

O'Day didn't miss the twinkle in his eye.

"Got any dope hidden in here?" asked O'Day conversationally.

"Dope?" Cokey's voice was horrified.

O'Day smiled grimly. "Yeah," he said. "Dope. You know, snow. Have you got any on hand?"

"Not a bit," swore Cokey vehemently. "I've given up the racket. Have a look around if you don't believe me."

"No, that's all right," said O'Day. "Well, I'll be seeing you. By the way what's that on your bureau?"

COKEY'S eyes followed the other's pointed finger and fell upon a fair-sized brown paper bag that lay on the bureau.

"Oh, that," said Cokey. "That's bread."

"Bread?"

Cokey withdrew a large loaf of Vienna bread from the parcel.

"I didn't know you did your own housekeeping here," commented O'Day.

"I don't. I like dry bread to eat at night when I'm hungry. Wouldn't be without it."

"Yeah," said O'Day.

As he left the room he realized that his interview had yielded him little information. He entered a speakeasy on the other side of the street and sat at a table in the window. While sipping his spiked beer he never took his eyes off the rooming house across the street.

He had sat there almost two hours before his vigilance was rewarded. He saw Cokey come down the brownstone steps and walk rapidly toward the business section of the town. Less than three minutes after the dope peddler had disappeared O'Day rang the bell of the rooming house and asked to see the landlady.

"Why, yes," she said in answer to his request. "I guess I can let you have a room all right. It'll be six dollars a week."

O'Day paid for the week in advance and followed her up the creaking stairs. A moment later he found himself alone in a small badly furnished cubicle. But to compensate for the condition of the room, he was elated to find that he was on the same floor as Cokey Walshe.

No sooner had the landlady's footsteps died away down the staircase when O'Day cautiously opened the door of his room and stole down the passageway. He withdrew a bunch of skeleton keys from his pocket, but discovered rather to his surprise that the door of Cokey Walshe's room was unlocked. O'Day entered and closed the door behind him. Then he went to work.

He tapped every inch of the wall space. He went through the scanty effects of the bureau with professional thoroughness. With meticulous care he examined the bedding and mattress. He subjected the pillows and the sheets to the same treatment.

"Not a damned thing in here," he muttered to himself as he returned to his bare room down the hall.

FOR the next few days, O'Day stepped into his new rôle of the landladies' best friend. He rented half a dozen furnished rooms, all of them in different buildings. But each of them held one of the dope ring's agents as a roomer. Each room he subjected to the same careful searching that he had given to the apartment of Cokey. And each time he discovered exactly what he had discovered the first time.

Each afternoon he went over the lodgings of the dope peddlers and found nothing, and yet each morning his men reported that they all made their appointed rounds. It was incredible. It was that enough dope for a day's supply even could be hid-

den in those rooms, yet each morning the agent delivered his supply.

Only one clue had made itself evident to O'Day. He recalled with a puzzled brow what Walshe had said about eating dry bread in the middle of the night. It apparently was a habit of the gang's henchmen. For in every room that he had gone over so fruitlessly, he had never failed to observe a loaf of bread tucked away somewhere in the chamber.

ON Thursday morning, he decided to give Cokey his personal attention. He waited till he heard him leave the room, then he tailed him. Cokey made three deliveries. He carried a brief case with him and visited a florist's, a tailor's shop, and a barber's place before he returned to the house.

All of the "stores" were well known by the police to be clearing houses for dope. For a moment, O'Day was tempted to step in and make the pinch while Cokey was carrying the dope-filled brief case, but he decided against it. After all, that would kill his chances of tracking down the source of the agent's supply.

But on the way home, he decided that some immediate step must be taken. He stopped in at a bakery on the corner and purchased a large loaf of Vienna bread.

He sat in his room with the door slightly ajar and waited. In a little while he heard footsteps in the hall, heard the bathroom door close, heard the running of water. Cokey was evidently enjoying a bath. This was his chance. He slipped the loaf of bread under his arm and slunk along the hall to Cokey's room.

Gingerly pushing open the door he crept inside and cast a swift glance about the room. There on the bureau in its accustomed place was the loaf of bread that Cokey had just

brought in. Silently and swiftly, O'Day made the exchange, picking up the loaf from the bureau and substituting the one he had bought himself. In less than a minute he was back in his own room.

