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... it won't cost you one cent!" — Signed: GEORGE F. JOWETT

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THRILLING DETECTIVE

Vol. XII, No. 2

HARVEY BURNS, Editor

October, 1934

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Where Readers and the Editor Meet

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marry?

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Science?

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symptoms of

sleeping sick-

ness?

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Motor?

What firm once

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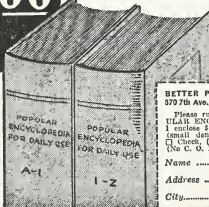
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Age Occupation

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*.... But It Brought Me The Book That Showed Me
How to Make \$6,000 a Year!*

AS I walked up to the mail box, Joe nudged Ed and winked broadly for my benefit.

"Sh!" he hissed in a loud stage-whisper. "This is going to be the big turning point in Frank Parker's life! He's writing for a book that tells how to get into salesmanship. Pretty soon he'll be earning so much that he'll make the rest of us look like pikers!"

Ed snickered.

"Won't it be grand!" he grinned. "Now he can quit punching time-clocks and eating 25-cent lunches."

He raised his voice. "Drop me a postal sometime when you get out into big business and start making \$5,000 or \$6,000 a year, will you, Frank?"

They both laughed uproariously. And probably it did seem like a joke to them that a 25¢ a week clerk would have the nerve to think he could ever get anywhere or make real money without some special "gift" or "pull."

But they laughed too soon. Just yesterday I sat down and wrote to Ed who is still at the shop, dragging along at the same old job.

"Dear Ed"—I wrote. "You asked me to send you a card when I 'got into big business and started making real money.' Well, here's your card. Yesterday I was promoted to the job of assistant Sales Manager of the Western Metal Works, at a salary that goes with it. I'll loan you my copy of that book on salesmanship you used to think was such a joke."

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28x4-20-17	2.50	2.75
28x4-15-16	2.55	2.85
28x4-10-15	2.60	2.95
28x4-5-14	2.65	3.05
28x4-0-13	2.70	3.15
28x4-0-12	2.75	3.25
28x4-0-11	2.80	3.35
28x4-0-10	2.85	3.45
28x4-0-9	2.90	3.55
28x4-0-8	2.95	3.65
28x4-0-7	3.00	3.75
28x4-0-6	3.05	3.85
28x4-0-5	3.10	3.95
28x4-0-4	3.15	4.05
28x4-0-3	3.20	4.15
28x4-0-2	3.25	4.25
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30x4-30-19	2.55
30x4-25-18	2.65
30x4-20-17	2.75
30x4-15-16	2.85
30x4-10-15	2.95
30x4-5-14	3.05
30x4-0-13	3.15
30x4-0-12	3.25
30x4-0-11	3.35
30x4-0-10	3.45
30x4-0-9	3.55
30x4-0-8	3.65
30x4-0-7	3.75
30x4-0-6	3.85
30x4-0-5	3.95
30x4-0-4	4.05
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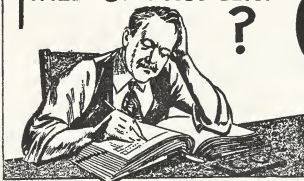
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A gun exploded, and a bullet fanned past Riley's head. Then they were

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MURDER

CHAPTER I

THE BLACK BLIMP

DESPITE a night with a hint of mist in the air, and a freshening breeze which betokened the coming of a storm, the thousands were gathered around the music shell in the public park, listening to the band concert, promenading, flirting, gossiping.

From the music shell came the strains of a military march, with brass and drums sounding a rhythm to stir the blood. The martial music effectually drowned the low hum of motors up in the sky.

The music ceased. People moved around as the handsmen rested, preliminary to the next number.

"Look! Look!"

The shrill cry came from a wo-

A Corpse Flung from the Sky is the Grisly



inside the darkened barn—with jets of flame stabbing for them

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man standing at the edge of the wide walk. She was looking upward, pointing, her manner that of intense excitement.

Others looked, too, and echoed her exclamation. Necks were craned as musicians and audience alike glanced toward the heavens.

Out of the dark sky and down toward the earth descended a spreading blue light, a ghostly cloud of

wavering color. It was something similar to a molten ball surrounded by a mass of eerie vapor.

It drifted lowly with the wind, seemed to hover directly above the music shell for an instant. And suddenly it burst, and dazzling white light blazed and streaked through the black night.

Men and women cried in alarm, crashed into one another as they

Harbinger of a Crimson Trail of Death!



Inspector Wendell

turned to run to places of safety. The blazing white light half blinded them.

It was there but a moment, then was gone, and there remained only the scattered light along the walks and across the front of the music shell.

"Flare dropped by some aviator—that's all!"

Some man shouted that reassuring intelligence. Men and women laughed, ashamed of their moment of fright. The musicians began picking up their instruments.

And then, high in the air above the park, there was a sudden burst of amber sparks. They cascaded toward the earth in a beautiful fireworks display.

And down through that amber shower floated—something. It passed swiftly through the dying fireworks and came on toward the earth in darkness.

There came the hum of motors—and the crowd could hear it now. Far up in the sky there was another flash of light. For a moment, those below could see a dark bulk with a smaller bulk clinging below it like a barnacle on the hull of a ship.

A dirigible! A black blimp! At least it looked black to those below,

Tensely, the crowd waited. There was no further display of fireworks. The humming of the motors died away. Something seemed to be drifting down out of the sky.

Something billowy white was coming to earth near the bandstand. It was draping across the wide walk and over the bushes as it fell.

"A parachute!" somebody cried.

The crowd started to surge forward. It was some advertising stunt, they supposed. Not a bad idea—to drive a blimp over the park during the band concert, and drop some sort of advertising matter.

A woman screamed.

Park policemen began fighting to get through the crowd and to the spot where the parachute was coming to rest. Now the wind was spilled from it, and it stopped, a white mass, against a tree and over some of the shrubbery.

More screams came from those near it. The crowd surged backward, away from the spot. Policemen got through, their night-sticks held ready. Then, they saw.

It was a parachute, as they had thought. But nobody had come down with it to advertise something. Attached to the parachute was a corpse!

IT was the corpse of a middle-aged man, well-dressed and prosperous-looking. Pinned to the front of his coat was a playing card—the five spot of hearts. The front of his shirt was soaked with blood. His eyes were open, fixed. An expression of agony was in the dead face.

The crowd surged forward again, agog with curiosity, morbidly interested. But the policemen drove them back. One of the officers started for a telephone, to call Police Headquarters and make a report of the affair.

Up in the dark sky, motors hummed again as the black blimp,

aircraft of death, moved rapidly away through the night.

CHAPTER II

THE GRIP OF FEAR

DAWN at Police Headquarters. High officials of the city were there, getting in one another's way and in the way of the laboring police officers. The city faced a sensation. The morning papers would play up the story.

The victim was Felix Randolph, wealthy philanthropist, and one of the best loved men in the city. And the playing card found pinned to his coat was significant.

For that card had become almost a trade-mark to the police, the signature that a clever criminal left behind him. The Five Spot!

Another of those mysterious, elusive, lone-wolf sort of crooks given to clever tricks! For some months, he had been indulging in an orgy of jewel robberies and sensational hold-ups.

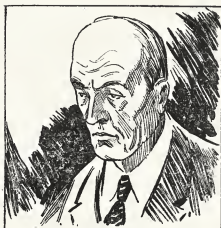
Like a drifting shadow, he passed around the city, plied his nefarious trade, and made mock of the police—always leaving a playing card, a five spot, at the scene of his crime.

It was supposed that he worked alone. And he always had avoided violence. But now—the Five Spot had killed!

No motive for the crime could be found. There was nothing in Felix Randolph's life to indicate wrong associations of any sort. He had no known bitter enemies.

Randolph had but one living relative, a daughter, Betty, twenty-five. She explained that her father supposedly had gone to Philadelphia on business early that morning.

But the police found that his parlor car reservation had not been claimed. Nor had he made an appearance at the Philadelphia bank



Henry Lennire

where they had been expecting him.

"Get the Five Spot!"

That order came from very high up, and it meant exactly what it said. Get the Five Spot! Failure would not be countenanced, and no alibis would be accepted.

INSPECTOR SAM WENDELL, put in charge of the case, was like a wild man. Success meant favorable publicity and possible promotion. But Sam Wendell was not thinking of that. He was thinking more of what failure would mean.

The black blimp from which the body had been dropped—that had engaged Wendell's immediate attention. Dirigibles were scarce, and all were registered. Wendell ordered an immediate check of them, to find where each was at the hour Randolph's body had been dropped.

Every blimp had an alibi.

Only one dirigible was unaccounted for, and that had been missing for almost four months. It was a small blimp which had set forth under the command of a certain Ed Bergster, an explorer, to investigate some little-known land in Northern Canada. It had not been heard from after a night of storm during which its radio had gone silent.

A mystery blimp! And one con-



William Braton

nected in some manner with the unknown and notorious Five Spot!

The affair dispelled one idea at least—that the Five Spot was of the lone-wolf type, and always worked alone. No one man had driven that dirigible and dropped the body of Felix Randolph after making a fireworks display to attract the attention of those below.

Detective Mike Riley, Inspector Wendell's favorite assistant, made an attempt at consolation.

"Aw, we'll get him, Sam! He can't get away with this," Riley declared. "Don't let it get you down. Everything's a mess now, but when the old bean gets to workin'—"

"We're up against the well-known stone wall," Wendell interrupted. "Not a hint of a motive. But we've got to get that Five Spot! If we don't, I'll probably have to quit the force and raise radishes or chickens for a living."

TEN O'CLOCK came, and nothing had been accomplished. Then there was a telephone call for Wendell. The inspector put aside the cup from which he had been gulping black coffee, and answered.

"Inspector Wendell?" an excited man's voice asked.

"Right!"

"I understand that you're in charge of the Randolph murder case."

"Right again! Who's this?"

"I'm Henry Lenmire, vice president of the Earthwide Chemical Company. Mr. Randolph was our president, as you probably know. I wish you'd please come to our offices immediately, Inspector. I have some information which may lead to a solution of the case. And please hurry. I—I'm afraid!"

His voice sounded like it. Wendell slapped the receiver on the hook and rushed from the building with Riley at his heels.

Through the teeming streets they dashed in a police car, to the huge downtown office building where the Earthwide Chemical Company had a suite.

Clerks and stenographers were going around the palatial offices on tiptoe, and whispering when they talked. An air of tragedy hung over the place.

But Wendell and Riley were used to things like that. Their business-like manner did not change.

A STOOP-SHOULDERED, pasty-faced man of middle age, whose eyes were bulging behind the thick spectacles he wore, was waiting for the men from Headquarters.

"I'm Hiram Weslock, Mr. Lenmire's confidential secretary, gentlemen," he announced. "I have orders to take you in to Mr. Lenmire immediately."

He shuffled ahead of them down a narrow corridor off which several offices opened. The tragic death of the company's president seemed to have shocked Hiram Weslock even more than the other office employees. He appeared to be on the verge of distraction.

Several times, he glanced at Inspector Wendell and seemed on the verge of saying something, but al-

ways refrained from doing so. Wendell watched him closely, wondering at his manner.

Weslock stopped in front of the door of Lenmire's private office, and knocked.

"Who's there?" somebody inside demanded. A note of fear was in the voice.

"It's Weslock, sir, with the men from Police Headquarters."

The knob of a spring lock was turned with a click, and the door opened cautiously. A white-faced man peered out, then opened the door wider and motioned nervously for Wendell and Riley to enter. He waved the secretary away impatiently.

Henry Lenmire was a small man of scholarly appearance, apparently of the timid and retiring sort. His eyes were gleaming strangely and darting apprehensively about the office. He was pale, and visibly nervous.

Wendell and Riley often had seen a man in the clutch of terror, and they believed they were looking at another now.

WITH a hand that shook, Henry Lenmire motioned for them to take chairs at the end of the desk. He glanced around the office furtively, toward the window and door.

He sank into his own chair in front of his desk, finally, and put a shaking hand to his face, brushed at the globules of perspiration there, and fumbled in a pocket for a handkerchief.

"Gentlemen," Henry Lenmire said in low voice, "the death of Mr. Randolph was a terrible, shocking thing. And it—it may be followed by another."

"You mean another murder?" Inspector Wendell asked, as he bent forward. "Whose?"

"My own," Henry Lenmire replied.



Felix Randolph

Even Inspector Sam Wendell was startled by that announcement and the manner in which it was made. He straightened in his chair, and Mike Riley made a funny little sound deep down in his throat.

"Am I to understand," Wendell asked, "that you mean your life's in danger?"

"I feel quite certain of it," Lenmire replied. "I must take precautions—"

"You come clean with me, Mr. Lenmire, and be mighty snappy about it!" Wendell ordered. "Don't hold back anything. Information you think doesn't amount to much may be very important to us. Now, why should this crook who's known as the Five Spot kill Felix Randolph?"

"I—I'm not sure."

"Not sure! What do you mean by a statement like that? What do you know? Have there been any threatening letters—hints at abduction unless blackmail or ransom was paid, anything like that?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Have you been having any labor troubles, or trouble with any of your competitors?"

"None at all," Lenmire replied.

"What makes you believe that

you're also in danger of being murdered?"

"I'll explain, gentlemen," Lenmire replied. "It's about our business organization here. I'm a chemist, and I invented certain formulae. I had no money, but interested Mr. Randolph, and in turn he interested Mr. William Braton. They put up the necessary funds, and I turned in my formulae. We were to share alike in the profits of the business, the three of us."

"Isn't that the usual arrangement?" Wendell asked.

"Yes. But we also made an unusual agreement. Randolph and Braton had many other interests. They decided to keep this company out of their general estates.

"We agreed that, if one of us died, his share wasn't to be included in his estate for settlement, but automatically would be divided between the two survivors. And, if two of us died, the sole survivor was to have everything."

INSPECTOR WENDELL betrayed a sudden interest.

"Randolph is dead, so his interest here will be divided between you and William Braton? And if either of you dies, the survivor will have the whole thing?" he asked.

"That's it," Lenmire agreed.

"Randolph is dead. And you're afraid that somebody is planning to have you bumped off. Which means that you think William Braton—"

Wendell ceased speaking and looked straight at Lenmire, and the latter merely nodded.

"Why?" Wendell asked.

"Braton is a fanatic about money. We have had tremendous profits in this business, more than we anticipated—but some men are never satisfied."

"But isn't Braton a rich man otherwise—outside this business? Doesn't he have his fingers in a lot

of different, varied financial pies?"

"He's supposed to be quite wealthy," Lenmire replied. "But he's been losing heavily the past year in speculation, and wants to regain lost ground."

"Even so, what makes you think that he'd resort to a double murder?"

"If you knew him well," Lenmire explained, "you'd realize that he's a man who'd stop at nothing to gain his end. And he was the one, by the way, who originally suggested the arrangement about the survivor inheriting everything."

"It's a lead," Inspector Wendell admitted, "and that's more than we had before. You keep quiet about this, Mr. Lenmire. Don't mention your suspicions to anybody."

"I—I must have protection," Lenmire said. "Here, at my apartment, wherever I have to go. If somebody is trying to kill me—" Again, he seemed on the verge of collapse.

"Brace up! You'll have ample protection every minute, day and night," Wendell assured him. "Is Braton in the office now?"

"I don't know. We talked over the phone an hour ago, but I haven't seen him. He doesn't come here regularly—has other offices. But I'll ascertain."

CHAPTER III

DEATH GRINS AGAIN



ENMIRE touched a button on his desk. The door was opened almost immediately, and Hiram Weslock shuffled into the office and up to the end of the paper-littered desk in a manner almost apologetic.

For some reason, Hiram Weslock seemed at the point of breakdown. Behind his thick spectacles, his bulging eyes held an expression of terror. He was breathing heavily, and



Attached to the parachute was a corpse!

his face was damp with perspiration. He licked at his pale lips as though they suddenly had become parched.

"Weslock, do you know whether Mr. Braton is in his office?" Lenmire asked.

"He isn't, sir. But he telephoned to say that, if you asked for him, he'd be out to the Randolph place, helping Miss Betty Randolph."

Wendell glanced swiftly at Lenmire. It seemed unusual that a man would be instrumental in the violent death of another, and then aid the victim's daughter; that he would have courage enough to face her in her grief. However, it might be

done in an effort to allay suspicion.

"Weslock, what's the matter with you?" Wendell suddenly barked at the secretary. "Are you sick? You seem about to go to pieces."

"If you'll pardon me, sir, I—I'd like to say something," Weslock stammered.

"About what, Weslock?" Lenmire asked.

Weslock looked at Inspector Wendell when he replied.

"It is about the terrible death of Mr. Randolph. I know some things that the police should know. I can't endure it any longer—this keeping quiet. I—I want to tell—"

Wendell saw what he thought was

an opportunity to get valuable information from a breaking man.

"Spill it!" he snapped at the secretary.

"I scarcely know where to begin. I—"

But Hiram Weslock did not complete the sentence. Wendell never got his information. For a sound as of a wasp buzzing invaded the office for a fraction of a second. The unmistakable crack of a gun was heard. There was a soft thud.

Hiram Weslock gave a peculiar grunt. He tottered, and the eyes behind the thick spectacles fluttered and closed. As the others sprang to their feet, Weslock collapsed to the floor. His eyes opened again—and fixed. Blood spurted from a wound in his breast.

CHAPTER IV

DEATH TRAP



FROM the throat of Henry Lenmire rumbled a hoarse cry of fear, as he darted swiftly to a far corner of the room and crouched there against the wall.

Wendell and Riley had jerked out their service revolvers, acting mechanically and without conscious thought, and darted aside also.

The shot had come from across the narrow court of the building, from the opposite wing. The window in Henry Lenmire's office was up from the bottom, and across the court a window was open also, and a wisp of smoke was curling through it and drifting off on the breeze.

"Stay under cover, Lenmire!" Wendell barked at him. "Riley, grab that phone and call Headquarters and report this. I want a flock of coppers up here, quick!"

Riley had dropped to the floor behind the desk, and now was making a swift examination of Hiram Wes-

lock. He lifted his head and looked at Wendell. "Center shot, Sam; he's dead," he reported.

"Stay here, Riley, and keep your eyes open! I'll handle the other end."

Then Wendell charged like a madman through the front offices, thrusting startled clerks and stenographers out of his path, and dashed into the corridor.

HE was compelled to race along this, into a cross hall and through that to the corridor in the other wing of the building, and then back along that for a distance. It took considerable time.

Wendell had spotted the office from which the fatal shot had been fired. Now, with his service revolver held ready for instant action, and expecting to face a fight the moment he entered, he threw open an unlocked door and sprang inside.

The pungent taint of exploded gunpowder was clinging to the room, and filled Wendell's nostrils. But it was an empty office. No human being was in it, nor was there a stick of furniture.

The first thing Wendell observed was a playing card attached to the wall close beside the door—the five spot of spades. That seemed significant enough.

The assassin could have sneaked into this empty office easily and fired the shot through the window and across the court.

Hiram Weslock had been killed just as he was starting to reveal something concerning the Randolph murder. Perhaps the killer had wished to stop Weslock's recital.

But, how could a man in this room have heard what Weslock was saying in that office across the court?

Then, too, it was possible that Weslock's death was accidental. Possibly it was Henry Lenmire for

whom the fatal bullet had been intended, and the killer had failed because of poor marksmanship.

After firing the shot, the assassin could have gone along the corridor in either direction, long before Wendell had got into it.

He could have dodged into another office, or gone to another floor of the building, either up or down. Hunting him was useless now, especially so since Wendell did not even know for what sort of man to look.

Wendell had stepped into the empty room for only a short distance, and then had stopped abruptly. Now, he became aware of a strange fact. Plainly, this office had not been in use for some time. A thick film of dust covered the floor. Wendell could see in this film the tracks his shoes had made.

But there were no other tracks!

He stooped and examined the floor carefully. Nobody had stood inside that room to fire the shot. And Wendell doubted very much that the assassin had opened the door and fired through it and the window from the corridor.

He would have run the risk of being observed, and the crack of the gun would have roared and echoed along the corridor and attracted unwelcome attention. And, there had been no gun smoke in the corridor.

THIS was the office from which the bullet had come—no mistake about that. And there was the significant five spot of spades.

Wendell removed the card and put it carefully into his inside coat pocket. He crossed the room to the open window and looked down into the court. Across it, Riley came within the range of his vision over in Lenmire's office.

"Did you call Headquarters?"

Wendell shouted.

"Yes. The squad's on the way,

Sam. Medical examiner, too. Get your man?"

Wendell shook his head negatively. Riley stood to one side of the window and bent forward to look down into the court. Wendell also could see Henry Lenmire, as he appeared suddenly near the end of his desk.

AND, in that instant, when Lenmire could be seen, there came the roar of a gun. It seemed to crack almost in Wendell's ear. With an angry snarl, a bullet zipped past his head.

He saw Riley give a senseless dodge as the bullet sped across the court and zipped past his head also, to thud into the wall of Lenmire's office. Lenmire cried out in fear and dodged out of sight.

Wendell whirled around swiftly, his revolver coming up ready to blast a killer. But there was no target. Nobody was in the office. The door remained closed. Yet there was a swirl of pungent smoke which told that a gun had been discharged there.

Wendell sprang across to the door and jerked it open, half expecting to be greeted with a burst of gunfire. In both directions, as far as he could see, the corridor was empty. A man would not have had time to close the door and run to another office and dodge into it.

Moreover, Wendell was certain that the door had not been opened, and closed again after the shot had been fired. He would have heard it, would have felt the current of air rushing in from the corridor.

Bewildered, he darted swiftly back against the wall and glanced rapidly around the office—only a small, single room on the court. There was no connecting room, no closet, no place for a man to dodge into hiding.

Smoke was swirling and drifting through the window. Across the

court, Riley was howling that he and Lenmire had not been hurt, and demanding to know whether Wendell was injured. Wendell called that he was all right.

Who had fired that gun behind him, as Henry Lenmire had revealed himself at the end of his desk in the office across the court?

Wendell supposed that it had been a second attempt to assassinate Lenmire, after the assassin's first bullet had gone wild and struck Weslock.

Then Wendell caught sight of a round black hole in the side of the casement of the corridor door. The edges of the hole were stained with powder burns. The odor of exploded powder was unmistakable around it.

Wendell guessed the truth instantly. A segment of the casement had been cut out, then replaced. Wendell pried it loose with his pocket knife. When the section was removed, he discovered a gun trap.

There was an aperture, in which an automatic pistol was fastened securely, its muzzle fitting into the tiny hole. An electric wire ran from the weapon down to the baseboard, along the edge of the casement.

The gun was fastened so that it was trained on the end of Lenmire's desk in the office across the court. A touch on a button, or the connecting of a tiny electric switch, and the gun could be fired. It was not anything new. Wendell had seen gun traps often before.

HERE was the gun—but it had been discharged from elsewhere. From some other office, possibly, the assassin had watched until Hiram Weslock had stood in the usual place at the end of the desk, then had touched a button—and the secretary had died.

Probably he had watched until Lenmire had stood in almost the

same spot, and the gun had been discharged again, and Lenmire barely had escaped death or injury. It may have been the intention of the unknown murderer to remove both men.

Wendell disconnected the wire from the gun, and started following it. It had been fastened cleverly to the baseboard, and followed the baseboard around to the window, up along the window casement, and passed outside.

THE work must have been done quite some time before, since there were no footprints in the dust, and the little wire was heavily coated with dust its entire length.

Wendell looked outside, and an exclaimed of disgust escaped him. Tracing the wire to its other end was not to be the easy task he had hoped.

Hanging loose, dangling below him into the court, was the wire. Wendell pulled it in carefully, coiling it and estimating its length.

And he found himself up against the proverbial stone wall again.

The wire was so long that the other end could have been in any one of a score of offices, on either side of the court, and either above, or below, or on this same floor.

Undoubtedly, the assassin would have ample time in which to remove all evidence as to where the other end of the telltale wire had been attached.

Leaving things as they were, Wendell set the spring lock on the door, and went out and closed it. He hurried around to the other corridor, and reached the offices of the Earthwide Chemical Company as the squad arrived from Headquarters.

"Block off this suite, and check the entire floor," Wendell ordered the men. "It's a murder case. Hold everybody until I say to let them go.

"And keep your eyes open—you may be up against a wanton killer."

CHAPTER V

NIGHT VISITOR



AS A result of that second shot, Henry Lenmire seemed to be on the verge of collapse. Wendell found him crouched in a corner of the office against the wall, muttering incoherently, staring at the body of Hiram Weslock, with Riley trying to soothe him.

"You'd better get out of here for the present," Wendell told him. "The medical examiner wants to do his work. And the police will be in charge of this suite until this affair is cleared up."

"Then I—I'll go into Braton's office, just next door, if I may," Lenmire said. "I must compose myself. I don't want the employees to see me like this."

Wendell went along with him. He said nothing to Lenmire about the death trap he had discovered. The door of Braton's office was fastened with a spring lock, but Lenmire had a key.

Wendell entered the room first, as a measure of precaution, and glanced around. There was one window, and another door which opened into the outside corridor, and which was locked on the inside.

"I'll be all right here—got to pull myself together," Lenmire was saying.

"I'll assign men to guard you," Wendell promised. "Try to get your nerve back."

Wendell left him there, sitting before William Braton's mahogany desk, and went into the front offices and corridor with Riley, to ask questions and receive reports from members of the squad. He learned nothing of value.

He explained to Riley about the gun trap.

"It looks like some of our work is right here," he said. "We'll send all the employees home, and have Lenmire guarded. If anybody makes another attempt to get him, possibly we can get a line on this thing and get going somewhere."

Then he hurried back to the door of Braton's office and knocked, calling out to identify himself. Henry Lenmire promptly responded and opened the door.

Wendell told Lenmire that he had arranged to have him guarded, and that he wanted him to go home or elsewhere while the police took complete charge of the offices.

"Please allow me to go to my own office for a moment," Lenmire begged. "I must get some papers, and lock my desk."

Weslock's body had been removed and a rug tossed over the blood spot on the floor. The medical examiner had concluded his work and was gone. Nobody was in the office.

LENMIRE seemed to be making an effort to gather courage before he entered. But finally he did so, and closed the door behind him. Wendell turned back to give further instructions to the men he had named as Lenmire's guards.

"Keep your eyes on him every minute," he ordered. "Somebody may try to shuffle him off. Remember everything that he says and does, and everywhere he goes, and with whom he talks. I want a complete report on him."

He assigned other men, Martin and Brown, to pick up and tail William Braton, explaining that he was under suspicion in a degree. Then he knocked on the door of Lenmire's office. There was no reply.

"Mr. Lenmire! We're ready!" he called.

When there was no immediate

response to that, fear came to Wendell. Had Henry Lenmire met death while alone in his office, with detectives and policemen only a few feet away?

But, as he was about to give orders to smash in the door, he heard Lenmire's weak voice: "I'm coming. Just a minute."

Lenmire opened the door. He had put on his hat and had some documents in his hand. But it seemed he had not composed himself to any great extent.

"I—I almost fainted—felt weak—had to sit down a moment," Lenmire said.

"You better go right home," Wendell told him. "These men will go along and guard you. You've been through too much. We don't want you to go to pieces. I may get around to see you later."

Lenmire went away with his guards. Wendell took Riley around to the vacant office and showed him the gun trap.

"But who worked the thing, and what became of him?" Riley asked.

"I don't know. Whoever he was, he wasn't William Braton. Braton has been at the Randolph house for hours. One of the men checked on that by phone."

"This wire could have reached any of the offices on either side of the court," said Riley. "But which one was it?"

"**W**E'RE up against the old stone wall again, Riley. If the Five Spot worked this gun trap, and killed Weslock, it's a safe bet that he's probably miles away by now. We'll go to Headquarters."

"And get the razz proper for lettin' a man get bumped off right under our noses," Riley mourned. "All right; we can take it."

The old stone wall!

There seemed to be only one good lead in all the mass—what Lenmire

had told them about the peculiar deal made by the three partners, and the death trap in the empty office with the long wire that might have led anywhere.

They went to Headquarters, where Wendell consumed quantities of black coffee, and continued to receive reports which were valueless.

"Get the Five Spot!"

That order was dinned in his ears and drove him almost frantic. Getting the Five Spot was no easy task. He was one unknown man in the midst of millions.

NIGHT came. Up all the night before, and having had a strenuous day, Wendell outlined work for others and went to the small apartment which was his bachelor home. Riley, who occupied a single room in the same building, went along with him.

Wendell took a bath and tumbled into bed. He was asleep almost instantly, to pass through a swirl of dreams.

In the midst of one it seemed that somebody was trying to prod him awake.

"Wendell! Come out of it! Wake up!"

That was no dream, but an actual voice speaking in whispers. Then Wendell realized fully that somebody was shaking him by the shoulder.

Another realization came to him, too—he was being prodded in the side with something that felt like the muzzle of a gun!

"Come awake, Wendell! I want to talk to you!"

Wendell's eyes snapped open—to find the room in darkness.

"Who are you?" he asked.

He started to sit up in the bed. His visitor in the dark thrust him backward.

"Take it easy, Wendell," he said. "Get your wits together. Don't

make me hurt you. I just want to have a little talk."

"Who are you?" asked Wendell.

"I'm the Five Spot!"

CHAPTER VI

THE MAN IN THE DARK



WENDELL made another attempt to sit up. But he was again thrust back roughly, and the muzzle of the pistol once more prodded him significantly. In the dark room he could

not see his visitor, only knew that he was there.

"Don't try anything foolish, Wendell," came the warning in low tones. "This is a friendly visit. But you're a cop and I'm a crook, so I'm taking no chances."

The voice was a low monotone, evidently disguised. Wendell had gathered his wits now. He knew that this was a time to move slowly, carefully, and take no unnecessary chances. It was a time for strategy and wit, rather than violence.

"So you're the Five Spot, are you?" he asked.

"If I wasn't, I'd be a fool to come here and tell you I was."

"What do you want here?"

"You're handling the Randolph murder case. I've read with great interest that I killed Felix Randolph, probably for hire, and dropped his body into the middle of a band concert from a dirigible. And that I killed that secretary of Lenmire's, too."

"All the evidence—those cards—"

"Fakes, Wendell. That's what I came to tell you. I knew nothing of the Randolph affair until I read about it in the newspapers. I may be a thief, but I'm not a murderer."

"You mean somebody's trying to pin it on you?"

"Exactly. It seems to have been well planned. Kill a man and blame

it on the unknown Five Spot. He's not in a position to step up and prove an alibi. If I'm caught some day, I don't want a murder charge hanging over me."

"Expect me to believe you?" Wendell asked.

"Yes. Why should I risk capture to come here and tell you this if I'm guilty?"

"To try to make me believe you're innocent. It's just another stunt."

"No, it isn't, Wendell. I'm protecting myself. The murder of Randolph looks like a professional job, but it wasn't."

"All right. Assuming that you've told me the truth, what do you think of the Randolph case?"

"If I were in charge of the case, one of the first things I would do would be to search William Braton's private office."

"Why?" asked Wendell.

"Because I suspect you overlooked a good bet there. I'm not going to tell you what—that's your job."

"All right—then what?"

"Find that dirigible."

"We've checked them all. Alibi for every one, except that Bergster blimp which was lost in the North Woods."

"ARE you sure it was lost, Wendell? Maybe not. And have you looked up the financial backers of the Bergster flight?"

"No. But aviators searched for days for the missing blimp."

"They were looking for wreckage and saw none. Would they have seen a blimp cleverly hidden so it couldn't be spotted from the sky?"

"Are you just making talk, or do you really know something?" Wendell demanded.

"I'll drop a couple of hints," the Five Spot said. "One is this—the Bergster people were searching for indications of certain chemical deposits. Ed Bergster was an all-

around scientist. And here's another hint—one of the backers of the expedition, the biggest by far, was William Braton, one of Felix Randolph's partners."

"What?" Wendell gasped.

Braton again! Wendell remembered what Lenmire had told him. Was it possible the Bergster blimp had not been lost, that it was being used in some illicit traffic, that Braton and the crew of the dirigible had slain Randolph?

Using the blimp and dropping the body to make mock of the police—that may have been only a spectacular trick to make everybody believe the Five Spot guilty.

"Five Spot, you seem to know a lot," Wendell said. "I think I'll keep you right with me till we get to the bottom of this. If you think you can walk out of here without me trying to stop you—gun or no gun—"

Out of the darkness came a soft chuckle. "I'm not a fool, Wendell. Before I shook you awake, I pricked your wrist with a needle. It's about time the drug was taking effect. A small dose, Wendell—you'll be unconscious only about half an hour. Long enough for me to get away safely."

"Why, you—"

DISREGARDING the gun that touched him, Wendell made an effort to spring out of the bed. But the Five Spot thrust him back. It did not call for much exertion on the part of the Five Spot. Wendell found himself miserably weak.

"You—you—" he muttered.

"You'll hear from me, Wendell, if I have anything to report," the Five Spot said. "I'm with you in this deal."

