

THRILLING DETECTIVE

10¢

AUG.

**SLIGHT
TOUCH
OF SATAN**
*A Johnny Castle
Novelet*
By C.S. MONTANYE

A THRILLING
PUBLICATION

THE *Night*
OF
TERROR

*A Baffling
Mystery Novel*
By THOMSON
BURTIS

BUY WAR BONDS
AND STAMPS
FOR VICTORY!



Do Your FEET ITCH, CRACK, PEEL or BLISTER?



**DOCTORS HAVE USED
KERODIN FOR YEARS
IT IS NOW AVAILABLE
DIRECT TO YOU.**

KERODIN was developed for the sole purpose of relieving Athlete's Foot. It is easy to apply: just paint the affected parts. By causing a gentle peeling of the treated cuticle, KERODIN is able to get at the parasites under the outer skin, in order to destroy them.

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GET RELIEF AS SOON AS POSSIBLE

The disease is contagious — others can catch it. It is infectious — often it spreads to the hands, sometimes to the armpits or crotch.

TAKE PROMPT PRECAUTIONS TO KEEP THE DISEASE FROM SPREADING

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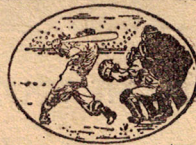
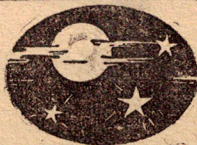
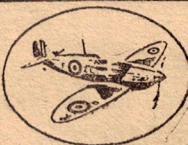
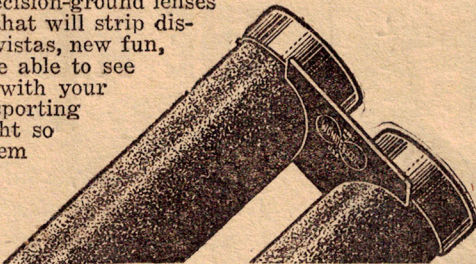
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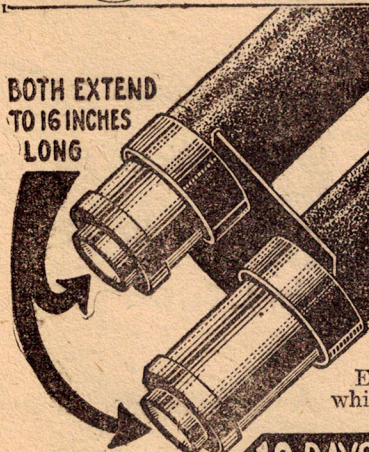
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THRILLING DETECTIVE

Vol. LII, No. 2

EVERY STORY BRAND NEW

August, 1944



A Baffling Mystery Novel

THE NIGHT OF TERROR

By THOMSON BURTIS

Rolph Burnham, wild animal trainer, faces dangerous human beasts when a grim Nazi crime plot unfolds—and entangles him in a sinister web of treacherous death-dealing intrigue! 11

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Where readers, writers and the editor meet

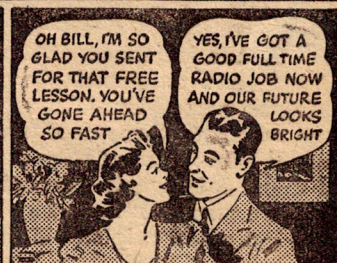
QUEEN OF THE GOLD-DIGGERS Samuel Mines 55

The true story of scintillating swindler Mignon Pierre

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There's a shortage today of capable Radio Technicians and Operators. The Radio Repair business is booming. Profits are large. After-the-war prospects are bright, too. Think of the new boom in Radio Sales and Servicing that's coming when new Radios are again available—when Frequency Modulation and Electronics can be promoted—when Television starts its postwar expansion!

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The day you enroll for my Course I start sending you **EXTRA MONEY JOB SHEETS** that help show how to make **EXTRA** money fixing Radios in spare time while still learning. I send you **SIX** big kits of Radio parts as part of my Course. You **LEARN** Radio fundamentals from my illustrated, easy-to-grasp lessons—**PRACTICE** what you learn by building real Radio Circuits—**PROVE** what you learn by interesting tests on the circuits you build!

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By the time you conduct 60 sets of Experiments with Radio Parts I supply—make hundreds of measurements and adjustments—you'll have valuable **PRACTICAL** experience. The superheterodyne circuit shown here is just one of the units you build. It will bring in local and distant stations.

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HEADQUARTERS

Where Readers, Writers and the Editor Meet



ANDREW K. REID was a prematurely retired Detroit industrialist. At the insistence of his wife, Bonnie, and an amazingly expensive psychiatrist named Dr. Michael Patterson, he was suffering through a mid-winter vacation at Mirror Lake Lodge in the wilderness of upper Michigan's Porcupine Mountains.

There was no reason why Reid shouldn't have got a new grip on his shattered nerves and come out of it. Just one thing. A red-headed woman is murdered at the resort—and Reid doesn't know whether he committed the crime or not!

SPECTERS WALK BESIDE ME, by Jim O'Brien, our featured novel for next issue, presents one of the most baffling and suspenseful detective mysteries that we have published in a long time. Imagine the anguished sufferings of a man placed in the position of having to find who the murderer is and why he committed the crime, all the time realizing that he is probably stalking himself!

A Maze of Suspense

In this dramatic story the author has presented an enigma that is not nearly as simple as an out-and-out case of amnesia. And as the plot unfolds the mystery becomes more and more involved, until both Reid and the reader are completely baffled and lost in a maze of suspense. And the final answer will surprise everybody.

This is a gripping detective novel with a powerful psychological twist that will hold you spellbound while you follow Andy Reid's grimly determined but faltering course along the slippery trail of homicide.

SPECTERS WALK BESIDE ME will cast phantoms upon the walls and ceilings of your reading room when you sit down to accompany Andrew Reid in his quest for mental balance and the solution of sudden death. This is a novel in which all the characters come alive and stride with three-dimensional steps across the pages before you. As for the snowbound atmosphere—well, you had better have a topcoat and a fully equipped St. Bernard handy when you launch into **SPECTERS WALK BESIDE ME**!

Perplexing Murder

Next issue, we also bring you an exciting novelet, **DEATH BEFORE DEFENSE**, by W. T. Ballard, a fast-moving detective yarn in which Ronald Wilson, the hero narrator, sinks into a bog of amazing intrigue. Teamed up with a swell gal whom he calls by her last name—Edmonds—Wilson works furiously to clean up a perilous puzzle and solve a very perplexing murder.

A killer may use card sharps and mobsters in his murder plans, but what chance has he when an impromptu sleuth has magic in his bag of tricks as a jack-of-all trades! Well, Ronnie Wilson needs every trick he knows before he reaches the end of this mysterious trail where all the cards are exposed, yet nobody knows which is the joker.

DEATH BEFORE DEFENSE is one of the best action-detective novelets of the year, and as you race with Mr. Wilson along the way better keep your eyes peeled or you will overlook some important clues.

(Continued on page 8)



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**• The Future belongs
to the Trained Men!**

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(Write above the subject in which you are interested.)

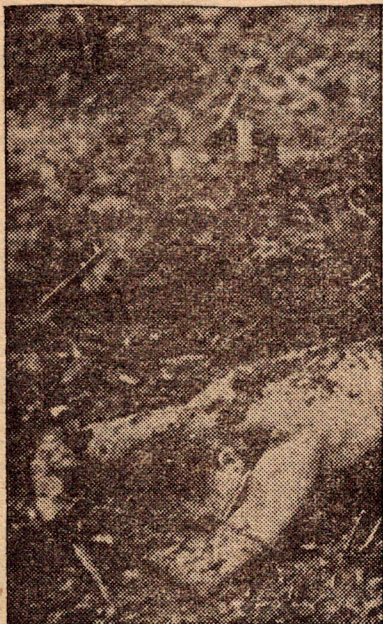
Name _____ Age _____

Home Address _____

City _____ State _____

Employed by _____
Present Position _____ Working Hours _____

This American is not expected to buy an extra War Bond in the 5th WAR LOAN



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Many of us can do much more than we ever have before.

When the Victory Volunteer comes to you and asks you to buy extra Bonds, think how much you'd give to have this War over and done.

Then remember that you're not giving anything. You're simply lending money—putting it in the best investment in the world.



Let's Go...for the Knockout Blow!

This space contributed by
THE PUBLISHERS OF THIS MAGAZINE

This is an official U. S. Treasury advertisement—prepared under auspices of Treasury Department and War Advertising Council

HEADQUARTERS

(Continued from page 6)

Besides the foregoing two long stories there will be a number of sparkling and clever short stories about crime and criminals by your favorite authors which are calculated to thrill and surprise you.

All in all, the September number of **THRILLING DETECTIVE** will be just the magazine to take along on vacation for ideal reading entertainment. Or, if you are not taking time off from office or factory or war job this year, our September issue will supply that need for amusement and relaxation that all of us need to keep us toned up for victory.

THRILLING DETECTIVE can be read at home or abroad, in an easy chair or on a bus. The result is the same—first-class detective story enjoyment!

Word from Readers

And how about writing in to Headquarters and telling us what you think—whether you agree with us or not? For we firmly repeat here what we have said before: we are trying to build **THRILLING DETECTIVE** into the best magazine of its kind that you will find on the newsstands. But we can't do it alone. YOU must help us. Write to Headquarters and tell us your preferences in stories.

Here is a brief report on our June issue.

As a rule I prefer short stories because of my broken reading time, but I'll have to break down and admit that "Get Johnny Leming!" one of the novelets in June **THRILLING DETECTIVE**, was one of the best yarns I ever read. It made me late for a date with my girl friend—and it takes a mighty gripping story to do that to me. I thought I ought to tell you.—*Gregory Saunders, Chicago, Ill.*

George, that is such high praise—in our opinion—that we are printing your note exactly as you wrote it. Offer our apologies to the lady, won't you? And buy her a copy of your favorite magazine next time so she can read while she waits. This should keep you out of the dog-house.

Next comes word from the West Coast.

Say, those fact crime stories you are now running in TD are clever! Who'd think that true stories could be told in such entertaining fashion? Don't go shy on us now and stop them. Let's have a lot more from the Mines fellow.—*Sgt. Henry Simmons, San Francisco, Calif.*

Thanks, Sergeant Simmons, and lest you worry overmuch, let us hasten to assure you

(Concluded on page 81)

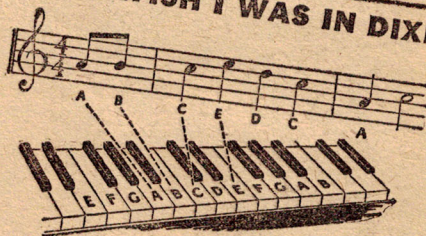
LOOKS EASY.....

AND IT IS EASY!

—yet, it's from that famous favorite of the South, "Dixie"



DEN I WISH I WAS IN DIXIE



On the diagram above, the first note on the music is "A." You'll find that "A" and third of the three black keys just above the middle of the keyboard. From this you can find the other notes. You'll be playing the melody of that famous tune, "Dixie." Now read below how you can learn to play any instrument this quick, simple, low-cost way!



THINK OF IT! Music Lessons for less than 7c a day and you learn right at home, this easy short-cut way

If you are anxious to learn music but hesitate because you think it is too difficult, just follow the simple instructions in the panel above. You'll be surprised to discover that it is easy as A-B-C to learn to play, right at home, without a private teacher, by this remarkable short-cut method.

Yes, thousands of folks have found the U. S. School of Music method makes learning a pleasant pastime instead of a bore. No long hours of practicing tedious scales and exercises. No trick charts or number systems. With this method you learn to play by playing real tunes from real notes.

And everything is made so clear you just can't go wrong. First you read the simple printed instructions. Then you see how to play from clear pictures and diagrams. Then you play yourself and hear how it sounds.

HERE'S MORE PROOF



PLAYS FROM THE START. Your advertisements are true to the letter. I can actually play my favorite instrument even though I'm only at the beginning. How can I ever express my joyful gratitude.
*F. B. O., Illinois.

*Actual pupils' names on request. Pictures by professional models.



INVITED TO PARTIES. Before I took your course, I did not know one note of music. Then 3 months later I started to play for dances. I've been invited to many parties. *R. M., Vancouver, B. C.

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(Do you have instrument?)

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Violin	Piano Accordion	Mandolin	Modern
Hawaiian	Saxophone	Practical Finger	Elementary
Guitar	Trumpet, Cornet	Control	Harmony

Name (Please Print)

Street

City State

NOTE: If you are under 16 years of age parent must sign this coupon.

Save 2¢ — Stick Coupon on penny postcard

In Your Mind's Eye

The Secret of MENTAL CREATING

IF you just like to dream, read no further. There comes a time when your fancies *must be* brought into light—and stand the test of every-day, hard realities. Are you one of the thousands—perhaps millions—whose thoughts never get beyond the stage of *wistful wishing*? Do you often come to from a daydream with the sigh, "If only I could bring it about—*make it real*?"

All things begin with thought—it is what follows that may take your life out of the class of those who hope and dream. Thought energy, like anything else, can be dissipated—or it can be made to produce actual effects. *If you know how to place your thoughts* you can stimulate the creative processes within your mind—through them you can assemble things and conditions of your world into a happy life of accomplishment. *Mental creating* does not depend upon a magical process. It consists of *knowing how* to marshal your thoughts into a power that draws, compels and organizes your experiences into a worth-while design of living.

ACCEPT THIS *Free* BOOK

Let the Rosicrucians tell you how you may accomplish these things. The Rosicrucians (not a religious organization), a world-wide philosophical fraternity, have preserved for centuries the ancients' masterful knowledge of the functioning of the inner mind of man. They have taught men and women how to use this knowledge to *recreate their lives*. They offer you a free copy of the fascinating book; "The Mastery of Life." It tells how you may receive this information for study and use. Use coupon opposite.

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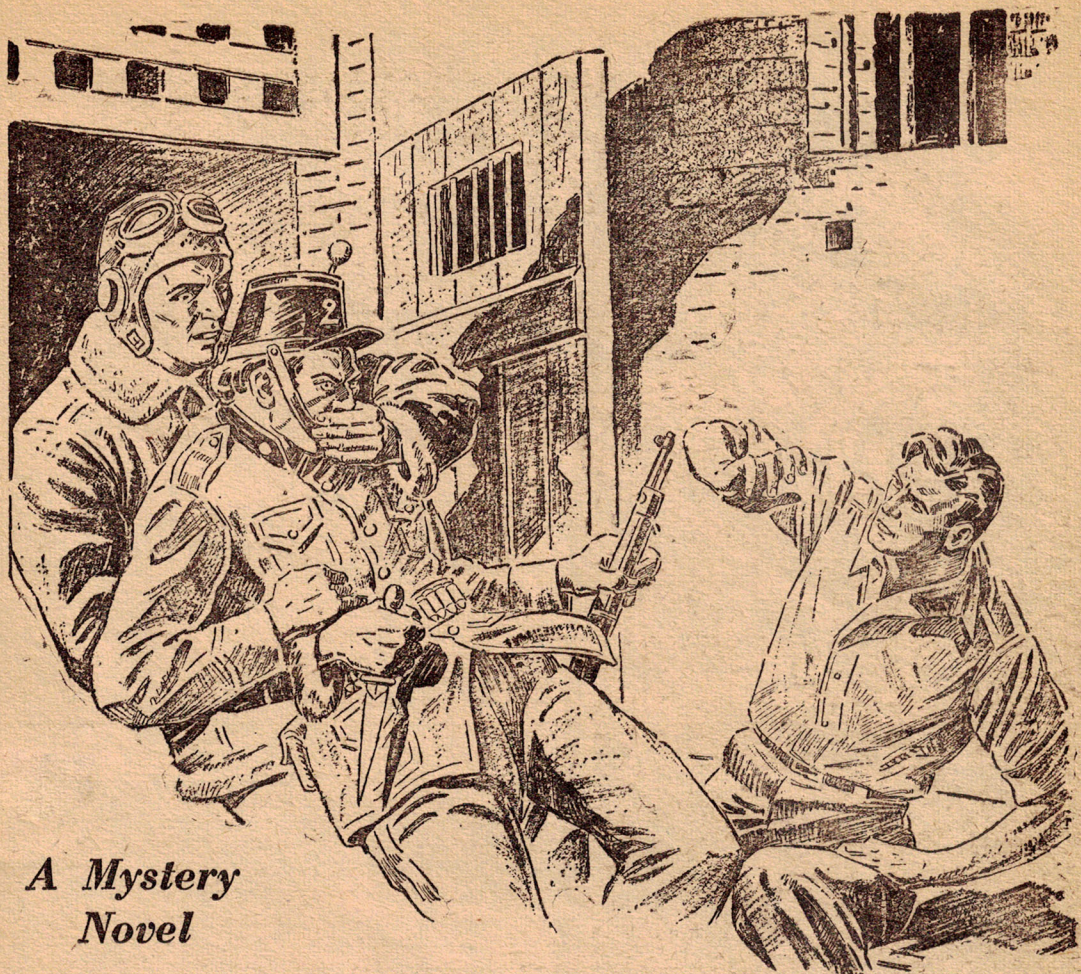
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Please send free copy of "The Mastery of Life,"
and I shall read it as directed.

Name.....

Address.....

City.....



**A Mystery
Novel**

As Mears' hand clapped over the guard's mouth, his gurgling scream was muffled

THE NIGHT OF TERROR

By THOMSON BURTIS

Rolph Burnham, wild animal trainer, faces dangerous human beasts when a grim Nazi crime plot unfolds—and entangles him in a sinister web of treacherous death-dealing intrigue!

CHAPTER I

DEPORTATION TRAIN

ON a certain Saturday night in September, 1940, three different series of events were taking place simultaneously within a radius of three hundred miles of Bateman, Texas. These strange, even melodramatic activities were

carefully designed to coincide at approximately 2:00 A.M. Sunday morning, which they did.

However, the best-laid plans of mice and men—or governments, which work through men—are subject to the vagaries of chance. Lady Chance stepped into one of the three carefully staged productions, and proceeded to change the climax of the show to an ex-



As Burnham turned a large and

tent which made it practically unrecognizable. Its reverberations and reactions would have been considerable, in any event. Due to intervention of Lady Luck, with considerable help from the greatest wild animal trainer in the world, the effects were sensational.

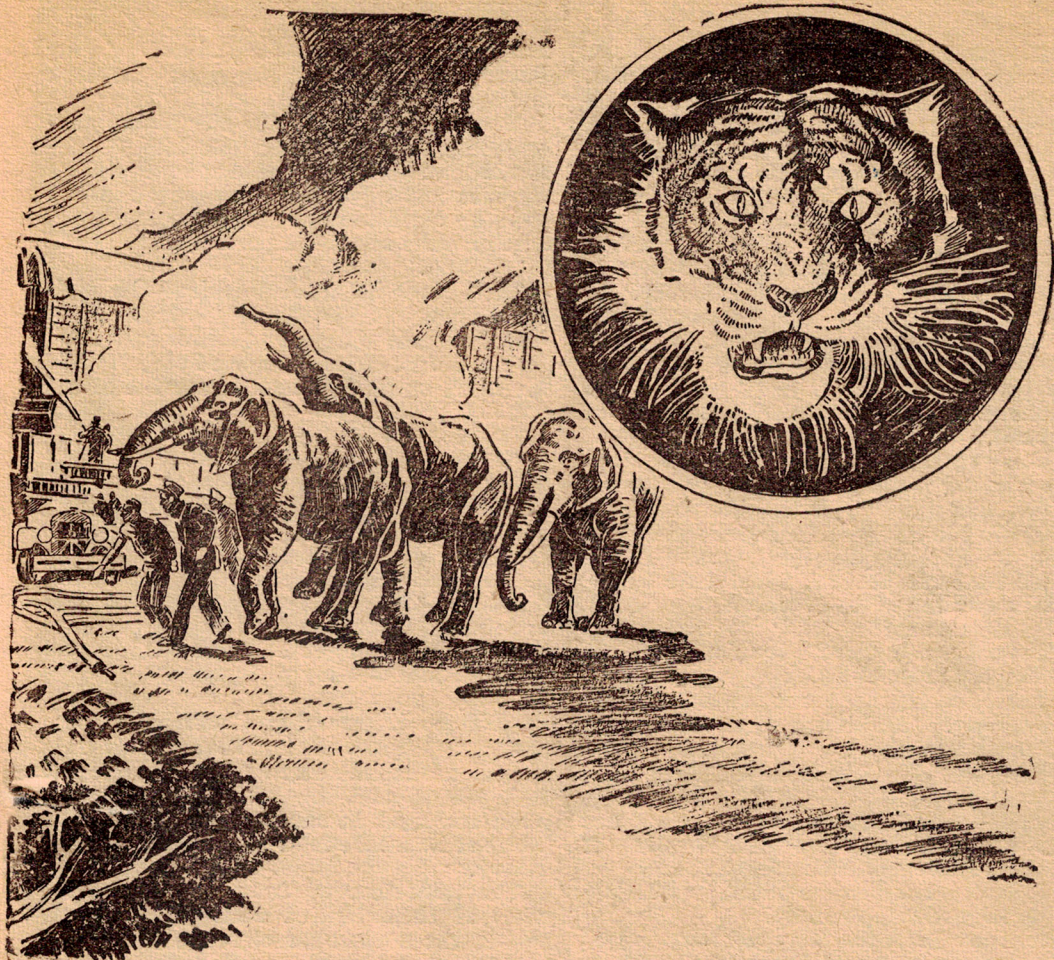
In Bateman itself, a sleepy little town a hundred miles from the Mexican border and an equal distance from El Paso, life was tranquil as usual at 6 P.M. on that Saturday evening. There were somewhat less than a thousand people in Bateman and on the ranches surrounding the town, and these people lazed away their lives indulging in a pallid imitation of the existence of their ancestors.

Not too many years before Bateman had been the trading point for ranches covering millions of acres, and as lusty a town as could be found the length and breadth of Texas. Its three-story hotel was the only relic of those good old days.

Now the surrounding acreage was mostly in cotton. The merchants and a lawyer eked out a living. One policeman for the night shift, and another one daytimes, were all the law enforcement Bateman needed. In hunting season the hotel had a few guests. Otherwise traveling salesmen and a few tourists on the transcontinental highway who stopped there, were all that kept old man Dewey alive.

This particular night, however, and over the past week-end, a bonanza had fallen out of the blue and into the lap of Rance Dewey. No less than thirty men, who registered from points as far apart as Los Angeles and Chicago, had converged on Bateman for a few days' hunting. Most of the men were in their thirties, and none over fifty, but they were old friends who explained that they made a four-day hunting trip each year a regular event in their lives.

They had the whole top floor of the Pioneer Hotel, and did more drinking and gam-



professional fist cracked into his jaw

bling than they did hunting. In fact, a few jackrabbits had been the only tangible evidence that they could hit anything at all with the shiny new rifles, backed up by a few pistols, which they had brought in their voluminous baggage.

SUPERANNUATED old Rance had had another hunting guest for more than a week, which had been a godsend. Since the war it had just seemed as though there weren't any hunters. But this George Haman had come to the hotel, and hunted every day, and got himself a buck, and proved himself a nice fellow with it all.

Particularly to Constable Higbee, who had the night shift. At the moment Haman was conversing idly with Higbee. The two had become pretty good friends within two days of Haman's arrival, and then the constable's three-year-old daughter had fallen on a razor-sharp scythe and practically cut off her little leg. Haman had not

only applied a tourniquet, but had rushed parents and daughter to El Paso in his beautiful sedan at a hundred miles an hour, and made all arrangements for the best doctor in El Paso to be waiting. Besides, he had loaned Higbee the money for the hospital bill.

As far as Bateman was concerned, in general, and Constable Higbee, in particular, George Haman was a good fellow. One of the best.

Haman leaned back against the trunk of the big pepper tree in front of the combined police station and two-cell jail. A bench surrounded the tree, and it was here that he and Higbee did most of their talking, with an occasional drink.

"You know, Joe," Haman said using his Chicago lingo, "I got a proposititon which I don't know quite how to put up to you, see? On account of you might get me wrong."

Beneath puffed lids his small, merry eyes

were downcast. His permanently swollen lips were quirked in an uncertain smile. Haman made no bones of the fact that he was an ex-pug, who now had a good thing in his gymnasium in Chicago plus managing an occasional good boy on the side.

His pleasant, freckled face showed signs of many batterings in the ring, and his short, powerful body indicated that before he had put on flesh he must have been a beautifully built specimen of humanity. He was getting bald now, and as he removed his small Stetson—concession to Texas—his face looked broader because the thin hair was plastered to the top of his skull and stuck out in all directions from the sides of his head.

"Come again," said Higbee. "I reckon it'd take a lot for me to get you wrong, George."

"It's like this," Haman said carefully. "This ain't to go no farther, understand? I come to Bateman to hunt, yes. But I picked Bateman because I had a tip that a certain guy might be comin' here to hunt, too. Understand?"

"Friend or enemy?" inquired Higbee, opening his knife and picking up a stick.

"That, Joe, is what I don't know," Haman said soberly. "And that's why I'm puttin' a deal up to you, see?"

"Proceed," Higbee said, whittling with concentration.

"And I'd take it as a favor if after you done it you'd forget that small piece of dough you owe me. Understand?"

"I don't understand nothin', yet," Constable Higbee said sensibly.

He was just the sort of run-to-seed Southerner who would be satisfied to be a peace officer in a town where nothing happened but an occasional small fire. He was a little too tall and a little too thin and a little too lazy. His eyes were a little dull, and his teeth stained. But he was a good fellow, in his plodding way.

"Well, I gotta ball the jack into El Paso tonight to meet a pal, see?" Haman explained. "This guy I'm talkin' about might drop in on the twelve o'clock from El Paso. On the other hand, he might come in from the other direction and arrange for the one-fifteen to stop here and drop him off, see?"

Higbee nodded.

"Now it's also just possible he'd drive a car. If he did, he would get in some time after ten and register at the hotel."

"And what do I do?"

"Just this. From ten o'clock on you go into the hotel every hour and look at the register and see whether a new man has registered. Might use any name."

"That kind of a hombre, eh?" Higbee said, with a stirring of interest.

"That kind of a guy," Haman nodded.

"You know," drawled Higbee, "them fellers at the hotel are a peculiar breed of cats.

Pasty-faced and flashy-dressed and got *mucho* dinero, all right, but some of 'em look mighty mean to me."

"Joe, old boy, life in the city makes anybody look mean," Haman told him. "Any-way, about this guy. Once an hour you see whether anybody's registered, see? Don't wake up old Rance, or Harry, or anything. Just give the register a peek. Understand?"

"Uh-huh."

"And meet both them trains—the midnight from and the one-fifteen to El Paso. Any guy gets off, you tail him and from then on, if he comes outa the hotel, you see what he's up to. It'll be well worth a couple of yards to me."

"Yards?"

"C notes," Haman explained. "Hundred-dollar bills. And I'd take it as a favor, pal, if you'd not only forget the hospital jack, but take another C note from me."

Higbee shook his head.

"I'm payin' the one, ten dollars a month like I said," he stated quietly, "and I'm glad to do you a favor. Specially like this hombre sounds like he might be bad medicine, and watchin' him was my plain duty."

AND so it was that Constable Higbee dropped into the hotel every hour from ten on, and found no new registrant. He met both trains, and saw no one get off, and after midnight he saw no sign in the hotel lobby of Rance Dewey or the elderly bellhop, Harry.

The third-floor windows, he noted, were most of them lighted until three o'clock, which was normal for city men. An occasional light went on or off, but there was less noise than usual—practically none. One man had slept in a chair in a window for hours, and a card game in another front room was so interesting that the two players he could vaguely see rarely changed their positions. An occasional figure pulled down or drew up a shade in a few front rooms which Higbee could see easily, and several bursts of laughter could be heard. Once four men passed around a bottle, standing in a front window.

All was normal in Bateman, with not one single soul on the street except Higbee since ten.

How could Constable Higbee be expected to know that Rance and Harry were in bed, drugged by their drinks of their guests' liquor? Nor could he guess that the four walking and talking men were going from room to room, pulling up shades, changing the position of dummies, and singing or drinking in front of various windows to give the illusion that all thirty men were safely domiciled.

He had no way of knowing, either, that George Haman's mysterious visitor was a pure figment of the imagination, designed

to have Higbee safely at the depot at certain specific times, out of sight of the hotel. He was completely ignorant of the fact that the twenty-six missing men had stolen out of the hotel in inconspicuous groups, to meet at a secret rendezvous. . . .

At almost exactly the same hour—ten P.M.—when Constable Higbee was making his first inspection of the Pioneer Hotel register, a rangy, red-headed young man was boarding a peculiar-looking train which had stopped for its regular load of water just outside of Graysville, New Mexico.

Every window of the train Pullmans was barred with sturdy steel bars. The platform doors were like the doors on jail cells, and a look inside the baggage cars would have shown they had special sliding doors.

The train was one of the deportation trains which the Immigration Service runs regularly across the country. This one had taken the northern route at first—San Francisco, and Salt Lake. Then it had swung south. At each large city where it stopped, a fresh consignment of illegal aliens, or aliens whose citizenship had been revoked, had been herded aboard for shipment to the East coast.

There, because of the war, some would be jailed and others given special permission to remain in the country for the duration. A few would be deported to the friendly or neutral countries whence they had come.

The train was fitted out by the railroad as a permanent deportation train, and rented to the Government. The railroad also supplied the guards, two of whom occupied what had been the women's dressing room on each Pullman.

The young man who had come aboard greeted the middle-aged—or older—guards familiarly by their first names, and ended up in the rear car of the train. This, once an observation car, was now living quarters and office of the two immigration inspectors who were in charge of the train.

The young man, too, was an immigration inspector, and had made many an official trip on this same perambulating jail. As he entered the observation car, he waved at Inspectors John Kelly and "Frosty" Jenkins, and looked in amazement at a fat and stupid-looking man of thirty who was smiling at him vacuously.

"Pete Neeley!" Dan Ruffing exploded. "How come you're aboard?"

"Saving the Government money." The moon-faced Neeley yawned. "Think you're the only guy that rates a free ride?"

"Don't let him kid you," advised handsome young Johnny Kelly. "He spends twenty-four hours a day cross-questioning Terence Schulz."

"And getting no more information out of him than we got out of his private papers," Neeley said, fatly somnolent.

The new arrival was Inspector Daniel Ruffing, who had had more to do with the presence of that same Terence Schulz of whom they spoke aboard that train than anyone else in America—with the exception of Pete Neeley. That fat and bovine young man was one of the star operatives in the Intelligence unit of the Treasury, and had had a great deal to do with such misfortunes as had overtaken Al Capone and other bigger and better men.

"Don't tell me the Nemesis of the *nouveaux riche* tax dodger is at a loss?" The freckle-faced Ruffing grinned. "You've nailed some big-shots in your time, Pete, but hanged if I don't think Terry Schulz doesn't have the makings of the biggest."

"You nailed him—not me," Neeley said querulously. "I wouldn't believe that any man living could have an income of hundreds of thousands a year, which he never reported for taxes, and leave us without a good case in court against him."

"What do you care?" Ruffing asked, grinning.

WHEN relaxed and enjoying himself, as now, or keyed up on a trail, electricity seemed to crackle from every pore of his skin. There was a dynamic energy and magnetism in the big redhead which showed in his brilliant smile and almost over-bright blue eyes.

"He's been deported for bribing legislators"—he threw back his head and laughed—"and to Ireland of all places!"

"I give him two years to be running the British Empire." Johnny Kelly grinned.

"Renting the horse-racing concession in Australia for so much, the betel-nut racket in India for so much," drawled Ruffing, "he'll do all right."

"And never more than ten thousand in the bank," Pete Neeley concluded. "We want to find out about that money because we could attach his property for millions if we had a leg to stand on."

"All that dough can't just disappear," Frosty Jenkins stated.

"But it did," Neeley said flatly. "By the testimony of reliable witnesses, it got as far as his secretary, in cash. Then it might as well have been poured down a well. Not even registered mail records against him. I figure he sent messengers out of the country with the cash, smuggled it out and then into some foreign country."

"If he's on the train, I think I'll go down and say hello," Ruffing said, accepting a drink from Frosty Jenkins. "With the possible exception of the man I'm on my way to visit for a couple of days, Mr. Terence Schulz is the most remarkable human being I've ever run into."

"I've been in the Islands so long," Jenkins complained, "I'm not up on Mr. Schulz."

What makes him the nonpareil? And who's Nonpareil Number Two, for whom you're cadging a free ride on our traveling madhouse?"

"Rolph Burnham—best animal trainer in the world." Ruffing answered the last question first. "Spoiled that plot to blow up those dams in California practically single-handed."

"And was in on capturing that German spy who'd wormed aboard the Nottingham," said Jenkins, nodding. "Is he—official now?"

"Counter-espionage—F.B.I.," said Ruffing. "Didn't want it, but we made him take credentials to protect him. It happens that his show—the Young-Burnham Circus—is giving a performance right this minute in Brazier City. They go into El Paso tonight, have Sunday off, then play there two days. He's a pal of mine, so inasmuch as we cleaned up that smuggling ring here in Graysville in jig time, I'm proceeding to El Paso to have a drink with Burnham and cut up a few old touches."