Hastily he broke the loaf in half, then in quarters, then in eighths. Then he crumbled the bread into pieces between his strong fingers. Finally, he shrugged his shoulders and sat down dejectedly on the side of the bed.

"It beats me," he announced to the empty room.

A few minutes later he was back at Headquarters talking to Joe Mann, a particular crony of his.

"Yes, Joe," he said, "whatever it is they're doing it's mighty slick. There's not a bit of dope in those rooms at night. Not a bit, I've searched and searched. Yet in the mornings they all make their deliveries. Then there's the bread angle. Seven normal men all take a loaf of bread home with them—no butter, mark you, and no jam. Just a loaf of bread to munch during the night when they get hungry. There's something screwy about it."

MANN nodded his massive head. "Yeah," he said. Something screwy. But are you sure that no one makes delivery at night. Some messenger might make the rounds and leave the stuff in a hiding-place in each house."

"Maybe," said O'Day dubiously. "But I've sat up all night, and I never heard anyone go into Cokey's room. Still that's the only angle left. If you'll park up on the roof tonight and keep your eyes glued to the window, I'll watch the door downstairs. If you think I've overlooked a bet you can search Cokey's room right now. But I tell you, you'll find nothing. Yet tomorrow

morning he'll make his deliveries as usual."

"Okay," said Mann. "Lead me to it."

TOGETHER they returned to the rooming house and were fortunate in finding Cokey absent. O'Day stood by with a grim expression in his eyes as his partner systematically ransacked the small room. Finally, Mann stood up after peeping beneath the bed.

"Well," he observed, "you're right. There's nothing here now. So he must get the stuff during the night."

"Yeah," said O'Day. "But how?"

Mann shrugged and they went to the room at the rear of the hall. A moment later they heard footsteps on the stairs, and O'Day nudged his companion. Together they peered through a crack in the door and saw Cokey Walshe walking up the stairs. Under his arm was a brown paper parcel.

"That's the damned bread," whispered O'Day.

At ten o'clock the detectives took up their respective vigils. Mann clambered cautiously out on to the roof, while O'Day leaving his door slightly ajar, switched out the light, lay back on his bed and fixed his eyes on the door up the hall.

For ten hours O'Day did not relax his watch. When daybreak came up, casting its ghostly fingers, his bones ached and his eyes burned, but he could honestly say that he had not taken his gaze from Cokey's door for a single moment.

The sun was already up when Mann entered the room.

"That mug's probably wise to us," he said. "He got nothing last night. The window to his room is forty feet above the street. He hauled nothing in the window. No one signaled him from the street. No one communicated with him on my end."

"Nor on mine," said O'Day. "He came in and not a soul has been near that door since he went to bed."

"Then he's wise to us," said Mann. "You watch. He knew we were watching him. He didn't get his supply last night. You see, he won't make his deliveries today."

"I guess not," said O'Day ruefully. "I guess we've muffed it somehow."

But to the detectives' utter and mutual surprise, Cokey Walshe *did* make his deliveries that day. Without deviating from his schedule one whit, without being more than a minute out in his scheduled time, the two policemen trailing, saw him perform his usual routine, then return to the house.

MANN, sweating from his exertion in following the dope peddler, wiped his brow with a huge handkerchief and turned despairing eyes toward his colleague.

"Now what?" he asked.

"My God," said O'Day. "Now you've seen it for yourself. He didn't have it yesterday. He didn't bring it in with him in his bread. He had no visitor during the night. But this morning he's got it. Now you explain it."

"Well," said Mann ironically. "Maybe it's a miracle. Maybe it's Heaven sent. Maybe it just drops out of the sky. Maybe——"

"Shut up," said O'Day sharply.

Mann looked at him in surprise.

"I'm thinking," explained O'Day. "I've got a faint glimmering of an idea."

"Hurray," said Mann unenthusiastically.

"Listen," said O'Day. "Maybe I'm nuts, and anyway, I will be if we don't get to the bottom of this thing. Now will you do what I tell you no matter what."

Mann nodded his agreement.

"Okay. Then at dawn I want you to be at the flying field at the police office. Keep right next to Davis, he's the flying cop this week. And stay there till I telephone."

Mann surveyed him dubiously. "You're letting this business turn your head," he said. "You don't think that an airplane flies in the window with the stuff, do you?"

