THE GHOST DETECTIVE

FALL ISSUE

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

THE CASE OF THE LAUGHING CORPSE

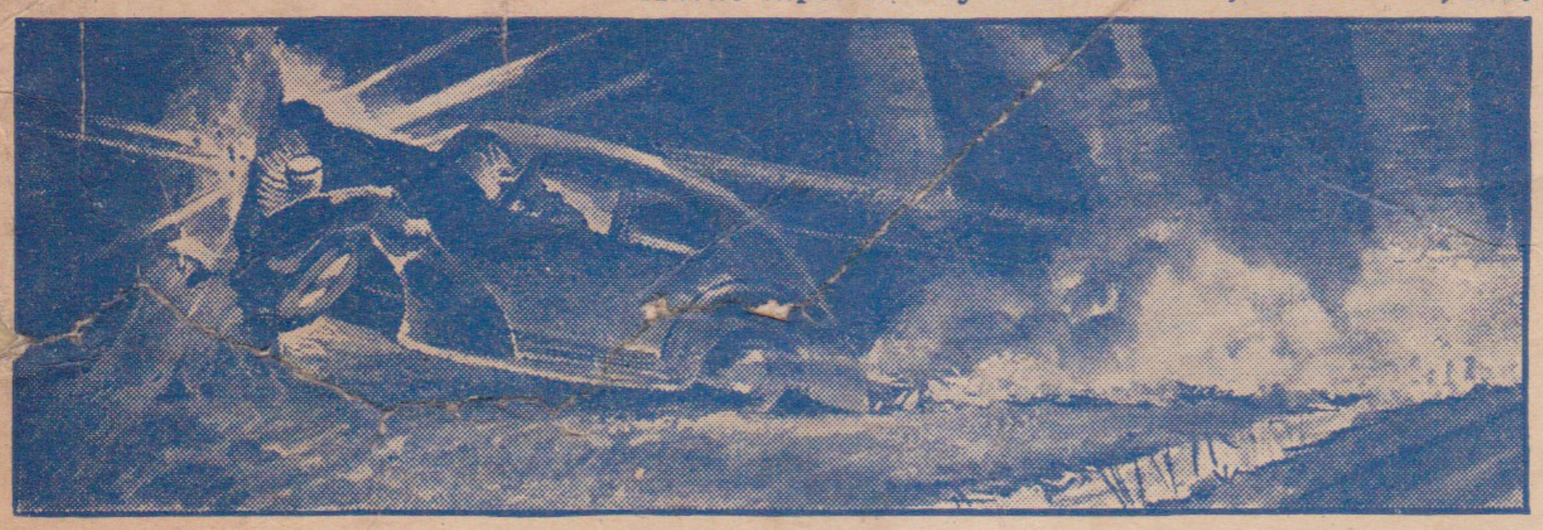
A Complete Novel Featuring the Mystifying Exploits of the Ma[illegible]n Sleuth

[illegible]bliga-
[illegible] details of
[illegible]alle's convenient
payment plan.

Check, sign and mail the coupon NOW.

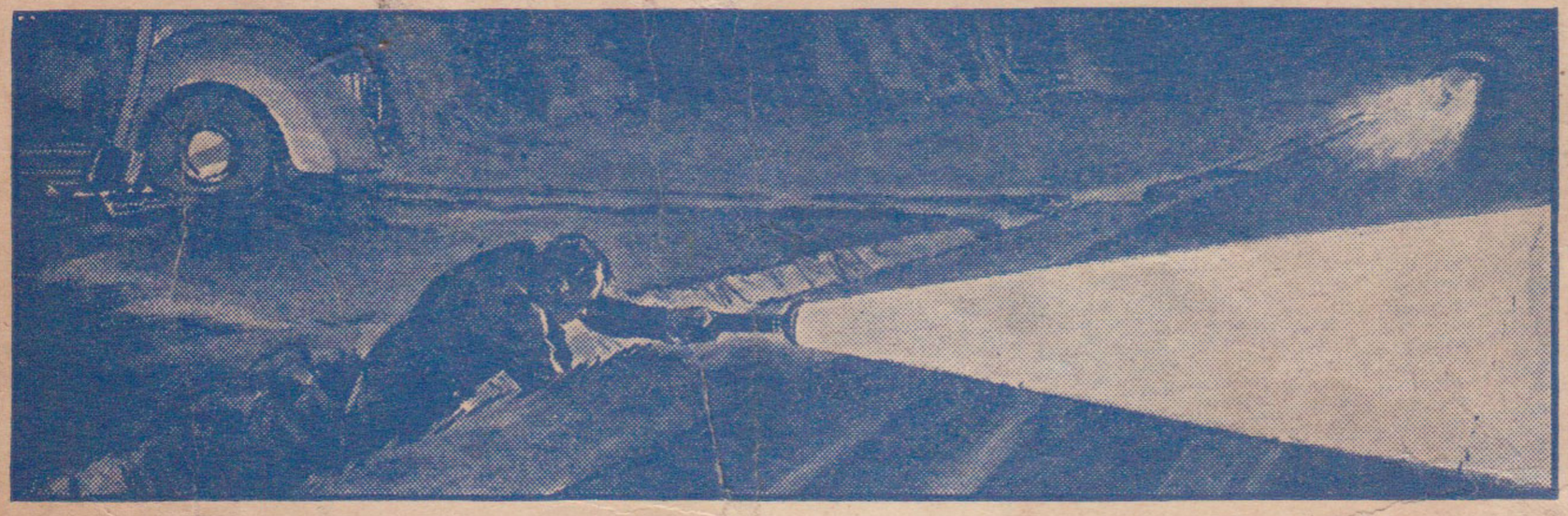
"MY CRIES WERE WHISPERS AS MY LIFE EBBED!"

A true experience of P. S. NICHOLLS, *South Bend, Ind.*



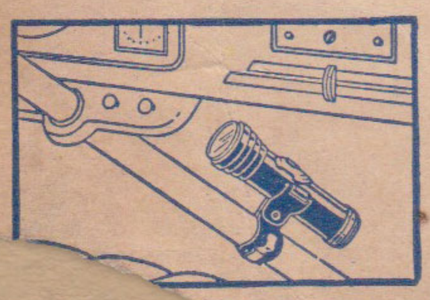
"LATE ONE NIGHT, r
turning from a fishin
trip, I dozed at the whe
of my car while going
a fast clip," writes M
Nicholls. "Suddenly
there was a blinding
crash!

"MY CAR HAD VEERED off the road and smashed head on into a tree. My throat was gashed and bleeding badly. I was able only to whisper—and seemed doomed to die in the inky darkness. Then . . .



"...I REMEMBERED MY FLASHLIGH ! Somehow I managed to get it from my tackle box and crawl weakly back to the road. Quickly the bright beam of the flashlight, waved in my feeble grasp, stopped a motorist, who took me to a hospital just in time. There is no doubt that I owe my life to dependable 'Eveready' *fresh* DATED batteries!

(Signed) *P. S. Nicholls*"



SAFETY FIRST! Keep an EMERGENCY LIGHT in your car—for tire changing, roadside repairs, locating lost articles, if lights go out, etc. The "Eveready" Auto Flashlight, shown here, complete with "Eveready" fresh DATED batteries and steering post clamp, only $1.25.

"Eveready" is a registered trade-mark of National Carbon Co., Inc.

...ES LAST LONGER... *Look for the* **DATE-LINE**

...OMPANY, INC., 30 EAST 42nd STREET, NEW YORK, N. Y.

...it of Union Carbide UCC *and Carbon Corporation*

1940

Why Trained Accountants Command High Salaries

—and how ambitious men are qualifying by the La Salle Problem Method

GET this straight.

By "accountancy" we do not mean "bookkeeping." For accountancy begins where bookkeeping leaves off.

The skilled accountant takes the figures handed him by the bookkeeper, and *analyzes* and *interprets* them.

He knows how much the costs in the various departments should amount to, how they may be lowered.

He knows what profits should be expected from a given enterprise, how they may be increased.

He knows, in a given business, what per cent of one's working capital can safely be tied up in merchandise on hand, what per cent is safe and adequate for sales promotion. And these, by the way, are but two of *scores* of percentage-figures wherewith he points the way to successful operation.

He knows the intricacies of government taxation.

He knows how to *survey* the transactions of a business over a given period; how to show in cold, hard figures the progress it has made and where it is going. He knows how to *use* these findings as a basis for constructive policies.

In short, the trained accountant is the *controlling engineer* of business—one man business cannot do without.

Small wonder that he commands a salary two to ten times as great as that of the bookkeeper. Indeed, as an independent operator (head of his own accounting firm) he may earn as much as the president of the big and influential bank in his community, or the operating manager of a great railroad.

Some Examples

Small wonder that accountancy offers the trained man such fine opportunities—opportunities well illustrated by the success of thousands of LaSalle accountancy students.* For example—one man was a plumber, 32 years old, with only an eleventh grade education. He became auditor for a large bank with an income 325 per cent larger.

Another was a drug clerk at $30 a week. Now he heads his own very successful accounting firm with an income several times as large.

A woman bookkeeper—buried in details of a small job—is now auditor of an apartment hotel, and her salary mounted in proportion to her work.

A credit manager—earning $200 a month—moved up quickly to $3000, to $5000, and then to a highly profitable accounting business of his own which netted around $10,000 a year.

And What It Means to You

Why let the other fellow walk away with the better job, when right in your own home you may equip yourself for a splendid future in this profitable profession?

Are you really *determined* to get ahead? If so, you can start at once to acquire—by the LaSalle Problem Method—a thorough understanding of Higher Accountancy, master its fundamental principles, become expert in the practical application of those principles—this without losing an hour from work or a dollar of pay.

Preliminary knowledge of bookkeeping is unnecessary. You will be given whatever training, instruction or review on the subject of bookkeeping you may personally need—and without any extra expense to you.

If you are dissatisfied with your present equipment—if you recognize the opportunities that lie ahead of you through home-study training — you will do well to send at once for full particulars. The coupon will bring them to you without any obligation, also details of LaSalle's convenient payment plan.

Check, sign and mail the coupon NOW.

LaSalle Extension University

A Correspondence Institution

DEPT. 10329-HR CHICAGO

Opportunities in Accountancy—Check below and we will send you a copy of "Accountancy, the Profession that Pays," without obligation.

☐ **Higher Accountancy:**

Other LaSalle Opportunities: If more interested in one of the other fields of business indicated below, check here:

☐ Business Management	☐ Commercial Law
☐ Modern Salesmanship	☐ Modern Foremanship
☐ Traffic Management	☐ Expert Bookkeeping
☐ Law: Degree of LL. B.	☐ C. P. A. Coaching
☐ Industrial Management	☐ Business English
☐ Business Correspondence	☐ Stenotypy
☐ Credit and Collection Correspondence	☐ Effective Speaking
	☐ Railway Accounting

Name.....

Present Position.....

Address.....

*Names available on request.

THE GHOST DETECTIVE

Vol. 2, No. 1 FALL, 1940 Price 10c

FEATURING THE MAGICIAN-DETECTIVE

IN

THE CASE OF THE LAUGHING CORPSE

A Complete Book-Length Mystery Novel

By GEORGE CHANCE

The Ghost, Master of Magic, Plays Danger's Game when a Dead Man's Hate Wreaks Havoc on the Living! Murder Calls the Super-Detective to Action when Keys of Doom Unlock the Doors of Crime 14

OTHER GRIPPING STORIES

FLITTERMOUSE ..... Arthur J. Burks 91
Detective Jed Marcus Fights Against the World's Fastest Killer

DRUMS OF THE DEAD ..... Hal G. Vermes 100
There Are More Ways than Murder to Kill a Man!

AND

THE GHOST FIGHTS ON! ..... Biographical Sketch 18

CALLING THE GHOST ..... A Department 112

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Read our companion magazines: The Phantom Detective, Thrilling Detective, Popular Detective, Thrilling Spy Stories, Thrilling Mystery, Thrilling Love, Thrilling Ranch Stories, Thrilling Western, Thrilling Sports, Thrilling Wonder Stories, The Lone Eagle, Sky Fighters, G-Men, West, Popular Sports Magazine, Popular Love, Popular Western, Everyday Astrology, Texas Rangers, Range Riders Western, Startling Stories, Strange Stories, Detective Novels Magazine, Masked Rider Western Magazine, Rio Kid Western, Thrilling Adventures, Black Book Detective Magazine, Air War, Exciting Western, Exciting Detective, The Masked Detective, and Thrilling Football Stories.

PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.

Read How These Men Got Better Jobs
THEN FIND OUT WHAT RADIO OFFERS YOU Mail Coupon

BEFORE COMPLETING YOUR COURSE I OBTAINED MY RADIO BROADCAST OPERATOR'S LICENSE AND IMMEDIATELY JOINED STATION WMPC WHERE I AM NOW CHIEF OPERATOR.

HOLLIS F. HAYES
327 MADISON ST., LAPEER, MICH.

I WAS WORKING IN A GARAGE WHEN I ENROLLED WITH N. R. I. I AM NOW RADIO SERVICE MANAGER FOR M_____ FURNITURE CO. FOR THEIR 4 STORES.

JAMES E. RYAN
146 SECOND ST.
FALL RIVER, MASS.

CLIPPING YOUR COUPON GOT ME STARTED IN RADIO. I AM NOW IN CHARGE OF THE RADIO DEPARTMENT FOR THE AMERICAN AIRLINES AT CLEVELAND.

WALTER B. MURRAY
AMERICAN AIRLINES, MUNICIPAL AIRPORT, CLEVELAND, OHIO.

I OWE MY JOB TO THE N.R.I. COURSE. I AM FOREMAN IN A RADIO FACTORY, MAKE MORE MONEY, AND HAVE TWO N. R. I. MEN HELPING ME.

OTTO CLIFFORD
312 W. SEMINARY ST.
CHARLOTTE, MICH.

MY LOUDSPEAKER SYSTEM PAYS ME ABOUT $35 A WEEK BESIDES MY RADIO WORK. IF IT HAD NOT BEEN FOR YOUR COURSE I WOULD STILL BE MAKING COMMON WAGES.

MILTON I. LEIBY, JR.,
TOPTON, PA

I EARN $10 TO $25 A WEEK IN SPARE TIME AND ALWAYS HAVE PLENTY TO DO. ONLY TRAINED MEN CAN FIX RADIO SETS NOWADAYS. I OWE MY SUCCESS TO N.R.I.

WILLIAM F. RUPP,
611 GREEN ST.
BRIDGEPORT, PA.

I will Train You at Home for RADIO *and* TELEVISION

If you can't see a future in your present job, feel you'll never make much more money, if you're in a seasonal field, subject to lay offs, IT'S TIME NOW to investigate Radio. Trained Radio Technicians make good money, and you don't have to give up your present job or leave home to learn Radio. I train you at home nights in your spare time.

Why Many Radio Technicians Make $30, $40, $50 a Week

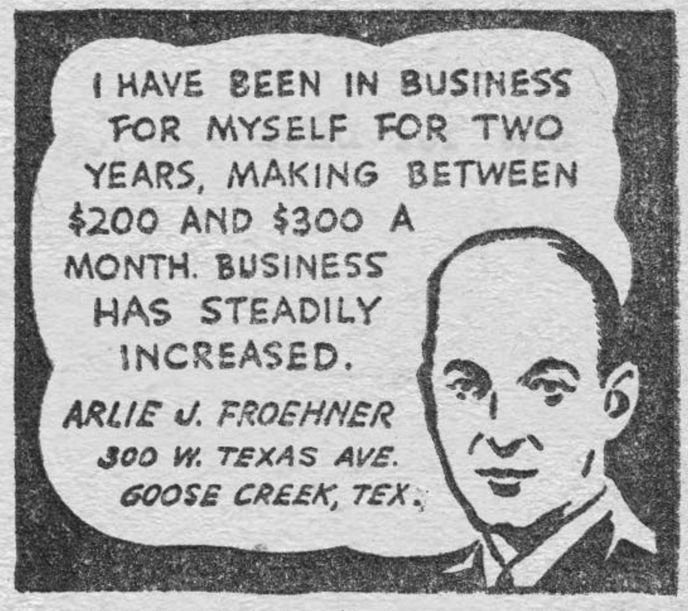
Radio broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, technicians. Radio manufacturers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, servicemen in good-pay jobs. Radio jobbers, dealers, employ installation and servicemen. Many Radio Technicians open their own Radio sales and repair businesses and make $30, $40, $50 a week. Others hold their regular jobs and make $5 to $10 a week fixing Radios in spare time. Automobile, Police, Aviation, Commercial Radio; Loudspeaker Systems, Electronic Devices are other fields offering opportunities for which N. R. I. gives the required knowledge of Radio. Television promises to open many good jobs soon.

Many Make $5 to $10 a Week Extra In Spare Time While Learning

The day you enroll, I start sending you Extra Money Job Sheets which start showing you how to do Radio repair jobs. Throughout your Course I send plans and directions which have helped many make $5 to $10 a week in spare time while learning. I send special Radio equipment to conduct experiments and build circuits. This 50-50 method of training makes learning at home interesting, fascinating, practical. I ALSO GIVE YOU A MODERN, PROFESSIONAL ALL-WAVE, ALL-PURPOSE SET SERVICING INSTRUMENT to help you make money fixing Radios while learning and equip you for full time work after you graduate.

Find Out What Radio, Television Offers You

Act Today! Mail the coupon for my 64-page book, "Rich Rewards in Radio." It points out Radio's spare time and full time opportunities and those coming in Television; tells about my course in Radio and Television; shows more than 100 letters from men I have trained, telling what they are doing and earning. Read my money back agreement. MAIL COUPON in an envelope or paste on a penny postcard—NOW!



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GOOSE CREEK, TEX.

J. E. SMITH, President
Dept. OK09, National Radio Institute
Washington, D. C.

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Mail me FREE, without obligation, your 64-page book, "Rich Rewards in Radio." (No salesman will call. Write plainly.)

Name ..... Age.....

Address .....

City ..... State .....

FOR MEN OVER 40

An Opportunity Offered You By a Man Who Built a Nationwide Business After the Age of 55

Starting from scratch, but with a business device that thousands of companies have since installed, the writer of this advertisement has proved that the seasoned, mature man has nothing to fear from life *if he works in the right field.* So many of our most successful men are well beyond forty, that we are addressing this advertisement to more such men, feeling that they will be a definitely greater asset to us.

Not A "Get-Rich-Quick" Scheme

Please understand. The only way you can make money with this proposition is by showing results. But take a look at the following: A. O. Davis of New York who made $110.77 clear in one day (SEVEN were REPEAT orders); E. L. Taylor, Virginia, $58.35 in a single day; L. F. Strong, Kansas, $163.38 profit in two days. If a few others interest you, read about these: C. W. Ferrell, who passed 1,000 sale mark, each paying from $5 to $60 net profit per sale; I. J. Keuper, Delaware, over $1,000 clear his first month, and so forth, more than we can mention here.

Not "A Morning Glory"

As a sound business man, you ask, "Is this a flash in the pan that will be here today, gone tomorrow?" The answer is that we have now been a national factor for over ten years, yet have barely scratched the surface because you can't get around to see hundreds of thousands of prospects even in ten years. We have men who have been with us for years, still with us today, busy, making real money, plenty of it, and happy to be with us.

A Proved, Valuable Business Device

First, and briefly (not much space left now)—We sell an invention that does for anywhere from less than 2% to 10% of the former cost a job that must be done in probably 99% of the offices in the country. You walk into an office and put down before your prospect a letter from a sales organization showing that they did work in their own office for $11 which formerly could have cost them over $200. A building supply corporation pays our man $70, whereas the bill could have been for $1,600! An automobile dealer pays our representative $15, whereas the expense could have been over $1,000. A department store has expense of $88.60, possible cost if done outside the business being well over $2,000. And so on. It has been put into use by schools, hospitals, newspapers, etc., as well as thousands of large and small businesses in 135 lines. Practically every line is represented by these field reports we furnish you, which hardly any business man can fail to understand. And you make a minimum of 67 cents on every dollar's business — on repeat orders as well as first orders — and as high as $1,167 on each $1,500 business done.

This Business Has Nothing to Do With House to House Canvassing

Nor do you have to know anything about high-pressure selling. "Selling" is unnecessary in the ordinary sense of the word. Instead of hammering away at the customer and trying to "force" a sale, you make a dignified, business-like call, leave the installation — whatever size the customer says he will accept — at our risk, let the customer sell himself after the device is in and working. This does away with the need for pressure on the customer — it eliminates the handicap of trying to get the money before the customer has really convinced himself 100%. You simply tell what you offer, showing proof of success in that customer's particular line of business. Then leave the invention without a dollar down. It starts working at once. In a few short days, the installation should actually produce enough cash money to pay for the deal, with profits above the investment coming in at the same time. You then call back, collect your money. Nothing is so convincing as our offer to let results speak for themselves without risk to the customer!

No Money Need Be Risked

in trying this business out. You can measure the possibilities and not be out a dollar. *If you are looking for a business that is not overcrowded* — a business that is just coming into its own — on the upgrade, instead of the downgrade — a business that offers the buyer relief from a burdensome, but unavoidable expense — a business that has a prospect practically in every office, store, or factory into which you can set foot — regardless of size — *that is a necessity* but does not have any price cutting to contend with as other necessities do — that because you control the sales in exclusive territory is your own business — *that pays more on some individual sales than many men make in a week and sometimes in a month's time* — if such a business looks as if it is worth investigating, *get in touch with us at once* for the rights in your territory — don't delay — because the chances are that if you do wait, someone else will have written to us in the meantime — and if it turns out that you were the better man — we'd both be sorry. So for convenience, *use the coupon below* — but send it right away — or wire if you wish. But do it now. *Address*

F. E. ARMSTRONG, President
Dept. 4047-K, Mobile, Ala.

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Dept. 4047-K, Mobile, Ala.

Without obligation to me, send me full information on your proposition.

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Street or Route.....

City.....

State.....

Step Up Where You Belong

What Is Your Present Level of Preparation?

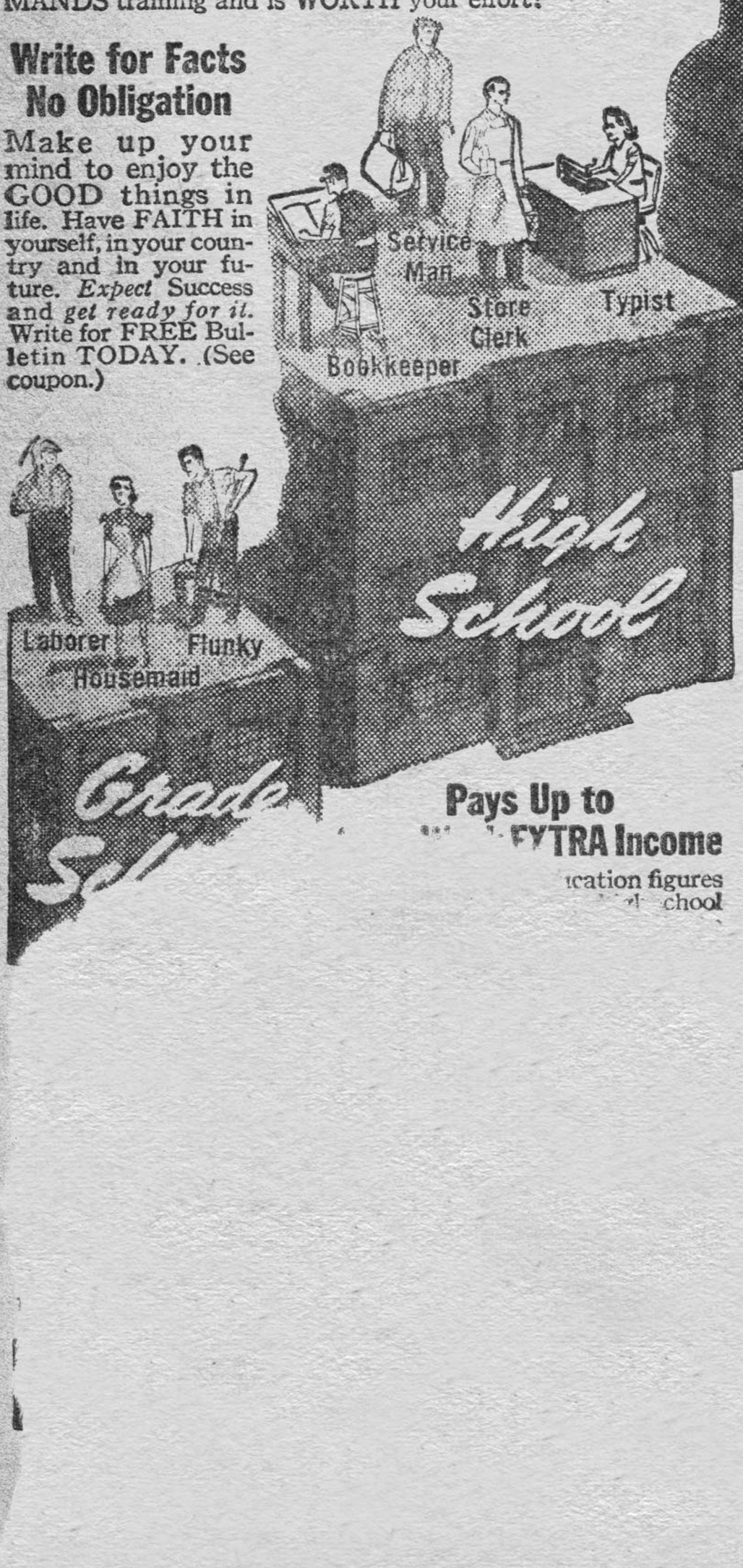
The FIRST proof of personal ability is your capacity to see the *need* for training and to GET IT. The man or woman who doesn't *realize* that education is VITAL to success—or who says he or she "doesn't have time," "hasn't the money" or that study is "too hard"—simply lacks one of the *fundamentals* of the ABILITY to make good. *American School (Chicago) graduates* by the thousands have PROVED that anyone who WANTS an essential education CAN HAVE it. *You can, too!*

You Are Only HALF a Man Until Training Rounds Out Your Ability and Experience

To make your natural ABILITY pay you *profits*, and to get jobs that give you the *kind* of EXPERIENCE that promotes constant progress, you practically MUST back that *ability* with TRAINING . . . combine *experience* with EDUCATION. Using only a PART of your SPARE time, you can train AT HOME for the good position you want. If it is WORTH having, it DEMANDS training and is WORTH your effort!

Write for Facts No Obligation

Make up your mind to enjoy the GOOD things in life. Have FAITH in yourself, in your country and in your future. *Expect* Success and *get ready for it.* Write for FREE Bulletin TODAY. (See coupon.)



Pays Up to ... EXTRA Income

...cation figures ... chool

Pays Up to $25 a Week EXTRA!

Government figures show that graduates of specialized training of college grade average $25 a week more than high school graduates, $41 more than grade school graduates. But whether you failed to finish college—or failed to complete high school—home study CAN HELP YOU. Basic high school subjects are included in vocational courses listed below.

More than 150 noted educators, engineers and executives helped prepare American School courses. An *Advisory Board* of 20 outstanding authorities—each an active leader in his field—is consulted when our work is prepared or changed. A Staff of competent instructors—home study *specialists*—works closely with the individual student. Why continue in an underpaid, overworked job—subject to periodic layoffs? *Step up where you belong*, into well-paid, pleasant work where you command the admiration and respect of others. For full details, mail coupon RIGHT NOW!

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...ng special ...part.

MAKE YOUR OWN RECORDS AT HOME

With HOME RECORDO you can make a record of your singing, talking, reciting or instrument playing right in your own home, too! No longer need the high prices of recording machines or studio facilities prevent you or your family or friends from hearing their own voices or playing. No experience necessary. No "mike" fright to worry about. No complicated gadgets. In a jiffy you can set up HOME RECORDO, play or sing or talk, and immediately you have a record which you and your friends can hear as often as you wish.