"By the way," John Kelly said quickly as he glanced out the window, "I want you to watch the prisoners coming aboard in a minute, Dan. I'm not saying anything, but see if you notice something in the actions of one or more of them."

Ruffing glanced alertly out the window, then back at Kelly. The train had been crawling slowly through the environs of Graysville, and was now threading myriad tracks through the yards. In a moment it would pull up at a remote station platform.

"What's on your mind?" Ruffing asked crisply.

"We think we've noticed something in one prisoner, at least, in every gang we've taken on," Jenkins said, his sharp face moody. "Terry Schulz is in the fourth car forward. Remember that, and watch the new prisoners."

CHAPTER II

BIG BOSS



RUFFING swung off the train. Herded by two immigration inspectors and four plainclothes policemen, a group of six men and one hard-looking young woman walked down the length of the train to be checked in at the observation car. Ruffing lounged along beside them.

Looking out the window of the fourth car up was the square, comely face he knew so well—Terence Schulz' face. He was looking down at the prisoners. A tall, fair man with a scarred face and erect carriage glanced up at Schulz. His head inclined forward until the heavy square jaw was almost on his breast. It might have been a shame-faced

avoidance of Schulz' gaze—or it might have been a signal of assent, or that all was well.

Back in the train office, with receipts signed and prisoners assigned to their quarters forward, Ruffing told what he had seen. He noted the quick looks that passed between the other three. Jenkins, an habitual worrier, smacked the desk with his small, almost feminine hand.

"Same thing in San Francisco," he rasped. "Same thing in Salt Lake City. Same thing in Denver! As I said, I've been in the Islands so long I haven't caught up on things. They assigned me to this train right off the boat to get me East. But listen." He leaned forward over the desk, as the train chuffed slowly out of the station. "Schulz ran a whole state like Croker and Tweed ran New York City. Right?"

"Right," Kelly answered him.

"He had two thousand men working for him and tens of thousands of political followers. Right?"

Kelly nodded.

"And his organization—that is, he had representatives all over the West. A lot of them were jailed. Quite a few who are being deported are right on this train. Every man we've seen nod in that meaning way at Schulz has been one of his ex-employees. Right?"

"So what?" Kelly asked.

"So I say those nods were signals," stated Jenkins, his little mustache bristling below his sharp nose. "I say plans are under way. And what I want to know is this: how did Terry Schulz, held incommunicado by you guys, get to communicate with the outside world?"

There was silence for a moment as they thought that over.

"Well, you don't need to worry about the first jailbreak from a deportation train, anyway," Ruffing finally said. "I understand that the congressmen from Schulz' state are raising the roof in Washington to have his deportation canceled."

"With a fair chance of success." Neeley nodded. "By the way, he offered two million cash to the Government to have the deportation canceled. The nerve of the guy!"

"Claims he owes no income tax, and then offers two million." Kelly chuckled. "Every dollar he's made, probably, is a dirty dollar, and some of 'em the dirtiest dollars possible for a man to get hold of, but I'll be darned if I don't have a sneaking liking for the fellow."

"Me, too, although I worked hard to put him where he is," Ruffing said, getting up. "I'm going down and have a little chat with him. He always stimulates me. Any sad cases aboard, lads?"

"Only one," the handsome, blond young Kelly told him, yawning widely. "Young Italian who'd just got married, with a past

felony rap against him. Gone straight for years. We've recommended to Washington that he be given a quota number and left out of jail, but you never can tell."

"I get off the boat," Jenkins said bitterly, "ready for a binge in the States, and what do I get? Chip in for carfare for this fellow's bride to follow her boy friend East and put up a plea in Washington. Twenty-five bucks! That's what I get!"

"Did you make it?" Ruffing asked Kelly, and Johnny nodded.

"All the boys chipped in. We got her carfare, but her hotel bill may be a problem."

"Here's twenty," Ruffing said, throwing it on the table. "Some of these deportation cases give me nightmares."

He walked through the women's car, on through two stag cars, and into the Pullman housing Mr. Terence Schulz. Mr. Schulz was ensconced alone in a section, save for one of the train guards. This ex-policeman was being charmed out of his wits by the blarney of his host, which blarney stopped abruptly when Schulz caught sight of Ruffing.

The boss got to his feet, wide, thin mouth stretched in an ear-to-ear smile.

"Danny, me bhoy!" he exclaimed in the phony Irish brogue he occasionally affected. "Me Nimisis, no less, and happy Oi am to see ye!"

"I'm a mean hand with a brogue myself," stated the Irish Ruffing with an equally broad grin, and sat down in the seat the guard had hastily vacated. "So you haven't been able to beat the rap, eh, Terry?"

"Not a chance, ayven if Oi wanted to," said Schulz. "And why should Oi want to, ungrateful as this great country has shewn itself? It's back to the Ould Sod of me ancestors, with money enough to set up as a country squire. Oi shall employ six of the prettiest colleens in the country for me servants, Danny, and at the ind of a year Oi shall marry the prettiest and best of them, to solace me declining years."

RUFFING shook his head unbelievably. In a moment, Schulz would switch impishly to a Harvard accent, he being a graduate *summa cum laude* of that institution. Here was a murdering pixie, a born clown who battered on vice. Here was a fine mind to which what most people called evil was good, and what most people called good was hypocrisy.

Terence M. Schulz, A.B., L.L.B., of Harvard, was a six-footer whose thick blond hair was so interspersed with gray that in some lights it looked platinum, and in others ash-blond. It was parted in the middle over a square face with a bulldog jaw. His big nose was straight and well-cut, his mouth wide and thin and firm, his thick eyebrows darker than his hair.

Underneath them his eyes had been made to seem smaller by a drawing of the flesh around them—Schulz' only sign of dissipation and good living. The square bones of his face were well-padded with flesh, rounding off the corners, but it looked to be firm flesh.

His big body, too, was well-fleshed, but hard-looking. Dan Ruffing, who had worked for months on the case, knew Schulz' daily schedule by heart. Up at six, a pint of fruit juice and an hour's ride. Huge breakfast at seven, office at eight, and continuous work until one. Big lunch, nap, gymnasium and swimming pool, and back at the office again at four, to work, if necessary, from then on.

Usually he was through at six, and proceeded to cocktails and an epicure's dinner. Unless business called him, he spent his evening in his palatial, but not too palatial, home, listening to classical records or reading either philosophy or commentaries on the political state of the world. A bachelor, women from the lowest to the highest strata of society seemed glad to accept invitations to his house at any hour or under any circumstances.

And society in the State ruled by Schulz was an anomaly in modern America. Gambling of every sort was legal, and before the Prohibition laws were revoked, liquor was legal, too, as far as the state was concerned. Divorce laws were a farce, and every law enforcement officer in the state was instructed to go the limit in keeping everybody out of jail except in the cases of theft or murder which Schulz had not approved beforehand.

As a result, the citizens had no State taxes to pay at all, dude ranches flourished like so many green bay trees, men of wealth settled there to avoid taxes, ordinary citizens saved wistfully against the day they could sample its delights.

Mr. Schulz, without title or making the hypocritical pretense of having any other business or interest whatever, was a partner in every single den, joint, dive, book-making establishment, Red Light district, and occasional more conventional businesses, in the state. It had been an asset to him to know in advance just what laws the legislature planned to enact. Whenever a new activity was legalized, it was invariably discovered that Mr. Schulz and associates had ready—built, equipped and staffed—the exact equipment necessary to conduct said activity.

In the pursuance of these activities, bribery, murder, wire-tapping, kidnaping and blackmail had been occasionally necessary. Likewise necessary had been a private police force, secret service, and business organization which had drawn to it some of the finest talent of metropolitan police forces, Chicago and New York racketeers,

Border gunmen, and legal talent without too many scruples.

Enough of these matters, after more than a year of solid work, had been traced to Mr. Schulz to enable a frustrated and harassed National Government to deport him to the Ireland he had left as a boy. To jail him for a felony was beyond their legal powers. To collect a dime of extra income tax had also proved to be beyond the capabilities of Pete Neeley and staff.

"Going to stay in Ireland even after the war, eh?" Ruffing said idly. "As I remember our investigations, you've got as much Swedish and German in you as Irish."

"But the fey part of me comes from Ireland, Danny, so that's where Oi'm stayin', after being so rudely ejected from your great country. Here was Oi, conductin' a social experiment of vast intherest to the scientific moind, on the people of a great, though small in territory, State. The trouble with this country, Danny, is that it's populated largely by hypocrites, and entirely by people that arre shtupid. Oi don't mind shtupid people that know they're shtupid, but what has made me a hermit in me palatial monastery is that Americans are shtupid and think they're smart."

"Give you time enough"—Ruffing grinned—"and you'd have killed off the most stupid and helped raise the standards of intelligence."

"Sometoimes it's necessary to kill," admitted Schulz tolerantly. "Loike in the coal mines, or the thousands that die of lead poisonin', or hundreds of thousands crippled iv'ry year in automobiles. Whin necessary for their profit or pleasure, people are willin' and eager to let hundreds of thousands be killed. When a mon's business requires the open and above-board liquidation of a given trouble-making individual, the same people who've hit three pedestrians drunk in their loives and had four of their own family in the hospital due to the disgraceful speed and disgraceful drivin' of modern automobiles, raise their honds in horror."

"You don't have any feeling of guilt, do you?" Ruffing asked curiously.

"Only a feelin' of frustrated virtue," Schulz stated, gazing out the window.

AND Ruffing believed him. For a moment there was silence in the section. A card game was proceeding noisily down the car, and the deportees seemed mostly more excited than downcast. The frankly criminal element were in other cars, more closely watched.

"Yes, sir," Schulz said with a sigh, "I could have done much for this country. Ye've stripped your forests and spint your resources like drunken sailors on a spree, and bragged about your wealth. Ye tax and

tax, whin by taxin' bookmakers and runnin' lotteries ye could get half your national budget except in toimes loike these. Oi would hov loiked to run this country for a while."

"You talk like Hitler," Ruffing said.

"Or Mussolini," agreed Schulz. "Any mon that'll take a twist out of the British lion's tail is a friend of moine, ye understhand, but Oi'm not sayin' I'm for either wan of the gintlemin. But they got something, Danny me boy. Niver forgit, a mon that gets up there and stays up there has got somethin'."

"You should talk Harvard, not Irish, when on deep subjects," Dan told him.

"Oi'm just practicin' fur me new home," Schulz said with that sudden wide grin. He never laughed aloud. "But enough of my ideas. Ye've been the busy little bee of late, I see be the papers. You and this animal trainer savin' those flood conthrol dams in California from being blown up by spies was a good job. What was his name? Burnham? Rolph Burnham?"

"Uh-huh," Ruffing said alertly. "We tamped down on the publicity, though, concerning him. How'd you know?"

"Oi hov ways, as ye know," Schulz told him sunnily. "Frind of yours, Oi understhand?"

"Right. He was an illegal alien himself, once, but he did the Department a favor and I was able to get him his citizenship."

Ruffing glanced at his wrist-watch. It was exactly midnight.

"Right now," he said, "the Young-Burnham show is just about ready to pull out of Brazier, up ahead, bound for El Paso. Rolph and I plan to hoist a couple in honor of old times in El Paso."

"Bein' a frind of yours," Schulz said calmly, "and me being a frind of yours despite the fact thot Oi'm on this thrain because of you, Oi will give ye a warnin' concernin' Misther Burnham."

"Shoot."

"Bein' born in an Axis country, no doubt they approached him to do some worruk for thim. He consents, and then notifies the authorities, and becomes a counter-espionage agint. Am Oi roight?"

"You usually are," Ruffing said noncommittally, but suddenly he was tense.

Mr. Schulz was absolutely right.

"Now don't think Oi've got sicind soight, or annything loike it," Schulz smiled. "Thot was plain to anny mon. Now I put mysilf in the places of the min high up in the Axis Intilligence, Secret Services, and the loike. Here is a mon made a monkey of thim, and shpoiled as fine a plot to stop the production of a dozen aircraft factories for a full month as iver was concocted."

He leaned forward. Dressed comfortably for the train in an expensive gabardine

sport shirt, gray slacks, and a neckerchief, he looked more a thirty-five-year-old sportsman than he did a fifty-year-old political boss.

"Putting meself in their places," he repeated, "Oi would make sure thot Rolph Burnham would rue the day he was a traitor, iv'ry day. Oi would ruin him and thin kill him, as a lesson to all the other agents, some of thim agents through blackmail, and with their heart not in it. Oi wance saw Burnham perform with his lions and tigers, and a broth of a lad he is. As a frind to ye, and if he's valuable to ye, hov him watched. All the toime."

He stood up, big brown hand outstretched. His smile was correct, his flesh-rimmed little eyes steady. He dropped his puckish pose of professional Irishman, and bowed slightly over Ruffing's hand.

"I've enjoyed this," he said easily. "I wish you were to be on the train for the entire journey. Good night."

Ruffing accepted the dismissal gracefully.

"I understand Washington may give you last-minute reprieve—perhaps a new hearing," he said, as they shook hands.

"That's what you hear, and that's what the entire Congressional delegation from my state thinks," Schulz said. "But I know better."

Ten minutes later, just before twelve-thirty, he asked that his berth be made up. Ordinarily, deportation trains are made up of chair cars, but wartime conditions had made it necessary to impress an old Pullman into service. He went to the washroom, and wet his handkerchief. When he returned, he looked at his bag, behind the curtains, and locked it. Then he pasted the wet handkerchief to the barred window.

These things done, he laid down with all his clothes on. . . .

AT THE same hour—ten P.M.—that Constable Higbee was making his first inspection of the register of the Pioneer Hotel in Bateman, Texas, and that Immigration Inspector Dan Ruffing was swinging aboard

the deportation train outside of Graysville, Texas, the third of the three series of events which were to converge with such surprising results was starting in Brazier.

The evening performance of the Young-Burnham Circus was a little more than half over. Its feature, and real climax, was about to begin, because the exigencies of tearing down a circus demand that all animal acts except horses and elephants be completed at half-time. Thus the menagerie top, and all its cages and equipment, can be torn down, transported to the runs, and loaded before the performance is over, and the crew gets to work on the Big Top.

The equestrian director, in an empty and hushed arena, had announced "The greatest wild animal act in the history of the outdoor show business—Rolph Burnham and his Kings of the Jungle." A white phaeton with top down had borne slowly around the ring, the lean man who looked like a thirty-year-old Indian chief, and was actually the forty-five-year-old survivor of an almost continuously dangerous existence in Europe and America.

He was in the barred center arena, now, long bull whip writhing like a live thing in the illumination of a dozen multi-colored spotlights beating down out of the darkened Big Top on that little circle of activity. Soon they would be replaced by the light of baby spots set around the base of the arena. Young-Burnham dressed their star act with all the trappings of the show business.

Out from the wooden runway leading from the menagerie top to the arena glided a long line of lions and tigers, running fast, silently, and low to the ground. Alternate beasts went right and left, until the tigers were running clockwise and the lions counter clockwise.

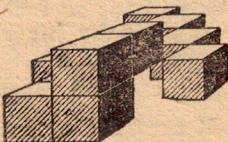
Three times those two deadly lines of tawny cats raced around the ring, and then the leaders of the two lines swerved in toward the center. The two lines flowed up and over graduated pedestals set across the ring, the highest platform in the center.

[Turn page]

BRAIN TEASER

THIRST PLEASER

How many cubes in this figure?



ANSWER.
There are ten cubes in the figure.



Three times they flowed over the pedestals like water over a rock. On the fourth trip, the bull whip cracked louder, and a quick bark of command came from the lean trainer.

Like a motion picture stopped suddenly, until the scene on the screen becomes a still picture of action stopped in full career, the big cats became motionless. Most had paws raised in the act of running, some were crouched, others had all four feet momentarily on the ground.

For a few seconds they held it. Then they were running again. This time, as they flowed over the pedestals, the whip and voice immobilized them again—this time sitting on their haunches, facing the trainer.

And then, with no warning save a greater number of stifled feminine screams than usual during the act, the arena suddenly became a chaotic horror out of a nightmare.

As one, three tigers and a lion leaped from their pedestals. A second later not an animal remained in the tableau, but twenty-nine snarling beasts were hurtling past the stunned Burnham, toward something in back of him.

Wielding the cruel whip savagely, but to no avail, he turned. In the split second before the animals engulfed it, he saw a picture which was to be limned on his mind in characters never to be effaced—a scene which would have been low comedy, had it not been the certain makings of stark tragedy.

It couldn't be so, but it was.

Standing at the entrance to the runway, from which it had evidently just emerged, was a blindfolded pig!

Before Burnham could make sure that his eyes had not deceived him, the pig disappeared under an avalanche of snarling brown and striped bodies. One squeal, barely heard amid the din of the big top, and its back was broken.

CHAPTER III

CLAWING DEATH



NOW the world was a madhouse. All over the Big Top women shrieked, and some fainted. Six thousand people were on their feet, and here and there they fell off the plank seats. Circus attaches were yelling, others trying to calm the crowd. And every eye was on the small

arena which was now a sight such as the Coliseum in ancient Rome had never seen.

Maddened with the smell of blood, and some of them with the taste of live meat, lions and tigers fought over now nonexistent food, and because they were natural enemies. The arena was a mass of writhing,

roaring, leaping bodies as the frenzied beasts went literally insane in the excitement surrounding them. The whole arena was like a crawling mass of Gargantuan menace, capable of killing half a dozen men in less than that number of seconds.

One look, and Burnham knew that he was helpless. All around the perimeter of the arena animal men with pikes were poking ineffectually at such pairs of cats as came within distance.

Burnham leaped for one of the little cubby-holes, about the size of telephone booths, which were spaced at intervals around the barred enclosure.

"Fire Alarm!" he shouted.

A lion and tiger, battling almost at his feet, saw him pass. Both crouched. His bull whip came down cruelly across their eyes. Nevertheless, though half-blinded, the tiger leaped. Rolph dropped to his knees, and the tiger went over his head. On his feet in an instant, the butt of his bull whip smashed down on the lion's nose. As the tiger turned to rend him, he dodged, and made one last frantic leap for the sanctuary of the safety pen. The tiger's claws ripped down his arm, shredding the leather covering which he wore over legs, torso and upper arms.

He slammed the gate and barred it. Long, narrow eyes were glowing with almost the madness of the big cats, and with some of the same quality in their red-shot black depths. His lips were twisted back in a snarl, his aquiline face a cruel mask.

It would have gone ill indeed with the man or men responsible for that pig had he had his hands on them at that moment. He could cheerfully have thrown them to the beasts they had driven mad.

For a few seconds, the only immobile person in that wild whirlpool of excited people, he looked over the mass of animals. He drew in his breath as he saw a tiger down. Half a dozen other beasts were tearing at it, and even as he watched the priceless beast stiffened and died. That was the second cat he had lost within less than a month.

He whirled away from the arena, to make sure that his directions about turning in an alarm had been heeded. And it was here that chance took a hand.

As he turned, his left leg came back, just in time to cushion the force of a long, sturdy piece of metal that looked like a darning needle. The end opposite the point was a handle perhaps an inch in diameter, which was grasped by his sinewy brown hand. The point caught momentarily in the leather sheath beneath Burnham's white riding breeches.

For a split second that seemed an eternity, Rolph was staring into slitted blue eyes set in a long, narrow face. The stranger was wearing the red coat with gold

epaulets of the ring attache, and the black-banded red cap. But here was no humble laborer for the Young-Burnham Circus. Here was somebody!

The trainer's reflexes were instantaneous. The butt of the bull whip crashed down through an interstice between the bars of the safety pen. The man, needle in hand, leaped backward to avoid it. The whip caught him a glancing blow on the head, but it was not that which felled him. His heel hit a brace, and tripped him. Thrashing the air, he fell, twisting, on his side. He strove to break his fall with the hand that held the needle.

As he hit the ground a shout of frantic fear escaped him—unheard, as the whole incident was practically unseen, in the wild bedlam of the Big Top.

Rolph, careless of the epic battle going on behind him, and of the animals literally hurling themselves at the bars of his little cell, stared at the thrashing figure. Even as he watched, the figure grew still.

And now the voice of the equestrian director was bawling over the loud-speaker system.

"Please be calm and keep your seats, ladies and gentlemen! The animals in the arena are not hurting themselves badly. They are like fighting dogs—more noise than damage! Do not be panic-stricken at the sound of fire sirens! A few squirts from the fireman's hose will make the animals harmless as doves! The performance will continue, ladies and gentlemen—keep your seats! Keep calm, and see an excellent free show!"

From far in the distance came the banshee wail of oncoming sirens. Close to Rolph's pen, he saw a lion go down under two tigers. It was Kaiser, his star performer, whom he had brought up from a cub. The others were some distance away, still a snarling mess of fighting cat.

Instantly Rolph unbarred the door. Standing a foot from it, his bullwhip sang, and licked forth like a giant snake. With all his strength he wrapped the tip around a tiger's nose. He jerked it, and dragged the agonized beast off Kaiser.

KAISER, on his back with all four claws working, got his opportunity. They ripped down the belly of the tiger. In an instant Kaiser was on his feet, and he and the other wounded tiger joined battle again. But again that cruel lash cut and stung, and both beasts turned to strike futilely at his maddening torture.

Into their maniacal minds came the recollection of what it meant. Surfeited, perhaps with excitement and battle, they slunk to the other end of the rink after one look at their master.

In a moment, while Rolph worked care-

fully on the outskirts of the free-for-all with whip and voice, the firemen came into the tent, unrolling their big hose. They worked as though part of the show.

A moment later, the great stream was knocking the big cats against the bars, frightening them half to death. Rolph nodded at the chief, and the stream died to a warning trickle.

An animal man thrust a heavy chair through the door into the arena. Burnham thrust his left arm through the rungs of the back of it, and held it like a shield, legs protruding.

And then, while an enthralled Big Top watched, he went into action. Mr. Rolph Burnham, greatest star of the circus world, was fighting mad. And he had learned to use that bull whip many years before at the Winter Garden in Berlin, under the tutelage of an Australian whose sole act was a demonstration of its use.

The big cats were confused, and mad, too. Blood still slavered from the jaws of some of them. Three pairs were resuming their fights, although without enthusiasm. Mostly the beasts prowled restlessly, wondering what would come next.

What came next was their being driven out of that arena, back into their cages in a menagerie where every last bear, female lion, and leopard was bawling its lungs out.

Burnham advanced steadily, and his whip was working so swiftly that it seemed to be six whips. It lashed and thrust at them like an inescapable swarm of biting insects. Three times an animal crouched to spring, only to take a beating around its nose and eyes that changed its mind. Hoarse commands were barked from Burnham's snarling lips, and his slow forward progress never stopped.

And, one by one, crouching and growling now largely to show off, the big cats slunk into the runway. Then, breaking into a swift run, they sped back to the cages which represented home and peace to them.

As the last one left the arena, Rolph started walking slowly out of it. The firemen were rolling up their hose. The three acts, and some clowns, who were next on the program, were at the back yard and front entrances.

And suddenly Burnham became aware of what had been a silence so deep in the Big Top that the breaking of it was a numbing physical shock. As the band burst into a march, the entire audience exploded in a mad bedlam of applause that fairly swayed the canvas of the tent and shivered the rigging high up above.

Limp in the reaction from the past ten minutes, Burnham waved at the crowd. His head was bent, and his thoughts did not include the thousands who were paying him tribute.

"Crowney wants to see ye in the doc's wagon!" "Chimp" O'Grady, the boss canvasser, was bawling into his ear.

"In a minute," Burnham shouted back, and waved the white phaeton away.

He walked out into the back yard, through the back door into the menagerie tent, and up past the cages of frantic animals which made Young-Burnham concededly the greatest animal show in the world. Second largest in point of size, in that long row of cages was the finest collection of trained animals the business had ever seen.

The brightest jewel in its crown, of course, was the combined lion-tiger act which had just quit the arena. The big cats were licking their wounds, now, while the veterinarian looked them over. He was a bandy-legged little man with steel-rimmed glasses and the largest and most knowledgeable hands Burnham had ever seen.

"We'll get by with a little iodine and such," he allowed, chewing a straw. "Sunflower there has lost an eye, and we'll truss him up and tend to it, but you got nothin' to worry about. In the jungle none of 'em would even be thinkin' about them cuts."

Burnham nodded. The veterinarian could be trusted.

The animal men gathered around him, leaving for the moment their work of boarding up the cages for the trip to the runs. All around them the menagerie top was being torn down. Quarter poles were out, and the exhibition animals already were being trundled out of the tent.

"How did that pig get in the arena?" Burnham snapped.

The boss animal man stepped forward, the boss elephant man with him.

"I swear to you, Mr. Burnham, there was no funny business in this tent!" old man Emory Miles said steadily.

And he should know. For the entire first half of the performance, he was in charge of driving the cats from cage to cage, making way for the ones who were to go down the one runway, leading from the middle cage, into the arena.

"Maybe I've got it," Burnham said, as though to himself.

He ducked between two cages, and under the menagerie top side wall. Miles came with him. Between the side walls of menagerie and Big Top was a space three feet wide. The runway, of course, crossed it, and then inclined down over the audience seats in the Big Top.

A man or men could work here unobserved.

AND someone had. A section in the side of the wooden runway had been neatly cut out. It was large enough to thrust the pig through. Whoever had done that had not even bothered to replace it, frightened

away probably as some member of the audience on the other side of the canvas had heard them at work.

"That's that," Burnham said. "From now on, I want every man in the menagerie to remember that this show has powerful enemies—the most powerful there are. Animals can be poisoned, let loose—anything can happen. Conduct yourself, Emory, and run your men, with that in mind."

"Yes, sir," the old animal man said humbly.

For he knew, as well as Rolph did, that the enemies mentioned were the secret services of the Axis. At last they had struck, for the first time.

Burnham walked down into the back yard, made his way through thirty-six beautiful ring horses lined up for their entrance, past some clowns who gave way respectfully, and through a little group of the flyers and catchers of the Ford aerial troupe. Mother Ford, just a trifle portly in tights, patted his shoulder as he passed.

"Nice work, Rolph," she said.

But even in her voice there was an undertone of awe. They all knew the counter-espionage coup for which Rolph Burnham, born Giovanni Madlon in Italy, had been responsible in Mesa Valley, California. And all knew there was more behind that pitiful blindfolded pig than had met the eye. There were wild rumors about what lay concealed in the medical wagon.

The back yard, a large area at the rear of Big Top and menagerie, walled in by a strip of canvas eight feet high, was a semicircle of tents, large and small. Male and female dressing tops for the ballet; costume tents; the huge padroom, which housed the ring stock in its center compartment, and dressing rooms for men and women performers at each end. There also were various wagons, one of them the doctor's headquarters.

Inside the small wagon, equipped as a rough and ready dispensary and examination room, Crowney Young silently thrust a bottle of whiskey at Burnham. On the examination table lay a tall figure, motionless. A blanket hid even the face from view. The chunky doctor, who had recently replaced Mr. Shires, was bending over something on the table.

Rolph took a long pull at the bottle, eyeing Crowney Young. The young majority owner of the show, who had inherited it from four generations of circus men, eyed him in return, smiling a little as he pulled on his forelock. The gangling, lantern-jawed Crowney was deceptively shy and diffident. He had been brought up with the circus, which means he was tough.

Suddenly Rolph Burnham grinned one of his rare grins. Conflict and danger always uplifted him and took him out of himself—

released, as it were, his full capacity for enjoyment as well as action.

"Is that the fellow who tried to stab me with a needle?" he asked.

"And what a needle!" stated the doctor. "Look."

He held up the handle into which the large needle, almost a stiletto, had been thrust. He had split it into two parts, revealing a heavy spring.

"You release this catch," he explained, "and that releases the spring, which would drive the needle very forcefully."

"What happened to him?" Rolph asked.

"Fell on his own needle," Crowney explained. "I saw you swing the bull whip, came over, and saw this guy was a stranger. What happened?"

Rolph told them, then explained how the pig had appeared in the arena. Long, sloping, narrow black eyes were glowing warmly, and firm mouth was curved in a ferocious sort of smile as he concluded:

"They thought first that the animals might get so excited fighting over fresh meat that they would turn on me and kill me. If that didn't happen, they knew that I'd have to run to one of the safety pens, in all likelihood. This man was ready for me. Crowney, they are trying to pay us back for what was done to them in California."

"You, especially," Crowney slid in.

"For our work in Mesa Valley and Point Emma," Rolph went on with that fierce zest. "Nobody but foreign agents could plan in such detail, and no one else would want to kill me. Not so?"

Rolph walked over and raised the blanket shrouding the stranger. He had never seen the man around the show, until that wild moment in the safety pen when he had stared into the now sightless eyes.

"Dead, eh?" he asked unnecessarily.

"When we picked him up," Crowney said.

Rolph took another stride to the doctor's side. He bent over the vicious contraption laid out on the table.

"Needle was poisoned, of course?" he asked, and the doctor nodded.

"Don't touch it," he said, indicating the brownish stuff which adhered to the needle for a half-inch from its tip. "I don't know what it is, but it's probably one of those vegetable poisons savages have used for centuries—curare and its derivatives, and so forth. We can have it analyzed in El Paso."

"And fingerprints," said Crowney, gesturing at the dead man. "I'm glad to do it, but do you realize, Rolph, that this working for the Government is costing us a bundle of cash? Twenty thousand dollars' worth of trained lion and tiger in the last month."

"I would be glad if I could replace them for that amount tomorrow," Burnham said. "But it is good, eh?" His grin was not one

of ordinary delight—it was the humorless grimace of a man transported by the love of the fighting in which he was actively engaged.

Soon he went out of the medical wagon, and prowled restlessly around the lot with a stride reminiscent of his own cats. He watched the tear-down, pacing ceaselessly, and when he rode the boss' truck—last off the lot—to the runs, he watched the razor-backs loading the show as though he had never seen it before.

Then, instead of going directly to his stateroom, he astounded the pie car by appearing at the counter for a doughnut and some milk.

CHAPTER IV

PRISONER OF THE AXIS



THE counter of the pie split one half of that privilege car in half, and opposite it the wall was lined with slot machines. The remaining half of the car was devoted to gambling layouts of all sorts—faro, keno, craps, roulette, blackjack, and stud and draw poker. Each layout was presided over by a circus employee.

Burnham astounded Mr. Daly, who took tickets on the sideshow afternoons and evenings, and dealt stud poker at night, by taking a hand. On his left was the sideshow giant, on his right the star flyer of the Ford aerial troupe, and across from him was the assistant lot superintendent and one of the cooks. It was two o'clock before he became bored, because he could not bet more than the other players could afford, and went back to his stateroom.

The great white-and-gold circus train was clicking over the rails, and just before dawn would be in El Paso. The show would be put up in leisurely fashion the next day, as an advertisement, and to feed the animals more easily and get them out of the cars. But no performance. Then two days of shows.

It was a heavenly vista for every member of the troupe. Hot baths for three days running instead of a pail of cold water thrown over themselves. Bellboys and night clubs and Juarez after the night performance.

Even the microscopically paid ballet girls had great plans for getting little apartments where four or six could split the expense, and every last boss and performer had a room reserved in every type of hostelry, from the Casa Del Norte down.

As Ralph turned into his stateroom, the train superintendent was hurrying down the aisle.

"Where are we?" Burnham asked. "And what time do we get in?"

Any good train superintendent can look out of a window anywhere in America, see a bush, tree, or fence post, and tell within two miles of where he is. So "Slats" Rafferty peered out of Rolph's window, and calculated.

"A few minutes out of Bateman, Texas," he said. He glanced at his turnip of a watch. "We're making time because there's a deportation train behind us and not much up ahead. Ought to be in by five."

Rolph was still far from sleep, his mind a fast-working machine examining the logical inferences to be made from what had happened that night. If the F.B.I. should put some men with the show, perhaps they could trap many a foreign agent who was assigned to teach a lesson to the man and the show that had made monkeys of them.

Then all thoughts, but one, were swept out of his head. He had seen the emergency cord above his head move. The next second he was almost thrown off his feet by the shock of the suddenly applied air-brakes.

Who had pulled that cord—and why?

He strode swiftly out into the corridor. Noise came from the other staterooms and compartments of the car assigned to owners, and stars of the show, but all but Rolph were in bed. He dropped off the platform to the cinders. Up and down the train the porters—superannuated old circus veterans to whom the jobs were given as a sort of pension—were out on the dirt, too.

The next second Rolph was plunging to the rear of the train, toward the flats. In the middle of the line of cars which carried the wagons of the show, one was on fire. Someone had been mighty alert!

But the man who had pulled the cord was standing alongside the train with his toothless mouth wide open in stupefied astonishment. A well-spoken man had given him one hundred dollars, back in Brazier, to pull that cord right here. Said he had a crippled son that would get an awful thrill out of the train stopping right there for just a second. Train would stop, then go on again as everybody would think the string had been pulled by accident, and no harm done to anybody.

But a car was afire! If the train hadn't stopped, all those cars behind the one burning would have caught fire!

The old porter started figuring on asking for a bonus from Crowney Young.

And another man, who had ridden the burning flat underneath the canvas tarpaulin covering the stake and chain wagon, and set that fire, was stealing away from the scene.