"Maybe, I do," replied O'Day. "Now will you do it?"

Mann made the gesture of a man who, perforce, must associate with a lunatic. "Okay," he said.

O'Day returned to the rooming house alone and after ascertaining that he was unobserved by Cokey, he retired to his room undressed and crawled into the uncomfortable bed.

At dusk, he arose and dressing slowly, shook off the lethargic sleep that was upon him. Then he quietly tiptoed down the hall and placed his eye to the keyhole of Cokey Walshe's door. He nodded with satisfaction as he noted that the dealer in dope had not yet returned.

O'Day swiftly opened the door of the small closet and entered it.

O'Day stifled in the fetid stuffy atmosphere as he waited for the occupant of the room to return home, but after three hours his patience was rewarded. He crouched up against the rear wall of the closet as he heard Cokey enter and switch on the light.

For a while he puttered around. O'Day peering through the door jamb saw him take a huge roll of bills from his pocket and count it, vast satisfaction showing on his misshapen features as he did so. Then, throwing the roll of bills on top of the bureau, Cokey proceeded to undress. Clad in his pajamas he approached the window and flung it open all the way.

THE little dope peddler peered out over the sill far into the night. O'Day shifted uncomfortably in his cramped position. Cokey withdrew his head into the room, and picking up the brown paper parcel from a table, uncovered a loaf of that mysterious Vienna bread. O'Day felt his pulse pound with excitement as he watched the next operation.

Then suddenly, as though he had just remembered something, Cokey turned, the bread still held in his hand and walked purposefully toward the closet which concealed the detective. O'Day held his breath, and his hand dropped to the butt of the thirty-eight which lay in his coat pocket.

He breathed a sigh of relief as Cokey passed him by and stretching forth a hand, switched out the lights. It took a minute or so for O'Day to accustom his eyes to the thin ray of moonlight that filtered through the window. But he soon saw Cokey carefully breaking the loaf of bread into small pieces. O'Day's eyes were glued to the door jamb.

Cokey then moved a chair over to the window and sprinkled the bread crumbs on its seat. Then again he peered out over the roof-tops, tensely and expectantly. O'Day glanced at the luminous dial of his wrist watch. It was after twelve. Whatever was about to happen should be just about due.

Presently, Cokey's head shot forward and he leaned out precariously over the sill. A faint fluttering sound came to O'Day's alert ears. Something seemed to whirl like some delicate mechanism within the room.

A beatific smile enveloped O'Day's countenance as he drew his gun from his pocket and placed a confident hand on the knob of the closet door. In another instant he had

flung open the door and switched on the light.

"Put 'em up, Cokey," he commanded as the darkness of the room vanished and the electric bulbs flared to life. "Put 'em up."

Cokey Walshe turned with a gasp of dismay only to find himself staring steadily into the unwavering muzzle of a black thirty-eight. On the chair by the window totally oblivious to the drama that was being enacted before them, three carrier pigeons calmly pecked at the bread crumbs which comprised their mid-night lunch.

Cokey spat a vile epithet at the detective, but O'Day merely laughed.

"A good gag, Cokey," he said. "You had me up a tree for a while. I don't know why I didn't think of it sooner. Carrier pigeons from the boss to the agents, eh? Well, I guess this is the end of that."

He snapped the bracelets on his prisoner, and gently securing the pigeons together perched them on his shoulder. Then he led the strange procession toward police headquarters.

Cokey was thrown into a cell while O'Day and his three feathered companions awaited the dawn.

Shortly after four o'clock the four of them were en route to the flying field.

Mann stared at his partner in utter astonishment as he walked into the police office at the field. "What the hell are you doing?" he demanded. "Going in for pets?"

O'Day smiled as he shook his head. "No," he said. "These are stool pigeons with a vengeance. They're going to lead us to dope headquarters. Have you got your gat?"

DAVIS, the cop pilot looked up with interest. "Any fight?" he asked.

"Sure," said O'Day. "I'm going to release these birds. Then we're going to follow in the plane. When we see where they land, Mann and I are taking the parachute route, so that the crooks won't have a chance to escape if they get leery because they've seen the ship. Come on, Mann, get into a chute."

He explained the happenings of the previous night as the three of them struggled into their chutes.