The monotonous voice had a soothing quality. Wendell felt his senses fogging. He tried to speak, but only muttered disconnected words.

Then the voice of the Five Spot died away—and he was gone entirely.

CHAPTER VII

MORE TROUBLE



SAM WENDELL came from the depths of a stupor for the second time that night, to a realization that somebody was shaking him roughly and begging him to come awake. But his brain was quicker to grasp realizations now.

He recalled instantly the queer visit of the Five Spot, and everything that had been said. He opened his eyes to find his face toward the wall. The lights in the room were on.

"Sam! Wake up; wake up! What's the matter with you? Snap out of it!"

That was Mike Riley's voice. Wendell grunted and turned over. Riley was standing there beside the bed, fully dressed. Wendell started to sit up, and Riley aided him.

"You sure must have been dead for sleep," Riley said. "There was an emergency phone call, and the office downstairs couldn't wake you, so they called me. I got in with the night clerk's master key. Thought somethin' bad had happened to you."

"What's wrong?" Wendell asked.

"Answer your phone, Sam. They're holdin' the call."

Wendell got out of bed and lurched across the room and grabbed the telephone.

"This is Martin, Inspector," a voice said. Martin was one of the men Wendell had assigned to shadow William Braton. "Our man spent the evening at a club, and did a lot of phone work."

"Got a line on it?" Wendell asked.

"He called Betty Randolph at her home a couple of times. And he put in three calls to a place out in the country. We didn't get a chance

to listen in, but we checked back. Nobody answered his calls."

"Where's the place?"

"We checked that," Martin replied. "It's a small farm. And that man Lenmire has a laboratory there—place where he makes experiments."

"Braton wasn't trying to reach Lenmire," Wendell said. "Lenmire's supposed to be home."

"He is, Inspector. I got in touch with Lenmire's guards. They said he took some sleepin' stuff and locked himself in his bedroom about nine o'clock. They're camping right in the living room of his apartment."

"But why get me out of bed to tell me this routine stuff?" Wendell demanded. "Where are you now?"

"We trailed Braton to Betty Randolph's. He's in the house now. I thought maybe you'd better know about it, so I came across the street to phone."

WENDELL glanced quickly at the clock on his table. It was one in the morning. A peculiar hour for William Braton to be visiting a girl whose father had been murdered the night before; who ordinarily would be a wreck from grief.

"Anything suspicious, Martin?" Wendell asked.

"We got close to a window, and we could hear a man and woman talking, and it sounded like they were quarreling."

"Stick close to the job," Wendell instructed. "I think I'll just drift up there."

He slapped the receiver on its hook and made a dive for his clothes.

"Get ready to take a ride, Riley," he said. "No more sleep for us tonight. Telephone downstairs and tell the clerk to have a taxi ready."

Wendell struggled into his clothes as Riley telephoned the necessary order.

"It may interest you to know, Riley," Wendell said, as he buttoned his shirt, "that the Five Spot called on me tonight, in person, right here in my bedroom."

"What?" Riley cried. "Are you foolin'?"

"No foolin'! Keep it quiet. He gave me an earful, and slipped me some sleep dope in my wrist. That's why I didn't hear the phone, and why you had such a job waking me. He says that it's a frame—that he had nothing to do with the Randolph killing."

"Says him!" Riley grunted.

"Maybe he's right. He told me some other things. We'll check on them in the morning. Let's go!"

Wendell grabbed up his hat as Riley started toward the door. But the harsh, discordant jangle of the telephone bell stopped them. Wendell rushed back.

"Wendell? This is Headquarters. Get out to the Randolph place. There's been a shootin' of some sort."

Five minutes later, Wendell and Riley were taking the wildest taxicab ride of their careers. The Randolph house was far out on a broad avenue where there was little traffic at this hour, and fast time could be made. The taxi driver made it.

WHEN they tumbled out of the vehicle at their destination, it was Martin, very excited, who met them.

"I called you right back, Wendell, but you'd started," Martin said. "Headquarters got you first. It happened just as I was crossin' back over the street after talkin' to you. But they called Headquarters from the house—"

"What happened?" Wendell interrupted.

"It's the Randolph girl." The speaker was Brown, Martin's partner in trailing Braton, who now

come forward and stepped up to them.

"Where's your man?"

"He's inside the house. Some of the Headquarters boys beat you here."

Wendell hurried into the house with Riley. He brushed aside a couple of the Headquarters men and went into the library.

Betty Randolph was stretched on a couch, unconscious, with a police surgeon making an examination. William Braton was pacing back and forth, with one of the squad men keeping a close watch on him.

Wendell gave Braton a swift appraisal. He was the well-dressed, middle-aged, successful type. Not half a nervous wreck, like Henry Lenmire. He'd not be an easy man to break down by questioning, Wendell judged.

"Sit down there!" Wendell snapped at him. "And talk! Tell me what happened."

CHAPTER VIII

ANOTHER FIVE SPOT



BRATON did not resent Wendell's manner, apparently. He sat down, seemed glad to talk.

"I scarcely know what happened. I was talking to Miss Randolph, about some personal matters. She was standing beside the couch, and I was walking back and forth. As I turned toward that window, I thought I saw a man peering in."

Wendell whirled to glance at the window—of the French type, and with one side open.

"What else?" he asked.

"At that moment, there was a shot. The bullet sang past my head. Miss Randolph gave a peculiar little cry, and I whirled toward her to see that she was falling. I caught her and put her on the couch."

"Then what?" Wendell asked.

"I called for the servants. They were all abed except the old butler, who had let me in when I came. He was in the rear of the house, but came quickly. Then I telephoned the police."

"Where'd the shot come from?"

"That window."

"See the flash?"

"Yes, just as I thought I saw a man looking in."

"Make any effort to catch him?"

"I attended to Miss Randolph first, then ran into the hall to telephone the police."

"WHEN you came back in here, did you rush to the window? Could you see anybody?"

"I hesitated about doing so. I supposed that the man who'd fired the shot had got away. And—perhaps I was a little afraid."

"You don't look like a man who'd be afraid," Wendell commented.

"In a case like that—unarmed, and with a chance of getting a shot from the dark—" Braton apologized for himself.

"Why should anybody shoot Miss Randolph?"

"I think that the bullet was meant for me," Braton replied. "It missed me, and happened to strike Miss Randolph."

"Wait here," Wendell ordered. He darted across to the surgeon and looked at him questioningly.

"It's a bad wound," the surgeon whispered. "No chance of her talking soon, Inspector. She may be unconscious for hours—if she ever regains consciousness at all."

"I want the bullet."

"I'll get it for you," the surgeon said.

Wendell returned to Braton. "What did the man look like—the one you saw at the window?"

"I can't tell. He had a dark hand-

kerchief, or cloth, pulled over his face and right up to his eyes, like a mask. I got just a glimpse at him, then the shot came."

Wendell's eyes bored into the other man's. "Felix Randolph was killed last night," he recited. "Later, Lenmire's secretary was killed in the office. Tonight Miss Randolph is shot—"

"But I'm quite sure that the shot was meant for me," Braton put in positively.

"Why do you think so? Do you think somebody is gunning for you?"

"Yes. I hate to ask for it, but—well, I want police protection. I feel that I'm in a position where I must be guarded. The next bullet may not miss."

"You don't know it, but you've been well guarded since yesterday forenoon," Wendell told him. "Two of my best men have been tailing you."

"What's that?" Braton cried. "Why? Surely, you can't mean that I'm under suspicion in the Randolph case. Why, he was my best friend!"

"Why do you want a police guard? Who's gunning for you, and why?"

"I hate to think it, but—"

"Spill it!" Wendell said.

"We had a peculiar business arrangement in the Earthwide Chemical Company—"

"You mean the deal where surviving partners inherited the interests of the others?"

BRATON showed surprise. "You know that?"

"I do. Have you the idea that somebody is trying to get rid of two of the partners?"

"That's it, Inspector," Braton replied. "I was hoping that it couldn't be true—was trying to keep it quiet. Such a suspicion would be

dreadful, if a man learned later that he was mistaken. But, if a man like the Five Spot has been engaged to murder—"

"To make it short," Wendell interrupted, "you suspect Henry Lenmire, don't you?"

"Yes, I do!"

Wendell smiled slightly. "It may interest you to know, Mr. Braton, that he also suspects you. That's why you've been watched. Lenmire is afraid that he'll be bumped off by your orders."

Braton sprang to his feet.

"What? Why, th—" he began.

"How am I to know?" Wendell asked. "The shot that killed Westlock, the secretary, may have been meant for Lenmire. And there was a second shot, which hit the wall—but almost got me. Both shots came from a gun trap. And the business end of that trap, the firing device, might have been in your private office!"

WENDELL was watching Braton closely as he spoke. Braton's eyes opened wide, and astonishment was mirrored in his face. Wendell was trying to decide whether the man was acting.

"What are you saying?" Braton cried.

"Randolph's body was dropped from a dirigible. You were the big backer of Ed Bergster's dirigible exploration trip, weren't you?"

"Yes. But what—"

"And you telephoned to Lenmire's country laboratory tonight, and didn't get anybody. You didn't think that Lenmire was out there, did you?"

Braton eyes flashed and his face purpled. "What does this conversation mean? Are you trying to insinuate that I'm a murderer?"

"It seems that you and Henry Lenmire are afraid of each other. Both of you have been shot at, it

appears. Are you gunning for each other?"

"I never heard of such nonsense!" Braton exploded. "I think you'd be doing better to spend your time trying to find the man who shot Miss Randolph."

"When I need somebody to tell me my business, I'll have an interview with the commissioner," Wendell retorted. "You stay right there in that chair. Watch him, Martin."

Wendell left the raging Braton and hurried across to the open window. An electric torch was being flashed outside, where one of the men from Headquarters was making an investigation.

Wendell got out his own torch and snapped it on, and crawled through the window.

The window was in the rear of the house, and a few feet off the ground. There was a tiny balcony on the outside.

Between the balcony and the high wall which ran along the alley was a distance of about twenty feet. This was a paved court. No chance of finding revealing footprints in soft earth.

YET there were footprints. Workmen had been making repairs around the balcony, and fine plaster was scattered over the pavement. In this were the prints of shoes.

But they were so blurred as to be valueless. Wendell gave them only a swift glance. He flashed his torch around the balcony and over the pavement.

He found there was a gate in the alley wall, and it was half open.

"Made his getaway through the alley," Wendell growled.

He returned to the balcony, got upon it, and thrust aside the draperies to crawl through the window. An exclamation escaped him. On the window ledge, where he had not noticed it before because of the dra-

peries, was a playing card—the five spot of diamonds.

CHAPTER IX

FINGERPRINTS



CRIMSON with rage, William Braton sat where Wendell had left him, with Martin watching him closely. And he became further infuriated when Wendell called the fingerprint man of the squad and instructed him to take Braton's prints.

To many minds, fingerprints are associated only with crime and criminals. It was so with Braton. He objected at first, threatening to call his attorney.

But Wendell reminded him that the absence of his prints on some article might serve to indicate his innocence and the guilt of some other man. So Braton allowed the fingerprint man to do his work.

Wendell gave the print man the two playing cards he had in his pocket—the one he had taken from the room where he had found the gun trap, and the one found on the balcony by the French window. Then he hurried to the surgeon.

The Randolph physician had been called, and it had been decided to remove Betty Randolph to a hospital immediately. They were preparing to do so now. Wendell instructed the police surgeon and one of the squad to go along.

"If she talks at all, even a few scattered words, I want to know what she says," he told them.

The library was cleared. Under guard, Braton was taken out into the big living room. Then Wendell and Riley examined the library.

"If Braton shot the girl, he got away with the gun," Wendell said. "That court outside has been searched, and no gun found. And we can't find one in here. None out

in the hall, either. Martin searched Braton, but he had nothing incriminating on him."

"You ask me, he's one smooth customer," Riley declared.

"Commencing to think he may have a hand in all this?"

"Looks like it," Riley commented. "That deal they made, the gun trap and this here thing—"

THE fingerprint man came hurrying in, and handed Wendell the two cards.

"His prints are on both of them," the fingerprint man said. "And when I say on 'em, Inspector, I mean *on* 'em. Take a look under the magnifying glass."

Wendell looked, and whistled. Yes, William Braton's prints were on the two five spots. In fact, they covered the cards, back and front. There was scarcely a fraction of a square inch of a card that did not bear a portion of one of Braton's fingerprints.

"What do you make of that, Riley?" Wendell asked.

"Sure looks like he's been handling them."

"A little overdone, isn't it?"

"How's that?"

"How does Braton impress you, Riley? Does he look like a weak-minded sap?"

"I said before he looks like a smooth customer."

"So he does, Riley, if such a man planned a thing like this, would he be careless? He's the sort to think of all the little details, isn't he? Wouldn't he be mighty careful not to have his fingerprints on the cards he left behind? We've never found a print on any of the real Five Spot left behind, have we?"

"That's right, we haven't."

"But here, Riley, are cards covered with prints. Rather careless, huh? Think a man like Braton would be that careless?"

"Never a crook but what got careless some time," Riley said. "That's why the jails are crowded."

"Look at the cards, Riley! Mazes of fingerprints! Does that tell you anything?"

"He must have handled the cards a lot."

"Observe, Riley, that his prints are the only ones. If these cards had been used in card games, doesn't it sound reasonable that prints of others' fingers would be on them? One person doesn't deal all the time."

"That's right," said Riley.

"Get it, Riley? These cards come from a deck that's been used to play solitaire. A lot of men indulge in solitaire, Riley, when they're relaxing, or even when they're doing heavy thinking."

"Are we to assume that Braton, quite a wise man in his way, took five spots out of his personal solitaire deck when he wanted cards to leave scattered around where he committed murders?"

"Somethin' fishy about it," Riley said. "Somethin' fishy!"

WENDELL went out into the living room with Riley close behind him. Braton was sitting on a couch, smoking nervously.

"Am I to understand," he demanded, "that I'm under arrest?" If so, I want to call my attorney. These rather high-handed proceedings—"

"We hear that line on almost every case," Wendell interrupted. He held the two cards. "Mr. Braton, as you may know, there was a playing card pinned to Randolph's coat—"

"I read of it—a five spot. That criminal—"

"Listen, please," Wendell interrupted. "We found another card when Weslock was killed. A few minutes ago, I found one on the bal-

cony in the library. All five spots.

"I have with me now that card and the one found at the office. The fingerprint man has been going over them. They're covered with your prints, Mr. Braton."

"What?" Braton cried.

"Did you ever see these cards before?" Wendell held them out to him.

"Why—I— don't know."

"Do the backs of them look at all familiar?"

"It—it's an ordinary back, isn't it. I mean, the cards are of a popular brand."

"Right. They can be bought at any cigar store or any stationery shop. No question about it, Braton—you've handled those cards a lot. Got anything to say?"

"I—I'd better see my attorney."

"Do you ever play solitaire?"

Braton betrayed sudden interest. "It's a pet vice of mine—if you can call it a vice. I play it by the hour."

"Where?"

"At any of my offices, when I'm thinking, or waiting for somebody to keep an appointment. At home, in the evening. Say! Those cards may have come from one of my solitaire decks."

"SO they might," Wendell agreed. "Braton, I want you to come along with us. Martin, you and Brown come also, and keep an eye on Mr. Braton."

"If I'm under arrest—" Braton began.

"Not yet—not officially," Wendell soothed. "But we're going to get to the bottom of several things."

"Are we going to Police Headquarters?"

"No. We're going to make a call on Henry Lenmire," Wendell replied.

"I don't want to see him at present. Perhaps it would be better if you—"

"Come along!" Wendell interrupted.

CHAPTER X

DISCOVERIES



HENRY LENMIRE'S bachelor apartment was on the second floor of a modest apartment building in a side street, about five blocks from the Randolph house. It was a quiet, respectable district where tenants could have respectability and economy combined.

Wendell took Riley, Braton, Martin and Brown and went there in one of the police cars. He left Braton in the car, guarded by Martin and Brown, and went in with Riley. In the living room of the Lenmire apartment, Lenmire's two detective guards were taking things easy.

They had coats and vests off, and were sprawling in easy chairs. The room was thick with tobacco smoke.

"How's your man?" Wendell asked.

Simpson, one of the guards, replied: "He turned in about nine o'clock, after peckin' at his dinner."

"And where is he now?"

"In the bedroom."

"Sure?" Wendell asked.

"About nine, he mixed him some dope, which he said was a sleepin' potion," Simpson replied. "He begged us to see that he wasn't bumped off durin' the night, then went into the bedroom and locked himself in."

"Still there, is he?"

"Haven't heard a sound," Simpson replied.

"Let's get in and see," Wendell suggested.

They tried the door, to find it locked on the inside. Wendell picked at the lock with skeleton keys, without success. He pounded on the door, but Lenmire did not answer.

"Wake up the building superintendent and get him up here," Wendell ordered Simpson. "Hurry it up. Riley, get on the phone and have a police doc rush right up here. He may be needed."

Simpson hurried out, and Riley darted to the telephone. Wendell worked with his keys again.

"The door's bolted on the inside, as well as locked," he declared. "Mr. Lenmire certainly was afraid of somebody walking in on him."

"You suppose they've got to him, Sam?" Riley asked, as he came back from telephoning.

"Hope not. We've got two killings, and possibly a third, in this case now. That's a lot more than plenty."

The building superintendent came, was told what was required, and hurried away for some tools. He was back in a few minutes and set to work.

The noise he made brought no protest from inside the bedroom. If Henry Lenmire was in there alive, he certainly was enjoying a drugged sleep.

BEFORE the door finally was opened the police surgeon had arrived. When the door came away, Wendell stepped inside, found the light switch and snapped on the lights.

Henry Lenmire was stretched on his bed. Wendell rushed there with the surgeon beside him. The inspector gave a sigh of relief when he saw that Lenmire was breathing regularly.

"Look him over," Wendell ordered the doctor. "Simpson says he took some sleeping dope about nine o'clock. Let me know how soon he'll be awake."

The doctor sniffed at a glass on a bedside table.

"I know the stuff," he said. "When did he take it? About nine?"

"Right!" Simpson replied.

The doctor grunted something and bent over Lenmire to make an examination.

Wendell began an inspection of the bedroom and its closets. He went to a window near the head of the bed, and spent some time there. Below the window was a shadowy paved court which opened into a dark alley. There was no fire escape.

WENDELL unlatched the window and raised it, and examined the sill. Three rubbed spots attracted his attention. He gave a characteristic grunt when he found them, left the window open and turned away. He opened one of the closets, and began rummaging around in it.

The police doctor called him.

"This may interest you, Wendell," he said. "The stuff this man took to put him to sleep, no matter how much he took of it, would have worn off in three or four hours. If he took it about nine, its effects would be ended."

"But he's drugged, isn't he?" Wendell asked.

"No question of it."

"Then, what's the answer?"

"Look here!" The doctor lifted one of Lenmire's hands, and pointed to a small perforation in the wrist, a swollen place. "Needle!" he said.

"A needle! You mean somebody jabbed him and gave him a shot of dope while he was asleep from the result of the drug he had taken?"

"I don't know how he got it. I'm a doctor, not a dick," the police surgeon replied. "That's your job."

"How long ago did he get it?"

"Not more than an hour, I'd say. Judging from the swelling. Whoever gave it to him didn't jab in just the right place—probably didn't know. That accounts for that swelling."

"That's the bunk!" Simpson roared. "Me and Harris haven't

left this room. Lenmire went into his bedroom and locked the door. Nobody has had a chance to get at him and jab him with any needle. You tryin' to make me and Harris out bums?"

"I," said the surgeon, testily, "am stating facts. It is not in my province to create bums. Nature does that."

"Say, you—" Simpson began, angrily.

"Cut it!" Wendell snapped. "Get Lenmire off his bed and stretch him on that big couch in the living-room. Simpson, you s't beside him with the doc, and wait for him to come out of it. Any idea how long it'll be, Doc."

"Can't tell," the doctor replied. "Don't know what he was given, or how much."

LENMIRE was moved, and then Wendell ordered all except Riley out into the big living-room. He gave Riley whispered instruction and they began going through the room.

"Look at this, Riley," Wendell said. He indicated the three rubbed places on the window casement.

"Somethin' been hanging out," Riley said.

"Not necessarily." Wendell went to the open window and peered down into the court below. "It might have been a ladder. Give me your flashlight."

Riley handed him the electric torch. Wendell cast the bright disk of light below.

In the shadows there was a long wooden ladder.

"Thought so!" exclaimed Wendell, as he ran the light over the ladder. There was a rope at one end of it. "Someone used that ladder to get in and out of this room—then took the ladder down again."

"Yeah," said Riley. "But who was that?"

Wendell was examining the center

mark of the three rubbed spots on the window casement.

"The murderer," he said cryptically.

"Sure," said Riley. "But who is the murderer?"

"I'm not positive yet," said Wendell. "But I'm hoping that I will be soon."

Wendell played the beam of the flashlight along the window casement, and on the wall below it. One thing interested him—a trace of plaster on the casement. On the rug, directly beneath the window, was another spot of fine plaster, just a trace.

"What's that stuff?" Riley asked as he observed the white substance on the rug.

"That, Riley, is plaster. At the Randolph place, outside the window below the balcony, plaster was scattered around. And in the plaster were blurred footprints."

He said nothing more at the moment, and Riley knew better than to question, for Wendell was searching methodically around the room, his manner that of a man determined to find something. And, presently, he did—as he flashed his light under the bed.

"Here we are, Riley!" he said triumphantly.

He held up a hypodermic needle and a bottle of drug.

CHAPTER XI

AN ARREST IS MADE



ORDERING Riley to keep silent about what they had found, Wendell led the way into the other room. The doctor was bending over Henry Lenmire, and Simpson was close also, ready to hear anything Lenmire said when he regained consciousness.

"How is he?" Wendell asked.

"I think he's coming out of it," the doctor answered.

"Stay as you are," Wendell ordered.

He hurried out, went down in the elevator, and returned with William Braton, under guard of Martin and Brown. He ordered Braton to sit in a corner of the room. Then they waited for Lenmire to regain consciousness.

THE police doctor tried a restorative, but could not do much. Wendell showed him the needle and drug, ordering him to keep silent about it.

"Depends on how heavy a shot he took," the doctor said. "He may snap out of it soon."

A moment later, Lenmire stirred, moaned slightly, and opened his eyes. He stared at them blankly a moment, seemed to be struggling mentally to realize things.

"Take it easy, Mr. Lenmire," Wendell said.

"What's happened? Where am I?"

"In your own living-room. You're all right"

"But what—"

"You didn't answer when we called, so we broke down the door," Wendell said. "Thought something might have happened to you."

"I—I took a sleeping powder—"

"You're all right now," Wendell said.

He helped Lenmire to sit up. Lenmire lifted his head and looked across the room, and saw Braton.

"What's Braton doing here?" he cried.

"I brought him along. There's been another—accident. Miss Betty Randolph was shot."

"Miss Randolph? When? How?"

"We found another five spot," Wendell admitted.

"Some monster—" Lenmire began.

William Braton sprang to his feet.

"Lenmire, did you give the police the idea that I was behind this terrible mess?" he demanded. "They've been watching me."

"I—oh, I'm bewildered!" Lenmire cried.

"You think I'd kill Felix Randolph, one of my best friends, a man interested with me in half a dozen lines of business? Why would I do such a thing?"

"To get control of the company," Lenmire replied.

"If it comes to that, perhaps it's you. If Randolph and I were removed, you'd have control of the company."

Wendell held up a hand in a demand for silence.

"LET'S get right down to cases," he said. "We found five-spot cards when Weslock was killed and Miss Randolph shot—and both cards are covered with Braton's fingerprints. That gun death trap we found had a wire that might have led anywhere. Braton, why did you call Betty Randolph twice late tonight? Why did you go to her house at such an unseemly hour, when she was grieving for her father? And why were you quarreling with her just before she was shot?"

"I'll—I'll tell," Braton said.

"Talk, if you wish," Wendell told him.

"I suspected Lenmire was behind all this—for certain reasons. I knew that Ed Bergster, the explorer, was an old friend of his—learned it recently. Miss Randolph thought Lenmire had been instrumental in the death of her father. She wanted me to tell the police about our business deal.

"I didn't want to do that. I thought it'd be terrible to accuse Lenmire of such a thing if he was innocent. Miss Randolph was insisting. That's what we were talking about. I was trying to save

Lenmire embarrassment, until we were sure. But it seems that Lenmire wasn't so kind regarding me. He ran to the police and hinted that I may have caused Randolph's death."

"Sounds good—especially since Miss Randolph is in no condition to refute what you say," Wendell said.

"You mean that you don't believe me?"

"Things look pretty bad for you, Braton," Wendell said. "I'm going to send you in."

"Arrest me, you mean?"

"Hold you on suspicion for the time being. Too much evidence against you to let you run around loose. Take him in, Martin—you and Brown—and book him."

"This is an outrage!" Braton cried. "You dumb police!"

"We've been called dumb by better men than you," Wendell assured him. "Take him away, boys."

Fuming and threatening reprisals, William Braton was taken away.

"MR. LENMIRE," Wendell said, "I don't think you need a police guard any more."

"So it was Braton," Lenmire muttered. "How could a man do such a thing? Randolph—Weslock—Miss Randolph. Is Miss Randolph seriously hurt?"

"Don't know what the outcome will be," Wendell replied. "Mr. Lenmire, I want you to go to another apartment. The superintendent has one vacant undoubtedly."

"But why—"

"I don't want anything touched here just now. You may take what clothes and things you wish."

"But I'd rather stay in my own place," Lenmire protested.

"There's a reason, or I'd not ask it. If Braton is the guilty man, he didn't work alone, did he?"

"That's right. There must have been others. The Five Spot and—"

"There you are. It may be safer for you in another room for the present."

"Maybe I'd better have the guard, after all."

"With Braton in jail, I'm quite sure his associates, if he has any and whoever they may be, won't make a move."

"If he's hired the Five Spot to kill me—"

"In that case, the Five Spot will be rather nervous, when he learns that Braton is arrested."

HENRY LENMIRE got some clothes together and prepared to go to a vacant apartment.

When he was gone, Wendell left two men on guard in the apartment. He sent the others back to Headquarters, with the exception of Riley.

"Where do we go from here?" Riley asked.

"We take a nice taxi ride, instead of using a police car, and go to the offices of the Earthwide Chemical Company."

"I always did like to ride in a taxi."

"Mike, you're bursting with questions. Let 'em out."

"Why send Braton to the jug when there's as much evidence against Lenmire?"

"Braton is safer there. Somebody may be out to get him, you know."

"Then you don't think Braton did it?"

"I don't. That card thing was overdone, for one item. Braton wouldn't have left cards covered with his prints. I think he was telling the truth about everything. Braton's safer in jail, and when this is ended he'll thank me for sending him there."

"Takin' the watch off Lenmire—"

"Makes him think we believe Braton guilty. And the watch is not off

Lenmire, Mike. He only thinks it is. I tipped two of the boys to shadow him."

"Then you think Lenmire's the man we want?"

"I'm not quite satisfied about that yet," Wendell replied.

CHAPTER XII

ONE LITTLE ERROR



EN were on guard at the offices of the Earthwide Chemical Company. Nothing had been touched since Wendell had left there after the removal of Weslock's body.

It was almost dawn when Wendell ordered all the lights turned on and went into Braton's office with Riley. Wendell had not forgotten the suggestion regarding searching the office that his nocturnal visitor, the man who called himself the Five Spot, had made.

For over an hour the two detectives went methodically over the place, examining everything, from the contents of the desk drawers to the wall fixtures. By the time they had finished, the early morning sun was shining in brightly through the windows.

"Nothing here." Wendell finally said wearily as he dropped into the chair at the desk. "And yet I was sure there would be."

Wendell felt under the desk as he finished speaking, then suddenly uttered an exclamation. He rose from the chair and looked beneath the desk. What he saw startled him. It was a tiny electric switch. He got down beneath the desk to make a better investigation.

Electric wiring was connected with the switch, and also with the general electric system of the building. The fine insulated wire ran through the rug, and beneath it to a corner of the room. There, it

went up the wall behind a file case, and to a ventilator.

Wendell raised the window and looked out. The wire did not emerge. Inside, he tugged at it, and the end came free from the wall. It had been cut or snapped off.

So the death trap had been fired from William Braton's private office!

Wendell showed Riley what he had found.

"But who worked it, and what became of him?" asked Riley.

"The clerks said that nobody came in here from the outer office yesterday morning. The door was locked on the inside with a spring lock. But—" Wendell waved a hand toward the other door. "There you are! He did his stuff, killed Weslock, then went through that door and calmly down the corridor to the stairs or elevator."

"But it couldn't have been William Braton," said Riley. "You checked on that yesterday and he had been at the Randolph house for quite some time."

"Yes, I realize that."

"Still it may have been somebody in Braton's pay," Riley suggested.

"**E**XACTLY," Wendell agreed.

"The end of the death trap was here in Braton's office. After the second shot was fired, the wire was snapped and let fall into the court and hang there, so we couldn't trace it. If we hadn't discovered this switch, it and the remainder of the wire probably would have been removed at the first opportunity."

"How did he snap the wire?" Riley asked.

Wendell got up on a chair and investigated where the wire had passed through the ventilator. Fastened securely, there was a heavy razor blade. It was imbedded in the cement and insulated, too.

"Probably the wire was cut almost through, just enough kept to

preserve the electrical connection," Wendell explained as he stepped down from the chair. "A tug on the wire, and it was cut the rest of the way through and fell into the court."

"Check!" Riley said.

Wendell went back to Braton's desk. He stood behind it and happened to look through the window and across the court.

"Riley!" he exclaimed. "Come here—look out through the window."

Riley joined him and both men gazed out. The way the light came down into the court of the building during the morning hours it made a perfect mirror of the window in the office where Wendell had found the gun trap. Reflected in that window now the two men could see a picture of the interior of Lenmire's office.

"Go into Lenmire's office and talk," Wendell told Riley. "It doesn't matter what you say—I just want to see if I can hear you."

"I get you." Riley hurriedly left the room.

A few moments later Riley appeared in the reflection of the other office in the window across the court. He began to talk, and Wendell could understand clearly what he said. It seemed simple enough now.

SOMEONE could have been at Braton's desk, watching and listening. The interior of Lenmire's office could be seen in the window opposite. The watcher could have heard Hiram Weslock begin revealing what he knew, as he had done the previous morning; could have seen in the window that Weslock was standing in the right spot to receive the bullet.

Then, a touch of the tiny electric switch—and it was done!

Later, the attempt on Lenmire's life could have been made when the window mirror showed him standing

at the end of the desk. But that attempt had failed.

Riley came hurrying back into Braton's office as Wendell lifted his voice and called to him.

When he entered, Riley found Wendell down under the desk examining the tiny electric switch and the wire which ran from it under the rug. Riley got down on his knees and watched.

"See this?" Wendell asked. "Right here on this wire, under the rug, another wire has been attached."

"Sure. Insulation scraped off," Riley admitted.

AND now, acting on intuition, Inspector Wendell made discoveries which startled Mike Riley. He moved the desk and threw back the rug. He traced an invisible trail to the wall between Braton's office and Lenmire's office, and there he found a tiny hole through the wall.

Now they hurried into Lenmire's office. Scratches were on the floor under Lenmire's rug, too.

"Wire ran from Lenmire's desk under the rug, through the wall, and connected with that other wire," Wendell explained. "Get it, Mike?"

"Not quite," Riley confessed.

"Wait a minute."

Wendell continued his investigation. Under the edge of Lenmire's desk was a spot which showed clearly that something had been fastened there with two tiny screws. The desk was scratched, as though that something had been removed quickly and with little care.

"Think I've got it," Wendell said, "but I'm not sure. We'll have to play a little game, Riley. But first, we'll eat."

"Eat?" Riley asked.

"Sure. Breakfast. Come along."

They descended to the street and went through the dawn to the nearest restaurant, where they demolished heavy breakfasts. Then Wen-

dell, without offering explanations, led the way back to the offices of the Earthwide Chemical Company again.

"I've got it now," Riley said.

"About time," Wendell told him.

"Just what have you got?"

"Lenmire worked that gun trap. He sat right there at his desk, and when Weslock started to talk, he touched a button and Weslock died. Then he touched it again and fired that second shot."

"Trying to get me as I was in the window across the court," Wendell added.

"But gettin' rid of the wires and all?"

"Easy," Wendell said. "He went into Braton's office. He disconnected the wire from there to the wall and got rid of it. Before he went home, he was back in here, getting some papers. In here with the door locked. And if you remember he was some time coming out—said he'd felt faint."

"I remember," Riley said.

"He was busy removing the wire which ran from the wall to his desk, and the switch under the desk. Probably stuffed them into his pocket and carried them away."

"But—breakin' the wire?"

"Easy. After the second shot, he tugged at it. The wire from here to the wire from Braton's desk was arranged for that. It cut the outside wire and let it drop into the court."

"**M**UST have been a lot of work arrangin' it," Riley suggested. "And why?"