"Couldn't have been timed better—right on the spot," he thought, as he ran from bush to bush.

It was George Haman, dressed in the roughest of clothing. He waited for a while,

until a few people from faraway cabins started materializing at the scene, then joined them to look, for a few minutes, at a circus at work to save itself. Already he could see a red lantern waving a quarter of a mile up the track. Then his rugged face split in a delighted, lopsided grin.

"There's his nibs!" he breathed to himself. "Right out on the job, which makes it simpler."

He was looking at Rolph Burnham. George Haman was not feeling good about slipping up on the job of having Burnham killed in Brazier. To square himself, he had thought of a most beautiful and audacious coup, one which would more than make up for the failure of his henchman with the needle.

In a little while, if all went well, he would be facing one man, and in a few hours three more men, to whom there would be no excuse for failure.

And yet, he saw now, there was going to be a partial failure. The other flats would be saved. This Young-Burnham outfit was a pain. Not only did they pop up wherever they weren't wanted, from an Axis point of view—Point Emma, for instance—to spoil an Axis plan, but there seemed no way to really get the best of them.

WITH grudging admiration, he watched them work. What he didn't realize was that in the long history of the circus, there was almost no emergency which did not have a precedent.

Even Rolph Burnham, though, who knew that, was moved to respectful approval of his own and Crowney Young's organization. There was literally nothing for the owners of the show to do—not a command to give.

Already razorbacks, protected by blankets, and with wet handkerchiefs over their faces, had disconnected the blazing car from the animal flats and passenger cars up ahead. A gang of canvasmen were beating out embers on the cars nearest to the burning flat. The railroad crew was on the job, and a second after the uncoupling had been completed, the engine was pulling the forward cars free. A safe hundred yards up the track, it stopped.

Now, from the the elephant cars, there was unloaded with dignity the entire eighteen-bull herd of the show. Razorbacks were bringing up great coils of rope. Others were uncoupling the crackling flat from the rear ones, and three of them were badly burned in the process.

Every inch of the rear flat closest to the blaze was covered with a gang which literally would not let the car catch fire. The dry canvas on the burning wagons was catching like tinder, and a great candle of flame shot up into the night.

Burnham was walking up and down, on

the outskirts of the battling crews. If someone had not pulled that cord just when he did, the draft created by the fast-moving train would have swept the flames back on the rear cars, and to all intents and purposes the Young-Burnham show would have been destroyed.

Animals and humans would have been left, but with no equipment to perform with, or canvas to cover them. Or train to carry them. Those cars were all of abnormal length, specially built for their job.

This was more than revenge on him personally. Evidently enemy agents knew that several executives of the show carried credentials from a secret Federal organization, and that reams of Intelligence reports flowed into Washington as the show went across the country and its members talked, investigated and listened to thousands of war workers, officials and ordinary citizens.

A lot of powerful people didn't want Rolph Burnham, or the Young-Burnham show, in business.

Now great ropes were being thrown around the burning flat. The elephants were being lined up, nervous at their proximity to the fire. Up ahead, the entire menagerie, for the second time that night, was going mad. And this time the horses joined them, as the smell of smoke drove them into a kicking, neighing, screaming panic.

Far down the track the headlights of the deportation train came in sight. Ex-pugilist Haman did not hesitate. Burnham, pacing like a wild animal, was a safe distance from the workers, and close to a heavy growth of small trees and bushes. In that madhouse, no one had eyes for anything but the fire, and the complicated evolutions being performed by sweating men and towering elephants.

Haman walked up to Burnham.

"Oh, Mr. Burnham," he said, and as Rolph turned, a large and professional fist cracked against the side of his jaw.

He fell unconscious against the bushes, and in a few seconds Haman had him hidden in them. Then he walked rapidly toward the slowing deportation train, a quarter of a mile to the rear. Several dozen cars and trucks on the transcontinental highway slowed and stopped and their occupants streamed across the field toward the fire.

Another short line of cars stood parked opposite the deportation train. Their thirty occupants, all masked, rushed the hundred yards to the track. As though they had rehearsed it a hundred times, groups scattered to cover every platform, and the engine.

Three men found the window to which Terence Schulz' handkerchief had been pasted. In a second an oxyacetylene torch was working on the bars. All aboard the

train seemed to be sleeping. No one on the train apparently sensed the fire ahead, and no guard appeared on a platform.

The prisoners close by Schulz' window peered out, but the guns waved at them from below sent them cowering back into silence. The engine crew was quiet beneath their guards' guns, and when the conductor peered out from the rearmost platform he, too, succumbed, apparently without surprise, to the menace of a gun held on him.

In less than three minutes Terence Schulz was out of the window, temporarily a free man. Haman was waiting for him. From the distance came the low drone, rapidly increasing, of an airplane.

"It—it's *too* easy," Schulz was saying unbelievably. "Nobody seems to have even waked up."

HAMAN dared to interrupt him. He talked fast and furiously. Schulz gave crisp orders. In a few more seconds, every one of the masked men were streaming across the field to the cars. But Haman and Schulz went on beyond the road, into a huge plowed field baked hard by the sun.

The cars roared off down the road, toward the fire. From the west, a huge, low-flying airplane, looking black in the moonlight, cut its two motors and glided toward the field.

"Things may have gone wrong in Brazil," Schulz was saying quietly, "but they're going so well here it frightens me, Haman. The train might have stopped a mile from this field. Why, the Immigration boys didn't even wake up! It isn't natural!"

"We gotta get the breaks sometimes, Chief," Haman said.

They ran toward the taxiing airplane. It turned around at the eastern edge of the field, in position for a take-off. In a moment a door in the side of the huge, khaki-colored plane opened, and Schulz climbed aboard and said something to the helmeted and goggled figure which had opened it. The twin radial engines were idling softly.

Then one of the big black cars slid up alongside the field. At the circus train, every eye was on eighteen elephants, straining at the ropes attached to the burning car. Even as two men carried the unconscious Rolph Burnham across the field toward the waiting plane, the flaming flat slowly came off its level keel on the tracks, tumbled over on its side, and slid down the sloping embankment.

A wild cheer came from the onlookers. Soon the two severed parts of the train could be connected again, and the show move on.

It was as though this sound brought Burnham out of his coma. He opened his eyes just as he was being carried aboard the plane.

The first thing he saw against the dark khaki of the huge transport plane was the star and circle and bar of the United States Army Air Service. Haman saw Burnham's eyes open, and Burnham was not yet tied. Taking no chances with his human tiger of a prisoner, the butt of his gun descended briskly on Burnham's skull. . . .

Burnham had no idea how long he had been unconscious the second time. He came to, to realize that he was in the air, and tied hand and foot. He was lying on the board floor of a large enclosure with a curved roof—the interior of an empty transport plane. From his position he could only look straight up at the bracing of the fuselage.

"There ain't a chance they can really pin anything on the boys, Mr. Schulz," he heard Haman saying. "The town cops gotta testify that they was all in the hotel, playin' cards and drinkin' and sleepin'. The cars all was driven in this very night. Their own buses stayed in the garage in Bateman. Masks and gloves and the dummies got rid of. Anybody can suspect, but nobody can prove nothin'!"

"When you get excited, your English becomes horrible," the voice Rolph was to come to know as Schulz' said reprovingly. "You can never rise high in this profession until you talk properly."

"Yes, sir," Haman said humbly. "It certainly went off like a charm, didn't it?"

Burnham was listening with every cell in his body. Bound and tied though he was, it was characteristic of him that he felt no fear—only a mighty thrill which increased in power and quality with every word the two men said.

"Almost unbelievable," Schulz said, as though thinking aloud. "Captain Mears wangles an assignment which lets him pretend to have a forced landing on our route; not a guard or an immigration inspector on the train even shoots; and a slight miscalculation—plus, I must admit, my dear fellow, your quick thinking—gives us Rolph Burnham alive."

The trussed-up Burnham's eyes were two pools of blinding light. These men were foreign agents! The deportation train the train superintendent had said was behind the circus train had been held up, and one at least of these men had been rescued from it. And here were the men responsible no doubt for the attempt on his life in Brazil! Flying in a United States Army Air Service transport plane!

Burnham was not gagged, and he raised his voice above the subdued roar of the two motors.

"I would like to sit up, if I could," he head-shouted.

"Of course, my dear fellow, of course!" came the cultivated voice of Schulz.

"Haman, if you please. I have a gun. Release Mr. Burnham's arms, if you will."

The ex-prizefighter with the bland face took the bindings from Rolph's wrist, and Rolph grinned up at him.

"Swell punch you gave me," he said.

"I ain't forgot what I used to know," Haman said modestly, helping Burnham to his feet. Putting an arm around his waist, he assisted the trainer to one of the two benches running lengthwise of the compartment.

"You mustn't hold this against us, Mr. Burnham," Schulz said, twiddling the gun in his hand idly. "It is our profession. My name is Terence M. Schulz."

"I recognize you, sir," Burnham said, with Continental meticulousness.

That square, strong face had adorned the front pages frequently during the last six months of the Government's chase and trial of the most elusive quarry they had ever tried to convict.

CHAPTER V

RENEGADE FLYER



DURING an adventurous lifetime Rolph Burnham never had felt as thoroughly keyed up and alert as he did then. Every faculty was magnified, his mind possessed of what seemed to be miraculous clarity and power.

"It is a surprise to find that you are one of us, Mr. Schulz,"

he said without hesitation.

Schulz' face did not change, but a new light came momentarily into his eyes—an ineffably keen shrewdness.

"What do you mean, one of us?" he asked, his body immobile.

"An agent of the Fatherland—in my case, two Fatherlands," Burnham said calmly. "I do not understand why you tried to kill me, or why I am tied. However, I assume that a man of your eminence is rather high up in our secret service?"

"Correct sir," Schulz said.

"Then I am happy at the opportunity of telling you that to my mind what I have seen and experienced of the organization shows it to be of a terrific stupidity, both in men and methods!" Burnham told him calmly.

"Because you were able to—er—interfere with the machine in Mesa Valley and Point Emma?" Schulz asked quietly, but his eyes had the lidless, unwinking setness of a watchful snake.

"Not me. American agents! They already knew so much that I had no choice, if I wanted to maintain my usefulness, but to pretend to throw in with them. This I did not do in either case until our cause was hopeless. And then what happens?"

Head thrown back proudly, aquiline face a study in contempt, arrogant eyes staring at Schulz as though that eminent criminal were an insect which had just bitten him, Burnham went on:

"Do the agents on the job understand? No! And just when I have made myself a hero to the United States agents, and could be most useful, you and your people try to kill me!"

If he expected that audacious attack to ruffle Schulz' serenity in the slightest, he was disappointed. Schulz' thin mouth widened in a sincere smile.

"Exactly the tactics I would use were I in your place, Mr. Burnham," said no man's fool. "Your quality is—er—extraordinary. Perhaps you may yet be reclaimed to do good work. In Europe, not here."

As though to let his last words sink in, Schulz said to Haman.

"It may be you did better than you knew, Haman. If so, this night has indeed been good. Miraculously good."

"Say, Mr. Schulz," Haman interrupted with explosive respect, "it ain't unbelievable that we're flyin' down into Mexico in a United States ship, is it? It ain't unbelievable that we got you off'n that there train, is it? I can see and touch enough to make me believe it!"

"Quite so, my good man, quite so," Schulz said tolerantly.

So they were over Mexico, Rolph thought, and the pilot of this plane was an Axis agent, and a captain in the Army Air Service. He looked ahead, through the open door into the pilot's cockpit. The man was fiddling with an instrument, and his profile fairly leaped out at Burnham.

Not because he recognized it. But the face of the man who had been called Captain Mears had been tanned to a hue so dark that it was like polished mahogany, making Burnham's deep bronze look like a convalescent pallor. Against the captain's skin the one eye Burnham could see looked to be all white. The beak of a bird of prey jutted boldly out over a mouth that was like a mere crack in the dark skin; and a long, outthrust chin. That eye was hooded by a drooping eyelid, and with face framed in a helmet Mears looked like some dark Mephistopheles who had seen everything that he had not done himself.

Burnham diverted his gaze to Schulz. Every nerve singing within him, he forced himself to smile casually.

"So we are over Mexico, flown by one of our agents in an American plane, and I am perhaps to go to Europe," he said. "I am interested, Mr. Schulz."

"Naturally," Schulz said urbanely. "I would be, too, in your place. I trust that you are not the kind of a fool who tries to stand torture rather than tell the truth?"

Rolph's reaction to that quiet, casual question was as suave and unemotional as the question itself.

"Having been exposed to it but once, when my inclination was to tell the truth anyhow—this was in Italy—I would not know," he said. "Inasmuch as I would realize that no man can stand everything possible which can be done to him, I'm sure that when hope of escape or rescue was lost, I would tell the torturers what they wanted to know."

"A man after my own heart, Mr. Burnham," Schulz approved. "Personally, I have always regretted the necessity for torture in police third degree, and particularly in our work. However, any man who is silly enough to make it necessary to torture him deserves it, which makes me feel better."

"You are warning me of what lies ahead?"

"Precisely. You are to meet three very important men, Mr. Burnham. Probably they will not bother with you here. I anticipate—without evidence, you understand—that it will be decided to take you aboard the submarine and let you tell what you know, and make your decisions, somewhere in Germany."

"I would think I could be most useful in America, pursuing my profession," Rolph suggested.

SCHULZ shook his head.

"Ah, no. But all that you have learned traveling this country will be useful. You have been intimate friends with the F.B.I. agents and immigration inspectors who have worked with your show as a base. You know much. Please do not hold it against us if you force us to torture it out of you. It is a part of this game, you know."

"But of course!" Rolph said, as though being told by a lawyer that some times the suppression of evidence was necessary to avoid obscuring the truth. "With me, however, it will not be necessary. I consider myself still an agent of the German Reich."

"Now that I think it over," Schulz said, putting the gun back in his pocket, "perhaps they will want you to talk freely when we arrive. In that case, I would recommend that you tell the truth unreservedly, even if it means admitting your past treachery and desire to do better in the future. Our host has been known to stake out men who displeased him in ant hills, covered with honey."

"Sounds charming," Rolph said. "Who is he, may I ask?"

"General Montez—General Pedro Montez."

"Ah, yes," Burnham said, forcing himself to be matter-of-fact.

For newspaper readers knew General Montez, as well as they knew Schulz. The

general was the Fascist-minded ruler of a remote province in West Mexico, and only a threat to call out Government troops and wage war against him and his private army had stopped him from conducting a semi-revolution during the last election.

"In Mexico, the Germans have not been so stupid as you seem to think they have been in the United States," Schulz went on. "For generations, they have immigrated to Mexico, married native girls, become a part of the life. We are strong in Mexico. Herr Madlon, when the time comes to strike."

Burnham affected not to notice the use of his real name. He gestured at the brooding pilot. All that could be seen of him now was narrow shoulders and the back of his thin head.

"Apparently," he said dryly. "We are not weak in the United States. An agent in the Transport Command must be very useful. The cargo of officials and agents carried by some planes is—important."

"Very," Schulz said, getting to his feet. "Captain Mears is one of our best men. The plane shot down over the Bay of Biscay recently, to the world, carried a famous English actor, and a few Army officers. But I assure you that Whitehall would give much to have just two hours with any one of several of the unknown names aboard that ship—just two hours. One man knew more about what goes on in the Balkans than any other single human being, except the man you saved in Point Emma."

He walked forward and bent over the pilot. Burnham noticed that his stride was springy, his back straight. Across from him, Haman, gun in hand, sat like a relaxed mongrel bulldog, and looked as harmless. Steadily the plane droned on, and with similar mechanical perfection Burnham's brain analyzed the situation.

He was being brought to a heavily-guarded stronghold where he would meet two important agents smuggled in from a submarine, and General Montez. A complicated conspiracy involving the fire on the circus train, the presence of the plane, and the gathering of a large gang of men had resulted in releasing Schulz from the deportation train and getting him to that meeting, a free man. Schulz was undoubtedly a principal agent in the United States, perhaps the principal agent, now that the consulates and embassies of the Axis had been closed.

Never, perhaps, during the war had an American—adopted or otherwise—been faced with such an opportunity. Some way, somehow, he must find a way to save himself, and the information he had already gathered.

There was no sense in planning. He had no knowledge of the circumstances he would

be forced to meet. It probably was hopeless. He likely would be killed, or taken aboard the submarine, before another twenty-four hours had passed.

Schulz' voice took him out of his reverie.

"Captain Mears will tell a tale of being forced at the point of a gun to fly us, and then tell a lie about where he flew us," the ex-political boss was saying. The plane went into a glide, motors dying to half-speed. "And by the way, Herr Madlon, we, of course, know that you were a flyer during the last two years of World War One. For the moment, I want you to forget that an attempt was made on your life. I gave those orders, against my will."

"Why should they want me dead?" Burnham asked.

"As a lesson to other agents, most of whom have no loyalties," Schulz explained. "And as the great Rolph Burnham, famous trainer, traveled the country, the man who had pretended to take Axis orders, and indulged in counter-espionage, some of these weak men might be tempted to come to you for advice. You see?"

"I see." Burnham nodded. "Well, Mr. Schulz, if we are at our destination, I wish to say that it will be silly to have me tortured, or to kill me, or to keep me from returning to America. Resuming my business, how many of those traitorous agents I could expose! What work I could do!"

"As I said before," Schulz said, "that is just what I should say in your place."

HE WALKED forward again, and gazed through the transparent covering of the pilot's cockpit as the plane spiraled down for a landing. Soon it grated on the ground in a perfect landing, and braked gradually to a stop. Rolph could hear voices, and soon the big side door of the compartment was opened. A ring of dark faces topping slackly uniformed bodies gazed curiously over the floorboard as Haman untied Rolph's ankles.

"You couldn't get no place from here." Haman grinned in friendly fashion. "This is the devil of a business, ain't it? Kinda fun, though."

Two long planks were put into position, and Schulz led the way down. Rolph Burnham followed him, with Haman's gun in his back. Bringing up the rear was Captain Mears. His goggles had slipped down over his forehead, and he was trying industriously to blow his nose into a voluminous handkerchief. What could be seen of his face looked purplish in the light of a gasoline torch held by one of the dozen ragged retainers of General Montez. Ragged they might be, but all were armed with old-fashioned single-action rifles, and each had a machete strapped to his waist.

A more neatly uniformed young Mexican

who looked to be all Indian saluted Schulz. He was wearing a sword.

"This way, please," he said in accented English.

The little cavalcade straggled toward the lair of General Montez, and Rolph had ample time to look about him.

Ahead, up a slightly-inclined slope, was a sprawling *hacienda* built of 'dobe mud, the walls of which looked to be extremely thick. Heavy wooden shutters swung beside each window. On all sides of it that Burnham could see, the slope had been cleared, as though to give an attacking force no cover. A considerable distance to the left were rows of small tents, and in the cleared spaces between them sentries paced up and down. There were two large, crude frame buildings which looked like barracks, and a dozen scattered outbuildings of all sizes, some built of 'dobe and some of wood.

A hundred yards from the *hacienda*, on all sides apparently, the *monte* started—mesquite, a hundred sorts of bushes, towering ironwood trees. It was split here and there by narrow *breches*, and one wide, rough road wound through it.

The entire establishment was built on a sort of mesa which finally dropped steeply to the wooded, but partially-cleared terrain stretching away as far as the eye could see in the moonlight. Cattle grazed in the clearings, a herd of sheep was visible a considerable distance away, and some goats were tied near the sleeping troops.

A large corral held at least three hundred horses and some milch cows. As they came closer to the house, Burnham saw cultivated clearings stretching away to his right, the corn tall and ragged against the darker green of the *monte*.

It was like some feudal fortress, he thought, and he could understand how General Montez, if the rest of his province was loyal to him, could fight a good-sized army through the *monte*, and make a creditable last stand at the *hacienda*. Providing, of course, that the attackers were as primitively armed as Montez' men seemed to be.

The plane had landed on a wide dirt runway which had been cleared at the edge of the *monte*. Now Burnham saw that similar wide strips had been constructed on all four sides of the *hacienda*, surrounding it like a frame. They could have no other purpose than as landing strips, which was cause for thought.

Other cause for thought was the number of men stirring at even this pre-dawn hour. The dozen men who had crowded around the plane had scattered, but the place was sentried like an army camp. Flat-faced, high-cheek-boned Indians paced the four sides of the *hacienda* and two guards were at the open gates which led into the *patio* of the building.

Uplifted as Burnham was by curiosity and the exciting scent of danger in his nostrils, he saw no hope while he continued to try to find some hope. Even if his life was not immediately forfeit, the future stretched bleak and empty before him.

Lights streamed from three different sets of windows facing the large, stone-flagged *patio*, which had a well in the middle of it. An arcade surrounded the three sides which faced them as they entered, and under it, outside large double-doors, they stopped.

"Wait here, gentlemen," Schulz said calmly.

The young officer led Schulz into a hallway, where they disappeared. Captain Mears was leaning against the wall in deep shadow, as though ashamed to be seen at close range by Burnham. Haman, too, was silent, as though awed by the vastness of the hundred-foot square *patio*, and the heavy dirty gray building which surrounded it. There was the smell of cooking.

"If they don't give me a drink right soon, I'm goin' on the prowl on my own," Mears suddenly said, in a Texas drawl.

"You and me both, brother," Haman said soulfully, at which moment the officer appeared in the hall doorway.

"*El Capitaine* and the prisoner, please," he said crisply. Then, to Haman, "I will take you to your room, sir."

They walked up the hallway, lighted by an oil lamp, and the officer knocked on two double doors. A raucous answer in Spanish, and he threw the doors open. He stood aside, allowed Rolph Burnham and Captain Mears to enter, then closed them.

CHAPTER VI

TEXAS COURAGE



SEATED around an enormous fireplace with burning logs two feet thick and eight feet long were Schulz and three other men. Two of those men arose. The third, who looked like the late General von Hindenburg might have if he had had Indian blood in him, remained seated like a darkly brooding Buddha.

And one of the men who got to his feet caused Burnham to draw in his breath sharply.

That face, like Schulz', had adorned a thousand newspapers and magazines, and as many articles had been written about him in four years as had been written about Rolph Burnham during his entire career as a star. It was a square, not unkindly face, deeply lined and heavily weathered, and with shrewd tired eyes. Heavy black hair, parted on the side, was getting gray. Heavy jaw, short neck, stocky, athletic body.

That was Hugo Nurm, formerly colonel

in the German Army, Hitler's commanding officer in World War One, and now his personal Intelligence agent all over the world. Consul-General in four great nations, head and coordinator of German Intelligence and Secret Services wherever he was—here was an important part of the brain of Germany.

Quietly the three men stood there before the fire, eyeing Mears and Burnham steadily as they walked across the huge, roughly-furnished room. From his seat alongside one end of the fireplace, General Montez was a great scarred rock, and motionless as one. Little, piglike black eyes squinted through puffy lids, like shoe buttons set in pasty brown dough.

Burnham did not turn his head to get a good look at Mears. Rather it was flung back proudly, and he stared back with arrogance and curiosity at his captors.

The other stranger, he knew, must be Japanese. But to his inexperienced eye the slight touch of the East visible in his face might have just as well have been Chinese or Malayan or, for that matter, Indian. It was merely a hint of almond about the opaque, narrow black eyes. Otherwise, his ivory face was long and narrow, with a good-sized curved nose and a small, smiling mouth. Above horn-rimmed glasses his forehead was a little too wide and high for the rest of his face. Glossy black hair was parted in the middle, and he was dressed, like Nurm, in a dark, well-cut business suit.

It was Captain Mears who broke the silence. One long, stringy arm gestured at a bottle of *tequila* set on a huge rough-hewn oak table which was littered with the debris of food and tobacco, plus dirty glasses.

"I'm Captain Mears," he drawled, "and I'm like to die for a drink."

Schulz and Nurm and the other man smiled at each other as though to say, "These Americans."

"With your permission, General?" Schulz said smoothly, and Montez grunted assent.

Schulz poured two generous drinks in half-dirty glasses.

"General Montez, Mr. Nayaki and Colonel Nurm," he said, "may I present one of our best men, Captain Mears? And—Giovanni Madlon, professionally known as Rolph Burnham."

Nayaki bowed and mumbled and Nurm just bowed. Montez said nothing. Burnham glanced at the Mexican as he bowed. There were two purple patches on his face, one on each cheek, where a bullet had evidently passed through. His hair was cut in a short brush pompadour, a la Hindenburg, and the scars of a thousand battles and the cruelties of fifty years had left ugly marks on it.

Suddenly Burnham got an intuitive feeling that to Nayaki he was personally interesting, to Nurm he was merely a chessman on a board, and that General Montez al-

ready hated him with a personal hatred. If so, that might not be so good.

He said Mears drank, and Mears pushed back his helmet, revealing a small portion of thin, mouse-colored hair. His eyes were a light, steely gray, cold as an Arctic sea. He looked, Burnham thought, exactly like the fictional portraits he had read of professional killers along the Mexican border.

"I think," Nurm said slowly, passing his hand over his eyes wearily, "that we will take up the case of *Herr Madlon* tomorrow, Schulz." He turned to Nayaki. "I have decided that we should not leave until tomorrow night," he said. "From what little Schulz has told us, plus the presence of Madlon here, we must not be too hasty, and endeavor to cover all the ground."

"As you wish," Nayaki said in equally perfect English, and bowed.

There was no doubt who was boss here, Burnham thought. Well, here was a breathing space.

"You will make Mr. Madlon comfortable, General?" Nurm said as though being polite in giving orders to an underling, "And see that he is well guarded?"

The general's answer was a loud bark which might have come from a sea lion in pain. The double-doors opened immediately and the young Indian officer stood there, saluting. Then, surprisingly, General Montez rasped his commands in good English.

"This prisoner is to be taken to the cell," he rumbled. "Guarded day and night—one sentry at the door, another outside the entrance to the corridor. Treat him well, for the time being."

The officer saluted again. Nurm smiled, and gestured at the door.

"Good night, *Herr Madlon*," he said. "I would give myself much cause for thought before I slept, if I were you."

WITHOUT a word, Burnham turned and walked unhurriedly to the door.

"I got an idea," he heard Mears say behind him. "I've got a couple of hours and—"

His voice trailed away as Burnham followed the officer to the *patio*. At an order, two soldiers loitering there fell in behind him. They walked across the *patio* and down another hall, and he was ushered into a small room with barred window, two cots on which were tumbled, dusty blankets, a bucket, table and chair. The heavy door had a barred peep-hole, and two heavy bolts on the outside.

Without a word the officer slammed the door and bolted it. He gave the soldiers some rapid-fire orders in Spanish, and one of them followed him down the corridor.

Rolph sat down on the bed and smiled wryly. Less than three hours before he had been asleep in his stateroom on the circus

train. And now he was in an unknown part of Mexico, a prisoner of war.

Elbows on knees, chin in cupped hands, he thought fast and hard. His only hope was to play for time, to convince them that he was still a faithful agent of the Reich, the man who had been forced by circumstances to seem to be a counter-espionage agent. There seemed literally no hope of escaping from this fortress. As soon as dawn broke there would be hundreds of Montez soldiers about instead of just a few.

And the cold facts were that he undoubtedly could not convince some of the shrewdest and most experienced men in the enemy camp of anything. They would leave him with General Montez and Schulz for them to question. Death, probably after torture, would be the inevitable end, no matter what he said or did.

He did not know how long it had been when he heard unhurried steps coming down the hall. There was the slide of a chair as his guard outside the door got up. Mears' voice said something in Spanish. The bolts clanged, and the door opened. In it stood his guard, rifle in hand, and behind him Mears.

Then it seemed that a snake had flashed around the Mexican's neck. As Mears' hand clapped over the man's mouth, the Indian's eyes widened in panic, and a gurgling scream was muffled by Mears' hand. Then the Mexican's body went limp.

The dead man and his killer were inside the door. Burnham stood silently, literally unable to move or think. Mears peered out the door. He placed the chair with its back toward the end of the corridor. Then he dropped the dead body to the floor, took a blanket off the bed, flung it over the back of the chair, and picked up the body again. He placed it in the chair, back toward the end of the corridor.

Blood was oozing slowly from a knife wound opposite the heart, although the knife was still there. Mears removed it, and propped the dead soldier in a position which seemed natural, gun across the knees. As he finished, the pacing of the other guard outside the corridor entrance became more audible.

"What does this mean?" Burnham asked carefully.

The busy Texan grinned a wintry grin. "Think yuh're the only counter-espionage man in this war?" he snapped. "Take it easy until I get the other one. Can't take any chances. Got to kill 'em."

He strode up the corridor, toward the other guard. Then Rolph heard their voices as they strolled down the corridor together. Then a gasp and a thud, and Mears was dragging another body inside the door. Burnham helped carry the other corpse.

The transfigured Burnham straightened.

The gangling Texan came upright to face Rolph Burnham's eyes. Again that thin, cool grin widened his mouth, and a gleam came in the cold gray eyes.

"Lieutenant-Colonel O'Mara — Military Intelligence," he said.

"You take great risks for me," Burnham said.

"Why not? We've got great plans for you after your season is over."

Eye to eye the two men stood, and Mears — O'Mara — was as calm as one of his Texas plains.

"Yore presence aboard was a surprise, and this is all impromptu," he explained. "The rest of it — the hold-up of the deportation train and Schulz' escape, we knew about and let 'em get away with, because we wanted to know where Schulz was goin', see? He's been suspected as a secret agent for some time. You and yore show were somethin' new. The F.B.I. have the hold-up men in custody by now, we figgered, and the Mexican government would handle Schulz and whoever his pards were. Now, as soon as they find out about us, they'll hightail to the submarine."

"What do we do now?" Burnham cut in.

His eyes glowed with the heat of his thoughts. The brain of a circus man, trained for unexpected emergencies, was hammering away at a door that would not open.

"I tie yuh up and march to the ship, and some way we get to take off," O'Mara said calmly. "The few men up are eatin'. I think we can get away with it."

SUDDENLY something exploded in Burnham's mind and blew open that door.

"But listen!" he snapped, and the words came in a rush from his twisted mouth.

O'Mara listened, and even his iron façade cracked a little as he breathed:

"It's worth tryin', even if it fails!"

He was throwing off leather coat, goggles and helmet.

"I kept them things on and used that handkerchief to cover my face because I didn't know what I was goin' to figger out to get yuh out of here, and thought mebbe I'd stay behind and let yuh take off alone — pretend yuh'd escaped, see? I told 'em I wanted to see yuh alone because mebbe I could make yuh talk freer to me than yuh would to them."

And that was not all he said. The two men's minds worked as only minds can which have faced life-and-death crises many times before. Soon Rolph Burnham had on helmet, goggles and coat, with the goggles down over his forehead. The handkerchief was in his hand. O'Mara gave him last instructions, Burnham nodded, and walked unhurriedly down the deserted corridor.

It had been decided that it would look sus-

picious if O'Mara removed his belt, holster and pistol, so Burnham was armed only with the still-bloody knife.

As he strolled across the *patio*, only one man eyed him, from the door of the kitchen. As he approached the two guards at the main entrance of the *patio*, he started manipulating the handkerchief in front of his face, snorting as though to clear his nasal passages. His other hand was in his pocket, gripping the knife.

He was almost the exact height of O'Mara, although only lean where O'Mara was thin. One blank-faced soldier was planted squarely in the entrance. The other leaned nonchalantly against the wall.

Rolph gave a little gesture toward the plane, and started to walk past the staring sentry. The man's hand caught his arm. Burnham's hand tightened on the knife. He stared imperiously into the muddy eyes, then dropped the knife in his pocket and with that hand struck the Indian's arm from his shoulder.

A flood of language poured from the soldier against the wall. He strode forward, haranguing his companion. Burnham forced himself to turn his back to them both, and walk an endless distance, without hurry.

Then he glanced around. The second Indian was evidently demonstrating to the man who had stopped Burnham that it was their business who came in, not who went out.

Every second was a year as Rolph Burnham entered the plane and walked forward. He studied the instrument board, and sought out the self-starter buttons which O'Mara had described. Circumstances might arise whereby he would have to try to take the big plane off himself. Then he lifted the pilot's seat and found the Garand rifle O'Mara had said would be there. This done, he hunched down until only his eyes and the upper part of his head could be seen through the transparent plastic covering of the cockpit.

And waited. Waited an infinity of time.

CHAPTER VII MEXICAN ROUNDUP



IN ALL his life Rolph Burnham had never been in such mental torture. They were his plans, but O'Mara had to carry them out, and he felt helpless and a slacker, lying there while the Intelligence officer carried the load.

Would he get by those guards? Undoubtedly not. Quietly O'Mara had said that he probably would have to shoot both guards, and if the Japanese and German agents put up a fight, hope to shoot them all and run for it. Burnham had a

good idea that the Texan could handle his .38 with speed and precision.

Then he gave what was almost a sob of relief. For he saw Schulz, Nayaki and Nurm coming out of one of the side entrances of the *hacienda*. Burnham closed the door between cockpit and baggage compartment, and coiled himself at the base of the pilot's seat, out of sight.

Soon O'Mara's voice was audible.