They climbed into the ship, and just as the pilot was about to take off, O'Day released the birds. They swooped over the field in a graceful spiral, then turned and went off to the south.

Davis followed the flight of the pigeons with his eyes and gracefully took the ship off and headed her nose in the same direction.

Some ten miles out of town, the birds suddenly swooped downward. O'Day watched them with anxious eyes. The three of them made straight for the roof of a large tall building upon which were hundreds of their fellow pigeons.

"Come on!" yelled O'Day, his voice fighting against the roar of the motor. "Here's where we go."

Suiting the action to the word, he clambered out on the strut, muttered a silent prayer that he would land on the surrounding empty lots rather than on the rooftops, and gently slid over the side. Remembering all that he had heard about parachutes in the past, he gritted his teeth and slowly counted ten before he pulled the rip-cord.

It wasn't as tough as he had expected after the first jump. He glided lightly down, and once when he looked up he saw Mann, a black floating hulk above him.

He landed with a terrific jerk in the middle of the street and a pair

of traffic cops darted up to see what was happening. Their jaws fell when they beheld O'Day.

"We need you guys," panted O'Day as he struggled out of his harness. "Help get Mann on his feet down the street there, then come with me. That building over there."

A moment later the four of them were racing up the street toward the building that kept the pigeons on its roof. Just as they reached the door a half dozen men raced from the building. O'Day's gun leaped to his hand. "You'll have to stay here a minute till we've searched this building," he said.

A voice from among the mob shouted, "God, they're here already. Give it to them."

O'Day recognized that voice and he smiled grimly as he thought of the conk on the head that he had received from its owner. The detective moved like a flash of lightning. Before a gun could be drawn he brought the muzzle of his own rod crashing down upon the speaker's head. The man fell in a crumpled heap upon the sidewalk.

That single gesture cowed the rest of them. By this time O'Day's allies had drawn their weapons and the remainder of the dope ring surrendered without ado. As his comrades turned preparatory to escorting their prisoners to the station house, O'Day entered the building.

"Where the hell are you going?" asked Mann.

"To get those pigeons," said O'Day. "They've just done their life's work. I'm going to pension them off. From now on they get *two* loaves of bread as long as this mob is in jail."

And the genial detective was as good as his word.

Can You Solve This Mystery?

Win A Cash Prize in this Thrilling Contest

THRILLING DETECTIVE here prints the fourth Baffler in its new contest feature.

Enter this contest—and see whether you can win one of the prizes for the best answers.

The rules, which are extremely simple, follow:

THE PRIZES:

First Prize.....\$15

Second Prize 10

Third Prize..... 5

RULES

Read the problem through carefully, considering every detail, then try to answer the questions at the end.

The winning solution will be printed in an early issue.

All answers must be mailed before February 15, 1932.

THE DEATH OF "DOPE" DURANT

It was three o'clock in the morning, a police patrol boat was cutting down the river. Suddenly it veered towards the north bank, where the sergeant standing by the wheel had spotted a dim shape which seemed to have become wedged under the prow of a barge at anchor.

Closer investigation revealed it to be the body of a middle-aged man. He wore evening clothes, and pinned to the lapel of his jacket was a sodden square of white cardboard, on which was roughly scrawled in black paint the word—"Paid."

At once the body was taken to a morgue, and was examined by the surgeon there. The man, he said, had not been dead more than an hour, then something strange about the body induced him to make a closer examination. It was then found that the body contained a fatal dose of a certain rare poison which, though little was known about it, was believed to be very potent, but also very slow working. Experiments had shown that the victim lived for at least an hour before it took effect and killed him.

The mystery which now arose caused a closer police investigation, and Detective Tirrel was put on the case. His first act was to go to the morgue and view the body of the dead man. Almost at once he recognized him as "Dope" Durant, a notorious dope smuggler. More than that, however,

he remembered that three days previously Durant had laid information with the police which had led to the rounding up of the leaders of a certain gang, of which Durant had been a member, but which had apparently let him down badly over a recent deal.

Some of the gang were still at large, and a letter was found in the dead man's pocket which Tirrel deduced had come from them, warning him that they meant to "get him" for what he had done.

The body was considerably bruised, apparently from being buffeted in the water, but the inspector particularly noticed one very deep gash in the back of the head and a black bruise on the jaw, while his teeth had almost severed his tongue.