"Wanted to pin the thing on Braton, probably have him sent to the chair. And he wanted it to use to make us think somebody was trying to shoot him. Also, in case somebody tried to talk out of turn—as Weslock did."

"Why, the murderin' devil!" Riley exclaimed.

Wendell turned to the telephone and put through a call to the apartment house. He got Lenmire out of bed.

"Please come right down to the office, Mr. Lenmire," he said. "Don't wait to eat breakfast. I think we've got this thing about settled."

Wendell smiled slightly as he replaced the receiver and looked across the desk at Riley.

"He'll be tailed, so he can't get away," Wendell said. "We'll play a little trick on Mr. Lenmire."

"Goin' to spring it on him and send him in?"

"Riley, I'm surprised at you! He didn't do all this by himself. He had associates. How about the blimp?"

"Forgot that," Riley said.

"Lenmire must lead us to his associates—and I think I know where they are."

WHILE they waited Wendell did some more telephoning. He ordered the police airplane held in readiness, and had a powerful police motor car sent to the office building to wait for him. He communicated with certain state officers and asked them to co-operate with him, for he intended to step outside his proper jurisdiction.

He gave orders to the policemen on guard in the office; and when Lenmire arrived he asked him to go into his own private office and wait, and sent one of the policemen out to spot the men trailing Lenmire, and give them special orders.

There was a telephone call, and one of the men on guard answered it at the office switchboard.

"For you, Wendell," he called.

Wendell hurried to the switchboard. "Hello!" he said.

"Inspector Wendell?" asked a voice over the wire.

"Right."

"This is Burke; they plugged me

through from Headquarters. I'm calling long distance."

"Oh, all right, Burke."

It was one of the men that Wendell had detailed to find the Bergster dirigible.

"I'm near a farmhouse outside the city," said Burke. "The place that Braton telephoned—and you had checked. There are three men here. Want me to get the local police to help me bring them in?"

"No; wait," ordered Wendell. "Don't do anything until I arrive."

"Right, Inspector," said Burke. "I'll be waiting."

THAT ended the conversation. Wendell got Riley and went to Braton's private office. They got close to the wall to talk, knowing that Henry Lenmire, waiting in the office adjoining, would hear them.

"That finishes it, Riley," Wendell said. "Listen now, and we'll go over it."

For Lenmire's benefit, Wendell recited the explanation of the gun trap.

"Last night Lenmire came to my apartment pretending that he was the Five Spot," said Wendell. "He wanted to implicate Braton as much as possible. That's why he told me about Braton having been one of the backers of the Bergster flight."

"But Lenmire was drugged—asleep," Riley grinned at the wall as he spoke.

"Only for a few hours, as the police told us," said Wendell. "He dropped out the window using a rope—and came to my place as the Five Spot. And then, later, he shot the Randolph girl."

"He used the ladder to get back into his room. Probably wasn't husky enough to climb up the rope. He was lucky—that ladder belonged to painters who had been working on the building. After he got inside the room he silently lowered the

ladder to the ground with the rope and then he dropped the rope down."

They talked on—knowing well that Henry Lenmire had slipped from his office and gone down the hall. Out of the suite he hurried, thinking that he was making a getaway, not knowing that he was immediately picked up and tailed by some of Wendell's men.

He hurried to the nearest telephone booth, and there put through a call.

"Hello! Bergster? This is Lenmire! It'll all over! They've got the dope on us! Get the blimp ready! We've got to make a getaway. I'll be right out. What? Don't care if it is day. They know about the blimp, too. Wait for me!"

Fragments of that conversation were overheard by a man in the booth adjoining.

Henry Lenmire rushed down the street and got a taxicab. He was trailed to a garage where he kept a high-powered car of his own.

He got into this and drove away, turning toward the outskirts of the city. Knowing where he was going, the officers went ahead, by a different route, save one who trailed in a roadster.

CHAPTER XIII

DESPERATION RULES



WHEN at the office, Wendell called for Riley to come with him, as soon as he learned that Lenmire had gone. They hurried to the waiting police car and sprang in. Through the city and to the airport they rushed at top speed.

Into the air they went in a police plane, Wendell giving the pilot explicit instructions. In scarcely any time at all, they were circling the little farm.

"Can land in that meadow," the

police pilot said, "if you want to take a chance."

"Take it," Wendell ordered.

One thing favored them. A ridge, covered with trees, gave them a chance to land in such fashion that anybody watching from the farm might think the plane had gone on.

They landed roughly, but without accident, and tumbled out of the plane.

"Can I go along?" the pilot asked. "I ain't had any excitement for a long time. Nothin' but plane crashes and dead-stick landin's. Life's stale."

"Pull a gun and come along," Wendell said. "The next half hour might not be stale."

THEY went over the ridge and stopped in a fringe of brush at the edge of the trees. Below them was the farm—with a ramshackle farm house, a couple of small out-buildings, a building which was newer and evidently was Lenmire's experimental laboratory, and a huge old barn.

"Notice the doors in the end of the big barn?" Wendell asked. "New and reach to the top. There's the blimp, or I'm all wrong. Under cover, now!"

They were careful as they approached, keeping behind clumps of brush as much as possible, dodging behind rocks, advancing a few feet at a time. Nobody seemed to be around the place. But, as they drew nearer the barn, a man came from the old house and called toward it.

"That's Ed Bergster," Wendell said. "So he didn't crash in Canada! I remember his pictures. See that big scar on his cheek? He got that in Africa, according to reports."

A small door in the barn opened, and a man came out.

"Got a phone call from Lenmire. We've got to run for it," Bergster called. "We'll use the blimp and hit

for Canada. Something's gone wrong. I suppose that fool Lenmire spilled the beans somehow."

"Better give us some help, Ed," the other called. "You goin' to wait for him?"

"Yeah! He might talk too much if we left him behind. We'll come down in some safe place before they catch up with us, and destroy the blimp."

Ed Bergster hurried to the barn and disappeared inside. Wendell, Riley and the police pilot continued their advance toward the barn.

"I've got information that there are three men," Wendell told the others. "That makes it even. Let's surprise 'em, if we can."

As they drew nearer, they could hear the three talking inside.

"Don't know how much the cops have learned," Bergster was saying. "Lenmire didn't say. If we can get into the air, maybe we can make it. This old blimp isn't so fast. They can overtake us if they come after us."

"We've got guns," another said.

"Right! We can shoot down a plane and keep goin' until it's safe to land. If we have luck, we can get up north, maybe keep goin' until night."

WENDELL motioned, and with the others went forward again. They reached the side of the barn and started creeping around to the front, toward the big doors and the little one beside it.

They took up stations near this little door, and Wendell motioned to the other two and pounded on the wall.

"What's that?" somebody inside asked.

"Maybe it's Lenmire, here already. Go take a look."

Wendell crouched at one side of the door, Riley on the other, and the police pilot, gun held ready, stood

a short distance away. The door was opened cautiously, and one of the men stepped out.

"Up with them!" Wendell snapped, lurching forward.

The man was a quick thinker.

"Cops!" he yelled, and tried to dodge back into the barn and close the door.

WENDELL and Riley hurled themselves at him. Back in the barn, a gun exploded, and a bullet fanned past Riley's head. Then the three were inside the semi-dark barn.

The man who had opened the door had lurched away from them, had rushed back into the darkness. From that darkness now came stabs of flame.

The stentorian voice of Ed Bergster, a participant in many an escapade, called to his companions.

"Blast 'em to hell!"

The pilot gave a screech as a bullet struck him in the arm, and emptied his gun at the flashes he saw. Wendell, crouching low, was rushing forward. Mike Riley, a gentleman who always welcomed a fight of any sort, was howling like a madman as he worked his gun.

Riley hurled himself forward, began clubbing a human head. One of the Bergster crew suddenly was still. Wendell fired slowly and deliberately at a man in a corner. Then a final rush, and it was the end.

"You all right, Riley?"

"Okay, Sam!"

"Open those big doors, and let's have some light."

"One of 'em plugged me high in the left arm," the pilot was complaining. "Had some excitement, anyhow."

The big doors rolled back easily. Now, they could see.

One of the three was dead. Another was sprawled on the floor beside the car of the dirigible, moaning, fatally wounded. Ed Bergster

was propped up against the wall, his gun a few feet away.

Bergster tried to smile as Wendell and Riley knelt beside him.

"Knew I'd get it—some day," he said. "Too big a game, this."

"We got the goods on Lenmire," Wendell told him.

"Thought we had a good thing. I knew Lenmire years ago. He got Braton to back our trip. We found mineral deposits—rich. Planned for Lenmire to get all the company; then he'd declare us in. Millions in it—cheap raw materials and all."

"I get it," Wendell said.

"Thought we'd have it blamed on the Five Spot. Got Randolph easy; killed him and dumped him over. That Weslock—he knew too much. Knew from the papers that Lenmire had blasted him. And that—"

Bergster choked and stopped.

A moment later, he went on.

"We should have bumped off Braton somehow. Well—it's curtains. Had a good time while I lasted."

Then Ed Bergster was gone.

"Now, we'll arrange to receive Mr. Lenmire," Wendell said.

UP the lane from the road rushed a car containing two of Wendell's squad. They parked the car behind the house out of sight and hurried into the barn.

"Came ahead of him and left a trailer," one explained.

"Got here when the work's all done," Wendell complained. "Get out of sight."

"How about the state cops?" Riley asked.

"They're hiding at the bend in the road. They'll let Lenmire pass, then trail him. But they'll not be needed now."

They waited a time. Then, in the distance, they saw a cloud of dust, a dark spot that they knew was a motor car being driven at terrific speed.

It turned from the road into the lane and rushed toward the house. It came to a grinding stop with brakes squealing protests, and Henry Lenmire sprang out of it and rushed toward the barn.

"Bergster! Bergster, let's get going!"

On he came, running, panting. Another car was turning into the lane, and Lenmire saw it.

"Bergster! Officers coming! Get ready to fight!"

As he neared the door, Wendell stepped out, gun in hand, and confronted him.

"Good morning, Mr. Lenmire," he said. "Your friend Bergster is dead. So are his two companions. But they talked before they died. Now, Mr. Lenmire, I think we'll take a little trip back to town, turn Braton out of his cell, and toss you in. You're on your way to the chair."

"You—you—" Lenmire's eyes took on a wild look. He reached for a pocket.

"Nothing like that, thank you!" Wendell said.

HE and Riley grabbed Lenmire, tore the gun from his grasp and hurled it away. Lenmire sobbed, collapsed.

"Too many angles in your game, Lenmire," Wendell told him. "You built up too good a case against Braton. Overdid it when you stole his solitaire deck to leave those last five spot cards with his fingerprints all over them.

"Also when you came to my apartment and pretended to be the real Five Spot. You were even double-

crossing your own partners when you suggested that I look for the Bergster dirigible—wanted to hog the whole thing, I guess. And then when you found we were hot on your trail you went running to those same men to help you.

"YOU slipped up when you gave yourself that hypodermic injection and then threw the dope and the needle under the bed. If anyone else had done it, they wouldn't have gone to all that trouble. They would have just dropped the needle and the bottle in their pocket and left.

"You didn't stop to realize that I would examine the window casement of your bedroom and find the two marks made by the ladder and the deeper one made by the rope.

"It's an old game to surround yourself with police protection, too. Thought the cops would furnish you with an alibi—watching you all the time, guarding you, when Miss Randolph was shot. You meant to get Braton, and missed, didn't you?"

"Yes," Lenmire admitted.

"Bumping off Weslock in front of our eyes before he could talk and implicate you—good stuff, Lenmire. That second shot, too—made it look like somebody was gunning for you.

"You went to a lot of trouble and did a lot of clever things with the blimp mechanic to help you with the electrical work. Then spoiled it all by getting a little plaster on your shoes—and we've got those shoes, Lenmire. That's why I had you move to another apartment in a hurry. You tracked that plaster into your room. Let's go, Lenmire."

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*Author of "Romany Kill," "Nothing Under
His Hat," etc.*

CHAPTER I

"ONE DROP KILLS!"

"IT IS not the usual snatch racket we are up against, Dugan," Fred Hammond, Cave City's chief of police, explained when I arrived in answer to his SOS. "Morris Leffenwell, wealthy department store merchant, disappeared six months ago. Cordell, a lawyer, disappeared shortly thereafter. Burke, a taxi driver, went during the second month, to be followed a month later by Gant, a miner. Lastly, "Red" Wharton, star halfback of our Brownell College football team, vanished two weeks ago. They just disappeared, and no word of any kind has come from them.

"At two o'clock yesterday morning, Patrolman Kine picked up a man at the corner of Calumet and Main. He was a walking skeleton, face wasted and skin-drawn, hair and beard matted and long, and as



Surrounded by the eerie hooded

white as cotton. He was naked except for the trunks of a pair of bib-less overalls, and his feet were bare.

"Kine took his catch to Captain Rhulin, night chief of the dicks, but Rhulin was up a stump, too. He finally called in a barber, had the man's hair cut, his face shaved—and recognized in him the lost merchant, Morris Leffenwell. Leffenwell was dying on his feet, his mind completely gone. His vocabulary consists of this one sentence: 'One—drop—kills!'

"He mutters that and not another word. Now, Pat, that's the dope. What are you going to do about it?"

"I'll have a look at Leffenwell," I told him, "as a first step."



figures, Cordell, strapped and helpless, groaned in anguish

Leffenwell's family, as well as the public in general, had been kept in ignorance of his return, and the man himself was then in the emergency hospital at City Hall.

I had a look at him, and never have I seen anything in human form that aroused pity in me more than he. He lay on his bed, staring up at the ceiling, lips moving silently.

Police Surgeon Lowe, who had first examined Leffenwell, came on call.

"Leffenwell cannot survive," he informed me. "I don't know to what his pitiable condition is due. His body has been poorly nurtured for a period of months, but I think the real seat of his trouble is mostly

mental. That is all I can tell you."

Dr. Stanley Fyke, of Brownell College, came in shortly after Lowe arrived. He was a tall, powerfully built man of forty or so, who had turned a highly trained mind upon subjects of psychological study, and his papers on his finding were widely read. He had viewed Leffenwell before.

"Unique in my experience," he told me. "Leffenwell has no conscious mind. It retains only one thought, and that is the thought he puts into words: 'one drop kills.' There is yet a center of the brain that functions, and in that center those three words are indelibly impressed. What caused it? Your

guess, Dugan, is as good as mine."

In the office which had been put at my disposal during my stay at City Hall, I spent half an hour trying to think out a line of action. Then, at exactly an hour after midnight, the case began to break with startling rapidity.

AT half past twelve the office door crashed open, revealing Detective Captain Braden, greatly excited.

"Dugan," he exclaimed, "there's something wrong out at Professor Fyke's house! Central reported to the desk that a telephone out there had been knocked over and she can't get anybody to answer. She thinks she heard sounds of a fight!"

In just ten minutes running time, Braden parked his high-speed roadster on the campus before the modest cottage occupied by Doctor Stanley Fyke. There was a light in the hallway, and the ivory-hued curtains in the living-room betrayed a dim glow. We found the front door unlocked, and hurried in. The door of the living-room, on the left, stood ajar.

On a rug near the fireplace lay the limp form of Dr. Fyke. His eyes were closed, and he breathed laboriously.

"Grab that phone off the floor, Braden," I said. "Get Doc Lowe out here *pronto*. Tell Headquarters to send a squad car full of dicks."

Braden leaped to obey, and I gave closer attention to the man on the floor. He appeared to be asleep; no sign of a wound on him. Drugged, that was it. Another moment and I spied a hypodermic, glass shattered and needle snapped off, lying between an andiron and a side wall of the fireplace. I retrieved the hypo and sniffed at it cautiously. Chloral!

Fyke, who was coatless, had had his shirt torn almost from his body. There had been a struggle in the room.

There was nobody in hiding inside the house, no servant there, and we found no windows unlatched. The kitchen door, however, was unlocked. We quickly determined that no robbery had been committed.

When the police arrived, Dr. Lowe made a quick examination.

"Drugged," he announced. "Acts like chloral, and that hypo smells like it. He's deep down, and will continue so for a considerable time."

Why had Professor Fyke been attacked? Did it hook up with the Leffenwell case? Was it in the cards that the snatcher of men had not finished yet, and that others were slated to go?

I could only believe that such was the case. That an attempt had been made to carry off Fyke, and that the falling of the telephone, which might give alarm, had balked it.

But for a lucky break, Fyke might even then be entering that silence from which Leffenwell had just returned!

CHAPTER II

DEATH MAKES AN ENTRANCE



R. FYKE, when he awakened that morning, could tell but little.

"He was hiding behind the draperies of the sitting-room bay window," the professor related. "A big man, near six feet in height. He wore a tightly buttoned coat of some kind of rubberized black cloth that came to his ankles. A mask, probably of the same material, and a black beret of shiny cloth was pulled low over his head. He wore gloves. There was not one part of him unconcealed, but, during the struggle, I got the notion that a short beard covered his chin under the mask. An injection ended my resistance quickly. That is all I can tell you."

I got a bit of information from

Fyke that sounded good to me. I learned that Dr. Hardwick Cantrell, nationally known psychiatrist, formerly practicing in Kansas City, now retired, was living in Cave City. If Leffenwell's condition had a name Cantrell should certainly be able to identify it. I had a slight acquaintance with the famous man, and decided to call on him.

Following directions, I drove out to the Cantrell home, a big stone mansion which stood in gloomy solitude on the brow of a hill.

A negro butler showed me into a small sitting-room, and a few minutes later Dr. Hardwick Cantrell came in.

Hardwick Cantrell was a large man of forty-five or fifty, standing just under six feet in height. His shoulders were broad, waist line narrow, no fat upon him. Eyes, hair and Vandyke were coal black, without so much as a thread of grey. His manner was stiff, formal, chilling. He recognized me, but was not at all pleased when I stated my business and requested his aid.

"IT is utterly out of the question," I came the brusque refusal. "I am at this time engaged in certain laboratory tests vital to the final chapters of a treatise I am finishing. I can permit no foreign matter to intrude."

"Okay, Doc," I replied. "Sorry to interrupt your work."

I removed my objectional person from the doctor's house, and would have been off his grounds in another couple of minutes but for a pair of swift feet which overtook me. They bore the bewitching person of Miss Lacy Cantrell, only child of the widowed specialist.

"Mr. Dugan," she said, drawing me around where the car would screen us from the house, "I want to apologize for father's rudeness a moment ago! I'm sorry!"

"That makes everything all fine again," I told her.

"And," she went on hurriedly, "I want to talk with you about the thing that brought you here. Red—Jack Wharton, and I have been engaged for almost a year. I know he did not disappear of his own accord," she said earnestly. "He—he cared too much for me. You will find him for me, won't you?"

"I'll do my best," I assured her. "When you saw Red last, did he appear worried about anything?"

"NOTHING, except he was blue over father's forbidding him the house. Father objected to our engagement, and for no reason in the world except that he thinks I'm too young for marriage. You will get him back for me, won't you?"

"I'll get him for you, my dear," I told her. "In the meantime, I'm down at City Hall, if you want me."

Five minutes after I returned to my office, Captain Braden barged in. His red face had taken on a deeper crimson.

"Dugan," he exclaimed, kicking the door shut behind him, "we got more grief! There's a stiff parked in a vacant house on Chataqua Road—and he's naked as a picked sparrow, except for a pair of them same kinda overalls, hacked off above the knees, that Leffenwell had on! Laying right in the middle of the front room floor, with his hands crossed on his chest, just like he'd been laid out by an undertaker!"

"Who discovered the body?" I snapped, reaching for my hat.

"A tile setter named Powell. Somebody called him up last night and told him to call at the house and size up a job of tile work in the fireplace in the sitting-room. He called, found the door unlocked, and the stiff like I told you."

We drove to Chataqua Road with siren blaring, and pulled up five min-

utes later in front of an isolated frame house of two stories and an attic. Powell, the tile setter, awaited us on the porch.

Lying in the center of the floor of the sitting room, was the body of a man of middle age. His face was a mask of agony. The eyes were wide open, fixed in the stare of death. The thin lips were drawn back, exposing clenched teeth, yellow and stained. His body was bare, except for the mutilated overalls about his middle.

"It's Sam Gant, the missing miner!" Braden said croakingly. "Shave off the beard, and it's him! We got a picture of him!"

Sam Gant was the third man of the five to disappear.

"**P**OISON," Police Surgeon Lowe declared, when he arrived. "Cyanide, strychnine, aconite, prussic acid. All act like that. God, Dugan, what's happening, anyhow?"

"It's our job to find out," I answered quietly. "Powell, here, was steered to the place this morning for the sole purpose of discovering the body on the floor. The pretense of a tiling job was obviously a stall. Whoever put the body here, wanted it discovered today, and arranged for it."

That it was not suicide was immediately plain to the trained observer. There was nothing in the room that might have contained the poison. Gant, dying in agony as his face betrayed, lay with his body composed and his hands folded on his breast. That shouted loudly of the presence after death of a second person.

Braden and I made a minute investigation of the house and the grounds around it, but learned nothing. We returned to Headquarters.

Directly after I entered my office, I sent for "Silent" Jim Brady. He was the most insignificant looking

sleuth the Police Department had on its roster—and one of the ablest.

"Brady," I said, "get me all you can about Dr. Hardwick Cantrell. You can't be too soon with the dope."

"Gotcha, Pat," said Jim, and went out as silently as he had come in.

Some time later, Dr. Lowe, police surgeon, called. His face wore a worried look, and he gave me a wry grimace.

"I've got to bust things all up on that poison conclusion," he said regretfully. "There is not the slightest trace of poison of any kind in Sam Gant's body."

That was a jolt!

"How about the condition of the heart?" I asked.

"Nothing serious there."

"The stomach—anything there?"

"Food in sufficient quantity to sustain life."

"Then Sam Gant died at the hands of a murderer," I snapped. "Verify your findings beyond dispute, and let me know what you find that's new, if anything. Murder cannot be done without leaving at least a slight trace, and it's up to you to find it!"

CHAPTER III

THE SNATCHER COMES—AND GOES



ALL the daily newspapers that afternoon informed the public of the attack on Fyke, and the finding of the body of Gant. Since the Gant autopsy had revealed death from natural causes, the information was to that effect. That was as I wanted it.

Just before I departed for supper that evening, at six o'clock, Charles Loubin, a druggist doing business in the slum section, who had long been suspected of trafficking in narcotics, made an interesting report to the detective bureau.

Mr. Loubin reported the theft, three months in the past, of a case of six hypodermics and a quantity of chloral hydrate. Queried as to why he had not reported the theft sooner, he was vague in his explanation.

Had the reported appearance of a hypo in the Fyke case a bearing on Loubin's decision to report the theft? At any rate, I had Loubin trailed.

It was while I was eating supper that night that I got a hunch. Maybe I could learn something by doing a bit of prowling on the Cantrell estate. Right after dark I parked my car on a rutted country road back of an iron fence which enclosed the property, cooned the fence and took my bearings from a cover of a patch of shrubbery, sharp eyes out for Silent Jim Brady. I did not want to seem to interfere with his end.

BELOW me, in a depression, the waters of a small lake glimmered in the light of an early moon. In the distance I saw the roof and chimneys of the house, the lower portions being masked by thickly growing trees.

Something moved among the trees and presently a woman appeared, walking toward the lake. She walked slowly, contemplatively, and sat down on a bench near the water. A closer view revealed her identity. She was Lacy Cantrell. Her presence there would afford me an opportunity to buzz her about certain things in my mind.

At that moment, from a spot farther up the lake, a man appeared. He stood gazing an instant, then slipped back into the brush.

In the brief glimpse I had of him I could determine only that he was a big man. In build he suggested Doc Cantrell.

I waited where I was. Three or

four minutes later I saw the skulker again. He was creeping up behind Lacy Cantrell careful not to betray his presence. I got a clearer view of him, then, and saw that he answered the description Fyke had given of his attacker, raincoat, mask and snugly fitting beret. Then I got into action.

Running swiftly, making as little noise as possible, I circled the east end of the small lake, gained cover in the growth of trees on its edge, and made my way toward where the young girl sat. But the snatcher was there before me.

"Help! Help!"

The plea, followed instantly by an ear-piercing scream, came from the lips of Lacy Cantrell.

I sprinted forward. As I broke from cover near the bench, I caught sight of her. Lacy was running like the wind toward the upper end of the lake, and the black-coated figure was in swift pursuit.

I whipped a gun up and fired. Not at the pursuer, for to do that would put the girl in danger.

The effect of the report on the snatcher was immediate and as I had hoped for. He stopped dead in his tracks, shot a glance back in my direction, then plunged aside into cover. The girl disappeared from view at the same time, having reached the grove of trees which bordered the rear of the house.

On my right grew heavy clumps of bushes, and I leaped to cover among them, intending to circle toward the place where I last had seen the running man—but I didn't reach the place.

SOMETHING leaped upon me from behind. I heard guttural growls of rage—and the next instant a vicious blow on the crown of my head sent me to the ground in a limp heap.

Sirens were wailing when I came back to consciousness. I sat up,

gathering my wits again. Whoever had attacked me had disappeared. Strange, I thought, that he should have gone without finishing me. Had something scared him off before he had time to make the job final?

I GOT up, wiped the blood off my face and out of my eyes, and went off on erratic legs toward the house. Captain Rhulin and a squad of dicks had arrived, and a second police car, containing Braden and two more sleuths, was coming up the hill, siren going, when I rounded onto the porch.

"Where is Miss Cantrell?" I demanded of Rhulin, who stood staring at me with mouth open.

"I'm not knowin'!" he exclaimed. "We joost got here! She telephoned, but th' connection was busted before she finished talkin'. What th' hell's been goin' on, Pat?"

"The Snatcher," I replied grimly. "He came—and he went. He chased Miss Cantrell, but she got away. Has anybody here seen Silent Jim Brady?"

"No. An' he hasn't reported to-night," Rhulin informed me.

That looked bad. What had happened to Brady?

At that instant a car rolled up the drive, stopped, and Dr. Hardwick Cantrell got out. The doctor was in a rage.

"Why this intrusion?" he demanded, his eyes fiery. "Is there no way in which I can protect my place from intrusions on the part of the police?"

"I suggest that you pipe down, Doctor," I told him. "Miss Cantrell has just barely escaped being kidnapped. That explains the cops."

"You are all worked up over nothing!" Cantrell fumed. "My daughter has been reading the wild reports in the newspapers. She has imagined an attempt—"

"No, Father! I was sitting by

the lake, and somebody attempted to catch me!"

Miss Cantrell stood in the door, eyes frightened, face pale.

"But surely, Lacy—" Cantrell began to protest.

"I saw the attempt," I interrupted.

"And somebody cut the telephone wire before I got through talking to Headquarters," Lacy informed him.

Cantrell's face became grave, at that, and his anger appeared to cool.

"If that is true," he said, "precautions must be taken."

"And will be," I assured him. "I shall leave men on guard."

Cantrell started to object, but thought better of it. He nodded.

"By the way, Doctor," I asked, "Where were you when the attack took place?"

"It is none of your business," he answered stiffly, "but I was calling at Professor Fyke's. He was not at home, however. Any more impudent questions?"

"No. You can trot along, Doc," I answered. "That's all."

Lacy Cantrell accompanied me out on the porch, bidding me good night.

"What is the nature of the work upon which Dr. Cantrell is engaged?" I asked her.

"It's another of those scientific books of his, Mr. Dugan."

"And the title, do you know it?"

"Yes," came the answer. "It is entitled: 'Reactions of the Human Brain.' A dry and tiresome subject, don't you think?"

MY reply did not come at once. The darkness hid the expression on my face, and the girl did not see to what extent her information had startled me.

"On the contrary, Miss Lacy," I said, "I think it a very interesting subject. The title of the book, too, is most striking. I might say that it stirs my curiosity deeply."

I returned to Headquarters, pulse beating high with eagerness for action. Action, I foresaw, would not be long in coming!

CHAPTER IV

"THIS IS MURDER"



BECAME more uneasy about Silent Jim Brady as the hours passed. I knew it was likely that Brady had prowled the Cantrell grounds in preparation for a secret entry to the house that night. Had the Snatcher met Brady there in the seclusion of the big estate? And if so, had Brady come to harm?

I ordered out every man available, with instructions to comb the city. Everything possible must be done to find Brady—before a terrible fate overtook him.

Captain Rhulin took personal command of the searching squads, and I lay down on a couch in the office to get what sleep I could.

At four o'clock Rhulin aroused me.

"Come a-joompin', Pat!" the big fellow exclaimed wrathfully. "We've found another wan!"

"Another what?" I demanded.

"Another dead wan! A boonch that was searchin' for Silent Brady found this wan in another vacant house. Dead on th' flure, arms folded acrost his chist, same as Gant's was. But there's more of it. There's a note av some kind pinned to him. Pinned through th' skin av his chist!"

We were off at once for the house in which the dead man was. On the way, Rhulin delivered his opinion of the whole matter:

"Thim five lads has bin right down into hell, Pat. Wan come back, minus his brains. Two more are back, with nothin' at all, at all! Five has wint, an' three has re-

turned—all three wit' th' mark of th' divil upon thim! An' take me word for it, whin we get thim other two lads back from hell, they'll have thim same divil's marks on thim, too!"

We drew up before a vacant house in the suburbs, and went in.

On the floor of the basement, lying with body composed, hands crossed on his breast, was the corpse of a man.

"It's Burke, th' taxi driver, and th' fourth to vanish!" Rhulin declared.

I knelt down and scanned a piece of limp paper which had been affixed to the dead man's breast by means of a pin thrust through the skin.

On the paper were these printed words:

You poor dumbells—this is murder!

That note let in some light. Whoever was doing this business took pride in it. Wanted the people to know that what had been termed, in Gant's case, death from natural causes, was murder!

What sort of fiend was this killer, anyhow?

THERE was nothing I could do there, so I returned to my office. On my desk was the report basket from the detective division. I started sorting through the reports, and almost at once a sidelight of humor was played across the grim events of the day. It was in the nature of a report from Detective Sergeant Holt. It read:

Captain Braden:

I was called to the storage warehouse of the Leffenwell Department Store at two o'clock this afternoon. Informed of a queer theft that took place nobody knows even approximately when. Twelve dummies, show window display figures, all males, were stored there six months ago. They became old and out of date. Nothing else is missing. Just the twelve male dummies, I

assigned Carpenter and Hale to the case, and respectfully report same.

Holt, Sergt. 2nd day relf.

That report gave me a hearty laugh. And then, abruptly, I ceased to laugh. Leffenwell's storage warehouse had been entered and twelve old and useless store dummies taken. Was it just a coincidence that the dummies had been stolen from Morris Leffenwell, who was himself but little better in mind and body than his own lay figures? How, in the name of sanity, could there be any connection between the disappearance of the dummies and the snatching of their owner?

A call came through, and I lifted the receiver.

"Pat," Captain Rhulin informed me excitedly, "Inspector Bell has just reported a thrace, or possible thrace, av Silent. He thinks he's afther havin' him turnin' up two hours ago at th' upper end of th' Siventcen Hundred block on Wather Shstreet. Will ye be afther takin' th' run, or will I?"

"Call Thompson, Cap," I instructed. "I'll make the run myself."

Thompson was the chauffeur assigned to me.

I would trust nothing so portentous in possibilities to anybody else—for I had a hunch that when Silent Jim Brady was found, if found he should be and in possession of his senses, the case would be in the bag.

CHAPTER V

10—27—32—1—2—3—4—5—6

7—8—9—10



WATER STREET is a short thoroughfare which begins three blocks south of the Missouri River and ends on a high bluff overlooking the stream. Its old shells of houses have long been given over to squatters, homeless dogs, and rats. Inspector

Bell and his assistant met me halfway down the block.

"An old chap living at the upper end of the block told me that he saw a man answering Silent's description at about eleven o'clock last night," he reported. "He passed under the light at the corner right after a big sedan had gone this way. That seems to check. Only two old shells in this block are occupied. The one where the old man lives, and Number 1754, down the block and across the street. Rabbit Sam, a dwarf, lives there."

"Let's go see the rabbit *hombre*," I said.

Number 1754 stands well back from the walk, and Inspector Bell hammered on the front door until it was opened. Rabbit Sam stood in the dim light of a single dirty incandescent in the hall.

ADWARF, Bell had designated him, but he was a dwarf in height only. About five feet tall, he was almost as broad as he was long. His arms reached far down toward the floor, ending in hands like a giant's. His head was a huge bullet in shape, with seagrass hair standing erect all over it. Blue eyes, set close together, twinkled beneath heavy grey brows, and his mouth was a wide, loose-lipped gash.

"Sam," Bell told him, "we're police officers, and we're looking for a man."

"I ain't got none here, mister," Sam whined in a high, squeaky voice. "Nothin' here, sir, but rabbicks. Yuh mebbe take some rabbicks? Fine an' fat, they be, sir."

I pushed by him, and was nearly floored by the disgusting odors that assailed my nostrils. Rabbits in hutches everywhere. We prowled the house from cellar to attic, and found nothing whatever.

I questioned the dwarf closely, but could not get him to admit having

seen a man that night who answered the description of Brady.