CHARLIE BARNET

and other famous orchestra leaders use

HOME RECORDO

YOU TOO CAN MAKE RECORDS RIGHT IN YOUR OWN HOME

Everything is included. Nothing else to buy and nothing else to pay. You get complete HOME RECORDING UNIT, which includes special recording needle, playing needles, 6 two-sided unbreakable records. Also spiral feeding attachment and combination recording and playback unit suitable for recording a skit, voice, instrument or radio broadcast. ADDITIONAL, 2-SIDED BLANK RECORDS COST ONLY 75c per dozen.

Charlie Barnet with Judy Ellington and Larry Taylor, vocalists in his band, listen to a record they just made with Home Recordo.

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If you play a musical instrument, or if you sing, or if you just recite, you can make your own r[illegible] can also Home Recordo for recording lett[illegible] can play them back on th[illegible]

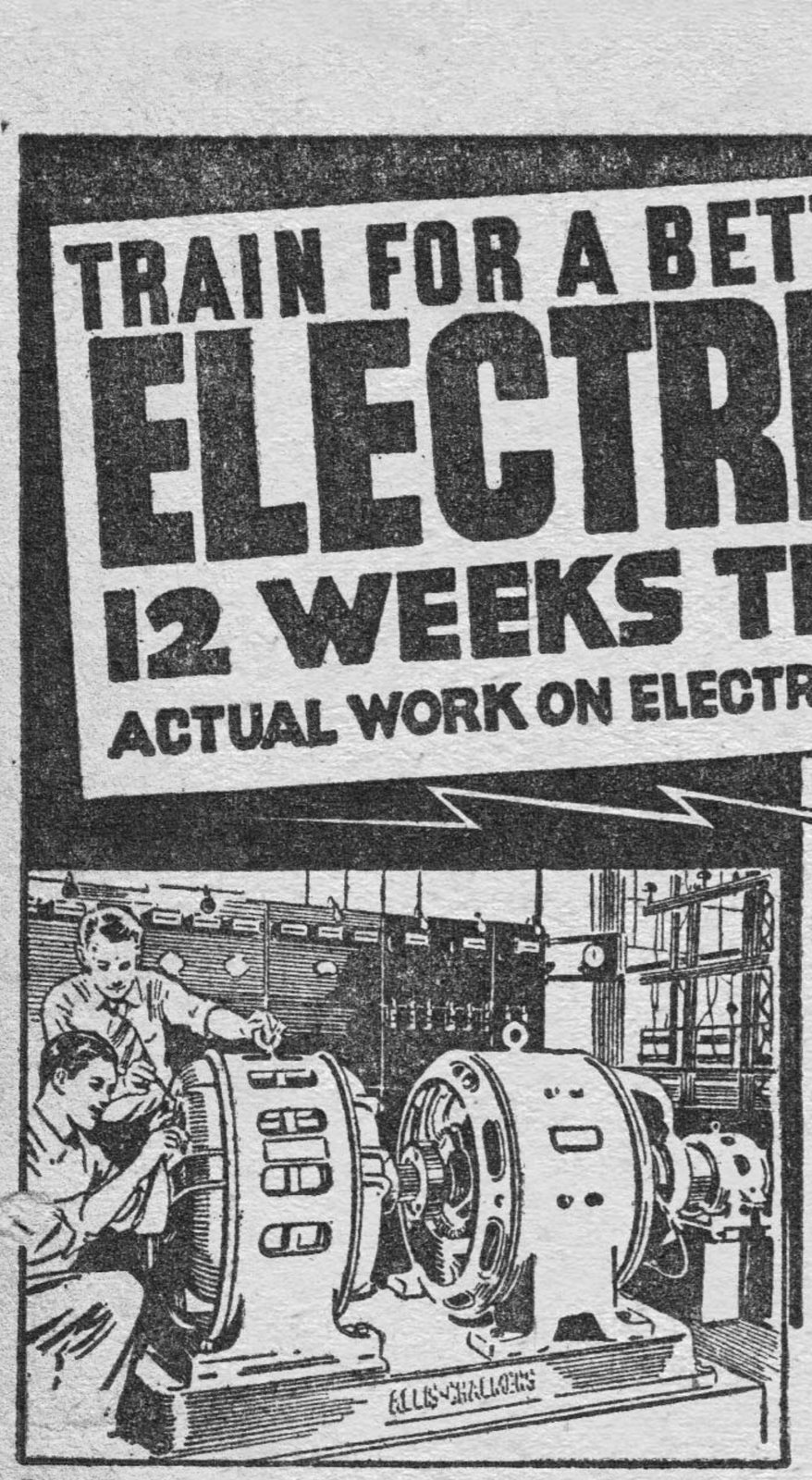
HAVE RECORDING PARTIES

You'll get a real thrill out of HOME RECORDING. Surprise your friends by letting them hear your voice or playing right from a record. Record a snappy talking feature. Record jokes and become the life of the party. Great to help train your [illegible]ce [illegible]o cultivate speech. Nothing to prac[illegible]e [illegible]ding at once . . . everything [illegible] buy. Just sing, spe[illegible] which opera[illegible]ph, [illegible].

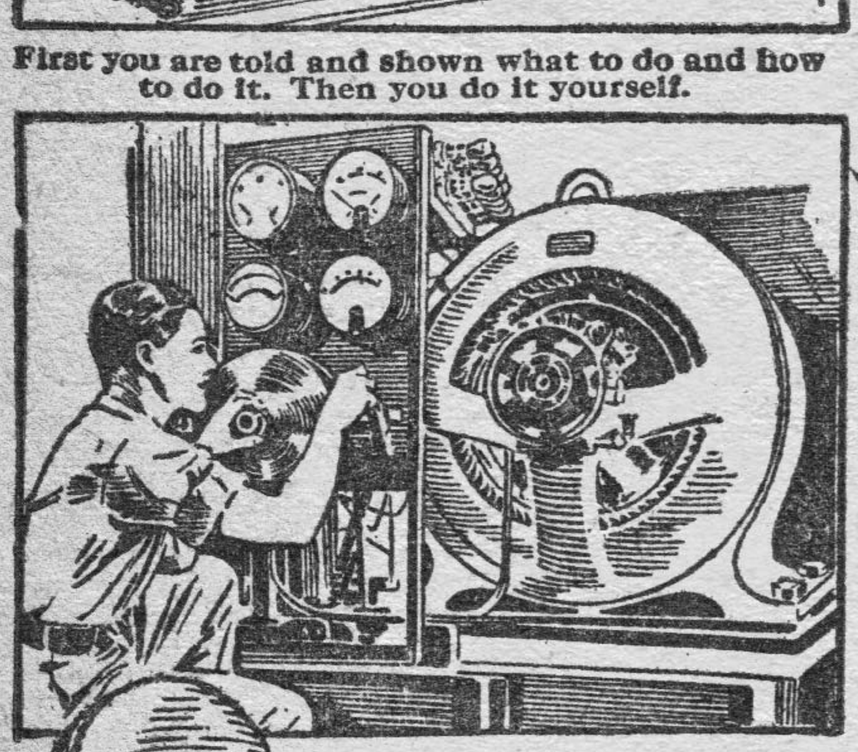
TRAIN FOR A BETTER JOB IN ELECTRICITY

12 WEEKS TRAINING

ACTUAL WORK ON ELECTRICAL MACHINERY



First you are told and shown what to do and how to do it. Then you do it yourself.



Send Today For Details of My "PAY-AFTER-GRADUATION" PLAN!

Are you out of a job? Are you working long hours at low pay in a job you don't like? Are you wondering where you can find a job that will give you steady, interesting work with better pay? If this applies to you and you are between 16 and 40 then you owe it to yourself to **read every word of this message.** Here at **Coyne** you have an opportunity to **get 12 weeks of practical shop training in** ELECTRICITY—training that can help fit you for your start towards a better job and better pay—and you can **get this training first** and **pay for it after you graduate.** My school is not the usual kind of school. It's more like a shop—**a place where a fellow who likes to get his hands on machinery feels right at home.** For that's exactly how you train, and because you **"Learn by Doing"** right here in my shops **you don't need previous experience** or **advanced education.** You do real work on real motors, generators and dynamos. You operate big, factory-type switchboards, wind armatures and do house wiring. You train in these and other branches of electricity—all with capable instructors to tell you and show you how. **And right now I'm including valuable instruction in Diesel, Electric Refrigeration and Air Conditioning at no extra tuition cost.**

EASY TO LEARN —EASY TO PAY

Don't let lack of money hold you back. If you need part-time work to help out with living expenses while you train, my employment department will help you find it. We also give you valuable **lifetime employment** service after you graduate. And remember this: If you are short of money you can **get this training first** and **pay for it beginning 60 days after you graduate**—in 12 monthly payments.

"LEARN BY DOING" Not a Correspondence Course

In my shops you **"Learn by Doing"** on real electrical equipment, wind armatures, do house-wiring, work on real dynamos, generators, etc.

Home of Coyne Electrical School

Mail Coupon for FREE BOOK

Get my big free book. It's filled with facts and pictures which tell the whole fascinating story. I'll also tell you about part-time employment while training, today's electrical opportunities, and my **"Pay After Graduation"** plan, and the **4 weeks extra Radio Course** I'm now including. **Mail the coupon for this big free book today.**

H. C. LEWIS, President
COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL
500 S. Paulina St., Dept 70-84, Chicago, Ill.

Please send me your big free Opportunity Book and all the facts about Coyne training, and the plans to help a fellow who wants to get ahead.

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY.....STATE.....

GROUP LIFE POLICY THAT INSURES THE ENTIRE FAMILY

TOTAL COST ONLY

$1.00 A MONTH

GRANDPARENTS, PARENTS, CHILDREN, AGES 1 TO 75 ALL INSURED IN ONE SINGLE LIFE INSURANCE POLICY

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Maximum Indemnity for Natural or Ordinary Death

$2,000.00
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Genuine Life Insurance— No Medical Examination

The extremely low cost of this marvelous Family Group Life Insurance Policy is made possible because the Bankers Life and Casualty Co. has reduced selling costs to a minimum . . . this policy is sold by mail—no high-priced, high-pressure selling agents will call on you. Bookkeeping costs have been reduced because an entire family can be insured in a single policy—requiring only one policy, one premium notice, etc., etc., for as many as ten persons in a family.

FREE Inspection for 10 Days

Now everyone in your family may enjoy sound life insurance protection. Regardless of which member of your family dies . . . or how they die, after this policy is in full benefit, it pays cash promptly. You don't have to risk a penny to inspect this policy . . . we want you to examine it carefully, ask your friends about it. Don't delay . . . you never know when misfortune strikes. Be prepared with safe, sound life insurance for every member of your family.

Send No Money—No Agent Will Call

Don't send money! Just fill out the coupon and get the details now, without a single penny of expense to you. Learn all about the free 10-day inspection offer.

ACT NOW • SEND COUPON!

LIBERAL BENEFITS SHOWN IN TABLE BELOW

The amount of insurance payable upon the death of any of the persons insured hereunder shall be the amount set out in the following table for the attained age nearest birthday at death of such person divided by the number of persons insured hereunder immediately preceding such death.

Table of amount of insurance purchased by a monthly payment of one dollar.

Attained Age at Death	Natural or Ordinary Accidental Death Amount	Auto Accidental Death Amount	Travel Accidental Death Amount
1-40	$1000.00	$2000.00	$3000.00
41-50	750.00	1500.00	2250.00
51-56	500.00	1000.00	1500.00
57-62	300.00	600.00	900.00
63-68	200.00	400.00	600.00
69-75	100.00	200.00	300.00

ACT NOW—AND RETURN COUPON AT ONCE

BANKERS LIFE AND CASUALTY CO.
Bankers Insurance Bldg., Jefferson Sta., Desk 35, Chicago, Ill.

Please send details and tell me how to get the Family Group Policy for free inspection.

Name ----------

Street or R. F. D. ----------

City ---------- *State* ----------

They Never Knew It Was SO EASY To Play

Thousands Learn Musical Instruments By Amazingly Simple Method

No Teacher, No Musical Knowledge Required. In a Short Time You Start Playing Real Tunes! 700,000 Now Enrolled

THINK of the fun YOU are missing! The popularity, friendship, good times! Why? Because you think it's *hard* to learn music. You have an idea that it's a slow, tedious task, with lots of boring drills and exercises.

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The Ghost, Master of Magic, Plays Danger's Game When a Dead Man's Hate Wreaks Havoc on the Living!

I drove the end of the cane hard over the gunman's heart (Chap XI)

THE CASE OF THE LAUGHING CORPSE

By GEORGE CHANCE

Author of "Murder Makes a Ghost," "Calling the Ghost," etc.

CHAPTER I

A Toast to a Corpse

IT was a pleasant dinner we three were having at Renault's Restaurant. I spotted a waiter bearing a gold-foiled bottle of champagne, and was agreeably surprised to discover that its destination was our table.

"Don't look at me," Police Commissioner Edward Standish said, shaking his graying head. "I didn't order it. I claim the dinner check, but the champagne belongs to Dyer."

Frank Dyer, the energetic district attorney, divided a twinkling glance between Standish and myself. He had odd eyes—dark and mournful as a bloodhound's. Sometimes, trying a case, they became twin drills of jet.

Murder Calls the Super-Detective to Action

"This is a celebration," Dyer said, his voice low and vibrant. "Mr. Chance can't fully appreciate it."

Neither, it seemed, could Standish; he looked puzzled. His face cleared.

"You mean Faust," he said.

"Good guess." Dyer turned to me, a thin smile on his narrow, ace-of-spades face. "Possibly you've never heard of the gentleman, Chance."

But I had—I most certainly had heard of Mr. Emery Faust. Or rather I should say that the Ghost had heard of him. I did not tell Dyer that, however. The number of people who knew my double identity—George Chance, Magician, and the Ghost, crime-hunter—was still limited to six, and the district attorney was not one of them. I was of no mind to enlighten him now.

"Faust," I said. "You mean the Faust of legend, who was in league with the devil—"

"No, not that Faust," said Dyer with a laugh. He cut the laugh off short. "The Faust I speak of *is* the devil. Emery Faust—the fat Uncle Emery of the pawn shops, the king of fences, the gentleman blackmailer, the con man extraordinary. Nor do I think I'd be indulging in libel if I suggested that Emery Faust might have dealt in drugs as well."

Joe Harper

"We never could prove anything against him," Standish said.

"A thorn in our sides for years," Dyer contributed. "The only man I ever knew who frowned at the same time he laughed. He waxed fat on his illegal earnings and put all of his belly into his laugh, and all of his laugh into his belly."

"I begin to get it," I said. "We're celebrating his death. I read something about it. A train and car crack-up, wasn't it?"

STANDISH nodded.

"On one of the suburban lines," he said. "He got crosswise of the track, refused to yield his position to the train. Insurance investigators said it was suicide."

"The immovable body and the irresistible force, eh?"

"The body," Dyer said, "was not immovable. But it was damned difficult to collect all the pieces. Faust was practically spattered."

"So Faust managed to contrive his own death," Standish said. "Disappointing to you, wasn't it, Dyer?"

"In a way," the D. A. said. "But the train accomplished what I was unable to do. It put Faust where he'll not be filching money from people's pockets."

"What happened to Faust's estate?" I asked.

"I was coming to that," Dyer said, and his eyes were snapping now. "Imagine my complete stupefaction upon being informed that I was named in Faust's will! A madman's will if ever there was one, for I was certainly his worst enemy!"

"What did you inherit—a statue of Faust thumbing his nose?" I asked.

"I can't get over it," Dyer said. "The man seems to have made all his

worst enemies his heirs! I'm not the only one. There's Barton Clay, the politician; Julian Hornaday, the miser; Henry Fu Chang, the Oriental importer; Carter Nash, who was Faust's attorney until Faust found he was robbing the till; and Nell Lafevre, the night club lady who was an ex-wife of Faust's. That's the group of heirs in which I was included. And believe it or not, each of us got an envelope which contained a brass key. That's all, nothing more. That's the extent of our inheritance."

"A key," I murmured. There was mystery here, mystery of the sort that would interest anyone, let alone the Ghost. What had become of the Faust fortune? Why had he left brass keys to his enemies?

"What does the key fit?" Standish asked.

"I don't know." Dyer shrugged. "If it's a joke, nobody's laughing. Unless Mr. Emery Faust is."

The head waiter appeared at Dyer's elbow with the message that the D. A. was wanted on the phone. Dyer excused himself and followed the waiter.

"A queer will," I said to Standish. "Those brass keys—very odd."

"Faust was a trouble maker all his life," Standish said. "If there was a way to die and at the same time make trouble for people posthumously, Faust would do it. There may be something for you in this, George."

"Something for Mr. G., you mean," I said in low tones. "Perhaps."

I referred, of course, to the Ghost, the other half of my dual identity. Perhaps a few words about the Ghost's origins and George Chance's life are in order at this point.

I was born right in the circus. My father was an animal trainer, my mother a trapeze artist. The Big Top was my university, the only college I ever knew. I had good teachers. To two of them, for example, I owe whatever abilities I have as a tumbler and

Glenn Saunders

a contortionist. I learned the art of makeup from a lovable clown named Ricki. Don Avigne made the knife a dangerous weapon in my hands. Professor Gabby trained me in ventriloquism.

But it was Marko, the magician of the sideshows, who taught me the basic tricks that turned my talents toward magic. And it was magic that carried me from my obscure beginnings to a position of fame among wand wavers, magic that graduated me from vaudeville to my own revue which toured the world. I made a modest fortune, finally retired from the stage to establish the New York School of Magic, where amateurs who are bitten by the craze to produce illusions are taught.

After that, I confined my performances to benefits. And it was at a policeman's benefit that I first met Commissioner Edward Standish. Friendship ripened between us and I expressed an interest in police work. He invited me to take a hand in a murder investigation. A simple slate trick caught the criminal.

The Ghost Fights On!

IN the last issue of THE GHOST George Chance smashed through to a solution of the baffling case of the steel-helmet murders. We are happy now to present him in his fourth memoir, THE CASE OF THE LAUGHING CORPSE, a narrative which in its glamour, excitement and mystery represents one of the Ghost's greatest achievements.

Rarely has a new magazine received the enthusiastic reception that has marked the successive appearances of THE GHOST. Clearly it is a tribute to George Chance, master of criminology and magic.

George Chance, as you know, doesn't brag—we do the bragging for him. He doesn't compare himself with that master of escape technique, Harry Houdini—we do.

Applying his magical gifts in his crime-crushing role of THE GHOST, George Chance has perhaps more signally served the Law than any other crusader for the right. It is no wonder that criminals dread his entry into a case, and that when THE GHOST walks, the underworld strives by every power at its command to put an end to him.

Keep these things in mind when you read this and future memoirs of George Chance, THE GHOST DETECTIVE, savant of the science of criminology, deadly crime-tracker and nemesis of criminals. This kindly, humorous magician is too modest to depict himself as the big man he really is. He won't say such things himself. That's why we're once again saying them for him.

—THE EDITOR.

Thus was born the idea of combining magic with crime detection, producing a new sort of investigator who might possibly achieve results beyond the power of orthodox police methods. Thus was the Ghost foreshadowed.

Sometimes it is a little hard for even my intimate friends to realize that the humorous magician, George Chance, is the graveyard personality who haunts the depths of the underworld as the Ghost.

District Attorney Frank Dyer returned to our table. Without a word to us, he sat down and gulped a mouthful of champagne. His hand shook.

"You look as though you've been talking with the dead," I said.

Dyer set down his glass, leaned forward with a white face.

"You're clever, George Chance," he said slowly. "I have!"

Standish stroked his moustache. His alert gray eyes met mine.

"I was talking to Emery Faust," Dyer said hoarsely. "We can stop celebrating. The man's alive. And laughing at us, damn him!"

CHAPTER II

I Go Ghosting

WE waited for Dyer to explain his startling statement.

"Yes," he said, "Faust is alive. For over a week he's been officially dead and buried, yet all the while he's been having his laugh!"

"But how in the world was it managed?" Standish gasped.

GEORGE CHANCE

"Simplest thing in the world," Dyer said. "He told me over the phone, the devil! It seems he has a man servant —*had* one, rather. The man was in the habit of borrowing the master's clothes. This time, with Emery Faust out of town on a business trip, the servant outdid himself, wearing not only Faust's clothes but also taking a watch, other personal effects, and a car. He was going to impress his girl friend, no doubt.

"Well, the servant got outside of a little too much whiskey, and on driving home evidently went to sleep with the car across the railroad track."

"And Faust let everybody think he was dead?" Standish said incredulously. "George, what do you think of that?"

"Truthfully," I said, "I don't know what to think of it."

"And probably nothing can be done about it," Standish said. "What he did isn't a crime, unless it falls under the head of malicious mischief."

"What he does is never a crime, when you get right down to it," Dyer snapped. "That's why we've never been able to catch him at anything. Faust knows more law than I do. We actually know only one crime the man ever committed. We know for a fact that he purchased a lot of stolen narcotics. But we can't prove that nor catch him reselling the narcotics. Federal agents camped on his tail until this train accident put an end to the case."

"Then perhaps," I suggested, "the train accident was simply a means to an end. Suppose he used the interval of time, which his supposed death gave him, to dispose of the narcotics—"

"In which case the accident might not have been an accident," Standish anticipated. "Suppose we run out to Faust's place and have a talk with him later on tonight."

Frank Dyer looked at me. "How about it, Chance? I believe you took a hand in a bit of police work once and were pretty helpful. Maybe magic can get something on Emery Faust where the law can't."

I looked at my watch, got up to go.

"I'd like to," I said, "but there's a party at the orphans' home and I'm supposed to pull some rabbits out of hats for the kids. Afraid you'll have to deal me out of the first hand."

District Attorney Dyer didn't know it, but he was going to see me again that same evening, not as George Chance but as the Ghost. Ned Standish knew that without my having to tell him.

As for the show at the orphans' home, that was no trumped-up excuse. I was, in fact, scheduled to put on a rather elaborate performance. But I have a way of being in two places at once. The Ghost would not have been so successful in escaping the wrath of the underworld if he hadn't. The explanation is simple—George Chance has an identical double.

A WORD about Glenn Saunders. He is my double. He has deliberately shucked his own identity in exchange for all that I can teach him of the art of magic. He tops six feet by one inch. He has a lean waist, square shoulders. His hair is ruddy-gold and slightly wavy. He has blue eyes, a fairly broad forehead, thin nose and mouth, prominent cheek bones. In describing Glenn Saunders, I give a pretty good picture of myself.

Natural resemblance has been aided by plastic surgery. He's enough of an actor to ape my every move and habit. There's only one exception: Saunder's shining teeth inevitably bite into the stem of a pipe, while I smoke only cigars and cigarettes. But when the necessity arises for Glenn Saunders to step into George Chance's shoes, he trades his pipe for my cigarettes.

From a telephone in a cigar store around the corner from Renault's I telephoned my home on East Fifty-fourth Street.

"The orphans are all yours," I told Glenn. "You're standing in for me tonight."

Glenn, who would rather do magic for a crowd of appreciative youngsters than eat, was delighted.

I took a taxi to Madison Avenue and East Fifty-fifth Street, where I got out and walked swiftly up Fifty-fifth to the old rectory which is the Ghost's headquarters. The place is kept empty by the high rent which George Chance has put up on it and by its reputation for being haunted. I entered at the rear of the building, went directly into the basement, the only portion of the house that is furnished. There I went through the business of becoming the Ghost.

It's quite a little trick—making a ghost of myself. Wire ovals go into my nostrils to widen them and tilt the tip of my nose. I deepen my eye-sockets by the use of brown eye-shadow. I highlight my cheek bones to skull-like prominence, and add a mouthful of old ivory shell teeth over my own teeth. Powder gives me a ghastly, corpselike complexion. That done, I put on a black suit which is very carefully tailored to contain secret pockets for special equipment and also a lining that makes the suit reversible. A black crusher hat pulled well over my eyes, and George Chance, the humorous magician, becomes a gaunt haunter of shadows who looks as though he might laugh only at a funeral.

But there's more to it than that. My makeup, you see, is relatively simple. The art of disguise, I've always figured, lies in control of facial muscles. Disguised as I have described above, I have the appearance

of a very ordinary person, a little unhealthy looking, perhaps, but not a person apt to attract too much attention.

But, with this makeup as a starter, I can escape from my commonplace appearance instantly, simply by control of facial muscles. I draw my lips back from my teeth and allow a vacant expression to creep into unblinking eyes. In short, I "turn on the Ghost." And you wouldn't care to meet that Ghost in a dark alley or a country churchyard after dark!

I LEFT the rectory with my black hat pulled low and hurried back to Madison Avenue, where I caught a cab and gave the driver the West End Avenue address of Emery Faust.

This latest trick of Faust's — whereby he had arranged to be legally dead — piqued the curiosity of the Ghost in me. It wasn't at all certain that the death of Faust's servant in Faust's car was an accident. And if it wasn't an accident, it was murder. Where murder entered, the Ghost could enter too. Whatever Emery Faust's motive, I intended to do a little haunting of Emery Faust that night.

Commissioner Standish and District Attorney Dyer had evidently spent a good deal of time at Renault's, talking Faust over and probably trying to find some new approach to this impregnable criminal character, for there was no sign of a car in front of the Faust house when I arrived.

It was a big old house in which Faust had employed quite a staff of servants. But, of course, since his "death" these servants had left the place, so I was not surprised to see only one lighted window in the house as I approached.

The surprise, or one of the surprises, came when I tried the front door and found it unlocked. Emery Faust and his hellish laughter had created enemies in the underworld as well as among the lawful, and he was running quite a risk in living behind unlocked doors. Needless to say, the Ghost did no knocking, but quietly entered the dusky hall.

For a moment I stood there with my eyelids lowered until my eyes got used to the gloom. Then I turned my attention toward the lighted room in the north wing of the house. There was only one sound in the place besides my own breathing—the tick of a clock.

The one lighted room proved to be a small and very businesslike study beyond a magnificently appointed living room where many expensive oil paintings hung upon the wall. It was a curious quirk in Emery Faust's character, this love of paintings.

I expected to walk into the study, find Emery Faust's fat form seated in front of the desk. If so, I intended to give him a taste of the Ghost's graveyard laugh. I walked in, sure enough, but found the study completely empty.

A swivel chair was pushed a yard or so back from the olive-green steel desk. The desk was orderly, almost barren. There was a single piece of paper on the desk pad and beside it a steel pen-holder with a broken steel nib. An inkwell was open, and there were droplets of red ink on the blotting pad and on the rubber cushion of the chair.

I looked into the inkwell and decided that the spots on the blotter and cushion weren't ink. The well contained black ink and these spots were deep red.

A quick inventory of the rest of the wide surface of the desk showed me a framed photograph of some river shore with hills or mountains on the horizon, an alabaster ash tray, an old time spiral-spring pen rack, and a leather sheath from which a paper knife might have been taken. Besides the desk and its swivel chair, the room contained two other chairs, a steel filing cabinet, and a typewriter stand.

THERE was another door in the room in addition to the one through which I had entered, and a

brassy edge of light showed beneath its lower edge. I went to this door and opened it with handkerchief-gloved fingers. The room beyond was a small, windowless library lined with books and lighted by a copper-shaded lamp that rested on a table beside a lounge chair. I looked toward the north wall and down, and there I saw Emery Faust.

Faust's fat, moonlike face, with its enormous features, was contorted as though with laughter. Yet from that wide open mouth, so like the gaping mouth of the mask of Comedy that used to adorn theatres of long ago, there came no sound.