"All right, gentlemen, here's my proposition," he was saying. "I'll prove to yuh with a Garand rifle that this secret plastic is absolutely bullet-proof. When thousands of these planes are over Europe, yuh can't shoot them down, but at least yuh can have the use of the plastic for yore own planes. I know the formula is easy to discover by an analysis of the material, otherwise we wouldn't be ordered to destroy all planes after a crack-up. So I give yuh samples, right from this plane!"

"If what you say is true," Nurm said slowly, "you will enjoy an even higher status with us than you do now, Captain."

"The heck with that," jeered Mears-O'Mara. "I'm not in this business out of loyalty. If I was, I'd be loyal to the United States. I'm in it for dough. That's what makes me a good man. How much is there in it for me?"

"Ten thousand now, ninety thousand within a week if the material is as you say," Nurm said calmly.

"The same from the Imperial Japanese Government," Nayaki said softly.

"All right," O'Mara said. "Let's get aboard."

"Why get aboard?" came Schulz' cultivated voice.

"The stuff is used as a linin' for the plane," O'Mara explained.

"Even so," Schulz said quietly, "I see no reason for all of us to get aboard."

"Because I say so!" snapped O'Mara. "Rolph!"

But already Burnham was crawling through the cockpit door, Garand in hand. The crack of O'Mara's pistol rang out, and there was a cry from Schulz. A second later, Burnham's Garand was covering two men upright, and Schulz on the ground.

"Get aboard!" Burnham commanded. "In two seconds I shoot. O'Mara! The guards!"

The two soldiers at the *patio* gates were running forward. Burnham's gun chattered and dropped them both, nor did they move again. Men were running out of the *patio* now.

Burnham's gun spoke again just above the heads of the stunned foreign agents. O'Mara's gun jabbed into Nurm's back. The two men started up the plank, while O'Mara picked up Schulz' big body and heaved it over the floorboard.

"Have to leave it to you," he gasped.

"They don't dare shoot for fear of hittin' their men, but they might!"

He ran forward to the cockpit. Hundreds of Montez' men seemed to be running toward the plane. Burnham herded his men to the rear, and with one hand slammed the compartment door shut. Schulz was lying in a slowly-widening pool of blood from a wound in his side. The motors roared, the ship taxied forward, then turned sharp left. Tense and watchful, Rolph Burnham stood in the center of the compartment while Nayaki and Nurm, faces impassive, sank to one of the side seats. Burnham dared not attempt to tie them, nor attend to Schulz.

A rain of bullets tore through the compartment and over and around the ship as it roared down the runway at right angles to one on which the ship had landed. The ship took the air, and drummed steadily upward. No word or movement came from the four men. It was as though no one, including Burnham, could comprehend the complete significance of what was happening.

Ten minutes later, the ship leveled off. Lieutenant-Colonel O'Mara crawled through the cockpit door and strolled forward as though on a routine flight.

"Thanks to the automatic pilot," he drawled. "We can now tend to the boys."

AS HE bandaged Schulz' deep flesh wound, and expertly tied the wrists of all three prisoners behind them, Burnham stood watchfully beside him. The Intelligence officer proceeded to bring him up to date.

"We land at Fort Bliss, just outside El Paso," he said. "Been on the radio, and Fort Bliss has been in touch with Mexico City. We'll deliver Nurm and Nayaki to Mexico, but they're happy to have our fellows cooperate in the questionin'. And Montez and his boys better get ready for a battle, because troops will soon be on the way."

"I feel like a fifth wheel," Burnham said wistfully. "All the time I have been a—creature of circumstances."

"You did the thinkin'," O'Mara said crisply. "And that's what business needs."

"Right ye arre, laddy!" Schulz said, relapsing into the professional Irishman. "And it's plannin' to use me brains Oi am afther Oi'm a prisoner."

"Goin' to talk, eh?" O'Mara said. "They had quite a scheme, Rolph. Montez was goin' to make a raid across the Border, a la Pancho Villa, to stir up trouble between Mexico and the United States, and as a diversion. Under cover of it, the Axis was goin' to slip a lot of saboteurs across the Border to replace the lads we caught that came off a submarine."

"You chaps had better think fast, too,"

Schulz said in his ordinary speech. He wagged his finger at the stolid, brooding German and the impassive Japanese. "You go to Mexico City. I trust the Mexicans will not be too—er—direct in their methods if you *don't* talk."

The German shrugged his heavy shoulders. In some curious way he seemed beaten—beaten not because of that night; beaten because he had been taking a beating for a long time.

Nayaki had not yet been tied up. Suddenly he came erect.

"Down, Nayaki," snapped Burnham.

O'Mara, having finished tying Nurm's wrists behind his back, straightened quickly.

"I think not," Nayaki smiled, and deliberately walked toward Burnham's Garand.

O'Mara jerked out his gun, signaling Burnham.

"One more step, Nayaki!" he warned.

Still smiling, Nayaki continued his steady progress forward. O'Mara's gun spat a single bullet. Nayaki staggered, spun half-around, recovered himself, and took two more paces forward.

"Tried to just wing him," O'Mara said, leaping forward. "We want him alive!"

Slowly Nayaki crumpled, like an empty sack.

O'Mara dropped beside him, and looked at the wound through the middle of his back.

"Dead," he said briefly as he straightened. "Nothin' on earth would have made him talk, anyhow, probably. Wanted to be shot."

"You have the craziest allies, Hugo!" Schulz said.

Nurm, sunk in bitter reverie, did not answer. The whole thing might have been a dream, as far as any visible effect it had on the German. Schulz asked for a cigarette, and Rolph lighted it and thrust it into his mouth.

"I've got so much to tell Uncle Sam!" the ex-political boss said.

"I hope you don't mind being tortured," Rolph Burnham suggested. "Remember saying that to me?"

"Indeed I do. And I remember how hard you tried to convince me that you were still a loyal agent of Germany. And now I'm going to convince Uncle Sam of the same thing about myself!"

He smiled his wide, thin smile.

"Military Intelligence, eh, Captain? And a good job. When I get through talking, much as I hate to hurt Hugo's feelings, don't be surprised if the Government appoints me a colleague of yours!"

"To tell you the truth," O'Mara said, before returning to the cockpit, "I don't think anything about you would surprise any Government!"

In a crisp golden dawn the ship took a

long time to land in the thin air at five-thousand-feet-high El Paso, but as soon as it had ceased rolling, three big sedans were alongside it, and a swarm of F.B.I. whisked the prisoners away.

When it had taxied to the line, and O'Mara had cut the motors, his iron façade fell away for the first time. He grinned warmly, and they clambered out.

"You and me have somethin' to celebrate," he said, "and we'll need some drinks before we start tellin' everybody and his brother the details. How about it?"

"That's what I'm here for!"

IT WAS a familiar voice to Rolph Burnham, and his own grin was as warm as O'Mara's as Inspector Dan Ruffing pushed his way through the small crowd of curious mechanics.

As Burnham shook hands with the only friend he had in the world, except Crowney Young, and introduced O'Mara, Ruffing seemed bubbling over with delight. Having discovered that O'Mara and Burnham were

familiar with the deportation train plant, he chuckled.

"The devil of it was that those hunyaks on the train didn't let me in on the plant, and let me go crazy wondering why nobody tried to stop the hold-up! When we found out that Rolph here had been kidnaped, apparently, the shoe was on the other foot. We all thought we'd outsmarted ourselves."

"I suppose the hold-up men are all in custody," O'Mara said.

"And a hundred agents on a hundred different trails the boys told about when they started to sing." Ruffing nodded.

"Wait till the three we brought in start," O'Mara drawled.

"Even immigration inspectors will be busy then." Ruffing grinned. "But this is a day off and I still haven't had that drink with Rolph. And you, now, of course, Colonel. And there's no show today. So Rolph, me lad, how about getting plastered for the first time in your life?"

"If there is to be a first time," Burnham said meticulously, "today will be it."

COMING NEXT ISSUE

SPECTERS WALK BESIDE ME

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Spence was shooting
when Big Joe's face
came into view again

Guinea Pig Money

By BENTON BRADEN

Blackie thought he had a good racket if his experiment worked—but he based his trust on faulty reasoning!

PHIL SPENCE, sergeant-of-detectives, was red-faced, smarting, as he came from the commissioner's office. Spence, with other detectives, had received a blistering from the commissioner because a series of crimes, ranging from a snatch to hit-and-run cases, had gone unsolved.

The newspapers had landed on the department, and the commissioner had taken it out on the dicks. Spence was sore. He

had been working his head off, trying to get leads on some of those cases.

He went on down to his office, recognized the big, fat, round-faced lady who was sitting by his desk. Mrs. Moriarty had been the victim of a hit-and-run artist. She was a loud-mouthed woman and she had expressed her opinion in brightly colored phrases when the cops hadn't been able to grab the man who hit her.

Spence figured he was in for it again.

Mrs. Moriatty could lay it on in harsher terms than the commissioner. But this was one case on which Spence had a good lead and he knew he would have that driver in a few hours.

"Good morning, Mrs. Moriatty." Spence spoke quickly to beat her to the punch. "Now I can promise you that we'll have the man within twenty-four hours. When we get him we'll make an example of him that will keep others from doing the same thing. So you just give us twenty-four hours more—and we'll have your man in a cell."

Mrs. Moriatty didn't react as Spence had expected. She didn't raise her shrill voice and bawl him out for not showing her results instead of making promises. Her attitude seemed restrained, almost demure.

"Sergeant," she said slowly, "I've been thinking things over. After all, I wasn't really injured in that accident. I didn't have a single bone broken. I really wasn't hurt at all."

"No thanks to the guy that hit you," Spence said shortly. "He smacked you and rolled you into the gutter, didn't he? Then stepped on it and got away as fast as he could. You might have been laid up in a hospital for months. We're going to make it hot for that bird—whether you were hurt bad or not."

Mrs. Moriatty didn't show any enthusiasm. She rolled her eyes a little.

"Sergeant," she said, "I just wish you'd—drop that case. I don't want to press the charges. The way things have worked out—I'd rather drop the whole thing."

Spence stared at her. He knew what he was up against now. A fix! The man who had hit her had become frightened. He was afraid he might be caught later. So he had sneaked around and squared things with her, hoping he could hush the whole matter up. Spence began to get a bit mad.

"So you want to drop the case, do you, Mrs. Moriatty? Yesterday you were in here, reading the riot act to us and yelling for blood. Now you're doing a complete about-face. I know the answer to that. This guy made a contact with you, didn't he? I'll bet he slipped you fifty or a hundred bucks to make you change your tune. Isn't that a good guess?"

Mrs. Moriatty suddenly smiled broadly. She opened her mouth and spoke loudly—but not in vituperation.

"I'll say he did!" she yelled exultantly. "That guy came across and he came across in a big way. Look!" She brought her hand out from her purse and waved a big roll of currency. "Five hundred bucks, Spence. That's more dough than I ever saw in one piece in my whole life. Five hundred smackers he gave me—and me with hardly a bruise on me. Soft, huh?

I'd let him brush a fender off on me every day for that kind of money."

Spence frowned unhappily. He knew he was going to pick that driver up, but it might be hard to get a conviction if Mrs. Moriatty behaved this way before a jury.

"I told you we were going to land this man, Mrs. Moriatty," he said sternly. "When we do we'll expect you to help us prosecute him."

"Prosecute him?" Mrs. Moriatty's big body shook with laughter. "You think I'm crazy? You think I'm going to prosecute Santa Claus? Well, you got another guess coming. This guy just lost his head, that's all. He must really be a pretty nice man. He said he didn't care so much about himself but he was trying to keep his wife and family from being disgraced."

"I get it," Spence said in disgust. "Before he gave you that five hundred he made you promise to lay down on the case. He made you—"

"He didn't!" she denied. "I didn't even see him. I don't know who he is. I just received a big brown envelope through the mail and it had this five hundred bucks in twenty-dollar bills in it—and a note."

"You've got the note with you?"

"Sure. You can read it if you want to."

Spence took the sheet of paper she handed him. It was written in longhand and the penmanship was very good. It was mostly a sob story.

THE writer had a loving wife and three babies and he didn't want them to suffer because of his thoughtlessness in running away from the accident. The letter concluded by hoping the enclosed five hundred dollars would square things. There was a promise of more money if Mrs. Moriatty's injuries proved to be more serious than newspaper accounts had indicated.

"You can see how I feel about it now, Sergeant," Mrs. Moriatty said, clutching her five hundred in great satisfaction. "Why should I pour it on a guy that tried to do the right thing? So far as I'm concerned he never hit me at all."

"We're going to get that lad!" Spence said flatly. "We're going to prosecute him and send him to jail."

Mrs. Moriatty flushed angrily. "Well, you can count me out!" she declared loudly. "I hope you never catch him, you bungling flatfoot!"

With that she got up and flounced out of the office.

Spence smiled grimly. He knew he was going to have the last word in the case. He had a witness that he had kept under cover. That witness had identified the hit-and-run car as an old blue coupé. And he got the last two numbers on the license tag.

With that dope it was no more than a matter of routine to find that driver. They'd have him any minute now.

It was just an hour later when Logan, one of Spence's assistants, marched a heavy-set man with a mean face into the office.

"Here he is, Sergeant," Logan announced. "Your hit-and-run artist. Name of Dan Steffen. Works in a mill as a laborer. We caught him in that same old blue coupé he was driving when he hit Mrs. Moriatty."

"How about it, Steffen," Spence asked. "You admit it?"

Steffen's face twisted.

"Yeah, I admit it," he grunted.

"Why didn't you stop after you hit Mrs. Moriatty?" Spence questioned.

"Because I was in for it either way. I had a pretty good snootful when I had the accident. I figured I wouldn't get any more for a hit-and-run than I would for drunken driving."

"Then you sat down and wrote Mrs. Moriatty a letter—trying to square things?"

Steffen stared a bit stupidly.

"I didn't write no letter to nobody," he said sullenly.

Spence blinked at that answer. It didn't add up. If Steffen had sent that money to Mrs. Moriatty he would most certainly admit it and claim it as a mitigating fact in his favor.

"You married, Steffen?"

"No."

"Are you in a position to help Mrs. Moriatty out, pay her damages for the injuries she suffered?"

"Nah." Steffen shook his head. "I ain't worked for three weeks. I only got seven dollars to my name."

"But you own and operate a car."

"I bought that car in a junk yard four years ago and fixed it up with spare parts so it would run. It ain't worth fifty bucks. Tires are about gone."

Spence was thoughtful for a moment. Then he leaned forward and said,

"Sit down in that chair, Steffen. Take that pen there and write out a statement of the accident and what you did afterward."

Steffen obeyed. He screwed his face into a painful expression and wrote awkwardly and with great effort. When he had finished and signed his name, Spence took the statement and read it. Every other word was misspelled. The handwriting did not even faintly resemble the neat script in the letter Mrs. Moriatty had received with the five hundred dollars of conscience money.

Spence questioned Steffen some more and then had him taken away.

"This is one for the book, Logan," he

said to his assistant, after they had discussed the case. "There is no doubt whatever that Steffen is the man who actually ran Mrs. Moriatty down and then beat it. Steffen couldn't have written that letter Mrs. Moriatty received. We know he didn't have any five hundred dollars to donate to her."

"You could take one look at Steffen," Logan agreed, "and know he'd never donate five C's to anybody—even if he had it. Now who could have been interested enough in that case to have parted with so much good dough?"

"Some smart lad, Logan. Some smart lad with a smart purpose."

Mrs. Moriatty started out on her spending spree the next morning. In great good humor, smiling from ear to ear, she went from one store to another. Every time she made a purchase she pulled out her roll with a flourish and paid with twenty-dollar bills. She had parted with almost three hundred dollars when she decided she had better save some of it for a possible rainy day. So at last she went into the Corner Savings Bank and deposited two hundred dollars.

Mrs. Moriatty didn't notice that she had been trailed during her journey by a slender, dark-complexioned man in a checked suit. Or that after she returned home that man took up a position across and down the street, from where he could observe the entrance to the flat building in which she lived.

She wouldn't expect, of course, that the donor of that five hundred would have the slightest interest in how she spent the money. That wouldn't have anything to do with his conscience.

NOT long after Mrs. Moriatty returned home Sergeant Spence came strolling along that same street. From his manner he seemed to be just whiling away the time. He showed no particular interest in anything until he came abreast of the slender, black-eyed man. Then he stopped. His eyes lighted in recognition.

"Well, if it isn't Blackie Sturn," he said pleasantly. "Imagine meeting you here. Haven't seen you, Blackie, since I picked you up for a stick-up more than a year ago. Too bad I couldn't make it stick."

"Blackie" didn't smile, didn't seem to enjoy the meeting.

"You couldn't make it stick because I wasn't guilty," he retorted. "You can't stick a guy when he makes a habit of stickin' strictly to his own business."

"And just what does your business happen to be at the moment, Blackie!" Spence asked.

"I'm not doin' anything right now. I'm

out of work. Lookin' for a job."

"Are Big Joe Hamlin and Sniffy Blade out of work, too? I suppose you're still palling around with them?"

"I ain't see either of them for weeks," Blackie denied.

"I've got half a notion to pinch you, Blackie," Spence said. "Just for old times' sake."

"You ain't got a thing on me! You can't pinch me for doin' nothing."

"I don't know about that, Blackie," Spence said easily. "Now I could pinch you for hit-and-run."

Blackie's eyes flicked just a little. "What hit-and-run?"

"A Mrs. Moriatty, Blackie. She lives just across the street. She was knocked down by a driver who kept right on going. And here I find you standing across the street, almost as though you were—watching."

"I ain't watching nothing," Blackie said quickly. "I never heard of no dame with a name like that."

"Then you're acting very peculiarly, Blackie." Sergeant Spence's tone changed. "Because you've been tailing her around all morning. You watched her as she went into certain stores. You watched her make a deposit at a bank. There's no use disputing it because one of my men picked you up and watched you."

"That's a joke," Blackie said. "It just happened by accident if I did. Why would I be tailing around a dame I never heard of?"

"To see how she spent that dough that you sent her, Blackie. Mrs. Moriatty received an anonymous letter in the mail. In it was enclosed five hundred dollars in twenty-dollar bills. It seems that the man who ran her down was stricken with remorse and wanted to square things—and save his own hide."

"When did that accident happen?" Blackie asked quickly.

"Last Tuesday. About four in the afternoon."

"Tuesday, huh?" Blackie thought for a few seconds. "You can't hang that on me. I haven't even got a car. And I can prove that I was in a certain dump drinking beer all that afternoon. I never hit that Mrs. Moriatty."

"I know that, Blackie. Because we've already got the guy that did the hit-and-run job. But we've found out that he didn't send Mrs. Moriatty that five hundred dollars. Somebody else sent it. Now that was a puzzler. Somebody who had nothing to do with the accident sent Mrs. Moriatty that money. Why?"

"It was some nut that read about the accident," Blackie suggested.

"Or some smart guy, Blackie. Some

smart guy who got the impression, from the newspaper accounts, that the hit-and-run artist would never be caught. And saw an opportunity to use Mrs. Moriatty as a guinea pig. The guy who had that money suspected that it might be very hot, possibly marked, and he got this bright idea.

"If Mrs. Moriatty could spend that dough in the stores," continued Spence, "deposit part of it in a bank, without having the F.B.I. come down on her, he could be pretty sure that he could spend the rest of the money freely."

Blackie was trying to smile unconcernedly, but his smile was tight and drawn.

"What money?"

"My guess is that it was the twenty-five grand that was paid over by Edward Markham when his twelve-year-old son was snatched. Markham played ball with the snatchers, didn't report to the cops until he got his son back. As a matter of fact he was on the level about the money. The twenty-dollar bills he handed over weren't marked at all. But you didn't know that, Blackie. You and Big Joe and Sniffy. You didn't dare spend that dough until you were sure it was okay. So you used Mrs. Moriatty to—"

"You're nuts, Spence! You can't pin that job on us!"

"I think I can, Blackie, now that I know who did the job. Little Eddie Markham is a pretty smart kid. The three of you wore masks all the time you were in his presence. But he had you tabbed for size pretty well."

"There are thousands of guys about my size."

"You and Big Joe and Sniffy had slits in your masks for your eyes and mouths, didn't you? Little Eddie could see your mouths—and your teeth when you talked. He said the big man had two prominent gold fillings at the left side of his mouth. The tallest man had very yellow teeth with one that was almost black in the center. How about you, Blackie? You're the slender man. How about that lower plate of yours that keeps bouncing up on you when you talk? It stands out like a—"

BLACKIE's hand moved. At first Spence thought he was reaching for a gun but Blackie's hand went up above his head in an odd gesture. And Spence, in spite of the fact that he had thought Blackie was alone in the street, knew it was a signal to someone. Spence caught that arm as it came down, spun Blackie around, hugged him tight so he couldn't use his arms. Then Spence looked up the street.

The help was coming from a car and it was coming fast. Spence saw the face of the man who was leaning out of the car.

It was "Big Joe" Hamlin. Big Joe was bringing a gun over to get in position for a shot. Spence jumped into a stairway, dragging Blackie with him. He got out his gun and quickly tapped Blackie over the head.

Spence flattened against the wall of the areaway, held his gun ready to shoot, propping Blackie before him.

He saw the hood of the car appear. He was shooting when Big Joe's face came into view again. Big Joe shot too and his lead tore into the stairs in front of Spence. Blackie slid slowly to the steps. Logan, who had been planted across the street, was taking a hand in it. Another dick, stationed on down the street, was in action too. The

car went on by. Spence moved to the sidewalk and emptied his gun.

He saw a tire blow out. The car weaved crazily and caromed into a truck. Big Joe and Sniffy had had enough. They had their hands up as they staggered down to the pavement. Big Joe's right arm was hanging awkwardly. Sniffy took two steps, then dropped to his knees, and stayed there.

Spence dragged Blackie out from the stairway entrance. Logan had run up to the car to take charge of Big Joe and Sniffy.

"Not bad, not bad," Spence muttered as he shook life back into Blackie. "We've cracked two cases at once, one big one and one little one. Even the commissioner can't squawk on that."



Impromptu Sleuth Ronald Wilson has magic in his bag of tricks when he tackles a baffling murder mystery in DEATH BEFORE DEFENSE, a gripping complete novelet by W. T. BALLARD

COMING IN THE NEXT ISSUE!

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STAR BLADES!**



4 for 10¢



Slight Touch of Satan

By C. S. MONTANYE

Sports writer Johnny Castle tries to protect famous ex-jockey Eddie Ring—and steps right into a diabolical murder maze of race-track bookies, criminal syndicates and notorious gangsters!

CHAPTER I TRIGGER MORTIS



HE semi-final came up after the main fracas—to make the exiting easier. But most of the cash customers, bored by the time the main bout concluded, began filtering out.

"Cauliflower Acres," or the "Land of Dreams," as I sometimes referred to Madison Square Garden in the sonnets I wrote for the *Orbit*, had a gallery

of around twelve thousand that night. Which made the gate approximately forty grand.

I left the press department and shoved along with the others bound for the cool night air.

The star go hadn't been much. A couple of second-rate welters had traded leather without a knockdown. There had been a minimum of gore. Which, of course, hadn't set well with the fans who liked eyes gouged out and faces torn apart.

There was grumbling all around me.

I issued out on Eighth Avenue, still hemmed in by the mob, and thinking about Harvey's Chop House around the corner, when a hand came up and grabbed my arm.

"Mr. Castle! Just a minute—"

The party who put on the stop didn't scale an inch over five feet in his nude feet. If he weighed a hundred and ten pounds, dripping wet, the scale was screwy. He had a wrinkled, young-antique pan, and a couple of worried eyes.

Also, he was perfumed with the rare, ripe odor of bottled goods.

I recognized him as Eddie Ring, an ex-jockey who, the year previous, had been ruled off the turf forever. The judges had gotten tired of setting him down. Eddie was an expert when it came to whaling heck out of a horse with one hand and choking him to death with the other.

He had plenty of pull, but it wasn't the right kind!

Yet, the kid had been one of the best jocks the hide ovals had ever known. His judge of pace was beautiful.

He had a pair of unequaled hands, a daring in the saddle.

When he rode honest, he had brought in winners that looked like dray horses anywhere from the start to the four-furlong marker.

I was really fond of the little tosspot.

Once I had written quite a piece about Eddie Ring. It was the day after he had piloted Reggie Allerton's great bay colt, Sir Rodney, first under the wire in one of the Belmont classics.

And that after Sir Rodney had been practically knocked to his knees as he was leaving the gate!

"Can I see you a minute?" Eddie's straight Bourbon voice shook a little. He looked scared to death. "Any place! But—quick! I've got a tail on me!"

We ebbed out to the curb. Cabs came up in a long line.

I didn't ask questions. I opened the door of the nearest taxi, pushed Eddie in and followed.

"Uptown, driver. Lenox Hill Apartments."

Eddie took a gander through the back pane before he relaxed with a sigh.

"I think we slipped him."

"What goes, kid?"

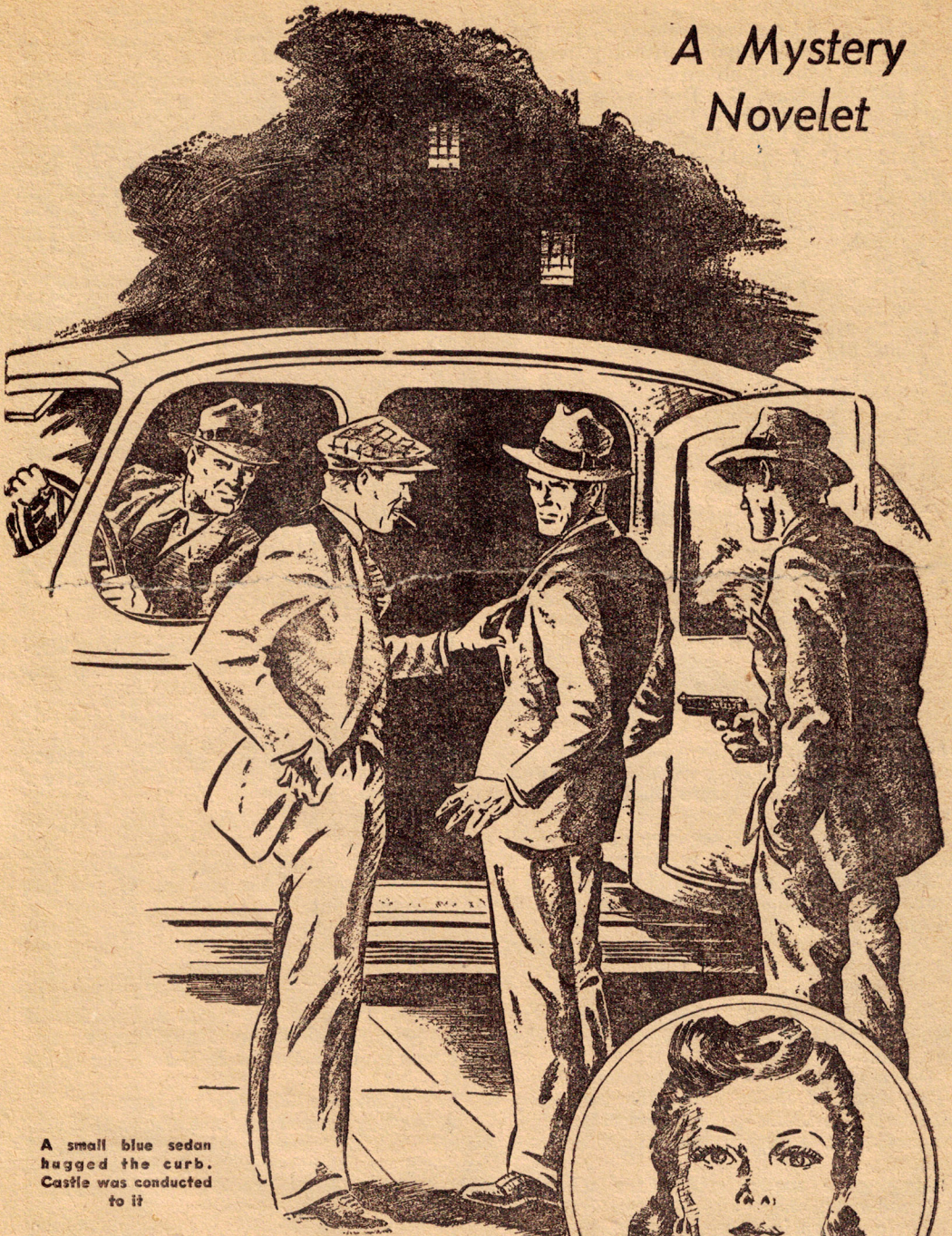
He twisted around. His teeth began to chatter like a couple of castanets. Now that he had shaken the one following him, the reaction left him jittery.

"Duke Kimball—somebody gunned him not thirty minutes ago!" He husked the words out, shivering. "I—I stopped in to see him! He was stiff and I ducked. There was a car in front of his place! Some guy got out and trailed me—"

I sat up straighter.

The Duke Kimball mentioned happened to be the trainer for the same wealthy Reginald Allerton who owned Sir Rodney. Kim-

A Mystery Novelet



A small blue sedan
hugged the curb.
Castle was conducted
to it

LIBBY HART

ball was the turf's leading trainer. What Eddie Ring told me represented news—important news for anyone drawing weekly wages from a metropolitan newspaper.

In his own way, the Duke was as well known as the Brooklyn Dodgers, only nobody ever called him a bum.

"Hold it!" I grabbed the kid's arm. "Where was Kimball bumped, what's the address?"

Eddie spilled and I told the hackie to pull to the curb.

"You're leaving!"

Eddie's tone had a touch of hysteria when he saw me reach for the door handle.

I spoke fast.

"Look, kid. You go up there and wait. Apartment Four F. I've got something to nose into. I'll be back as soon as possible. Roll, bud," I directed the driver, handing him a couple of bucks. "Take this gentleman to where I told you. Get going."

Then I cut across the avenue, flagged a southbound cab and hopped aboard.

TEN minutes later the clock wheeled up to the Hotel Craven, a small hotel in the West Forties. I knew it well. Patronized by stage and sporting people, the Craven was managed by Hal Bernard, an old friend of mine.

I recognized a police prowler car further up the street. That meant the cops were already on the job. One of them, an Ed Wheeler, who ran with the well-known Homicide Squad, captained by my old friend and enemy, Fred Mullin, was in the lobby when I went through.

I made like I didn't see him and headed for the single elevator in the rear.

"Mr. Kimball's floor," I said to the elevator. At the same time I handed him a bill and that got service.

"The cops are up there, mister!" the operator wheezed.

"So what?"

He didn't have an answer on tap. He stopped the lift at the fifth floor and slid the door open.

"Down the hall—to the left, mister."

The door of Duke Kimball's two-room suite was open. Detective Larry Hartley, and toothpick, were propped up against the jamb.

Larry gave me a cold stare when I leathered over.

"You can't go in there, Castle," he said. "On account—"

He stopped when the medical examiner, bag in hand, breezed out. He was Doc Sterling. Once a month I played poker with him. Just to keep on the right side I let him win a pot or two and that pleased him no end.

The doc was a fiend for breaking even, if he couldn't show a profit.

"Hello, Johnny. Game Friday?"

"I said 'yes,' took advantage of the break and walked in.

Captain Mullin, with a couple of assistants, were in the center of a small living room, kicking the ball of conversation around. Mullin, a short, stocky little guy, had pale, suspicious eyes and a jaw that looked as if it had been made from stuff out of a scrap drive. Once I had made a monkey of him in the *Orbit*, and the captain had never forgotten.

He liked me the same as the Nazi army does a Russian winter!

"What's yours, Castle?" Mullin broke away from the group and got in front of me. "Don't hand me any of that newspaper-pass stuff. You're a sports writer. This is murder!"

"Kimball happened to train race-horses," I said. "Skinners come under the heading of sports, I believe."

I could have bitten off my tongue. Mullin snapped that up in a hurry. "So you know Kimball's dead? Who told you? I had a faint idea this was official police business, hadn't been released yet. What do you do—consult fortune-tellers?"

"Possibly."

I tried to make it sound light and whimsical, but I felt like a dope caught in my own booby trap.

The lids came down over Mullin's glinting eyes.

"You'd better stop down at Headquarters tomorrow, Castle. I think I'd like to have a little chat with you."

"Sure, sure. Meanwhile," I said, "I'll just smell around."

"You'd be closer to right," Mullin said from the corner of his mouth, "if you left the 'around' out."

I let that ride and took a glance at the place. The living room was typically Hotel Craven. Three-piece upholstered suite, regulation pictures on the wall, radio cabinet in a corner. Telephone on a stand. I noticed it was a private telephone. Its exchange number was under celluloid in the center of its dial.

I went on into the bedroom beyond.

A big cop leaned against the wall there. He didn't pay much attention to me. I stopped on the other side of the threshold. The bedroom looked as if a cyclone had hit it.

There was blood all over the place, furniture knocked down, a general upheaval. Duke Kimball had evidently put up a better fight than the smackers I had looked at, such a short time previous, at the Garden!

The trouble was it had all been in vain.