"He was along here about eleven o'clock," I urged. "Try and remember—"

"Good gosh, mister!" Sam exclaimed. "I went to bed nigh about ten, las' night, an' ain't been outten bed since then. I couldn't of seed no man."

I WAS standing near a small table which was littered with papers, soiled dishes and other articles. With my glance resting on something I had discovered there, I asked: "Sure you went to bed at ten, and have not been up since?"

"I done just that, mister," Sam declared. "Never even hearded no sound, ontill you gent'mens wokened me up. So help me God!"

I sat on the edge of the table for a moment.

"All right, Sam," I said. "Sorry we had to wake you up. You can get back to bed now."

When we reached the car again, I took something out of my pocket and turned the light of a flash upon it. It was a telegram, sent locally, addressed to Sam Bockman, 1754 Water Street. It had been filed at twelve o'clock at the Princess Street office of the telegraph company. It bore the date of the night just passed.

It was clear that if Sam had retired at ten o'clock, and had not got out of bed again until the cops came, the telegram would not have been lying on the table in his room. That was clear—but the text of the message was not. Far from it.

10-27-32-1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10

The thirteen numerals constituted the sole text of the message. It was not signed.

I studied the cryptic message intently for a moment, then gave Bell an order.

"Watch the rabbitry front and rear, until I send you a relief. Don't let Sam get a glimpse of you. If he goes out, tail him."

Back in my office, I spread the telegram on the desk. I had seen at a glance that the first three numerals referred to month, day and year. The 27th day of October, 1932. The day just dawning. Since the message had been sent to a man of the dwarf's evident small mental capacity, it had to be a simple code. Unquestionably, the following numerals indicated the hours between one and ten, inclusive. But which of the numerals was the right one, and how determine upon it?

The message probably made an appointment. If the appointment was to be kept at the rabbitry, it likely would be after nightfall. 8-9-10. Those three hours, I thought, only needed considering. The sender, as I doped it out, had notified Sam that he would call at the rabbitry at eight, nine, or ten o'clock that night.

MORRIS LEFFENWELL died during the day, without having spoken other than the three words: "one drop kills."

After considering the matter, I gave an order withdrawing the guards from Cantrell's premises for the coming night. I left only one man, and he inside at the door of Miss Cantrell's room. I wanted the doc to feel free to act. I also took the tail off Druggist Loubin, and for the same reason.

The day dragged slowly to a close, night coming in a ominous calm.

Braden and Rhulin were in my office when Dr. Lowe came to report that the autopsy on Burke showed he had died from natural causes. It was about seven o'clock in the evening, and we were summing up the developments of the day. Before anybody had time to comment, the door was flung open and Professor

Stanley Fyke entered hurriedly. His face was white, his eyes anxious.

"Pardon the intrusion, gentlemen!" he gasped, dropping into a chair. "But I fear something terrible has happened!"

"What?" I cut in, rising.

"Lacy Cantrell—has—has disappeared!"

I FELT a shock go through my nervous system.

"Spill it, man!" I snapped. "Give us the details—and be quick with them!"

"Yes. I shall be brief," Fyke said jerkily, making a strong effort at control. "Cantrell and I have long had a strong admiration for each other's work. He has, in the past, consulted me when working on a book or treatise, and I have done so with him. He phoned this afternoon a request for me to call at his house for the purpose of discussing a matter of importance.

"After our talk, which lasted about an hour, Miss Lacy asked me to drive her to Carbaugh's department store, the Cantrell town car being in a shop downtown for repairs. She would get the car later and drive it home. Cantrell was pleased to have her go with me, but enjoined her to return well before nightfall. I drove the young lady downtown and dropped her at Carbaugh's. Then I went home.

"A few minutes ago, Cantrell telephoned me. Miss Lacy had not returned from town. She had not called for the car, which was ready and waiting for her, nor could Cantrell get trace of her at Carbaugh's. Miss Cantrell has completely disappeared!"

"She may have only been delinquent in returning," Braden suggested harshly.

"She promised faithfully to be in the house before six. It is now seven. Lacy is not the girl to break

so important a promise as she gave her father. Believe me, something has happened to her—and I shall never forgive myself if harm comes to her!"

"Take some orders!" I snapped abruptly. "Braden, throw out every man available with instructions to patrol the whole city until further orders. Rhulin, send two men to check up at the department store; then go yourself to the garage where Cantrell's town car is. Grill every man there."

The moment I was alone, I snatched up the phone, called the number of a prominent restaurant where I had been taking my meals, and got the proprietor on the wire.

"Potter," I said, "I'm ordering half a dozen dressed rabbits sent to your place at half-past eight. Rabbit Sam will bring them. Accept the rabbits, and do not let on that you did not order them yourself. Do what you like with the rabbits. I'm footing the bill. Get it?"

"Surely, Mr. Dugan," Potter returned. "I'll do just as you say."

I hung up. Then I got the desk and ordered a messenger boy sent to Rabbit Sam's with the order for Potter. Everything was set. Descending to the squad room, I beckoned Thompson, and we drove off.

I was betting that I had correctly spotted the hell to which the missing six had been taken. I was staking everything on it.

CHAPTER VI

"THE VERY BACK ROOM OF HELL"



THOMPSON and I peered through the cobwebby and dusty window panes of a vacant house across the street from Sam's rabbitry. A dim light showed through a dusty transom above the front door of Number 1754, and light showed at

the edges of a drawn shade over a front room window. Sam the dwarf, was at home. Not for long, however, did he remain there.

The door opened at exactly half-past eight, and the dwarf came out. He locked the door, and went at a waddling gait toward the city.

"Going to deliver those rabbits," I remarked to Thompson. "That makes it certain ten o'clock is the hour. Let's get busy."

ENTERING the rabbitry from the rear, we descended to the basement. It was there we had to search. What I searched for was an entrance to a sub-basement, and I had good reason to believe we found it. We did.

An old shell of a hot-air furnace stood in a corner. It was pipeless, the fire-door sealed by rust. The furnace had been cleverly divided in two parts by hinges at the back. One upright section was stationary, the other opened out. Opened, the section disclosed a trap-door in the floor.

I lifted the door, and looked down at a set of steps which lost themselves in darkness. A dank odor of sour earth and rotting wood came up.

"Stick here, Thompson," I ordered. "I'll prowl."

In the sub-basement I found that the west wall had a door, and the door was secured by an iron bar across it. I opened the door and looked down a narrow passage which had been dug for some distance in the earth. It led, as I now knew, to a tier of sub-cellar vaults once used by the Heimback Brewery which, in days gone by, had occupied the now vacant tract just west of the rabbitry. A survey of a map of that section during the afternoon had recalled the brewery to my mind.

I went through the passage and emerged in a big cellar room. It was walled with crumbling bricks,

solid earth forming the floor. I flared my flashlight and directed it around the room—to leap back into the mouth of the passage, the butt of a gun snug in my hand.

The rays of the flash had disclosed a singular scene. In the center of the vaulted room stood a table with a heavy stone slab for its top. At the left of the table, on a raised platform, were the vaguely seen figures of a group of blackgowned, masked and hooded men!

There was no movement in the group, no sign that any man there had noticed the light of the flash. Presently I risked another look. Then I stepped inside, holding my light upon the group, and slowly approached the platform.

Standing beside the marble topped table, I counted the figures in the first row. There were five. One was seated in an armchair, with two others on each side. Back of the first row were seven more black-robed figures, all standing.

"The twelve dummies, stolen from the Leffenwell warehouse," I ejaculated softly.

I lifted the mask from the face of the figure in the chair, and stared into a badly damaged waxen countenance. No need to examine the others; all twelve of the dummies were there.

PASSING beyond the grouped dummies, I found a door set in the wall. It was barred. I opened the door softly—then closed it again quickly. The odors from the space beyond were almost more than I could stomach. That place was the very back room of hell!

I hurried back into the sub-cellar beneath the rabbitry, climbed the steps and found Thompson waiting beside the furnace.

"I've found it, Thompson," I said, "and it's as bad, even worse, than I expected it to be. Now, come down

here with me, and I'll tell you what you must do."

Thompson followed me into the sub-basement and to the door which gave out of it into the passageway to the old vaults.

There I stopped.

"I'm going inside," I told him. "You will close this door and bar it. Then you will go back into the cellar of the rabbitry, close the trap-door carefully, and as carefully put the furnace back as you found it. Make certain that nobody will suspect it has been tampered with. On that, Thompson, much depends. The lives of at least five persons—including my own.

"You will then go outside and hide in the house across the way. If I have not joined you by half-past ten, go to a phone and summon help. Then wait until eleven sharp. If I have not appeared then, crash the joint and come down. Remember, do not make a move until eleven sharp."

"I'll do as you order, Dugan," Thompson protested, "but it's not because I'm willing to. Good God, alone down there—"

"Thompson," I broke in, "there are only two men concerned in this business. The dwarf, Rabbit Sam, is one. The other is not now known to me. I can handle the situation alone. Two men might be one too many. Get at your end of it, and leave mine to me."

"Right, sir."

I PASSED into the narrow corridor, and heard the door shut back of me, the heavy bar fall in place. I was a prisoner underground, locked in with twelve inanimate dummies—and at least four living human beings!

There was not a moment to lose. Every move I made from that time on must be swift, direct, certain. I hurried across the vaulted room in

which the dummies were, opened the door to the deeper rooms, and flashed my light around.

On my left were two doors, one at each end of the wall, each with a narrow hole cut in the panels about chin high. On my right were two similar rooms, and I suspected there would be others beyond. I chose the first room on my left, and went to it. A bar secured it. Dropping it, I entered.

ON a bed of loose straw lay the inert form of Lacy Cantrell. She was breathing deeply, easily, her eyes closed in a sound sleep.

Doped. I felt her pulse, listened to the beating of her heart. Just dead to the world—and unhurt.

I went out, replaced the bar as I had found it, and passed to the other room on that side.

A pair of red, glittering eyes peered at me through the hole; eyes that did not close when the light smote them.

"Back, are you?" a voice snarled. "If I ever get my hands on you, I'll break every bone in your cursed carcass—"

"Hold it!" I halted him. "It's the cops—"

"The cops! God, man—at last!" Red Wharton, the football star, cried brokenly. "Let me out! That fiend has brought Miss Cantrell here and means to treat her as he has done the rest of us! Let me out—for the love of God!"

"You are all safe now," I told him soothingly. "Only a little while, and you'll be free again. Lacy is unharmed. Who is the fiend, Red?"

"I only wish I knew! I have never seen him unmasked. Why not let us out now?"

"Because I mean to take him red-handed tonight. I haven't time to discuss things with you now. Don't betray the fact that I have been here, and all will be well."

I crossed the room, and found the lawyer, Curtis Cordell, a sad wreck of a man, in a room over there. Cordell still retained his mind, but it was near to slipping.

"You will probably be taken into a large room soon," I told him. "A room in which you will see other men. A dozen of them. They are only dummies, placed there for the sinister effect. The stage has been set, in other words, to strike fear into the minds of those not in the know. But you will not be harmed. I'll be on hand, and at the first indication of harm to you I'll stop him with lead. Will you go through with it, under my guarantee?"

"Yes," the poor wretch choked.

"I'll do anything to help you nail him, whoever he is."

"Good. Act as though I had not talked with you. Act frightened, and leave the rest to me. Don't give things away."

"HELLO, Silent," I called through the slit of the fourth door.

"Lo, Pat," came back to me.

"Damned near gave you up."

"How did you get caught?"

"I was snooping the Cantrell grounds. Saw a bozo, a dwarf, clout you in the brush. He saw me, too, and beat it. I tailed him in my car. He drove into the back yard of 1754 Water, and later I cooned the fence. Blooey! Somebody sapped me when I lit on the ground—and here I am. That's all there's to it. Let me out."

"Later. If you should be missed, Silent, my plans would go wrong. Everything is okay. I'll free you within an hour. Lie doggo until then."

I looked no farther, but hurried back to the door into the vaulted room, stood there for an instant, then slipped into the darkness that served to envelop the postured dummies.

CHAPTER VII

THE DUMMY IN THE CHAIR



ARSHLY, a strong white glare from a hooded lamp shone down upon the slab-topped table that stood in the center of the vaulted room. Strapped on his back to the table, able to move only his head, lay the figure of a man.

The man was Curtis Cordell.

The light above the table diffused its glow sufficiently to reveal the sinister black gowned and masked group on the raised platform to the right. It also disclosed a group of three persons near the wall on the left-hand side of the table. Handcuffed one to another, further secured by a chain attached to a ring in the wall, the three crouched there, faces expressing fear, loathing, horror.

They were Jack Wharton, Silent Jim Brady and Lacy Cantrell.

Between the three and the table stood the dwarf, Rabbit Sam, his monstrous features alight with unholy pleasure.

Beside the table stood the Snatcher—big, powerful, masked and coated, a black beret covering his head. He spoke, and the voice, muffled and disguised, rang hollowly in the vaulted room.

"Originally you were five. Five men, carefully selected and brought here to serve me in a great work. Three have already passed out—just as I have told you who are left that you will pass. The fourth, yourself, Cordell, will die very shortly. Have I not told you so during the past long months? Now my word shall be made good.

"As I have informed you and Wharton, once each day since you were brought here, I am at the head of a secret society of master chemists. We are gathered here tonight,"

the speaker went on, waving a hand toward the grouped figures on the platform, "to test for the fourth time the efficacy of a poison which has no antidote, and of which no man outside our organization has ever heard.

"Three men have succumbed to it here in this room—just as you, Cordell, will succumb. It is a distillation from the blood of the cobra—and one drop kills. One drop spilled upon the tongue, kills instantly, and leaves no trace. That is the marvelous character of the potion. One—drop—kills!"

"One—drop—kills!" The high squeaky voice of the dwarf echoed the masked man's words. "Ah, but I am proud of my brother. What an honor it will be, when it is disclosed to the world!"

A CHOKED scream came from the blue lips of Lacy Cantrell, and an oath broke from those of Silent Jim.

The masked man dipped a hand into a pocket of his coat, brought up a small vial and held it in the light. It contained a thick, green liquid, at sight of which the dwarf shouted in glee.

Cordell, strapped and helpless, groaned in anguish.

The masked man drew a strong bladed spatula from a pocket, moved closer, stood directly above the frantic victim.

"There will be a quick sharp shock—and all will be over," he said gloatingly. "Prepare, Cordell, to die."

He uncorked the bottle, thrust the blade of the spatula between Cordell's teeth, pried his mouth open, then, while the dwarf howled in glee, slowly tipped the phial downward.

"Help, Help!" Cordell screamed the words.

"For God's sake, Dugan—where

are you?" Silent Jim's voice roared.

And then—the dummy seated in the chair on the platform, flanked by two others of his kind, appeared to move. Did move, in fact. One hand raised and snatched hood and mask away; the other flashed out, gripping the butt of an automatic.

"Back from that table, you lousy killer, or I'll send you to hell where you belong!"

CLOTHED in the black robe which I had taken from the dummy, automatic gripped in extended hand, I must have been a terrible sight to all who saw me.

"Kill the crook, Pat—and save spoiling a good rope!" Silent Jim Brady called.

The man in the beret backed slowly away from the table, eyes flaming lights back of the holes in his mask. The dwarf shouted a high-keyed note of terror, then, realizing that the seeming dummy was in reality a man, crouched on the floor, lips curled, fang-like teeth bared.

"Unmask!" I snapped. "Quick—or I'll chuck lead into your stomach!"

A black gloved hand reached upward, dropped down with the mask grasped in long fingers. I stared into the rage-congested face of Professor Stanley Fyke!

"You blundering ass!" Fyke fairly screamed. "You would stop me from giving the world the greatest scientific discovery ever made since time began! Dolt! Idiot! I, Stanley Fyke, am the one man alive who can save the human race from ultimate extinction! I have proved my power. Here in this room I have slain two men—with no other weapon than my mind!"

"If I can cause death with my mind, does it not follow, imbecile, that I can prevent death too? I have not sought to kill, but to cure!"

"You are going to be called a

murderer, stood on a gallows trap, and shot downward with a rope around your neck," I snapped. "Order your Man Friday to release these victims—and don't let me have to tell you twice!"

"Think, Dugan—think what you are doing!" the professor cried in a pleading voice. "Think of what you are about to snatch from the hungry grasp of a suffering, dying world—"

"Kill! Kill! Kill!"

The dwarf, roused into a frenzy, slaving, eyes rolling, leaped for me, a ponderous hand gripping the butt of a pistol. With a flip of my wrist, I trained my gun on him, and fired once.

The dwarf stopped suddenly, his face working in pain, horror, surprise. Then he fell forward, dead.

In the split second of my diverted attention from him, Fyke snatched an automatic from under his cloak. Silent Jim Brady cried a warning.

Two heavy reports rang in the vaulted room, but only one shot took effect. My lead caught Professor Stanley Fyke center in the heart, killing him where he stood.

AFTER Dr. Lowe had examined Wharton and Cordell, and announced that they needed only rest and food to make them entirely normal, and when Lacy Cantrell had gone home with a very much chastened father, Chief Hammond gave his terse opinion of Fyke.

"Nutty as hell, Pat!"

I leaned back in my desk chair and surveyed the faces of the cops gathered in my office.

"I don't agree," I replied to Hammond. "Fyke was simply a cold-blooded scientist. He was completely sold on his specialty. Believed that the human brain was all-powerful, and that he had the most powerful brain of all. He conceived the

idea of demonstrating his power to commit mental murder, and went about it in a coldly efficient manner.

"With the aid of his brutish brother, Sam, he captured his victims, brought them to the vaults, kept them separate so none would know what was happening except as it happened to him. On the verge of collapse from fear and anxiety, poorly fed, abused, his victims were gradually worn down. He planted the thought of death by a peculiarly subtle poison in their minds and kept it there.

"TWO of the victims died of shock on that table. One, Leffenwell, went crazy before the test was applied. Fyke probably released him just for the pleasure of horrifying the people.

"Crazy? I'll say not! Witness the cunning of the man. He stole the hypos, intending them to be traced to Loubin in case one should come into the hands of the police. He staged that fake attack, knowing that the cops would think that he himself was in danger.

"Having tried his brain weapon on men, he wanted to test it on a woman—so he got Miss Cantrell merely by shooting her with a hypo while she was in the car with him. In every act, he was cold-bloodedly intent upon his own purposes, regarding human life and human suffering as nothing, when weighed in the balance against the successful demonstration of his ability. And, gents, I reckon that's all there is to say."

"Except that dope in the bottle," Silent Jim said. "That stuff Fyke said was poison. What was it, Pat?"

I grinned. "Nothing but colored water. But for his purpose, it was as deadly as the deadliest poison known!"

**NEXT MONTH: MURDER'S BREED, An Exciting, Thrill-Packed
Novelette of Ruthless Crime by ED LYBECK**



Famous Crimes

"-THE GIFT OF A GUM DROP
AND CRIME DETECTION"

IN THE FALL OF 1924, THE BODY OF MISS FLORENCE ALLISON, A BEAUTIFUL ENGLISH VISITOR, WAS FOUND IN MORRISTOWN, N.J., BEATEN TO DEATH.

THE ONLY EYE-WITNESS HAD BEEN THE DEAD WOMAN'S LITTLE FOUR-YEAR-OLD NIECE, BESSIE, WHO WAS SO FRIGHTENED THAT THE LOCAL POLICE WERE UNABLE TO GET HER TO TALK. NO CLUES WERE FOUND AND THE AUTHORITIES WERE COMPLETELY BAFFLED.



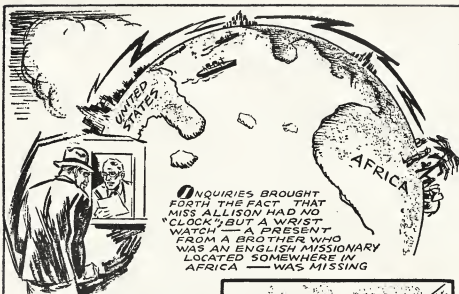
DETECTIVE
ELLIS H.
PARKER

WHOSE UNCANNY
ABILITY HAS AIDED
HIM IN SOLVING 215
MURDER CASES.



DETECTIVE ELLIS PARKER OF MOUNT HOLLY, NEW JERSEY, WAS CALLED ON THE CASE. HE DETERMINED AT ONCE THAT THE SOLUTION OF THE CRIME HINGED UPON WHAT THE BABY MUST HAVE SEEN. UTILIZING HIS KNOWLEDGE OF CHILD PSYCHOLOGY HE APPROACHED HER, SMILING, BUT SAID NOTHING. FROM HIS POCKET HE TOOK SOME CANDY AND OFFERED HER SOME. SHE TOOK A GUM DROP, SHYLY.

PARKER ASKED HER NO QUESTIONS AS THE OTHERS HAD. SOON AFTER EATING THE CANDY, BESSIE WAS FOLLOWING HIM AROUND. AS THE DETECTIVE IGNORED HER, GLANCES SHE STEPPED IN FRONT OF HIM SAYING, "THE BLACK MAN TOOK AUNTIE'S CLOCK." WITH THIS CLUE HE SOON SOLVED THE CRIME.



THEN, DETECTIVE PARKER WENT INTO ACTION. URGING THE NEED OF HASTE HE REQUESTED THE BRITISH EMBASSY TO ASCERTAIN THE NAME OF THE JEWELRY FIRM WHICH HAD SOLD THE WATCH TO THE AFRICAN MISSIONARY. SOON CABLEGRAMS BROUGHT HIM THIS VITAL INFORMATION AND ALSO THE SERIAL NUMBER OF THE WATCH.

WITHIN 48 HOURS AFTER THE MURDER PARKER HAD BROADCAST THE SERIAL NUMBER AND AN ALARM TO ALL PAWN SHOPS. THAT DAY RUFUS JOHNSON, "A TALL COLORED MAN" ATTEMPTING TO PAWN MISS ALLISON'S WATCH, WAS ARRESTED IN BALTIMORE.



DETECTIVE PARKER BROUGHT THE SMALL GIRL TO THE CELL IN ORDER TO BE SURE OF IDENTIFYING THE CULPRIT.

THE PRISONER BROKE DOWN AND MADE A COMPLETE CONFESSION OF THE GRUESOME CRIME, IMPLICATING ANOTHER MAN NAMED GEORGE SMALL OF MORRISTOWN, NEW JERSEY. BOTH WERE HANGED WITHIN A MONTH.



Catch as Catch Can!

*Follow Assistant District
Attorney Bain Dexter's
Whirlwind Path as He
Strives to Crack a
Baffling Mystery!*

A Complete Novelette

By A. T. LOCKE

*Author of "Tragedy of the Little
French Doll," etc.*

CHAPTER I

IN THE DARK

THERE was a frown on the face of Bain Dexter as he ambled slowly through the rain past the dark and lifeless entrance to that sordid East Side tenement.

The broken peak of an old cap hung crookedly down over his eyes; his shoulders were hunched high; the collar of his ill-fitting coat was turned up; and his hands were plunged deep into the pockets of his wet and shapeless trousers. Sodden with the rain that was blowing through the night, he appeared just as he wished to appear. He might have been a double of the disconsolate-looking



"Now turn around and don't try

derelict who came shuffling toward him, went sloshing by, and vanished into the darkness behind him.

Dexter went up the street and, at the corner, turned south on the intersecting avenue.

Already he had passed twice around that block, walking at a snail's pace and scrutinizing carefully every detail of his surroundings. Some faint premonition sharply insinuated that he was in danger, that it would be wisest and safest for him to walk with wary steps into the intricate, perilous maze that might very easily lie just ahead of him.

And so he was proceeding cautiously, not because of fear, but because it would be stupid to blunder into a trap.

Twice he had passed slowly by that old, five-storied tenement; once he paused directly before it and,



any tricks," she warned. "If you make one out-of-turn move, I'll kill you!"

facing it while lighting a battered pipe, he had given the front of the place a quick and furtive examination.

The strongest impression that he had received from his momentary inspection he could sum up in one word:

Darkness.

The vacant first floor windows were streaked and blotched with dirt and grime and those of the second floor were as opaque and lifeless as dead men's eyes. A faint light seemed to come from the shaded third floor windows but the fourth and fifth stories were a blot of blackness.

The man Dexter was supposed to see lived on the top floor, rear, the door to the right of the hallway. That is, if the note in Dexter's pocket was authentic and had been sent in good faith. If not—

A policeman standing in the shelter of a doorway, eyed Dexter sharply as the latter slouched along, turned from the avenue and walked east again.

That was the second time within a half-hour that he had been spotted by the same cop who, it was apparent, was inclined to be suspicious of him. It would not do to pass around the block again.

Anyway, Dexter had learned all that he could hope to learn from the outside of the dark and, apparently, almost deserted tenement. There was nothing left to do but slip into the place and find out what awaited him there.

He quickened his pace and in a few moments he once again came to the front of the building. This time, after a quick glance up and down the street, he vanished like a

shadow into the shelter of the vestibule. Cautiously opening the door, he edged his way into the hallway and paused.

He sensed, more than saw, the flight of stairs that led upward into the deep obscurity above. A slight draft suggested the moldy corridor that ran through the building and probably opened into the yard in the rear.

Dexter listened but the only sound that came to him was the faint drizzling of the rain outside.

The top floor, rear.

He started cautiously up the wooden stairs, each of which creaked under his weight. Reaching the first landing, he groped his way to the bottom of the second flight, and cat-footed carefully upward.

There had been a light in those third floor windows. As he reached the landing, Dexter saw to his surprise that the door opening into the front apartment was slightly ajar. He waited, listening, tense and alert.

For several minutes he remained crouched at the head of the stairs, but not the faintest whisper came to him through the slightly open door. Strange. And, somehow, menacing. His destination was on the top floor, rear, however, and after a moment more of hesitation he slipped forward through the hall to the foot of the next flight of stairs.

HE was halfway up them when he was startled into sudden rigidity by the abrupt and unexpected thunder of two shots which roared above him and echoed hollowly through the hallways.

Then four more shots shattered the darkness and Dexter heard a crash as if someone had thrown a door violently open.

A piteous and frightful moaning, coming to his ears, sent a chill of horror through him. Tearing his

gun from his holster, discarding all caution, he went leaping up the stairs, aware as he did that heavy feet were trampling down the flight above him.

As he reached the landing a thin tongue of fire licked at him from the front of the hallway and he heard a bullet whick past his ear. Instead of scrambling back into the shelter of the stairs he stepped swiftly across the hall and sent two shots hurtling in the direction from which he had been attacked.

HE heard something drop solidly to the floor and then came a soft thud, followed by a gurgling, choking, groan. He moved swiftly forward, on hands and knees, just in time to escape two shots that were fired from the staircase above him and that went crashing into the baseboard at his back.

Still in a crouching position, he flashed two shots back. A gasp rasped through the darkness and then he heard the bumping of an inert body as it went rolling and tumbling down the stairs.

Then there was silence and, during the tense respite, the mind of Dexter raced furiously.

What had happened? Was this a trap that had been laid for him and that, for some reason, had been sprung prematurely and ineffectively? If it was, he thought grimly, those who had sought his life had thus far been badly worsted.

In the silence he heard the faint hiss of whispering come down to him from the floor above. There were others up there in the darkness, then, alive and alert and deadly.

Again that moaning came from the upper hallway. Dexter crept quietly forward until his hand came in contact with the face of a man. A moment later he realized that his fingers, wet and warm and sticky, had dabbled with fresh blood.

Quietly he considered the critical position he was in. There were enemies above him, intent on killing him; were there others in that dimly lighted room below? Had he, despite his caution, walked blindly into a fatal trap?

Both ahead of him and behind him there was dark and deadly menace; best to stay where he was and let the others move first.

HIS fingers explored swiftly, accurately, until he had not only ascertained the position of the body that he first had touched but also that of the inert figure that had come toppling down close to it from the deep darkness above. Then Dexter himself sprawled limply down at the foot of the stairs, huddled against the two prostrate and motionless killers, after he had silently reloaded.

There was blood on his forehead which he had blotted with his wet fingers; his eyes were slightly open. He was in such a position that he could see up the stairway. And his gun dangled in a hand that hung limply, but that was set to snap into action the instant the need arose.

For minutes he lay there, in a silence so strained that he could hear the faint heart beat of one of those two bullet-pierced bodies with which he was tangled. Then he heard a stirring at the top of the stairs, the cautious scratching of a match, and looking up he saw two faces peering downward. They were dimly illuminated by the tiny and unsteady light, but Dexter's momentary impression of them was vivid. Hard faces they were, thin and swarthy, and their eyes were like those of snakes.

Silence hung heavily for a moment. The light of the match went out and again the space around him was choked with darkness. Then the groaning from somewhere on the floor above commenced again, and Dexter heard a husky voice.

"Go back 'nd rub that punk out, Carlo," the man above growled. "Jeez, how much lead can he hold?"

"He's got all he needs now—just let 'im lay," the other whispered. "Did you see anything down the stairs?"

"Yeah, but I don't hear nothin'," rasped the other. "Someone got Johnny 'nd Rossi, it looks like."

"Who?" whispered the other. "It couldn't'a been th' cops or they'd been up here long ago—"

"Maybe someone else got wise," came the cautious voice of the other. It sounded as if there was only one guy shootin'; maybe Johnny or Rossi plugged 'im."

"Maybe. We gotta find out."

Dexter, lying there motionless, heard them start slowly down the stairs.

They stopped, halfway down, and one of them lighted another match.

"Jeez!" came the husky exclamation. "There's Johnny 'n' Rossi, all right, 'n' another guy, too!"

"All croaked, it looks like," the other said. "Jeez, what's it all about?"

Through slitted eyes Dexter saw that each of them carried a gun, that each gun was pointed straight in his direction.

THE match flickered and went out—and Dexter, driving a couple of blinding, crashing shots before him, leaped into life and went thundering up the stairs.

He knocked one of the descending figures sideways into his companion as both of their guns were sputtering fire. They lost their balance and, while he leaped upward toward the top of the stairs, they went hurtling to the bottom. From the landing he heard their gasping, frightened curses as they sought to extricate themselves from the confused tangle in which they had landed.

Fire from his gun went stream-

ing down the staircase until the chambers of it were empty.

But all of his shots, apparently, had gone wild for he heard their racing footsteps pounding along the hall and down the lower stairs. He listened and he knew that they did not pause at the lighted room on the third floor; they were rushing from the building in a panic.

CHAPTER II

TRAPPED LIKE A RAT



Dexter waited for a while, wondering if they would return. He could hear moaning that came from the room down the hall, and the furious beating of the rain on the roof that was just above him.

Then he went quietly down the hall to the closed door behind which, he was certain, a man lay dying. The door opened under his pressure, and he peered into the room. A lighted gas-jet shed a pallid illumination over the place and Dexter's attention centered at once on an old-fashioned wooden bed that stood against the wall opposite him.

There was a man stretched on it, clad only in pajamas, lying in a welter of his own blood. A gun was clutched in one of his motionless hands.

Dexter slipped into the room, closed the door behind him, and turned the key that was in the lock. Then, walking softly across the littered room, he bent over the prostrate figure on the bed.

One brief glance and he knew that the man was beyond help. He had bled profusely and it was plain that he had but a short time to live.

There was a dirty sink in one corner of the disorderly room and Dexter, wetting a towel with cold water, applied it to the forehead of the lead-riddled expiring man. Almost

immediately his moaning ceased and the faint, convulsive movements of his tortured body quieted.

Dexter stood erect, scrutinizing the man on the bed, wondering whether or not to summon an ambulance. If there were a telephone—but of course there was none in the house. And, if he left the building in the dark, he undoubtedly would be chopped down by the two men who had escaped.

To his surprise, he saw the lips of the dying man move slightly and, bending quickly over, he placed an ear close to them.

The man had had something to tell him, some information for the office of the district attorney, and it might not be too late yet to get the message.

But Dexter could catch nothing from the twitching lips but a faint and unintelligible murmur; all that he heard at the moment was the heavy splashing of the rain upon the roof.

But then a voice sounded suddenly behind him:

"Put your hands up—don't move after that!"

IN his hand he held the gun which had been lightly clutched by the weak fingers of the dying man. He thought he might be able to whirl around, and catch the intruder unaware. But he obeyed the soft-spoken command and raised his hands helplessly, because the voice that he had heard was the voice of a girl.

Even without turning he realized that, under the cover of the driving rain, she had managed to raise a window without his hearing her and cover him from the fire escape. He had made a slip, perhaps a serious one, in overlooking the fact that the room might be entered otherwise than through the door.

He heard her scramble over the sill and close the window after her.

"Now turn around and don't try any tricks," she warned. "Because if you make one out-of-turn move, I'll kill you!"

With his hands above his head he turned and saw her standing there, a slender, blue-eyed girl who was spattered with the rain. A gun in an unwavering hand was pointing straight at him and there was neither fear nor hesitation in her eyes.

"You killed him, you rat!" she exclaimed tensely. "Drop that gun on the floor and then step back! And be careful all the time!"