A finger of ice traced its chilly path down my spine.

There is no more gruesome sight in the world than laughter on the face of a corpse.

CHAPTER III

The Devil's Heirs

THE body of Emery Faust slumped grossly against the book-lined wall. It was as though his legs were much too frail to support his enormous torso and had buckled under him.

Blood splotched his shirt front in a wide spot that was centered by the brass handle of the paper knife I had noticed missing from the desk. There was blood on the brown flooring, blood on the fat hands of the corpse, blood on the red binding of the open book his right hand was clutching.

The book—it was a copy of Lord Tennyson's Poems, covers bent back so they touched—were grasped in the dead man's clutch. I glimpsed the title at the top of one of the crumpled pages. It was "Crossing the Bar."

That was the mad touch in the whole hideous tableau—that book of poems. There had been no poetry in the life of this fat and grasping monster. "Crossing the Bar," clenched in such hands as these, gave an almost sacrilegious touch. Certainly there was "no moaning of the bar" when Faust "put out to sea." Instead, there must have been laughter, a sort of unholy glee.

EMERY FAUST'S face got me, though I had met corpses enough in my hauntings.

In life he was ugly enough, with his huge nose wedged in between bulbous cheeks, his tiny eyes, his large and pointed ears, his eyebrows that slanted upwards like Satan's. But it was that wide open mouth, seemingly on the point of letting out laughter, that somehow got under my skin.

I went back into the study, was about halfway across when I was brought up short by a knock at the door. Standish and Dyer, perhaps. Or perhaps not.

At any rate, I couldn't have walked into a better spot to be accused of murder.

You will remember that the study and the library were the only lighted rooms in the house when I had entered.

So darkness covered me as I crossed the living room to the wide stairs that spiraled up to the second floor. I went up the steps in the dark and found that I could see most of the reception hall and the living room from the top of the steps.

I watched the front door open. I saw a short chunky figure silhouetted against the dim night glow. I heard the whisper of fingers that groped for a light switch.

And as the switch clicked on, I saw the visitor.

He was a Chinese!

The Chinese, having closed the door, looked about with narrowed eyes. He removed his hat from his nearly bald head, stood there drumming on the

crown of his hat with his yellow fingers.

Somebody knocked at the door.

The Chinese gave the front door a glance, scurried to the nearest chair, sat down. No matter what you've heard about the iron nerves of the Chinese, this one was displaying considerable agitation.

And why not? No one was coming to answer the knocking at the door. And it certainly wasn't the Chinese gentleman's place to answer it, since he had entered without invitation. Yet answer it he would have, for he was on his feet and going toward the door when it was suddenly thrust open by the combined efforts of a man and a woman.

THE woman, tall, blond, beautiful, and extremely gowned in blue satin that fitted like paint, stood there with her hands on her hips and a slippered foot tapping.

"You mummy!" she said to the Chinese. "You damned yellow mummy! Why didn't you open the door for us, Henry?"

The Chinese bowed, holding his black hat flat against his chest. He smiled and said he was so sorry. He bowed again to the man and then again to the blond.

"Good evening, Miss Lafevre, and good evening, Mr. Nash. It is very nice weather." The Chinese spoke perfect English.

"It was until *he* called me up," said the blonde. "Nice weather, hell! Henry, don't you know he's alive?"

"I know," said the Chinese. "He spoke to me over the phone a short while ago and I hastened over to congratulate him."

His small eyes darted a glance at the blonde's companion.

"Shouldn't we congratulate Mr. Faust on being alive, Mr. Nash?"

From my bird's eye view, I watched the little drama and began to get the characters straight. The blond woman was Nell Lafevre, ex-wife of Emery Faust and owner of a night club.

Carter Nash was the bald man with the dull looking face and the lower lip that looked as though it belonged on a cream pitcher. Nash's looks were deceiving. He was shrewd enough. He had pulled Emery Faust out of a number of scrapes.

Of course the Chinese could be none other than Henry Fu Chang, the wealthy Oriental importer. All three of these persons had been named heirs to the Faust fortune—and had received as their share a little brass key.

"Where's Faust?" demanded Carter Nash.

His voice was as unpleasant as his appearance. Brains and nothing else made him a great lawyer.

"I do not know," Henry Fu Chang said. "I regret there was no one here to let me in."

"How did you get in then?" de-

[*Turn page*]

manded Nell Lafevre. "They build the house around you?"

"The door," Fu Chang said with a gesture, "was unlocked. I walked in, even as you did. I would ask you to be seated, only I am not the host, as you know."

Nell Lafevre walked to the center of the hall. She raised her magnificent golden head almost as though she had spotted me where I crouched in the shadows of the upstairs hall.

"Emery!" she shouted. That contralto voice of hers had carrying power. "Emery, where are you?"

Emery did not answer, and Nell Lafevre looked at Carter Nash.

"Not so much as a laugh from him," she said. "Where is that leering monster?"

Nash started into the living room, but he was stopped by the clatter of the door knocker.

It occurred to me then that Emery Faust had done a peculiar thing. You see, all his heirs turning up here at this time couldn't have been coincidence. He must have called each and every one of them, just as he had Dyer —called them and laughingly informed them that he was alive and kicking. And they had come at once to his house where very shortly they would find him quite as dead as they had supposed him to be in the first place.

BUT why this rush to see the man they were all probably glad enough to have dead? The only answer to that question was that they wanted to ask Emery Faust exactly what I would have wanted to ask him: What was the meaning of those brass keys which had been his legacy to them?

Carter Nash went quickly across the living room and beyond the range of my lookout post at the top of the steps. Nell Lafevre was the one who went to the front door. She opened the door. District Attorney Frank Dyer stood there, looking thin and pale.

Behind Dyer I made out the well known figure of Commissioner Standish—a typical copper's build, with a torso that was as thick as a barrel and legs that were like pipe stems. Beside Standish was Barton Clay, one of New York's smartest political bosses—and, as has been mentioned before, another of Faust's mysterious brass-key heirs.

Suave was the word for Clay. He was gray-haired, pink-cheeked. Behind the desk at a bank you would have trusted him with your last dollar. And it was a pretty well known fact that a lot of people trusted him with their votes. He was respected for his power rather than his questionable honesty.

Clay, Dyer, and Standish came into the hall, and at about that time Carter Nash was once more within my view. He came out of the door leading from the study into the living room. His lower lip dangled so far down that I could see the pink of his lower gums. Beads of perspiration gleamed on the smooth dome of his head. His legs seemed undecided which way they were going. He stumbled twice, stopped on the second stumble and took hold of the back of a chair to steady himself.

"Get a doctor," he said hoarsely. "Call Dr. Millais at once. Something's happened. Something terrible has happened. Faust—Faust now is really dead!"

There was an interval of silence in which those in the hall simply stared at Carter Nash. It was Barton Clay who spoke first.

"Dead?" He lighted a cigarette with calculated slowness. "We've heard that little gag before about Emery Faust."

"And if this time it's true—" Nell Lafevre put a gloved hand over her mouth and yawned. "So what?"

Ned Standish's square of moustache twisted slightly at one corner. He started for the room where the body lay.

CHAPTER IV

Night Attack

THROUGH the tall, narrow window on the stairway I saw lightning flare and tremble on the horizon. Thunder rolled ominously.

In the hall below, Frank Dyer, Barton Clay, and Carter Nash followed Commissioner Standish, disappearing from my view. Only Henry Fu Chang and the blonde Lafevre were left. The Chinese went back to his chair, twisting his black hat entirely out of shape.

"Henry."

"Yes, Miss Lafevre?"

"Is he really dead?"

Nell searched her evening bag with nervous fingers and produced a cigarette. The Chinese scratched a match for her.

"I have not seen it with my own eyes," Fu Chang answered.

Nell laughed, and her laughter billowed smoke.

"I'm not so sure, Henry! You hated him. Ever since the pearl deal. Do you know, you're about the only man who ever lived to succeed in putting a fast one over on Emery Faust? That shipment of seed pearls, remember?"

The Chinese nodded soberly.

"But I do not hate him. Why should I hate a man whom I outwitted in a business transaction? He hated me, is more accurate. I would not kill him."

"No?" she said softly. "Well, maybe not. You're a pretty good egg. But I think that if I had found him alive tonight, I would have killed him later. The filthy beast. You think you know Faust is rotten, but you don't know how rotten until you try living with him."

"Perhaps, Nash—" Fu Chang began.

Merry White

And then he shook his round head. "I will insinuate nothing."

"You're not insinuating anything, Henry. It made the papers, remember? Quite a smelly business. But that was Faust all over—smelly. He thought because Nash was getting a fat retainer for being his lawyer that Nash would stand by and watch his daughter being dragged into the gutter. It's a particular kind of hell that Emery reserved for his wives. Faust would have eloped with Carter Nash's daughter if Nash hadn't stepped in."

Nell Lafevre stepped into the living room and seemed to be listening to the rumble of voices from the study.

"I wonder if he's really dead. I won't believe it until I hear his own doctor say so."

I stood up, moved silently through the shadows of the upper hall. I knew I had to find a way out without attracting too much attention. The lower floor was filled with people and there would soon be police to deal with. Standish would have vouched for me, but that would have meant I would become involved in police routine—something for which I had no appetite.

As I moved around the circular hall, hoping to find a rear stairway, a breath

of air fanned my cheek—air that came from the opening of a door!

I turned. A flare of lightning pasted a silhouette of a man flatly against the oblong that was the open door. And what the lightning did for me it must have done for the man in the door. He came at me clumsily enough, almost fell into me, in fact.

I HAD whisked out my knife at the first sign of danger, and now I let the man taste the needle-sharp point of it in his middle as he crowded in close and tried to get his hands to my throat.

"You'll utter just one sound this side of the grave!" I whispered, and thrust him slowly backward into the room from which he had made his sudden appearance. Keeping the point of the knife against him, I shut the door quietly with my left hand and groped for the light switch. With the coming of the light, I saw why the man's attack had been so absurdly clumsy.

First of all, he looked barely over his twentieth birthday—a clean looking kid with well formed features, tousled blond hair, and eyes that were deep blue although somewhat bloodshot. The big raw hands that hung awkwardly down at his sides looked capable enough of starting a rumpus, and there was a certain petulance about his mouth that indicated he was in a fighting mood. But what actually took most of the fight out of him was a blue-black lump over his right eye. And the pain in his head was troubling his vision.

As his eyes became used to the glare, comprehension showed in his face. The Ghost, I might add, was fully "turned on"; I was giving him that dead-pan stare that generally brings fear to those who meet the Ghost. I thought for a moment that this youth who was staggering around under that lump on his head was going to faint.

"Who are you?" I asked in the Ghost's monotonous voice — a voice that would make a police radio announcer sound like a singing teacher by comparison.

The kid moistened his lips.

"W-w-wilkins," he stammered.

"A servant of Faust's?"

"No. Stanley Wilkins. I—I'm a student. Medical student. I—I live next door. Who—what are you?"

"I ask the questions," I said. "What are you doing here?"

"I—I don't know. I was walking in Mr. Faust's garden. He—he doesn't mind. I live in an apartment and some nights I walk in Mr. Faust's yard. I—I heard a quarrel. Mr. Faust was laughing and cursing—"

"Did you overhear any of the quarrel?"

"Just a word now and then. Mr. Faust was laughing so hard, it was difficult to understand him. He said something about dynamite, and the other man said he could handle dynamite without much trouble. And then there was the sound of a blow. I ran around to the front door. It was dark when I entered the hall, and dark in the living room. And then somebody rushed out of the study and hit me. I—I should have fallen in the hall downstairs, but—"

"But you bounced up here," I concluded.

PERHAPS the boy was telling the truth. And then again he might be the murderer. That lump on his head might have been handed him by Faust, in the struggle.

"Is there a back stairway?" I asked.

Stanley Wilkins nodded. He pointed a finger toward the door and said he'd show me.

I turned toward the door, my back toward Wilkins. He had no idea that my eyes were still upon him. You see, I always wear a mirror ring—a device very useful to the magician and also to the Ghost, for it virtually gives me eyes in the back of my head. I saw Stanley Wilkins lunge at me as soon as my back was turned—a pretty logical move for him to make if he was the criminal who had killed Faust.

Or, as it later occurred to me, if he happened to think that *I* was Faust's murderer.

I pivoted to meet his low tackle. My right arm swept down, hand turned so that the handle of the knife caught him a clip on the side of the head. He flopped heavily on his belly and lay still.

Down on hands and knees beside him, I searched his pockets, found a revolver, pulled the teeth of the weapon by breaking out the cartridges. Then I left Wilkins and his gun in the room where I felt certain the police would find them.

I went out into the hall, still looking for the rear stairway. Downstairs in the hall, Henry Fu Chang was bowing to a tall, dark man who carried a satchel in his hand. The new arrival was Dr. William Millais, for many years known throughout the city for his surgery. Recently he had become less prominent due to the fact that his eyes had developed cataracts. This had made it necessary for eye operations which had restored his sight but not his confidence in himself.

He was a quiet-spoken, modest man, this Dr. Millais. As George Chance, I had met him several times. Except for a rather swarthy complexion and the thick-lensed glasses which the eye operation had forced him to wear as a substitute for the natural lenses of his eyes, he would have been ordinary in the extreme.

Millais' coat collar was turned up against the rain, and he paused in the center of the hall to straighten his coat and make himself look more presentable.

"I do not understand," Millais was saying to Henry Fu Chang and Nell Fafevre. "You say that Emery Faust is dead— But of course he's dead. A train accident—"

"That's what we thought," Nell broke in. "But he spoke to me on the phone tonight. And to a number of other people. This time, I want to be sure."

Robert Demarest

"This time," Henry Fu Chang said, "it is rumored that Emery Faust's death is not an accident. The Commissioner of Police is here."

"So?" Dr. Millais said quietly. "Very confusing. Which way, if you please?"

NELL LAFEVRE and the Chinese walked on either side of the doctor, led him into the living room and from there toward the study door. They met Standish and Dyer at the door. Voices mumbled. I heard Dyer ask Standish if that was the Homicide boys pulling up in the car across the street.

"They've hardly had time," Standish replied. "Possibly it's Julian Hornaday. He's the only one of the Faust heirs who hasn't put in his appearance."

I left my post at the stair top, found the rear stairway leading out of what might have been the cook's bedroom, hurried down, bent on getting out of the house before the police started a

search. I found myself in the kitchen, recognizable in the dark because lightning briefly illuminated the glistening cabinet sink.

The rain came in sheets that drenched the windows of the kitchen and the rear door of the house. Before letting myself out into Nature's great bathtub, I imitated Dr. Millais and turned up my coat collar.

Just outside the back door I paused. Above the sound of the driving rain, I distinctly heard the clatter of gun fire!

I ran around the side of the house, dodged in behind shrubbery that was planted close to the foundation. Inside the house I could hear startled cries and the pelting of footsteps.

Across the wide sweep of lawn a man was running, ducking from one tree to another to bury himself in a bed of shrubbery. And then the shrubbery bed spoke with a dozen flaming tongues as slugs from a machine-gun spattered the stone walls of the house and made lace glass of the window above my head.

I ran at a crouch toward the front of the house. Distantly sounded the wail of a police siren—the homicide boys approaching. And then machine-gun fire broke out from the other side of the house. Indoors, a revolver answered with three sharp barks. Ned Standish always packed his gun, and it was undoubtedly he who had retaliated. What was behind this attack I had no idea, but it seemed to come from all sides at once.

I came up beside the front porch, which was hardly more than a stoop, just as the front door opened and a man came out. And I got the jolt of my life!

For just an instant I thought the man on the porch was the twice-dead Emery Faust. And then I realized that it was somebody who had borrowed Faust's enormous checkered topcoat as a shelter against the rain—I had seen Faust wear that coat in life.

On the other side of the porch, bushes waved against the wind. The porch light glinted on blue gun-steel. And I realized I was in a nice spot to witness a second murder of the evening.

CHAPTER V

Questions Without Answers

THIS was the time to act and then think afterward, though thinking might be slightly impaired by the presence of a bullet in my brain. I lunged at the man on the porch, both hands going out to strike him at the back of the knees. And that was the instant that the gun on the other side of the porch spoke its word.

The man on the porch fell backward on top of me, and the two of us fell down behind the protection edge of the concrete porch. I untangled head and shoulders from the legs of the man I had brought down on top of me, picked up my little automatic from the gimmick that usually holds it near the bottom of my coat.

The man who had tried murder was racing across the lawn, probably confident that his bullet had completed its murderous work. It hadn't, because the man who was tangled up with me was alive and kicking. In fact, as I took what I considered pretty good aim at the fleeting figure, I got a kick somewhere between the shoulders, which was an excellent excuse for missing my mark.

My shot brought one in return. The gunman stopped in full flight, gun braced across his left arm. When the shot came, it clipped mortar from the wall behind and to my left, and the gun flare gave me a lightning glimpse of the man's face.

It was a face to remember—grayish color all over, an insignificant nose,

cruel slits of eyes. The Ghost had met this man before and found him dangerous. His name was Mike Pannard, and he held a tight grip on a lower East Side mob of criminals. Pannard was just about the only criminal on the books who would have attempted laying siege to Emery Faust's house. He was about as subtle as a cyclone.

Pannard's objective seemed to be the car that was idling across the street from the Faust house. My objective was obviously to head him off. I would have had a swell chance of doing just that if it hadn't been for the confused person I had just rescued.

I just got myself unlimbered from the man I had knocked from the porch, started out of the bushes after Pannard, when my pal from the porch got ideas. He landed full weight on my back—a necktie tackle that brought me to earth, winded me completely. I squirmed over on my back, gulping for air. My lungs seemed to be leaking—that was the sensation, anyway. I didn't have much to give, but what I had I put behind a blow to the jaw of Dr. William Millais!

For it was Millais who had stepped out onto the porch to see what all the noise was, no doubt. He hadn't cared much for the sort of weather we were having just then and had put on dead Mr. Faust's topcoat, which had marked him as a man Mike Pannard would have liked much better dead than alive.

IT was quite a mix-up for a little while. Millais was pounding blows into my body, suffering under the impression that I was trying to murder him, I suppose. Only I was doing most of the suffering, and not from any impression except those made by Millais' fists. And then Millais got a glimpse of my face and started to use his sense. But by that time, Mike Pannard had made his getaway, taking his machine-gun artists with him.

I got up, took a couple of handfuls of Emery Faust's topcoat, and pulled the doctor to his feet. For a moment, Millais' eyes with their pitifully malformed pupils caused by the surgery that had removed his cataracts, blinked bewilderedly at me. His glasses were askew on his nose, but he had not lost them in the scramble, otherwise he couldn't have seen a thing.

"Good lord! The Ghost!" he whispered.

I gave Millais a ghoulish laugh, shoved him toward the house.

"You'd have been a ghost yourself in another moment if I hadn't stepped in," I informed him, but I think he knew that now.

He stammered something that sounded like an apology, but I didn't wait for him to finish. I was in a hurry to slip away before the police started to put some embarrassing questions to me.

On my way back to the rectory I sifted the possibilities of the attack on the house and the attempted shooting of Millais. The latter seemed to account for the former. Millais had appeared in Faust's topcoat and had been fired upon. Therefore Pannard must have attacked the house for the purpose of killing Faust.

On East Fifty-fifth Street, my haunted rectory crouched in the shadow of the steeple of the church next door. I slipped along the side of the building with its boarded windows, went to the back door, and down the basement steps. The sound of voices mumbled from within in spite of the heavily insulated door. I knew that Glenn Saunders had informed my aides that the Ghost was on the prowl, for only my intimate friends have keys to the rectory basement.

No sooner had I opened the door than Merry White ran across the room and threw her arms around my neck. Then she backed a bit, examining my ghostly get-up with her laughing green eyes.

"Old darlin' Ghost!" she said. "If you'll just take those nasty looking

shell teeth out of your mouth, I'll kiss you!"

That was a bargain any time, as far as I was concerned. The delightful bit of business over, I allowed myself to be led to the couch at one side of the basement room, pausing to shake hands gravely with my smallest and oldest friend—Tiny Tim Terry.

As his name would indicate, Tim is a midget. I had known him since circus days. His child-size body was clad in a tailored suit that would have been a credit to a Wall Street broker. His babyish mouth was pretty well occupied with one of his enormous cigars.

JOE HARPER was also there—Joe who had once used my spare room as a place to have a hangover and then forgot to go home. Joe knows Broadway as well as he knows the palm of his hand, for he's been everything from vaudeville booking agent to sidewalk pitchman.

Joe didn't bother to get out of his chair. He examined me with narrow, black-beetle eyes that lurked in the shadows of his nauseating green hat. Shrewd eyes, those glittering orbs of Joe Harper's, the sort of eyes that dig beneath the surface, see the goings-on in a great city which the ordinary man never even thinks to look for.

An odd trio they made, these friends of mine. Joe, the artistic chiseler with his vast store of worldly knowledge; Tiny Tim, the child-sized body with the brain of a man; Merry White, whose charm had done much to hold attention of my audiences when I had toured with my magical act—these were the friends I was counting on to aid me in unraveling the mystery of the hideous laughing corpse of Emery Faust.

I could talk about Merry White for a long time. She's a lovely little thing with black hair rolled coquettishly back from a beautiful forehead. Her mouth is at its prettiest when it's laughing. Her nose—but then there's so much more to Merry than mere beauty. Joe Harper would express it something like this:

"The girl's got what it takes and plenty more."

Joe Harper invited me to have some of my own whiskey. He's remarkably generous that way. And then he lolled back in the chair, a cigarette dangling from his lips, a highball in his hand, and urged me to "give."

I brought them up to date on all that had happened at the Faust house, being as brief as possible and at the same time emphasizing those details I thought important. The articles on Faust's desk, the book in the dead man's hand, the blood drops on the blotter—all these might furnish material clues.

Then there was the blond young fellow who had given his name as Stanley Wilkins. He deserved considerable notice, I thought. Wilkins represented one of the quirks in Faust's peculiarly unpleasant character. Faust had evidently been kind to Wilkins, or at least gave the young fellow the impression that he was being kind.

I had never heard of Faust being kind to anyone.

Then, what about the heirs who had been named in Faust's will—that strange will that had actually been executed before Faust's death? What was the meaning of the brass keys that were shared, as Dyer had said, by Faust's worst enemies?

"Ooh, I'm going to like this," Merry White said when I had finished. "Especially, I like the part about the brass keys and Tennyson's poetry. There's poetry in my soul, I think. And when I was a little girl I had a whole collection of old keys that wouldn't fit anything."

"Frail," Tiny Tim said as he paced back and forth across the floor and waved his cigar around in his mouth, "that is entirely irrelevant. Don't totter back into ancient history when you were a little girl."

"You'll utter just one sound this side of the grave," I whispered (Chap. IV)

HARPER'S voice broke in nasally. "This business has more angles than a chorus girl has curves. Take a look at the nutty stuff in this murder. Why was Emery Faust laughing when he died? He obviously didn't die immediately. The murder took place in the study and it must have been after the killer had gone that Faust crawled into the library to get that book. That was when he actually died. Died laughing."

"Maybe the knife tickled his ribs," Merry said. And if this seems in any way disrespectful, consider for a moment that Emery Faust had never earned anybody's respect while he was alive.

"When you get right down to brass tacks," Tim contributed, "a grimace of pain on the face of a dying man might be mistaken for a contortion of laughter. Why did he go into the library for that book? Why turn to 'Crossing The Bar,' if that's what he turned to? Did he want to give his own funeral oration?"

"Listen," Joe said, "we don't know that Faust turned to that piece of graveyard poetry. The way I get it, the whole book was messed up under Faust's fingers. He was looking for something in the book and death counted him out."

"That's it," I said. "We know Faust tried to leave something for living eyes to see—perhaps the name of the killer. The broken pen on the desk, the open inkwell, the one sheet of blank paper—they tell us something. They tell us Faust tried to write something, couldn't because the pen was broken. Then he went into the library and got the book of poems."

"'Men may come and men may go'," Merry White quoted, "'but I go on forever.' That's Tennyson's 'The Brook.' Anybody named Brook involved, darlin'?"

I smiled at her and told her I hadn't run across anybody by that name yet, but if she went on studying Tennyson she might find the answer for us yet.

Joe Harper put a fresh cigarette between his thin lips.

"Where," he asked as he flamed his smoke, "is Faust's dough? Is it behind doors unlocked by the brass keys he left his heirs? If so, why leave the brass keys to his enemies? Because Faust hated those heirs. We know he hated Dyer and why. Carter Nash was Faust's lawyer, sure, but Faust hated Nash. Remember that scandal that was created when Faust tried to elope with Nash's teen-age daughter?"

"And," I added, "there was obviously mutual hatred between Faust and his ex-wife Nell Lafevre. Henry Fu Chang outsmarted Faust in some sort of business transaction. And when Faust tried to put his oar into politics, he smashed that oar against Barton Clay. What about Julian Hornaday? He was also one of the heirs."

"Maybe," Joe said, "this isn't anything at all, but Julian Hornaday has been known to lend money at usurious rates. Maybe he had squeezed Faust on a loan."

I SIPPED the whiskey and soda Joe had handed me. When I put down my glass on the cocktail table, right beside Joe Harper's feet, I told my friends that all this riddle asking and wise cracking was nice clean fun but it wasn't getting us anywhere.

"We've got a murder mystery to solve," I said. "Maybe we've got two of them. Because how about this servant of Faust's who died in the train wreck? That's too pat, especially with the body being identified as Faust's and Faust not coming out in the open to deny it."

"At least not coming out until he discovered that the insurance company refused to pay insurance claims on the grounds that the death was suicide instead of accident," Tiny Tim put in sagely. "There's something bigger in this than we've guessed. With Faust mixed up in it, it's bound to be big."

Merry jumped up from the couch, patted Tiny Tim on the head as she might a clever child.

"Cunning little man! Only you've forgotten that Emery Faust is dead twice over!"

We were to learn that Emery Faust, dead or alive, was very much mixed up in the business which became twice as ugly and doubly dangerous because of the malicious meddling of that fat, evil old man.

CHAPTER VI

The Staggering Man

EARLY the following morning, before Commissioner Standish had time to get to his office, I called his apartment on the phone.

"Any dope on Mr. Faust's extraordinary departure from this earth?" I asked.

"Maybe some you didn't pick up," Standish said. "Dr. Millais is inclined to believe he owes you his life. He had the poor sense to put on Faust's topcoat and stick his head out of the front door and into that rain of lead somebody was directing toward the Faust house. Incidentally, Mr. G., around headquarters, Emery Faust's death is not referred to as a departure from this earth."

"No?" I questioned.

"No," Standish said dryly. "Here we call it his homecoming in hell. But the thing we turned up was a young chap named Stanley Wilkins. He was taking an enforced nap in one of the upstairs rooms. He seems to have been tapped gently but firmly in two places on his head."

"Oh, we've met," I chuckled, "this Wilkins and I. In fact, I'm responsible for laying one of the eggs on his head. The larger one seems to have been the work of Mr. Faust's slayer. Or else Wilkins bumped himself in the act of killing Faust. In which case it would seem unlikely that he'd walk up the steps, after the deed, and take a nap."

I described my encounter with Wilkins.

"Both Dr. Millais and Demarest had a look at the bumps on Wilkins' head," Standish said, "and he couldn't have conked himself. It looks like he's telling the truth, but we're watching him closely. You see, he's got a motive."

That was news to me.

"An eight-hundred-thousand-dollar motive, in fact," Standish said. "Emery Faust had life insurance. You may remember that a life insurance dick refused to permit his company to pay up when Faust 'died' in the railroad crack-up, on the grounds that his death was suicide. You see, these insurance companies are particular about such things. You insure your life, most concerns won't pay if you kill yourself within a six-month or sometimes a twelve-month period after you take out your insurance."