A further search through his pockets brought to light some letters which showed that he had been supplying opium to a certain young society girl, the wife of Major Stanley Heeton, but lately returned to New York from India.

Early the following morning the detective and a policeman called at the Heetons' apartment. They arrived at the door just as the two maids put in an appearance. They were admitted by one of the girls who apparently had a key, and asked to wait while she went and told her mistress, who would not be up yet.

Suddenly a shriek was heard from the direction of Mrs. Heeton's bedroom and the

inspector dashed forward and flung open the door. The maid had fainted, and then he saw, lying on the bed, the figures of Major and Mrs. Heeton—both dead.

A surgeon was immediately called, and it was found that both had died from exactly the same poison as had been found in Durant. It was also found, however, that Mrs. Heeton had apparently been under the influence of opium when the poison had been administered.

A search of the flat, however, revealed no trace of any bottle containing any of the poison or any similar clue. In the sink in the scullery, however, the inspector found several small pieces of broken thin glass—and the wrist-watch on the major's wrist was found to be without its glass front. He also noted that the face had been pushed in and the hands had stopped fifteen minutes to three. Also on the floor of the scullery were the broken remains of a wine glass, but they were quite clean, having, apparently, been washed before the glass was broken.

In the sitting-room several cigarette stubs of an uncommon brand were found in the ash-trays, and it was found that cigarettes of the same brand were found in a case on "Dope" Durant's person.

According to the maids, the major had

been away some days, and had, apparently, returned after they had left for the evening. Durant, they said, had called at the flat several times, both before the major went away and during his absence. They had thought him a friend.

More information from the night constable patrolling the district. He said that he had seen a man answering to Durant's description leave the house in which the Heetons' apartment was at about 2:15 A.M. Inquiries at the dead man's dingy lodgings showed that he had not returned since he had gone out, about 10:30 of the evening before he was taken from the river.

The detective carefully examined the crook's lodgings, and there was plenty of evidence to show that he had apparently been carrying on a successful trade in opium and other drugs for some little time. Apparently, Mrs. Heeton was one of the regular customers. But so far as any further explanation of his sudden and extraordinary death was concerned, nothing could be found.

These are all the facts from which Detective Tirrel brought the case to a satisfactory conclusion.

The questions to be answered are:

- (1) How did "Dope" Durant die?
- (2) Explain the mystery.

THE SOLUTION TO THE MYSTERY OF WHITESTONE MANOR

The correct solution of this problem, published as Baffler No. 2, in the December THRILLING DETECTIVE, is as follows:

1. Three persons were involved.

2. Knowing that his wealthy cousin usually kept large sums of money in his safe, Duane thought of a clever scheme by which he could misappropriate that, and at the same time clear up the valuables which he knew would be found where there were so many wealthy guests. His valet, who was really an accomplice, had never left the train at all, and Duane told Morley and his guests the story to mislead them. Actually he had let him in through his window, and hidden him in his room until all was safe for him to get to work. Duane had then gone downstairs, and when he thought his accomplice would be almost finished, went up to Morley and told him of the bogus valet in order to divert suspicion from himself. This, however, was where his plans went wrong.

3. The butler, Jones, had been hankering after a good picking for some time, and that same night had decided to take his chance. He, too, had thought of the safe, and for weeks had been surreptitiously watching his master work the safe, so that now he was able to find the combination with comparative ease. He also had thought of gathering what he could from the guests' rooms, and thus it was that the two marauders had set out on their jobs at about the same time. Duane had told his accomplice to take his links, and he was astounded at finding all his money gone, too. He did not know that Jones had entered his room while his accomplice was in another and had been through his things, and had thought that he was being double-crossed. Hence his rage.

Jones had started on his rounds some little time before the other, and had already got the safe door open before the "valet," who had been gone through, discovered him. Jones' story had, of course, been concocted on the spur of the moment, with the positions reversed. Actually he was the one who had been found, although in the struggle which followed he had come off worse and had succumbed to a blow from the heavy weapon—it turned out to be a jimmy—which the other had swung at him. The "valet" had made his escape the way he had come—through the window, and had, in his haste, dropped the ticket which had first put Yancey on the scent.