The Duke was reposing on the disordered bed. He was in what was left of dark green pajamas. There was a bullet-hole in the side of his head so big you could have sailed

a freighter through it. And his face wasn't pretty. The killer had gone to work on it, probably with the butt of his gun, and with a perfect score.

Nobody in Kimball's family would have recognized him!

The whole set-up had a slight touch of Satan in it—a fury both demoniacal and terrible.

Beside the bed, I stared down on the Duke. Trigger mortis had set in, but that didn't prevent me from getting a gander at the gold wrist-watch Kimball wore.

I leaned over and saw the watch had stopped at exactly twenty-two minutes after ten o'clock.

Then, with a wrench at my stomach, I turned away and went back to the living room.

"What's the angle, Captain?" I asked Mullin.

"See your fortune-teller."

I did better than that.

In his office, off the lobby downstairs, I lapeled Hal Bernard. He was a big lug, six feet two, strong as an ox. I noticed he was drying a handkerchief on the window-sill.

"This is terrible. You know how murders kick back on hotel trade, Johnny. Now I suppose you want all the details for your paper."

"Who found Kimball?"

"One of the bellboys. Kid named Andy Garson. He took ice-water to Kimball every night at ten-thirty."

"You're sure about the time?"

"Tonight," Hal said, "Andy tells me he was about five minutes late. Why? Is that important?"

"Everything's important in a murder case. How about the elevator operator? Did he take anyone up, or bring anybody down, that struck him as being suspicious?"

BERNARD rubbed his chin and shook his head. "I haven't had time to check with him. The police asked a lot of questions before they let him go."

The door opened and Hartley lounged in.

"The captain wants to see you again, Mr. Bernard."

I said so-long to Hal and took to the street. The morgue cart was at the front door. I hoofed over to the *Orbit* office and found Bill Jamison still around.

Bill handled the mystery stories for the sheet. I passed him what details I had on the Kimball murder, he jotted them down and looked thoughtful.

"Funny this should happen on the eve of the mayor's inspired investigation of race-track bookies, syndicates and the like. Or is it?"

"I wouldn't know," I said, and took another taxi up to my place.

CHAPTER II

TIME: 10:27



OT having my key I had to ring the bell.

I expected Eddie to open the door. Instead, a blond doll with delft-blue eyes, earrings, a lip-sticky mouth and perfume answered the buzz.

She was rather small. She had a good figure and was a reasonable facsimile of a hot spot chorine from the top of her bleached hair to the stilt heels of her little open-toed sandals.

Blue eyes drilled me.

"What's yours?" she asked, and her voice had a touch of palsy.

"New maid?" I made it sound cheerful.

The eyes kept on boring me.

"If you're looking for Mr. Castle—the party who lives here—he isn't home."

"He is—now," I said, sliding past her.

"Where's Eddie?"

"In here."

The little guy got up from a sofa where he'd been parked. I hung up my hat and coat, aware that Eddie looked better. His complexion was still a shade on the pea-green side, but at least he wasn't shaking like a pair of dice.

"I thought you were never coming back," he said.

I looked over at Blue Eyes.

"Who's the babe?"

"Araby Rogers, my gal friend. I called her on the phone when I got up here. Honey, meet Mr. Castle."

"Pleased to meet you. Pardon my mistake at the door. For a minute I had an idea you might be a copper."

"Araby's over at the Macarimbo—in the floor show," Eddie pointed out.

"Yes, and I've got to get right back," she stated.

"But not before a drink."

"There's nothing in the house," Eddie piped.

"You didn't look in the right place."

I got what was practically extinct liquor and a bottle of soda. I took the Scotch back to the living-room, breaking the seal en route.

Eddie whiffed his off like it was so much fresh air. Araby shook her peroxide top-knot.

"I'm on the wagon." She went over and kissed the former jockey. "Take care of yourself, Sugar. You won't let nothing happen to him, Mr. Castle!" she added anxiously.

"Not a thing," I promised.

She put on a mangy-looking cape. I went to the door with her, dropping a hint that it might not be smart to tell anyone where she had been or that Eddie was my guest.

"What do you think I am—a maroon?" she grated.

I listened to the stilt heels click off to the elevator and then shut the door and went back to Eddie. "Let's hear it, kid."

His story wasn't complicated.

Every Friday night Eddie had been in the habit of stopping at the Craven to see Kimball. The Duke hadn't forgotten that Eddie's winners had done a lot toward making him a top trainer. So, as the kid explained, Kimball had been giving Eddie dough every week. Not much, just a touch to keep him going.

Tonight, so Eddie explained, he reached the Craven around ten-thirty. He wouldn't take an oath on the exact time, but it was near that, either way.

"Duke had been living there for a long time, when he wasn't down at the track. If he wasn't in he'd leave the key for me under the mat, my money in an envelope on the table in the living room."

EDDIE stopped. I saw sweat break out on his wrinkled face.

"Keep going."

"The key wasn't there, so I figured he was in. I touched the button, rang the bell. There wasn't any answer. Then I took hold of the knob and it turned in my hand. I went in—"

He stopped again, beginning to shiver.

"What else?"

"There was a lamp lighted in the living-room. A funny smell, like burned gun-powder, was in the air. There was a light in the bedroom, too. So I—I walked to the door there and—"

He shuddered, reaching for the Scotch with a trembling hand. I let him gulp some down before giving him the prod again.

"Then you ducked. Okay. Tell me about the guy who tailed you. You said something about a car outside the hotel."

"That's right." Eddie tried to pull himself together. "It was to the left of the entrance. A little blue sedan. I passed it and crossed the street. Just as I reached the other side a guy dropped out of the heap. Before I had gone a street I knew he was following me. Then, when I got to the Garden, I dived into the crowd coming out and you know the rest."

"Did you recognize the tail?"

Eddie hesitated—a couple of seconds too long.

"No, I didn't."

"You don't know any reason why you were followed?"

He shook his head and I let it go at that. But I had a feeling Eddie was holding out. His story was plausible enough. It dovetailed with the bump at the Craven, but my hunch was he knew more than he had lippled.

Did he have a part in the actual killing? On the face of it, gunning the Duke didn't fit. People didn't go 'round shooting their benefactors. Unless, of course, there was some deep, dark and secret motive behind it.

I gave the kid the guest-room and sat up listening to the radio.

I thought about Kimball. Then I thought about Reggie Allerton, the man he had trained for. A week ago Allerton had announced his engagement to Lizzie Wandell. Liz hailing from one of the oldest and finest Knickerbocker families, was the granddaughter of "Honest" Sam Wandell, one of the turf's leading sportsmen and a power in the local jockey club.

The *Orbit's* sob sister, who had toyed with the item, said it was, "the perfect wedding—the merging of two top families, the blending of two famous stables. Society and the turf would be sure to benefit."

Just before I put out the light I came up with a recollection of Hal Bernard. Big, powerful Hal—and the handkerchief he had been drying on the window-sill.

Next morning I told Eddie to stay planted, sent him breakfast from the grill around the corner and took my A. M. newspaper with black coffee.

The Duke's demise had reached the front page. Jamison had done a good job on what scanty material I had supplied him with. He had also gone to town on the Mayor's Investigation.

I read that through.

It seemed that His Honor boiled again. This time over a reputed bookmaking syndicate that had an octopus hold on the town. Several names were mentioned. Among them was Joe Manion's.

That was news.

Manion, I happened to know, was an underworld overlord. Mixed in several Black Market matters, he had never been entirely reached by the law. Now, Manion was mentioned as a possible lead for a Grand Jury probe. I smiled when I read that. By the time they got around to Manion he'd be somewhere in South America, working rackets on the mañana mob.

At the office I stopped long enough to talk to Beth Wheaton. Beth, one of the phone gals, was as sharp as a January morning and just as chilly.

"Look, sweetheart," I began, before she interrupted.

"We can dispense with the sweet talk. What's on your mind—legitimately—Mr. Castle?"

Beth had brown eyes and hair to match. I gave her the telephone number that had been under celluloid on the instrument in Kimball's living-room—his private wire.

"I want you to do some sleuthing. Get the phone company to supply a list of all

calls made from this number last night."

Beth sniffed.

"Oh, mystery? Who got rubbed this time?"

"Why don't you read the *Orbit*?" I suggested, and went on down to Headquarters.

MULLIN was in his private room, busy with a couple of plainclothesmen. He waved me to a chair and let me cool there for ten minutes or more.

Finally, when he got rid of the plainies, he moved his swivel-chair around so he could face me. The pale, suspicious eyes met mine.

"Give, Castle. What do you know about Kimball?"

"Next to nothing."

"Did you blow him up, walk out and come back later?"

"What do you think?"

Mullin began to get mad.

"How did you know Kimball was dead? Who tipped you?"

I tried to make it sound good. I didn't know if Ed Wheeler remembered seeing me walk through the lobby. I took a chance that he hadn't.

"It happens a pal of mine operates the Craven. Hal Bernard. I got the dope from him, including the slant on the bellboy who found the body."

I could see Mullin didn't believe me.

"That's all?"

"Certainly, fortune-tellers to the contrary."

Mullin let that go and began to smile. I didn't like it. It had kind of a wolf leer to it.

"By the way," he went on, casually. "You know Eddie Ring, the former jockey?"

That was striking close to home. The suspicious eyes kept boring into mine. It was a beautiful spot for a wrong expression, an incorrect answer. So the captain had a lead—on the little guy with the ginny breath and the worried pan?

"I know who he is. I guess everybody knows Eddie. He was the greatest horse rider in the country a year or so ago."

"Seen him lately?"

I made believe I was thinking.

"No, not recently. Why?"

"Ring went to see Kimball last night. Around the murder hour. He's been in the habit of dropping there every Friday evening. The elevator operator recognized him. And Ring," Mullin added, "isn't at his home address, or any of the drinkeries where he usually hangs out."

"So?"

"I figure," Mullin continued, putting his feet on the desk, "it was this kid Ring who tipped you to the Kimball slay. And I figure you know where Ring is. In fact, you know a whole lot more than you're letting

on. Okay, Castle. If that's the way you want to play it, I'll go along with you. But in *my* way!"

His threat rang in my ears all the way over to the Pioneer A. C. where I had to interview the manager of a visiting professional basketball team and clear a couple of other minor matters for the *Orbit's* sporting page.

It was after one when I got back to the office.

Beth stopped me on the way in with the report from the telephone company.

"Here it is, Mr. Castle. Service with a sneer."

"Thanks."

I sat down at my desk and looked at the report. There had been two outgoing calls on the Kimball line the previous night. One at 8:30. That, according to the statistics, was to a Miss Libby Hart, whose address followed.

The other, the second call, made something tingle up and down my spine. I read the information over twice. At 10:27 P.M. the Duke's phone had been used to put a call through to Reginald Allerton at the Abbington Chambers on Park Avenue.

According to the wrist-watch on Kimball's arm, he had been knocked off at precisely 10:22. No one could be certain that the watch stopped when the Duke was struggling with his assassin. But, all things considered, it was a peg to hang the death time on.

If it were right it meant that, five minutes after Kimball was killed, someone had used his phone to call Reginald Allerton!

CHAPTER III

JOHNNY IS FLOORED



BUZZED my place on the hello box.

"Eddie?" I said.

"Right here, Mr. Castle."

"Did you call Allerton on the talkie last night when you were in the Duke's suite?"

"Call—nix! Like I told you, I got out fast. Why?"

"I was just wondering. You'd better stay hidden out today," I told him. "You're hot. I saw Fred Mullin of the H. S. and he's got a net out for you. The lift pilot at the Craven identified you."

I hung up and reached for a cigarette. After all, the Duke Kimball murder, with its satanic touch, was none of my business. It didn't enter my department, as Captain Mullin had already pointed out, and it was no skimmed milk off my cereal.

Yet, it had a certain fascination.

For one thing, I didn't want the cops to scoop Eddie in and give him more bad publicity. I didn't want the kid inquisi-

tioned and locked up. Maybe his story had a couple of detours in it, but the more I thought of it the more unlikely and unreasonable it seemed to assume that he had anything to do with the untimely passing of Reggie Allerton's trainer.

Who was Libby Hart?

I DIDN'T know, but I decided to find out. The address the phone company supplied was in the middle Eighties, on West End Avenue. It was a nice apartment house, high-class and boasted a doorman. But, it developed, the Hart frail, merely roomed there. With a family named Borden—on the third floor.

She was out. Mrs. Borden, a middle-aged, pleasant dame, told me that when I pressed the pearl circle of the front door-bell.

"She'll probably be back here toward six. She's employed, you know."

I didn't, and said so.

"Yes, she's a private secretary to Mr. Reginald Allerton."

She mentioned the address of a Fifth Avenue office building.

With a word of thanks I went back to Riverside Drive and a bus.

The Rhinelander Building was up near Radio City. The directory in the entry read: REGINALD ALLERTON, 903. I took a local, got off at the ninth and followed an arrow around a bend in the corridor.

I figured the lay. Rich guys like Allerton often maintained offices, and staffs, to handle the details of investments, taxes and so forth. Allerton's outer office was like the living room in a mansion. The walls were paneled in brown mahogany. The furniture was upholstered in tan leather. The rug underfoot was a tobacco brown and indirect lighting fell on the sporting prints along the walls.

It also shone on the polished black hair of the good-looking chick who was busy at a beautifully-carved desk in the exact center of the room.

I looked at her. She was worth anybody's third glance. In addition to the ebon hair-do, she advertised a creamy complexion, lashes so long they made shadows on her smooth cheeks, a classically perfect nose and a set of magenta lips.

She wore a severely plain dark dress and no ornaments. She didn't need any. When I got through with the eye massage and went over to the desk she looked up at me quickly.

It was odd.

I might have been all wrong, all damp, but in her liquid, starry gaze I thought I detected the same scared look that had been in Eddie Ring's eyes and face when he had put the stop on me outside the Garden.

"What do you want?" Libby inquired, after I had mentioned the *Orbit*. Reference

to the sheet sent the lashes down again.

"Just a dash of information. Mind if I sit down?" I took a chair before she could answer. "You know Duke Kimball, Allerton's trainer, was given a dose of acute ventilation last night?"

A full minute passed before she nodded.

"Yes, I read about it."

Her pretty face was placid, but her slender, white hands were a give-away. They fluttered like a couple of adolescent doves on the edge of a cote.

"Would you mind telling me why Kimball telephoned you last night at eight-thirty?"

The polished head jerked up. The magenta lips parted. Her teeth were nice, too. White, even, glistening. She looked at me as if I were a magician hauling a bunny out of a silk dicer.

"You—know—"

"Look, Miss Hart. There's nothing complicated. The Duke had a private wire. The phone company furnished the calls made on it last night. Yours was one. I found that out. So will the police. It's one of the first rules."

"Mr. Kimball did call me."

SHE wove her fingers together. Maybe to keep them from shaking off. Her expression changed. It went from fright to tight.

I could see the facial muscles tense.

"I'm sorry, I have no information," she said. "The call was strictly personal. I see no reason to discuss it with you."

"How about the police?"

I ran an eye around the prints. One of them was of the famous Sir Rodney and from where I sat it looked as if the kid who had the leg up was Eddie Ring.

"I shall tell the police the same thing—if they ask me."

"Wouldn't you like to have Kimball's murderer tucked in the poogie?"

"Yes, but—please don't ask me any more questions."

"Only one. Mr. Allerton in?"

She gave me a startled glance.

"No, he isn't. He's gone for the day."

I threw a final gander at her profile and got up.

"Then I'll find him at the Abbingdon Chambers?"

"You're more likely to locate him at the Turf Club."

"Thanks. Thanks very much. Now I'll tell you something. I think you're being very foolish—holding back. Captain Mullin is an uncouth guy, nothing at all like I am." I grinned. "He has no couth at all and never uses kid gloves. I might be able to keep you out of the papers—if you'd care to cooperate."

But she shook her dark head.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Castle."

The Turf Club was a couple of streets east and a couple north. A brownstone, old building with a mansard roof and nothing in the way of a sign to indicate its identity. It was one of those places hard as heaven to get into.

Once a member, only the Grim Reaper gave you a check to get out.

I looked the party who opened the door for me straight in his mutton chops and asked for Allerton.

"Who's calling, if you please?"

I didn't mention the *Orbit*. I didn't want the guy to throw a stroke. I said I'd just come from Allerton's office and told him my name. I let him infer my mission had something to do with Allerton's business. That worked.

"One moment, if you please." He went away, stayed a while and then came back. "Mr. Allerton will see you in the library."

Reggie was in the big front room on the second floor. I recognized him because I'd seen him frequently at the track. He was a tall, slender, aristocratic-looking lug. He wore his hair parted in the middle, a set of snobby threads and a complexion that indicated high-blood pressure.

Allerton turned out to be excessively friendly. He listened to everything I said and, instead of yelping for the Palace Guards to come and pitch me out, told me he'd try to help me in any way he could.

"I'm naturally very distressed about what has happened to Duke. He's been with me for several years. In addition to being a fine trainer, Kimball was a very likable chap. I was genuinely fond of him."

"He never mentioned having any enemies?"

"Never. He had a host of friends. I don't know anyone who disliked him."

I let that pass. Any guy training horses to win races had enemies—touts and gamblers who socked it in on long shots and shuddered when chalk horses won.

"About the phone call made at ten twenty-seven to your apartment last night."

I gave him the lead and waited. Important developments hinged on Reggie's reply. It was a six-to-five bet that the murderer had made that call.

Allerton rubbed his aristocratic nose and shook his head. "I'm sorry, Mr. Castle, I know nothing about it. I wasn't home at all last evening. I happened to be at the theater."

"Someone at your apartment must have gotten it. The call was made. It's on the record. Mind calling your place and checking with your servants?"

"Not at all." Allerton stood. "I want to do everything possible, in every way, to solve the riddle of Kimball's death. Pardon me a minute."

I sat and looked at books. Hundreds of books, thousands. I thought of all the cattle

who had laid down their lives to make the pretty bindings. It was an intriguing thought.

I was still building it up when Allerton returned.

"What luck?"

"The call came through, just as you said. My man took it. It wasn't jotted down, as other calls are, because the person who called left no name. He simply asked for me and rang off when informed I was not at home."

"Thanks," I said, disappointment kicking me in the teeth.

IT WAS almost six o'clock when I broke away from the office and got up to my apartment.

I wondered how Eddie had passed the day. I had locked up the Scotch. I hoped he hadn't gone out for a snifter. I hadn't given him any money and I remembered he hadn't made his usual collection from Kimball.

I didn't think his saloon credit was worth much. He had probably stayed holed in, with the radio for company.

As I slid my key into the front door I had a funny feeling. One of those intuitive flashes everything wasn't at par. It deepened when I stepped into the foyer. The air was warm and stuffy. It might have been imagination but some of Araby's perfume seemed to be still loitering around. Or maybe it was a hangover from the previous evening.

"Hi, kid."

No answer. I dropped my skimmer on the table under the hall mirror, took the seven steps to the living room door.

One glance was enough.

The room looked as though The Chief had gone through it at top speed. Like Kimball's bedroom, only without the plasma, the furniture was tipped over, one of the drapes ripped down and some of my prized old glass reduced to splinters.

But that wasn't as important as Eddie Ring! And Eddie, I had a hunch, was among those absent. Somebody had called at the apartment to remove the jock. He hadn't wished to be exited.

He had even fought against it, but not with success.

I started toward the bedroom.

Then, as I passed the half-open bathroom door, I imagined I heard a step behind me. A quick, quiet step!

Instinctively, I wheeled around.

I never saw what hit me—or who delivered the blow. Like a switch pulled open and plunging out all existing light, a wave of blackness came up from the floor and blotted out everything.

My knees buckled. I floated off on a soft, billowy cloud.

CHAPTER IV

AT THE MACARIMBO



AFTER a while the song birds stopped warbling. The black, chiffon clouds rolled away. I opened my eyes, a pain in my knob sending out a boogie beat that echoed in my ears.

I sat up, listening to it. Only it wasn't in my head. It was at the front door. Somebody was

knocking.

Except for an egg-sized lump over my left ear, I didn't seem too badly off. I was a trifle dizzy when I made my full height. But that wore off when I put the brogans into high.

I opened the door and Detective Larry Hartley wandered in.

"What's the matter with your front door-bell, Castle? It don't work."

I tried to stall him in the foyer. No dice. He headed straight into the living room and looked around with a kindle of interest. I could see his bushy eyebrows form a great big interrogation point.

"Cute, eh?"

"What's been going on?" Hartley grunted. "Looks like the happy end of a Greenpoint picnic. Your friends play rough."

"What's wanted?"

"You!" Hartley squinted at the lump over my ear and grinned.

"Get your hat—get two hats. The captain craves your company. Come on, we're due downtown."

Mullin didn't pull any punches. My head still ached dully. The captain wasn't any bromide.

"Wheeler tells me he saw you going into the Craven last night. He said you didn't stop to talk to Bernard until you came down."

"All right, I'm a liar. So what?"

"You know where Ring is."

Mullin began to get red around the gills.

"I wish I did!" I replied fervently.

"You knew where he was last night. All the time I was looking for him you could have put the arm on him for me!"

"That's possible."

Mullin curled a lip. That made him look more like a bulldog than a bulldog. He leered up at Hartley, with one of those "See-what-I-mean" expressions.

I didn't have anything to hide now. So I unloaded with truth and candor.

"I let Eddie Ring stay at my apartment. Why? Because the kid's clean and I didn't want you to go to work on him. Somebody hi-jacked him. But not without a brawl. If you don't believe me ask your bloodhound. Hartley saw the going-over my living room got."

I refrained from mentioning the gent in the bathroom—the one who had jumped me and laid the egg on the side of my noggin. That was beside the point, irrelevant.

Fred Mullin's facial hue went from rosy red to deep vermillion. For an instant I thought he was going to barge over and start socking, he looked that mad. He showed me all his teeth, all twelve of them, in a snarl that would have interested a tiger.

"By rights I ought to slap you in the clink, Castle!" He spat it out humidly. "You're a nuisance, a menace. You made a fool of me once and you've been trying to repeat ever since! I've got a good mind—"

Hartley leaned over and whispered something to him. Mullin stopped talking, but kept on glaring, while he listened. Finally he nodded and sank back in his desk-chair.

"That's all, Castle. Beat it, get out of here! I don't like the looks of you. You make me sick."

"You don't give me much appetite, either," I told him.

I thought it was a gag, but nobody made a move to check me. I left the office and Headquarters without a hand, or a foot, barring the way.

THAT was one for the book. What had Hartley told Mullin? What had made the captain lay off? From what I knew of his methods it wasn't anything pleasant. He had quit putting on the crush for some other trick he had thought up. Something sponsored by the toothpick-chewing addict, Mr. Hartley.

"Rats!" I said, and went back to straighten up my disordered living room.

I was worried about Eddie. So worried I called the Macarimbo, trying to get hold of Araby Rogers. I was informed that the "ladies of the ensemble" were not permitted to answer the telephone.

I got a bite of dinner at a nearby chop-house and went back to the suite. I listened to war news and put witch hazel on the bump. It felt larger than ever.

Then I must have dozed a bit because when I snapped out of it the war bulletins had turned to a dance band and the telephone beside me was ringing merrily.

I picked it up and was jolted wide awake.

"That you, Mr. Castle?" Eddie asked.

"You little rat!" I was so glad to hear from him I didn't care what I said. "Where are you? What have you been doing? Who tore up my apartment and busted my expensive glass knick-knacks? Talk!"

"It's a long story. I'll tell you about it when I see you. That's why I called. Look, I'm over here at the Macarimbo. I'm phoning from the booth near the dressing rooms. I'll wait here for you. Can you come right over?"

THE night club was a half-dozen streets south, in the fabulous Fifties. It was in the middle layer, neither cheap nor expensive. One of those hoof-and-tipple resorts where they clipped you on the check if you were at all muddled.

It bragged about its floor show, name band and master of ceremonies. You could have taken all of them, tossed them out in the alley and the world would have been a better, fresher place.

As I left the apartment, heading for the Macarimbo, I felt I was being trailed. It was one of those uneasy, elusive but positive feelings. I tried to trace back from effect to cause. Nothing definite. I began to think I was mistaken.

If I were tailed, it was being done by an expert. Somebody who gave plenty of leeway and kept discreetly in the background.

When I reached the Macarimbo, and went in, there wasn't a soul on the street.

The bar, in front, had 'em packed in like sardines. Only sardines were better off because they were lying down. Babes from penthouses and frowzy rooming-joints—dames who looked like Salome and acted like salami—went in or came out of the powder room.

For the most part their escorts were equally as ill assorted. Guys as Blue Bookie as Reggie Allerton or just plain bookie.

There were plenty of uniforms at the tables. Army, Air Force, Marine, Navy, with the feminine sections of the services also ably represented.

I eased over to the head man. He wore a tux and a maltreated ear. Once he had pushed leather. Now he shoved waiters around.

"Hello, Yorkie."

"How'ya, Johnny boy?"

"How do I get back to the dressing rooms?"

Yorkie rolled an eye.

"Uh-uh."

He supplied directions. I went around back of the coat-room counter, down a flight of smelly stairs. A wooden-floored passage led past the kitchens. I looked through the steamy entrance. A chef in a big white hat was bobbing and weaving as he stirred and tasted.

A door at the end of the corridor opened on a squared-in recess and just beyond that was an aisle of dressing-room doors. Some were open, some shut. Gals were laughing and gabbing, arguing and swearing.

As I went up the stairs, Araby Rogers came out of one of the rooms. She was in lace and spangles, a costume that didn't cover too many of her charms. The little canary saw me, stopped as if she'd been shot, and dashed over.

"Mr. Castle!" Her breath caught in her throat. "Is Eddie—"

"Okay. He phoned me to meet him here."

The blue, blue eyes went wide and panicky. She grabbed my arm, pushing me out of earshot. I could feel her fingers growing chilly when they dropped to my wrist.

"Eddie—phoned you—to meet him here! Oh, something must have happened! He hasn't been here, he never comes here! Are you sure it was Eddie?"

"Positive."

She gave me a stricken look. Her voice sank to a whisper.

"I'm scared, Mr. Castle. Honest I am. This don't sound good to me. He's in trouble! He never called you, and told you that stuff, unless he had a gun pointed at him!"

It began to look that way. Whoever had snatched the kid was using him for a purpose. What was it? To get me out of the apartment? Or to take me to the Macarimbo for some further going over?

"Who'd want to put the clamp on Eddie?" I said, reassuringly. "He's as harmless as talcum powder."

"Yeah? Then why did 'Link' Bronson follow him last night?" Araby asked unsteadily.

My ears went up.

SO EDDIE had known who had tailed him! One of the kinks in the story he had told me straightened out. Bronson? He was one of Joe Manion's henchmen, a gun-happy hoodlum who had been in plenty of trouble!

"I'll duck back to the flat," I told the blondie. "If Eddie does show up here you ring me this time."

I left her. She had a bewildered, blank stare on her grease-painted face. Just as I went down the steps some guy went in and I heard him saying:

"C'mon, dolls! Get into it! You've got a show in five minutes. What are you gazing at, Rogers—"

There was another door midway down the passage, a little beyond the kitchen entrance. I hadn't noticed it before. Now it was slightly open, letting in some of the cool night air to battle with the steam. A man lounged there, a hand in his pocket. He had a cap pulled down over his forehead, a cigarette dangled from the corner of his mouth.

My nerves telegraphed a warning. Danger was written all over him. I didn't like the hand in his pocket, either. I slowed down, stopped and gave an imitation of someone who had forgotten something and was about to retrace my steps when the inner telegraph system flashed a new warning.

Another man was coming along the passage, from behind me. A guy in a gray felt hat, with a thin, pinched face. A tall guy with stooped shoulders and a funny kind of a shuffling walk.

I was hemmed in. I thought of the kitchen, but before I could take a step toward it, the lounge with his hand in his pocket slid up to me.

"Just a minute, pal! Got a match?"

I started to shoulder him aside, but Felt Hat didn't approve of that. Several inches of cold steel slipped out from under the left side of his coat and jammed up against me.

"Easy, friend." His voice was smooth and quiet, but under the brim of the hat I could see his eyes like twin, glittering sparks. "Frisk him, Link," he directed.

Quick, deft hands investigated. Link—I recognized him now—nodded and the Hat closed in.

"We're taking a little roll uptown, friend! You're coming along. Act smart and you'll get there with all your health. Try any tricks and I'll make you look like a kitchen colander!"

CHAPTER V

MIRACLE GUN



OUTSIDE, in the shadows down the street, a small blue sedan hugged the curb. I was conducted to it, urged along by an arm and the pressure of the smoker transferred over to my side.

Link opened the rear door.

There was a guy at the wheel.

"Get in!" Bronson ordered.

"All clear," the driver said.

I sat between Bronson and the party who wore the felt hat. He was referred to as "Rube." The chauffeur was addressed as "Smitty" and the gun, cuddling me, never moved an inch.

"What's this all about?" I inquired, with real curiosity.

"Shut up!" Rube said in his quiet, silky tone.

"I think," I went on, amiably, "you've got the wrong one. You don't want me. I'm only a newspaper reporter who—"

"If that bull hadn't knocked on your front door, after I snapped the bell wires," Bronson interrupted, "you'd been up to where we're going, a long time ago! As it was I had to check out of your place in a hurry."

"So you're the bathroom boogey man?"

Bronson laughed. He didn't say anything further and I relaxed against the worn upholstery.

I didn't like any part of it. They didn't have the wrong guy! They wanted me and they had me!

But what for?

I watched the mid-city streets drop past. Smitty drove at a legal speed, careful of the traffic lights. He didn't want any cops stopping him, asking questions.

My mind went around like a squirrel in a cage. Gleams of intelligence began to filter through. I lined up the facts as they came along.

First, Eddie Ring knew that Bronson had tailed him last night. That meant that Eddie had blundered into Duke Kimball's suite at the Craven while the killer was still there. Eddie had seen and recognized the trigger man. Like the ex-jock said he had gotten out in a hurry—but with Link sent out after him to make a score.

Okay for that.

Bronson must have seen Eddie with me outside the Garden. Okay again. That told him that Eddie had probably spilled. Therefore, I knew who had murdered the Duke and had to be dealt with accordingly. Bronson's first attempt to knock me out had failed. As Araby had dreamed up, they had snatched Eddie and, to get to me, had used the little guy to make the appointment via phone.

So far so bad.

My thoughts limped along. Link Bronson worked for Manion. Manion faced a Grand Jury hearing. In some way that tied in with Kimball. Kimball must have known something about the activities of the syndicate under official fire. Known so much Manion was afraid of him! So, abiding by all underworld rules and regulations Allerton's trainer had to be smeared before he had a chance to open his trap.

That hung together sensibly. It had its flaws, naturally. But I believed I had a general synopsis of the situation. And, as I mulled it over, the personal angle—my own nosy part in it—wasn't at all attractive at the moment.

In fact, the smell of lilies seemed strong around me.

The blue sedan went up through Washington Heights. It kept cutting west. Above Kingsbridge it turned left, descending a hill and took a street that ended in a road. The Hudson wasn't far away. In the faint moonlight I could see the Palisades looming opposite.

They made a pretty picture. I fervently hoped I'd be around to get a glimpse of it in the future.

Then, abruptly, I knew where we were bound. Near the bank of the river was an old stone mansion. It had been called The Castle Orme. Once it had belonged to one of Manhattan's merchant princes. That had been fifty years or more back.

Several people had owned it since. The last had lost it. A downtown bank had taken it over and rented it at a negligible figure. No one in his right mind—or without ulterior motives—would have been interested in the rambling rookery.

It was like leasing the Grand Central Terminal—without modern touches.

The car went through an open iron gate. It passed what had once been formal gardens. It went by a tremendous hot-house. Most of the glass had been broken or taken away. We parked under a couple of colossal trees near a side entrance.

"We get out here," Rube said.

All three alighted. Keeping me in the middle they gave me a personal escort through a door that was a foot thick. We went along a flagged hall.

"Hold him in the wire room," Link Bronson said to the others, "while I talk to the boss."

He opened a door. I was ushered into what must have been the main reception room once. Now it was the most complete kind of a horse parlor.

IN THE shine of a green-shaded, dangling light I had a glimpse of cashiers' cages, tables and chairs, blackboards with the odds of the last races of that afternoon still chalked on them.

Over the boards was a loud-speaker. Entries were thumbtacked on one wall and the floor was covered with cigarette stubs. Rube shoved me up against a table and grinned.

"Relax, sucker."

"Where's Eddie?" I asked.

"He's around—but not for long."

"It looks to me," Smitty put in brightly, "like another cement job. The boss was asking about barrels this afternoon—three of 'em."

"He got them."

That sounded interesting. A croak, gangland's old device of stuffing the corpse in wet cement and the convenient river at the edge of the Castle lawn! But three?

Who was the third barrel for?

Bronson came back.

"Bring him along."

The next stop was in a rear room, a vaulted-ceilinged place of oak-paneled walls and an ecclesiastical aspect heightened by the pipes for an organ that had been removed.

The furnishings were flamboyant, glorified junk. Grand Rapids at its worst. Tapestries and odd pieces collected solely because of their size. A litter of tables and chairs, sofas and cabinets made the huge room resemble a furniture warehouse. But not a very good one.