"Of course," I said. "I understand that. But do you mean to say that this fellow Wilkins benefits by Faust's insurance?"

"He does. As I said before, he benefits to the tune of eight hundred thousand. And this time the insurance company will have to pay up, since there's not a chance in the world of calling this second death anything but murder.

"Dyer's standing on his ear. Faust was such a tricky devil that Dyer doesn't trust anything he ever did, including die. I don't know how many times Dyer asked Demarest if he was sure Faust was dead."

DEMAREST was Robert Demarest, the medical examiner, and I can assure anybody that if Demmy says you're dead, there's practically no hope for you.

"The book of poems, though," I reminded Standish. "Got any ideas?"

"Well," Standish said, "Emery Faust wouldn't be above throwing a nice basket of red herring in our faces, even if he was dying. Maybe that's why he was laughing so hard when he passed out. Maybe the book was a joke. Anyway, it doesn't fit anywhere, though any time you see Inspector Magnus of the Homicide office, he's apt to be reading Tennyson. Which is a whole lot more than Emery Faust ever did, judging by the book."

"You mean," I said, "that the book didn't show much use? Some pages not cut, and that sort of thing?"

"Exactly," Standish replied. "It was one of those books that look nice on the shelf but which nobody is apt to read. I don't suppose Faust looked into it. That's why I say it could be a herring. Now that gun attack on the house—"

"That," I interrupted, "could have been a herring, too. It was directed by one Mike Pannard. I saw him quite close—uncomfortably close, in fact. And it could be a herring if Pannard killed Faust with a knife and then returned later when there were witnesses to attack the house with guns, giving out the impression that he didn't know that Faust was dead and therefore couldn't have killed him."

"Uhm," was Standish's comment. But he had to admit that such a trick would have matched Pannard's brass. As for motive, this man Pannard was thought to manage a small dope ring. And it was a pretty well established fact that Faust had either hijacked or purchased a large supply of drugs shortly before his death. That might be the connection.

"We'll round up Pannard," Standish said.

The rest of that day was practically wasted, so far as the Ghost and his aides were concerned. Joe Harper was attempting to get information on Henry Fu Chang and Carter Nash. His method of doing this, I knew, might include anything from buying drinks for Nash's servants to losing his shirt in a fan-tan game in some Chinese hangout on Pell Street. Tiny Tim Terry had a man-sized task in trying to get a line on Julian Hornaday, the wealthy old nickel nurser who had been the only one of Faust's heirs who hadn't showed up on the night before.

Merry White had begged me for the chance to investigate Nell Lafevre, the blond nightclub proprietress. And with this end in mind, I bribed Nell's cigarette girl to be sick for a week so that Merry might take over her job.

The cigarette girl, when she saw the color of my money, said she'd not only play sick but she'd roll over and play dead for that amount. There remained nothing for Merry to do but alter her appearance a bit, see Nell Lafevre and cinch the job.

ALL of this wasn't quite the casting about in the dark that it seemed. The police had their eyes on Wilkins and would have also taken a few good looks at Pannard, had they known his hideout, because both the young medical student and the gangland chief had motives for killing Faust. But there were others—the five men and one woman who had been remembered in Faust's will to the extent of a mysterious brass key apiece.

You see, when Faust was supposed to have been the victim of that train accident, his will had been read and the six keys distributed. Presumably none of the heirs knew what the brass keys were for, but all knew well enough that Faust was a wealthy man. For that reason, they assigned value to the keys.

Imagine, then, the disappointment of some greedy heir to find that Faust was alive and laughing! The brass keys had more than mystified; they had whetted appetites for Faust's wealth—wealth that was unattainable while Faust lived. There was motive enough. Why, I could hardly exclude even District Attorney Dyer from my suspicion.

Early that evening, when I was

alone in the Ghost's rectory eating a meal of sandwiches and coffee, the phone rang and I heard Merry White's smiling voice.

"Did you get the job with Nell Lafevre?" I asked.

"Without half trying. I'm in my apartment now, waiting until time to go to work. But I just did the smartest thing ever, darlin'!"

I almost told her I was afraid of that. She's as unpredictable as April weather.

"I was waiting in Nell's office to see her about the job when the phone rang. And I answered the phone, darlin'. It was a man speaking. He was in a big hurry about something. He didn't even wait to ask who I was. He just called me Miss Lafevre and said he was Barton Clay."

"Well?" I urged.

"I didn't say anything. I couldn't. I didn't have a chance. Mr. Clay was telling me everything and doing it in such a hurry as though it was a life and death matter. He told me, thinking I was Nell, of course, that I needn't have Mr. Fu Chang stop for him tonight inasmuch as he would not be able to attend the meeting. And then what do you think I did?"

"Told him you weren't Nell Lafevre," I supposed.

"No. I asked him what meeting he was talking about. And he cursed—it was awful what he said, but not so much as though he was mad as though he was scared."

"Then what?"

"He hung up. That was all there was to it. And the next moment Nell came into the office and I had to see about the job and this is the first chance I've had to call you. Is it important?"

I thought perhaps it was. I couldn't quite account for this subject of a meeting between Clay, Fu Chang, and Nell Lafevre.

"Unless," I said to Merry as the thought occurred to me, "they are planning to get together and discuss

Faust

this matter of brass keys. Might be that they think if they put their heads together, they can see a solution to the mystery."

Then I told her to be a good girl, hung up, and under cover of darkness left the rectory, wearing the dismal regalia of the Ghost.

BARTON CLAY lived in a hotel half a block from Times Square. Three quarters of an hour after I had received Merry's message, I alighted from a cab at that hotel, went into the crowded lobby, and up to the desk where I learned that Barton Clay was not in.

Questioning the doorman, I learned that Mr. Clay had left the hotel late that afternoon and alone. No, the doorman had not heard the address Clay had given the taxi driver and not even five dollars could repair his memory. But Mr. Clay had an office in the Wander Building and I might try there.

I went across Broadway to the Wander Building, took an elevator to Mr. Clay's office, only to find that it was locked for the night. I returned to the street level, convinced that this

was just another one of those things. In any sort of an investigation you run into blind alleys of this kind.

I was about to follow the crowd across Broadway again when I saw the staggering man. He was in the crowd and about ten feet ahead of me, waiting for a break in the traffic, apparently. I thought he was hanging on to the arm of another man, though I could not see clearly because so many people were jammed at the intersection.

The man was weaving around on his feet like a drunk. A very respectably clad man he was, what I could see of him from the rear. And his gray hairs would have indicated that he was old enough to know better than to get tight, especially this early in the evening when a lush was pretty apt to attract a lot of attention.

I took all this in during a very short interval, because there wasn't but a second between the moment I got this rear view of him until I was looking down into the man's face as he lay on the pavement! Whether somebody pushed the man or whether he started out from the curb of his own will was never entirely cleared up. But I had seen him run suddenly into the middle of the street, ducking fearfully from a car that was fully thirty feet away from him only to dash insanely into the path of a second car that couldn't possibly have stopped in time.

The man saw this second car only when its bumper was within inches of him. He made one clumsy effort to get out of the way, was pasted flat to the pavement, and both front and rear wheels of the speeding car bumped over his body before the driver could apply the brakes.

Women screamed. A cop's whistle shrilled. Rubber burned off onto the pavement as wheels locked. And I dashed ahead of the crowd to drop on my knees beside the fallen man. And I looked down into the still, white face of Barton Clay.

Yes, he was dead. Blood flecked his handsome white lips. Wheels had passed over his chest, crushing life out of him. One leg was twisted like that of a rubber doll. My eyes traveled down that mangled leg to the shoe of his right foot. And I noticed a peculiar slot between the rubber heel and its leather platform, as though something had been wedged in between rubber and leather.

My hand went out swiftly to untie the laces of the oxford, and got no further before the hand of the law dropped on my shoulder.

CHAPTER VII

The First Brass Key

I LOOKED up at the officer. The Ghost, you can be sure, was completely "turned off."

"Is he dead?" I asked the cop.

"And if he wasn't, he soon would be, smothered by this mob. Get back, will you? Get back, all you people."

I obeyed the cop's orders, of course, but I was on the inner circle of people who surrounded the dead man, and my eye didn't leave that right shoe on the corpse.

I could have wired in tomorrow's news story then:

BARTON CLAY WAS KILLED LAST NIGHT BY AN AUTOMOBILE WHILE CROSSING BROADWAY ON THE WAY TO HIS HOTEL.

Because that was what it looked like. But I didn't believe it. I don't know why my mind persisted in the idea that this wasn't an accident. Certainly no one else was going to have that slant on it. I wondered a good bit about the man who had been with Barton Clay. I was certain that Clay had been hanging onto the arm of a man, perhaps a perfect stranger—or his murderer.

My eyes searched the crowd for a single familiar face. Strangers all. And then we were once more pressed back by the police as the ambulance came racing up the street. Police were busy taking the names of witnesses. How they passed me up I do not know, unless it was the comparative obscurity lent me by my black suit.

The car that had run over Clay had been driven by a woman who was middle-aged and tearful. I think she gave her name as Dorothy Handel, but that doesn't make any difference, since it was entirely obvious that she couldn't be blamed.

It was at the moment when two men in white were loading the body onto the stretcher that I did the most brazen trick of my entire career. I stepped to the stretcher and directly behind one of the interns, took hold of the leg of the corpse and lifted it to the stretcher. It was then that I pulled the right shoe off Clay's foot.

Of course I got caught. The Ghost isn't quite the Invisible Man. One of the interns said:

"Hey, we don't need your help."

And I backed away to the edge of the crowd, holding the dead man's shoe down against the right leg of my trousers. Unfortunately, Clay's shoe was brown. It showed up beautifully against the black leg of my trouser. Yet it wasn't until the body was halfway into the ambulance that an intern noticed the missing shoe. And then I started through the crowd, only to run squarely into a cop. And it would be the same cop who had discovered me bending over Clay's body in the first place!

He took a look at me and saw the shoe.

"And what do you think you've got there, mister?" he exploded.

I RAISED my left arm and shoulder in what appeared to be a gesture for accompanying my baffled "Where?" Actually the move opened a large concealed pouch on the left-side lining of my coat. My right hand, carrying the shoe, snapped toward the mouth of the pouch, scarcely moving more than four inches to accomplish the vanish of the shoe. I simply tossed the shoe into the open mouth of the pouch and then dropped my hands to my sides.

Of course the bulge made by the shoe would have been visible from the rear view, but this cop was standing directly in front of me. The cop opened his mouth and then his eyes opened just as widely. And the first place he looked was down at the street, as though he thought I had dropped the shoe. Somehow, they *always* look down when you pull that fast one. And, of course, the downward glance was the "down beat" for me, and I got started.

I dashed through the crowd and to the east side of the street. Coppers were keeping traffic moving, so there was shortly a stream of cars between me and the cop. And then I crossed the sidewalk and got behind a long line of people waiting at a theatre box office. I slipped along the line, saw a cab pulling up at the corner to let out a fare. Then I ran for the cab, slipped into the vacant seat, and was away from the scene in a hurry.

Once more in the rectory, I removed the shoe from its hiding place. It was that slot between the heel platform and the rubber heel that interested me. Something had been forced between the heel and its platform. A very nice hiding place it was, for something like a key.

Sure enough. I dug into the slot with the blade of a knife and shortly produced a small brass key.

It looked a good bit like the key for an ordinary skeleton lock, only smaller. The key-blade itself had a squarely scalloped top edge, something like the battlements on an old castle. And then there were square and oblong holes punched right through the blade itself. And that made the key anything but ordinary.

The key in my hand, I untethered my thoughts and let them wander where they would. If murder had been done tonight it was mighty subtle, almost indetectable. And yet I was quite certain that Barton Clay wouldn't have run out into the street of his own free will.

Even if he *had* deliberately made that plunge into the sea of traffic, something had certainly been haywire with his judgment of distance. He had ducked from a car that was too far from him to be any sort of a threat, and he had walked directly into the path of another car which had killed him instantly. It was almost as though Barton Clay had been walking in his sleep.

I called Commissioner Standish on the phone.

"Barton Clay got his," I said, "but I suppose you already know."

"Don't tell me you were there!" Standish said in amazement. "How do you get that way?"

STANDISH'S amazement was understandable.

"This wasn't exactly a coincidence," I said. "Merry gave me some dope on Clay and a purposed meeting that was to include Nell Lafevre and Henry Fu Chang. Clay seemed to get scared out in the last minute and phoned Nell to have her tell Fu Chang not to stop for him. He wasn't going to be at the meeting. But the thing is that he didn't want Fu Chang stopping for him. Or maybe someone else didn't want Fu Chang horning in at a moment that would have been embarrassing."

"I would have thought not," Standish said dryly. "Demarest just called me from the morgue. He's had a look at Clay's body, and the belly and chest are covered with minute cuts. It looks like torture. Suppose the torturer forced Clay to head off Fu Chang, forced him to make that call to Nell."

"That's it, I think," I agreed with Standish. "But the torturer didn't get what he was looking for. Clay probably lied to him about the location of the key."

"The key? You mean those crazy brass keys are back of it?"

"What else?"

"Then maybe the key was in Clay's shoe! Did you notice his right shoe was missing when they loaded him into the ambulance?"

"Notice it?" I laughed. "My dear Ned, I *stole* the shoe!"

"You mean in the middle of Broadway you had the brass to—now look here, that's impossible!"

"It's something that the cop who let me get away with it isn't likely to report," I said, "but it's not impossible because I have the shoe right here. And if it will make you feel any better, I don't mind telling you that your deductions were entirely correct and the brass key *was* in the shoe. I'm coming right down to Headquarters with it, now that I've had a look at it."

I took more than a look. I took photographs of the key and also wax impressions of both sides of it. That done, I set about making myself presentable for Police Headquarters.

There was no need to change my clothes, but my face needed working over. One of my favorite aliases is that of Dr. Stacey, in which I pose as an unofficial adviser to Medical Examiner Demarest and Commissioner Standish. Dr. Stacey is a frequent visitor around Headquarters Building.

To adopt this identity, I filled my naturally hollow cheeks with metal "plumpers" which also served the purpose of making Dr. Stacey's voice depart from the natural voice of George Chance. A few deft touches with a lining pencil added signs of approaching age. A false moustache that was going gray gave me the dignity of years as did the grayish powder I scattered through my hair. Then, for a touch of professional wisdom, I mounted a pair of Oxford glasses on my nose.

Satisfied with the face of Dr. Stacey, I left the rectory, took a subway train into lower Manhattan. Shortly after leaving the train I was going through the Centre Street entrance of the Police Headquarters Building.

NED STANDISH met me in his outer office and I slipped Barton Clay's brass key into the commissioner's hand. Ned leaned forward with one hand on my shoulder and whispered:

"Don't throw too much weight around with that fake doctor's title of yours. Dr. Millais is in my office, talking with Demmy."

The commissioner's office, I found, was really quite crowded. Ned Standish was in the habit of having even persons he suspected of being guilty drop into his office for quiet little chats. During these informal "parties" as he called them, Standish's shrewd, close-set eyes and alert mind keenly analyzed character.

So I was not surprised to find Stanley Wilkins in the commissioner's office and also that smiling, broad-faced Chinese gentleman, Henry Fu Chang. Wilkins and Fu Chang were uncomfortably squatted on the edges of their chairs, while on a leather sofa against the north wall of the room sat Dr. Millais, my friend Robert Demarest, and District Attorney Dyer.

I was introduced all around, except to Demarest, of course. The medical examiner gave me a sleepy glance from beneath his heavy eyelids and said:

"How are you, *Doctor?*"

A very nasty emphasis he put on that word "doctor" too. Unless you understand Robert Demarest, you're apt to come to the conclusion that he's the most unpleasant man alive. He's a croaking raven. There's an aura of the morgue that seems to spring from his gloomy face. He reeks with the unhappy combination of pipe smoke and formalin. But I've known him a long time and have learned to think a great deal of him.

Tiny Tim

I told Demarest I was all right, asked him how he was. He explained that he felt terrible—if there had been a morgue slab handy, he would have curled up on it and asked somebody to sprinkle him with embalming fluid.

Dr. Millais shook my hand, examining me with those unnatural looking eyes of his. I felt then a great pity for this man whose eyes showed clearly the work of the oculist's knife. In fact, his unnatural looking eyes seemed magnified by his large spectacles, lending him a certain unavoidable ugliness which I thought he was constantly aware of.

"Dr. Stacey, eh?" he said in his quiet voice. "Oh, I've heard of you. You're a specialist, aren't you?"

"I am afraid my chief specialty is murder, Dr. Millais," I said with a laugh. I doubted very much if his having heard of Dr. Stacey was anything more than an effort to be polite.

"Then no doubt you can help us with the problem of Emery Faust's murder," Millais said. "We were just discussing it. Inasmuch as I was Faust's physician, Dr. Demarest has had the courtesy to invite my opinion

on the baffling matter."

"And have you come to any conclusions?" I asked.

Millais' smile came and went from his dark, sad face.

"Unfortunately, no. I am afraid I must agree with everything that Dr. Demarest has said about the case, showing practically no originality in the matter."

I WAS introduced to Stanley Wilkins, who timidly took my hand. He had an immense amount of adhesive tape wrapped around his head.

"I am afraid I'm a little out of my element," Wilkins said, "with three full fledged doctors in the room. After all, I'm nothing but a pre-medics student."

"And I," put in Henry Fu Chang as he bowed low to me, "must remain a humble listener here and grow fat with the learning of others. I have taken my degree from the university of what you call hard knocks."

"If," District Attorney Dyer put in, "you've got your degree at that school, Mr. Fu Chang, you're way ahead of the rest of us. We're still going to the school of experience. And Standish didn't invite you here to be a listener, incidentally."

"No?" Fu Chang enquired politely.

"Mr. Chang," said Standish, now that Dyer had thus bluntly put the Chinese on the carpet, "we've got to ask you about this appointment you had with Barton Clay this evening. As soon as Dr. Demarest and his assistants discovered that Clay's body showed evidence of torture, I sent details of men to Clay's hotel room and also to his office. Police found you knocking at the door of Clay's office. You said that you had an appointment with him."

"That is true," Fu Chang said, perfectly composed. "I had planned to pick up Mr. Clay at his office this evening. We were going to Miss Lafevre's night club to compare notes concerning our strange legacy from our mutual friend, Mr. Faust. I believe Mr. Dyer will bear me out in this. He, too, was invited to attend this meeting."

Standish looked sharply at Dyer, and the D. A. nodded.

"It's this fool brass key business. We thought that if we came together and compared our keys, offered our opinions, we might come to some conclusion regarding this legacy. Though if anybody offered me a penny for my thoughts on the subject, I'd say that anything that Emery Faust left us would be poison. You've no true conception of the unholy hatred that man was capable of if you think otherwise."

I glanced at young Stanley Wilkins. His blond face flushed. His lips were thinned as though he was containing himself with some difficulty.

"I heartily agree with that," I said to Dyer, but actually intending to goad young Wilkins. "Faust was a beast. Greedy and conniving where money was concerned. Selfish and brutal in the treatment of women with whom he came in contact. And since he seemed to have had reason to hate every person he mentioned in his will, I'm inclined to believe that the brass keys are just what you said, Dyer—I think they're poison!"

Stanley Wilkins stood up.

"Commissioner Standish," he said. "I don't know why you asked me here tonight. I guess everybody here is against Emery Faust but me. I didn't know a whole lot about him. I don't know what he's done to you people that you hate him so, but he was always nice to me. So if the purpose of this conference is to throw mud at Mr. Faust, you'd better count me out."

WILKINS started for the door.

"Wait a minute," Dyer snapped. "If somebody left me eight hundred thousand dollars in life insurance, maybe I wouldn't think they were such bad medicine myself. But what we can't get straight and what

the insurance company doesn't seem to understand is just what relation you were to Faust."

Wilkins whirled.

"So I'm suspected of murdering Faust. Is that why I was brought here? It won't do any good then to tell you that when I received that check for the insurance money, I was as surprised as anybody else. It won't do any good to tell you that I met Faust for the first time six months ago. But if you think I murdered Emery Faust, you'll have to prove it!"

Those were dangerous words for young Wilkins to utter. When he left Headquarters, there was a police detective on his trail.

CHAPTER VIII

Was It Murder?

DOCTOR MILLAIS smiled gently at the D.A.

"That," he said, "is why I would never make a police investigator. That lad looks entirely clean to me. I'd be rather inclined to look in another direction if I were searching for Faust's murderer."

"But to get back to the Clay affair," I said. "You said you sent a detail of men to Clay's hotel and office, Standish. Uncover anything?"

"The torture took place in Clay's office," the commissioner said, resuming his seat behind his wide desk and leaning back in his chair.

I nodded slowly, understood then why Clay had been forced to call Nell Lafevre to have her prevent Fu Chang from calling at Clay's office for him that evening. Undoubtedly Clay had made the phone call with a gun at his back. After that he had suffered the torment of the damned at the hands of some fiend who had been trying to get Clay to tell where his brass key was located. And Clay had lied about its location while his tormentor had believed him.

And then it occurred to me that Clay and the torturer must have left Clay's office at just about the time I had gone there, for Clay had been killed within a few hundred feet of his office in the Wander Building. I couldn't have missed meeting Clay and his murderer by more than a few seconds! Except for those few seconds I might have saved Clay's life.

I turned my attention to the Chinese.

"This puts an end to your attempted conference about the brass keys," I said.

"Unfortunately so," Chang said. "Though our efforts would have met with no good anyway, since this Mr. Julian Hornaday declined with thanks our invitation to be present."

[*Turn page*]

"All this business about brass keys is very confusing to me," Dr. Millais said. "Did the person who tortured Barton Clay succeed in getting the key?"

"We don't know," Demarest said, though the question wasn't addressed to him.

"No," Standish said. "The key was found on Clay's body. Clay evidently lied about the location of the key—providing it was the key the man was after."

"It was," I said. "The seeds of hate have found fertile soil, I'm afraid."

Demarest made a wry mouth at me. "Don't go poetical on us. Inspector Magnus has taken up reading Tennyson because of that book angle on the Faust kill. One is enough."

"That, I claim, is more truth than poetry," I rejoined. "Faust deliberately left those keys to people he hated, to pit one against the other, to cause conflict and trouble, and perhaps even murder after Faust was dead and buried. Maybe that was why he was laughing—and with good reason—when he died."

"PLEASE—" Henry Fu Chang stood up, bowed. "May one as ignorant as I offer a slight suggestion? Mr. Faust was a wealthy man. We do not know what became of his wealth. Perhaps it is hidden behind some doors to be opened with brass keys. Perhaps he regretted the hatred he bore us, and as a long overdue penance—"

"No," Dyer said definitely. "Faust never did a kind thing for anybody. If his insurance went to this Wilkins fellow, it must have been with the fond hope that Wilkins would drink himself to death. Except for the fact that it might give me a clue that would indirectly lead to the identity of Faust's murderer, I'd throw my brass key into the East River. And there you have my opinion of the mystery keys."

"Got that key with you?" Standish asked.

Dyer produced a brass key and tossed it toward Standish's desk. By seeming accident, I stepped in the way of the key. It struck my chest and fell to the floor beneath Standish's desk. I went down on my knees at once to retrieve the key. But before I handed it to Standish, I pressed the key into a cake of magician's wax that I had palmed, making a clear impression. Then I handed the key to Standish.

"Have you considered the possibility of Clay's being murdered?" I asked.

"That's a very nice possibility, *Doctor,*" Demarest said, "except for the fact that it was an automobile accident. Middle-aged ladies don't go around running over people on purpose."

"Dr. Stacey," Millais said to me, "I had the privilege of viewing the body of Mr. Clay. I am in agreement with Dr. Demarest entirely."

"Any evidence that Clay was drunk then?" I asked.

"None," Demarest said. "The great trouble with you, *Doctor,* and possibly the reason you haven't a very large practice, is that when you see a case of pneumonia you are apt to suspect murder."

I shrugged quite as though my professional pride had been hurt by that remark.

"Anyway," I went on, "it seems incredible that a man of Clay's intelligence would run out in the path of a car as he did. And from what I get from talking with an eye witness of the accident, Clay seemed utterly unable to judge the distance between him and the oncoming car."

Standish took my cue. He knew that I was hammering at Demarest for further post mortem examination of Clay's body, but that I couldn't do it openly in the presence of Millais, Dyer and Fu Chang.

"There's no motive, he said, pretending to oppose me. "None at all, Stacey. Suppose the man who tortured Clay had one motive—the brass key. Why

Blood splotched his shirt, and he held a book of poems (Chap. III)

kill Clay after he had obtained the key, or at least thought that he had learned where the key was?"

"Excuse, please," Fu Chang ventured, "but there is a motive. Fear could be the motive, could it not?"

"Exactly," Dyer said. "Clay knew who was torturing him. He would have named that man to the first policeman he came to."

"If he was permitted to do so," I said.

DEMAREST raised his heavy eyelids slightly and regarded me for a moment.

"I really have no idea what the office of Medical Examiner is for. How easily it could be eliminated and the work of the department handed over to the district attorney and a chiropractor."

Demarest got up and went out. I followed him in apparent anger. He was waiting for me in the hall.

"Do I get my post mortem or don't I?" I whispered to him.

"Gladly, when you turn up at the morgue some day," he replied acidly. "Just get yourself murdered any time and I'll be glad to accommodate you."

"The same old Demarest," I said. "You see, I happened to eye-witness Clay's death. I think he was pushed out into the street, and further I think the pusher took certain precautions to see that Clay didn't know where he was going. Clay acted as though walking in his sleep."

"Why didn't you voice those pearls of wisdom before?" Demarest asked. "Millais would have been interested. The poor devil's a surgeon at heart, but since that eye operation he's lost

confidence in himself. He'd like to get in on an operation even if it happened to be on a dead body. Just think, the three of us could have had such a jolly time over Clay's body tonight. Half way through the autopsy, we could have stopped for hamburgers and coffee and discussed it all professionally."

There is positively nothing that can be done with Robert Demarest when he gets in one of those moods. But he'd snap out of it soon enough and do what I had asked him. He always flatters me with the utmost confidence in the opinions I voice when I speak as the Ghost.

From Centre Street, I went uptown to Times Square once more, there to have a talk with the elevator operators on night duty at the Wander Building. I discovered that Barton Clay had gone up to his office at about seven-thirty that evening. He had apparently been alone. And not one of the operators could remember seeing him come down again.

And that was the best evidence I had had so far that Clay had been murdered.

This is how I figured it. Clay had returned to his office alone because it was there that Henry Fu Chang was supposed to pick him up. His murderer had been watching, had followed Clay to the office, had forced Clay to try to get in touch with Chang to call off Chang's visit.

Then the torturing of Clay had followed. Clay had lied about the location of the key. The murderer, probably with a gun pressed against Clay's side, had forced Clay down into the street, this time using either the stairway or the fire escape so that he would not be noticed by the elevator operators as a man who was accompanying Clay. Because the man who had tortured Clay fully expected a murder investigation to follow.

He expected the investigation because he fully intended to commit murder!

CHAPTER IX

At Lafevre's

MERRY WHITE didn't know when she had ever enjoyed one of the Ghost's assignments as well as this one. The Sixth Avenue club that was designated simply as *Lafevre's,* written in neon above the doorway, was one of the newest and swankiest places of its sort in town.

Merry liked the band. In fact, she had a great deal of trouble to keep from dancing with her cigarette tray as a partner. She liked the brief and flaring skirt of her black satin costume, too. And being exquisitely feminine, she liked the admiring glances of the men patrons of the place.

Nell Lafevre thought she had a find in Merry White. When Merry was refilling her tray with cigarettes at the back of the room, Nell came up to her and told her she was doing swell and to keep it up.