Jones, finding himself in a fix, had pretended to be worse than he was, and as soon as he was left, had made a quick getaway. He had not been searched, and still had a considerable quantity of stuff with him. Indeed, he still had most of it when he was caught within half an hour of the "valet," the latter falling into the police net as he was attempting to jump a freight train back to New York.

See Page 128 for Announcement of Winning Contestants.

HEADQUARTERS

WHERE READERS, WRITERS, AND THE EDITOR MEET



The Court is called to order! Next case! Defendant: "The House of Hooded Death," by G. Wayman Jones, published in December **THRILLING DETECTIVE**.

Testimony: "'The House of Hooded Death' was wonderful," Mrs. E. Heckworth, Helper, Utah; "'The House of Hooded Death' was the best story I ever read," John Harklin, Pasadena, Cal. Others witnesses agreed substantially with Mrs. Heckworth and Mr. Harklin.

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Remember we're friends, and that this is YOUR corner for the expression of your true opinions. Your letters help us make **THRILLING DETECTIVE** the kind of a magazine you want to read!

Answers to "The Mystery of Whitestone Manor," Baffler No. 2, came in great numbers. Evidently this problem was a little more difficult than "The Problem of the Secret Dispatch" for fewer readers presented solutions that were fully correct.

The editor's hat is still off to the readers, however, for the majority of the answers, once more, were approximately correct.

The best answer was that of Paul Carney, Youngstown, O., who wins first prize. The second prize goes to E. E. Echols of

Moundville, W. Va., and the third to William Knopf of Bristol, Ct.

There were many other good solutions, among which the following rank honorable mentions: M. A. Morgan, Davenport, Ia.; Bruno Galeassi, Westminister, Mass.; H. G. McCathran, Overton, Tex.; Mrs. Samuel Polhemus, Eatontown, N. J.; John Binko, Cedar Rapids, Ia.

Harry E. Walcott, Detroit, Mich.; William Nealon, Bernardsville, N. J.; Violette Kellinberger, Jennings, Okla.; Theresa Buckrey, McAdoo, Pa., and Mrs. Mamie Tower, Ludington, Mich.

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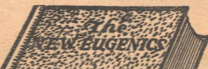
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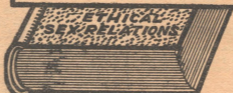
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TWO BOOKS IN ONE
WAS Reduced
\$5.00 to \$2.95

Pioneer Publishing Company,
110 W. 40th Street,
Dept. 71, New York.

Gentlemen:
Kindly send me "The New Eugenics" (650 pages) in a plain wrapper. I will pay the postman \$2.95 (plus postage) on delivery. (You will also send me—FREE OF CHARGE, your book "The Philosophy of Life").

Name.....

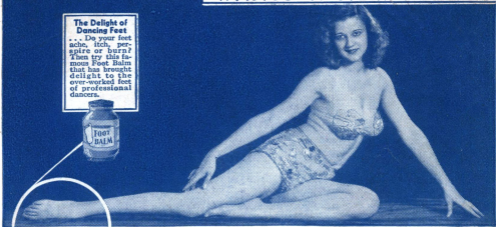
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City..... Age.....

Orders from Foreign Countries must be accompanied by Express or Money Order of \$3.45.

DANCER ON WAY TO STARDOM. WANTS A NEW NAME!

**The Delight of
Dancing Feet**
... Do your feet
ache, itch, per-
spire or burn?
Then try this fa-
mous Foot Balm
that has brought
delight to the
over-worked feet
of professional
dancers.



We will pay . . . \$50,000 Cash Just for a Girl's Name

★ (NEWS ITEM)

On the very threshold of great success, Jeannette Williams waits a new "Stage Name." Young—graceful—talented! her beautiful body is vibrant with the magnetic glow of youthful personality. Critics may her performance as "Sensational" "Ecstasy," and that she is at the door of stardom. . . . Now, because her name is similar to that of another star of Broadway, she wants a NEW name by which she will be featured and which she hopes to carry to fame.

WHAT an amazing opportunity! You may win this big cash prize in only a moment's time. Simply send us a name for this graceful young dancer—*nothing more to do*. Sound easy? It is easy! The first name that comes to your mind this minute may be the very one to win \$50,000 cash. It does not have to be a "fancy" name—just some simple name that is easy to say and easy to remember—a name that will look well in blazing electric lights in front of the ma-

COSTS NOTHING TO WIN
Nothing to Buy—Nothing to Sell—No Entrance Fees—
No "Number Pats" or "Goosing" to win This Cash Prize
JUST SUGGEST A GIRL'S NAME

tion's finest theatres. Think of a name—send it Today—Win \$500.00 Cash—qualify for \$3,000.00 opportunity.