Lounging in a chair that had carved dragons for arms, Joe Manion sat uncomfortably at ease. He looked like Humpty-Dumpty, he was that round and fat. He had thin hair, plastered over a bald spot, baggy eyes and a dewlap. His face was circular in shape, shaved very close. His nose was like a lump of putty that had been slapped on as an afterthought. He looked too stupid to be dangerous, but I didn't let his gray-flanneled appearance fool me.

Manion and a coiled cobra were brothers under the scales!

"So you got up?" Manion spoke slowly, as if it were an effort to get the words out.

"What's the frame, Manion?" I asked directly.

"I don't like snoopy people." His smile made folds in his face. "Guys who go 'round checking on telephone calls and the like. Guys who know too much for their own good."

"Such as Kimball?" I suggested.

"Right. Such as Kimball. You can say hello to him when you get to where you're going."

"Wait a minute." I bent forward. "What good is another knock-off going to do you? It is not going to stop the Grand Jury's machinery. Personally, your business is none of mine. If you want to lay it on the line for the death-house at Sing Sing that's your privilege."

"Look, Castle. I'll talk, you listen. I'm going to beat the investigation. All right, smile. I've taken it before and I can stand up under it again. But I'm not going to have a lot of people running around loose with an in on the Kimball thing. That's why I had you lifted tonight and that's why I'm giving you a decent funeral. Buried at sea!"

He shook with a brief spasm of amusement. The laughter made my blood run cold. But not as cold as it did when one of the many doors in the room opened and two of my other comrades in trouble were led in.

The first was Eddie, looking dejected and slightly mussed. He was wearing the latest thing in black eyes. That was tough with ration points what they were on beef. He gave me a hangdog, appealing look.

I let it go and stared hard at Libby Hart.

She was certainly attractive. Even against the nightmarish background she stood out like a bottle of rum at a prayer meeting. Her black hair looked more polished than ever, her skin whiter and her eyes more starry, liquid. She walked in with dignity, free-limbed, as if to the music of the organ that wasn't there.

My heart went bump-bump. The dark eyes encountered mine. I saw a spot of color creep into her smooth cheeks. Her lips parted slightly and pearls such as Tiffany never had for sale glimmered between them.

For a moment I forgot Manion, Eddie, the vaulted room and why we were all there! I gave Libby a smile I didn't feel and turned to the Dumpty whose fingers were caressing the dragons.

"The gal, too. Where does she fit?"

The telephone, somewhere in the back of the room, rang. Manion nodded and Link took it. Manion turned back to me.

"Like you, she's smart. Kimball's been passing it along, feeding it to her." He

grinned. "The jock, likewise. You three are the only ones with a mark against me. Catch it?"

"It's Scollard." Bronson capped the mouthpiece of the phone with a skinny hand. "He wants to talk to you, Boss. It's important!"

Manion puffed out of the chair and went across the room.

"Hello?" I heard him say, "Didn't I tell you never to call me here?" Then, after a pause, "Confession? What do you mean? He—he—"

Manion stopped and stiffened as much as a load of fat and flesh could. The round face darkened. He choked out something and banged the receiver back on the hook.

I did some fast thinking. Confession? While the phone call had been going on I had a gander at a door that seemed to be open an inch or two. A door that was part of the paneling, to the left of the dragon chair.

SLOWLY, unobtrusively, I edged toward it, my face to the others, my nerves taut. Any chance, logic told me, was better than standing there and having the Valentine's Day massacre repeated on a small scale!

Libby was watching me intently. So was Eddie. Manion, apparently shaken by the call, got Bronson aside and was doing some swift whispering with gestures. I backed another foot and felt the oak paneling press against me.

Then a miracle happened!

From the door a hand touched me. A gentle, persuasive, significant hand. It seemed to be telling me in a mute way that it wanted to reach my fingers! So I slowly slid my arm back.

A gun, coldly ominous, but comforting as an ice-bag on a fevered brow, was laid against my palm!

Manion, finished with Bronson, waddled back to the center of the room.

"All right, line them up! You do the shooting, Rube!" As he barked the order, Bronson, giving his cap a pull over his forehead, left the room.

Rube began to reach for his heater. I stopped his hand halfway to his shoulder-scabbard with a quartet of words.

"Hold it! Start reaching!"

The miracle gun came into full view. Manion looked at me as if I were something that had stepped out of a glass case in a museum. The shock of what I said, and how I backed it up, straightened Rube's stooped shoulders.

He gaped at me incredulously.

"You dope!" Manion's voice trembled. "You bring him here without frisking him! Go get him!"

"Ladies first!"

I kept the two covered. Libby didn't need a second invitation. She glided over to me as if on wires. Eddie, amazed, hardly moved.

"Come on, kid," I ordered. "Get the lead out of your shoes. Put on a whip finish. We're getting out of here!"

CHAPTER VI

CONFESSION A LA MODE



LIGHTNINGLIKE, I slammed the door leading out to the flagged passage. I didn't kid myself. Miracle gun, or not, we weren't in the clear yet!

The proof of that came when Eddie tore open the side door of the Castle and we piled out into the night. The stars never looked better, neither did fresh air ever feel fresher or smell more like perfume. Or maybe that was the scent of Libby, hurrying along beside me.

But Link Bronson was out there. Manion's first lieutenant, starting the blue sedan, must have seen us framed against the light as we came out the door. He sized up the situation at a glance and acted fast.

Out of the car, he ripped a gun loose and began firing. I urged Libby Hart into the stone shelter beside the door's entrance. Eddie flopped full length. I held my fire until Bronson came cautiously out from the car's bulk.

No more than sixty seconds had elapsed, but it seemed like a thousand years before he came into view. I could see him craning his neck, ready to count bodies.

It was almost impossible to miss.

The shot I squeezed from the gift gun caught him in the shoulder. He let out a yelp, dropped his own Roscoe and did a nose-dive into the shrubbery.

"Okay! Come on!" I grabbed Libby's arm and sprinted for the car.

Just as we got in I heard a cannonading from the interior of the Castle. That meant my unknown pal on the other side of the oak paneling had gone to work!

Link had obligingly left the motor running. I let off the brake, pressed the gas pedal and went away from there like one of the honest horses Eddie Ring had ridden in his palmy days!

"For a couple of minutes," the kid chattered, "I thought I was all through! Where'd you get the gun? How come they missed it! Who was shooting when we left?"

He rolled the questions out like a red carpet at a wedding. I paid no attention.

"Give," I said to Libby. "How did they pick you up? Why?"

"A fake phone call. Supposedly from Mr. Allerton. This car was on West End Avenue when I went out. A man—the one you shot

—stepped up to me and forced me into it. Why?"

"Yes, why?"

SHE drew a long breath. By that time we were almost over to Broadway and for the first time I began to feel a trifle safer.

"Haven't you figured it yet?"

"I know Kimball was ready to squeak. They didn't like that and dealt with him accordingly. Manion, or Rube, went to work with artistic touches. They're the killers, either of them, but there's someone else in

Joe Manion had unwittingly let drop when I had first gabbed with him, seemed to make it airtight and foolproof.

I rang Allerton's front door-bell. I had the feeling, when no one answered, I was too late.

Then the door opened. A little guy with a smug, obsequious face stepped out. He wore a black coat, a derby and carried a cowhide bag.

He jerked an inquisitive look at me as I reached out and pushed him against the door he started to close.



"Am I Guilty of Murder?"

THAT WAS THE BAFFLING, dread question that tortured Andy Reid's mind—and he grappled with his own soul to find the answer.

The maddening mystery of the slain red-headed woman whom he might have killed did not let him rest.

REID HAD LOST his memory—but not his sense of justice. And so he went on a strange quest—to ferret out the murderer, whoever he might be. Even if it were—himself!

IN THE COURSE OF HIS investigations, Reid comes perilously close to death several times—and opposes some of the cleverest criminals at large! Surprise follows surprise and you will be amazed at the twists and turns of plot as you are held spell-bound by the fast action and gripping suspense in—

SPECTERS WALK BESIDE ME

By JIM O'BRIEN

A COMPLETE MYSTERY NOVEL COMING NEXT ISSUE!

on it. The 'man higher up', as we say in the newspaper business."

"You mean—"

"Patience. If this heap has plenty of gas you'll find out presently."

The fuel tank gauge said three-quarters full. It must have been. We sailed down Park Avenue in style. I pulled up in front of the Abbingdon Chambers, told my passengers to wait and ducked into the building's rococo lobby.

I was bound for Allerton's suite. I didn't figure there was much chance of seeing him, but the angle was hot and I had to follow through. An elevator took me up. Maybe I was all wrong.

That single word "confession," and what

"Mr. Allerton in?"

"No, sir."

His eyes blinked and his lips twitched.

"Who are you?"

"Scollard, sir. I—I'm—"

I took his bag, tossed it inside and put the gun on him. As soon as he felt it he began to shake all over. He didn't try to argue or block me. With perfect docility he let me back him into the apartment and led the way, through a maze of rooms, to Allerton's study.

Reggie, his hair still parted in the middle, lay on the floor there, in a posture that wasn't lifelike. The automatic he had used to go harp-strumming was still clutched in his aristocratic right hand. He was as dead

as anybody could be with a .45 slug in what had been his brain.

"Okay, Scollard," I said to the little guy. "Now, hand over your late employer's confession and stick around while I put in a call to Headquarters!"

"Yes, sir," he answered meekly.

TWO hours later Eddie, Libby and I had a table at the Macarimbo.

It was no place to take a gal of the Hart number's quality and intelligence, but Eddie had a yen to see Araby and I couldn't refuse him.

I was amply rewarded when the final floor opera began. Because then the gilt top, prancing roguishly out with the other lovelies, suddenly spied her Eddie, black eyes and all, sitting there grinning like a wolf. Araby almost fell over her own feet from the shock.

"Get around back and comfort her," I advised Eddie, when the number ended. "Show her you're not a ghost!"

He lammed.

I turned to Libby.

"Well, let's fill in the blank spaces. From a peek at Allerton's confession I'm wise to a lot of things. That most of his dough came from Manion. That he was a silent partner in the syndicate. That he realized an investigation would wash him out and hang him up to dry. That it would kill his chances of matrimony with Wandell's granddaughter and finish him on the turf as well. So much for that. Now it's your turn."

"Kimball had found out a lot about Allerton's connections with Manion. I'm sorry to say the Duke tried to use this information for his own profit."

"I get it. He tried to blackmail Reggie. That's why Allerton passed the word to Manion to blow Kimball up. And it was Manion who used the Duke's telephone at ten twenty-seven. No doubt he called Allerton to tell him the job had been taken care of. That was the call," I explained, "that gave the show away."

Libby's arched brows drew together.

"I don't understand."

"Manion said he didn't like guys who went around checking telephone calls. I hadn't told Eddie and I hadn't told you about the ten twenty-seven buzz. But I had told Allerton. I went to see him about it. So when Manion let it slip I knew that Reggie was in on it."

The dark head nodded. "And you figured out 'confession' and Scollard all by yourself?"

"That wasn't hard. The thing that baffled me was the gun slipped into my hand up there."

The liquid, starry eyes met mine.

"You haven't cleared that up," Libby murmured.

"My old side-kick, Captain Mullin of the Homicide Squad, obliged. You see, when I turned over the defunct power behind the syndicate, together with a neatly-typed confession, Mullin was grateful—grateful enough to tell me how it happened. One of his best men had been planted at the Castle since the mayor started the ball rolling. Planted there, gathering evidence. He shoved me the heater, figuring I'd need it more than he did. I guess he had another one on him because he blocked Manion and Rube when they tried to follow us."

"And they're both in jail?"

The band was letting go with one of my favorite numbers. I got up. So did Libby.

"Nothing like a dance to get acquainted." I led her out to the wax. "Tell me something frankly. Is or isn't this the beginning of a beautiful friendship? Funny, I sort of had an idea you might be carrying the torch for Kimball."

"On account of that phone call?" She laughed. "I had helped him, up to the time I realized what he was doing and why he wanted information about Allerton. But, sentimentally—"

She made a grimace.

I liked the way she pursed her red lips—the way she wrinkled her nose—and kissed back!

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An Amazing True
Crime Story



QUEEN OF THE GOLD-DIGGERS

By SAMUEL MINES

*Scintillating Mignon Pierre, of Monte Carlo, Paris and London,
perfected some original rackets to get her men—and their money!*

CHISELING babes of today, out to take the susceptible male for a mink coat and some sparklers, could get valuable pointers from Mignon Pierre, a gal who operated back in the eighteen seventies—but with a very modern technique.

Mignon learned her trade from her mother, who ran a high-class gambling joint in London. As the girl grew up, she

became so beautiful that Mama realized she had a much more valuable asset in her daughter than in her roulette wheels.

Mignon was not reluctant. In fact she quickly outstripped Mama—and you can make anything of that you like. Men were her prey and she knew down to the last nickel how much could be taken from a victim.

Her first was in Monte Carlo. They had

been there, Mignon and Mama and brother Jacques, for a year or more, for Mignon had had a run of luck at the tables. But it didn't last forever and then this rich young man came along, the son of a prominent French politician.

He was rich, he was generous and he was head over heels in love with Mignon. He made with the gifts: jewels, furs, gowns—and cash, until the well ran dry. Then, since Mignon's affections cooled unless warmed continually by currency, he forged his father's name for a big lump sum.

Not being expert at that sort of thing, the forgery was badly done and quickly discovered. The boy's world crashed about his ears. He could think of only one thing: to get his Mignon and run. He rushed to her hotel, pleaded with her to escape to Spain with him.

Mignon had other plans. And taking it on the lam to Madrid and living in an attic with a thoroughly cleaned sucker was not one of them. The boy got a quick brush and presently blew out his brains in the hotel corridor right outside her door.

But Mignon had a strong stomach. It didn't upset her enough to keep her away from the gambling tables. That very evening she got busy losing the cash for which the boy had just paid his final price.

News of the suicide didn't do her any good in Monte Carlo, however. A representative of the local constabulary called upon her and told the family in no uncertain terms that Monte Carlo air would be much more breathable if Mignon and Mama and Jacques stopped polluting it.

Some time later the trio showed up in a magnificent chateau outside Paris. Mama had now become a Countess. Mignon was The Hon. Marie Josephine Henrietta. And Jacques, for reasons of his own, wore the robes of a Roman Catholic priest.

By now Mignon had taken over. Her brain was the sharpest of the three, and now it was Mama and Jacques who took the orders. She set up three distinct and different rackets.

One was the good old gambling club, carried on in the chateau and at an expensive apartment in Paris itself. Professional sharpers, hired by Mignon, took the public for as much as it would stand. An ancient but still optimistic Italian count is supposed to have lost \$20,000 in a few nights' play at the chateau.

The second device, which appealed to Mignon's peculiar talents, was to get herself "engaged" to those wealthy and

feeble-minded citizens who were sufficiently dazzled by her beauty. She specialized in Americans, for every Yankee was supposed to be a millionaire. And since poor Americans usually didn't visit Paris to move in such company, Mignon was reasoning correctly.

THE third racket was one which could only have been worked in the eighteen seventies. Mignon told the suckers that her mama, the Countess, had much influence at foreign courts and that titles and decorations could be had—if the proper palms were properly greased.

Mignon set up a complete price scale for these titles, the charge naturally rising steeply with the importance of the phony decoration. And to promote reality, she built all the props and held court in a phony "throne-room" of the chateau, where with impressive pomp and circumstance, the "Countess" bestowed the decorations.

This racket flourished pleasantly for Mignon over a period of two years or more. She specialized in distant orders, like the Turkish and Russian courts, which were too far away to check easily. Orders were also taken for the Papal Court where her brother, the supposed priest, played his part.

The crack-up came through one of those Americans for whom Mignon had a fondness. He didn't want to be made an earl, he just wanted to be a Chevalier of the French Legion of Honor.

That was easy for the Countess, Mignon said, and the cost would be trifling, say \$25,000. The American paid it over promptly, which was a mistake, for after that there were all kinds of unexpected additional expenses and the final amount was nearly double the agreed price. However, there were officials to be bribed, Mignon told him, and the whole process was a delicate, expensive and long-drawn-out affair.

In the meantime, *ma fois*, he was their guest, and their home was his home, *parbleu!* So he stayed at the chateau and dropped a couple of thousand francs at cards every night. But he didn't mind.

In fact, so taken was he with the fetching Mignon that he hardly knew what to do for her. At an expense readily imagined, he imported several of his own special horses from his Texas ranch and established a complete riding school on the grounds of the chateau, just to teach Mignon to ride!

The affair of the Legion of Honor took so long that by the time it was settled,

Mignon had become an expert rider. However, she judged it was time to produce some results before the American got restless, so finally she announced that success had crowned their efforts.

Mama got all rigged up in her ducal robes, with her coronet on her head and perched herself on the throne. The ribbon-happy American came in, kneeled down and Mama hung the gew-gaw around his neck and made impressive sounds in French which he couldn't understand.

He was so proud and happy that he wore his ribbon in his buttonhole like any other Frenchman. That broke it. The French cops wanted to know where he'd got it and French cops can ask quite a lot of embarrassing questions.

Mignon was never slow on the pickup. By the time the cops got out to the chateau it was empty, both of Mignon and anything valuable that could be carried away.

Considerably enriched, the trio skipped across to London where they immediately set up business in a swanky apartment in the fashionable West End. Mignon played herself, Mama dropped the Countess, and Jacques, in love with the rôle, became a French priest.

Success must have gone to Mignon's head for she now branched out into a very dangerous racket indeed—blackmail. It was easy for her to entice men to the apartment and since she was beautiful enough to spe-

cialize in, and get, important men, it was natural for her to see blackmail as the next logical step.

A noted judge, name withheld, was known to have paid \$5,000 to get back some letters he had written her. Others equally prominent, were taken to the cleaners.

Nor was this enough. Mignon didn't even pass up the small stuff. Operating on the principle that anyone who pays for anything is a sucker, she charged everything she bought and never paid the bills. Thus stores were gypped out of sums which in time ran up into thousands of dollars.

Of course this sort of open warfare on society could not go on indefinitely. The French police, sore at having her slip through their fingers, notified Scotland Yard and the British waited until they had enough evidence and made the pinch.

Mignon, Mama and Jacques drew stiff sentences, all three. Which brings up an interesting observation. There is no telling how long Mignon might have gone on had she been careful. Perhaps she'd have been caught sooner or later.

But it is noteworthy that the most successful criminals are so unbalanced by their success that they promptly go to the most foolish and reckless lengths. And believe me, brother, there is always a cop standing around and just waiting for that.

Crime don't pay well, as Art Huhta once remarked.

GENUINE BANKNOTES

The True Story of James Griffiths, Counterfeiter Whose Activities Baffled Scotland Yard

By SAMUEL MINES

COMING NEXT ISSUE

Many Never Suspect Cause of Backaches

This Old Treatment Often Brings Happy Relief

Many sufferers relieve nagging backache quickly, once they discover that the real cause of their trouble may be tired kidneys.

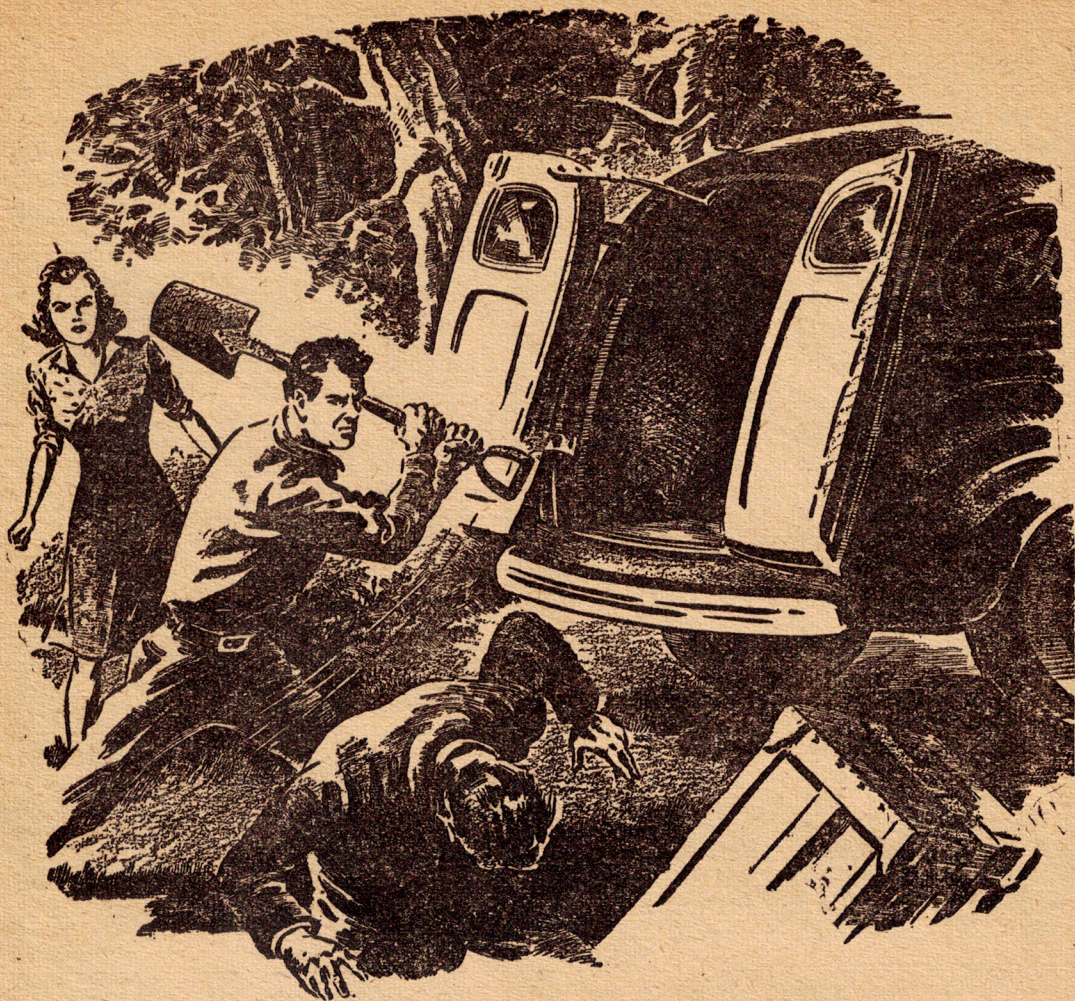
The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking the excess acids and waste out of the blood. They help most people pass about 3 pints a day.

When disorder of kidney function permits poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up

nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills.

(Adv.)



Joe brought the blade of the shovel down on George's head

Murder on Her Mind

By WALTER WILSON

Dolores and Ed had their sweetest crime for profit all worked out until the corpse decided he'd played ball long enough!

DOLORES STELL was ready to work on this youngster who sat with her at a table in the Blue Stork, this Joe Anglin who had dated her and blown his money on her for the past three weeks. Just three weeks ago she had singled him out as a prospect when she had spotted him tossing money about in a cheap night spot. Dolores had fixed it so he would think he had met her by pure

accident. But she had had a sinister purpose from the beginning.

Dolores, with some assistance from her co-worker, George Matlin, who had remained discreetly in the background, had checked on young Joe Anglin. She had found out that Joe was no more than a clerk for an investment house. His salary was peanut money. He had no connections, no wealthy relatives. Yet he was spending

dough like water, spending it as if there were a time limit on the source of his wealth.

So Dolores had played him around. Tonight he had drunk a bit more than usual. He was ripe for the picking. Dolores' eyes grew calculating, cruel, as she looked at him. A generous man might have guessed Dolores at twenty-five. A catty woman would have tabbed her at past thirty. She knew how to use make-up cleverly, what clothes showed her figure to best advantage. And she knew just how to work on a young fool like Joe Anglin.

"Joe," she said softly, "I've been doing a lot of thinking lately."

"About what?" he asked lightly.

"About you. About us, Joe. We've had a lot of dates together and a swell time. You must know I'm crazy about you. So crazy about you that I'm worried—worried because you've been spending so much money on me."

"Forget it." Joe waved his hand airily. "What's dough good for if you can't spend it on the finest little girl in the world?"

"It all depends, Joe." She lowered her tone to a very earnest pitch. "Now you've told me something about your job at Westerman's. You can't be getting a very large salary."

Joe frowned just a little.

"I get enough to get by on," he mumbled.

"But not enough to keep up this pace, Joe. You've spent a lot of money in the last three weeks. You've thrown most of it away. It worries me."

"Why should you worry?" he shrugged. "Maybe I've got a rich uncle who lets me check on his account."

She slowly shook her head.

"But you haven't, Joe. You've already told me you have no close relatives at all, no one that you even keep in touch with. You don't earn this money that you blow. You don't get it from any relative."

"What do you care where I get it?" he asked a little roughly. "Have you ever heard me squawk about the nut? Do I fumble when I reach for a check?"

"No, Joe. You spend it as if it were burning your fingers. We can't go on like this, Joe—if you've meant what you said to me. I'm scared. I've got to know some of the answers."

"All right, Dolores," he said after a moment. "The answer is easy. I've just borrowed this dough I spend. Borrowed it from the house I work for."

She leaned forward and looked him squarely in the eyes.

"I suspected that you did, Joe—suspected that you borrowed it from Westerman's. But—does the house of Westerman know that you are borrowing it?"

His face tightened.

"What do you mean by—"

"I mean exactly what I say, Joe. You can't fool me any longer, loving you the way I do. You've been borrowing this money—without bothering to tell your boss about it. You know you have, Joe. You can't deny it—not to me."

He lowered his eyes to the table cloth and his face twitched. He took a deep breath, opened his lips as if to speak, then closed them again.

"You're short in your accounts, aren't you?" she said, very sure of her ground now. "Sooner or later someone will check your figures and find out the truth. What will happen then?"

HE WAITED a minute, then raised his head and grinned a little.

"I hope it will be a nice jail," he said. Then he frowned and asked, "Are you going to call Westerman's and tip them that I—"

"You know I'm not, Joe," she answered quickly. "That's the last thing I'd do. I can't bear the thought of what will happen when they find out."

"Then forget it, Dolores. We might as well go ahead and have a good time until the blow-off comes. I ought to last a couple of weeks yet—until the semi-annual audit."

"No!" she said fiercely. "You're not going to jail. I won't let them put you in jail, Joe. It would kill me!"

"If there's any other way out, I haven't been able to figure it," he said dryly.

"There is an out, Joe. We can run for it—together. I have a little money saved."

He leaned forward, his eyes eager.

"You really mean that, Dolores—that you think enough of me to give up everything—and run for it with me?"

"Of course, Joe. You must be blind if you can't see that. You're all I care about. We'll run away somewhere and start all over again under new names—where no one can ever find us. How much are you short, Joe?"

He hesitated a moment.

"About three thousand, I guess."

"If we only had that much now, Joe. I've got about three hundred dollars. But that won't last us long. We've got to get more money than that—get it somewhere."

"There's more where that came from," he reminded her. "I guess I wouldn't be in any worse jam if I took all I can get my hands on now."

"You mean that you have the chance to get a lot more, Joe—without being caught?"

"Sure, Dolores. I guess I could walk out with twenty thousand if I waited for just the right chance. All I have to do is help myself—with certain precautions."

Dolores' eyes glowed. This was just the

way she had figured it from the beginning. This Joe Anglin was ripe. Just waiting for a smart girl like her to pluck from the vine. And Dolores Stell knew how to do the plucking without leaving a trail.

"Twenty thousand!" She said it as though the sound of that much money frightened her. "Twenty thousand dollars! With that much money, everything would be easy. I know a place here in the city where you could hide out till the hue and cry has blown over and the police stop looking for you. Then we could go away and make a new start. I've no relatives either, Joe. No one who cares a hoot about me. Only you, Joe."

"That's swell, Dolores," he said hoarsely. "You know I'm wild about you. But I never dreamed that you—I thought you'd drop me like a hot potato if you knew the truth, knew that I was—"

"You had me all wrong, Joe. I probably wouldn't have guessed the truth if I hadn't been so much in love with you. Now I won't be able to sleep until we're safely away. I'll be scared to death Westerman's will find out before you—"

"Don't worry about that, Dolores," he told her. "I can cover everything till that audit comes along. I can grab that twenty thousand in a couple of days. How soon can you be ready?"

"Anytime, Joe. We mustn't wait a day longer than necessary. I'll see about that place tomorrow, the place where you can hide out safely till the heat is off. Just when can you get that twenty thousand?"

"Day after tomorrow, Wednesday," he said. "In the afternoon—when my bosses have a weekly conference and I'm alone with some real cash for an hour or so. All I'll have to do is grab it and sneak out. Where is this place you can get, Dolores? It will be okay?"

"Absolutely sure, Joe. It's a small flat—out in a suburb. No one would ever think of looking for you there. You can stay in the flat, and I'll just have to go out once in a while to get groceries and things. It'll be easy and safe. Now we've got to plan everything in detail so there won't be any misunderstanding."

Dolores' face was grim and determined when she found herself alone in her apartment two hours later. She went straight to the phone and called her co-worker.

"I was right, George," she said exultantly when Matlin's voice came over the wire. "I hit everything on the nail. He came clean when I put it to him straight. You might as well get the trunk ready, George. And a bottle of brandy. We're going to need it—day after tomorrow."

"How much does it rate?" the harsh voice asked.

"Twenty grand. Soft, huh?"

"It sounds all right. But I want to talk to you—to make sure about everything."

"I tell you it'll be a cinch. You get a trunk right away. And the brandy. That's all."

"I know. But I'll drop by to see you in about three hours."

"Sure, George. I'll be here waiting for you. I've got it all set. About all you'll have to do is to—to close the trunk."

DOLORES STELL paced up and down the living room of the cheap flat. From time to time she glanced impatiently at the little watch on her wrist. She went to the window and looked out. Joe Anglin wasn't to show here with the dough until it was dark.

It was almost dark now—just a few more minutes. There was just one thing that really worried her, the possibility that he might lose his nerve at the last minute. Her face grew vicious at the thought that twenty grand might evade her greedy fingers.

Her eyes gleamed five minutes later when she heard the steps in the hall. Two quick taps on the door followed. She forced a smile of expectancy to her face, went to the door and opened it.

"Joe!" she whispered. "You made it."

"Sure, I made it." Joe Anglin came in and closed the door. He carried a brown case in his right hand. "It was easy. Nobody tumbled at all. I waited until I got things just the way I wanted them, then grabbed the money and walked out with it. I got it in this case."

He walked over to the table, put the case on it, opened it with a key he took from his pocket. Dolores' eyes sparkled at the sight of the exposed currency. He took a packet in his right hand, held it up. It was held together by a strip of white paper. Dolores saw the twenty dollar bill on top. She smiled broadly, and this time there was nothing phony about the smile. Money was the one thing that could make Dolores deliriously happy.

Joe reached in his pocket and took out another key after he had replaced the currency and locked the case.

"Here's a key for you, Dolores," he said. "In case anything should happen to me. We'll keep the case ready and handy all the time, so we can grab it and blow in a hurry if things should break wrong."

"Nothing is going to break wrong here, Joe," she told him. "We can stay here a month if we want to."

"Swell, Dolores. Now I can relax. It was a strain for a few minutes when I was getting away with that dough. I had to sneak in the vault. I feel a little shaky now that it's all over."

"Of course, you do, Joe." This was just the break she had been looking for. "What you need is a good stiff drink to relax you. I've got a bottle of brandy. I'll get it from the kitchen. You wait here."

She went to the rear of the flat, came back with a bottle and two glasses. She put the glasses on the table, poured out a big drink for Joe, a small one for herself. She handed the big drink to Joe, then touched his glass with her own.

"Here's to us, Joe," she said. "Everything is going to be just fine from here on."

He grinned, raised the glass to his lips, drained it. Dolores put her glass to her lips. Then she coughed a little and turned her head.

"I never could drink brandy," she said. "It makes me cough. I'll wait a minute and then sip some of it."

"That's hot stuff," Joe Anglin chuckled. "It sure hit the spot with me. Took the edge right off my nerves. Just what I needed to relax— Say, I feel—I feel kinda funny. I feel like—"

"Like what, Joe?" she asked in a low voice as she stared at him.

"I'm—I'm gettin' dizzy," he said thickly. "And sick. I gotta lie down."

"Sure, Joe. You lie down right here on the divan. It's just the reaction from the strain you've been under. Lie down, and you'll be all right in a few minutes."

She caught his arm and steadied him until he got to the divan. He was almost out by the time his head hit the cushions. He gave a great sigh and closed his eyes. In a minute, he was snoring lustily.

Dolores watched him for a short time. Then she shook him by the shoulders and shook him hard. She was satisfied now. He was completely out. She went swiftly to the window and raised the shade about a foot, then lowered it. That was the signal that George Matlin was waiting for. She looked at Joe again, then moved over to the door and waited.

After a minute, she opened the door, and George came in. He was stocky, dark-complexioned man with thick lips. He was well-dressed, businesslike in his actions. He looked at the prostrate man on the divan.

"Everything went by the book?" he asked easily.

"Like clockwork," she assured him. "He gulped down the stuff with his eyes shut. He needed the bracer badly. It hit him like the kick of a mule. I got him to the divan before he passed out. He won't wake up for—well," she smiled cruelly, "he won't ever get a chance to wake up again, will he, George?"