"Let me explain, won't you?" begged Dexter. "He sent for me and—"

"Hold that gun out very carefully and drop it on the floor!" she told him. "And then move back from it while I pick it up!"

He did as she ordered and she secured his gun, both her eyes and her weapon on him every instant.

"Now you can speak your little piece," she said in a low voice. "But I'm warning you not to start anything you can't finish!"

"I'm from the office of the district attorney," Dexter told her. "We got an unsigned note asking that someone be sent to this apartment at this address. There was some information of some sort—"

SHE regarded him keenly, doubtfully, for a moment and then a cynical smile touched her lips.

"You look as if you came from the D. A.'s office," she said with a hard little laugh. "If I ever saw a punk killer, you're one!"

It was a tribute to his disguise, and Dexter realized that his appearance must be decidedly suspicious. He was about to offer to show her the note that had brought him to the place, but quickly he decided against it. It would be wisest first to find out who she was; per-

haps, already, he had revealed too much about himself.

"I'm sorry that you won't believe me," he told her. "But I am telling you that I did not shoot that man. Four men were here—I was coming up when they started firing, and I had to tangle with them."

"But they're all gone now, I suppose," she suggested scornfully, "and you just happen to be here alone."

"There's two of them down at the foot of the staircase—dead," he told her. "You can go down and see for yourself if you care to," he added.

"I'm staying right here and so are you," she asserted steadily. Then, "Oh, God, but this is terrible!" she moaned suddenly.

SOMETHING in her voice seemed to strike deep into the consciousness of the dying man and his eyes fluttered open and rested on the girl. The sight of her was, Dexter could see, like a sudden and powerful stimulant to him. There was a quick movement of his lips, as if all of life that remained to him had rushed into them.

"Eileen! The light—the gas!" he gasped convulsively. "The gas—" he repeated, the words drifting swiftly away into a dying, incoherent murmur.

"Turn that gas down—low!" the girl commanded Dexter. "It's up too high—it hurts him!"

Dexter groped for the jet, keeping his eyes on the man on the bed as he did so. He saw a convulsive shudder shake the prostrate figure which then, suddenly, became very still.

"He's dead, miss," Dexter told the girl gently. "The light won't bother him any more."

"He isn't! He can't be! He mustn't be!" she cried. "Oh, what will I do if he is?"

Her eyes swept swiftly around

the room, ignoring Dexter for a moment, and then they fastened on him again.

"Get in that closet over there—quick!" she ordered him.

There was a hysterical tenseness about her that, he realized, made her as dangerous as nitroglycerine.

"But, if you only will believe me," he protested, "I may be able to help you!"

"In that closet!" she exclaimed. "Now! Or I'll shoot!"

HE hesitated a moment, looking at her curiously, wondering abstractedly where she fitted into the picture.

"I'm warning you for the last time," she breathed vibrantly. "I wouldn't like to kill a man but—if I have to—I will!"

Dexter sensed that she meant it and he walked across the crudely lighted room and into a dark and stuffy little closet. The door closed violently after him, a key turned in the lock, a heavy bolt snapped shut.

And then the sound of unrestrained sobbing came to him through the heavy, old-fashioned, door.

Questions passed like fugitive spectres, one after another through the mind of Bain Dexter, as he stood there in the dark.

Who was the dead man out there—the man who had tried to get a message to the office of the district attorney? Who were the four thugs who had killed him and why had they committed the bloody deed? Who was the girl, not more than twenty at the most, and why was she out there sobbing over the body?

There seemed to be no answers to those riddles but Dexter had a strange feeling that it would not be long before they would be forthcoming.

The sobbing ceased after a while

and Dexter heard the girl moving around the room. He heard the rustle of papers, the opening and closing of drawers, the moving of furniture.

She was looking for something, he was sure; perhaps for the same thing the four stalkers had come in search of.

For an hour or more he heard her questing about the room and then, without as much as a word to him, she was gone. And then he heard nothing but the steady, monotonous, beating of the rain on the roof above him.

He waited a few minutes and then he commenced to explore the closet door with his fingers. It was vitally necessary to make an immediate escape from his prison. Already, the air was becoming noticeably stuffy and difficult to breathe.

He stepped back and launched a tentative attack at the door, crashing against it with one of his shoulders. It quivered but it did not give. A frown creased Dexter's brow in the darkness. He realized that it was not going to be an easy task to liberate himself. Again and again he lunged violently against the old and dampened panels, but they did not yield to his shoulder or to the vicious battering of his heavy-soled shoes.

HE had paused a moment, breathless and almost exhausted, when he suddenly was startled by a clamor outside, by the sound of rough voices and by a thunderous knocking on the door that opened into the hallway, "Open up in there!" rasped a harsh voice.

Dexter kept silent while his heart, despite his iron control, commenced to palpitate perceptibly.

Trapped like a rat in the top and rear of that old and deserted tenement!

A moment later he heard a crash, the splinter of wood, and he knew that the outside door had given away before a vicious and determined onslaught. Heavy feet, many of them, came trampling into the room and he heard coarse exclamations of surprise. He crouched back in the closet, scarcely breathing in his effort to be silent.

"He's here somewhere, boys!" growled one of the intruders. "Someone made that racket we heard."

Dexter heard one of the windows go up with a crash that smashed the glass and sent it tinkling to the floor.

Then a series of staccato shots, followed by a cry of discovery.

"They're goin' down the fire escape—two of 'em!" came a gruff shout. "They're gone, though, disappeared like rats!"

"They didn't have time to get out that way!" shouted someone. "It was only a few seconds after we heard the racket that we crashed the door. That closet over there—is it open?"

There was a violent rattling of the knob and Bain Dexter felt that he was lost.

"The door's locked!" There was a note of harsh and vengeful triumph in the shout. "Come out of there now, you, or you'll be carried out dead!"

FOR a moment Dexter maintained his silence, thinking swiftly, desperately. There would be no hope of remaining alive if he remained inside the closet; if he surrendered he might find some way to outwit his captors.

"I'll come out!" Bain Dexter announced loudly. "Unlock the door!"

"Come out with your hands up," came the sharp, harsh order to Dexter, "or else—"

The bolt snapped back, the key

twisted in the lock, and the door swung suddenly outward.

And Bain Dexter, standing close to it with his hands raised high, gasped with relief.

CHAPTER III

THE GIFFING JEWELS



HERE were six hulking hard-faced men in the room but three of them wore police uniforms. And, among the other three, Dexter recognized Detective Sergeant Jake Flannagan, a thick-necked, old-time dick.

Dexter carefully kept his hands up, however, for the guns were on him and he could see that Flannagan, in the excitement of the moment, did not recognize him.

"Can I take my hands down, Flannagan?" he then asked easily. "You know me—I'm Dexter—from the D. A.'s office."

"Jeez!" Flannagan exclaimed, scrutinizing Dexter closely and a trifle sourly. "But keep 'em up, Dexter, until you tell me what you're doin' here locked in a room with a dead man. I'm askin' you that, D. A. or no D. A.!"

"On business for the office of the district attorney," replied Dexter suavely. "Even you know by this time that I'm an assistant D. A. don't you, Flannagan?"

Dexter knew Flannagan did not like him. None of the police, from the commissioner down, approved of an assistant district attorney whose sole function was to investigate criminal cases for his office.

But Dexter had taken the appointment at the request of his friend, John Mortimer, who had been one of the few candidates elected on a reform ticket. Mortimer, as district attorney, knew that his office would not receive the co-

operation essential to its effective functioning from a police department controlled by crooked politicians of a party opposed in every way to the one he represented.

Having a fortune of his own and being deeply interested in criminology, Bain Dexter had gone to the assistance of Mortimer with a certain grim satisfaction. As an independent criminologist, the police of the city had shown him but scant courtesy; as an assistant D. A. they were powerless to prevent him from conducting his own criminal investigations whenever he pleased.

"WELL, then, take your hands down, Dexter, and tell us what you know about this case," growled Flannagan grudgingly. "It seems that some dame 'phoned in that there was a dead man in this room and that the man who killed him was locked up with him.

"You found two bodies at the foot of the staircase outside didn't you?" questioned Dexter. "Well, they account for two of the killers and—"

"Two bodies at the foot of the staircase!" exclaimed Flannagan. "We didn't find any two bodies!"

"What!" gasped Dexter. "There were no bodies out there?"

He saw at once by the expressions on the face of Flannagan and the rest of the officers that they wondered if he was dreaming. At once he explained everything that had happened and an officer, sent down to examine the bottom of the staircase, found ample proof in bloodstains.

A couple of officers drenched with rain came through the open window from the fire escape.

"They're away clean, whoever they were," one of them said. "They got too good a start on us."

"Those must be the two who got away from me," suggested Dexter. "I don't know how they ducked the bullets I threw at them."

Flannagan shook his head dubiously and turned his attention to the dead man on the bed.

"It beats me, Dexter, because it all don't seem to make no sense," he asserted. "Maybe when we find who this guy is, we'll know what those stalkers and the girl were after. And we'll know why a man threatened with death," he added, "wanted to see someone from the D. A.'s office instead of the cops who would have easily saved his life."

A photographer, fingerprinter, and an assistant medical examiner came up from Headquarters.

"I'd say that he's been pretty sick—too sick to go out," said the medico, after looking over the body. "Lungs congested rather badly," he added.

"There's somethin' about that face that looks familiar to me," said Flannagan, his brows deeply furrowed. "But I just can't place 'im. I'm stayin' here," he added, turning to the fingerprinter, "until you send me a report on the stiff."

"Okay, Sergeant, I'll rush back to Headquarters and give you the word as soon as I can."

BAIN DEXTER remained in the background, a little smile on his face, while Flannagan and the men under him combed every nook and cranny of the room without finding anything of particular significance.

"Classy dresser at one time, that guy," remarked one of the detectives. "That suit of his is sorta worn but it never cost less than a C and a quarter. And them pajamas! Kinda nice, what?"

"I know that punk's face," insisted Flannagan stoutly. "Jeez!" he gasped suddenly. "If that ain't Fingers Fletcher, I'll eat a nightstick! But it don't seem natural to find 'im here. He's a—was a—high shot!"

"Hiding out, Flannagan," suggested one of the other men, "after pulling the Giffing job."

Flannagan looked thoughtful for a couple of moments.

"Maybe you're right, Cal," he agreed. "And the swag is what those gunners and the girl was after."

"Worth goin' after," asserted one of the men dryly. "A hundred grand in ice and emeralds!"

"Well, they're not in this room," asserted Flannagan positively. "Maybe those starkers lifted 'em or the girl got away with 'em."

"I don't believe so, Flannagan," said Dexter easily.

"Oh, you don't think so, Dexter—and why?" asked Flannagan truculently. "What do you know about this case that we don't know, anyway?"

"I don't know a thing about it that you don't know," insisted Bain Dexter. "I've told you every little detail that happened. But what's the idea of saying that any rocks are involved in the case?" he queried with an aggravating grin. "You don't even know who the dead man is."

"But assumin' that he is Fingers Fletcher," persisted Flannagan, "and—"

"—that he had the Giffing jewels," interrupted Dexter, with a faint smile.

"And that they were right in this room!" snapped Flannagan irefully. "Then what's the idea of sayin' that neither the girl or those guys got 'em?"

"I was just thinking, that's all," Dexter replied easily.

AN officer who had been detailed to remain by a telephone in an all-night restaurant on the nearby avenue came dripping into the room.

"That's Fingers Fletcher, all right, Sergeant," he said. "Just got word from the muggers."

"I'm sure he pulled that Giffing job," asserted Flannagan, "and those

Giffing stones are surely mixed up in this case."

"And I think we can break it, Sergeant, you and I," said Dexter, "if you'll let me make a couple of little suggestions."

"Make all the suggestions that you want to, Dexter," said Flannagan, somewhat affably. "I ain't the sort of guy that knows it all."

FIRST, then, Sergeant, where's the most obvious place in a room to hide a note?" asked Dexter. "The place anyone searching for such a thing would look first?"

"There's no note in this room!" snapped Flannagan. "We've looked everywhere!"

"Where did you look first?" asked Dexter. "Under the carpet, didn't you?"

Flannagan nodded his head and there was a questioning look in his eyes.

"Then if you want to break the case, Flannagan," said Dexter impressively, "there is this to be done. Detail a man to guard the foot of the fire escape, one to watch the front entrance, and one to see that no one gets to the scuttle on the roof. You had better take the last spot yourself, Flannagan, because you're very liable to meet some callers there."

"And you—what are you going to do?" Flannagan asked Dexter.

"I'll stay right here in this room, Flannagan," replied Dexter. "I've a reason for doing it and, if everything goes off all right, I'll tell you what it is."

"You know where those rocks are," Flannagan accused him. "You've spotted something."

"I don't know where they are any more than you do," replied Dexter sharply. "But I think I can find them if you'll do as I say."

"All right, all right," growled Flannagan. "Murphy, you take the

front entrance and, Rosario, you take the foot of the fire-escape. Me, I'll take the roof and I'll be sorry for the punks who try to get past me."

"Watch out up there near the scuttle," warned Dexter impressively. "There's liable to be danger there."

A moment more and Bain Dexter was left alone in the room, with orders that he was not to be disturbed. Even the dead-wagon, then on its way, was to be turned back that night; and the body of Fletcher was to be removed early in the morning.

CHAPTER IV

BREAKING THE CASE



AS soon as the door closed behind the officers, Dexter turned off the gas and, for a while, he was busy working around the fixture. Then the light went on again and, after examining a small piece of paper that he held, he hastily scrawled a note on another piece of paper, folded it carefully, and tucked it into the pillow that lay under the dead man's head.

Then, turning the light out again, he waited, listening to the rain that was dropping so monotonously and so mournfully, on the tin roof above him.

A smile touched his lips as he thought of Flannagan who was absorbing water up by the scuttle, waiting for intruders who would not appear.

An hour passed by and he had commenced to wonder if his surmise had been wrong when he heard, and saw, one of the windows slipping open. A minute passed by, two minutes, and he distinguished the slender figure that he had seen once before that night, slip deftly

and silently into the darkness of the room.

He was pressed back in a corner, not three feet away from her, but she did not notice him or, apparently, suspect his presence.

Straight across the room she went and, striking a match, she lighted a tiny jet of gas. Then, turning and seeing the stark figure of the dead man, she glided toward the bed and, for a while, knelt beside it, crying softly.

Then she arose, brushing the back of a hand across her eyes, and went toward the gas again.

"Turn it up—not out—sister," Dexter said gently. "And don't be frightened or worried."

She gasped, gave a faint cry, and whirled around with dilated eyes.

Then she saw Dexter walking toward her, his gun in his hand.

"You! Oh, I thought no one was here but me—and him."

"But I'm here and you must slip out of here," he said gently, putting his gun in his holster. "As soon as we have had a little talk."

SHE shrank back against the wall and her hands rose protectively in front of her.

"A little talk?" she moaned. "About—what?"

"About you, sister, and the trouble you are in," he said. "Let me tell you the story," he added. "You remember, after you left here before, that your brother—"

"My brother!" she breathed. "How do you know?"

"There was a certain resemblance and then, just a moment ago, when I called you sister—"

"Oh, I thought that it was him speaking to me," she cried. "His voice was—something—like yours."

"You remembered after you left here," he continued, "that the last words of your brother were about the gas. And it was not because the

light was too high, sister. It was because he had removed the fixture and slipped a little piece of paper in the pipe. But I thought of that, too, and I have the paper."

"Give it to me—it's mine!" she pleaded. "He meant me to have it."

"Why didn't he trust you with it, then?" asked Dexter. "While he was alive?"

"He seemed afraid to give it to me," she said, "because I had been trying to persuade him—to go—straight."

"And it was you who induced him to send that note to the office?" he queried. "And why did you do it?"

"He was ill with tuberculosis—getting worse all the time," she said. "Prison would have killed him and I told him he might make a bargain with the D. A.—to return the stones, or some of them, in exchange for his freedom."

"There is no more bargaining with the district attorney's office," said Dexter. "It represents justice now—and it didn't do that before."

THERE was silence between them for a moment as the rain whispered away outside.

"What are you going to do with me?" she asked then, and there was a slight tremor in her voice. "My brother was good to me—I worshipped him."

"And you took an upper room in the house next door when things got so hot after the Giffing robbery that he had to hide out here to be safe," said Dexter. "You wanted to be close to him—so you could help him—and you could reach him from your room by the fire escape."

She nodded quietly.

"I noticed that you weren't very wet when you came in the first time," he said, "and I knew that you hadn't come very far through the rain."

"I've had a room in the house

next door," she admitted, "on the floor below this one."

"Do you know who those starkers were who killed him?" asked Dexter. "Now that you know that I didn't do it," he added.

"No, and he never knew, either," she said. "Someone who knew him must have recognized him when he came in and—"

HER voice broke and she choked back a little sob.

"Don't you worry, sister, we'll get them," Dexter told her. "And you—you're going back home, wherever that is."

"Yes, I'm going back home, if you'll let me, after I make arrangements to take—him—with me," she agreed. "Mother is very old—she never knew—about Frank's profession."

"Then you had better go now, because there might be complications and we wouldn't care for that," Dexter told her. "If I can do anything—"

"Nothing—you've done enough already," she said. "And—thank you, Mr. Dexter."

She stood by the bed, bent over and kissed the bloodless lips of the white-faced sleeper, and then vanished through the window to be wrapped in the rain.

Bain Dexter sighed, turned the gas high, surveyed the room once more and then, extinguishing the light, he went out and closed the door.

At the end of the hallway there was a ladder leading up the scuttle. From the foot of it, he called Flannagan.

"All right, Sergeant," he said. "You can come down now."

There was just the shadow of a smile on his face as Sergeant Jake Flannagan oozed down the ladder, leaking water like a sieve.

"I've got what you want, Ser-

geant," Dexter said softly, "and as soon as you come out of the water I'll give it to you."

"Got what I want—where'd you find 'em?" sputtered Flannagan angrily. "I knew that you—"

"Tut, tut, Sergeant, I haven't got the stones," said Dexter reproachfully, "but I have a little piece of paper that will direct you to them. You can pick them up in the morning, if you really care to."

HEAVERY feet came pounding up the stairs and the excited face of Rosario appeared in the dimly lighted hallway.

"I happen to look up a couple of minutes ago," he exclaimed, "and I saw someone on the fire escape, Sergeant. But the rain—I couldn't see very well—and I lost sight of—"

Flannagan cast a sharp, suspicious glance at Dexter.

"I didn't see a sign of anyone while I was in the room," the latter said innocently, "and there was no one there when I left."

Flannagan, however, darted into the room. He lit the gas and turned it high, gave the place a quick but thorough inspection, and then threw up the window and surveyed the fire escape.

"I don't see no one," he growled "No one at all."

"And yet while Officer Rosario is up here, the rear entrance to the house and the foot of the fire escape are wide open," said Dexter, shaking his head. "If I was a sergeant of detectives and detailed an officer—"

"Rosario, get back to your post!" snapped Flannagan irefully. And, after the cop, indignation flaming on his face, strode out, the sergeant turned to Dexter. "You might as well give me—that—now."

Dexter handed him a little slip of paper and Flannagan, standing under the light, examined it.

"Ah! A telephone number!" exclaimed Flannagan. "IBbetson 2-0012. Where did you get it, Dexter?"

"Out of the gaspipe, back of the fixture, Flannagan, and not under the carpet," said Dexter suavely. "You remember that I told you that the last word uttered by Fletcher was 'gas'?"

"And now we'll go and I'll see you tonight at seven o'clock at the D. A.'s office," said Dexter. "Bring five men with you and pick me up and we'll wind up this case by catching the killers of Fletcher."

They passed out of the room after turning out the light. Flannagan was about to take the key out of the lock to fasten the door from the outside when Dexter objected.

"Leave the door open, Flannagan, and call off the cops," he said. "Leave the place open and unguarded for the rest of the night and all day tomorrow."

"It sounds nutty to me, but I'll do it on your say-so," growled Flannagan. "I'll pick you up at seven tonight."

AN hour later Bain Dexter, after getting in touch with John Mortimer and having a brief talk with him about the case, was asleep in his suite at the Hotel Dauphin. A call awakened him at five in the afternoon. He dressed and shaved and ate, and then went to the office.

At seven sharp, Flannagan was there with five men and two cars. Joining them, Dexter ordered the drivers to drive to a certain corner on the East Side.

"There's an old abandoned warehouse at Dutch and Walton Streets," he said. "We must all get into it but we must go separately and none of us must be seen going in. I want one man to stand by a telephone in a little cigar store a couple of blocks away and wait for a call."

A half-hour later six of them,

guns in their hands, were hidden in the shadows of a cavernous, half-decayed, dark old structure that was slowly falling into ruins near the bank of the river.

A FEW minutes more passed by and low sounds came from outside. The door creaked open.

Dexter saw the men slip in, one after another, four of them. The door closed behind them and they advanced cautiously forward. One of them had a flashlight.

They had advanced perhaps twenty feet from the door when Dexter pressed a switch in his hand. A powerful beam of light swarmed down and enveloped them.

"Get them up, you rats!" he shouted. "You're covered."

For a moment they stood there dazzled, paralyzed, like dark-painted statues. Then one of them flicked out a gun and sent a shot crashing into the crystal of the spotlight. The place was plunged into darkness. Darts of fire whipped through the inkiness, and the place reverberated with thunder.

And then, silence.

Outside the sirens of police cars shrieked. The door was hurled open, and a beam of light from a car streaked along the rotten floor.

Four men lay there close together, and only one of them was moving. His convulsive writhings were those of a dying man.

"You know any of them, Flannagan?" asked Dexter, looking down at the upturned faces.

"Holy cow, that's Monk Manuel," cried Flannagan. "It was him and his mob that mixed up in this. They musta snatched those two dead bodies from the house because they knew we'd recognize 'em. Where's the stones—they're in this place somewhere, Dexter?"

Dexter shook his head as he looked gravely at Flannagan.

"Then what th' devil did these guys come pilin' in here for?" asked the irate detective.

"Just because I left a note in Fletcher's pillow last night, sort of intimating that they would find what they were after in here," explained Dexter. "They got what they've been after for a long time."

"But how did you know they was coming?" asked Flannagan.

"I figured they would go back to find what they were looking for if there were no cops around the place to scare them," said Dexter. "And I had the front and back of the house watched all day by a couple of boys from the office."

"Jeez, who's runnin' the police department now, anyway?" asked Flannagan belligerently. "And say, Dexter, that telephone number you gave me must 'ave been a bum steer. It's the number of an Old Men's Home and I was up there all day givin' 'em the buzz. There's no one in that place who's got the Giffing jewels."

"The stones are in a safe deposit box in the bank where Fletcher was known under another name," said Dexter.

"WELL, what's that telephone number got to do with it?" asked the exasperated Flannagan. "What did you send me on that bum steer to an Old Men's Home for?"

"Did I say it was a telephone number?" asked Dexter easily. "It's I-B-2-0-0-1-2, isn't it?"

"Sure, Ibbetson 2-0012," replied Flannagan truculently.

"Now, Flannagan, I told you that you really ought to think once in a while," chided Dexter. "You go to the Industrial Bank with authority to open the box that was numbered twenty thousand and twelve, and when you put in your thumb, Jake, you'll pull out a plum. And what a plum!"

Mwamba Cobra



Don stung himself behind the cover of Ahmed's body

*Hideous, Swift Death from the Fangs of a Poisonous
Reptile Awaited Those Who Dared to Defy a
Sinister, Demanding Criminal!*

By **HAL K. WELLS**

Author of "Horse Sense," "Death Turns Hangman," etc.

IT WAS early in the afternoon when Joyce Kendall disappeared. Two hours later John Kendall received the brief cryptic phone call that told him that his daughter was in the hands of the deadly unknown figure of sinister mystery who called himself "Mwamba."

Ten o'clock that night found two men seated in the library of Kendall's suburban home, tensely waiting for the arrival of Mwamba's

promised second message. One of the men was John Kendall, his face haggard with grief and anxiety. The other was Dan Mowery, youthful lieutenant in the Detective Bureau, the man Joyce Kendall was to have married.

John Kendall moistened dry lips as he glanced at the clock. "It's ten now, Dan. He promised to get in touch with me before ten-fifteen. What if he doesn't call?"

"He'll call." Dan Mowery's voice

was grimly confident. "That is one of the very things we've learned about Mwamba in the past—he always keeps his word."

John Kendall shuddered as he sensed the unspoken thought behind Dan Mowery's words. During the months since Mwamba first had begun his unique campaign of torture and extortion, he had proved that he kept his word down to the last grim detail.

When the family of one of Mwamba's victims disobeyed the extortionist's instructions in any respect, the promised death came swiftly and hideously. Next day another body would be found somewhere along a desolate country road, a body bloated and blackened from the deadly venom of the snake from which the killer took his name—the *mwamba* cobra.

IT was five minutes after ten when a single sharp ring of the front door bell brought Kendall and Dan abruptly to their feet. Standing beside Kendall's tall big-boned figure, Dan looked almost boyishly slight, yet there was a lithe symmetry about his solid shoulders and trimly compact waist that told of muscles as resiliently powerful as oiled steel.

The two men hurried forward through the silent, deserted house. The servants had been dismissed for the night in order to give Mwamba every opportunity for unhampered communication.

As they approached the door, they saw a face framed in one of the upper glass panels. It was a rigidly set brown face, with wide-open staring eyes. There was a black uniform cap on the man's head.

Both men gasped as they recognized the brown face. It was that of Juan Salvadore, the Filipino chauffeur who had been driving the car in which Joyce Kendall had van-

ished! Dan leaped forward and flung the door open.

The next instant he recoiled in involuntary horror. The body of Juan Salvadore had apparently been merely propped against the door. When it opened, Salvadore's figure pitched limply forward on its face.

DAN knelt and turned the Filipino over. The chauffeur had been dead for hours, and he had died the same hideous death that Mwamba had meted out to his victims on previous occasions. The agonized, staring eyes and horribly swollen body told the story even before Dan uncovered the livid puncture marks of a cobra's fangs on the Filipino's ankle.

They found the message they were seeking in the dead man's inside coat pocket. It was a square unsealed envelope containing a single sheet of heavy white paper. The message was typewritten:

At eleven o'clock tomorrow night a messenger will call for the contribution I am requesting from you. The amount will be \$100,000—in bills not larger than twenties. If you do not have the full sum ready I will be regretfully forced to return Joyce Kendall's body to you in the same condition that you find this one.

"Any attempt at following my messenger, or endeavoring in any way to trap me, will, of course, result in instant death for your daughter.

The note was signed "Mwamba." Beneath the signature was a small, exquisitely drawn picture of a serpent—the dreaded *mwamba* cobra of the South African veldt country. There was stark evil written in every line of the vicious upreared body with its distended hood and fanged mouth.

Dan's eyes narrowed to slits of cold fury as he stared down at the crumpled body. The Filipino's murder was so utterly typical of the callous, brutally spectacular methods of

the unknown killer who called himself Mwamba. A horrible death inflicted upon a helpless victim, for no other apparent reason than to serve as an object lesson of Mwamba's ruthless power!

Kendall lifted a stunned white face to Dan. "One hundred thousand dollars!" he said brokenly. "It might as well be a million. Dan, there's no way on earth that I could possibly raise even fifty thousand dollars in the next twenty-four hours!"

Dan nodded. He knew the carefully guarded secret of Kendall's business collapse; that for months the man had been practically bankrupt, his position in the vast organization he once owned being now nothing more than a salaried figurehead maintained by a creditors' committee.

FOR once, Mwamba had guessed wrong in gauging the wealth of a victim. But the one who would pay the tragic penalty for that wrong guess would be Joyce Kendall.

"Our one possible chance of finding Mwamba's hideout is through the messenger he will send for the money," Dan said slowly. "Fix up some fake packets for him, genuine bills on the outside, dummies inside."

"You are going to try to follow him tomorrow night?"

Dan shook his head. "It can't be done. We learned that to our sorrow when Mwamba held Jack Redding's boy. I'm not planning any attempt at following the messenger this time—I'm going *with* him!"

It was raining the next morning. The Weather Bureau announced that the storm coming in off the Pacific would probably continue for the next twenty-four hours. Dan received the news with grim satisfaction. The darker and stormier it was that night, the better it would suit him.

His entire plan was based upon the regular routine which Mwamba's messenger had followed on previous occasions. The messenger's first step after picking up the money had always been to head directly for Brandt Boulevard and follow it over Brandt Pass into the semi-desert country of the San Juandero Valley.

The one direct route from Kendall's home to Brandt Boulevard was up through a sloping-walled, heavily wooded canyon through the foothills. Half a mile above Kendall's place, the right wall of the canyon closed sharply in a sheer sixty-foot cliff that edged the road for a distance of a hundred feet.

Early that afternoon a small gang of Mexican laborers set to work on the canyon road at the base of the cliff. They looked like nothing more than an ordinary road maintenance crew, but their foreman, with his face buried in half concealment behind the turned-up collar of his slicker, was Dan Mowery.

Eleven o'clock that night found Dan crouched precariously behind the cover of an out-jutting bush thirty feet up the face of the cliff. He was dressed from head to foot in dead black—a close-fitting cap pulled far down over his eyes, heavy woolen jersey, and gym shoes with thick soles of crepe rubber.

IN the roadway below, two lines of red lanterns glowed ruddily, pointing out a narrow lane left clear in the middle of piles of shale and debris. Near the far end of the single traffic lane, the macadam was torn up so badly that it left a twenty-foot stretch that a car could safely negotiate only in low gear. The exact location of that torn-up stretch had been calculated down to the last inch in Dan's work that afternoon.

As Dan crouched on the cliff face, he had a clear view down the wind-

ing roadway to where a street light glowed in front of Kendall's home. The rain had slackened now to a thin steady drizzle. Dan focused a pair of highpowered binoculars and waited, grimly tense.

IT was exactly eleven o'clock when a car came pulling in, to stop in front of the Kendall house. A chunky figure of a man climbed out with a small leather satchel in his hand and entered the house. Dan noted with relief that the car was the same type that Mwamba had used previously—a heavy, somewhat old-fashioned sedan.

The messenger returned almost immediately. Dan saw him flash a light and inspect the car inside and out, to check against anyone's attempting to stow away in it during his absence. Then the man climbed in and started up the canyon.

Dan cased the glasses and left them dangling in the bush, to be picked up later. Reaching behind him, he got both hands on a long strand of black rope that slanted up the cliff face, to where an old tree trunk jutted out from the top of the cliff. That tree trunk had been lashed in place that afternoon. The rope Dan held ended in a swivel set into the tree's far end, squarely over the roadway below.

Dan saw the approaching car slacken speed as it passed a flare-lit sign fifty yards down the road: "*Slow—Road Under Repair.*" He drew the rope taut and waited with grimly narrowed eyes as the car entered the red-marked narrow lane and slowed down still more. Dan hesitated a second longer, trying to gauge the distance and speed of the car to the last fraction,

Then, just as the sedan grated into low gear in the torn-up stretch, Dan leaped out into space. His hurtling body at the rope's end swooped dizzily down nearly to the

roadway, then began rising again in its giant pendulum swing.

For one numbing moment Dan feared that he had waited too long, that he was going to miss the sedan. Then a deeper chuck-hole made the driver touch his brake for just the brief interval Dan needed.

His feet flashed on above the car's roof, barely clearing it by inches. Dan let go the rope and dropped. The heavy rubber soles on his shoes helped him to land with the smooth silence of a cat. The bumpy surface of the road eliminated all chance of the driver's noting the faint jar of Dan's arrival.

As they emerged from the torn-up strip and swung smoothly on up the canyon, Dan relaxed on the swaying car top with a sigh of relief. His first objective had been safely attained.

They entered Brandt Boulevard and sped on through the wide notch of Brandt Pass, down into the broad barren San Juandro Valley. It was raining more heavily on this side of the Pass. The slanting downpour chilled Dan to the bone. He huddled on the car top in numb misery.

But the rain had one advantage. It cut down the number of other cars on the road and minimized the chances of other drivers getting curious about the huddled black figure on top of the sedan.

THEY swung abruptly off the Boulevard, heading straight across the Valley. Five miles brought them to the desolate foothill district on the other side. They swung up into the hills. Rounding a curve, the driver suddenly snapped the lights off and bored on in utter darkness through the rain-swept night.

Dan hitched himself forward to where he could peer over the edge nearest the driver, then waited with every nerve alert, his eyes aching with the strain of trying to keep

constant watch in the smothering darkness.

The driver obviously knew every foot of the desolate hill district. He wound on through a maze of narrow trails, boring steadily deeper into the hills.

Dan realized now why the police had so tragically failed in their previous attempts to trail Mwamba's messenger. Any effort to follow an unlighted car through this labyrinth of seldom-used trails was inevitably doomed to failure.

THERE was at least one guard posted along the route to further safeguard against pursuit of the messenger's car. Dan saw the brief flashes from the driver's electric torch and the answering flashes from a hill-top, that apparently told him all was clear, for the sedan promptly plunged on into the night again.