NO WAY YOU CAN LOSE . . .
Simply suggest the winning name—that is all you have to do to get the \$500.00. We are giving the prize to

advertise our marvelous Foot Balm that is even now used by many professional dancers. Because a famous name is valuable in advertising, the new name chosen for this rising young dancer will also be used as the name for our Foot Balm—her fame will bring us big advertising. . . . It is your opportunity of a life-time. Maybe your own name, or the name of a friend may be the very name we want. Nothing for you to lose—a fortune for you to win.

**JUST SENDING A NAME QUALIFIES YOU FOR OPPORTUNITY TO
Win \$3,000.00
OR BUICK 8 SEDAN AND \$1,500.00 IN CASH**

THIS money is entirely separate and in addition to the prize for the Dancer's Name. Over 30 huge cash prizes—3 fine automobiles. Think of it! You may win over \$3,000.00 cash or a new Buick 8 Cylinder Sedan and \$1,500.00 cash besides! What a magnificent fortune! Some one is going to get it—why not you? You have just as good an opportunity to win as anyone. Suggest a name for the Dancer. Do it now—it may mean a fortune for you.

\$1,000.00 CASH CERTIFICATE Will Be Sent to You At Once—Be Prompt

One thousand dollars EXTRA if you are PROMPT and win first prize. So don't delay! Send your name suggested promptly—nothing more to do now or ever toward getting the Name Prize and to qualify for the opportunity to win the other huge prizes. You can't lose anything—EVERY PERSON WHO TAKES AN ACTIVE PART WILL BE REWARDED IN CASH. I will send you a \$1,000.00 Cash Certificate as soon as your name is received—I will tell you just how you stand in the distribution of over \$5,000.00 in cash prizes and fine new automobiles.

HUNDREDS HAVE WON

● Viola Leader, Oregon, was destitute—her

home burned down. She suggested a name for our toilet soap and won a big cash prize of \$500.00! Hollenbach, Pa., won \$675.00; Thompson won \$625.00; Lutz received \$500.00. Hundreds of others made happy by big prizes and rewards. Now, some yet unknown person is going to win \$1,000.00 cash; many others are going to be made happy with scores of prizes as high as \$750.00. Three fine cars will be given.

Read These Simple Rules

Contest open to all except employees of our company. Only one name may be submitted—sending more than one name will cause all names sent by you to be thrown out. Suggest a first and last name for the dancer. Contest closing date given

in my first letter to you. In case of duplicate winning names, duplicate prizes will be given. Every person submitting a name qualifies for opportunity to win \$3,000.00 cash or Buick 8 Cylinder Sedan and \$1,500.00 in cash. Use the coupon or write a letter to submit name and receive all details.

WALTER BRENT, Mgr.
Dept. 704-B,
906 Sycamore Street Cincinnati, Ohio

Winning Name Coupon

WALTER BRENT, Mgr.,
906 Sycamore St., Dept. 704-B, Cincinnati, Ohio.

The Name I suggest for the Dancer is:

Name.....

Address.....

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

Rush me the \$1,000.00 Cash Certificate for Promptness and tell me how I stand for Winning \$3,000.00 cash.

NEW BIG MONEY FIELD

FOR
WIDE AWAKE
MEN!

**SELLING NEW
SPECIALTY
to
BUSINESS
and
PROFESSIONAL
MEN**

Four \$15 Sales Daily Pay \$280 Weekly

When green men, with just average ability, make \$200 to \$400 a week, and up, our proposition must be worth investigating. We train you, giving you successful methods of one of the fastest sales forces in the country. If you are looking for a man-size business, free from worries of other overworked lines of work, write for full information.

WORLD'S LARGEST

Firms Among Our Customers: Sears, Roebuck; Larkin Company; Laffin Bros. and Company; LaSalle Extension University; National Radio; Dault, Mead and Co.; Collier's National Brake Service, Inc.; Advance-Kumby Thresher Co., and scores of others nationally known are among our customers. It's a life saver for the smallest merchant who needs it even more than the big firm and he buys quick, 2 sizes—one costs \$2.50—sells \$7.50; your profit \$5, and more, as your sales increase. Other size costs \$5—sells \$15—your profit \$10 and more—every salesman working regularly makes close to \$10 profit per sale on this size! Think of that!