"No. He ought to be glad he won't."

"The trunk is back there where you put it, George. You'd better get it."

"Right. There's no use waiting. I've got a nice spot picked for it. About twenty miles out. I got hold of a paneled truck to use for a few hours. All we've got to do is get him down to it."

"He'll go down in the books as another smart guy who lifted twenty grand and got away with it. The cops will always be looking for him in some God-forsaken spot. Well, that's where he will be, but they'll never find him. I'll get the trunk. We'd better move fast."

George went back into the rear hall. He was carrying a boxlike trunk when he returned. He placed the trunk on the floor alongside the divan. He opened the trunk. Slowly he maneuvered George Anglin into a sitting position inside. Then he pressed the shoulders forward until he could get the lid down and snap the lock.

"That does it," he said as he straightened up. "He's out cold, all right. Never even grunted. All we've got to do now is get the trunk in the truck. The rest will be easy. Is that the dough in that case on the table?"

"That's it. He opened it, and I saw the currency stacked in it. He gave me an extra key so we don't have to bother about his. We'll open it up and count it when we have more time."

"Okay. Now let's get out of here. You help me get the trunk up on my back so I can carry it down the stairs. Then you bring the case and follow me. When we get to the truck, you open the doors in the rear so I can back up to it and slide the trunk in on the boards."

"This is always the worst part of it for me," Dolores said. "Getting that trunk out to the truck. I'm always afraid something will happen, that somebody will guess what's in the trunk and—"

"That doesn't make sense," he said shortly. "Forget it. Nobody can possibly guess what's in the trunk. He ain't going to squawk. I'll handle him as easy as I can. That's the smart part of this plan, Dolores. Even if we should be nabbed they'd never be able to stick us for the full rap—because Anglin is still breathing. The cops would revive him and all we would get is a stretch. We don't even have to bump him. All we got to do is bury him and let nature take its course."

"Yeah, but I'll feel better when we get rolling. Let's get it over with quick."

HE TURNED around, and she helped get the trunk up on his back. She picked up the brown case and opened the door. She looked out into the hall, nodded that the coast was clear. He followed her out into the hall, picked his way carefully down the stairs and out to the street. They walked

about twenty yards to where the truck was parked.

She opened the rear doors. He backed and let the trunk slide down on to the boards. He pushed it inside about two feet and closed the doors. They went quickly around to the front of the truck and climbed into the seat. George started the motor, and the truck moved away.

That flat in the suburbs hadn't been picked at random. It was just a few minutes drive from there to a highway that led straight north into the country. Dolores and George breathed more easily when they were safely out on that road. The rest of the job was mere routine with a little hard work thrown in. George turned off the main highway after about fifteen miles and went west on a plain dirt road. He drove about four miles more, then switched off his lights and turned off on a narrow rutted lane to the right. It was hard to see without lights, and he drove very slowly. At last, the truck went up a sharp hill in low gear. He parked and turned off the motor.

"This is it," George announced. "There's a small open place in a clump of trees off to the right there. Come on. It'll take me a half hour or so to dig the hole. You can turn the flash on for me once in a while so I can see what I'm doing."

Dolores followed him over the rough ground to the clump of trees. He picked his way among the trees and stopped. He handed her a flashlight and had her turn it on for a moment while he placed his tool for the first shovelful. The ground was soft and he worked fast. Dolores used the light when he asked for it. He worked steadily until he was down about two feet.

"I gotta rest a while," he said, gasping. "I ain't used to this kind of work."

"Let me have a go at it," Dolores said. "Anything is better than standing here waiting. You hold the light while I use the shovel."

He took the shovel away from her after three minutes. At last, he climbed out of the hole.

"That ought to do it," he grunted. "There'll be about two feet of dirt on top of the trunk. All I'll have to do is put a little sod back on top and it'll never be noticed. Let's go back and get the trunk."

They walked back to the truck. George opened the rear doors, reached inside and got hold of the handle of the trunk. He pulled it out a little, then turned so that he could shift it up onto his back. Dolores reached over and pushed. George gave a mighty heave, and the trunk went up onto his back.

"Cripes!" he yelled. He twisted sideways and let the trunk fall to the ground. "Watch out, Dolores! Something's wrong!

That trunk is empty!"

"Sure, it's empty!" Joe Anglin said from the blackness and brought the blade of the shovel down on George's head. George went down in a heap. Dolores tried to turn and run for it, but Joe caught her by the arm and jerked her back. Then he dragged her around to the front of the truck and turned on the lights. He took her back to the trunk and the unconscious George who lay beside it.

"I ought to fold you both into that trunk and sink you in that hole where you were going to sink me," he said. "Only I've got other plans—plans I've had for a long time. You thought you worked it pretty smoothly that night you met me about three weeks ago, didn't you? But all you did was take the bait. I did the planting, and you fell for it. I acted just like the sort of sucker you were looking for, and you fell for it."

She tried to jerk away from him, cursed him as she fought.

"I'd been watching you and George for months before I showed my hand," he told her. "I kept watching George all the time. I knew the way you played it. After you put it up to me night before last, I prowled George's place."

"I found the trunk and the brandy the next night. I had a locksmith fix the trunk so I could work it from the inside. I switched the contents of the brandy bottle. I had the stuff that was in it analyzed. It wasn't poison. Just knockout drops, enough to make me dream for hours. George didn't suspect the switch when he brought the trunk and bottle out today."

"And I put a little mark on the label of that bottle so I would be sure it was the same one tonight. All I had to do was pretend I was out. But I was ready to land one on George if he had happened to guess I was faking. I let you put me in the trunk and bring me out here. I wanted all the evidence I could get. This hole in the ground will convince any jury."

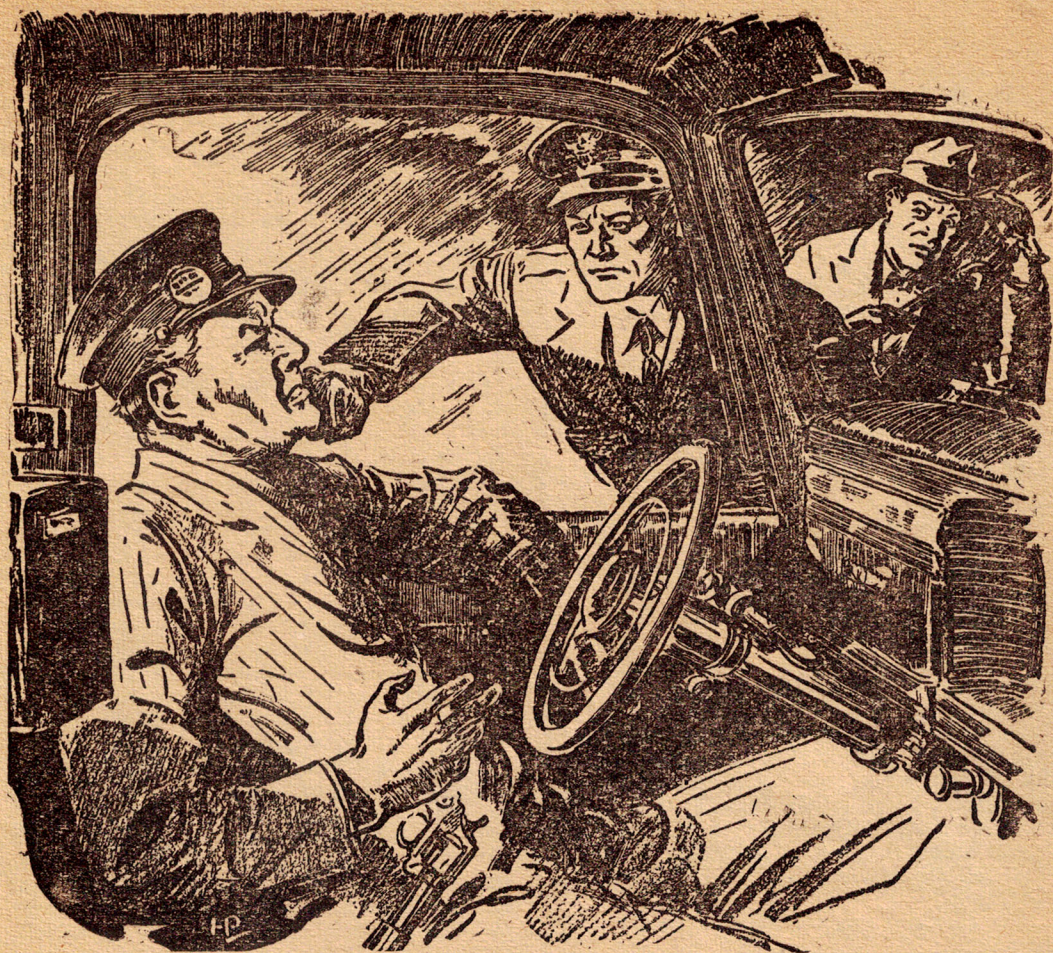
"You can't stick us for so much!" Dolores sneered. "You aren't even hurt. You weren't even doped. You only got us for an attempt. So what!"

"So this, Dolores. Out near Chicago, a farmhouse burned down. The farmer decided to build his new house on a different site. When he excavated for a cellar on that new site, he dug up a trunk. There was a dead man in that trunk. He was finally identified as a Tom Stephens, who had stolen thirty thousand dollars and disappeared a few years before."

"I don't know anything about that!" Dolores cried frantically.

"The cops picked you up and questioned you about Stephens, didn't they? They ac-

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A savage right to the jaw sent the driver sprawling over the wheel

Leave at Your Peril

By SAM MERWIN, JR.

Lieutenant Paul Britton splits a sinister murder plot wide open when he returns to the swanky Garnet Club!

THE first familiar figure—and in this case it *was* a figure—that Paul Britton spotted within the smart red and white portals of the Garnet Club, belonged to Toni Evans, the sleek, dark-haired young beauty who ran the check room and cigarette concessions. From the top of the steps, he could see that the seams of her stockings were as straight as twin plumb lines as she stood on tiptoe to place a pair of hats on the top shelf.

He removed his own hat and waited while she handed the customers their checks. Then he advanced and laid his hat on the counter. It took her a few seconds to notice him, and he used the time to the hilt in enjoying her lush, fresh loveliness. He decided that Toni must have blossomed out since he'd last seen her, or that eighteen months away from the New York scene had seriously impaired his judgment.

"Maestro!" she squealed, and throwing

a pair of firmly rounded and pleasantly undraped young arms around his neck, kissed him full on the lips. Then, pulling away from him abruptly, she said almost shyly, "Gee, I'm sorry! I forgot. I guess I must be glad to see you."

"I guess you must be," said Paul, grinning and delving under his uniform jacket for a handkerchief, to undo the lipstick damage. On second thought, he pulled her to him over the counter and returned the embrace. It was, he decided, definitely worth while.

"You've grown up, Toni," he said. "You look years younger."

"Hey!" said a rough male voice behind him. "Just what kind of a place do you think this is, Lieutenant?" a hand on his shoulder spun him around. Tom Morris, gray-haired, stocky, lumpy-faced owner of the Garnet glared at him from less than a foot away.

"Hello, Tom," said Paul, extending a hand that was taken limply.

Morris' surprise was almost ludicrous. His eyes popped, and his Adam's apple ran up his neck like a pink champagne bubble.

"Paul!" said the club owner. "Why don't you let a guy know when you're coming. I'd have had out the fatted calf, or the closest to it—what with all this rationing. Say—I heard you got a commission the hard way, but aren't those silver bars?"

"That's right," said Paul. "I was lucky—too lucky, maybe. It begins to look as if I'm buried down South teaching for the duration."

"I think he's wonderful," said Toni proudly.

Tom Morris cast an annoyed glance at her, then led Paul away, an arm linked through his.

"Will Jerri be glad to see you!" he said. "She's still singing here and still carrying a torch that bothers the dimout bosses."

"I'll bet," said Paul without much feeling. Even down South he could read the Broadway columns. He changed the subject. "How's the band sound with Stan Johnson running it? Okay?"

"Okay," said Morris, "but not like when you were here. Come on over to the round table and say hello to Jerri. She'll shoot me at sunrise if you don't. Come on, fellow, the place is yours tonight."

The Garnet was a rectangular room that had once been the basement and kitchen of a midtown Manhattan mansion. In one corner next to the door was a quarter-circular bar. In the center of the back wall was the orchestra stand, flanked on either side by doors leading to kitchens, offices and dressing rooms. The lighting was dim and pleasant.

Business looked good to Paul. He glanced across the shifting heads of the dancers on the small floor to where tall, blond Stanley

Johnson was conducting the small but excellent orchestra that had once been Paul's own. Johnson didn't play a horn—he had been pianist and arranger in the old days. Now he contented himself with waving a baton.

The round table, an idea which Tom Morris had lifted from John Perona of El Morocco, was just that—a round table in a favored spot near the door where the owner could entertain guests and favored clients. At the moment, only two people were sitting there.

JERRI LANE, Paul saw, even in that flattering light, had not weathered the last eighteen months as well as had little Toni out in the hat checkery. Unquestionably, clad in strapless white satin, she was close to being the perfect golden blonde—but there were suggestions of tautness around the corners of her eyes and mouth that spoke of living on nerves and mas-seuses instead of on sufficient rest.

"Paul!" she cried. "How marvelous! You're looking wonderful, darling."

Despite the enthusiasm of her words, Paul got the impression that she was merely saying them, not feeling them. He offered a silent prayer of thanks—he'd been a little afraid of *this* reunion—and glanced at the other occupant of the round table.

Artie Aleno saluted him casually with the hand which was not wrapped around Jerri's forearm on the table. It had a cigarette in it which described a figure eight of light in the dimness. He was a close-faced, swarthy man of indeterminate age, who wore his costly dinner jacket as suavely as a ballroom dancer—or a waiter captain. He was also, unless he had slipped, an extremely opulent racetrack bookmaker.

"Just get in town?" Aleno asked him. Something in the gambler's indifference was a bit too studied.

As he made a polite reply, Paul wondered if the man were in love with Jerri. There was something proprietary in the way his arm rested on hers, but with a Broadway character, that could mean anything or nothing at all.

"You look pretty terrific, Paul," said Jerri, flashing him her best smile and disengaging her arm gently but firmly from Aleno's grip.

Two years back, that smile would have sent chills up his spine and under his ribs. Sixteen months in the Army changed a man's perspective.

"Strictly G. I.," said Paul. "You look pretty terrific yourself, Jerri. How about it, Artie?" He glanced at the gambler, who allowed his eyebrows to move in a sort of shoulderless shrug.

"Miss Lane is a very beautiful young lady," he said.

Paul repressed a shudder. He'd forgot-

ten that people talked like that. Tom Morris came back from somewhere then, put a hand on his shoulder.

"Just seeing that the champagne got iced," he said. "Now how about getting up there and leading the boys for a couple of numbers? It will be like old times. Jerri can give you a plug."

"No thanks," said Paul. "I got a faceful of dust on maneuvers last week, and it still isn't out of my skin. I don't know what my lip would do if I tried to blow a horn. I'd be terrible, Tom."

"So what?" said the owner. "Nobody'd care. But everybody here would like to see you try one. Come on, kid, it would help business. Do it as a break for me, will you?"

Jerri added her entreaties, and finally settled the issue by rising to consult Stanley Johnson on the stand. Johnson's eyes followed her glance, spotted Paul and beckoned to him with both hands. There was nothing for it. A spotlight picked him up as he rose, and the music stopped.

Jerri gave him the works, made him out pretty much of a hero, which he wasn't, told the two hundred-odd souls present that he was back in better shape than ever to blow them a few high ones—which was certainly not the case.

"And now," she concluded, "which one of Paul Britton's old specials would you like him to play for us?"

Paul had, in the meantime, ascended the platform, where someone had handed him a horn. He turned his back to the audience, pressed it to his lips, tried a couple of runs. He might, he thought get by if he didn't try to press too much in the upper register.

"Hey, Paul," said Stanley Johnson softly in his ear. "Did you get that wire I sent you yesterday?"

"Yeah," said Paul. "I got it, but I couldn't make sense of it. That's what brought me up here. I was overdue for a leave anyway."

"Am I glad of that!" said the baton wielder. "I'm up against something I can't handle without your advice."

"Good thing I'm not in Africa or Australia," said Paul, wondering what was up. "Where and when can we talk?"

"I'll meet you backstage as soon as you get through," said Johnson. "In the orchestra room. Have the band play a number on their own."

"Okay, Stan," said Paul. "See you in ten minutes if my lip doesn't pop first. Maybe we'd better go across the street for coffee."

"Maybe," said Johnson. "We can settle it later. Boy, I sure am glad you could make it."

There was, Paul thought, as he watched the orchestra leader leave the stand and walk to the dressing-room door, no doubt

about his sincerity. Johnson was a friend of long standing, anyway. He wondered what in hades had gone wrong up here.

Jerri sang "Begin the Beguine" for the opening number, and Paul managed to back her up without difficulty. It felt good to be up there playing again with the boys behind him. There were new faces in the lineup of course—the war had seen to that. But Stanley had selected and groomed replacements so well and so carefully that the style and quality of the outfit remained almost the same as before.

HE TOOK a chorus and, by taking it easily and in conservative fashion, managed to get through it without damaging either the tune or his lip. Then Jerri, with a flourish that brought a hearty round of applause, turned the band over to him alone and retired from the spotlight. Paul ordered a "Muskrat Ramble" and gave the down beat.

The exhilaration was too much for him, and without meaning to, he began to let out. He took the chorus, and his tone felt thick and clean. He went after volume and got it. By the time the other lads had done their stuff and the final chorus ensembles came up, he really went all out. It was then, in the middle of it, that his lip split.

It felt as if it had been blown open right down to his chin. He hadn't suffered such a sharp pang since his last visit to the dentist. Laying down his horn, he motioned the band to carry on without him, covered his lower face with a handkerchief and dug into the cornet case of his successor for a styptic pencil to make the necessary repairs.

"I'm one heck of a soldier!" he thought as he ducked behind the orchestra stand. "A split lip knocks me right out of things." He leaned against the wall in the narrow aisle behind the stand, wondering briefly if he were going to faint, and complete the job of making an ass of himself. Then the pain subsided, and he went to work with the pencil.

The band was still giving out when he had finished, but he had neither desire nor intention of playing again that evening. He'd come to New York to talk business with Stanley Johnson, and Stanley was waiting for him in the musicians' room in the rear of the club.

Stan was waiting, all right. . . . From the look of the still-red blood that made a two-tone job of his shirt front, he'd be waiting until the medical examiner decided to take him away. Someone had put a bullet through his chest as he was sitting at the table, smoking a cigarette. The butt had fallen to the floor, where it still smoldered.

In spite of the fact that Paul wore the bars of a first lieutenant in the Army of the United States, he was still a stranger to violent death. For a full two minutes,

he stood there, stunned. He was not aware that someone had opened the door in back of him, until a strange voice sounded in his ears. He jumped a foot and pivoted with his hands up.

"Ain't this pretty!" said the plump man in early middle age who stood there regarding him gloomily, both hands thrust into the side pockets of a weather-stained gabardine topcoat. His round cheeks and jowls hinted at good nature, but his eyes were black buttons in his face. They darted from the corpse to Paul, seemed to stab him through.

"Somebody shot him," said Paul, feeling like a fool but unable to help it. "His name is Stanley Johnson. He led the band here."

"Yeah," said the stranger. "I know all about it. Somebody was polite enough to call up the precinct and give us all the dope. They said he was maybe shot by a guy named Lieutenant Paul Britton, an old boss of his. That wouldn't be your name, would it? Or are those bars coincidence?"

"I'm Britton, all right," said Paul. His tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth, and his voice didn't sound normal even to him. "But I didn't kill him. I came up on leave especially to talk business with him."

"What kind of business?" Those little eyes were remorseless.

"As a matter of fact, I don't know," said Paul. "I—that is, Stan sent me a telegram saying he had to see me. We were partners in a way. I mean, he handled some of my affairs since I was drafted. He was waiting for me here to tell me what was wrong. That's the truth."

"You don't know much about it, do you, Britton?" said the other ironically. "By the way, I'm Mike Fallon of Homicide. Maybe if we go in the office or somewhere, you can clear things up a bit. As it is, it don't make sense." He walked out, motioned a group of officers and plainclothes men who had gathered in the corridor to do their stuff with the body.

The shooting, which had evidently not been heard in the club, thanks to the noise of the band, had created little disturbance. The police, who had apparently come in through the alley and the service door, seemed to want it that way. But in the office, Tom Morris and Jerri Lane were waiting for them.

The club owner was nervously chewing on the end of an unlit cigar as he paced the carpet, while his singing star lounged in an arm chair of modernistic design, tapping the carpet with a toeless silver slipper.

"Okay," said Detective Fallon when they were all seated. He had perched himself in a half sitting pose on a corner of Morris' desk. "Morris, let's hear what you got to say about this first."

"I don't know a thing about it, Fallon," said Morris, opening his well-kept hands in

a helpless gesture. "Paul—I mean Lieutenant Britton—turned up here tonight unexpectedly. He used to run the band. We asked him to play us a number. Stan Johnson gave him the stand and Paul took over. He leaves the stand in the final chorus of the second tune he plays, and the next thing I know, you arrive."

"Who sent us the tip?" Fallon asked him sharply. "Did you?"

"No," said Morris. "I tell you I didn't know anything about it. So how could I send in a tip? But get this straight. Paul didn't do it. He and Stan were friends—real friends, from way back."

PAUL was thinking: Thanks for them kind words, Tom. But don't kill me with kindness—in the electric chair. It was a disquieting thought. Come to think of it, unless this hard-eyed detective chose to take his word for it that he'd been behind the band stand fixing his lip while Stan was killed, he might very well be on a nice warm spot.

Jerri's evidence, which was substantially the same as Paul's, didn't do him any good either. He noticed that neither Tom nor Jerri said a word about Artie Aleno having been in the club. But that didn't prove much either way. In a murder mess it isn't smart to involve men with connections like the bookmaker's unless it can be pinned on them.

"Well," said Fallon, when he and Paul were once more alone, "how about it—how about giving me an account of what you've been doing?"

Paul told him, gave him as careful a summing up of his movements after leaving the stand as he could. But he could tell the detective wasn't much impressed. During the recital, a lesser official came in and put Stan's belongings on the desk. Fallon looked them over carefully, scanned the few papers and letters the leader had carried on him.

"What was this business you and Johnson had together?" he asked.

"As a matter of fact," said Paul, "Stan had my power of attorney while I was in service. Tom Morris is a great night-club personality and manager, but he's a rotten owner. He likes the ponies too well. I helped him build up the Garnet, and I didn't want to see it go under. So Stan was taking control of it for me little by little."

"That," said Fallon, leaning back in his chair, "ain't the way I heard it. It's common gossip that Artie Aleno bought in here when your pal Morris couldn't come up with enough scratch to cover his losses at Belmont. Maybe your pal Johnson was playing with him. Maybe you got word about it. Maybe you came up here to settle it the hard way."

Paul felt the floor ooze right out from under him. The detective wasn't talking

through his hat. There was authority in the very tone of his voice. He couldn't believe it—not of Stan—but put in a matter of fact way, it was hard not to worry. It would not be the first time such a double-cross had been pulled in the night-club business.

At that moment, there was the sound of a scuffle in the hall outside the closed door. A girl was demanding entrance, and the policeman on duty was trying to shoo her off. His remonstrations gave way to a yelp of pain followed by a curse. Then the door was flung open, and Toni Evans, the hat check girl, stood there, angry, lovely, and just a trifle absurd in her spangled bodice and short fluffy ballet skirt.

"You're not going to hang Paul Britton with this killing as long as I can be a witness for him," she said.

The police guard appeared behind her, limping and furious, but Fallon motioned him away.

"And what information can you give about Lieutenant Britton's movements?" the detective asked her. Though his face was impassive, Paul thought he read a certain amusement in those beady black eyes.

"Plenty!" said Toni. "He couldn't have done it. I saw his lip split up there. I was peddling cigarettes near the stand when it happened. Paul—I mean Lieutenant Britton—got a styptic pencil from the regular trumpet player's instrument case. Then he went around to the alley behind the stand and tried to stop the blood."

"How did you happen to be there, young lady?" Fallon asked her.

"I was afraid he'd faint," she said, vividly alive in her earnestness. "I used to play a tuba in my high school band back home, and I know how much a split lip hurts. I wanted to be sure he was all right."

"You seem to take quite an interest in him," said Fallon.

"Who wouldn't?" said the girl, unabashed. To his horror, Paul felt himself blush warmly from the rim of his collar up. "You," she said pertly to the detective, "seem to be interested in him yourself. Or did you just keep him in here to bore yourself silly?"

"I suspect our interests aren't quite the same," said Fallon. He cocked a head and considered Paul from a different point of view. "But I see what you mean. He is cute, isn't he?"

"For Pete's sake!" said Paul. "What's my name—Sinatra? This is a heck of a way to act with Stan lying in there shot."

"They've taken him downtown," said Fallon quietly. He sighed. "It's always like this. Every time you get a good-looking suspect, some dame comes along and springs him with an alibi." He gestured toward the door. "Okay, Britton. Beat it. I've got work to do, so take the kid with you. Where

are you staying while you're here? I might need you."

Paul gave him the name of his hotel and went outside. He leaned against the wall and mopped his brow with his bloody handkerchief. Toni fussed around him, reminding him of a kitten.

"Thanks, honey," he said. "I was picturing myself with those straps on my knees and ankles. You came through in the clinch on that one. What can I do to even things up for you—or try to?"

"Just this," said the girl. She put her arms around his neck, stood on tiptoe and kissed him soundly.

This proved to be both messy and painful, as his lip reopened, and it took more doctoring to fix it.

"Gee! I'm sorry," she said. "Darn it! I didn't mean to hurt you."

"Here," he said, extending his arm. "Cut this off. You're welcome to it after what you just did for me in there. I mean it."

She helped him make repairs, and they moved out toward the front of the club, arm in arm. The more Paul saw of Toni, the more he wondered how he'd passed her up before. Behind them, the police guard shook his head sadly.

"She kisses a guy with a bum lip," he muttered, "while here I am with a perfectly good mush, and she has to give me a kick in the shins."

IN FRONT, the club was deserted except for waiters piling chairs on the tables. The police had evidently decided to close up the Garnet early for the evening. Toni got Paul his hat and leaned on the counter of the check room, chin in her hands, looking up at him.

"Are you going to take me to supper?" she asked. He shook his head. He began to be glad he had nine more days ahead of him this trip.

"Sorry," he said. "And this isn't a brush-off. Remember, Stan was murdered back there an hour or so ago. He was a friend of mine."

"Sure he was," said Toni. "He was a great guy. I understand." She sighed, then grinned like a gamin. "Anyway, it's good to see you don't go for that Jerri Lane any more. I used to worry about it."

"Did you!" said Paul, smiling. Then he was serious, as a thought came to him. "How about this Artie Aleno? Does he go for her these days?"

"Like a falling Stuka," Toni said. "But Jerri's playing the same game with him she did with you—taking you for what she can get and handing it out to the real boy friend on the side."

"You don't need to rub it in," said Paul, wincing. Somehow, now that it was over, he didn't mind being ribbed about it—not

from Toni at any rate. "Tell me," he went on, "what did Aleno do after Jerri got me up there on the stand? Did he stay at his table all the time?"

"No," said Toni, "he didn't. No one was there for awhile. Artie got a call on the phone booth in back. I gave him the message, and he took it. Gee!" she went on, "I hadn't thought . . . he came back, saying the call was a phony. But I suppose he could have done it. He's not the nicest customer in the world when he gets boiling about something."

"Yeah," said Paul. "I'm aware of that. And so long, Toni. I've got some business to attend to. I'll drop around tomorrow early."

"You'll drop around tomorrow for lunch," she said, slipping a bit of paper into his hand. "That's where I live and my phone number. I'll expect you at one o'clock, so be there on time."

"Yes, teacher," said Paul. He grinned, turned to walk away.

"Hey!" she cried. "Can't I kiss you good night, Paul?"

He turned back, considered the proposition, stooped and turned his face.

"On the cheek," he said, pointing to it. "Once over lightly."

He looked around for Tom Morris when he got outside. The club owner was nowhere to be seen, so he hopped into a cab and gave the driver Artie Aleno's address. He hoped the gambler hadn't moved from his huge apartment on the West Side. If he had, he might be hard to find.

Away from Toni, he found himself upset and thoroughly unhappy. He couldn't help but wonder about Stan. Fallon's suggestion that the band leader might have sold him down the river to the gambler didn't make sense on the face of it. Stan hadn't been that sort of a lad. But if the leader hadn't been mixed up in something, why had he been shot? People just didn't go around getting killed if their hands were clean.

No, Aleno was the man he had to see. If he or one of his men had shot Stan—well, that would have to be settled. And there was the little matter of just who *did* own the Garnet. Paul had been figuring on it as a productive nest egg that would be waiting for him when the war was over. It was a solid entertainment property.

Aleno, wearing a heavy watered-silk dressing gown over his dinner trousers, answered the bell himself. He peered at Paul suspiciously and looked far from pleased at the prospect of a visit just then.

"Yes?" he said. "Is there something you wished to see me about, Britton? You had better come back in the morning. I have company." His speech, as always, was careful to an utterly ridiculous extreme.

Paul used his greater bulk to push him-

self inside the apartment door.

"I'm afraid it won't wait," said Paul. "You and I have a lot to straighten out."

The gambler's eyes were light with anger.

"Suppose you tell me," said Aleno, moving over toward a card table with a drawer in it. "After you finish, you can get out of here."

"I want to know just one thing," said Paul. He had a sudden and irrelevant feeling that he was looking at a bad imitation of George Raft, then realized that this man was dangerous as a snake. "Was Stan Johnson playing ball with you in your purchase of the Garnet?"

"And," said Aleno, his eyes narrowing still further—if such a thing were possible—"what if Johnson was? See here, Britton. I've always liked you. This is a murder rap. Why don't you keep your nose clean?"

"For one thing," said Paul, "Stan Johnson was a friend as far as I know. And I've got interests that make me want to prove it. I've got fifteen grand in hard cash I paid Tom Morris for the Garnet."

Aleno stared at him, poker-faced. His hand moved toward the table drawer. At that moment, Jerri Lane, still wearing the strapless evening gown and looking like a Hurrell photograph of herself, appeared in the doorway behind him, saw the tableau and pouted prettily.

WITH typical egotism, she misread the situation entirely, evidently decided that the men were arguing over her. Paul, to whom she was no longer a mystery, saw her visibly preen herself, like a peahen watching a couple of gorgeous peacocks battle for her affections.

"Paul!" she said. "Really! You shouldn't have followed me here. Artie and I were just having a couple of drinks. He was nice enough to ask me here to make things easier after what happened at the club."

"Sure," said Paul. He glanced at the silver-mounted photograph of Jerri—a Jerri with lips parted and shoulders bare—that stood on the hall table. "I understand. It was nice of Artie, wasn't it?"

"Artie is a gentleman," said the girl. She pouted again, extended a hand to each of them. "You, Paul, my dear old friend, and you, Artie, my new one, must both come in and have a drink together."

Paul thought, as he followed her reluctantly into an overstuffed living room with a small bar in the corner, of the corny song "Friendship." This was one for the book. He glanced at the gambler, was somewhat startled to see Aleno was blushing under his olive skin.

Jerri chatted gaily into a conversational vacuum as she set about mixing drinks for them. Paul was silent as he vainly dug for some ruse which would make the gambler talk. Aleno, slumped down on the sofa,

was obviously embarrassed, angry and unhappy. For a veteran Broadway gambler, he seemed to lack *savoir faire* in large quantities.

He and Paul downed their drinks quickly. As he set his glass down on the table, Aleno stared hard at Paul.

"Fifteen grand!" he said. "So it was you—"

"Stan was fronting for me," said Paul quietly. "I had to have someone on the spot. I've got receipts and stuff to prove it."

"No wonder the cops wanted you," said Aleno. "How come you got out?"

"Toni Evans, the check girl, went to bat for me," said Paul.

Aleno digested this fact in silence for a moment.

"Who sent her? Tom Morris?" he asked.

Jerri resenting the fact that she was no longer the center of attention, tried to interrupt, but Aleno silenced her with a look that made her go white under her lipstick.

"I hadn't thought of that," said Paul. He wondered if Toni's alibi had just been a favor for the boss. Rather to his surprise, he found that he felt pretty strongly about it. The kid had seemed genuinely fond of him, but she *was* just a cigarette girl. They came a dime a dozen along the Main Stem. "I don't know," he concluded.

"If she did it without orders, she's in trouble," said Aleno somberly. He glanced again at Jerri, got up and began to pace the floor.

Paul suddenly found that he had to find out about Toni. He got up, said good night in a hurry and left the apartment.

It was in the elevator that he realized something was haywire. The story Toni had told couldn't very well have been a phony—which was what Aleno had hinted. She had described, item by item, everything that he had actually done! This was a horse of a different feather.

He left the elevator, found a pay-telephone booth in a corner of the apartment-house lobby and gave her number a ring.

"Paul!" she cried with something like a sob in her voice. "Are you all right, honey? Just hold on. I'll be there in ten minutes."