Dan's eyes were slowly becoming accustomed to the darkness. He could now dimly make out the darker masses of the hills bordering the trail. Occasionally they passed a still darker splotch against a hill-side, marking the site of an old shaft abandoned by the miners who had once searched the district for gold.

It was just as the car passed another of the dark tunnel mouths that the thing happened for which Dan had been waiting. The driver slowed his speed momentarily. Dan saw the shadowy sweep of an arm and heard the muffled thud of the satchel as it landed on the rock floor inside the tunnel mouth.

Dan sprawled tensely motionless, though he knew that the dark bulk of the hill facing on the road's other side must make him practically invisible to anyone in the tunnel.

The car gathered speed again and moved on, probably to continue a circuitous route eventually leading

back to the city. Dan waited till they were thirty yards beyond the tunnel, then lithely dropped to the trail behind the sedan.

He sped swiftly back to the mouth of the shaft. There were vague sounds inside as of someone fumbling around in the pitch darkness. Then the fumbling ceased as the unseen searcher found the satchel. Footsteps receded back into the shaft. Dan waited for a moment to give the other a safe lead, then slipped into the tunnel in silent pursuit.

The darkness was absolute. Dan had to feel his way inch by inch, and his unseen quarry steadily drew farther away. The tunnel was apparently an old, abandoned mine shaft, narrow and curving, with rock walls and ceiling, braced at intervals with wooden shoring.

They had gone for nearly two hundred yards when the figure ahead turned on the faint beam of a small flashlight. Dan had a brief glimpse of a tall, vaguely outlined man fumbling at one of the rock walls. Then a door opened. The man stepped through. The door closed behind him.

Again Dan stared into impenetrable darkness. He whipped out his own flashlight and hurried to the spot where the other had disappeared. The wooden door was so cleverly faced with imitation rock that Dan could never have found it had he not known the exact place at which to search.

THERE was no lock. A pull on a rocky knob brought the door open. A weighted rope pulled it shut again behind Dan. For twenty feet he groped through the darkness of what seemed a freshly made tunnel, then emerged into what was apparently another old mine shaft.

Seventy yards ahead there was a dim glow as of light filtering through

a cloth. Swiftly Dan slipped along the passage toward the light.

He found that the barrier at the shaft's end was a curtain made of several folds of burlap. In the light beyond the fabric, there was the sound of someone moving around on a wooden floor.

Dan slipped his .38 automatic out of his shoulder holster. He cautiously drew one edge of the cloth aside until he had a crack through which he could peer.

HE looked into a small room lighted by a bright oil lamp set on a table in the center. By building the short new passage between the two old mine shafts, a continuous passage had been cut clear through the hill, for Dan heard the faint drum of rain on the roof of the room before him.

A tall, gauntly built man clad in a black topcoat and a broad-brimmed felt hat leaned over the table, his back to the curtain. Over in one corner of the room, a smaller wooden table supported a large, square glass case in which a group of four sooty-black *mwamba* cobras writhed sluggishly. On a rough bunk in the other corner was the bound figure of a girl. A heavy blindfold shrouded her eyes.

Dan's heart leaped in relief as he recognized the trim, slender little figure with its short curly bob of amber-colored hair—Joyce Kendall. He shoved the curtain aside and stepped into the room, pistol alertly leveled.

"Get 'em up!" he snapped curtly.

The tall man at the table straightened and turned around, his movements as carelessly unconcerned as though he had been expecting the interruption. Dan found himself staring into a gaunt, hawk-like face in which dark eyes glittered with cold reptilian menace. Dan did not need to see the heap of opened money

packets on the table to realize that he was facing Mwamba himself.

The man's eyes studied Dan in contemptuous silence for a brief second, then wandered on beyond him. A flickering command gleamed briefly in their depths. Too late Dan realized the peril of the curtailed opening at his back.

Before he could turn, a long arm flashed over his shoulder. Fingers of steely strength clamped the wrist of his gun hand, swinging the muzzle of the weapon irresistibly down. There was a crashing report as reflex action tightened Dan's trigger finger. The bullet ploughed harmlessly into the wooden floor.

The other arm of the man behind him coiled about Dan's body in a grip of such crushing power that he was helpless. The fingers on his wrist twisted with a savage force that brought an involuntary gasp of agony to Dan's lips. The gun dropped from his paralyzed fingers.

"All right, Ahmed," Mwamba said quietly, "I'll take care of him now."

A heavy-calibred automatic pistol in Mwamba's hand covered Dan.

"You should have known that I would hardly be careless enough to leave my retreat entirely unguarded," Mwamba said mockingly. "But tell me—how did you trail my messenger here? There was no car following him. Of that I am certain."

DAN'S only answer was stony silence.

Mwamba shrugged bony shoulders. "Oh, well—it does not matter. The messenger will pay for his carelessness. Search our prisoner, Ahmed."

As Ahmed stripped Dan's pockets, Dan got his first good look at the man. He was a huge, shambling creature, stolid of face, and with the dark brown complexion of an East

Indian native. Mwamba's white teeth showed in a wolf-like smile as Ahmed found Dan's badge.

"So—you are of the police," he jeered.

"His name is Mow-ery," Ahmed spelled out slowly from Dan's identification cards. "Dan-iel Mow-ery, an officer in the Detective Bureau."

"Dan!" Relief and grief were blended in the startled cry from the blindfolded girl over on the bunk.

SADISTIC delight glowed in Mwamba's murky eyes. "So you are more than a mere policeman. You are a friend—and apparently a very dear friend. That is good. It will make that which is to happen much more interesting."

Mwamba turned to Ahmed. "Release the girl. Remove her blindfold. There is no longer any danger of her seeing too much."

Dan shuddered. He realized the grim meaning in Mwamba's words. It no longer mattered what Joyce Kendall might see, because she would not be allowed to live long enough to tell anyone about it.

When Joyce's bonds and blindfold were removed, Mwamba ordered Dan over to sit on the bunk beside her. Dan threw a protective arm around the girl's slender shoulders. Silent and white-faced, they awaited Mwamba's next move.

"Get them ready, Ahmed," Mwamba ordered.

The big brown man knelt and stripped shoes and stockings from Dan and Joyce. Then he stepped over and took half a dozen cans of condensed milk from a wall shelf. He ripped the cans open and drenched the bare feet and ankles of both prisoners with the thick, creamy fluid.

Mwamba jerked his head briefly toward the reptiles in the case. "All cobras love milk," he explained softly. "You may be able to rub

most of the liquid off, but the scent will remain upon your skin. And they have remarkable powers of scent, those beauties!"

Ahmed stepped over to the cobra case. In one hand he held a short heavy stick, a running noose set in its tip. He dropped the noose over the hood of the largest of the snakes—a thick ugly specimen some four feet long—drew it taut, and fished the reptile bodily out of the case. The cobra dangled impotently from the stick's end, writhing and hissing in savage fury.

Mwamba reached in his pocket and drew out a single match. He broke it between his fingers, leaving barely half an inch of wooden stick below the head, then tossed the fragment on the floor at Dan's feet.

"Pick it up," he ordered tersely. "Two minutes from now it will seem the world's most precious object to you. You would gladly sell your very soul for a dozen of them."

MWAMBA'S eyes glittered with mad delight as Dan picked up the broken match. Dan realized now that the man was more than merely a cold-blooded killer. He was a sadistic fiend, reveling in the last possible portion of pain and terror he could wring from his victims before killing them.

"That room is especially prepared for occasions like this," Mwamba indicated a closed door over in one wall. "It is bare of all furnishings. There are no windows and only one door. When it is closed the room is absolutely dark.

"It is in that pitch darkness that I am placing you both—and the cobra. Darkness will be little handicap to it. The scent of the milk will bring it straight to you, no matter where you may be."

Mwamba sneered as he looked at Dan. "By holding the girl in your arms, clear of the floor, you can of

course delay her death momentarily. But it will be little more than a futile gesture. After the cobra's fangs have slain you, she will be left helpless and alone.

"And your death will not have lessened the cobra's deadliness in any appreciable degree. There is more than enough venom in the well-filled poison sacs of that hooded beauty to kill you both.

"In providing you with that broken match," Mwamba continued, "I am giving you the means of creating the only moment of light you can ever have in the pitch darkness of that room. Strike it, and for possibly five seconds you will be able to see the cobra, and so dodge its attack momentarily.

"It is in your manner of making use of that one brief flash of light that the interesting problem should arise—whether you will use it at once, or save it against the terror of that last frantic moment in the darkness when tortured nerves can stand no more."

Dan shuddered as he realized the fiendish ingenuity of the torture that Mwamba was describing. To be locked in the dark room with a cobra would be an ordeal sufficient to strike horror into anyone's heart. But the gift of the single broken fragment of a match added the final exquisite touch of refined cruelty to the plan.

JUST that one swift flame of light, then utter and irrevocable darkness until the cobra struck. Dan could see where the struggle to make the best use of the single second's respite could easily become a maddening ordeal before which one's very sanity would reel.

Mwamba stepped slightly to one side, out of the prisoners' path, and gestured with mocking courtesy toward the door. "And now," he said softly, "you will enter the room."

Dan had looked into the faces of too many killers not to recognize the murder lust glowing in Mwamba's dark eyes. Any slightest hesitation or hint of resistance would merely bring a stream of leaden death crashing into their bodies from that alertly leveled pistol. He gently drew Joyce to her feet. With his arm about her shoulders, they started slowly toward the door.

DAN'S brain was racing, trying to find some possible chance, no matter how faint, of escaping the hideous ordeal that loomed ahead. Then, as his arm tightened about Joyce's slim shoulders in a reassuring embrace, his fingers noted the sheer fabric of her crepe blouse. Dan's eyes narrowed as a thought suddenly struck him.

They opened the door. Light reflected from the main room revealed the interior of a small cell-like room fifteen feet square, containing nothing beyond bare walls and bare floor. At Mwamba's command they walked on to the far wall, then turned to face him.

Ahmed stood beside his master in the doorway, with the stick holding the cobra thrust into the room. Mwamba's lips drew back in a silent smile. He snapped a curt order to Ahmed. The noose loosened. The writhing cobra dropped free!

As the thick scaly body thudded to the floor, the door slammed shut with a clash of metal bolts sliding home. Darkness, absolute and impenetrable, filled the little room.

Dan was in action the instant the door closed. He drew Joyce swiftly over to the nearest corner, placing her behind the shelter of his own body.

"Quick!" he whispered. "Get that blouse off!"

Light was the one thing they had to have. The flame of the broken match alone would be too perilously

faint and brief for what Dan had in mind. But using that match to start a larger fire was a different matter. The only available tinder was Joyce's blouse. Dan's garments were water-soaked.

Dan had a vital use for his own jersey, though. Swiftly he pulled the heavy woolen garment over his head and wadded it into a thick pad over his left forearm, lashing it in place with his belt.

As he worked, Dan's ears strained tensely toward the spot where the cobra had landed. Its first brief flurry of angry hissing had died out. There was no sound of any kind from it now. Apparently the reptile was waiting, motionless for the moment, while it got its bearings again after its fall.

But Dan realized their respite would be brief. He knew that the *mwamba*, like its cousin, the giant King Cobra of India, is one of the few snakes so innately vicious that it will invariably attack any human being within reach.

"Here's the blouse, Dan," Joyce whispered.

"Good." Dan took the flimsy garment and carefully stuffed it into a little heap on the floor at his feet. He fumbled for Joyce's hand in the darkness and gave her the broken match end.

"When I give you the word," he whispered, "set fire to the blouse. Nurse its light as long as you possibly can. It's our one chance."

Before Joyce could answer there came a sound that froze them into tense silence—the faint slithering noise of a scaly body gliding slowly over the floor toward them!

With nerves taut almost to the breaking point, Dan forced himself to wait while the dry rasping sound crept stealthily closer in the smothering darkness. His moment of light would be all too short at best.

He had to wait until the snake was within easy reach.

Dan realized with a thrill of pride that the girl with him was facing the grim ordeal with the steel nerve of a thoroughbred. The slim fingers that Dan clasped were cold with dread, but they never trembled, even when the scaly slithering across the floor advanced until it seemed nearly at their very feet.

Dan dared wait no longer. He released the girl's hand.

"Quick—the light!" he whispered tensely.

There was the spluttering flash of the match, startlingly bright after the utter darkness, then the far brighter rush of light as the sheer crepe leaped into flame.

The cobra was upreared barely a yard away, its bulging hood swaying in lethal menace. Long curving fangs glittered in its open mouth, their slightest scratch meaning swift and hideous death.

Dan crouched low. His padded left forearm jabbed forward like the glove of a boxer. The snake's head swayed to one side. It hissed sibilantly, viciously.

Again Dan jabbed in an effort to madden the cobra into striking. This time his stratagem worked. The hooded throat arched back, then snapped forward in a thrust of lightning speed!

DAN felt the impact of the blunt head as it struck the pad about his arm, but the wool was too thick for the fangs to penetrate. Their curving needle points caught momentarily in the heavy, closely-wadded fabric.

Dan lunged forward and pinned the cobra's head between his padded arm and the floor. Then, careful to make as little sound as possible, he threw his own body across the snake, smothering the writhing coils beneath him. The flaming crepe

flared in a final flame and burned out.

In complete darkness Dan groped up along the snake's pinioned body with his right hand, over and past the hood. Finally his fingers locked securely around the thick neck just back of the head.

Dan held the writhing thing at arm's length and lurched to his feet. Carefully he groped with his left hand until he had another grip close to the one he already had on the neck.

Then with every ounce of strength in his wiry muscles Dan twisted his hands. For a long straining moment the reptile's thick body resisted. Then slowly it gave. There came the dull crush of a breaking spine.

THE short, savage battle was over. It had been fought throughout so silently that no warning sounds could have reached the listening ears of Mwamba and his servant out in the main room.

The cobra's body continued to twist sluggishly in Dan's hand, but it was merely the blind reflex action of a thing that was to all practical purposes dead. For the moment Dan continued to hold the snake. He dared not place it on the floor near their feet, for if those fangs were carelessly trodden upon by a bare foot they could still be deadly in death as in life.

"I'm okay, Joyce," he whispered in swift reassurance to the girl. "We're going to put on a show now to trick Mwamba into believing that his little pet has done its work. I'll go first. When you hear me hit the floor, then do your stuff the same way."

"All right, Dan," she whispered.

Dan put everything he had into the cry he then gave. It was the agonized moan of a man in the last extremity of pain and terror, the sort of cry that a man would give

as the fangs of a *mwamba* cobra stabbed home. A brief flurry of bare feet threshing in apparent agony over the floor, with moans dying away to strangled gasps. Then the heavy thud of a falling body, striking the floor.

Joyce was quick to follow his lead. She screamed, again and again. There was more than any mere acting in her voice. It contained the stark horror of taut nerves at last finding expression.

Dan came lithely to his feet. Joyce's cries crescendoed in apparent pain. They completely drowned the thud of the dead cobra's body as Dan flung it over in a far corner safely out of the way.

Dan slipped silently across the floor toward the closed door. He located it with groping fingers. Joyce's screams died away to sobbing moans, followed by the convulsive struggles of a body on the floor—then utter silence closed on the heavy darkness of the little room.

Dan crouched beside the door, muscles tense and ready. He did not have long to wait.

There was the sound of bolts sliding back, then a crack of light. The door was hinged so that it opened outward into the next room. Dan had a flashing glimpse of Ahmed's brown face in the narrow opening. Ahmed was crouching down as he worked the edge of a wide board into the door crack to pen the cobra in.

DAN hurled his body forward in a headlong dive. His shoulder sent the door smashing into Ahmed. The big servant went crashing backward. As Dan sprawled forward across Ahmed's prostrate body, he saw Mwamba standing just behind them.

The heavy fall half dazed Ahmed. He and Dan lurched to their knees together. Dan saw Mwamba's hand raising his pistol into line. Desper-

ately Dan flung himself behind the cover of Ahmed's body. Mwamba tried to halt his contracting trigger finger, but he was too late. The gun crashed. Ahmed stiffened, then pitched lifeless to the floor as the slug tore through his brain.

Dan came to his feet with the lithe speed of an uncoiling steel spring. Mwamba was barely five feet away. Dan covered the distance in a single hurtling leap. Mwamba had time for only one wildly hurried shot.

Dan staggered as the slug ripped through his left shoulder, but the impetus of his leap carried him on. Before Mwamba could fire again, Dan's right fist crashed solidly against his jaw.

The blasting force of the blow sent Mwamba sprawling heavily backward. As Mwamba fell, his shoulder struck one corner of the wooden table on which the cobra case stood. The table overturned. There was the crash of shattering glass as the case struck the floor within arm's length of Mwamba's prostrate body.

The three cobras, maddened to fighting fury by the fall, came surging out of the wreckage of the case.

Mwamba frantically tried to roll clear of the viciously striking snakes, but he was not quick enough.

One of the thick black bodies straightened in a flashing strike that buried its fangs deep in Mwamba's throat. He struggled to his knees, sobbing in agonized horror as he wildly clawed at the writhing thing at his throat. He tore it free, then slumped forward on his face in quivering collapse.

DAN snatched up Mwamba's gun and leaped to the man's aid. Stepping in close, he emptied the automatic in a rippling blast that smashed the heads of the three cobras into harmless ribbons.

But Mwamba was beyond help. The snake's fangs had struck squarely into the principal arteries of his throat. The venom acted with startling and deadly swiftness. Even as Dan watched, he saw the man's flesh begin to swell and blacken.

His twitching body stiffened in a final paroxysm, then lay quite still, inert. Mwamba was dead—a final victim of the hideous fanged death that he had ruthlessly meted out to others.



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MURDERED



Then Beth's weapon cracked spitefully

*Death Calls for the Chief Weather Observer Henri Naille
in this Ingenious, Breath-Taking Detective Yarn*

A Thrilling Beth Moore Story

By MARGIE HARRIS

Author of "Tabloid Murder," "Lenses of Vengeance," etc.

ANTHONY NITTI, operative in charge of the night detail for the Moore Agency, private investigators, slipped a new clip into his favorite gun and grinned across the desk at his green-eyed girl companion.

She was Elizabeth Moore, she-shamus extraordinary, a girl in her late twenties but already famed as one of the city's most brilliant investigators. Now she was frowning at a telegram.

Presently Tony said: "It's a wo-

man's lot to worry about her man, but why you fret about a tough old bird like your Dad is beyond me."

Beth nodded impatiently, ran one hand through her close-bobbed dark red hair. "Dad's sixty-four," she replied. "It was bad enough for him to go after that Boston kidnap ring single-handed, but flying back when there's storm signals from the Virginia Capes to Canada is just plain insanity."

"Flying conditions may be all right between here and Boston," Nitti argued. "If you're worried, why not call your old sidekick up there in the Weather Bureau and ask him?"

"That's a good thought," Beth answered and promptly dialed the number of the observatory fifteen stories above them in the same building. After a moment she clattered the instrument back into its cradle and said, "Busy!"

Then, at intervals of a minute she continued calling. With the sixth buzz she dialed "Operator" and asked for a check on the line. Presently she said, "Thank you," and put the receiver down.

"The line is open and nobody's talking," she said. "Suppose we go up and take a look-see."

AN express elevator let them out at the top floor. Thence they passed through a glass door and up the stairway to the Bureau tower. The door at the top stood open.

Beth touched Nitti's arm. "That's wrong, Tony—" she began, but fell silent as a piercing, eerie shriek, a ghastly scream that might have come direct from the Inferno, slashed at their ears.

Silence fell through a long second; then the horrifying scream sounded again.

Nitti put out a brawny arm, thrust Beth behind and stepped quickly through the doorway. The

outer office was in shadow except for a bright pathway of light that shone through the partly opened door of the main record room.

He paused briefly, said "Wait!" over his shoulder. The beam of his pocket flash probed into the shadows, but there was no one hiding there, no sound of movement from within. Quickly he passed to the door of the inner office, then halted irresolutely as a gruesome sight met his eyes.

Chief Weather Observer Henri Naille lay slumped in his chair, crimson rivulets seeping from wounds in his head and throat. Murdered! Death had called for him in the final minutes of the old day.

AS the two young detectives moved forward from the doorway, a third ghastly howl swelled forth. Tony Nitti touched Beth's arm, jerked a thumb toward the telephone receiver on the desk-top.

"The screamer," he explained. "A howling device the repair service puts on a line to call attention to its being open." He took up the instrument in his folded handkerchief, signaled the board and explained the circumstances. Then he put the instrument back on the desk.

Meanwhile Beth's keen eyes were traveling slowly, carefully, about the room. Presently, with a stifled exclamation, she crossed the room and picked up a tiny object near the doorway.

Nitti looked up from the body. "Find something?" he asked.

Beth nodded. "A seed pearl, Tony. Look him over and see if one is missing from his cuff links or watch-case."

He straightened after a moment. "Links are plain; watch too, and there's no charm. Naille didn't drop that, you may be certain."

Beth walked around the desk, let

her inscrutable eyes rest for a long moment on the placid dead face. "This will hurt Dad," she said gently. "He and Henri Naille have been close friends for forty years."

But Tony was giving no heed to her words. Instead, he was flashing the beam of his light about the floor beside the body. Suddenly he called:

"Look! Here's one of the slugs—and undamaged."

He got to his knees, held the light so Beth could see the bullet half hidden in the thick pile of the rug. "A .38" he said. "When we get the gun that fired that one, we'll have the killer. See, it isn't even marred."

Beth nodded. "Great, Tony. But we'd better call Homicide. You wait here and help as much as you can—but keep quiet about the seed pearl. I'm going back to the office to wait for Dad."

DAWN lights were greying the eastern sky when Big Emmett Moore came booming into his office, roaring joyful greeting to Beth and Nitti. But a single glance at their faces silenced him.

"What's the matter?" he rumbled. "I come home with a two-grand fee and you two sit around looking like hired mourners."

Beth met his gaze levelly and nodded.

"It's bad news, Dad. Someone murdered Henri Naille tonight up there in the Bureau. Tony and I found him when we went to see why we couldn't get an answer on the wire."

Old Emmett's eyes narrowed; some of the ruddy color left his cheeks. Moments passed before he spoke. "What'd you find? You were first there. Any clues?"

Beth showed him the seed pearl. "I found that on the floor; held it out on the cops. There was a spent bullet, too; we left that. There was something else I noticed—a

strangely patterned mark on the opposite side of the desk from the body. I'll show that to you after awhile."

Old Emmett's eyes shone red. "You and Tony get on it," he rumbled. "You made a fine team on the Terry Guinan killing; see what you can do now. I'll tell the cops we're working angles, which'll satisfy 'em plenty. And by the way, what'd they find? Fingerprints?"

TONY shook his head. "No prints—and no weapon. The elevator boys who went on at ten o'clock swear nobody went up after that until they took us to the top floor."

"One slug went in through the temple, a second through the throat. There was a third, into the left side of the abdomen. It smashed the watch in his pocket, stopped it at 11:59:06."

Old Emmett crashed his palm against the top of the desk. "Listen, you youngsters," he roared. "Henri Naille and me were friends forty years. It's little I can do now that he's gone, but we're going to get his killer! That's your job: now do it!"

He swallowed hard, went on in milder tones. "Make it your business to know where Elsa Naille was tonight. That's a bad woman. She was too young for Henri, too wild. She's been mixed up with a forger. He calls himself 'Corte Lopez,' says he's a Spaniard, but I think he's just Mex."

"Elsa?" Tony said. "That's the second Mrs. Naille?"

"Yes, a hard-boiled, gold-digging female if ever I saw one."

Beth smiled thinly. "You might not sense it, Tony—but Dad doesn't like the gal. He screamed like a panther six months ago when she induced her husband to add another \$25,000 insurance to the \$10,000 he already carried."

"Yah!" Old Emmett roared, "and

he signed his death warrant when he paid his first premium." After a moment's thought he asked: "Who notified her, the cops?"

Tony told him: "Yes. She was sleeping. At first the maid refused to call her."

The old detective rumbled something under his breath. "That's another I don't like—that maid. She's a sly one, a Belgian with come-hither eyes; just the sort a hard case like Elsa Naille'd have about her. In the whole house there's only one person worth the powder to blow 'em to the devil—and that's Mrs. Andrew, the housekeeper."

Beth caught Tony's eye, winked warningly.

"It's daylight, Dad," she said with a yawn. "Let's get a few hours rest so we can start out fresh."

Old Emmett stretched, took up his hat and Gladstone, and stamped out of the office. Instantly Beth drew her chair close to Tony's.

"You beat it back to the Bureau," she said rapidly, "and see what you can nose out while I'm gone. If Dad calls back, tell him I sent love and kisses."

She took up her envelope purse containing her gun and emergency kit, stopped at the door.

"You'll be hearing from me—one way or another," she said evenly. "And here's to a quick clean-up."

II



ONY NITTI found Patrolman Pat Dougherty on guard in the Weather Bureau. Dougherty was sleepy, disgruntled at his assignment and in the mood for company. They chatted awhile, fell silent presently at the sound of footsteps on the stairs. A middle-aged man, wearing horn-rimmed glasses and baggy clothing, stood in the doorway.

"I'm Hartson, chief clerk," he explained. "I just got in from my home in Jamaica. Someone telephoned me the Chief was dead. I've got to check over the apparatus to make sure the records will continue."

Tony touched the policeman's arm. "You take it easy here," he said, "I'll go 'round with him and see that everything's okay."

AT the officer's nod, he followed the clerk into the main office. Then, for fifteen minutes, they went from gauge to gauge, thermometer to thermometer, thence to the barometer, checking readings at each.

Presently Hartson touched a switch, disclosing a massive machine mounted on a steel and concrete base in one corner. A boom supported by a cup bearing attached to an upright column supported a stylus, which in turn rested against the face of a drum covered with smoked paper.

"What's that?" Tony demanded.

Hartson leaned closer, inspected the wavering lines on the dark brown surface.

"A seismometer — one of the Chief's hobbies," he said shortly. "Rightfully, it belongs in the Geodetic side, but he installed it out of his own funds that he might carry on his own observations."

Tony shrugged. "From the Greek *seismos*—earthquake," he said. "So I presume it records earth tremors; that it?"

"And atmospheric disturbances—sometimes both. It's a permanent record. When we take the roll off, we pass it through a tray containing a solution of shellac in alcohol, which gives it a transparent coating. If you wish, I'll show you how it's done."

"Let's," Tony said briskly—and followed him into a tiny laboratory.

Beth, meanwhile had made her

way to the Naille home, a modest two-story brick in one of the older Brooklyn residential sections. But she no longer was the immaculate Beth of the office. En route, over on the subway, she had undergone transformation.

A FEW deft touches to her hair, an unbecoming adjustment of her beret, a slouching gait and a stick of chewing gum—and she was a fair replica of the Flatbush housemaid. She had come to enlist the aid of Mrs. Andrew, the Naille housekeeper, and the masquerade was for the purpose of accounting for her presence as a job-seeker if she encountered other members of the household.

Fortune favored her, for even as she touched the latch of the rear screen door, a portly, white-haired woman, her eyes red from weeping, came out for the milk.

"I'm Emmett Moore's daughter, Mrs. Andrew," Beth said softly. "I've come to ask you to help me find Mr. Naille's murderer. Dad feels it all keenly, but I've got a plan—if you'll do your part. When does Mrs. Naille arise mornings?"

"The maid serves her breakfast in bed at nine. After that she draws the bath, then comes down here for her own breakfast."

Beth said, "Wonderful! It just fits. Now, where can we go to talk where we won't be discovered?"

"In my own room. No one ever comes there." They crossed the narrow hall, went into a stuffy bedroom, talked there in whispers for ten minutes. At the end Beth took a flat vial from her purse, measured out a small quantity into a glass and handed it to Mrs. Andrew.

"Do what I've told you," she said quietly, "and I'll attend to everything else. If you lose your job—"

"It's gone already," the older woman interrupted. "I just stayed on

because of the old gentleman. I wouldn't work for that woman."

She went out, slipped the spring lock behind her. Beth, worn from an all night vigil, lay back on the pillows. In a moment she was asleep.

The sun was shining and sounds of traffic were loud in her ears when she awakened. Mrs. Andrew, white-faced, was shaking her.

"I'm scared!" the housekeeper chattered anxiously. "They look like death—and they're breathing horribly."

"They're quite all right," Beth assured her. "It's a new form of chloral. They'll sleep two hours and feel no bad effects when they awaken."

First stopping at the maid's room, she followed Mrs. Andrew to the dining-room. There, her head fallen forward, her chin on her breast, slept a thin lipped brunette in maid's uniform. Beth touched an eyelid, opened it. When there was no reaction to light, she turned back to Mrs. Andrew.

"Mrs. Naille next," she said. "We'll have to work fast."

MRS. NAILLE, sketchily attired in a fussy, silken night robe, was snoring raucously. She was plump, with a petulant face, a wealth of black hair and skin of unusually fine texture. At thirty-five, she still had much of her youthful charm.

"I'd like to know what time she came in last night," Beth said after a moment's thought. "Has she a chauffeur?"

"No, Miss Moore, but I can tell you. She came in at 11:45, and there was a man with her. Their voices in the hall awakened me."

"Eleven forty-five," Beth repeated. "It doesn't check. You're sure?"

"Yes—I looked at the clock to see how long I'd been asleep."

Without replying, Beth swung

about and began a methodical search of the room, ending with the vanity, a chiffonier, a dresser and finally a high chest of drawers in a corner. Presently she opened a closet door and sighed at sight of its dress-packed interior. She turned back to Mrs. Andrew.

"I'm looking for a beaded wrap, maybe an evening gown with some sort of seed-pearl design about the 'V' or on the sleeves."

Mrs. Andrew shook her head, puzzled, then pointed to a second door behind her.

"Try there," she suggested. "It's a combination bath and dressing room. She always leaves everything in there when she comes in late."

In a moment Beth was sorting over lingerie, stockings, shoes, a costly coral pink evening dress, a velvet evening wrap, gloves.

"She wore those last night," the housekeeper said. "I saw her when she left for the bridge tournament at the Midtown Club. She was a contestant." After a moment she added: "That's in the Mammoth Building; they have quarters there."

BETH smiled grimly. "Now," she said, "there's something that does check. It places her in the building where the Weather Bureau is situated. We think she killed him for his insurance money, but to tie her up to the murder, I've got to find something she wore which was decorated with seed pearls."

"I recall only one thing of the kind," Mrs. Andrew said. "Mr. Naille once gave her a beaded bag. There were imitation pearls, large ones at the bottom, and they graduated up to a band of tiny ones at the top, but I don't think she carried it last night."

"We've got to find it," Beth said harshly. "Let's go!"

Fifteen minutes of intensive searching passed before she found

the bag. She had stooped to feel between the mattress and the box spring when her fingers encountered a hard object. It was something wrapped in a damask towel.

A quick flirt of her fingers brought to view the pearl bag, within it something bulky.

Mrs. Andrew stifled a scream when Beth, using her handkerchief for a screen, showed a stubby .38 caliber revolver. Beth sniffed at the barrel, opened the breech and ejected the shells.

"Fired recently—barrel fouled—three exploded shells," she said triumphantly. "Imagine sleeping on a gun with which you'd just killed someone!"

SHE replaced it in the bag, rewrapped both in the towel.

"I've got to get back to town," she told the housekeeper. "All you have to do is stand pat. Your story is that they were sleeping and you didn't want to awaken them. We'll have them both in a cell before night, so you've nothing to fear."

Old Emmett Moore and Tony Nitti had their heads together over the seismometer record when Beth burst into the office after a fast subway trip from Brooklyn.

"I've got it!" she shrilled. "Got the goods on Mrs. Naille. Think of it! She carried the gun home and slept on it all night!"

Old Emmett's eyes danced. "And you've got her in jail?" When Beth frowned guiltily, he chuckled.

"I know," he said consolingly. "There's something that doesn't tie up as yet. What is it—the matter of time?"

"How did you know, Dad?" She asked it in an awed whisper.

"This," he answered, pointing to the smoked paper. "Tony found it upstairs; a part of last night's seismometer record. Instead of the shooting being at midnight, it shows

that the shots were fired at 9:55:05, 9:55:09 and 9:55:25.

"Instead of midnight? You're sure, Dad?"

Old Emmett swung about. "You show her, Tony," he said, pushing the now glazed strip of paper before her.

"THOSE wavering lines," Tony said, "mark the shots. The sheet is divided off into minutes, but the record moves ahead a millimeter every two seconds, so the split-time is easy to figure. Here the stylus was nearing 10 o'clock.

"Back of that are other deviating lines, but we've checked them against subway trains, and nearby blasting at the new building down the block. Each has been identified by comparison with other records.

"But at this point, five minutes before ten, there were violent atmospheric disturbances, the first two four seconds apart; the third sixteen seconds later."

"It sounds good, Tony, but how do you know they were pistol shots?"

He grinned indulgently. "Because we fired other shots from a .38 pistol and got identical lines on the seismometer record. Here it is; compare the two."

Beth took both sheets, studied them carefully. "And at midnight?"

Tony pointed to an unbroken line at the twelfth hour and for many minutes before.