GUARANTEED

To Bring Customer 10 Times Its Cost in Actual Cash

Customer note signed certificate of guarantee protecting him, backed by a national organization. Very few business men are so foolish as to turn down a proposition guaranteed to pay ten for one, with proof from leading concerns of the world that it does pay.

Here's What Our Men Make

\$400 Weekly! **\$165 First Day!**

Between Sept. 8th and Sept. 30th—just two weeks—E. D. Ferrell, of Atlanta, Georgia, cleaned up \$302.50 on his first orders. His sales were all made in three small Georgia towns. His customers are reordering, and he is going strong. His sales winning plan is now added to our sure-fire sales manual. Tells where, how and who to sell.



EDDIE FOWER
\$4,929 in 3 Months
California rims the bell again! Eddie Fower starts out April 1st and by July 1st he has \$10 \$15 sales to his credit. Multiply \$10 by \$15 profit and you've got something to show you the money in this proposition.

ARTHUR FRIEDMAN
\$105 Profit on 1 Sub-Agent Sale
Besides his own profits—\$1,260.09 clear in 23 days—Friedman, Wisconsin, gets a \$105 bonus on a single sale made by one of his sub-agents! It's all in selling the right things, boys!
\$60 Per Day
For W. E. Vaughn, North Carolina.

Made by E. H. Walker—Georgia—Made one sale to a Columbus, Georgia, organization, and that sale got him four more sales within a few hours. Met another salesman, and the other salesman bought him out! That's the kind of proposition this is.

Leaves 14 Day Job After Making \$120 in Spare Time First 5 Days.

Here's Sidney Rosenthal, Illinois—This old-timer wired an order for 100 of the \$15 size 8 days after getting our sample.



He had cleaned up \$120 as a sideline in spare time, and wrote: "This is the best and easiest proposition I have ever become associated with. Will specialize on \$15 size."
\$1,500 a Month
clear for M. L. Terly, Calif.
\$6,000 First Year
for A. R. Almond, South Carolina. They make good everywhere.

Write for Other Salesmen's Reports
We can send them as fast as you can read 'em. We're not plenty. See for yourself. Mail the coupon for details.

REFERENCES:
YOU GET PORTFOLIO of LETTERS from WORLD'S LEADING FIRMS
Climches the Sale!

A handsome, instructive portfolio that contains letters from the world's most famous concerns. Every type of business and profession represented. You have immediate, positive proof of success. They can't say—"doesn't fit my business." Nails 'em right then and here. Sells them on sight.

Over 1,000 Salesmen Have Joined Us in Last 3 Months
Boys, what does that tell you? We've had to double our office force to keep up with applications. So as we get the country covered, we close up the list. Remember, this is no ordinary proposition. You deal with a company that doesn't split pennies, headed by a man who spent twenty years on the road. A company with a record you can be proud of as our representative. Get the facts—see with your own eyes what you can make in this business. Mail this coupon for full information.

SURETY Company's BOND Protects Customer

Your customer is entitled to the services of a national organization bonded by a Surety Company with assets running into the millions. He CAN'T lose. You are able to show positive safety. This means quick sales and big turn-over for you.

Seeing is Believing... Mail Coupon for Proof

This is a business with a future to it. Enormous repeat business. Tremendous profits from sub-agents—your sub-agents have more margin than total profits on \$9 out of 109 other specialties. You get profit on all mail order business you territory. Every customer is a prospect for two or three times the initial amount on your second call. Every customer recommends you to you. If you get ready to quit, you have an established route that can be sold like any other business. An opportunity to make \$5,000 to \$10,000 a year is worth while. Just a limited number of openings. Hurry, boys—they won't be long now!

F. E. ARMSTRONG, Pres., Dept. 4047-B, Mobile, Ala.

SEND ME FULL INFORMATION. MR. ARMSTRONG
Without obligation to me, send me full information on your proposition.
Name _____ Street or Route _____
Box No. _____ City _____ State _____
F. E. Armstrong, Pres., Dept. 4047-B, Mobile, Ala.