Nell, Merry's dancing green eyes observed, wasn't doing badly herself. The blond woman circulated among her guests, frequently sitting at a table where there were lonely men, drank with them, encouraged them to spend money freely. Lafevre's was a clip joint, but it was surprising how many of its patrons enjoyed being clipped.

Along about midnight, a very lush person took Lafevre's place in his unnatural stride. He was a squarely made man with broad shoulders, big hips, and—fortunately for his slightly impaired equilibrium—big feet. He had a rather evil looking face that was short-browed and scowling. And apparently he came alone.

He took a table over in one corner, placed his order with the waiter. That done, he lowered his head, stared at the table cloth, wagged his head from

side to side in a manner that Merry found laughable.

Merry carried her cigarette tray over to his table.

"Cigars? Cigarettes?" she suggested, waiting until the drunk looked up before she handed out her smile.

The drunk looked her up and down appreciatively. In fact, she thought his cruel black eyes were a bit too attentive. She was somewhat relieved when the drunk shook his head. Merry started for the next table, but the drunk caught her by the hem of her skirt. She looked back at him over her shoulder, one eyebrow raised, her green eyes as chill as a pair of arctic circles.

"Don't," said the drunk, waving his right hand negatively, "don't get mad nor take any of thish pershonal. But d'yah know what's matter with you, babe?"

"I think I'm about okay," Merry said. "I was getting along peachy up to now."

"Trouble with you ish," the drunk continued, "you got black hair. Go take a peroxide dip, honey, and you will be okay with Oscar. You know what happened lash time I went for a black-haired babe?"

"You'd be surprised how interested I'm not," Merry said, trying to pull away.

THE drunk hooked his right forefinger into the top of his collar and stuck his chin up in the air. There was a scar on one side of his throat.

"That'sh what I remember Olivia by," Oscar said. "It was in New Mexico where I come from and the end of Sheptember and just about the end of Oscar."

Oscar let go of Merry's pert little skirt, crooked a finger at her. She came a little closer, but not much. Oscar put a hand up along side his mouth and whispered loud enough to be heard above the music of the band.

"Last time I came East, there was a woman in this joint by the name of Nell. Big, blond, beautiful, and a perfect gentleman. Yes, she was a gentleman. And why do I shay gentleman? Because lady ish a term that'sh very much overworked."

Oscar fumbled in his pocket and brought out a roll of bills. He peeled off a ten spot and extended it toward Merry.

"That's for you for finding Nell for me," he said, and tossed the ten spot onto Merry's tray.

Merry found Nell Lafevre at the semi-circular bar at the back of the room. She went up behind Nell, nudged her with her cigarette tray.

"Boss," Merry said, "there's a big cactus and cattle man from New Mexico over at that table looking for you. He's the short lad who's high, if you know what I mean."

Nell took a look at Oscar. She frowned. Merry, who was very close to Nell, noticed the depth of the wrinkles that formed when Nell frowned. To Merry's discerning woman's eye, Nell Lafevre was a lot older than appeared on the surface.

"Honey," Nell whispered in her deep, throaty voice, "he doesn't look a bit farther west than Jersey to me, but a customer is always right."

"Especially when he's got that kind of lettuce," Merry said, showing Nell the ten dollar tip Oscar had given her.

Nell picked the bill from Merry's fingers. Her blue eyes hardened.

"Honey, I don't think I mentioned, we split all tips three ways. You get one-third and I get two-thirds. And since I don't have any change right now, we'll settle later."

And Nell Lafevre sauntered over toward Oscar's table.

Half an hour later, Merry happened by Oscar's table and noticed that Nell was still there. She and Oscar were getting along pretty well. Fifteen minutes after that, when Merry was peddling last night's orchids to some suckers on the other side of the room, she happened to look over at Oscar's table in time to see Nell Lafevre on

her feet, holding her left hand up to the low neck of her dress, and giving her right hand to Oscar. But the hand she gave Oscar was doubled up and moving fast. It connected quite solidly with Oscar's jaw.

Oscar, who had been halfway under the table, figuratively speaking, when he had entered the club, now went all the way under. And Nell, her blue eyes flashing, but otherwise unperturbed, moved quickly across the dance floor, holding onto the torn front of her dress with one hand and to a broken gold chain with the other.

THE gold chain was a frail little thing that had come from Nell's neck. On the end of it dangled a key. Nell hurried through the door at the rear of the club and into her private rooms at the back of the building. Merry, very solicitous for her employer's welfare, and with her green eye on the key, followed closely.

"The party get rough?" Merry inquired.

"Oscar has a lot of wrong ideas," Nell said. She let the gold chain and the brass key that was attached to it sift through her fingers and to the top of her dressing table. She looked at the damage that had been done to her blue evening gown in the mirror.

"Honey," she addressed Merry, "would you mind getting me that other gown out of the closet? I'll have to change. Oscar doesn't know it, but that rip cost Oscar more than it did me! I was pouring champagne cocktails into him like water over Niagara!"

Merry got a white satin dress out of the closet for Nell and while the blond woman changed, Merry went over to the dressing table and fingered the chain and key.

"He busted your bangle, too, didn't he? What a funny thing this is on the end of this chain. It's a key, isn't it?"

"Yes. Just a little present from a husband I had once," Nell said, smoothing the white gown down over her hips.

"Is it valuable?" Merry asked innocently. "It looks like brass."

"Yeah," Nell said, "to match the wedding ring. Honey, will you run out and tell Sandy, the bouncer, to take care of that Jersey cowboy? Tell him to see what the bill is and then tack on a hundred bucks cover money, take it out of the guy's pants, and then shove him into a taxi."

Merry obeyed, but not entirely. She went out of Nell's room, but stood just outside the door, listening intently. She heard Nell cross the room, high heels pecking the floor. She heard something metallic striking something that was glass or china. And only then did Merry go to give Nell's instructions to the bouncer.

As she watched Oscar's forced exit from the club, Merry wondered just how much of Oscar's attentions to Nell had been due to Nell's charm and the champagne cocktails. Maybe the brass key had a lot more to do with it—a whole lot more.

At a quarter after one, Nell was out on the dance floor, dancing with one of the club's patrons. Merry, her eyes on Nell, worked her way toward the back of the room to that shadowy spot where the door connected the club with Nell's office and dressing room. Taking shallow breaths, her heart hammering loudly within her breast, Merry slipped through the door, into the hall, through Nell's office, into the dressing room beyond.

OUTSIDE Nell's door, Merry had heard the clink of metal against glass or china. Now that she was inside the dressing room and alone, her eyes hurried to the dressing table, to the crystal jars of cosmetics arranged there. Breathless with excitement, Merry went to the dressing table, lifting the top of one jar after another, digging into creams and powders with her fingers until finally she found the key buried in a bowl of rose-scented

dusting powder.

She was about to drop the key into the bosom of her costume when some sixth sense told her that she was being watched. It was a terrifying sensation. She stood perfectly still, the key locked tightly in her fist, her eyes downcast. Suddenly she nerved herself, turned swiftly to face the door. The door was open half an inch, and halfway up the length of the long narrow slot thus formed, Merry White saw the glitter of a human eye.

The eye was gone almost at once. Retreating footsteps were scarcely audible. Merry put both hands back of her and on the edge of the dressing table. Her eyes remained fixed on the door. She leaned back, waited, scarcely breathing. What was next? The police? An irate and dangerous Nell Lafevre? Or perhaps something like Oscar. For the more she thought about it, the more certain she was that the man called Oscar had been putting on an act about being drunk and had actually come to the club to steal Nell's key.

For perhaps three minutes Merry White stood there waiting for some logical sequel to the peering eye she had seen at the door. And then she tiptoed to the door, opened it fully, went into Nell's office. Whoever had been out there peeping at her had turned out the office light so that he or she wouldn't risk being seen if Merry made a sudden move.

Merry went to the office door, found the light switch and flicked it on. She went straight to the telephone on Nell's desk and unhesitatingly called the number of the Ghost's rectory—a number that was listed in no directory but which was deeply impressed in the memories of all the Ghost's aides.

"Darlin'," Merry whispered when the Ghost answered, "I think you'd better come for me. I don't know but what the weather is going to be kind of nasty."

She hung up as the door of the office opened and Nell Lafevre came in.

CHAPTER X

The Spiders

NELL stared at her.

"Calling somebody, honey? Go right ahead. Don't mind me. I've got to get on with the cash book and catch up before we close."

Merry breathed again.

"I'm all through," she told Nell. "I just wanted someone to come for me."

Nell smiled one-sidedly.

"It's okay to have them come for you but don't marry any of them. Keep them coming, the more the merrier, but don't ever get the idea of settling down with one guy."

[*Turn page*]

"I Talked with God"

(Yes, I Did—Actually and Literally)

and, as a result of that little talk with God some ten years ago, a strange new Power came into my life. After 43 years of horrible, sickening, dismal failure, this strange Power brought to me a sense of overwhelming victory, and I have been overcoming every undesirable condition of my life ever since. What a change it was. Now—I have credit at more than one bank, I own a beautiful home, own a newspaper and a large office building, and my wife and family are amply provided for after I leave for shores unknown. In addition to these material benefits, I have a sweet peace in my life. I am happy as happy can be. No circumstance ever upsets me, for I have learned how to draw upon the invisible God-Law, under any and all circumstances.

You too may find and use the same staggering Power of the God-Law that I use. It can bring to you too, whatever things are right and proper for you to have. Do you believe this? It won't cost much to find out—just a penny post-card or a letter, addressed to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 16, Moscow, Idaho, will bring you the story of the most fascinating success of the century. And the same Power I use is here for your use too. I'll be glad to tell you about it. All information about this experience will be sent you free, of course. The address again—Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 16, Moscow, Idaho. Advt. Copyright 1939 Frank B. Robinson.

"You talk as though you've had considerable experience," Merry said.

Nell laughed deep down in her throat.

"Just once, honey. Once I was married to a guy named Emery Faust. I stuck it out just six months. When he took a mule whip to me, I was finished. I was cured. Ever since then, little Nell has been a body to hang swell clothes on—and she's done all the hanging herself. And she keeps her heart in the safety deposit vault with her bank roll. Better do likewise, honey. You've got what it takes. Keep away from wedding rings."

Merry went out into the club room. She passed the orchestra stage. Neither the dance floor nor the tables about it were as crowded, yet it seemed to Merry there were more lonely men in the place.

Merry felt uneasy. That sensation of unseen but seeing eyes came to her again. She hastily made the round of the room with her cigarette tray. Patrons were thinking about going home, or had lost all craving for anything but drink. There were no cigarette sales for Merry.

But there were those eyes that followed her. Three men in particular acted as though they had come to the place only to watch her. But she was not flattered. She felt like a fly floundering helplessly in a web where many spiders waited patiently for her to stop moving.

What if Nell Lafevre found that the key was gone? Were those who were watching Merry so intently agents of Nell's, who intended to recover the key and make that recovery as unpleasant for Merry as possible? Or were there others fingers in the pie?

Merry slipped in through the door of Nell Lafevre's office, and Nell looked up from her ledger. Nell's eyes looked strained and somehow old.

"If you're in a hurry, honey," Nell said, "you go right ahead and change. Your smokes sold and tips collected for tonight break a record. Men like you, honey, but remember what I told you."

Merry said she would remember and went into the dressing room to change her clothes. For just an instant she considered dropping Nell's brass key back into the powder jar. After all, the blond woman had been nice to her and the Ghost hadn't asked her to steal the key. But then if the Ghost didn't want the brass key, he could get it back to Nell someway. Merry didn't feel that she was stealing the key. She had only borrowed it.

"And borrowed plenty of trouble right along with it," she thought as she changed to her street clothes.

THAT done, she held Nell's brass key in the palm of her hand for a moment. To save her life she couldn't think what to do with the thing. She envisioned hands of underworld thugs tearing her clothes from her body in an effort to find the key, and she shivered at the thought. Finally, as though she found the key entirely too hot to handle, she popped it into her mouth.

Merry hurried past Nell Lafevre's office without saying good night to her employer.

Out in the club proper, she found that most of the customers were on their way out. The band was putting away its instruments. Sandy, the bouncer, was diplomatically urging a pair of well dressed drunks to go home. Merry hoped that she could slip out with the patrons who were lined up in front of the check room.

Half way across the room, she heard the sound of a chair pushed back from a table. A voice well known to her said:

"Looking for me, Merry?"

Merry looked in the direction of the voice and saw not the Ghost but a smiling George Chance coming toward her.

For an instant, panic seized her. She had wanted the Ghost, and not George

Chance. If George tried to get her out of the club by means of any of the tricks he frequently employed in the disguise of the Ghost, the intimate connection between George Chance and the Ghost would be revealed.

But there was nothing to do but face the music—even if it turned out to be a funeral march. And she knew it might well be that, because no sooner had George Chance started toward her than Merry noticed two of the three men who had been closely watching her get to their feet. There was something very suggestive of heavy artillery about the droop of the pockets of their evening jackets.

So, as Merry White and George Chance met in the middle of the room, Merry did the unpredictable thing. She put her arms around the tall, lean man with the red-gold hair and deliberately kissed him. It was a kiss with a purpose. Merry simply thrust Nell Lafevre's brass key into George Chance's mouth and felt better about the whole thing.

It was as their lips parted that the two men came toward them. Merry seized the arm of her escort and hurried him toward the door. The two men who had been watching Merry for the past thirty minutes fell in behind.

"How do you like going with a working girl?" Merry asked, with considerable effort to keep her voice gay.

"Nice enough," returned her escort only after he had coughed into his right hand, thus getting rid of the key in his mouth.

Merry and her escort hurried by the line of people waiting in front of the check room, still hoping to dodge the twin shadows. But the men kept doggedly behind.

OUT on the sidewalk, Merry turned to the right. And it was then that the two men came alongside. Merry felt the pressure of a gun muzzle against her ribs. A hoarse voice whispered:

"You're doing all right, babe. Just keep right on going and everything will be ducky."

Evidently her escort had received similar attention, for he stopped, turned to the man on his left and asked what was the meaning of this.

"Never mind, Mister. This is no stick-up. You're just going places with the babe. That's what you want, don't you?"

There was nothing to do but keep on walking, four abreast down the sidewalk. It was as they turned the corner under the direction of the two gunmen, that the unexpected happened. Right in the middle of the sidewalk was a man with a camera. The camera was sitting on a peculiar metal tripod. It appeared to be one of those plate variety cameras, and the owner and operator of the instrument had his head and most of the camera box covered with a black cloth. There was a flash gun in his right hand.

"Hold it for the papers, folks!" cried the man whose head was concealed by the black cloth. And it was then that he fired the flash gun.

The two gunmen knew instantly that something had to be done. For all they knew they had been "mugged" in the act of abducting George Chance and a girl friend. That they jumped at the wrong conclusions on two counts didn't alter the fact that they were sure the camera with its tell-tale plate had to be destroyed. The law of self preservation asserted itself and both men forgot their charges and sprang at the camera man who remained hidden, ostrich fashion, beneath his black cloth.

The two men reached simultaneously for the camera. And what happened then was indelibly impressed on their minds for the rest of their natural lives. Camera, black cloth, metal tripod, vanished in that proverbial space of time in which it is supposed an eye can twinkle. And there stood the Ghost, a skull's grin on his lips, his cavernous eyes gleaming with macabre merriment, and an innocent looking

Commissioner Standish

black cane in his hand.

Merry White grasped the arm of her escort, realizing only at that moment that it was not George Chance who had called at Nell Lafevre's for her, but Glenn Saunders, his double!

THE reader, I hope, doesn't share the confusion of the two gunmen who found themselves reaching out hands to touch the untouchable Ghost. But just in case all this is too puzzling, I'd better drop back a bit to what happened when Merry White called me at the Ghost's rectory.

I knew that Merry must have felt herself in pretty desperate straits to have called upon me for help in this manner. She knew as well as I the difficulties attending the Ghost's efforts to rescue her publicly from whatever danger threatened. The connection between George Chance and his Ghost was something that simply must not be discovered.

It will be remembered that I had made impressions and also taken photographs of the brass key belonging to Barton Clay, and an impression of District Attorney Frank Dyer's. Only leaving Police Headquarters that evening, I had taken the keys, impressions and pix to Glenn Saunders who was filling my shoes at the house of George Chance. I was in the disguise of Dr. Stacey, and if there were any witnesses to this act they would have simply supposed that George Chance was receiving medical attention.

George Chance, the magician, has frequently been heard to remark that Dr. Stacey is his physician. That's a lie with some truth in it, if everything is considered.

Having delivered the key impressions to Glenn, who would very shortly duplicate the keys in the magic workshop in the basement, I left the house, still disguised as Stacey, and returned to my rectory.

It was some time later that I got Merry's call for help. I immediately phoned Glenn Saunders and instructed him to call at the club for Merry. He was instructed to do nothing that George Chance wouldn't do. The Ghost, I said, would be backing him up to the fullest.

In fact, the Ghost arrived at the club a little before Glenn Saunders did. I scouted around on the outside, found a large black sedan parked just around the corner from the club. And who should be behind the wheel but little Oscar Gruder, one of Mike Pannard's best-dressed gunmen. It was Oscar who had made an attempt to get Nell's brass key away from her a bit earlier, though I didn't know this at the time.

Oscar and his like are not given to lonely vigils on side streets unless they are up to no good. I walked past Oscar's car, looked both ways to be certain no one was watching, sprang suddenly onto the running board, cracked Oscar on the side of the head with the muzzle of my automatic. That, I figured, was all to the good.

I had come prepared to back up Merry's and Glenn's exit from the club to the fullest. The stunt of the sidewalk cameraman wasn't exactly an im-

promptu trick. In fact, I had considered the surprising possibilities of the illusion quite a long time before there was a chance to put it into effect.

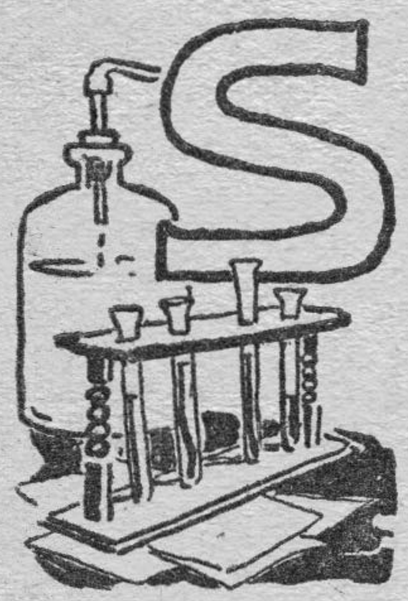
MY bulky camera equipment wasn't quite what it seemed. For the tripod, I used the cane portion of that ingenius stage trick known as "Cane and Hat to Table." It's an opener for many a magical show, so I'm not at liberty to describe the workings of it in great detail. It is enough to say that the cane contains a cleverly made table-base that folds in and out of the cane cylinder at the touch of a button.

Thus equipped, I waiting around the corner for Glenn and Merry to appear. I was not disappointed at finding they were accompanied by two of Pannard's gunmen. I had only to block their path, my face concealed by the black silk, fire the flash gun, and wait for the two gunmen to try and smash my "camera."

You can't smash something that vanishes before your eyes.

CHAPTER XI

Keys to Doom



STUNNED is the word to describe Mike Pannard's two gunmen. The effect of the "camera" vanish, coupled with the appearance of the Ghost, gave me every advantage that surprise can offer. Their fingers fumbled for guns and my cane lashed out to meet the drawn weapons. I cracked a wrist and a gun struck the concrete. The second man tried a running fight, hoping to clip the Ghost with a shot over his shoulder. But the cane only extended the reach of my arm a little more and I was able to drop him with a blow on the top of the head.

The man with the broken wrist came in close, or did his best to, and I drove the end of the cane hard over his heart. He stumbled backward and sat down.

People who were coming out of the Lafevre Club had collected at the corner and were getting excited. With Pannard's two men occupied with what I had handed them, I thought the wisest thing to do was to vanish before I became involved in police difficulty. A block away I had a taxi waiting for me, and I lost no time in getting to it. Glenn Saunders, I knew, would see to Merry's safe return.

Merry, however, had not returned to her apartment. Though it was after three in the morning when I got back to my rectory, Merry was there waiting for me. She had the key which she had stolen from Nell Lafevre with her, and also the two duplicate keys that Glenn Saunders had prepared for me that evening.

On the cocktail table in front of the couch in the rectory room, Merry lined up the keys as a child might a row of tin soldiers.

The key which was a duplicate of the one which had been held by Barton Clay I have already described. Dyer's key was even more curious. At the outer extremities of the blade were two oblong pieces that ended in a couple of circular knobs. Between these two oblong pieces, the top line of the key blade was convex, drawing an arc that was divided exactly in the center.

"Looks a lot like the doors on the saloons you see in the movie westerns," Merry said. "No wonder Emery Faust laughed. It *is* funny!"

"Funny, but not laughable," I said. "Now let's consider the key you swiped from Nell Lafevre."

I picked up the third key in the line. It was exactly like the others except that the blade had a totally different design. Holding it with the blade pointed up, I asked Merry what it looked like.

"A man," she said.

"Man?" I questioned. It looked a lot more like a woman to me. It might have been the silhouette of a Southern belle in a hoop skirt.

"Not the kind of man I like," Merry said, wrinkling her cute nose. "The kind of men you play with. A chessman. What are those little ones in the front row of a chess game? Swamps, or something like that."

"Pawns, they're called."

MERRY nodded vigorously. "That's it. That's what it looks like to me."

She leaned back on the couch and yawned.

"Do you realize what time it is, young lady?" I asked with mock severity.

"I realize. You ought to take me home, shouldn't you? Isn't something terrible supposed to happen to a ghost if he gets caught outside of his haunted house when the cock crows?"

"That's true," I laughed, "but it's been a long time since I've heard any cock crowing around Manhattan." I stood up, took hold of Merry's hand, and pulled her to her feet.

On the way to her apartment in the car which I own and maintain in the name of Dr. Stacey, Merry cuddled up against me and asked:

"Do you know who Nell Lafevre's secret love is?"

I didn't.

"That blond young fellow who got his picture in the paper this evening on account of his being named beneficiary in Emery Faust's life insurance. Isn't his name Wilkins?"

"Stanley Wilkins?" I gasped. "Why, he's just a kid. Nell Lafevre must be ten or twelve years older than he is."

"Twenty years older, anyway. He came into the club by the back way early this evening. I saw him kissing Nell. I just thought I'd mention it. Couldn't she have some sort of a hold on him? And if she did, wouldn't that be reason enough for her killing Emery Faust? Couldn't she get her hands on the insurance money that way—I mean through this Stanley Wilkins?"

It was certainly an idea. That I couldn't tie it up with the death of Barton Clay didn't make much difference. It didn't have to tie up—the person who killed Faust didn't have to be the power behind Clay's death.

When we reached Merry's apartment, I noticed a copy of Tennyson's poems on her table. It wasn't the same edition as the one I had found in the hands of Emery Faust.

"Tomorrow," Merry said, "I'm going to read Tennyson. I tell you, that book of poems in Emery Faust's hands meant something. No man could be so mean he would deliberately mislead people just when he was dying."

"I don't know about that," I told her. "The more I know about Emery Faust, the more respect I have for a sewer rat."

And what happened between then and dawn didn't do much toward bettering my opinion of dead Mr. Faust.

I had three of the brass keys in my possession, or at least two duplicates and one original. On file in the Ghost's rectory were impressions and photographs of the three keys. What happened early that morning indicated that I had been wise in recording the design of each of the three keys.

On leaving Merry's apartment, I drove out to the Faust place on West End Avenue. I parked the car fully a block from the house and proceeded on foot along the lonely sidewalk.

IF there were locks in the Faust house that could be opened by any one of the three brass keys in my possession, I was determined to find out about it. The keys and their respective locks would answer a whole lot of the questions that were bothering me.

I intended to enter the house by means of the rear door so as to avoid attracting the attention of some cop who might be passing along the street

on his regular beat. But as I got to the back of the house, the large triple garage in the rear attracted my attention.

The garage was empty, but the door was locked. It was a padlock that closed the door of the garage, and what with all the escape tricks in my bag, you can be quite certain that there are few padlocks that can stand up against my ingenious tricks. No standard lock, in fact, has ever given me much trouble.

I don't know what I expected to find in the garage—perhaps some sort of cylindrical safe sunk into the concrete floor. There was no such safe. A steel tool cabinet proved of no importance. Obviously there was nothing in the garage which any one of the brass keys would unlock.

I gave the floor one final searching look, guided by the beam of my pocket flashlight. It was then that I noticed that the cast iron strainer plate that topped the floor drain was standing a little way up on edge. I went to the plate, knelt, lifted the round circle of iron, and flashed my light down into the drain.

The plate couldn't have been seated perfectly on the top of the drain for the simple reason that the handle of a wrench stuck half an inch up above the rim. I gloved my fingers with my handkerchief, lifted the wrench from the drain. It was an ordinary monkey wrench, and yet there was something about it that was extraordinary. I mean the bloodstains on the head of it and the few white hairs that were clinging to the spots of dried blood.

I took an envelope from my pocket and put three of the hairs into it. Then I replaced the wrench in its hiding place. Somehow, I didn't think that the man who had placed it there would come back for it. You see, I had the sudden inspiration that it was dead Emery Faust who had used that wrench, and used it in the most unpleasant manner imaginable.

My brain raced back to the first "death" of Emery Faust, when Faust's servant, smashed beyond positive identification in the train wreck, had been mistaken for Emery Faust. How simple it would have been for Faust to have knocked his servant in the head, dressed the unconscious man in his own clothes, added a few personal effects to encourage the idea that the body was Faust's. Then, in order to complete the murder-hoax, Faust could have put the body of the servant into his own car, parked the car on the railroad tracks, and awaited the smash.

THAT, I concluded, must have been exactly what had happened. There was motive enough. Faust hoped that the eight hundred thousand dollar life insurance money would be paid to Stanley Wilkins. And then Faust probably had the idea that he could get the money from young Wilkins. Perhaps Wilkins and Faust had been in the scheme together, despite Dr. Millais' opinion that young Wilkins was perfectly clean. Or then again Faust might have had some hold on Wilkins that had compelled Wilkins to fall in with the idea.

So, while the garage had yielded me no information concerning brass keys, it had given me notions about Mr. Faust's first "death." The trick would have been entirely in keeping with that fat, laughing monster's character.

I left the garage, went to the back door of the house. There I was faced with an ordinary skeleton lock that opened not with one of the mysterious brass keys but yielded quickly to one of the master keys I always carried. I was just in the act of pushing the door open when I sensed a sudden movement behind me.

There was no possible chance for me to turn around. A gun muzzle jammed painfully between my shoulder blades.

"Go right in," a voice whispered. "Don't look behind you. Don't make a single false move. I would kill you on the slightest provocation."

I stepped through the door. The fingers of my right hand dipped down toward my coat sleeve in an effort to reach the handle of my knife. Afterward, it occurred to me that if I had succeeded in pulling my knife, I probably wouldn't have lived to tell about it. For at that moment the man behind me lunged full weight against my back. I pitched forward, hands outthrust and grasping at thin air. The floor seemed to go out from under me. Rushing air pounded on my eardrums and I felt as though I was falling into a bottomless pit.

The pit, however, had a bottom—the hard concrete floor of the Faust basement. But by the time I had fallen the full length of the stairs and struck the floor I didn't have the necessary faculties to tell what I had struck. In fact, I was completely out.

CHAPTER XII

The Corpse to Be

I WAS scarcely aware of returning consciousness until the sense of feeling indicated that I was lying against cold concrete. Getting to my feet was a gradual process.

I had a dull pain in my right side, but I could blame that on my automatic and the magical gimmick which carries it—I had fallen on the gun. I was thankful, then, that I hadn't produced my knife, otherwise I might have run that into myself falling down the steps.