"What the heck!" he said. "Are you crazy or am I? I'm fine. What makes you think I'm not? I'm in the lobby of Artie Aleno's place."

"But Paul," she said. "I just got a call from somebody who said you'd been beaten up badly and taken to St. Augusta's for treatment."

"How long ago did you get it?" he snapped.

"Let me see," she said. "I'm almost dressed. It must have been five minutes or so ago. Does it matter?"

"I'll say it does, darling," he told her grimly. "Now listen carefully, because this is important. You said Artie Aleno got a

phone call while I was playing tonight. Can you tell me how long he was back there by the dressing rooms taking it? Think carefully."

"Let's see," she said thoughtfully. "I gave him the message. Then someone called for cigarettes near the stand. I sold a pack of Luckies and made change. Then, when I turned around, Aleno was coming out—and he looked sore. Then you split your lip."

"Okay, honey," he said. He saw the elevator doors open and Jerri and Aleno come out and cross the lobby to the street door. "I want you to stay in your room until I put a V for victory ring on your bell. Have you got that? Stay put till I show up in person."

"Yes, Paul," she said as he hung up.

He dashed after the couple and arrived at the door just in time to see the gambler put Jerri into a cab. Then Aleno called the next cab and started to get in. Paul stepped across the sidewalk and jumped in beside him. The gambler glared at him.

"What's the idea?" he snapped. "Get out of here, Britton."

"Not just now," said Paul. He leaned forward and gave the driver the address of a corner of the block where Toni Evans lived. "By the way, Artie," he said, "I don't suppose you just got a phone call."

"What business is it of yours?" Aleno asked. But there was admission as well as puzzlement in his eyes. "Where are we going?"

"You," said Paul, "are out to commit another murder, aren't you?"

"I'm not out for love," said Aleno bitterly. Then, "What do you mean, *another* murder?" His eyes narrowed as Paul patted his companion's chest, felt the bulk of the heavy pistol holstered there.

"We're going to clear things up," said Paul, smiling. "I've got a friend's death to settle, and you've got to keep the seat of your pants out of the electric chair. Okay, driver, pull in here."

THEY were just short of the corner. Paul got out of the cab and motioned the gambler to follow. Peering around the corner, the Army officer saw that, except for a single taxicab midway in the block, the sidewalks and street that separated the two rows of brownstone houses were deserted. He moved cautiously toward the vehicle.

When he reached its rear mudguard, he peered through the window. There was no one in it but the driver, who was huddled over the wheel. Paul smiled faintly. This was as it should be. He stepped silently up alongside the man, tapped him on the shoulder.

"Sorry, I'm taken," the man said, turning around so that Paul could see his face. As

the driver recognized Paul, his eyes popped and his mouth fell open. A savage right to that slack chin closed the mouth with a brain-jarring snap that caused the eyes to glaze.

Two more wallops set the driver sprawling over the wheel. Then Paul reached in and drew a silenced automatic from the killer's lap.

"See what I mean, Artie?" said Paul. "Dollars to doughnuts, you got a call to come here. And double the odds, Fallon and his boys got the same tip and will be on their way any minute now."

"No takers," said the gambler, permitting himself the luxury of a smile as the wail of police sirens split the still night air. A moment later, the cohorts in blue had the situation well in hand.

"It was like this," said Paul to the detective. "I was buying into the Garnet through Stan Johnson, to have something under me when the war is over. Tom Morris was taking the dough and either blowing it on Jerri Lane or the nags at Belmont and Jamaica.

"But he took a licking anyway, and got into Artie here for a lot more. So he sold him chunks of the club, too, to cover his losses. Isn't that about right, Artie?" He paused, while the gambler nodded.

"Somehow," Paul went on, "Stan found out about the mess and sent me an S. O. S. He'd have had to find out eventually. He was no dope. That was when Tom went berserk. He probably figured all along he

could make a killing and square things, but he knew that once he was caught he'd be in trouble with Stan and me, or with Artie, or with all of us.

"He couldn't face jail, or worse. So he knocked off Stan after arranging a frame for Artie as a likely suspect. I blundered into that by bull bad luck. They couldn't have planned my split lip. Then Toni Evans blew it up with her testimony, and he had to go after Artie again—and it seemed like a good idea to eliminate the Evans girl at the same time. But I called her and spoiled it for him."

And that, except for minor matters, was the way it stood. When the police were finally satisfied, Artie and Paul shook hands.

"You're okay, kid," said the gambler. "It begins to look as if we own a night club together. How about it? Do you want to play it as partners?"

"I guess we're stuck with each other," said Paul grinning.

"You'll need some sort of representative here, just in case there are things to be signed in a hurry and you get sent overseas."

"You know," said Paul, "I was thinking the same thing. Someone I can trust." He glanced up at Toni's apartment house. "And," he went on, "I mean a *legal* representative. So long, Artie. See you tonight."

With a wave of his hand, he went up the front steps of the brownstone, three at a time.

MURDER ON HER MIND

(Concluded from page 62)

cused you of leading him on till you got him to steal that thirty grand, didn't they?"

"They couldn't prove a thing on me," Dolores screamed.

"But they can prove it now, Dolores. Because you tried to do exactly the same job on me tonight that you did on Tom Stephens four years ago. That's what I hoped you would do. That's why I had them hush up

the finding of Tom's body until I could get the proof on you for his murder. I've got it now.

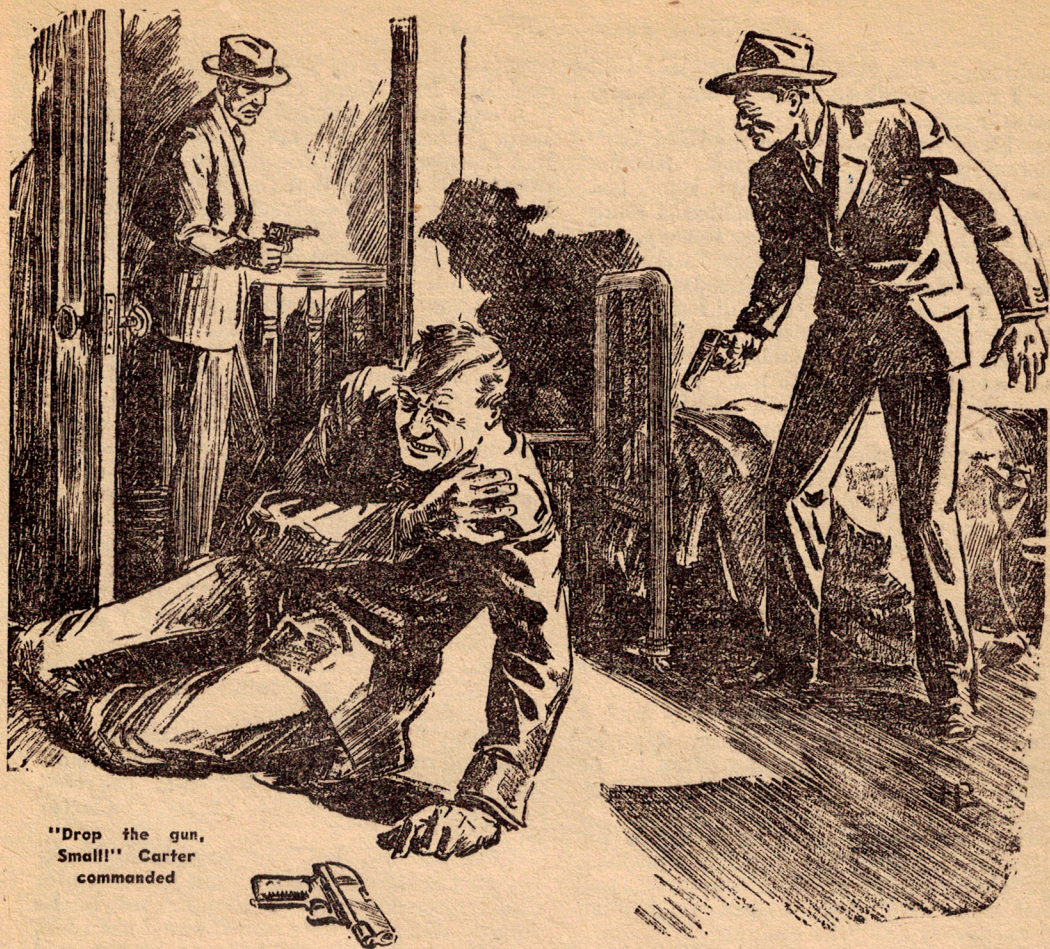
"You'll go back to Chicago and stand trial for that murder. That's what I've worked for, Dolores, worked for years. Tom fell for you. He stole for you. For that—you killed him and robbed him. I swore I'd get you for the job. Tom was my older brother."



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"Drop the gun,
Small!" Carter
commanded

LINED WITH DEATH

By JOHN L. BENTON

*Detective Nelson runs into a slick scheme for loot
and mixes it with a crew of greed-maddened killers!*

STANDING just inside the door of the living door of the big old Darlton town house, Detective Nelson Carter, of Police Headquarters, stared down at the motionless figure on the floor. So this was the end for one man who had lived by the rules of chance—for Joe Hill, one of the last of the big-time gamblers.

A quiet end, too, here where thick walls muffled the sounds of the city for this old brownstone house that seemed to hold itself

aloof from the modern world. Light snow drifted down outside the windows, white flakes against the black of night.

"You found him like that?" Carter asked, in the unconsciously hushed tones of a man speaking in the presence of death. "You didn't touch the corpse?"

He looked at the white-faced, wide-eyed girl—Nan Darlton—who had summoned him here to her home.

"I—I didn't touch anything," she said

tremulously. "He was lying there like that when I came home not more than twenty minutes ago."

Her blond hair gleamed in the light from a discreetly shaded table lamp. Slender hands moved restlessly in her lap. She seemed tiny in the big old-fashioned chair where she had dropped, sitting tensely, and yet Carter knew that she was fairly tall.

She shuddered as she stared, horror-stricken, at the corpse. Joe Hill looked like a giant black crow as he sprawled there on the worn but expensive Oriental rug. The handle of the knife in his back was a dull gray against the black cloth of his dinner jacket. He had not bled much.

"They called him a walking bank," Carter said musingly. "He always carried at least ten thousand dollars in cash on him—sometimes more than that. Yes, one of the last of the big-time gamblers."

"I know," said Nan Darlton. "He was my uncle."

There was faint surprise in Carter's quick glance at her.

"I didn't know that. He lived here then?"

"Sometimes," Nan nodded. "He had a room of his own here, and was always welcome to stay as long and as often as he wished. He hadn't been here lately, though."

Carter walked over and knelt beside the corpse. He searched through Hill's pockets. Keys, change, address book, a gold pen and pencil set, handkerchief—but no wallet, and no money save the change.

"If whoever did this had left the wallet on him," Carter said, as he put everything back in the dead man's pockets, "it might have been believed he wasn't carrying any money tonight."

Nelson Carter stood up, a tall, thin man who gave no outward evidence of the strength in his wiry muscles. That, it was said down at Police Headquarters, was one of his greatest assets—that neither physically nor sartorially did he look like a detective. Nor did he act like one.

Always well-dressed, he appeared more the smartly groomed business man now than detective, in his well-tailored gray suit. His Chesterfield and snap-brim hat he had left in the hall.

FOR a silent moment he stood over the dead man, looking steadily at the trembling girl. Somehow, to him, Nan Darlton looked out of place here, though this was her home. She fitted much better in the setting in which he had several times seen her before, standing in front of a mike in a Village night club, singing the daring little songs that were making her name known in New York's night life. She must have only returned from the club because she was still

wearing an evening gown, and her gray fur coat had been flung carelessly on a chair.

Little things puzzled Carter. Why had Nan phoned *him* to come the minute she had discovered that Joe Hill had been murdered? Of course, though, he did happen to live just across the street, and he had met her at the Willow Club where she sang. He liked the place, liked to drop in there when he was off duty.

"I know you're wondering why I called you instead of phoning for the police," Nan said impulsively, as though reading his mind. "But I—I didn't know just *what* to do. Then I remembered you living so near, that you are a detective, and thought you might be able to help me."

Carter nodded. "I did wonder. But I'll have to call Homicide anyway. You understand that, of course."

He had started toward the phone on a table at the far side of the room when the ringing of the door-bell somewhere far back in the house was a startling sound with its insistence.

"It's my maid's day off," Nan said quickly. "Would you mind seeing who is at the door, please?"

Nelson Carter nodded, stepped into the hall, and opened the front door. A little old man stood there, his hat and overcoat powdered with snow. He peered at Carter worriedly.

"I've lost my cat," he explained, blinking in the light. "He's a long-haired Chinchilla named Sandy. I thought maybe he might have come here and if you'd seen him you'd have let him in because of the cold and all."

"Sorry," said Carter. "I don't believe your cat came here."

"Oh, dear, that's too bad!" The little old man sighed. "Now I'll have to go asking everybody up and down the street if they saw him. John Quinn is my name. I live across the street at seven-twenty-eight. If you see Sandy will you please let me know?"

"I'll let you know. Good night."

Carter shut the door and went back to the living room. The house was so quiet that the rustling noise of the snow against the windows could be plainly heard. As he stepped into the living room he saw that Nan had not stirred from her chair, and that she was more white-faced than before—frightened, too.

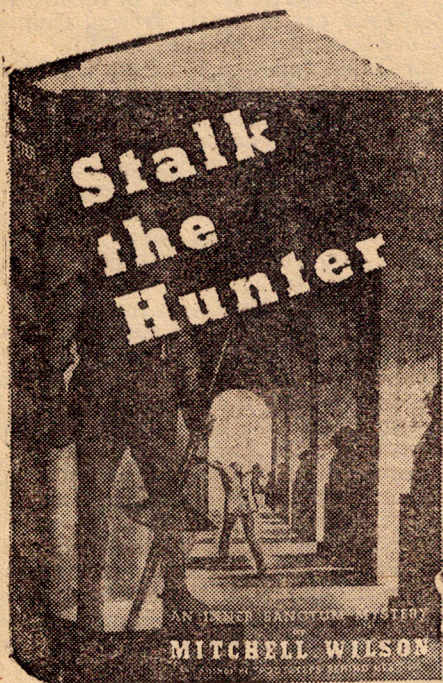
"Stand still!" a gruff voice commanded.

The voice of one of two hard-looking men standing on either side of the doorway. They were covering him with automatics. He stopped short, and stood motionless.

"Who are you?" Carter demanded, as his glance shot from one man to the other. "Been hiding somewhere in the house, I suppose?"

[Turn to page 74]

"Deliver Anna Mahler to Me in Twenty-four Hours—or, Else—"



PAUL CAMPBELL'S threatening voice stabbed through Kit Gruenholtz. Her pale cheek was still numb where he had slapped her, knocking her to the floor of his office.

SUDDENLY, ALL THE TERROR that Kit believed she had put far behind her had rushed back with a horrible, stifling force. She knew now what she should have known before—that Paul Campbell was a Nazi agent who sought to destroy Anna Mahler and the entire Czech Underground movement!

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"Yeah," said the big man on his right. "The dame came home too quick. When we heard her open the front door we ducked without frisking Hill and getting the dough. We heard her talking to somebody, so we stayed hid."

"Then you two killed Joe Hill," said Carter. "For the money he was carrying." He smiled at the man. "Carter is my name. What's yours?"

"Hap Reed," the fellow who not only was big, but apparently brainless, said promptly. Then he scowled, as realization flickered. "Hey!" he burst out. "You ain't gonna know my name without knowing his too!" He raised a thumb at the man on the other side of the door. "He's Tony Small."

"And am I dumb to team up with a guy like you!" Small muttered disgustedly. "Quit jawin', Hap. Let's get the dough and get out of here. The girl hasn't got it, so this Carter guy must have the wallet."

"Wrong," Carter said coolly. "I haven't the faintest idea where the money is, or what happened to Hill's wallet."

"That's what you say," snapped Tony Small, and moved in on Carter. So did Hap.

Carter moved then, with lightning speed. His hard right caught Small squarely on the chin and sent the man reeling back. Reed aimed a blow at Carter's head with his gun, but missed as the detective ducked. Tony Small leaped forward.

"Let him have it!" Hap!" he shouted as he caught Carter by the arms and held him tightly.

Reed's arm flashed up and he brought the barrel of his gun down hard on Carter's head. Carter heard Nan scream, but it faded out as he dropped to the floor unconscious. . . .

NELSON CARTER'S first sensation when he opened his eyes was one of freezing cold. He sat up and a small furry animal that had been huddled close to him uttered a plaintive cry. It was a long haired cat. Carter reached out and patted it.

"Must be the cat old man Quinn lost," Carter thought.

He struggled to his feet and saw then that he had been lying in the snow in a vacant lot at the far end of the street on which he lived. Without his hat and overcoat he was half frozen. He dusted the snow off as best he could, picked up the cold, damp cat and walked to his own house.

Glancing across the street he saw that lights were still burning behind the drawn blinds on the lower floor of the Darlton house. But he had no intention of going back there until he had phoned for the Homicide Squad.

He had just stuck the key into the latch of his front door when a little old man came running down the street, and hurried up the steps.

"You've found him!" John Quinn exclaimed delightedly. "You've found Sandy!"

"Come in," Carter said, as he opened the door. "Your cat is nearly frozen, Quinn." He added ruefully, "And so am I."

John Quinn followed him into the house and Carter closed and locked the door. He handed the cat to the little old man who gently brushed the snow off the fur of the long-haired Chinchilla, crooning to it. Carter led the way into the living room.

Carter was proud of this remodeled old brownstone house he had bought and fixed over just two years ago. It was a comfortable place, though at times it seemed large for a man who lived alone.

The fire in the grate had died down, but was still burning, and as he poked it up he wondered what had happened to the girl in the house across the street. Evidently those two killers who had naively admitted their names were Reed and Small must have decided he didn't have dead Joe Hill's money or they would never have left him lying out there in the snow.

Carter quickly picked up the phone and dialed Police Headquarters. Old Quinn, seated in a chair with the cat on his lap, listened as Carter asked for Homicide, told about the murder of Joe Hill and gave the address of Nan Darlton's house. He also gave good descriptions of Hap Reed and Tony Small so that the two men could be picked up promptly.

"A murder!" Quinn said awedly as Carter cradled the phone. "And to think I didn't even suspect anything was wrong when I rang Miss Darlton's doorbell and asked you about my cat!"

"You know Miss Darlton?" Carter asked.

"Just casually—by sight," said Quinn. "The way an old fellow like me without much of anything else to do always notices neighbors without actually knowing them. I have seen you coming in and out of this house often, Mr. Carter. Charming girl, Miss Darlton. I had never spoken to her, though before early this evening. I was flattered when she stopped me on the street and asked me if I knew a tailor who could fix the lining of her fur coat. She had torn it."

"You told her of a tailor?" Carter demanded.

Quinn nodded. "Dan Grover is his name. He has a shop over on Third Avenue." He mentioned the address.

Carter went to a window and peered out. He saw a woman wearing a fur coat come hurriedly out of the house across the street alone. It was Nan Darlton—he recognized her blond hair as she passed under a street

lamp. Carter wondered how she had managed to get away from the two killers.

"I've got to go." Carter swung around from the window. "Stay here until I come back, will you, Quinn? I want to talk to you. Make yourself at home. Give Sandy a chance to get warm before you take him out again."

"All right." Quinn placed the cat down in front of the fire and took off his overcoat. "I'll stay."

Carter got another hat from the hall closet and clapped it on as he rushed for the front door. He had no time to look for an overcoat upstairs.

Police cars were drawing up in front of the Darlton house as he hurried across the street. The Homicide Squad had arrived.

"Where's your murder, Carter?" asked Lieutenant Brady, in charge of the Squad, as he recognized the detective. "It better be good to get us out on a cold night like this."

"Inside," said Carter. "It's Joe Hill, the gambler."

The front door was unlocked, and he barged into the hall with the Homicide men following him as he headed straight for the library. But the body of Joe Hill was no longer lying on the Oriental rug there. It had disappeared!

"Hill's body was lying right here!" Carter said, pointing to the spot. "Dead as a door-nail, I tell you!"

"Search the house, men," Lieutenant Brady ordered. "If Carter says there was a body here it was all right." As his men scattered to search, he said, "What's the story, Nelson?"

CARTER told him everything that had happened from the time he had received the phone call from Nan Darlton asking him to come over to her house to investigate a murder.

"Looks plain enough, doesn't it?" Lieutenant Brady said, when Carter had finished. "Those two guys Reed and Small—if that is their names—followed Hill here, killed him for the dough he was carrying. The Darlton girl came home unexpectedly. The killers got scared, not seeing at first that she was alone, and hid without searching the corpse and getting the money."

"Looks that way to me," Carter nodded. "But that business about them not getting the wallet sounds fishy to me. It would only take a second to lift a wallet out of a man's pocket unless—" He smiled. "Why didn't I think of that before?"

"Think of what?" Brady looked puzzled. "Put yourself in Hill's place," said Carter. "Suppose he discovered he was being followed just as he got to the house. He would be sure those men were after his

[Turn page]

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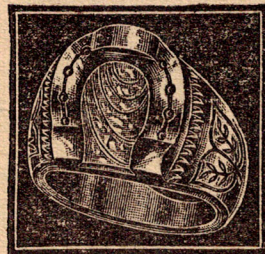
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money. The first thing he would think of doing would be to get rid of the money so it wouldn't be found if he was held up, or if he thought there was any chance of anybody breaking into the house." His eyes narrowed as he heard Brady's men moving about searching the house. "Now where would Hill put it? Not outside—of course."

As Carter spoke, he and Lieutenant Brady had moved into the hall. Suddenly Carter stopped and stood looking at a tall vase-like affair standing near the door—an old-fashioned umbrella stand. There was a man's big black umbrella in the stand. Carter felt of it. It was still slightly damp.

"This must be Hill's umbrella," he said. "He put it in the umbrella stand and dropped his wallet containing the money down in beside it." He felt around inside the stand. "It's not here now though. I didn't think it would be."

"Why not?" asked Brady.

"Because Nan Darlton must have that money now," said Carter. "Evidently the two men tried to force her to tell them where the money was hidden, but she couldn't because she didn't know. Likely those killers gave her up when they must have decided they had better get rid of Hill's body fast. The old business—produce the corpse before you can prove a murder. If Hill's body disappeared they would feel safer."

"You mean they just left the house with the body, leaving the girl here?" demanded Brady. "All she would have had to do was phone the police or yell for help."

"The police are here now," said Carter grimly. "And if your boys didn't believe me, not one of us could prove there had been a murder in this house tonight. Suppose Nan Darlton told you what had happened. What would you think, Lieutenant?"

"That the dame was crazy," Brady said frankly. "But if she found the money, where is she? And how did she happen to look in the umbrella stand?"

"I'd say her first impulse was to get out of the house before those killers came back after getting rid of the body," said Carter. "So when she started to leave, knowing it's still snowing, she grabbed up the first umbrella she saw. Hill's. Maybe the wallet was caught in the umbrella. She found the money, then decided not to take the umbrella when she left."

"Sounds possible," said Brady. "Any idea where she might have gone?"

"I think so," Carter nodded. "She would want to hide the money where it wouldn't be easily found, and she asked Quinn about Dan Grover, a tailor. Yes, that's it."

Carter opened the front door. Brady gaped at him in amazement.

"Where are you going?" demanded the Lieutenant.

"To find the girl," said Carter. "And I'd better go alone."

Carter hurried to the tailor shop on Third Avenue, three blocks away, about which old Quinn had told him. It was nearly midnight and most of the shops were dark but he found a faint light still gleaming through the crack of a drawn blind at the front of a store which had a sign reading:

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The door was closed but unlocked. Carter pushed it open and stepped silently inside. There was a counter across the front room of the shop and clothes hung from hangers on a long rack at one side. He heard voices coming from a rear room behind the counter.

"You'll do as I say," came the voice of Nan Darlton, and she sounded hysterical. "Sew that money into the lining of my coat—and hurry!"

"But I can't do this," protested a man's voice. "You must have stolen the money or you would not be hiding it. This is against the law."

THE detective moved silently around the counter to where he could peer into the back room without being seen. He saw a heavy-faced, thin-haired man with a black mustache seated at a sewing machine. Dan Grover was in his shirt sleeves and he was sewing paper money into the lining of a gray fur coat.

Nan stood behind him, tall and slender in her low-cut red evening gown, and she was holding an automatic in one hand and more paper money in the other.

"Drop that gun, Miss Darlton!" Carter said sharply, as he stepped into the room, his right hand in the side pocket of his coat. "I've got you covered."

Nan gasped and lowered the automatic. The tailor stopped the sewing machine and looked up, startled.

"Mr. Carter!" There was relief in Nan's tone as she recognized him. "I thought you were dead. Those awful men said they were going to kill you when they got you away from the house."

"They intended to let me freeze to death," said Carter. "But I regained consciousness sooner than they expected." He glanced at the money and smiled. "So you did find your uncle's wallet in the umbrella stand."

"How did you know?" Nan looked at him in amazement.

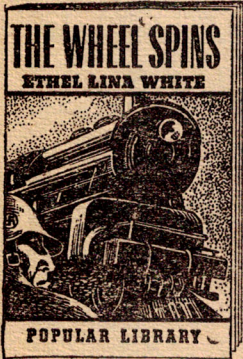
"I just guessed," said Carter.

"And weren't we dumb!" said a hard voice behind him.

(Turn to page 78)

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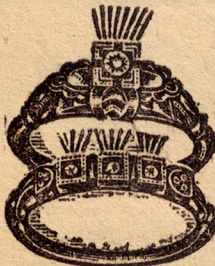
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He shot a glance over his shoulder. Tony Small and Hap Reed stood there with guns in their hands. Both looked mean and dangerous.

"Good thing we kept out of sight when we saw the cops at the house when we went back there," Small growled. "And trailing you here was a blame fine idea, Carter."

"Get the money, Tony," ordered Reed. "And don't talk so much."

"Quite a haul you're making," commented Carter. "There must be ten grand there, and with the other ten thousand your pal Reed lifted off the corpse when you weren't looking, Tony, you boys should be quite rich."

He was deliberately trying to stir up trouble between the two killers by claiming that Reed had taken ten thousand dollars from the dead man's body. Evidently Small did not trust his partner, for he glared at the big man.

"What's this about you holding out some of the dough?" he demanded. "You sent me out of the room after you stabbed Hill. Maybe Carter knows what he is talking about."

"He's lying!" Hap Reed said impatiently. "Get the money and don't argue."

Small stepped forward, ripped the half-sewed lining of the coat and got the money. Nan still held a bundle of bills in her left hand. The gun in her right hand was hidden by her skirt as she held the automatic down beside her. Carter moved closer to her. Reed glanced at the money in her hand.

"Give me that dough!" he ordered curtly.

Nan flung the money into his face. At the same instant Carter grabbed the gun out of her hand. He fired and Small uttered a howl as a bullet nicked his ear. He turned and ran back into a hallway beyond the back room, but held on to most of the money in his hand.

Reed brushed the money that Nan had thrown at him aside. It slid off his body like green snow. They could hear footsteps pounding up a flight of stairs.

"Small probably will duck out with the money he's got," Carter said. "I'm afraid he doesn't trust you, Hap."

Reed cursed as though he believed the same thing about his partner. He had lowered his gun, for Carter had him covered. The detective stepped forward, and as he moved he slipped on some of the paper money scattered on the floor. He went down hard, jarring his elbow so that it knocked the gun out of his hand.

"Got you!" snarled Reed, raising his gun and aiming it at Carter. "I'm going to put a bullet in you right now!"

Nan had moved back, and now was close to a light switch that controlled the single green-shaded drop-light burning in the

back room. She pushed the switch, plunging the room into darkness just a moment before Reed fired. Carter rolled over, heard the gun roar and a bullet thud into the wall as it missed him by inches.

He heard Reed moving back into the rear hall of the five-story building. Evidently the killer wasn't taking any chances of Carter grabbing up his gun and firing at him in the dark. Again there was the sound of footsteps on the stairs leading to the apartments above the shops on the street floor of the building.

"All right, Nan!" Carter called, as he got to his feet. "Switch on the light."

NAN pushed the button. The green-shaded drop-light cast a white glow over the room. Hap Reed was gone. The money was still scattered about on the floor. The tailor got up from the machine and began to gather up the bills.

Carter examined the automatic he had taken from the girl and decided it was a good thing that Nan had turned out the light. For he saw at once that the automatic was empty.

"I haven't got a gun!" muttered Carter. "And there are no more cartridges in this."

"I've got one!" Grover exclaimed. He leaped to a drawer and drew out a long-barreled revolver. "This is loaded."

"Thanks." Carter put down the automatic and took the revolver. "I'm going after those two now."

He made sure the gun he now held was loaded, then went back and started up the stairs.

He went up as quietly as possible, and reached the second floor hall. Evidently most of the apartments were vacant or no one had heard the two shots that had come from the tailor shop. For there were no doors open and no curious faces were peering out.

Carter moved along the hall. He paused in front of a door that was open just a crack. Angry voices came from inside. Small and Reed were in there arguing.

"What did you do with the rest of the dough?" Small snarled. "Tell me—or I'll plug you!"

"There wasn't any more dough," whined Reed. "That detective was lying about that, Tony."

"Says you!" Small cursed to emphasize his disbelief. "This is it, Hap!"

A gun roared, and there was the thud as someone hit the floor hard. Carter flung the door open. He stood there covering Tony Small with the revolver in his hand. Reed was on the floor, clutching a wounded shoulder with one hand.

"Drop that gun, Small!" commanded Carter.

[Turn page]



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Small foolishly tried to raise his automatic and fire. Carter shot the weapon out of his hand. There were voices downstairs, and then Lieutenant Brady and the men of the Homicide Squad appeared. John Quinn was with them.

"The police came over to your place," the little old man said to Carter. "They were questioning the people in the neighborhood. I didn't know where you had gone, of course, but I did remember you wanting to know this tailor's address. I thought you might have come here to question Dan Grover about something."

"And you were right," Carter smiled. "There are your killers, Brady. They'll tell you what they did with Joe Hill's body. I'm sure of that."

"So am I," Lieutenant Brady said grimly. "Take them away, boys."

Carter and Quinn went back down into the tailor shop. Nan was there, talking to Grover. She had what money had been dropped there in her hand. Carter had gathered up the rest before the prisoners had been taken away.

"I'm sorry I forced you to sew that money into the lining of my coat, Mr. Grover," Nan said, smiling at the tailor. "But I thought those men would never look for it there."

"The lining is still ripped," said Grover, as he started the machine and began sewing. "This will only take a few minutes."

He finished the job quickly. Nan handed Carter the money.

"Please keep this for me," she said. "I was Uncle Joe's only living relation—I guess the money goes to me eventually—but you might need it for evidence against those men."

"Probably." Carter took the money and placed it in his pockets. "Would you all care to drop into my place for a drink now?" He felt young and more interested in life than he had been for a long time as he gazed at Nan. "That means you, too, Grover."

"Why, yes," Nan said as though he had spoken to her alone. "I'd love it."

Quinn and the tailor nodded. The little old man smiled.

"Besides I must go back and get Sandy," he said. "He'll be so interested when I tell him about all this. Murder is so exciting!"

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HEADQUARTERS

(Concluded from page 8)

that these little crime vignettes will be a regular feature in **THRILLING DETECTIVE** for a while. We will pass your compliment on to Mr. Mines who is busily reading his eyes out going over old records for the most interesting cases of criminal history to tell us about.

And now for the shortest letter we have ever received here at Headquarters.

Have read June number. No complaint.—
Jos. C. Holmes, New Orleans, La.

For some reason, this strikes us as being to the point as well as funny. Mr. Holmes, it is obvious that you are a man of few words, and we'll be just as brief. In short—thanks.

If anybody else has any comment to offer, please write us. You may be sure we read and appreciate every scrap of mail that comes in. And we adopt suggestions, too, where at all feasible. The Headquarters address is—The Editor, **THRILLING DETECTIVE**, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. And our letter opener is sharp and ready.

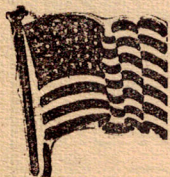
Thanks, everybody!

—THE EDITOR.

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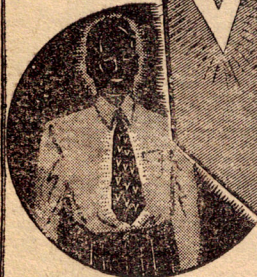
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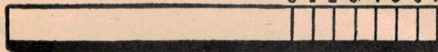
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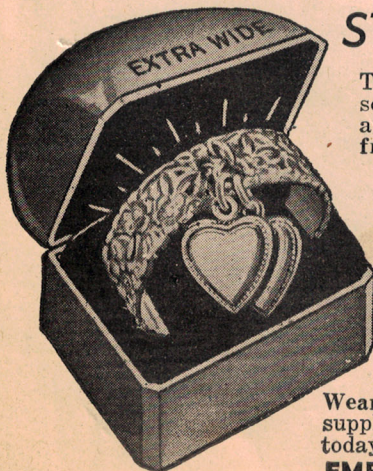
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