"Definitely—absolutely," he said, "we can prove no shots were fired there at or near that hour. The seismometer can't lie and its record puts the time of the killing at 9:55 o'clock."

Beth drew a long, quavering breath. "Then I've got the rest of the case here," she said, bringing to light the towel-wrapped bag.

Old Emmett said, "Hah!" approvingly at sight of the gun. He mut-

tered congratulations when Beth took the single seed pearl from her purse and fitted it to an empty socket in the design about the mouth of the pearl bag.

Meanwhile Tony had screwed a jeweler's loupe into his left eye and was examining the gun. "No prints," he said. "How'd you get all this?"

"Mrs. Andrew and I," Beth answered. "She doped the coffee with that new chloral syrup, knocked out the maid and Mrs. Naille and helped me search."

"That's all very well," Old Emmett grumbled, "but we've still got to tie Mrs. Naille in and out of the building last night."

Beth grinned back at him tauntingly. "You would," she grumbled, "but I've got all that." Then she launched into the story of the bridge tournament, told of Mrs. Naille's homecoming at midnight.

Tony got to his feet. "I'll check that right now," he said. "I know the ropes."

FOR the next twenty minutes he was busy at the telephone. When he returned he was smiling.

"Got it!" he jubilated. "According to one of the checkers, Mrs. Naille played in the East-West combination, beginning at Table five. It was a twenty-board tournament and play started at 8:30. The checker distinctly remembers that she was missing for several minutes after 9:45; that she returned, pleading a sudden illness as excuse for overstaying the time required for the East-West table change."

Old Emmett's fist rapped the desk top resoundingly. "That's good enough!" he roared, and dialed a number. Presently they heard him say:

"Give me Inspector Gilliland"; then, "This is Emmett Moore, Gilly. How'd you like to clean up the

Naille murder right quickly—and take all the credit?

"Oh, yeah? You would, eh? Well, send over to Brooklyn and pinch Mrs. Naille, her Belgian maid, Marie, and just to make it look good, bring in Mrs. Andrew, the housekeeper—though she's okay. Then have some of your boys round up Corte Lopez, a gigolo, who hangs around the Broadway light spots. Have 'em all in my office at 4 o'clock—and I'll give you a murderer."

He put the telephone down, flared around at his assistants.

"Put every man we've got out on the details," he roared. "I want the elevator operator who took her up; whoever saw her leave the club-rooms, whoever saw her carrying the beaded bag last night.

"That's a big job—and there's a 4 o'clock deadline. Don't throw me down."

III



INSPECTOR GILLILAND came in fifteen minutes before the time set. He was smiling grimly.

"One of my men is bringing Mrs. Naille over from Brooklyn. We cooled her for an hour in one of the precinct houses. The maid will arrive in a squad car ten minutes later.

"Lopez is down in Bellevue getting patched up. He resisted arrest, and I'm here to say he's a hard baby.

"I let Mrs. Andrew out in Miss Beth's private office. She talked, so I know she's not a pinch. What do you want me to do?"

"Sit tight," Old Emmett answered. "And lots of that."

They talked sketchily of old days in the Department until the master box buzzed and the reception clerk

said: "Lieutenant Brenner and Mrs. Naille."

Old Emmett summoned up his best frown. "In with 'em!" he yelled.

Mrs. Naille, becomingly attired in a tailored outfit, came through the door like a fury, eyes blazing, words bubbling from her lips.

"So it's you, you crook!" she blazed. "I'm beginning to get the idea now. You've always hated me and now I'm to provide new publicity for your dishonest agency."

OLD EMMETT'S scowl became real. "Sit down, Mrs. Red-hot!" he rasped. "All I'm wanting is the woman who killed her husband at 9:55 last night, then went to bed and slept nine hours on top of the murder gun. I'm meanin' you, Missis Woman, and I wouldn't kid you."

A pasty whiteness replaced the angry red in the woman's cheeks.

"You—you dare to accuse—me, of killing Henri?" she snapped.

"Nothing less, and here's the picture. You're all tied up with that Mexican gigolo, Lopez. You got Henri to put another \$25,000 on his life. You've made each day a hell for him with your extravagance, your demands for money—and now you've killed him.

"You'll be saying next 'What's the motive'? Well, here it is, just as the jury'll get it when you finally get to court:

"You've rid yourself of an elderly husband. If and when the insurance is paid off, you'll have \$35,000 to squander on a new husband. You want excitement—and I'm going to give it to you."

Mrs. Naille, two bright spots flaring in her cheeks, snarled her rage.

"It's a bluff; a horrible frameup, Emmett Moore. I was at home—in bed—before Henri was killed."

"Says you, Missis Naille. And when did he take the slugs?"

Her gaze lifted quickly, flashed in

anxiety at the set faces about her. "The papers said that it was a few minutes before midnight," she faltered.

Old Emmett slammed his palm heavily against the desk top.

"It took you sixteen seconds to set the watch ahead and fire the third shot," he accused wrathfully. "Which proves wilful murder, not a crime of sudden insanity. That's why you'll burn in the chair."

"Prove that, Imitation Policeman," she raged. "I'm nobody's fool."

THE old detective chuckled poisonously, swept a drawer open.

"Here's the murder gun," he rasped. "Here's the beaded bag you carried in and out of this building last night with the gun in it, and here's a pearl out of the top of it. You dropped that while you were doing your little murder chore. And here's the undamaged bullet which matches samples fired from that gun today."

Mrs. Naille, suddenly fearful, covered her eyes with her fingers. Old Emmett, standing, poked at her forearm with the muzzle of the gun.

"Look at it," he raged, "smell the burned powder; remember how Henri looked when he took the first slug—then tell me it's not yours."

Moaning frenziedly, she let her fingers slip downward. For a brief moment she eyed the gun. A gasp of fear sprang to her lips.

"It's mine—ours—" she said faintly. "He kept it in our room."

"And you brought it down here, sneaked away from the tournament, went up there and killed him while the others changed tables."

"No!" She fairly shrieked the word. "I was ill—I didn't leave—"

"Don't lie to me, woman. You walked down three floors, rang for the elevator, went to the top floor. We've got the night elevator boy who took you up. He's described you and

the bag you carried. We've got you, Sister; got you cold."

Before she could reply, the master box buzzed again. "Lieutenant Miller and Marie Ortelle," a voice said.

Beth winked significantly at Tony Nitti when the Belgian woman entered, her head high. Bold black eyes flashed from face to face, coming to rest at last on Mrs. Naille. Old Emmett nodded to Beth to take over the questioning.

"Sit down, Marie," she said evenly. "I want you to remember that whoever tries to shield a murderer becomes an accessory after the fact. I'll want the truth from you."

The maid shrugged indifferently. "I have nothing to hide," she replied with just a trace of foreign accent. Her eyes slipped easily from her mistress, to the beaded bag, thence to the gun. She looked back at Beth.

"You suspect—her?" She pointed to Mrs. Naille.

"Yes. You've heard them quarreling frequently?"

"Much of the time. She was not very kind to that so-good old man."

MRS. NAILLE whimpered tonelessly. Beth, watching narrowly, saw a malicious light in Marie's eyes.

"And there was someone else—a younger man, Marie?"

"Many—all younger. But there was one, ah! For him she would lie, steal, murder—"

"Lopez?" Beth interrupted.

"Himself, the pretty man with the so-beautiful manners."

Again Mrs. Naille's voice rose stridently. "No!" she shrieked. "Not that! I've been a fool, but not that."

Marie nodded sagely. "Always, madame: now the greatest fool of all."

Before she could explain the words there came the sudden thudding of feet, the sound of blows, mumbled curses in the outer office;

then the door shook, bulged inward, bringing with it a third detective—lieutenant and a grey-clad man. The latter's face was covered with criss-cross of plaster; one eye was blackened, but his shiny hair was slicked down tight to his skull.

Lieutenant Miller, nearest to the battling pair, sunk hard fingers in the prisoner's neck. The policeman, nursing a puffing eye, said:

"He heard the woman's voice in here and started another hey-rube. I had to sock him."

Old Emmett told him, "Sock him another if you want; I've been waiting months for the chance."

Lopez, undaunted, grinned tauntingly. "What's the rap, Gumshoe?" he snarled. "And why choose me?"

Beth, her eyes wide with excitement, crossed to Lopez' side and looked long at his right ear. Then she held up a finger to attract her father's attention.

"Let's wait a moment," she said crisply. "First, I'd like to talk to the boy who took Mrs. Naille up in the elevator last night."

Old Emmett mumbled a name in the speaker-box, then sat back chewing on a cold cigar and staring frowningly at Beth. A few minutes later Michaels, one of the Agency men, came in with a scrawny youth. The boy had buck teeth, a retreating chin and a pimply face. Beth motioned him to a chair.

"**Y**OU'RE Freddy Miller, elevator operator at night in the building?" she said. When the youth nodded, she continued: "Last night, while the Bridge Club was having its party, you carried a woman from the third floor down, from here, to the top, didn't you?"

The boy nodded briskly. "Yeah—about 9:50. She had on a pink dress, carried a bead bag and had some kind of a lace thing around her head."

Beth moved closer, put her hand on the boy's shoulder.

"Answer the next question by 'Yes' or 'No,' Freddy, but don't point anyone out. Now—do you see that woman in the room now?"

"Uh-huh—she's here: I'd swear to her anywhere."

Beth patted his shoulder approvingly. "Right!" she said. "Now just sit still and say nothing." She turned back to Mrs. Naille.

"It sounds bad for you now," she said. "What have you got to say?"

THE suspect's eyes sparkled angrily; color flooded her cheeks.

"I didn't—harm Henri," she said resolutely, "and I didn't carry the beaded bag or handle the pistol last night. Marie Ortelles lies when she says those things; I'm beginning to wonder why. Was the gun really found in my bed—and if so, by whom?"

Beth told her: "Yes—I found it early this morning while you were—sleeping. That part of it is straight as can be."

"But," Mrs. Naille continued, "my maid lies when she says Henri and I quarreled often: that I ran around with many men. It is true that I spent more time with Lopez than was proper—but there were no others."

Beth smiled thinly. "You went for Lopez, though, in a big way, didn't you? You even had considered a divorce?"

Mrs. Naille let her eyes drop. "Y-yes!" she stammered. "He is young, handsome. I—I wanted—gayety."

Beth said: "I know," and turned to a filing case at her side. After a moment she swung about. In her hand were two cards, each with a photograph pasted in the upper left corner. She held them so only Mrs. Naille could see them, and moved closer.

"Take your time," she said encouragingly. "Look closely, then tell me if you've ever seen these people."

The older woman's eyes widened in horror. She put the back of her right hand over her lips to stifle the shriek of anguish which came there unbidden as she recognized the familiar features, saw the damning text which accompanied them.

IV



CATCHING her significant glance, Tony Nitti crossed to Beth's side. His eyes dropped to the pictured faces on the identification cards, but neither by word nor gesture of any kind did he display surprise.

Beth drew the cards from Mrs. Naille's unresisting fingers. The suspect was sobbing brokenly now and Beth heard Lieutenant Miller whisper raucously: "She'll crack up any second now. The case is in the bag." Beth turned in time to intercept a quick, understanding glance between Marie, the maid, and Lopez. It was at once malignant and triumphant.

Ordinarily cool-headed, well poised, sudden anger now flooded the girl detective. Two quick steps brought her to her father's desk. She planed the two criminal records across to him. At the same moment she barked:

"Tony—on your mark!"

She was breathing heavily. Angry lights flashed from her eyes as she said huskily:

"When they brought Mrs. Naille in, she charged us with a frame up. I thought it was the ages-old defense of the criminal. We have proofs enough on her to indict her for first degree murder, probably to convict her and send her to the electric chair.

"But if we did that, the Moore Agency would be lending itself to the worst, the most vicious plot I ever

have encountered. I say to you now that Elsa Naille is more sinned against than sinning, but I'm going to let another witness point out the real killer."

She swung sharply about, and pointed a stiff forefinger at Freddie, the elevator boy.

"The truth now," she snapped. "Who was the woman you took from the ninth to the twenty-seventh floor at nine-fifty last night? Point her out and be sure you're right beyond all possibility of a doubt!"

The boy's face flushed as all eyes turned on him. He squirmed in his chair for a moment before he twisted about and said: "That's her!"

His pointing finger was within inches of the pallid face of Marie Ortel!

The tableau held only through the fractional part of a second before the Belgian woman threw the place into utter chaos.

Launching forward as though impelled by a mighty spring, she brought the side of her right palm down in a chopping blow at the base of the elevator boy's head. It was the Paris Apache's *coup de mort*, fatal when properly delivered. But some reflex moved the boy's head sufficiently so that the blow struck the side of his head, sent him toppling to the floor.

WITH her left, the woman slashed with clawed fingers at Beth's eyes, a brutal, gutter blow that missed by a hair's breadth. The completion of the double attack brought the woman's both hands before her, and she utilized them promptly to do a rolling fall that brushed one police lieutenant aside and brought her up, standing, beside Lopez' chair.

There her hand flashed under her skirt, to come forth instantly with a stubby pistol from a concealed thigh holster. Hate burned in her sullen eyes as she moved the muzzle back

and forth to cover the others, who, by chance, now were ranged in a semi-circle before her.

She jerked at Lopez' shoulder, began backing toward the door behind her which opened onto a side hallway.

"You—each of you—will sit so quiet—if you do not wish to die," she snarled grimly, then added in taunting tones, "—like that old fool died up there—last night."

Beth, her open purse before her, one hand concealed in its depths, was the first to speak.

"That was what I was waiting for, Marie," she said levelly. "Your confession."

The woman halted her backward stride, eyes narrowed. The muzzle of her weapon moved to cover Beth. "For you!" she cried, and the knuckle of her trigger finger whitened.

As though synchronized by the same impulse, Beth's hand flashed out from the depths of her purse, bringing to view her .25 calibre gun. In the same instant she flexed her muscles and fell to her knees.

MARIE ORTELLE'S slug cut through the air where Beth's head had been a split second before. Then Beth's weapon crashed spitefully.

The missile bored deep into the woman's side. It rocked her, sent her tottering to the wall, hands outspread. For a moment she clung there blindly, then slumped to the floor.

With the crash of Beth's gun, Tony Nitti heaved his taut body at Lopez and landed a vicious hook to the man's chin which felled him. Inspector Gilliland was first to regain his mental equilibrium.

"What is this, anyhow?" he demanded. "I thought she was—" He

jerked a thumb toward Mrs. Naille.

Beth shook her head, held out the identification cards.

"So did I for a few hours," she said evenly, "but, strangely, she really was ill those few minutes last night. When they brought Lopez in, I recognized him as Enrique Robles, a Mexican killer, who's wanted in half of the border cities for murder. There's a scar on his right ear that identifies him.

LOPEZ and Marie are man and wife, I have discovered. He ordered her to kill Naille, knowing he could get his hands on the \$35,000 insurance eventually. The maid, hating Mrs. Naille because of her deep interest in Lopez, double crossed him and planted the gun and bag on her. Disguising herself as Mrs. Naille, she thought she had an air-tight case."

"Maybe Lopez did the killing," Gilliland objected, but Beth shook her head.

"Marie did it. She knew where Mrs. Naille was last evening, and framed everything. She even schemed to plant the seed pearl where it would be found, but she made one error and that's what will convict her if she recovers from her wound."

Smilingly, she opened her purse and handed Gilliland an enlarged photograph. "That," she explained, "is a print of a brocaded flower on the left sleeve of the dress Marie wore last night on her murder mission.

"The desk had been newly cleaned with a wax preparation and the print was clear—as you can see. I saw the dress in the maid's room at the Naille house this morning. To me it looks like a first-class ticket to the electric chair."

Another Exciting Story by Margie Harris Soon!

Death *on the* Wire



A shot shattered the silence of the night

*Jonathan Bullock's Method of Killing Will Amaze You
in this Unusual Story of Crime!*

By C. K. M. SCANLON

Author of "Stolen Diamonds," "I Know a Murderer," etc.

JONATHAN BULLOCK, standing to one side of the window, had a smile of satisfaction on his face. Peering down from the dark room into the misty darkness outside, he saw the shadowy outline

of the figure of the man who was stealing so furtively, so silently, up the iron rungs of the fire escape.

The somewhat involved scheme of Bullock's was working out just as he had foreseen. The crisis was ap-

proaching, and within a few minutes the coup he had so carefully planned and that meant so much to his future, would be executed and over with. Over with, at least, so far as he was concerned, he was not even remotely interested in what might befall the other two men who were involved in his machinations.

Jed Guthrey, who even then was sleeping in the next room, would die and the unknown man in the raincoat and the battered felt hat would die too. But Jonathan Bullock would be very much alive and fully capable of enjoying the wealth that his cleverness had won for him.

THINGS thus far had gone without a hitch and even the weather seemed to have come to the aid of Bullock. The fall wind was blowing gustily, rustling the dead leaves of the trees which loomed around the small-town hostelry. Successfully it concealed the faint sounds made by the man who was climbing upward to disaster.

Already he had reached the third floor landing. In another moment, he would be at the window of Jed Guthrey's fourth floor room, the room next to the one occupied by Bullock.

The latter, with the certainty of one who knew just what he was about, left the window, moved quickly across the dark room, and lifted the receiver from the hook of an old-fashioned telephone that was on a little table standing close to the bed. He listened and, when there was no response, jiggled the hook up and down impatiently.

Was a sleepy night-clerk in the lobby below going to ruin his plan by failing to respond at the critical moment? Bullock frowned, jiggled the hook violently again, and felt a sense of relief as the voice of a man came somnolently over the wire.

"Is this you, Hastings?" he asked

in a low voice. And then: "This is Bullock. Say, there seems to be some trouble in the room next to mine. Four twenty. Some peculiar noises. Why don't you call the room and see if there is anything wrong?"

He hung up quietly and then stood there in the darkness, alert and tense, waiting. Almost instantly he heard the faint ringing of the telephone in the adjacent room where, he knew, Jed Guthrey was in bed.

The ringing ceased and then, in another moment, a shot shattered the silence of the night.

It seemed to galvanize Jonathan Bullock into action!

He rushed to the window, drew a gun from his pocket and, leaning out, marked the figure of the man who was standing on the fire escape, peering with amazement into the window of the next room. Guthrey, before answering the telephone, apparently had switched on a light. In the illumination that came from the window, the countenance of the stranger was perfectly visible to Bullock.

He stood there motionless, as if he had been startled into rigidity by something utterly unbelievable that he had just seen with his own eyes. Jonathan Bullock shouted loudly, hoarsely, at the intruder and then fired at him, point-blank.

ONLY a faint click came from the automatic in his hand, however. He cursed softly under his breath and hesitated in surprise a moment as the startled man on the fire escape swung swiftly around. And then something crashed in the face of Jonathan Bullock and sent him reeling backward into the room, a blast from his gun smashing wildly into space.

He was blinded with pain, and, as he wiped his face frantically with the back of a hand, the latter be-

came warm and sticky with the blood that was streaming from his lacerated features. When he staggered to the window again and looked out, the fire escape was empty. He could see nothing of the man who had been on it such a short time before.

FOR a moment he felt a sense of bafflement, of rage, but he quickly composed himself. Everything still was all right; his alibi for the death of the man in the next room was perfect.

He went to the telephone, jerked the receiver off the hook, and bobbed the latter up and down impatiently. The response was quick this time and it came in a startled questioning voice.

"What happened up in four twenty, Mr. Bullock?" was the half-frightened query. "I called up like you asked me to but just when I got the connection I heard something that sounded like a shot over the wire. It nearly blew my ears off and—I can't get the man in that room—and—"

"Plenty happened, I guess, and you'd better notify the police and get up here quick yourself!" snapped Bullock. "I heard a gun go off in there and I ran to my window. Someone was on the fire escape outside of the other room. I grabbed my gun but before I could shoot he threw something in my face and almost knocked me out and—"

But the connection had been cut off by the excited operator. Bullock, after listening for a moment, hung up his own receiver.

Then he switched on the light in his room and examined his face in the mirror over the washbasin. It frightened him for a moment, for it was so cut and bruised and battered that he hardly could recognize himself. There was a deep gash on

one cheek, both eyes were displaying signs of discoloration, and his nose was bleeding profusely.

He cursed viciously under his breath and, filling the basin with warm water, he commenced to bathe his wounds. His mind worked furiously as he reviewed the events of the past few minutes. He confessed to himself that he was just a trifle worried.

Damn that gun of his for jamming! He should have known better than to trust to an automatic for such a critical job. He would feel better, much better, if he knew that the man in the raincoat and the soft hat was dead.

However, it would be just the same. Even if the fellow should be caught, his fantastic story would be jeered at as a desperate attempt to explain away a murder. And even if circumstances brought about a confirmation of his story, there still would be nothing to connect him, Bullock, with the case.

HE opened his door as he heard footsteps in the hall outside. Looking out, he saw Hastings, some keys in his hand, a frightened expression on his face. A door opened further down the corridor and a white countenance peered out into the hall.

"Any trouble?" a voice asked. "I thought I heard—"

"Not a thing that we can't take care of," said Bullock softly. "Just go back to bed and—"

He didn't want any more people around until he had accomplished certain things that just had to be done.

"What's happened, do you suppose, Mr. Bullock?" the weak-chinned night clerk asked, his voice quavering. "Your face!" he exclaimed. "It's bleeding—it's all cut!"

"That's nothing—I told you that the murderer threw something at

me just as I was about to shoot at him," said Bullock impatiently. "Open that door—let's see what happened!"

WITH a trembling hand the night clerk managed to insert the key in the lock of four twenty and the door swung inward. A small desk light stood on a table close to the bed, and a gasp of horror escaped the lips of the pale clerk as he saw the sight that it illuminated.

For there on the bed, slumped back in the carmine-spotted sheets, was the body of a man with a blackened, bleeding face.

"Don't be afraid—go on in!" snapped Bullock impatiently. "If he's not dead, he ought to have attention; if he is dead, he won't bite you!"

"But I called up Bill Brannigan and he'll be right over," protested the clerk. "And he said he'd take care of the case."

"If you're afraid to go in the room," suggested Bullock, "you might go down and run around and see if you can find any trace of the man who shot the poor fellow there. I'll stay here until Brannigan comes. But hurry," he added. "This is murder, Hastings!"

The clerk, as if glad to get away from the gruesome sight of the body on the bed, swiftly turned and left. Jonathan Bullock, his heart palpitating violently, went quickly into action.

He slipped the bolt on the door of the room and then, without even looking at the dead man, went swiftly to the telephone. He picked up the dangling receiver, and severed the cord attached to it with a pair of small but keen-edged scissors.

Slipping it in an inside pocket of his dressing gown, he whipped out another receiver, unscrewed the top of it and, working deftly and

swiftly, connected it up to the end of the cord. Practice had made him perfect in the task and not more than a couple of minutes had elapsed before the job was complete. The substituted receiver, after having been carefully wiped with a clean handkerchief, was dangling in place again.

Then Bullock went to the door, unbolted it and left it slightly ajar. After that he relaxed and, going over to the side of the bed, he looked down at the body of Jed Guthrey.

The vast sense of relief that he felt, together with the utter callousness of his temperament, left no place for horror or self-condemnation in his mind.

It had been a neat job and, by a stroke of unexpected good fortune, he had been able to cover completely his share in it sooner than he had expected. Even if the man he had failed to shoot should be captured and brought back, now certainly it could not effect the future of Jonathan Bullock.

There was a glint of approval in his eyes as he studied the head of the dead man. The bullet had entered right below the left ear and it had sped upward straight into the brain just as he had calculated that it would.

"It looks like murder, doesn't it, Bullock?" a quiet voice drawled behind him. He whirled around, his eyes dilated with fear at the unexpected voice that had intruded so violently on his thoughts. He saw William Brannigan standing out in the fire escape, looking placidly into the window. Fear smote him for a moment. How long had Brannigan been there?

"You nearly scared me out of my wits!" he rasped nervously, gathering his shattered nerves together and forcing a thin smile to his lips.

"I thought I was hearing the voice of a ghost."

Brannigan, moving slowly and ponderously, came into the room through the window. After taking a long look at the body, he glanced casually around the room.

"WHAT do you make of it, Chief?" asked Bullock, paying the compliment of his title to the officer.

"Why, it seems simple enough," replied Brannigan slowly. "Somebody came up the fire escape and gunned this fellow out."

"Looks that way, doesn't it," replied Bullock, exulting in the stupidity of the small-town dick. "Who was the dead man, anyway?"

"He's registered as James Murphy of New York, so Hastings tells me." Brannigan informed him. "But sometimes, of course, people don't register under their own names."

"Not if they have anything to conceal," agreed Bullock. "And this fellow may have been a crook of some sort."

"Or it may have been just a plain case of attempted robbery," said Brannigan. "We'll know more about it when that fellow down below gets conscious again."

"What fellow!" exclaimed Bullock, his voice just a shade too anxious. "Did you catch anyone—the man I saw and tried to shoot?"

"Same one, I guess, but it looks as if he caught himself by catching his toe on the fire escape," said Brannigan. "It looks as if he fell off while he was climbing down."

"Do you know who he is?" asked Bullock. "Anybody that you recognize?"

"No, but Hastings says he's a fellow who came in on the five o'clock train yesterday morning," replied Brannigan. "He's registered as Thomas Denton, of Boston."

"Well, whoever he was, he was

after Murphy," asserted Bullock. "Some underworld stuff of some sort, maybe."

"Maybe—but you can't never tell," said Brannigan. "Well, we'll do our best to find out."

The door opened and a half dozen men came into the room, among them the night clerk, Hastings. Bullock also recognized the coroner, old Doctor Fitzgerald.

"Did you find out what ailed that fellow, Doc?" Brannigan asked. "Did he bump himself badly?"

"Looks like a fractured skull, Bill," replied Fitzgerald, peering in the direction of the bed. "He struck his head on a stone when he landed and—well, he seems to be in pretty bad shape."

"He might as well die that way as in the chair, I reckon," said Brannigan. "Save him a lot of agony and the state a lot of expense."

HE walked over by the side of the bed and, taking hold of the dangling telephone cord, he replaced the receiver in the hook without touching it. Bullock, suppressing a smile, silently wished him luck in his quest for fingerprints on the instrument.

"Well, I guess you'll want to carry on your investigation without being disturbed," Bullock said to Brannigan. "I'll get out of here and get back to bed, if you don't need me any more."

"I guess there's nothing more tonight," said Brannigan. "May want you at the inquest, though."

"Let me know if you do and I'll be right there," said Bullock. And then, after saying good-night, he left the room in possession of the murdered man and the others who were there.

Back in his own quarters he went to bed with a feeling of complete serenity. He felt a sense of grati-

tude to the police of New York who, by hounding him out of the metropolis, had literally driven him into the richest haul that he ever had made in his long career as a confidence man and jewel thief. It had been a career marked by some decidedly sensational exploits. But the depression had hurt his business, along with other financial activities, and things had not been breaking right with him for a couple of years. What was there better to do at such a time than to find a quiet retreat in a small town not too far away from the city and just let the world roll peacefully on its course for a while? That was what Jonathan Bullock had done. He had been in Elmvile, stopping at the hotel for a month, when he had read with envy of the theft of the famous Eberley emeralds by an expert supposed to be Jed Guthrey.

Bullock, born under beneficent stars, knew Guthrey by sight, but the latter had no knowledge of Bullock's identity. When Guthrey had registered at the Elmvile House a couple of weeks before, Bullock had realized at once that he, too, was hiding out; and he had commenced to make plans to take possession of those emeralds that, he had soon made certain, Guthrey had with him.

BULLOCK might, of course, have killed Guthrey himself or he might have taken the emeralds from the place where he knew they were hidden and made a quick departure from Elmvile.

But killing Guthrey directly had elements of danger in it that Bullock did not like; and abstracting those gorgeous emeralds from their hiding place and taking it on the lam also held a menace. Bullock knew that Guthrey had scrutinized him thoroughly, could give an excellent description of him, and would

know him well if they ever met again. No sense in having a man like Guthrey, who undoubtedly had many friends in the underworld, on his heels for the rest of his life.

Not if Guthrey could be put out of the way without danger and the jewels lifted without the slightest risk. And, besides, what was a shrewd intelligence, an ingenious mind, given to a man for if not to be used in every way for his own personal advantage?

Jonathan Bullock had passed off finally into a quiet and restful sleep, the sort of a sleep that comes only to those who are conscious of having accomplished a good day's work.

HE slept late in the morning and, after he awoke, he remained in bed for a while going over the plans he had made.

During his stay in Elmvile he had been posing as a retired business man who was looking for a farm that might be converted into something resembling an estate. To maintain his pose he had made a number of trips out into the country with the village realtor, looking at various properties which were on the market. There had been something about each one, however, which he had found objectionable, because the last thing that Jonathan Bullock wanted in the world was anything even remotely resembling a farm.

His next move, he knew, would be to recover the Eberley emeralds from the next room before someone stumbled on them by accident. He had glimpsed them one night through the keyhole and he knew just where Guthrey had hidden them away. He would conceal them himself, after gaining possession of them, and then linger in town for a couple of weeks before taking a quiet and regretful departure.

For a moment a frown furrowed

his usually placid brow. If that damned automatic had only not jammed! Well, perhaps the fellow would die anyway.

He got out of his uncomfortable bed, took a bath in the uncomfortable bathroom that served the entire floor, and then went down and enjoyed a belated breakfast.

HE rather enjoyed the air of excitement that pervaded the establishment, an excitement that he had created himself. All kinds of stories were circulating about the murder. The case had stirred the quiet town as had nothing else in years. And Bullock, having occupied the room next to the slain man and having seen the murderer and taken a shot at him, found himself very much in the spotlight.

He dropped down to the little police station after breakfast and looked in on Brannigan.

"Anything new, Chief?" he asked. "How's the killer this morning?"

"In bad shape—very bad shape," replied Brannigan. "Can't live long—can't even recover consciousness, I reckon."

Bullock shook his head dolefully, despite the immediate sense of elation that he experienced.

"That's too bad, Chief, but you've got it on him anyway," he said. "There's no doubt but that he was the one who did the killing."

"Doesn't seem to be, does there?" replied Brannigan quietly. "Sort of justice, wasn't it, him being killed right after he took the life of another man."

"There's a lot in what you say, Chief," replied Bullock in sombre tones. "It's hard to get away with murder."

He went out, smiling inwardly, and drifted back to the hotel where he went to his room. Then, moving swiftly, surely, again he went out into the hall, whipped a key from

his pocket, fitted it to the lock of the room that had been occupied by Guthrey, and entered the place.

If anyone should happen to surprise him in there he would claim that he found that door open, that he had gone in out of sheer curiosity.

Then, after looking up and down the hall, and listening to make certain that no one was coming up or down the stairs, he went to the old-fashioned bureau, removed the bottom drawer, reached back into the space revealed, and brought out a small chamois-skin sack. Slipping it into his pocket, he replaced the drawer, left and locked the room, and was safely back in his own quarters once more.

He opened the bag and took one fleeting exultant glance at the gems that gleamed inside of it. Then, opening a battered looking suitcase, he placed the sack in a cleverly concealed false bottom that had been specially made for the piece of luggage.

That afternoon he learned that the man who had been found unconscious at the foot of the fire escape had died without recovering consciousness or without making a statement of any kind.

THE inquest was held the following day and Bullock attended as one of the chief witnesses. He repeated his story of how he had heard sounds in the room next to his own, how he had called the night-clerk and how, a moment later, the shot had sounded out in the night. He had rushed to the window, seen the figure on the fire escape outside of the window of the next room, and had been struck in the face just as he shot his gun that had jammed on his first attempt to fire it.

He had learned, before, that what he had been hit with was a thirty-

two calibre gun. It had been found on the ground below his window, the gun that the intruder must have carried and hurled at Bullock.

The verdict of the coroner's jury was perfectly agreeable to Bullock—that the dead man, Murphy, had been murdered by the dead man, Denton.

THE case, then, appeared to be closed. And while Bullock saw Brannigan around the hotel now and then, it did not cause him the slightest concern. He quietly spread the word that he could not find any property in the district that seemed to meet his requirements; and, on an afternoon some two weeks after the murder, he was at the station with all his luggage, waiting for a train to carry him away.

A few minutes before the train was due, however, a couple of burly-looking men who belonged to the police force of Elmvile stepped up to him.

"Chief Brannigan wants to see you at the hotel, Mr. Bullock," one of them said. "It will be best for you to come along quietly."

"But I'm just going to take a train," protested Bullock, a flame of fear sweeping over him. "I've made all arrangements to leave and—"

"Sorry, but you can't leave right now," the other said. "Brannigan wants to see you at the hotel."

There was nothing to do but go willingly for a show of resistance would serve to confirm any suspicion that Brannigan might have of him.

So, leaving his hand-baggage in the check room, he returned with them, protesting with good-natured vehemence over the trouble they were causing him.

They took him up to the room that had been occupied by Guthrey and he almost blanched when he

entered it. For Brannigan was seated by the table on which the telephone stood. He had just clipped the receiver off the cord and he seemed to be busy putting another receiver on the instrument.