The house above me was silent, but I went up the steps cautiously just the same. The brass keys I had had in my pocket were gone, as you've probably guessed. But I had been prepared for exactly such an emergency and the keys could easily be duplicated from the impressions I had made.

With my little torch to light my way, I made a complete search of the house, hunting for locks even though I no longer had the keys I had started out with. There was no conceivable door or lock that might have been opened with the keys.

I wondered if the person who had pushed me down the steps had been similarly disappointed. Perhaps he *knew* what locks the keys would fit. And yet that was hardly a logical conclusion to draw. If this key collector knew what door the keys would unlock he was wasting a good deal of time getting hold of the keys when a charge of explosive would have probably opened the door with much less effort.

When I left the house, the sky was turning gray and I hurried to the rectory. As Merry White had remarked, it was unhealthy for a ghost to be about at dawn.

Reaching the rectory, I found Joe Harper extended full length on the couch, his green hat lying across his face to shield his eyes from the light within the room. On the cocktail table, which he had drawn conveniently close to him, was an ash tray heaped with cigarette butts, a whiskey glass, and another brass key.

I lifted Joe's hat. The light fell upon his lean wolfish face. He opened his black beetle eyes and gave me his never-surprised stare.

"Ghost," he said, quite as though we had been conversing steadily for the past half hour, "you are looking at a first class heel."

"I've known that for some time," I said, "but I like you anyway. Where'd that brass key come from?"

I picked the key up and looked at it. It was very much like the three other brass keys I had seen, except in the design of the blade. In this case the skeleton key blank had been cut in a series of right angles, not unlike what a child might draw to indicate steps.

"That," Joe said, "is the key Emery Faust willed to Attorney Carter Nash. I obtained it by foul means from a fair

lady. That's why I'm a heel. The fact that I spent a lot of your money making the gal into a pickled peach doesn't have anything to do with the way I feel, because I had a very nice time and so did Laura Nash."

I fingered the key.

"You mean you worked this out of Carter Nash's daughter?"

"That's right. I filled her full of champagne and hooey. The hooey was about how I could get her into a Broadway show. She's a nice kid. Looking at her, you can understand how Emery Faust, old as he was, thought of her as a tender morsel. Looking at her, you can also understand just exactly why her old man broke off with Faust when Faust tried to elope with her."

"And you took advantage of her innocence, got her drunk, made her tell you where the key was."

Joe nodded. He wasn't exactly feeling bad about what he had done.

"She gave it to me when I took her home awhile ago. I just asked for it and she gave it to me. It was in her dad's wall safe. She was so pie-eyed she couldn't run off the combination."

"Oh?" I raised an eyebrow at this bit of news. "Who did run off the combination—Carter Nash himself?"

Joe met my glance steadily.

"You've got the key, haven't you? Don't ask so many questions."

I made an impression of the key and handed it back to Joe.

"You can put it right back where you got it," I said. "We just borrowed it."

"I can't put it back right away," Joe said as he put the key into his pocket. "You see, I'm hatching an idea. A very hot idea."

He reached out for his hat, put in on his head, but only to shade his eyes so he could go back to sleep. I could have used some sleep myself but I compromised by sitting down for a change. No sooner had I done so when the phone rang.

It was Ned Standish.

"A cop reported this to his precinct stations," Standish said. "I don't know how long it's taken the news to filter through to me, but I just got it. It's about Frank Dyer. He's walking on the roof of his apartment, wearing pajamas!"

"He's *what?*"

"Don't shout," Standish said tiredly. "It looks like one of those prolonged suicide attempts. He's up where no one can get at him from the inside, out on a ledge and about fifteen stories up. There's blood all over his face, but he still acts as if walking in his sleep."

"That's exactly how Barton Clay acted!" I said. "I'll be right over."

I hung up. The makeup of the Ghost was certainly going to be of no use to me where I was headed. To mingle with police who would probably be on hand at the building where Frank Dyer was tempting annihilation,

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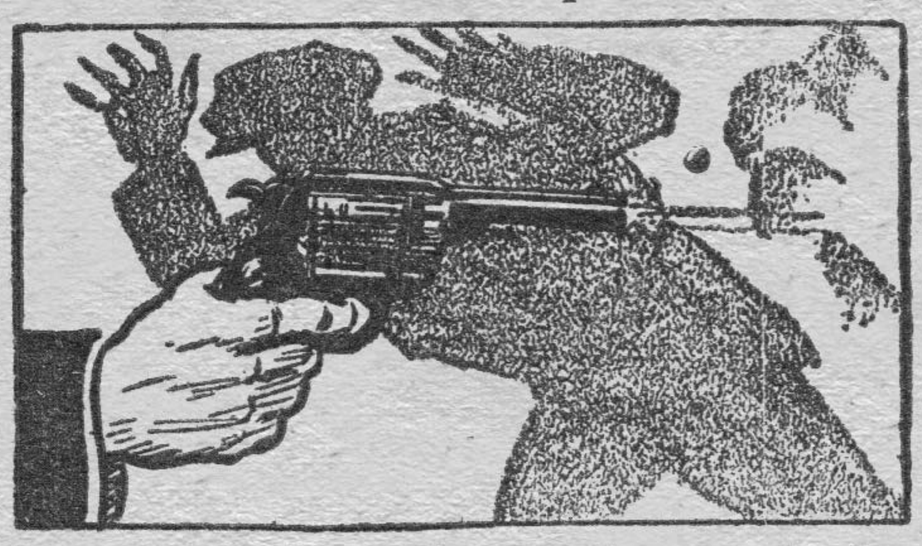
I needed a police disguise. Ideal for this was the identity of Detective-Sergeant Hamill, as fictitious a character as Dr. Stacey.

Red toupee, a flat nose broadened with putty, shoulder pads beneath my coat, plumpers in my cheeks, and I began to look like the detective-sergeant of my own creation. I had only to adopt the slouching walk and the husky voice to give the character life. A regulation police badge provided for me by Ned Standish completed the job. Then I was off for Frank Dyer's Riverside address, riding in a taxi that I picked up along Madison Avenue near the rectory.

Half a block from the New Sheffield Apartments where Dyer made his home, I could see the white-clad form of a man on a narrow stone parapet that belted the tall building two thirds of the way up. A searchlight from a fire truck was turned upward through



the gray mists of morning, pointing with a finger of light at Frank Dyer. A fire ladder was being extended rapidly toward the stone ledge, and below firemen were standing around with safety nets.

Back from the building, as I was in the taxi, I leaned forward on the cushions to see what I afterward learned no one directly below the pajama clad man could have seen. What I saw was a long-handled broom or mop—something of the sort—thrust out of a window near where Dyer stood.

I knew then that this was to be murder. Within me was a cold, leaden something, a sort of sense of utter futility, that weighted me down. For murder it was, and I was utterly powerless to prevent it.

CHAPTER XIII

I Go to the Morgue

I TOSSED a bill into the lap of the cab driver, opened the door, got out before the taxi stopped rolling. Even as I did so, a roar broke from the crowd clustered on the sidewalk at the foot of the building. I looked up, saw Frank Dyer running along the stone parapet.

He didn't know what he was doing. He couldn't have known. I think his feet were still running even when his body twisted off balance and he plunged into space. There was no chance for the firemen to reach him with the safety nets—the crowd got in their way.

I looked away. Once, during my youth in the circus, I had seen a trapeze artist killed in a fall from a swinging bar. That terrible memory was still vivid in my mind.

Someone had pushed Frank Dyer. Perhaps it was only a gentle push, something that could not have dislodged a normal man, or one whose nerves and muscles were normally coordinated. But something was wrong with Frank Dyer. How he had got out onto the parapet in the first place was beyond comprehension. Unless he had gone out there thinking to run from something that had terrified him.

But even in terror he had not reacted normally. There was some insidious influence besides terror working here. Dyer wasn't a coward. Somehow his intellect had been drugged, his senses poisoned. Something had attacked inwardly to destroy judgement of distances.

I skirted the crowd, rushing forward now toward the inevitable sight on the pavement—that of a body pitifully crushed to death by the force of gravity and the immobility of concrete. I ran

into the service entrance of the building. The door had no time to close behind me before it was driven open by the ramming shoulder of Commissioner Ned Standish.

When I reached the service elevator, Standish was right behind me, his eyes snapping.

"Thought I'd beat you over here," he panted as I reached for the elevator starter lever. "For heaven's sake, what does it mean?"

"Either Dyer was mad or he was drugged," I snapped, as the elevator shot upward. "Those damned brass keys."

"But why kill Dyer?" Standish's voice was high-pitched and cracking like sparks from a telegraphic sounder.

"I don't know. I don't understand at all. Unless Dyer clearly saw the face of the man who was torturing him to make him reveal the hiding place of the key."

"You think Dyer was tortured?"

"There was blood on his face before he fell."

I braked the elevator, threw back the safety gate, and we ran out into a corridor. Standish had his gun out. No cop on the force could use a gun better than the commissioner himself. Perhaps at last we had this torture murderer cornered.

The corridor was filled with people from neighboring apartments, standing in front of their doors in various stages of undress. Only two doors in the hall were not open.

A MAN bundled up in a bathrobe got the flash of my badge and pointed to one of the doors.

"I heard Miss Miller scream," he yelled at me. "That was what woke me first."

I shouldered open the door the man indicated, with Standish crowding in beside me. Halfway across the threshold, the two of us stopped. In the center of the living room floor lay the "Miss Miller" who had had the great misfortune to have screamed. Her forehead had been beaten in by successive blows of that most murderous of weapons vaguely described as "a blunt instrument."

She was dead, this woman whose screaming might have brought help and prevented murder. She had faced that ruthless killer, had seen him, and there had been no subtle means of getting rid of her. Nothing but "the blunt instrument."

Standish and I ran through the apartment, guns out, goaded to unreasoning rage by this double murder of the new morning. We saw the open window, saw the floor mop which had been used to give Frank Dyer the shove that hadn't stopped shoving this side of eternity. But there was no murderer lurking in the closets.

Back in the hall, we asked some of the onlookers where Dyer's apartment was. It was right next to that of the unfortunate Miss Miller. The door was unlocked and we went in. Everything was turned inside out, doors, clothing, closets. Undoubtedly the killer had found his brass key, but if he was the same person who had robbed my pockets a few hours earlier, he now possessed two keys exactly alike. Actually, the murder of Dyer had been so much lost motion, though the killer could have had no way of knowing that.

And in Dyer's bedroom, we saw how drapery cords had been used to spread-eagle the D. A. in his own four-poster bed. There was blood on the sheets and pillow cases, indicating that torture had been employed. But the killer—the killer was gone.

No one had seen him. There was no living witness. Oh, the district attorney's private elevator communicating with the basement garage of the apartment building, explained the getaway clearly enough. The murderer had even employed the D. A.'s car for his escape. The well oiled machinery of the police radio went into instant motion, acting on Standish's orders. The D.A.'s car was found soon enough,

but there wasn't anyone behind the wheel then.

In Standish's office some time later, when we had learned of our complete defeat by this murderous key collector, the commissioner turned a tired, grave-eyed gaze on me.

"This thing has got to stop," he said quietly. "We can't just stand around and wait until all the owners of brass keys have been killed except one. If we could, our job would be an easy one."

"It'll stop," I said emphatically, "or Demarest will get an opportunity to perform a post mortem on a ghost!"

And before noon that day I had stepped once more behind the alias of Dr. Stacey and was on my way to Bellevue Morgue.

THE figure of Dr. Stacey was a familiar one around the morgue, though I must confess that that medical gentleman had never developed much of a taste for the autopsy room. I was, in fact, bound for the office of Robert Demarest to see whether or not that gloomy-faced king of cadavers had performed a post mortem on the body of Barton Clay.

As I was walking toward Demarest's door, Dr. William Millais stepped out. He recognized me at once. Rather, he recognized the man he had been introduced to as Dr. Stacey. A slow smile spread across his dark-skinned face, a smile which unnatural and inexpressive eyes were unable to share.

"A very good morning to you, Dr. Stacey," he said, grasping my hand.

I said good morning to him, trying not to notice that ugly defect which his operation had left in his eyes. I knew he was sensitive about his appearance.

"I'm afraid," he said, "that I must extend most humble apologies, as our mutual acquaintance Henry Fu Chang might say. Or I might say that I am guilty of having bet on the wrong horse."

"Meaning?" I questioned in the voice I always used along with the Stacey role.

"Mr. Barton Clay, it would seem, was not a victim of accident. Though how the police will prove murder, I do not quite understand."

"You mean that Demarest found something?"

"Oh, quite!"

Dr. Millais looked through his owlish glasses at Demarest's door. Then he looked down at his watch.

"I believe I'll step in with you a moment and bask in the light of your professional triumph, Dr. Stacey. I'm not due at my office for several hours. Even if I was late, I doubt if I'd be apt to miss a patient."

So we went into Demarest's office, and for the first time I caught the medical examiner eating. He raised his sleepy looking eyelids just far enough to glimpse me over a coffee cup. And then he choked on the coffee and put the cup down. It's a well known joke that Robert Demarest claims he hasn't time to eat because so many people in New York insist on dying unpleasant and unnatural deaths.

"Well," Demarest said, "I thought you had gone." This no doubt was his conception of a greeting for Dr. Millais.

"I have been breaking the news to Dr. Stacey," Millais said. "But I left the full story for you."

"Generous of you, Millais," Demarest said. "But after all you spotted the drug as soon as I did. It's sodium pyratol, *Doctor.*"

"Clearly indicated," Millais supported. "And we've taken the trouble to check with Barton Clay's own physician to see if the drug had ever been prescribed for Clay. Clay's doctor, that's Dr. Claude Alfred and a man entirely above reproach, says he has never prescribed that particular drug for Mr. Clay. You can draw your own conclusions, which you have undoubtedly done, Dr. Stacey, since you probably guessed the drug long before we found it in the body."

"Oh, there's no doubt but what Dr. Stacey is one of the *guess* men in the profession," Demarest said.

Millais laughed at Demarest's pun, but had he known more of the intimate life of Dr. Stacey he would have enjoyed it a good deal more. He thanked Demarest for the opportunity of getting in on the autopsy and left Demarest and me alone.

"Reminds me of a stuffed owl," Demarest said, following Millais with his eyes.

"And you, my friend," I reminded him, "would look like a cadaver with glass eyes if you ever had a cataract operation performed on you. But not with any deliberate attempt to display ignorance, what is sodium pyratol?"

"A hypnotic drug founded on barbituric acid. Induces sleep or quiet, but the immediate results are a sort of numbness, dizziness, and a feeling of great confusion. The subject finds it difficult to move quickly and loses all judgment of distances. In short, *Doctor,* it's what helped kill Barton Clay. Other contributing factors are the fact that he possessed one of those brass keys and was probably pushed before that car that struck him."

"I wonder if you'll find sodium pyratol in the body of Frank Dyer?" I mused.

"I wouldn't be at all surprised," Demarest said.

CHAPTER XIV

The Frightened Man

SODIUM pyratol was certainly a contributing factor in the death of Frank Dyer. The autopsy proved that. Dyer must have been tortured until he revealed the hiding place of his brass key. Then he had been drugged and forced out onto the ledge outside his window—something which Demarest said would not be difficult to do if Dyer was under the influence of the sodium pyratol.

The drug, of course, was supposed to upset Dyer's sense of equilibrium, his judgment of distance, and make his movements inaccurate and clumsy. But the D. A. hadn't pitched from the stone ledge as soon as his murderer had expected. Someone had seen the man on the ledge from the street, sounded the alarm, brought police and firemen.

Dyer, by that time, had moved along the ledge, out of the reach of the murderer and possibly in a position where he might be saved in spite of the fact that he was no longer responsible for his own actions.

And the chance of Dyer being saved was something the murderer dared not risk. I repeated that many times to myself. For it meant that there could be only one motive for the murderer killing Dyer after the murderer had obtained the brass key. It meant that Dyer could have identified this fiendish collector of keys.

To insure Dyer's death before help could arrive, the murderer had entered the apartment next to Dyer's, killed the unfortunate woman who had met him face to face, and finally given Dyer that fatal push from behind with a mop handle.

Again the murder motive struck me forcibly between the eyes. This killer killed because of fear—fear of identification. There must be no living witness for his crimes. None who met him face to face must live. It seemed a mania with him.

Later on, with Demarest in the morgue, I made a careful examination of the hairs that I had removed from that blood-stained wrench beneath the drain in the Faust garage. I told my gloomy companion that I believed them to be the hairs from the head of the Faust servant who had died in the train wreck and had been identified as Faust.

Demarest had a complete record to

the investigation of Faust's first "death."

"The same hair," he informed, after microscopic examination. "You've worked it out right. The servant was slugged with the wrench while in the Faust garage, put into Faust's clothes and in Faust's car. Then Faust himself must have parked the car on the railroad track and awaited results."

"After the insurance money, no doubt," I said. "If Faust could fake his own death by killing someone else and then allow Stanley Wilkins to collect the insurance money, it's possible that Faust intended to get hold of that money through Wilkins. Could be that that was his only motive in naming Wilkins as his beneficiary. I think Wilkins ought to be grilled."

I HURRIED back to the rectory. Merry was there, waiting to see me before she went back to her post at the Lafevre Club. I found her curled up on my couch with a copy of Tennyson's poems open on her lap. The book wasn't the same edition that had been found in the hands of Emery Faust, but it undoubtedly contained the complete selection of the poet's works. She let the book fall to the floor as she jumped up to kiss me.

"Darlin', what's happened? Have you caught the key collector? Is he anybody I know?"

"Emery Faust killed his own servant," I told her, "by stunning him with a wrench, packing him into the Faust car, and parking him on the railroad track. After all, it's got to be that way, because who else would have access to the clothes and personal belongings which were found on the corpse?"

"Also, my dove," Merry contributed, "I don't think Mr. Faust would have kept hidden after the 'accident' if he hadn't planned it that way. But I don't quite see how he intended to collect on his own insurance through Wilkins."

"It could have been pre-arranged between Wilkins and Faust. After all, remember that it seems that Faust was kind to Wilkins. And from what we know of Faust, it's doubtful if he'd go out of his way to be nice to anybody unless there was a selfish motive behind it."

"All right," Merry said. "Faust killed his own servant to engineer the appearance of his own death." Merry ticked that off on her thumb. "Now" —she counted to her forefinger—"who killed Emery Faust?"

"Could have been anybody. You've got to consider that he was actually working several people up to a murderous pitch. We know that he called all of his heirs—those who had inherited brass keys by his first 'death' —and probably he jeered at them. If there were any among them who presumed that the keys had an actual value or perhaps knew what the keys were for, there's a swell murder motive right there, in order to make Faust's will stick. And we have reason to believe that Faust also taunted Mike Pannard, and we know what Pannard tried to do. Possibly he had some other enemies who had been rejoicing over his death and were pretty disappointed to find their old foe still alive."

Merry nodded her head vigorously.

"Nothing open and shut about it. Golly, what Faust did practically amounted to suicide, getting in touch with all his enemies and reminding them that he was still alive and laughing!"

"That's true," I said after a moment's thought.

"And what about Mr. Clay and Mr. Dyer? Who killed them?"

"Actually I suppose that Faust killed them. Dead Mr. Faust. You see, if he hadn't been so mysterious and left those brass keys to his heirs, the murders wouldn't have occurred. It's obvious that that is what the murderer is after—the brass keys. Apparently they have value and he knows it."

Merry clapped her small hands. Her green eyes shone triumphantly.

"Darlin', that's why Faust left the keys to his enemies! He wanted them to kill each other off. How he must have hated them!"

I nodded. That had been in my mind for some time. And always, marching right along with the idea, was that question as to whether the brass keys had any value at all. Wouldn't it have matched Faust's warped sense of humor if the keys were valueless? There was grim irony that would have pleased the dead man in the possibility that a murderer was killing off the people that Faust hated for the sole purpose of gaining something that was worthless.

But always, when you thought of that, there was that question of what Faust had done with his money. He had been a wealthy man. Surely not all of his money had gone into those life insurance policies he had taken out shortly before his death.

SHORTLY after Merry departed for Nell Lafevre's, Tiny Tim entered the rectory. He was swaggering. The buttons on his trim-fitting suit coat were about to pop off, his chest was so puffed out. His fat cigar was tilted at a jaunty angle.

"George, I believe I've done some good. Yes, I really feel as though I've accomplished something."

Tim, you will remember, had been assigned to watch Julian Hornaday, the one of the Faust heirs who had refused to show himself or take any interest in the affair at all.

"Hornaday is frightened to death," Tim said. "He has a bodyguard. He's had iron bars installed on the windows of his house. And this evening when he came out onto his porch to pick up the evening paper, this bodyguard was right beside him. He stood there on the porch, getting a breath of air and looking at the paper. The paper had the news of Frank Dyer's death. Hornaday dropped the paper and if it hadn't been for this tough egg who was hanging around behind him, he'd have collapsed to the floor."

"Where were you?" I asked.

"Just behind the porch railing," Tim said, giving his cigar a flip to dislodge the cone of ash. "You see, I was trying to figure a way into the house. Hornaday is harder to get near than the king of Siam, and I haven't been able to scrape up much information about him. He's got plenty of the old dough, though. Everybody seems to agree on that. And he lives like a hermit in an old stone front house in Waverly Place."

"Know anything else about him?"

"Well," Tim said, pacing the floor importantly, "I learned from a neighbor who used to work for Hornaday, that Emery Faust and Hornaday were originally rivals. They both started in the pawn shop business. Faust used to devil Hornaday nearly to death. He hired gutter urchins to toss rocks through Hornaday's window. And finally, to put a stop to that, Hornaday retaliated. But legally. Hornaday took legal steps."

"And probably didn't get anywhere," I said. "I imagine that even in the old days Faust knew something about taking care of himself."

"That's it," Tim nodded. "From what I gather, Hornaday couldn't prove anything against Faust. Finally Hornaday picked up his courage and went to Faust himself. What he told Faust only made Faust laugh."

"I can imagine that laugh," I said.

"And Faust kicked Hornaday out of his shop, looked at him through the window, laughed at him. Hornaday went to the window and was evidently pressing his hands up against the glass, wishing he could get his hands an Faust's fat throat. And then something happened."

TIM appreciated the value of suspense. He took a few drags on his cigar before going on.

"Faust had an iron grating above his

window which he let down when he closed his shop. It wasn't quite closing time, but Faust chose that particular moment to trip the lever that dropped the grating in place. Hornaday didn't get away fast enough, and the falling grating clipped off three fingers on his right hand."

"And Faust, I presume, laughed," I said.

"Maybe. But that wasn't the most important thing he did. He called the police. He beat Hornaday to the draw, you might say. Claimed that Hornaday was a desperate character, that he had tried to break Faust's window, and that he had threatened Faust with a gun. And the cops did find a gun on Hornaday, though he insisted that Faust had planted it on him. Anyway, Hornaday lost three fingers and three of the best years of his life because he tried to stand up to Emery Faust."

"You mean Hornaday went to prison?"

"He did," Tim said.

At every turn along the trail of mystery surrounding the brass keys, dead Emery Faust was more clearly illuminated as an inhuman monster, a man adept at hating and tormenting his fellows.

"What's Julian Hornaday look like?" I asked.

"Tall and thin," Tim said. "Dyspeptic. He has a lot of gray hair."

"Any way of getting into his house?"

Tim nodded. "I could get in, maybe. There's a ventilator on the roof of the house—one of those things that turn with the wind. I could get up on the roof by climbing the drain pipe from the eaves, but that pipe wouldn't hold you, nor could you get down into the house through the ventilator."

"But you could," I said. "You could go down and open the door, letting me in. That is, if you could handle Hornaday and the bodyguard."

"I can," Tim said. "You give me a try and see if I can't do it."

"It's pretty much of a risk, Tim."

"I can do it, George," he insisted. "Give me the chance. But once you're in the house, what do you expect to do?"

"Impersonate Hornaday and invite a visit from the murderous collector of brass keys," I told him. "That looks like about the only way to catch this killer. And simply because Hornaday is so careful, the murderer should be watching him very closely—watching him and hoping that he will make that one slip which will give the killer a chance at him and at his brass key."

Tim teetered up and down on his toes, his thumbs hooked in the arm holes of his vest.

"George, are you forgetting Hornaday has three fingers missing from his right hand? How the devil do you expect to get around that? You can't conceal that with gloves."

"Well, I'm not sacrificing three fingers just to impersonate Mr. Hornaday," I laughed. "A magician without fingers would be somewhat more futile than a ghost without a groan. However, Tim, if you want to take the chance, we'll try it."

And try it we did.

CHAPTER XV

Through the Air Shaft

JULIAN HORNADAY'S house in Waverly Place was a narrow filling of stone sandwiched between two red brick structures. It had long windows and a skinny door, and was altogether as sorrowful a house as any that Tim Terry had ever seen. Around at the back of the building was a small court that was without a single blade of grass. There were ash cans and garbage cans sitting beside the back steps.

Tim had learned from his discreet investigation that Julian Hornaday's only servant was a plump Irish woman who came in during the day time to clean and prepare his meals. At night the lean gray nickel nurser was alone with his bulldog of a bodyguard.

It was into this gloomy court that Tim went. He gathered the sheet metal down-spout into his arms and legs and climbed quickly to the eaves. It was quite a job for a middle-aged man, but Tim had never permitted his little muscles to get soft.

The house had a Mansard roof. Tim leaned back against the sloped metal facing, dug his heels into the eaves trough, and worked his way along until he came to an attic window. This window, what with its sills and the decorative fret-work about it, gave him enough of a foothold to get to the flat plateau of asphalted roofing on top.

His small feet made no noise as he walked over to the ventilator. Getting the conical rain-shed off the ventilator pipe was a job that made quite a little noise and taxed Tim's strength to the utmost. After that was done, he listened breathlessly at the top of the pipe, but there was no indication that anyone within the building had been alarmed.

"What," he thought, "if the Ghost and I are too late? What if I get inside there and find that Hornaday and his bodyguard have been murdered?"

Tim didn't care for corpses. In fact, he had almost a childish horror of them. But he reassured himself by arguing that if the Ghost had to employ a midget in order to gain entrance into the Hornaday house, the murderer could have scarcely entered at all. Unless, of course, the murderer happened to be a friend of Julian Hornaday.

"Well, friend murderer," Tim said to himself, "if you're down there and I get a glimpse of you, I'll shoot and shoot to kill." He entered the ventilator shaft with the terrible feeling that he was about to be buried alive. The shaft wasn't large enough to admit a full grown man, but Tim was so small that he had to hug the sides with his knees and elbows to prevent himself from dropping too rapidly.

When his toes touched bottom, he found that the shaft became a horizontal passage not more than two feet in height. He squatted, then got to his hands and knees and crawled along the passage. After that impenetrable dark, the glimmer of light he could see at the end was a welcome sight.

HE crawled about ten feet before he encountered a wire grating that covered the end of the ventilating shaft. He looked out into a room illumined by a miserly yellow light. There, in an enormous black leather chair which would have held three thin men, was Mr. Julian Hornaday. And the snores that whistled from Hornaday's thin beak evidenced the fact that he was no cadaver regardless of the pallor of his cheeks.

What annoyed Tim about the entire setup was the fact that Hornaday's gray claw of a left hand was hooked around the butt of an automatic that looked the approximate size of a Howitzer.

Tim took hold of the grating with both hands. It rattled alarmingly, but Mr. Hornaday continued to snore. Tim explored the corners of the grating and discovered that it was held in place by bolts and nuts. He took a small tool knife from his pocket, unfolded a small pair of pliers from the knife, and went to work on the square-headed nuts.