"Hate to bother you, Bullock, but there's just a few questions I want to ask," he drawled cordially. "I'll be through with this job in just a minute."

There was absolute silence in the room as Brannigan worked at his task, while Bullock watched him with an almost uncanny fascination.

He wrenched his eyes away from the receiver and looked around with an attempt at a smile. But the faces around him, those of Hastings, old Doctor Fitzgerald, and others he did not recognize, were sober and unsmiling. And he was conscious that behind him and between him and the door, were the two men who had brought him there from the station.

Trapped—unless he could talk fast.

Brannigan finally finished his task and turned placidly to Bullock.

"Did you ever hear of a man being shot by a bullet that came out of a telephone receiver?" he asked.

"Of course not," replied Bullock easily, with a smile. "Such a thing is impossible."

Brannigan nodded his head as if satisfied with what he had heard and then continued.

"IF a dying man in a delirium mentioned such a thing," asked Brannigan, "what would you think, Bullock?"

"That he was a dying man—in a delirium," said Bullock.

"Does it seem reasonable to you that a telephone receiver at any time should be entirely without fingerprints?" Brannigan then asked.

Bullock hesitated a moment. Bitterly he realized that he had made

an error in wiping off that receiver after he had replaced it. He should have left some imprints of the dead hand of Guthrey on it.

"Why—I—er—never thought of it," he told Brannigan. "I wouldn't know just how—to answer—such a question."

THERE was a long silence on the part of Brannigan then, and as Bullock's mind raced around like a squirrel in a cage, he became momentarily more nervous. That man who had cracked his skull had talked in his delirium and that small-town dick, Brannigan, had been dumb enough to follow up such a clue. And it never had occurred to Bullock that an absence of fingerprints on anything might be as deadly evidence as their presence.

"Would a man entering a room to shoot another man who was in bed get down on his knees to shoot him?" asked Brannigan.

Bullock paused a moment for he did not understand what the officer was getting at.

"What—do—you—mean?"

"That bullet entered under Guthrey's left ear and it went upward into his brain," said Brannigan. "How would you account for that?"

"Guthrey!" exclaimed Bullock. "I thought his name was Murphy."

He had been on the alert that time—he had not been trapped.

"And it was a wet night—the fire escape was dirty," continued Brannigan, "and yet there was no sign of footprints on the carpet."

Bullock said nothing because there seemed to be no answer required.

At that moment the telephone on the table rang with startling suddenness and the conversation ceased abruptly. The instrument rang again and Brannigan turned to Bullock with a smile.

"Answer that, will you, Bullock?" he requested. "You're nearest."

Bullock's blood suddenly turned to ice-water. He had seen Brannigan working on that phone and he suspected what he had done.

"Wh—the—er—call must be for someone else," he stammered. "It couldn't be for me—I wouldn't care to answer it."

"Well, answer it anyway," said Brannigan. "See who it's for."

Bullock knew that he was white with fear, that his trembling must be apparent to everyone in the room. If he failed to answer the telephone it was an open confession of his guilt—if he answered it there might be a chance that Brannigan was bluffing.

HE reached for the instrument—and then he broke.

"I won't touch it!" he screamed, drawing back in horror. "I won't answer it. You can't make me!"

With that he made a snatch for a gun in the holster of one of the men who had brought him in. But he was pinioned up in a moment and securely held a captive. And just then a man hastened into the room and handed Chief Brannigan two objects. One was a telephone receiver and the other was a little chamois bag.

"Found them in a false bottom of his suitcase," said the fellow.

"Just as I thought," said Brannigan, after a brief investigation of the receiver. "This is fitted with a fountain-pen gun, shooting a .22 shell, and it is so arranged with little weights that as soon as its position is changed from vertical to horizontal, the delicate firing mechanism operates. I suspected something queer as soon as I found that Guthrey had been shot with a .22, while the gun of the man who was supposed to have shot him was a .32.

"Bullock is a smart man—so smart on big things that he overlooks little things. For instance, like

forgetting that it is so easy to see when a wire has been freshly cut. And he overlooks the fact that, sometimes, small-town police do have a little intelligence—enough to be suspicious of strangers who, very apparently, are crooks.

"Why, two weeks before this murder happened, I had already had reports from New York on his fingerprints and I knew just who he was. So I let him play along for a while to see if he wouldn't make himself a little trap to step into.

"His set-up for the haul was as intricate as his receiver-gun—he seems to like to do simple things

in a difficult way. He apparently got some connection in New York to send up a stooge to rob Guthrey and—but, jeez, the whole thing will come out during the trial. The one thing that interests me right now is the possibility of that device of his. I'd like to get a patent on that and put it on the market."

"Who'd want anything like that?" asked Hastings, the night-clerk, derisively. "Why—"

"Nobody'd really want them," said Brannigan agreeably, "but they'd be swell to use on people who occupy public telephone booths for a half an hour at a time."

Mystery Bafflers

TWO CLUES TO MURDER

Taken from DETECTIVE DUNN'S Case-Book

DAVID PLANT, eccentric bachelor millionaire, and his nephew, William Travis, quarreled constantly. At nine o'clock, they were at it hot and heavy. Travis, a professional gambler, irked his uncle to such an extent that the old man drew a gun, menaced him with it. Travis took the gun away from the old man and left. He returned later to apologize, but wasn't very successful in winning his uncle over.

That was the story Travis told Detective Dunn as they stood looking down at the body of David Plant. The millionaire had been shot through the head twice. Blood covered the glass desk top where his head rested. "If you came back," Dunn said to Travis, "why didn't you give the gun back to your uncle?"

"I threw it in the bushes outside the house," Travis told him. "I was afraid he might take a shot at me."

"You left here the last time at ten o'clock?"

"I looked at my watch and it was five minutes after ten when I left him. He told me to get out and stay out. I admit it looks as if I killed him. I haven't got an alibi because I walked this lonesome road back to the city. I've got the motive too, but I didn't kill him." Detective Dunn questioned the butler then.

"I saw the master last alive at nine-thirty, sir. I brought him his usual glass of water and two sleeping tablets he has been in the habit of taking for years. Later I heard the front door open and I saw Mr. Travis come in. He stayed only a minute or two and then left."

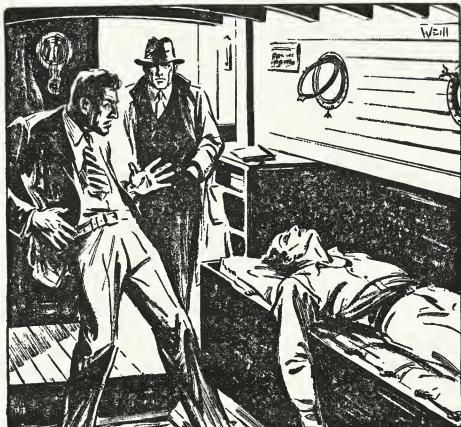
"Did you hear a shot?" Dunn asked him.

The butler shook his head. He had heard nothing, not even voices. Dunn found the millionaire's overcoat thrown in a corner of the room. There were two holes through it. The gun had been muffled by wrapping the coat around it.

Dunn examined the dead man, saw that in his right hand he gripped a fountain pen. Yet there was nothing on the desk to show he was doing any writing. The glass of water was on the desk. Dunn lifted it, found that beneath it, the glass desk top was covered with blood and the bottom of the glass wet with it also. When he lifted the heavy glass desk top a little, he found beneath it a short letter written by the dead man. It stated that if any harm came to him, his nephew, William Travis, should be arrested for murder and that if this happened, Travis automatically was left nothing and that any other will was annulled. Everything pointed to Travis as the murderer and yet Detective Dunn arrested the butler on the spot. Why?

Can you solve the problem? Check up your answer on page 119.

The Body in the Boat



The man's mouth hung loosely. His lips quivered, broke apart in a scream

*Drowned—or Murdered? The Mysterious Disappearance
and Death of Larry Hopkins Was a Tougher
Thing to Explain than It Seemed!*

By STANLEY R. DURKEE

CORNING paused in his stride of the room and flung a withering glance at the uniformed man before him.

"Standing here and talking isn't going to do any good! Do something! Larry's got to be found—!"

"Easy!" Lieutenant Graham soothed. "We're doing all we can.

The Coast Guard is out and a sea-plane's covering the same area. We ought to hear from them pretty soon."

Corning pushed his steel-rimmed glasses up on his pinched nose with an irritable gesture.

"I know!" he admitted, slowly. He resumed his pacing, then stopped

short. "It's this confounded waiting! In heaven's name—why didn't I send out word sooner?"

Lieutenant Graham hooked his thumbs into his Sam Browne belt and rose up on his toes for a moment.

"You did the best you could," he said patiently.

It was late afternoon, and for two nights Larry Hopkins' sloop had been missing from the little bay under the bluff. As a rule this would be no cause for alarm. Hopkins— young, rich, eccentric—was inordinately fond of the water and spent most of his time in his thirty-foot sloop.

He was an expert sailor.

BUT he drank. And his first thought, once he had a load aboard, was to get out in his sloop and perform feats that would whiten the hair of a Gloucesterman. The blacker the night, the better—and he'd sail his boat on its gunwales, for the sheer, drunken joy of it. But never before, by the next day, had he failed to notify his cousin that all was well.

There had been no message yesterday, nor this morning. The silence was the more ominous in view of the fact that, the night Hopkins left, there had been a stiff blow for a few hours.

"You haven't any idea what time he left?" asked Graham.

"None at all," said Corning, shaking his head. "You see, I'm a pretty sound sleeper. And Larry never made any noise, even if he was tight to the ears."

"Was he tight?"

Corning shrugged. "He'd been drinking—you saw his room. The trouble was, he was supposed to quit. Doctor's orders. He didn't touch a drop for over a month and then the desire hit him all at once. Of course, it would! It was the stu-

pidest way to break him of the habit—!"

"Did he give any excuse?" Graham interrupted.

"No. I pleaded with him, but he broke out a couple bottles of Scotch. When I wouldn't drink with him, he became terribly angry and locked himself in his room.

"Well, I wasn't worried—then—and there was nothing I could do, so I dropped off to sleep. When I woke up in the morning, he was gone."

Corning turned, his face haggard and drawn. "Everybody likes Larry. I know him better than anyone else. I love the boy! If anything's gone—if he's—"

"All we can do is wait," said Graham uneasily. He always felt a little squeamish at times like this. He muttered something, cleared his throat gruffly, and with a hurried excuse left the room.

In the hall he met the white-haired police chief of the neighboring town. The chief's jaws were moving easily under the inspiration of eating tobacco.

"Quite a crew outside," he informed Graham, jerking his head toward the door. "Maybe Larry had a drop too much now an' then, but that didn't hurt his popularity none."

GRAHAM looked out of the window beside the door. The white picket fence bordering the road was lined with people. Natives of the nearby village, reporters, sensation-hunters—all were acutely interested in the fate of Larry Hopkins.

"Have you said anything to the news hawks yet?" he asked.

"They just got here," said the chief. "Better tell 'em the truth. It'll come out sooner or later—an' coming from the State Police, it won't sound so much like gossip."

"That he was drunk, you mean?"

"Right! It was a miracle he wasn't

drowned long ago—an' miracles can't keep up forever."

Graham opened the door, descended the two brick steps, and was immediately surrounded by a group of reporters. He recognized one or two of the men as being from outstanding papers.

"THIS is front page for the Boston sheets!" chattered a short, heavy man. "What's the inside?"

"You know as much as I do," Graham said. "Hopkins went for a midnight sail a couple nights ago and he hasn't been heard from since. He'd been drinking."

"Why'd he go at night—?"

"Maybe he was sore at something!" offered the fat man, expectantly. He poised his pencil. "That's it! The woman angle!"

Graham held up his hand. "Listen, eight-ball—don't embroider this! He went because he liked to sail at night."

"Why?"

"I'll ask him," said Graham gently, "the next chance I get." He turned on his heel and retreated into the house, forcibly closing the door in the fat man's face.

In the living room, Corning, his jaw set, was standing over the chief. The older man gripped a French phone in both fists, and was just hanging up as Graham entered.

"Coast Guard found the sloop!" he announced. He glanced up at Corning, swallowed, and went on:

"There wasn't a soul aboard! The cockpit was flooded an' the mast snapped!"

Corning stiffened incredulously. His hands shot out and gripped the chief by both shoulders.

"Then where is Larry? *Where is he?*"

The chief slowly disengaged himself and stood up, his gaze averted. "I guess there's no answer to that," he muttered.

Corning stumbled over to the window. His shoulders sagged as he took off his glasses and wiped them with deliberate motions of his handkerchief. His face, white, was composed with a forced calm as he finally faced them.

"That's—the end!" he whispered.

"They found his wallet floating in the cabin," the chief said, grimly.

There was a long silence. Graham looked at the chief, caught his eye, and motioned to Corning. The chief nodded. As they were about to leave, the officer at the door presented Graham with a card.

He held it up, his face blank.

"John Stanton, M.D.," he read aloud. He hesitated, frowning. "I never heard of him—"

"I have!" Corning snapped. He took the card from Graham and peered at it bitterly. "This man was Larry's doctor, in New York! If he'd used his head, trying to get Larry off the liquor—!"

He stopped, but his inference was plain enough.

"Show him in," Graham then ordered.

STANTON was tall, spare, and had the air of being completely at ease. He kept one hand in the pocket of his dark suit as he came up to Graham.

"I've been cruising up the coast," he explained, "and just heard of Hopkins'—disappearance." He spoke the last word with marked hesitation. "Since I was his physician, I came over at once, hoping to be of some assistance."

Graham looked him over, and felt an instant liking. Here was a man obviously different from the usual run of police busybodies.

"There's not much can be done," he told the doctor. "The boat has been found. Hopkins is—well, he wasn't aboard."

"Wasn't he?" Yet, in spite of his

tone, Stanton did not seem to be surprised. He was silent for a moment, then said: "I wonder if I could look around here? Maybe I can throw some light on this."

"WHAT do you mean?" Corning's pale blue eyes blinked at the doctor as he took a step forward. He clenched his hands.

"You're a fine one to be talking! You made him quit drinking in such a hurry that he was almost crazy! It was your crazy way of treating him—!"

Stanton nodded. "Perhaps I was wrong, though I don't think so. Surely you don't object to my looking at his room?"

Graham stared at him; his face screwed into a puzzled frown. Why hadn't Stanton shown more surprise at the news that the sloop had been found? And why didn't he defend himself against Corning's charge?

"I'd like to give a last look around," Graham told Corning, suddenly. "You don't mind if Dr. Stanton goes with me?"

Corning subsided. Abruptly, he flung himself into a chair and rested his chin on his fist as he stared at the rug. "Go ahead!" he said, angrily.

The chief left them in the hallway. "Nothing more for me to do here, an' I got to be getting back." He sighed. "Larry was a fine lad, but he had it comin' to him!"

At the top of the staircase, Graham turned to the right and opened a door. He stood on the threshold, allowing Stanton to precede him.

"Hopkins' room," he said. "Nothing has been touched. Their valet wasn't to come from town until the first of the week."

The coverlet on the bed was rumpled, although the bed had not been slept in. A whiskey bottle had fallen from the table and lay shattered on the floor. Another bottle,

almost full, stood on the dresser beside an empty glass and siphon.

Graham had looked on as Stanton sniffed at the whiskey, replaced the bottle on the dresser, and walked over to the window. He looked out.

"Pretty view," he said, idly.

"Sure! But what's the point in all this?" Graham demanded, peering over Stanton's shoulder.

The house, in line with two others, was on a high bluff overlooking the bay. Within his line of vision was the end of the private wharf, below, and the float, rocking gently in the blue water. It was low tide, and, above the beach grass waving at the crest of the bluff, he could just see the breakers as they pounded down on the sand.

"Suppose you tell me what happened here the other night," countered Stanton, turning away.

GRAHAM related Corning's story of the events of that evening. Stanton listened attentively, but without remark. At the conclusion he thought for a moment, then went over to the window again. He stroked his chin. Before Graham could utter a word, the doctor was in the closet near the dresser, pawing over Hawkins' wardrobe, piece by piece.

"Well?" said Graham, sharply.

Stanton withdrew and closed the closet door. He started to speak; then, as his eyes fell on a woolen bathrobe hanging from a post of the bed, he gave a low exclamation. He hurried over, snatched it up, fingered its thick, soft cord.

He looked up. "Be patient with me for a few more minutes, Lieutenant!" he begged. "Then I'll have something to say."

He replaced the bathrobe, and, Graham trailing, descended the front staircase at a rapid gait.

Corning was in the hall below, and he adjusted his glasses and glared

up at the doctor with ill-concealed dislike.

"Are you quite through?" he demanded.

"Almost," Stanton said, composedly. He eyed the man below him with a steady gaze, then came out with the most irrelevant question Graham had yet heard. "Is there a swimming pool near here?"

CORNING'S jaw dropped. He looked angrily at Graham, on the step above. "There you are! Must I answer such idiotic questions? Won't you have the decency to leave and take this man with you?"

Graham hesitated, torn between the desire to put an end to this case and the desire to see what Stanton was driving at. The facts were simple enough—and yet—

"A few more questions, and we'll leave," he promised. "It's a sort of routine, you understand."

His pinched nose quivering, Corning compressed his lips. "No! There isn't any pool!"

The doctor bowed slightly, his poise unshakable.

"How would we get from here to the boat?"

Corning stuffed his hands in his pockets. He opened his mouth as if to object, swallowed, and led the way out the rear door. He stopped on the narrow porch, turned back with a defiant stare.

"There's no need of this!" he said angrily. "Gentlemen, I've had a severe shock today—"

"It will only take a minute," Stanton quickly interrupted. "We'll both be gone in just a minute."

Corning said pointedly, "I didn't ask you!"

He guided them along the short path to the edge of the bluff. A series of steep, wooden steps were pinned against the high embankment at a crazy angle. Below lay the strip of white beach and the small boat-

house at the landward end of the pier.

Graham followed Stanton down. The stairs halted at the rear of the boathouse, the eaves of which overhung the right-hand side of the wharf. The three men strode along the weatherbeaten boards of the wharf and picked their way down the cleated incline to the float.

Some distance out, a can buoy bobbed in the swell. A dinghy was made fast to it.

"He usually left the dinghy behind unless he was planning to stop at a definite port," said Corning. He cleared his throat, staring at the lonely little craft. "That's what worried me in the first place."

STANTON walked around the edge of the float, paying close attention to the faucet at the end of the pier. He ran the water, tasted it.

"Where do you get your drinking water?" he suddenly queried. "From a pond?"

"We get our water," said Corning, "from a pumping station. A private one." His face suddenly darkened as he raised his fists. "And I'll be obliged if you'll leave—now! You practically sent Larry to his death! Is there any reason why you have to hound me like this?"

Graham felt a flash of sympathy. After all, the man was visibly broken up by the death of his cousin. These questions were only grating his nerves, unbalancing him, and accomplishing nothing.

But the doctor was staring at Corning with a cold interest. Graham followed his eyes, noted the pulse that was throbbing in the side of Corning's neck. He shivered. In spite of his experience with emotional scenes, Stanton's abstract interest repelled him.

"Let's go!" he muttered. "We've wasted too much time already."

They climbed back up the incline

to the wharf. But as they approached the boathouse, Stanton halted.

THE eaves of the wooden shack extended out, covering a narrow platform. In a recession against the side of the shack was a large wooden hogshead, hidden from sight to one coming down the steps along the bluff.

"Wait, please," Stanton said. He turned to Corning, who had reluctantly stopped, and pointed to the barrel. "What's that used for?"

Corning's weak eyes blinked in the sunlight. It was warm down here on the wharf, and he mopped at the tiny beads of perspiration that started out on his forehead.

"We always stored water there before we ran the pipe to the float!" he snapped. "It's empty now. Are you satisfied, or do you want the whole history of this place?"

Stanton's eyes veiled his thoughts. He glanced upward, toward the bluff, then studied the barrel again.

Graham saw Corning's figure tremble as he waited. The lieutenant gazed at the barrel again, then edged along the narrow platform under the eaves, toward it. There was something here that needed explaining! Both of these men were interested in that hogshead; with growing irritation, Graham decided it was time he was let in on the secret.

He put his hand on the cover, looked back over his shoulder at Corning, then suddenly lifted it. He leaned over the rim of the barrel, caught his breath—

But the barrel was empty.

"There's nothing in it!" he said loudly, flushing at Stanton's faint smile. "See here—I'm tired of this! I think, doctor, that you and I had better leave."

"Wait!" said Stanton again. He slid past the lieutenant and peered down into the interior of the hogs-

head. Bent over, he said, "Has this always had a cover on it?"

"N-no!" Corning stuttered. His face was pale, his body rigid with anger.

"And," Stanton continued, "the eaves leak badly. It's been full of rain water at one time."

Suddenly the doctor leaned over still further. Graham heard his low whistle. He watched Stanton scrape the inside of the barrel with his fingernail, bringing it to light covered with a greenish, wet slime.

"One of the commoner algae," said Stanton, regarding his moist finger with a curiously satisfied expression—something like a polite tiger about to pounce. But his tone was normal as he went on: "A fresh-water growth. You won't find this stuff in salt water!"

WHAT of it, Graham wondered impatiently. He couldn't believe that the doctor was quite a fool—something deeper lay behind all this, and he was determined to get to the bottom of it. But Stanton forestalled his question by leading the way up to the house.

In the living room, Corning polished his glasses with great precision, firmly replaced them, and faced the doctor. He took a deep breath.

"I've been almost too patient!" he said. "Are you going to leave—or shall I have you thrown out?"

Stanton's face was grave. "I'm sorry you feel this way," he said. "I've one more request to ask of you, Mr. Corning. Then I shall be finished."

"I don't care what it is! I'm through with you!" Corning shouted. "Get out—!"

"I want to take you to a man who was sailing out there!" Stanton interrupted, raising his voice. "A man who saw Hopkins in his boat!"

"What!" Corning's hands dropped

(Continued on page 116)

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(Continued from page 114)

to his sides and he took a step forward. He stopped. "But that won't do any good—now!"

"There's something he wants you to know," said Stanton.

GRAHAM squared his shoulders. "Then why didn't he come with you?" He peered at Stanton, his jaw thrust forward. "There's something screwy here! What are you trying to say?"

"Only the truth," said Stanton. "Will you come with me?"

"Yes!" Graham scowled.

Stanton looked at Corning. "—and you?"

Corning wet his lips, the frown on his face deepening. He shook his head sullenly.

"No! I'm sick of listening to your lies! I want to be alone! Damn it, can't you get it through your head that I'm all upset?"

"Remember," urged Stanton, "this man talked to your cousin!"

"Oh—!" Corning bit his lip. "I'll come, for a while," he growled.

The crowd at the gates was mostly gone. One or two people looked at them curiously as they climbed into Graham's car and drove away. The road wound down the bluff, flirted with the beach, then cut across a wide peninsula to a tiny cove hidden among pine trees.

"My boat," said Stanton. He pointed to a fairly large yawl riding at anchor in the middle of the cove.

A small boat put out from the yawl, manned by a Jap. In silence the three men were rowed to the larger boat and climbed aboard. Corning kept his gaze on the doctor, following his every move with red-rimmed, blinking eyes.

"This way," requested Stanton. He disappeared down the companionway, and, in the cabin went forward to a closed door. He grasped

(Continued on page 118)

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SOLUTION OF TWO CLUES TO MURDER

(See page 108)

The butler had stated that he brought the glass of water to the millionaire at nine-thirty and he was alive then. Had this been the case and had the murdered man taken his pills then, the glass would have been placed on the desk top. When the blood from the wounds flowed on the glass covering, it would not have seeped under the drinking glass and there would have been a bare space there, devoid of blood. The bottom of the drinking glass would have been clean, too.

It showed clearly that the butler had placed the glass on the desk after he had murdered his master. There was a second clue also. The dead man had been writing the letter incriminating the nephew and he still held the pen in his hand. If he had shoved that letter beneath the blotter, he would have had to use both hands and would have put the pen down, for the glass desk top was heavy. The butler had killed him as he finished writing it and, knowing that it would be good evidence to use against Travis, he had slipped it under the blotter where it wouldn't become gory with blood and possibly prove unreadable.

Dunn was right and the confession of the butler proved it. The butler had overheard the argument between Travis and the dead man. He had been stealing from his master and was on the verge of being caught, so he took the opportunity and killed the millionaire. When Travis had returned to apologize to his uncle, the butler had observed him throwing the gun in the bushes. He had picked it up and used it to murder his master with and he committed the crime the moment Travis was out of hearing of the house.

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THE BODY IN THE BOAT

(Continued from page 118)

moistened his lips, twisting his head from side to side as he searched the faces of the two men.

"It's a frameup!" he shouted. His fists beat madly against Stanton's chest. "You staged this just to get me! I'm innocent, damn you! Anybody would admit murder when you shove a horror like that at them!" He turned, pleading with Graham.

"Don't believe this fool! I'm being framed, I tell you! How do you know Stanton isn't—?"

"Pipe down!" Graham interrupted. His brain was whirling, scarcely able to grasp the sudden turn of events, but it was easy enough to read the terror-stricken truth behind Corning's eyes. He paused, looking at Stanton thoughtfully.

"Where'd you find him? When? What made you think he'd been murdered?"

Stanton lighted a cigarette, flicking the match out of a convenient porthole. "I'll start at the beginning," he said.

"I was sailing up the coast this morning, when I picked up a sloop behaving pretty queerly. I came up alongside, recognized it as Hopkins'—and found him in the cockpit, drowned. I took him aboard, but the sloop was too much for me to tow, and I knew it would be found eventually, anyways.

"It was queer that the sloop hadn't overturned—and, when I examined Hopkins' body, I came across something that made me stop and think."

He took a breath of smoke. "So I thought a while. I knew that Corning, here, would get Hopkins' money if anything happened to him—but the way Hopkins was running through it, there'd soon be nothing left. I was pretty certain in my own mind that this was a scheme of Corning's—a clever one, which would have

(Continued on page 125)

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HEADQUARTERS

WHERE READERS, WRITERS, AND THE EDITOR MEET.



NICHOLAS JAMES sat alone in his house. He wished he had not given his servants the night off. He shuddered with dread premonition as he again read the ominous note he had found under his door. "You shall die at midnight," the ghastly message read—and it was signed "THE EXECUTIONER."

A sudden wave of terror swept over the broad shouldered, white haired man. Hastily he seated himself at his desk and picked up the telephone.

"Lance?" he said after giving a number. "Nicholas James talking. I wonder if you can come out to my house right away—"

Over the window-sill behind the man at the desk slid a black shape. A black cloak veiled the shape entirely. Black gloves covered the long-fingered, questing hands.

"I'm a little ashamed to ask such a thing," James said over the wire. "But I have reason to believe—"

Behind James the black shape rose to its full height. It stood within a yard of the man at the telephone, eyes burning through the eyeholes in a black hood.

"Lance!" James screamed into the telephone as he glanced over his shoulder. "My God—"

The words ended in a choking cough. Blood welled from his lips, and from his throat where the handle of a knife stuck out. James slumped forward across the desk,

with the knife-handle jamming askew between his flesh and the desk-top.

The black shape stood unemotionally over the dead man an instant. It picked up the death note, started to tear it across, then chuckled inhumanly and tossed it back in plain sight. . . .

That's the gruesome, gripping start of **THE HOODED KILLER**, by Paul Ernst, next month's complete book-length novel!

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Who killed Nicholas James? Whose footsteps were those in the hall? What did the brass clock reveal? You'll learn the answer to these and other questions that baffled police and public when you read this exciting yarn in next month's issue of **THRILLING DETECTIVE**.

But that great novel is only part of the feast of thrills that will be spread before you in next month's issue. Exciting crime stories in the shorter lengths by Peter Warren, George Harmon Coxe and John Paul Jones, to mention just a few of the high spots!

Then there's another treat in store for you. A complete novelette by Ed Lybeck. It is called **MURDER'S BREED** and is packed with action from start to finish! You'll like the way Kynaston, the Federal detective,

(Continued on page 124)

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(Continued from page 122)

fights his way through a maze of crime and murder.

And, of course, there are the special features that help to make **THRILLING DETECTIVE** the interesting and exciting magazine it is.

The letters that have been pouring in certainly have been enthusiastic about **YOUR** magazine. Here is what just a few have to say:

Great! That's my opinion of **DEATH PARADE**, by George A. McDonald. It kept me up until the wee small hours, but I wasn't sorry.

MURDER IN DARK CANYON, by Edward Churchill, in the August issue, was another swell yarn. I could tell you just what I liked about each story, and I read them all—but I guess I cover everything when I say I think **THRILLING DETECTIVE** is the best ever.—*Henry Swietzer, New Rochelle, N. Y.*

Four good reasons why I like **THRILLING DETECTIVE**. 1. Plenty of fast action. 2. Characters that are real. 3. Lots of chills and suspense. 4. Always good stories by authors who can write.

I have just finished reading **DEAD MEN KILL**, by L. Ron Hubbard, and I am afraid I'll keep looking back over my shoulder to be sure I'm not being followed when I take this letter to the post office. Gosh, but that yarn was spooky!—*J. K. Gradan, Hagerstown, Md.*

Exciting, and I don't mean maybe! That's what I think of **THE RED MASK MURDERS**, by Preston Grady, in the September issue. Grady certainly can write. I have read the last three issues of the magazine and I thought **DEAD MEN KILL**, by L. Ron Hubbard; **CRIME MUST GO**, by Norman A. Daniels; **DEATH PARADE**, by George A. McDonald, were all just great and now I'm adding **THE RED MASK MURDERS** to my list of really exciting yarns.—*Arthur Keithon, St. Augustine, Fla.*

We'd like to hear from **YOU**, too. Let us have your ideas and suggestions. The viewpoint of every reader counts, for this is **YOUR** magazine, and we want to give you the type of detective fiction that you find most satisfying.

Tell us how you like **MURDER TRAP** in this issue. See you next month.

—HARVEY BURNS.

THE BODY IN THE BOAT

(Continued from page 120)

been successful except for that one point.

"What happened the other night is only too clear. Corning, in some way, was able to get Hopkins to take a drink. Then he hit him a blow just hard enough to knock him out, carried him down the bluff, and pushed him down in that barrel—which he had previously filled with salt water!"

CORNING faced them with a derisive smile. "Very clever! But one thing proves this is a fairy tale! With the whole ocean in front of the house, why should I, or anybody, drown a man in a barrel?"

"That's what I can't figure out!" Graham said, with a puzzled stare. Stanton looked at the tip of his cigarette.

"Because," he said, "the 'whole ocean' was in view of the other houses on the bluff! You had to take the chance of carrying the body from the house down to the wharf—probably you did it in a terrific hurry. However, it was low tide and someone might have seen you if you tried to drown him in the surf. The float and the dinghy were both too dangerous, for the same reason.

"But the barrel—aha! That was entirely sheltered from view! You filled it with salt water, in case the body was found—"

"He'd have struggled—the cold water would have brought him to!" Corning objected, desperately. "Don't

(Continued on page 126)

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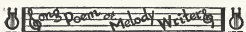
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(Continued from page 125)

you see what a silly story this is, Lieutenant?"

"I haven't finished yet!" said Stanton, calmly. "He couldn't struggle—he was tied! With the cord of his own bathrobe—thick, soft enough not to leave any marks, yet strong enough to hold him!"

Graham nodded. That was the explanation of Stanton's peculiar behavior in the bedroom.

"BUT, confound it, if you found the sloop out at sea, who sailed it from the harbor?" he objected.

"The dead man!" Stanton explained. "Given a steady breeze, that boat would almost sail herself! Corning rowed the body out to the sloop, propped it against the wheel, and headed it for sea. Then he swam back, counting on the storm that night to overturn the boat later on!"

"You've said a lot!" Corning shouted. "Now prove it! You can't! There's no way on earth you can prove it!"

"I said I hadn't finished yet!" Stanton reminded him with a smile.

He opened a locker overhead and brought out a small microscope which he placed on a bunk. He inserted a glass slide beneath the lower one of the two stubby projections.

"When I examined Hopkins' body, I happened to notice something in the water from his mouth. A bit of slime! It puzzled me—because that stuff doesn't ever live in salt water!"

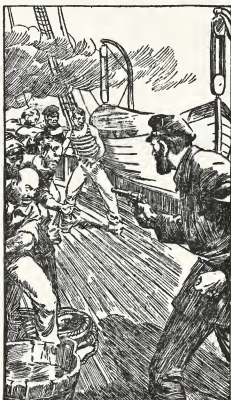
He leaned over and adjusted the eyepiece. "Look!"

Graham squinted down. In the dim field of vision he could make out a greenish mass, twisted in spiral bands. "What is it?" he inquired.

"One of the commoner fresh water
(Concluded on page 128).

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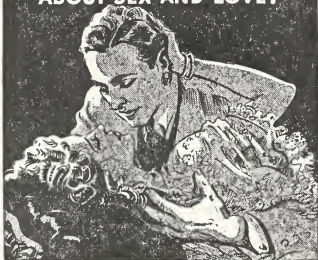
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