He had removed two of the four nuts when Mr. Hornaday moved. The gaunt gray man in the chair uncrossed his legs and extended them in front of him. He didn't open his eyes, but he was awake. His red tongue darted out to moisten his cracked and colorless lips. And then, apparently, he was off to sleep again.

Tim tackled the bolt at the upper

left hand corner of the grill, got it off without trouble. But the bolt at the upper right corner was rusted in place. He could turn it but nut and bolt turned together. He exerted all his strength, and the grating, still held by that one bolt, swung sideward, making a clanking noise as it did so.

Julian Hornaday came awake. He sprang to his feet, stared in mortal terror at the grating of his ventilator shaft. It was possible that he didn't see Tim at first, but only the sagging, swinging grate. Perhaps he thought that his house was being undermined like that of Poe's unfortunate Usher family.

Tim knew that he was in the worst possible place. Getting down the ventilator shaft was one thing and getting up it was something entirely different. There was nothing to do but face whatever music was in store for him in Mr. Hornaday's living room. He held the grating as far up and to the right as possible and scrambled through.

Holding the grating up with his right hand hampered him in drawing his gun. Hornaday remembered his own weapon, which he held in his left hand, but as he raised the gun he was taken with the ague of fear. He fumbled, dropped his heavy gun, and then came down from his thin and lofty height to pick the gun up again.

By that time Tim was in a position to offer argument. He stood in the middle of the room, his ten-shot Spanish .25-caliber automatic in both hands and trained on Mr. Hornaday. Tim's heart was beating rapidly, but with excitement. The marines, he felt, had definitely landed.

"Ah-ah, Mr. Hornaday!" Tim cautioned as Hornaday would have picked up his big gun.

HORNADAY straightened the crook in his back, stared at Tim, and was probably more astonished by Tim's childish voice than he was impressed by the danger from the little man's gun. For a moment he couldn't do anything but stare. And then he came near enough to his senses to call for help.

"Hey, don't!" Tim said, realizing that instead of merely pointing a gun at Hornaday he should have warned the man not to utter a sound.

Footsteps sounded in the hall outside the living-room door. Tim knew that he would have to move now and fast. He darted across the room to kick Hornaday's gun beyond reach. He heard the rattle of a doorknob and immediately ducked around behind Hornaday's big chair. Peeking around the back of the chair, Tim saw Hornaday's bodyguard come into the room. The man was massive. He moved with the grace and speed of a dredging engine. He stared bewilderedly around the room and at Mr. Hornaday.

"What's the matter with you, Boss?" he asked, his small dull eyes on the lean figure of Mr. Julian Hornaday.

"Matter? Matter enough! The fiend! The damned little fiend. Get him! Don't stand there goggling!"

Hornaday pointed at the chair behind which Tim was hiding. The bodyguard, not quite clear as to what he was expected to face, advanced cautiously with his gun drawn. He didn't see anything. It would have been impossible for him to have seen Tim because of the shadows and because the little man was pressed tight up against the back of the chair.

"The devil's behind the chair!" Hornaday yelled. "Look out! He's dangerous! No doubt at all but what he's after me. Wants to murder me as he murdered Barton Clay and Frank Dyer."

The bodyguard looked at Hornaday. He blinked his eyes.

"Where, Boss?"

And that was when Tiny Tim Terry went into action. He shoved forward on the chair with both hands. The chair unexpectedly caught the bodyguard at knee height. The big man fell forward, both hands going out straight in front of him. His grasping hands

missed the top of the chair back. He folded forward, arms, head and neck over the chair back.

Down there in the shadows, he saw not a dragon, which he might have expected from Hornaday's warning, but what appeared to be a child dressed in man's clothes and carrying a man's gun. Had he met a crouching gunman, it was entirely possible that he would have conducted himself a bit differently. But what he did now was not to his credit. He simply stared at just handed that big egg, you'd better be good!" he piped.

MR. HORNADAY stared at his fallen Goliath and then raised trembling hands above his head.

"Don't hurt me," he pleaded. If he had had a mirror in which to view this situation he might have realized the absurdity of it. "Don't torture me. Don't kill me, please. The key—you'll find it in the tobacco jar over there on the table."

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Tim and asked what the hell this was —some sort of a kiddie game, huh?

Tim got mad at that. He raised his gun in both hands, stood on tiptoe, brought the gun barrel hacking down to the center of the bodyguard's forehead. The bodyguard stiffened, rolled sideward, and plunked woodenly to the floor.

Tiny Tim danced from behind the chair and brought Mr. Hornaday under the watchful eye of his gun.

"If you don't want more of what I

"That's just fine," Tim said. "That's very fine indeed. Only you've got a lot of wrong notions. I'm not a murderer—not so long as people do what I say, anyway."

He walked toward the thin, trembling Mr. Hornaday. He held his automatic in his right hand while his left went to his pocket to procure a loaded hypodermic needle which the Ghost had given him. A shot of the stuff would knock a man out at once and painlessly, producing a period of

oblivion of about ten or fifteen minutes.

Tiny Tim came within striking distance of the trembling Hornaday and jabbed the needle into Hornaday's thigh. Hornaday took two faltering steps backward. Then his bony knees hinged. His lean body all but clattered, striking the floor.

Tim shoved his automatic into his pocket and strutted out to find the front door in order to admit the Ghost.

CHAPTER XVI

Alias the Miser

NO one could have done better than Tim had done.

"You're dynamite, Tim," I said as I came into the living room of the Hornaday house and saw the two men stretched out on the floor.

"Nothing at all, Ghost," Tim said. "I had all the breaks. When the big lug came into the room, I thought I'd pass out. It was tough getting him down to where I could hit him."

I chuckled as I went to work on Hornaday and his bodyguard. Strong silk cord from my pocket was what I used to bind the two men. Then behind shaded windows I went to work to reproduce Julian Hornaday's dyspeptic face with my own features as a foundation. I had brought with me a gray toupee which duplicated Hornaday's hair close enough. As for Hornaday's clothes, there was nothing much I could do in that direction. The man's shoulders were entirely too narrow, and if I had put on one of his coats I wouldn't have been able to move my arms.

I examined the results of my facial makeup in the mirror and decided that in the dim light, which seemed to be about the only kind you could get in the miser's dingy house, I was passably like Julian himself.

"You look good enough," Tiny Tim said gravely. "I might even say perfect. Now what do we do?"

"You," I said as I added a final wrinkle between my eyebrows, "will have to get out of here. If I'm expecting visitors, I can't run the risk of your being on hand. Because the lad I'm hoping will visit me is not exactly a gentleman."

Tim looked at me reproachfully.

"I might be able to help, Ghost," he said.

"Help?" I stooped to put a hand on Tim's shoulder. "Tim, you've helped me tonight where no one else in the world could have helped me. But if I have to pull a ghost act and the criminal audience happens to find you around, the audience might get the idea that the Ghost and George Chance are one and the same. You understand that, don't you?"

Tim pulled his jaunty hat well over his eyes and left the house.

My first job was to revive Julian Hornaday. Why? Simply because while I had feasted my eyes on Julian's beautiful countenance long enough to be able to impersonate his appearance, I had never heard the man speak. I sat Hornaday in a chair and it wasn't long before he came out of his doped trance.

The drug which Tim had used on Hornaday hasn't a very long hangover. Nevertheless, I think Hornaday must have thought himself drunk when he came to and saw a likeness of himself standing in front of him. His first impression was that it was all done with mirrors, I believe, for he looked at my face for awhile and then down at my dark suit, finally looking at his own gray trousers and maroon smoking jacket. No, mirrors could not be the explanation, he must have decided.

JULIAN HORNADAY'S jaw dropped. Sweat came out on his high forehead. He fumbled for a handkerchief and blew noisily into it.

"No," he said, trying to convince

himself about something.

"Yes," I contradicted, my voice now an echo of his own. "Yes, Mr. Hornaday. The age of miracles has not yet passed. Don't you know who I am?"

"I never had a brother," Hornaday denied. "Twin or otherwise. I don't believe in you."

"I'm the Ghost," I told him. "I want to help you, and this seemed to be the only way I could do it. I came in here and found you and your bodyguard pretty well tied up."

Which was true enough and certainly implied no connection between Tiny Tim Terry and the Ghost.

"You're not a whole lot of help," Hornaday said. "I'm still tied up."

"That," I told him, "is because I wasn't expecting to get any cooperation from you. Some people refuse to be helped. You know your life is in the gravest danger?"

Hornaday nodded slowly.

"That damned Emery Faust. I know why he remembered me in his will now. It was because he hated me. He left me one of those damned brass keys just so that someone would try and murder me for it."

"I think you're just about right," I said. "Have you any idea why some person would want to get hold of the brass keys?"

"None whatever. They are probably valueless. I happen to know something about Emery Faust that probably no one else knows."

"And what's that?"

"That he was broke," Hornaday said. "Four months ago he came to me wanting money. He tried sobbing on my shoulder, recalled old times and how he and I had always been enemies, but now that we were both getting older didn't I think we ought to become friends?"

Hornaday uttered a sharp, harsh laugh that was entirely without humor.

"Friends! And look what he did to my good right hand!" He held up his maimed hand. "And look into my face. The prison sentence he framed me with is indelibly written in my face."

Hornaday leaned as far forward in his chair as his bonds would permit.

"Look here, I don't know who you are or what you are. I don't know what you intend to do with me. Only if you've really come to help me, for God's sake get me out of here. Frank Dyer is dead. The papers say that he was walking in his sleep and fell from the roof of a building, or something else equally absurd. He was murdered. I know he was murdered!"

"HOW do you know?" I asked. The captive drew a deep breath.

"I just know. It's those damned brass keys. They're not safe to have around. And yet if I threw mine away, what good would it do, since this murdering devil kills even after he gets hold of the keys? And Barton Clay was murdered, too. There are others who have brass keys. One of them, a Chinese by the name of Henry Fu Chang, called me on the phone the other day and proposed that all owners of brass keys get together and compare notes."

"You didn't go," I said.

"I didn't. How did I know but what the Chinese was arranging some sort of a meeting where he could get all the brass keys together and then kill us off for the possession of them?"

I hadn't given that much thought—not with Henry Fu Chang as the culprit, anyway. Somehow the fat little Chinese didn't impress me as being the murderous sort. Carter Nash might murder, Nell Lafevre might murder, even Hornaday looked as though he was capable of some dirty work—but not Mr. Fu Chang.

"You wouldn't, then, object to handing over your brass key to me?" I asked.

Hornaday eyed me suspiciously. He was afraid again—afraid that I was the collector of brass keys. He didn't answer.

I walked over to Hornaday's tobacco

jar, lifted the cover, felt around in the shaggy tobacco within, located his brass key.

Hornaday cursed softly.

"Who are you?" he whispered tensely. "You seem to know my own mind."

I laughed. "The Ghost knows quite a bit," I said mysteriously. Why spoil the show by telling him that Tiny Tim had told me the location of the key before he had left?

I looked at the brass key. It might have been made from a Yale blank aside from the fact that it was brass. One curious thing about it was that in the long guide groove that extended the length of the key blade six letters were engraved minutely:

HUDSON

I put the key into my pocket. Hornaday, in the chair at the other side of the room, struggled against his silk bonds.

"Don't worry," I said. "If this thing has any value, I'll see that you get it back."

I walked over to Hornaday and picked him up. He wasn't much of a load. I carried him into his somber bedroom and put him down on the bed. Then I proceeded to gag him.

That done, I returned for the bodyguard who was showing signs of coming to his senses. He was a bigger load than Hornaday, but I managed to drag him into the bedroom and gag him in similar fashion.

I WENT back into the living room and sat down. I took another look at Julian Hornaday's brass key and then put it inside a secret locking flap of my cigarette case. In magical performances I had frequently concealed a card behind that flap and handed out the case for examination. If a critical audience had failed to find it, it wasn't likely that any of the Ghost's criminal playmates would be apt to discover the secret of the case.

There were two ways in which I might hope to encounter the murderer. One was to sit patiently in the Hornaday house with the front door open and wait for the killer to turn up. Another was to go out and hope that the Hornaday house was being watched so that I would be shadowed. I decided on the latter.

I made a great show of turning on the light in the front hall and also on the porch. Then I went out the front door, taking plenty of time about it so that my features — or should I say Hornaday's features—were clearly illuminated by the porch light.

Across Waverly Place, a man was leaning up against a lamp post, smoking end on end cigarettes. Maybe he was watching the Hornaday house. Then again he might simply be one of those lads who enjoy holding up a lamp post.

I crossed the street, skirting the lamp post by about ten feet, and turned south, walking slowly. Again I had given any possible watcher plenty of opportunity to get a look at my face. I was gratified by the sound of hard heels on the pavement. The Hornaday house had been watched, probably for several days.

Half a block ahead of me, I saw another man who was leaning up against the brick front of a building, apparently interested in something across the street. The man behind me coughed. It was a signal. The man in front of me left his building, started walking toward me. I stopped, half turned, just as Mr. Hornaday might have done if afraid.

I got to the curb, made as if to run across the street. But I didn't try too hard! I was grasped by both arms. A harsh voice said:

"Listen, old geezer, we like you better cooped up in your dump. Let's go home, huh?"

"What do you two men want?" I quavered in Hornaday's voice. "You let me go or I'll call the police!"

"Don't be like that, old geezer," the

man with the harsh voice said. "You got any idea what it's like to be dead?"

The snout of a gun was thrust into my side. And for once in my life I didn't care at all!

CHAPTER XVII

Trial by Fire

MY two escorts didn't show much of their faces until we were beneath the porch light. Then I saw that the man with the harsh voice was young and hungry-looking, with eyes that were wide, blue, and expressionless.

The other man was short and square-shouldered. The untrimmed hair at the back of his neck brushed the soiled top of his collar.

We went into the living room of the house. I was told to sit down. The young man with the glass-blue eyes went at once to the phone.

"What do you men want?" I whimpered in Hornaday's voice.

"Never mind," said the younger of the two as he dialed the phone.

There was ominous silence until the buzz of the phone stopped and a loud voice on the other end of the line said hello.

"Boss," the man with the glass-blue eyes said, "we're in the house. The old geezer hasn't given any trouble up to now. You coming in on this, or do you expect me and Al to do the dirty work?"

I couldn't hear the answer of the man addressed as "boss." The young man hung up and said to the other:

"We wait."

That, I thought, would be very nice. Perhaps now I would see the face of the murderer—a face that up to now had been as the face of the Gorgon, bringing sure death to all who saw it.

We waited. We waited for forty-five minutes. And I didn't take a single deep breath in all that time. You see, I was worried about Hornaday and his bodyguard in the next room. Any kind of sound, such as the creak of a bed or a low groan, would have been enough to cause my captors to investigate.

And then the front door opened and Mike Pannard came into the room—Mike Pannard of the gray face, the insignificant nose, the cruel steel-gray slots of eyes. I hadn't seen Pannard since the night he had led the attack on the Faust house, and neither had the police. I would have given a good deal to have known exactly what telephone number the young man with the glass-blue eyes had called in order to get hold of Pannard.

Mike was wearing a blue serge suit and a perfectly unnecessary topcoat that was turned up at the collar. His pearl gray hat was turned up at the brim so that his rather wide face was boldly displayed.

Mike pulled a footstool up in front of the chair in which I had been forced to sit. He got astride the stool and sat there a moment, examining my face with his slots of eyes.

"You're in a hole, Hornaday," Mike said quietly. "I guess you know that. But it's pretty damned easy for you to get out of it. All you've got to do is pass over that brass key that Emery Faust left you. You do that and forget you ever saw any of us and I don't think we'll hurt you."

I shook my head.

"You expect me to believe that?" I asked in Hornaday's voice. "After what happened to Clay and Dyer? You killed them after you got their keys. You don't think I'm a big enough fool to hand the key over to you, do you?"

MIKE didn't say anything for a few moments. His narrow eyes kept boring into my face. I had faith in my makeup. The only flaw in it at all was the fact that my right

hand was not maimed as Hornaday's was, and you can be sure that I kept my right hand hidden in my pocket.

"You got a lot of screwy notions under that mop of gray hair, Hornaday," Mike Pannard said. "One of those screwy notions is that we'll let you live just as long as you don't tell where that brass key is."

Mike stood up, stuck his hands in his hip pockets. His coat hung down across his wrists in back like the tail of a wet rooster.

"Maybe you're right, old man. Maybe we won't kill you. But maybe after we're through with you, you'd rather be dead than alive."

Mike walked across the room to a door, pushed it open, saw that the kitchen was beyond. He crossed the kitchen and I heard the opening of another door. Then he returned to the living room and said to his two henchmen:

"You bring Mr. Hornaday down into the basement. He can yell his head off down there."

I cringed. I clutched the arms of the chair.

"No!" I said. "I won't go. You just want to torture me. You want to torture a man old enough to be your father!"

"Old enough, maybe," Mike said, "but my old man would sure have enough sense under his hat to know when he was licked. You coming across with the key or are you going to listen to the sizzle of your own hide?"

"No! I won't tell you where the key is. You'll kill me!"

As I said this, I thought I heard the patter of footsteps somewhere in the lower part of the house. I couldn't be sure at the moment, because the young man with the glass-blue eyes chimed in just then with a bit of advice.

"Listen, old geezer," he said, "there ain't nothing in the world worth holding out against the sort of torture Mike hands out. He'll burn your creepers clear off to your ankles."

Mike Pannard spread his hands in a gesture that said plainly that he was doing all the talking during this act.

"Let Mr. Hornaday make his own decisions, Eddie. Don't you see he likes to have his feet burned? He's looking forward to it, understand? If that's what he wants, bring him along down into the basement."

Struggling with about as much strength as I thought the gaunt Julian Hornaday could have mustered, I was dragged down the basement and into a combination furnace and laundry room. Mike Pannard kicked a wood box up alongside a gas hot-plate and I was made to sit down.

THE man Pannard called Eddie removed my right shoe and sock. Mike lit the gas hot-plate. The young man called Eddie lifted my bare foot toward the gas flame.

"Just a minute," I said.

"Wait, Eddie," Mike Pannard ordered. "Maybe Mr. Hornaday would like to change his mind. There's no use to be stubborn about this, Mr. Hornaday."

"If you would tell me why you want the brass key, maybe I'd hand it over to you," I said.

"You're in a hell of a position to bargain. On with the heat, Eddie."

Eddie started toward me again. I lifted my bare foot before he could reach me and put it into the gas flame. I said in a conversational tone:

"I don't think this is going to do much good, do you?"

You see, it wasn't the first time that the Ghost's underworld playmates had tried torture by fire, and I was pretty well prepared for such things. The soles of the feet are the pet torture areas of such men, but I had succeeded, by my own special and regular treatment, in making mine sufficiently calloused to be at least temporarily impervious to pain caused by heat or fire.

I leaned forward toward the stove, my foot still resting in the "cool" part

of the gas flame, near the burner. I drew my right hand from my pocket. Between my thumb and first finger I held a small ball of solid camphor. I reached out, lighted the camphor in the flame, quickly tossed the blazing ball into my mouth.

Closing my mouth tightly extinguished the flame. But immediately I raised my left hand to my left ear and there, to all appearances, reproduced the ball of fire. This was accomplished by means of what the old fire kings of the circus knew as "Demon Light"—a wad of flash paper containing a powdered chemical and a capsule of acid. Breaking the enclosed capsule caused the flash paper to burst into flame.

Mike Pannard and his two henchmen backed away from me as though I were poison. I calmly took my bare foot out of the gas flame—it was becoming uncomfortably warm — and thrust it into my shoe.

"I have the brass key in my pocket," I said, "but I don't think any of you would care to come and get it."

"Mike!" Eddie said, pointing a quivering forefinger at me, "that old geezer ain't Hornaday. Look at his right hand!"

The short square man called Al pulled his gun. Perhaps my fire eating act had given him the idea that he was facing the Ghost. Anyway, you could tell that he didn't like me at all.

My faithful little throwing knife dropped from my sleeve into my right hand, became a thrusting ray of silvery light that flickered across the room unerringly to Al's right shoulder. Al dropped his gun and his right hand went up to the hasp of the knife. He pulled it out, stared at the blood, dropped the knife, ran toward the stair.

"The Ghost!" Al yelled.

UNDOUBTEDLY my knife-throwing ability had identified me, and while Al might have been a holy terror in a gun war, he wasn't anxious to match his art against the Ghost.

I had no sooner thrown the knife than I was out after Mike Pannard. Somehow I didn't think he was the murderer, but if he knew what the brass keys were for, he knew something that I wanted to know pretty badly.

So I rushed Mike Pannard. Mike was fast on the draw. His gun was out of his shoulder holster by the time he and I went into a clinch. I got his gun wrist in my grip, thrust his arm upward. He let go with a short left jab that took me in the middle. That jab hurt. I tried a fast one for his jaw that snapped his head back but didn't have enough of what it takes for a knockout. And then there was a disconcerting movement from across the room. I wheeled Pannard around, still keeping his gun up where it couldn't do much damage, saw a small hand and a blue steel automatic jutting over the rim of a laundry tub.

Tiny Tim Terry! The little devil hadn't done what I had told him to do. Afterward, when the smoke of battle had cleared a bit, I realized that I owed my life to his disobedience. You see, this young man with the cold blue eyes—the lad called Eddie—was on the other side of the room and quite calmly taking a killer's aim at my head. If Tim had fired a split second later than he did, or if he had failed to make his mark, I'd have been the wrong kind of a ghost for sure.

The two shots came one on top of the other—Tim's to knock Eddie's right leg out from under him and spoil Eddie's aim, Eddie's to whine past my ear and clip concrete out of the wall on the other side of the room.

Mike Pannard was evidently a man who thought it not only more blessed but a whole lot safer to give than to receive. That shot of Tim's, coming from where it seemed impossible for it to come, gave Mike a nice case of jitters. He squirmed desperately out of my grasp, got in a hacking blow with

his gun that almost took my ear off.

Then he raced across the room, knocking out the dangling light bulb. In the dark, Tim must have jack-in-the-boxed out of his protecting wash tub, because it was Tim I fell over in trying to catch up with Mike as he gained the basement stairs.

By the time I could pick myself up and follow up the steps, Mike had got through the back door of the house and was well on his way. Where he went after that was one of those things. Certainly I didn't find him in the close little court at the back of the house.

Tim came toddling up behind me.

"How was I?" he panted.

"You," I said, "were pretty much okay, Tim. You hang around here and see that Julian Hornaday doesn't get out. Because I've got some more of this play-acting to do."

You see, according to what old Hornaday had said, Henry Fu Chang had been trying to get Hornaday to leave his house and join with the other heirs in conference. Though I still couldn't picture the fat Chinese gentleman as a murderer, I had been fooled before. It was possible that Fu Chang had simply called Hornaday with the idea of getting him out of the house so that he would be vulnerable. Fu Chang might not be the murderer, but he might be a tool of the murderer.

CHAPTER XVIII

Pannard's Hood

EDDIE came creeping up the basement steps like a maimed fly. He had his gun in his hand and he looked both ways before he stepped out the back door. He didn't, however, look far enough to the left where I was flattened against the side of the house, all but invisible in the thick shadows.

I tapped Eddie on the head with the butt of my automatic, caught him before he could fall, got him onto my shoulder, carried him out into the deserted street. At a police call box I got rid of him. I simply handcuffed one of his wrists, linking the other end of the bracelets to the support of the police box.

I knew some officer would pick him up, and I intended phoning Standish about the man so that Standish could see that he was put on the grill. I doubted a whole lot if he knew why Mike Pannard wanted the brass keys, but in a muddled maze like this it didn't pay to leave any stones unturned. There was certainly the hope that Eddie might reveal his boss' hideout.

That done, I discovered Henry Fu Chang's Bayard Street address in a drugstore telephone directory. Apparently his place of business and his residence were one and the same.

My disguise was perfect for this visit to Fu Chang. As Julian Hornaday, Fu Chang would be apt to welcome me on one of two counts—either as a fellow fugitive from a murderous key collector or, if Fu Chang happened to be the killer, as a prospective victim.

A taxi dropped me off in Bayard Street, and I walked along for a block or so before I sighted Fu Chang's place. In a row of dingy shops and lodging houses, Fu Chang's was the darkest and had the dustiest window. His name appeared in red on the window, and beneath it the words:

Oriental Importations

Wholesale

Beyond this window was an office, but the only light to acquaint me with that fact was that which filtered in from the street.

Hardly two feet separated this building from its neighbor on the corner. I ducked into this narrow avenue and made my way toward the

back. No light showed anywhere. I came upon a door at the side and tried the knob. The door was unlocked. I opened it, stepped into total darkness, closed the door behind me.

I flicked the beam of my pen-light about me for just an instant. I was in a small entry way with one wall and three doors, one of which I had just passed through. I opened the door directly in front of me. A ray of light showed me a store room filled with those curiously wrapped boxes that characterize shipments from the Orient.

I closed this door, opened the one to my left, flashed my light on a stairway and then turned the light off instantly. Somewhere on the floor above sounded a deep, bumbling voice.

ONCE before I had heard that voice. It was artificially deep and muffled, as though consciously disguised. I had heard it at my back the night I had visited the Faust house and discovered the bloody wrench in the garage drain. It was the voice of the man who had pushed me down the basement steps, who had stolen three of the brass keys from my pocket. Was it the voice of the murdering key collector?

Murderer or not, I had a score to settle with him.

Light in one hand, automatic in the other, I tiptoed up the steps.

"There is no escape, Fu Chang," I heard the voice whisper. "You know what happened to Barton Clay and Frank Dyer. The same thing can happen to you. And yet you can easily avoid a similar fate."

There was no answer from Fu Chang.

I gained the top of the steps. I didn't dare show a light. I waited until the voice of the killer sounded again. Because this man *was* the murderer! This was the man who boasted of killing Clay and Dyer. This was the man who had shoved me down the steps at the Faust house.

"Make it easy for yourself," the voice urged. "I am standing beside this little table. Bring the key that Faust left you to this table. Put it on the table and then go into the next room and count to a hundred. Then, Fu Chang, you will still be alive and quite able to call the police. Small good that would do!"

"I make no bargains with murderers," Fu Chang spoke from the darkness close to where I stood.

I took three steps in the direction of Chang's voice. In the darkness I tried to locate the killer. On the other side of the room was a window, heavily curtained. But through the gap between the curtains stretched a feeble ray of light from the outside. It was this ray of light that showed me the dusky figure of the killer.

It revealed no distinguishing feature. I could not have given even a general description of his appearance. I simply knew that across the room from me stood a man who had murdered ruthlessly.

I took a step toward the killer. No use denying that my pulse hadn't jumped to a new high. Neither magic nor my knife were apt to be of much service to me now. I had to depend on my little automatic, and with a well lighted target I am none too accurate a shot. What chance had I of shooting at the sound of a voice or at a veritable shadow of a man?

I took another step forward and my toe encountered an article of furniture that moved complainingly on the floor. The killer heard the sound.

"I warned you not to move," said that deep, unemotional voice. "I tell you you cannot escape me."

MY hand went out to the piece of furniture I had touched. It was a small table. There was a lamp on it. My fingers found the lamp switch. For a moment I hesitated. Light was the thing I wanted most, even though it might target me for the killer. I got some consolation in the

possible fact that the killer might be even a worse shot than I. Certainly he hadn't employed firearms in any of his murders. Then there was that idea that Julian Hornaday had harped on—the fact that the killer wouldn't be apt to murder until he had put his hand on his victim's brass key. I decided to risk the light.

I pressed the light switch. There was a faint click. Nothing more. I understood then why Fu Chang had been caught in the dark. The killer had evidently pulled the electric switch or possibly a fuse, before attacking the Chinese.

Light, then, was the thing that the killer feared most. So light was what I gave him—a flameless ray from my flashlight, and yet it was the spark that ignited dynamite! The killer threw his left arm up over his face, the strangest gesture I have ever seen—strange, because I was almost certain that he already was protected by a black domino mask. And at the same time he started shooting from his hip—a withering blast of unaimed gun fire that filled the air with the deadly poison of whining slugs!

Some one grabbed my left arm. It was Fu Chang. Afterward I learned that the Chinese had been warned that it was sure death to show a light and in his terror he sought to quench that ray that was intended to mark the killer for my gunfire. With an unexpected move, Fu Chang twisted the light from my grasp, threw it to the floor. I shoved Chang aside, took deliberate aim at the center of the gun fireworks on the other side of the room, and placed two quick shots.

There was a pause in the fusillade—but only the pause of an instant. And then it began all over again. The gun on the other side of the room fired eight shots at absolutely regular intervals. I emptied my automatic, was faintly surprised to find myself still alive when the other gun stopped talking. The last echo died. Faintly from the street below came the skirl of a quickly approaching police whistle.

"Chang," I said quietly in Hornaday's voice, "are you still alive?"

"Most happily so," said the Chinese in a terrified voice.

"I think it's over," I said cautiously, and turned my light in the direction of the killer.

A short and entirely inadequate oath exploded from my lips. Not even the profane vocabulary of a sailor could have expressed my feelings at that moment.

CHAPTER XIX

Arrest

CUTTING through thick layers of gun smoke, my light gleamed back at me from the dragons carved on the legs of a teakwood table. On the table was a vase of high brass, a carved jade elephant, a round device that looked something like one of those automatic reels that are used in fly fishing.

Here was the murderer? Well, that was what was worrying me. He wasn't there, dead or alive. No one in the room at all except Henry Fu Chang and one George Chance, alias the Ghost, alias Julian Hornaday.

I picked up the round device that looked like a reel. There was a trigger attached to it and eight holes spaced evenly around the circumference. The holes smelled of cordite, and when I had removed the circular cover I found an empty brass cartridge casing thrust into each hole. The thing contained a small clock-work motor with a striking hammer. The motor revolved the outer ring which contained the cartridges and also operated the hammer.

I'd seen pictures of such devices. They were intended for the sole purpose of scaring off night prowlers, and

at a touch of the trigger would fire eight blank cartridges automatically.

Considering the thing for a moment, it wasn't hard to discover what had happened to the murderer. He had set this device on the table, turned it on, walked out of the room, while I concentrated on shooting at harmless noise and flashes.

Fists pounded on the door. I turned to Henry Fu Chang. His moon of a face was gleaming with the sweat of fear.

"Mr. Julian Hornaday—" he began, forgetting his bow.

"If that's the police at the door," I cut in, "send them away. You and I have to talk."

"But the shooting? How can I explain that?"

"Some of your imported firecrackers exploded," I said. "Everything is now under control."

Fu Chang went to the door, opened it a little way. A cop in uniform stood outside. He wanted to know what all the racket was, and Fu Chang fed him the line about the firecrackers. The cop didn't look satisfied, and I knew that he would be keeping a watch on the house from the outside, but there was no way he could legally force his way in without a warrant.

When the Chinese was rid of the cop and the door closed, Fu Chang turned to me.

"It had not penetrated this thick skull of mine until now, but I realize I am indebted to you for my worthless life."

I nodded, for I had observed no modesty in the makeup of Julian Hornaday.

"This little adventure with the murderous key collector seems to prove two things," I said. "First that the killer works alone and therefore would not think of tackling more than one victim at a time. Second, that he is afraid of light. I think if you had not interfered when you did, we might have bagged the devil."

"I am an ass," Henry Fu Chang said. "But I do not understand how the man vanished."

I EXPLAINED to the Chinese the blank cartridge device by means of which the killer had held my attention and concentrated my fire, and then put the device into my pocket. It was something which the Ghost could use very nicely.

"I am afraid that I made a mistake in not accepting your invitation to talk over these brass keys in the beginning," I confessed for Julian Hornaday. "Do you suppose the keys have any real value?"

"Inestimable value," Fu Chang said quietly. "Please be seated, Mr. Hornaday. We will talk."

And talk we did. Fu Chang clung stubbornly to the idea that Emery Faust had been rich and that there was nothing to explain what had happened to his money except the brass keys. He was of the opinion that the six brass keys together would unlock some sort of a treasury, the contents of which was intended for Faust's heirs. This was entirely out of keeping with Faust's character, it seemed to me, but this Fu Chang was a forgiving soul who possessed the idea that Faust had regretted his misdeeds and hoped to make amends for them.

I gained Fu Chang's confidence, got him to show me his key which I kept in my possession only long enough to make secretly an impression of the key blade in a cake of magicians' wax. That done, I had complete records of how four of the brass keys had been made and originals of the other two keys. The murderer, to the best of my knowledge, had only three of these keys. How to use them was the problem that had faced me continually from the beginning of the mystery.

I advised Fu Chang to seek police protection at once, and then left for the Ghost's rectory. I felt intuitively that the mystery was beginning to unravel.

As I was opening the door of the

rectory basement I heard the telephone ringing. It was answered immediately and the person who answered it was Merry White. I entered the room, glanced at the clock, saw that it was not yet midnight. She should have been at Lafevre's supper club.

Merry listened closely for a moment.

"He isn't here, Tim," she said. "And I don't like him running around disguised as somebody who might turn into a corpse any minute."

I walked quietly up behind Merry.

"Well, I'll tell him when he comes in, Tim. What do you suppose happened to them?" She hung up then and I put both hands on her shoulders. She turned quickly, startled a little by my appearance, then threw both arms around my neck and snuggled her head on my chest.

"I hope it's you. I hope it is, but if it isn't, this will sure do nicely until you really come."

I ASKED her what Tim wanted.

"Oh, he wanted me to tell you that Mr. Hornaday and his bodyguard escaped. The bodyguard must have been a pretty resourceful person because he cut himself loose with a piece of watch crystal. Tim doesn't think either of them could have been tied up very long."

"Well," I said, "it's of no particular importance. Only thing it does, it prevents us from eliminating Mr. Hornaday from our list of suspects, since I can't be sure where he was when Mr. Fu Chang was having a little trouble with the key collector. What I want to know is what you're doing away from the club at this hour."

"I was fired," she said, moving her copy of Tennyson's poems in order to get closer to me. "Nell thought I was the one who swiped her brass key. Woman's intuition, and it was right this time. But that wasn't it, I don't think. You see, I discovered something that maybe Nell wouldn't want known. She sure doesn't look like Lady Macbeth, does she?"

"What's this?"

"Nell Lafevre and that blond young Wilkins fellow. Tonight they split the insurance money that Wilkins got from Faust's death."

"You mean that?" I grasped Merry's hand hard.

"Sure. I'm one of the best eavesdroppers that ever dripped. Only Nell caught me in the act and she sent me home. She would have smacked my face, only the Wilkins lad did the knightly thing and prevented it. They split the money tonight."

I got up and went to the phone. I called Standish at his office, couldn't get him, tried his apartment with better luck. I told him this new version.

"How about it, Ghost?"

"Arrest the pair, of course," I said. "It's the best lead we've got so far. If they're in this together, there's a chance of getting the truth from one or the other of them. When thieves fall out, you know."

"I'll have that attended to at once. Are you making any progress in any other direction?"

"In probably all directions except the right one," I confessed. "You see, I met the murderer tonight. We shot it out. Only when the smoke cleared away a little, I found that I had been shooting at a teak table in the home of Henry Fu Chang. I don't know when I ever felt so completely up against that well known blank wall of enigma."

And I told Standish of the affair at Fu Chang's.

"One thing, though, we've done a little eliminating, by the process of trail and error," Standish commented.

"Most by error," I said. "We can pretty well eliminate Mike Pannard. He wants the brass keys and probably knows what they're good for, but he's not the sort to tackle anything like this alone. And this murderer was alone. He was out after Fu Chang, and when I showed up disguised as Hornaday and carrying a gun, he decided that two people were too many."

STANDISH was silent a moment. "Probably didn't think you were Hornaday at all, no matter how well you were disguised," he finally said. "You were handling your gun with your right hand, I've no doubt, and Hornaday couldn't very well do that."

I had to admit Standish had some logic there.

"It also eliminates Fu Chang from our list of suspects," I told Standish. "So all in all, perhaps the evening wasn't too poorly spent."

I hung up and returned to where Merry was sitting on the couch. I removed from my pocket the block of wax on which I had taken the impression of Fu Chang's brass key. The key blade looked like the silhouette of a short, fat bullet, or maybe the door of a church.

"They all look like something, don't they?" Merry said. "I mean something besides keys. Why, do you suppose?"

"It's a puzzle," I said. "What do you think of this one?" I showed her the brass key I had taken from Hornaday—the one that looked like a Yale.

She examined it closely.

"It doesn't look like anything unless it would be a bunch of hills on the horizon."

I looked into Merry's sweet face. Hills on the horizon—I snapped my finger.

"Comes the dawn!" I said. "Over the hills on the horizon, comes the dawn!"

I got up, went to the phone, called Standish.

"Sorry to bother you again at this time of night, Ned," I apologized, "but this is important. I wonder if you could see that I got that framed photograph that was on Emery Faust's desk and also the copy of Tennyson's works that was found on the corpse."

"Of course," Standish said. "Tomorrow—"

"I mean tonight," I said.

"Don't you ever sleep?" Standish complained. But he finally agreed to pick up the book and the picture and deliver them at the rectory in person.

"But you don't need a book of Tennyson," Merry said. "I've got one right here. I've read it from beginning to end. There's nothing in it at all that has any bearing on the case."

I went back to the couch, picked up her book of poems, went through it carefully. In the middle of the book was a brown-tone print photograph taken from the portrait of Alfred, Lord Tennyson. I studied it carefully, wondered if I would find such a portrait in the book of poems that Faust's dying fingers had searched for.

There was no rest for the wicked that night. While waiting for Standish to show up, I ran over to my own house, woke Glenn Saunders, put him to work making me a complete set of brass keys. That is, he made duplicates of five of the keys, for I had Hornaday's original keys, and impressions and photographs of the other five.

BY the time I had returned, I found Merry White was entertaining Ned Standish.

"Look here, Ghost," Standish said, looking at me with tired eyes, "I've had about enough of this mystery. If you know who the killer is, I wish you'd tell me."

"I can't tell you," I said. "I'm not sure. But it's all here. You know as much as I do. It's a matter of putting the puzzle together, considering all the clues. First, let's have a look at the book that was found in Faust's hand."

Standish handed me the book of poems. As the commissioner had said, the book showed no signs of use. About half the pages hadn't been cut. We cut them now, though, and I examined each page in turn. I nodded slowly as I came to the end of the book.

"Something's missing," I said. "There's no picture of Tennyson in the book at all. That's what Faust was looking for. Faust wasn't a student of poetry, but he was a collector of paintings. He was looking for a portrait

of Tennyson. And he didn't find it. There's a portrait of Tennyson in this book Merry has, but not in the one that Faust had. But Faust knew enough about paintings and painters to suppose that he might find such a portrait reproduced in this book."

"I don't get it," Ned said.

"Me too," Merry put in. "But of course I'm just a dumb girl. What's this photograph that was on Faust's desk have to do with it?"

I picked up the framed photograph of hills rising above a shore line. I carried it across to the other side of the room, put it on a table. Then I took out the brass key I had taken from Julian Hornaday, held it horizontally in front of my eyes, backed away from the photograph. About seven feet away I made an amazing discovery.

The "bumps" on the key blade corresponded exactly with the hills on the horizon in the photo!

CHAPTER XX

Dead Man's Treasure

YOUNG Stanley Wilkins and Nell Lafevre were brought into the office of Commissioner Edward Standish the following morning. They were not alone. Nell had engaged the shrewd but entirely unprepossessing looking Carter Nash as her attorney. And because Nell had every appearance of a nervous breakdown looking for a place to happen, the soft-spoken Dr. Millais was also with her.

The Ghost was on hand, too, disguised as Dr. Stacey, but he sat quietly in one corner, his Oxford glasses pinched upon his nose, looking, I hope, intelligent.

Nash pulled at his ugly lower lip while Standish was talking. Dr. Millais stroked Nell Lafevre's hand, tried to calm her down. I didn't think that Nell's state of nerves was the result of anything but anger. Her skin was thick as well as beautiful.

Standish leaned across his desk, his bunchy brows drawn together above his close-set eyes. He drilled Nell and young Wilkins with his glance.

"But you can't deny that the money Mr. Wilkins realized from the death of Emery Faust has been divided between you two," Standish said. "You understand the grave situation that puts you both in?"

"Nothing of the sort," Nash said. "You're jumping at conclusions, Commissioner. You're considering Faust's life insurance as the only possible spoils from the murder of Faust. What about these brass keys? Someone certainly puts a good deal of value on the keys. Someone entered my house and stole mine."

"For which you can thank your lucky stars," Standish said. "Because if your key hadn't been stolen quietly, it's entirely possible you'd have been tortured into giving it up. All of which is beside the point." He turned to Wilkins.

"And you still deny any connection with Emery Faust? You deny that you and he plotted originally to fake Faust's death, collect on the insurance, and split it between you?"

Wilkins knotted his fingers.

"I repeat that until the insurance money was paid over to me on Mr. Faust's death, I was entirely ignorant that he had named me beneficiary. And I might add that what I did with the money is entirely my own business, to put it bluntly."

"Don't, Stan," Nell Lafevre said. "You can't get tough with these cops."

"Please, Miss Lafevre," Dr. Millais said softly. "Don't excite yourself."

"Shut up, Millais," Nell said tartly. "I'm not exciting myself. I just happen to know when I've reached the end of my rope. I'm going to make a clean breast of things."

NELL LAFEVRE took a long breath. The blue shadows around her eyes weren't the result of makeup. I studied her face carefully. There were certain sensitive lines around her mouth and nose which I had never noticed before. It was as though that mask of artificiality, that veneer of sophistication with which she armor-plated herself, had fallen away. She looked tired and a little old.

"I killed Emery Faust," she said. "And I have no better reason than that I was once married to him. You can't know what that means, but it's motive enough for anybody to kill him."

I interrupted. "You don't by any chance think that Stanley Wilkins killed Faust, do you, Miss Lafevre?"

She looked at me sharply. Stanley Wilkins got out of his chair, came over and put a hand on Nell's shoulder.

"Please —" Wilkins whispered. "You know that isn't true. You know you couldn't have killed him. You were at the club when Faust was killed. You can find any number of witnesses to prove it."

"And," I said, "Wilkins couldn't have been the murderer either. Dr. Millais and Dr. Demarest both are of the opinion that Wilkin's was quite thoroughly knocked out at the time of the murder. That true, Millais?"

"I came to that conclusion," Millais said, looking owlishly at me.

"There is a certain marked resemblance between you and Wilkins," I said to Nell Lafevre. "I hadn't noticed it before."

Wilkins laughed tautly.

"There should be," he said. "She's my mother. And I didn't know it until last night, but Emery Faust was my father. Mother never wanted me to know, but I came to that conclusion last night. That's why I was named beneficiary in his insurance."

"Is that true, Miss Lafevre?" Standish prodded.

Nell nodded slowly.

"The only decent thing Emery Faust ever did. You see, he discovered he had what was in his case an incurable disease—cancer of the stomach. He knew he was going to die soon, but just how soon he didn't know. He put his last penny into life insurance, hoping to die a natural death before it became impossible for him to pay the regular premiums."

"Is that possible?" Standish asked, addressing Millais.

"Entirely so, Commissioner. Cancer of the stomach is difficult to detect without X-ray examination. Faust fooled the insurance doctors into thinking he was a pretty good risk, in spite of his age."

"That," Nell explained, "must have been the reason why Emery faked his own death in the train accident. Suicide was impossible, of course, if he expected Stan to get the money. You might have called it a decent gesture on Faust's part, I suppose."

[*Turn page*]

"Hardly," Standish said, "inasmuch as in order to fake his own death, Faust murdered his servant to do so. That isn't being exactly decent."

NASH interrupted.

"I believe that Miss Lafevre can retract her confession, especially since it wouldn't be at all difficult to prove it false. And there really aren't any grounds on which you can hold either Miss Lafevre or her son, are there, Commissioner?"

"Standish was silent a moment. I knew how he hated to give up. Yet, by accusing Wilkins and Nell of murder, he had brought certain things to light that might not have otherwise been revealed.

"You can go," he said, waving his hand at the door.

When Millais, Nash, Nell and Wilkins had left, Standish turned to me:

"Joe Harper called me and told me to tell you he wanted to meet you this noon at the Hotel Girard. He didn't say what was up his sleeve. Have you come to any conclusions?"

"Quite a few," I said. "This little interview this morning was enlightening. I want it repeated tomorrow morning. It's most important. Have the same people, plus Fu Chang and Hornaday and Pannard. I want them all—absolutely every one of them."

"We don't have to go to Chang and Hornaday," Standish said. "They've come to us—for police protection. If it's humanly possible to get Pannard, we'll get him too. Things are coming to a head, eh?"

"They are," I said.

I left Standish, went to the Hotel Girard. Joe Harper was waiting for me in the lobby. Familiar with my alias of Dr. Stacey, he had no difficulty in picking me out of the crowd. We went into the grill for a quick lunch.

"That key I swiped from Nash," Joe confided quietly, "put me on the trail of something. I happened to remember an old gent who used to make pineapples and the like for some of our best hoodlums. I called on him, and I'm pretty damn sure he recognized Nash's key. I put the pressure on him. I did everything that was legal and some things that weren't, but he wouldn't come across with the truth. I think he made that key and probably the others. I think he designed the lock. If you'd give him a shot of truth serum and the third degree, we might find out where the door is that can be unlocked with the keys, and maybe some more stuff about this dead man's treasure."

I shook my head, smiled at Joe's lean, wolfish face.

"It won't be necessary, Joe. I think we can find the place easily enough on our own hook. You see, the keys themselves give the location of the dead man's treasure!"

"I'll be damned!" Joe said. "And I've worn my legs off to the knees trying to find this locksmith. Maybe I took my life into my hands, I don't know. Anyway, I was followed last night by a hard-looking number. And then when I get the dope, all ready to pass it over to you, you say no thanks. That is sure a rotten brand of gratitude."

"How'd you like to take a run up the Hudson with me?" I asked Joe. "I may be entirely wrong, but I've got a hunch that we'll find Emery Faust's treasure house."

JOE'S black eyes glittered in the shadow of his green hat brim.

"If," he said, "treasure is to be taken as accumulated wealth, I think I could be fascinated strangely by your proposal."

"I don't think you can definitely count on the wealth part of it," I said. "From what I get, Emery Faust was broke. I think he went broke on that dope deal he tried to pull off shortly before his death."

"I'm still interested," Joe said, pushing back from the table. "Shall I struggle with you over the check, just for appearances' sake?"

CHAPTER XXI

The Door with Six Locks

UP into Westchester along the Hudson past Ossining, Joe and I drove. We kept our eyes on the palisades on the Jersey side, since it was obvious that the shoreline photo that had stood on Faust's desk represented these hills. You will remember that the word "Hudson" had been engraved in the guide of Hornaday's brass key.

We didn't make very good time. Every now and then we'd come to a place which looked a good deal like the picture, but a careful comparison would prove we were wrong. It wasn't until we were up as far as Verplank and looking across in the general direction of Topkins Cove, that we found a horizon scalloped with peaks and corresponding exactly with the photograph and also the edge of the key. A notch on the edge of the key indicated the exact position of a road that wound up through a corresponding notch between two hills.

"So what?" Joe asked, as he gazed on our find without enthusiasm. "What do we do now? Swim the Hudson?"

"We don't. We drive up to Bear Mountain Bridge and across and back on the Jersey side until we reach that winding road we can see from here. I've a hunch the brass keys will carry us on from there."

My hunch was right. When we had again found the winding road up through the hills, we didn't have far to go before we came to a driveway leading up to the right. In front of the drive was a gate with two concrete posts topped with stone balls. A silhouette of that gate corresponded exactly with the duplicate of Frank Dyer's key.

The gate was unlocked but we didn't enter at once. Just to be prepared for any eventuality, I thought it would be wise to wait until dark before Joe and I went farther. We had no idea what we might meet at the other end of our trail. Also I couldn't very well run the risk of meeting a whole lot of action in the disguise of Dr. Stacey. The good doctor just wasn't the type of person to be giving it and taking it with criminals. The Ghost was the man to handle this job.

So with the coming of darkness, I altered my facial makeup and also did some work on Joe Harper's face, giving him a wide putty nose that hid his own lean beak, darkening his complexion with grease paint. I think almost no one would have recognized Joe without his hat, but I couldn't prevail upon him to give it up.

"After all," he said, as we left the car and started up the drive, "there must be a lot of green hats in this country."

We didn't go very far before we came upon a gray stone house. And here again the first key I had found—that of Barton Clay—gave us our clue. The house had stone battlements about the top, corresponding exactly with the indentations on Clay's key. And as we approached the front door—an arched affair of oak—I saw clearly that this was a silhouette after which the rounded key of Henry Fu Chang had been made.

THE front door was locked, but with an ordinary skeleton lock that yielded readily to one of my master keys. Inside the house we turned on lights, found that it was completely furnished.

"Look at the art work," Joe said, turning his flashlight on paintings that hung on the walls of the living room.

"This place was Faust's all right," I said. "He was hipped on the subject of paintings. But let's see where we go from here."

We searched the house from top to

bottom, but found nothing that gave us any further clue until we once more returned to the living room. There we found a full length portrait of a woman in a hoop skirt. I took out the duplicate of Nell Lafevre's key and came to the conclusion that the blade of it looked a lot more like a woman in hoops than it did like a chessman.

Joe and I took down the picture. It covered an ordinary stock door which opened at a turn of the knob, revealing steps leading downward. Steps—and Joe immediately recognized them as being represented by the blade of the key he had from Carter Nash's safe!

At the bottom of the steps was a door with six locks.

"The saps!" Joe said as we hurried down the steps. "The poor saps! If they'd all got together, they could have worked this thing out themselves. But all the brass key owners seemed to be suspicious of each other. A little cooperation, and whatever is behind this door would have been theirs."

I didn't say anything. It seemed to me that Joe was crowing a little too soon. After all, we didn't know what was on the other side of the door.

The six locks were arranged in a circle in the center of a steel panel. We fitted the keys into the proper locks, one at a time, turning each one. When the last key was inserted and turned, the door opened of its own accord. Joe and I stepped into a totally dark basement room.

Joe, usually cautious enough, rushed in ahead of me. He fell over something, cursed. I stepped in, stooped to pick Joe up. He got to his feet quickly enough, and I turned on my flashlight.

It was a small room. There were shelves on three sides of it and cardboard boxes were stacked on the shelves clear to the ceiling. Joe and I hurried forward, took down one of the boxes, opened it. It contained a package sealed in waxed paper. Joe's trembling fingers ripped the paper apart. White crystaline powder snowed down between his fingers.

Joe looked at me. In the light from the flashlight I could read the disappointment in his face.

"Hop," he said.

"Morphine sulphate," I said, more correctly. "A fortune in the drug stored right here in this room. No wonder Pannard wanted to get in on the brass keys. Pannard's a dope merchant. He must have known that Faust had purchased a large supply of drugs. Faust must have put the biggest part of his fortune into the contents of this room. And then found the Federal agents on his trail, couldn't get rid of the stuff without getting caught."

JOE nodded agreement.

"He stashed the stuff here, intending his heirs to inherit it. But why leave this fortune in drugs to people he hated? I don't get it. It's nuts."

"Not any nuttier than wanting to be murdered," I said.

"Wanting to be murdered?" Joe stared at me. "Are you nuts, too?"

"Maybe. But Faust *did* want to be murdered. He had an incurable disease. He didn't know when he was going to die. But being murdered was better than a slow death. And if Stanley Wilkins, Faust's son, was to cash in on the life insurance, Faust couldn't kill himself. So he made his worst enemies his heirs, hoping that he could goad one of them into killing him. If not, he might taunt Pannard or someone else to do the job. Faust had to die and he had to die before he let his life insurance lapse. And it couldn't be suicide. Faust *wanted* to be murdered!"

"And this," Joe said as he turned around, looking at the walls of the room packed with a fortune in drugs, "is Faust's treasure. This is—"

Joe stopped suddenly. His hand gripped my arm hard. His beetle-

black eyes stared across the room.

"Hell and damn," he said quietly, "who did that?"

I followed Joe's gaze. And as I looked across the room, yet another reason for Faust making his six enemies his heirs came to me. A second panel of steel had closed upon Joe and me—not the door with the six locks, but a second door. And as I looked at the floor in front of the door, I saw what Joe had tripped over. It was a piece of wire stretched at ankle height. How I had happened to step over it, I didn't know. But its obvious purpose was to operate this second door which had inexorably swung into place.

This second door had a lock. You could see where the cylinder was inserted in the steel. But there was no keyhole and no handle at all on this side.

Joe ran across the room and hit the door with his shoulder. He bounced, and the door did not tremble.

"Hey, they can't do that to us," Joe said.

"*He* can't do this to us, you mean," I said.

"He? Who?"

"Emery Faust, of course. Up to this point, I don't think we ever fully realized what a complete beast Faust must have been. Do you happen to hear a ticking sound?"

Joe listened. He opened his mouth, closed it, swallowed.

"Yeah," he said faintly. "A ticking sound. I've heard lots of sounds in my time, Ghost, but I don't think I ever heard one I liked less. What do we do now?"

"The hate of the laughing corpse seems to have been visited upon the wrong people," I said. "This place is mined. No wonder Faust's own death was such a good joke. Faust made sure of taking his six enemies into hell with him. If they didn't kill themselves off trying to get their hands on the brass keys, they'd eventually wind up in here and be blown to bits."

JOE'S gaunt face stiffened with an audible chatter of teeth.

"Hush," he said. "I'm beginning not to like this! Can't we stop it? After all, we're the wrong guys for this big blow-out!"

"I'm afraid Emery Faust doesn't know about that," I said quietly.

And even as I spoke came the hollow sound of laughter within the room.

Joe Harper beamed his flashlight around frantically, finally pointing it at the ceiling. Set high above our heads was a radio reproducer, and from this came the hellish sound of Emery Faust's taunting laughter, reaching to us from beyond the grave.

CHAPTER XXII

Dynamite

ALL of it was operated by electric and clockwork mechanism, beautifully synchronized—the closing of the door, the starting of the time bomb, and the phonograph record which was responsible for the dead man's voice that taunted us from the radio speaker above our heads.

"My very good friends," dead Mr. Faust chuckled, "I have prepared a place for you, you that are left alive. It was to be hoped that you would kill yourselves off, bickering over the little brass keys. But such of you as have managed to reach this spot, know that you haven't much more time to live. About eight minutes, as a matter of fact. Then you'll be nicely blown to bits.

"There's no possible escape. It's all been worked out so nicely. There's dynamite packed around the walls and under the floor. The electrical connections can be broken only from the outside, so there's really no way of stopping this thing. But if it's any

consolation to you, I don't mind telling you that I'll see you all in hell!"

That was the end of the record. Faust's laughter drifted off, and then there was complete silence except for the unalterable ticking of that damned clock.

Joe Harper, quite as pallid as the Ghost himself, looked at me.

"We can't just sit here waiting."

"We're not going to," I said. "Get these boxes of dope down from the shelves. Stack them on the floor. If we can reach that radio speaker above, we may be able to short an electrical circuit."

I didn't have a whole lot of hope in that. Even if we could short the speaker, it was folly to suppose that Faust would have overlooked this means of getting out of his trap. The electrical detonator that would fire the dynamite was probably on a separate circuit. But it was better than waiting.

As we worked, I kept my mind busy, did my best not to hear the ticking of that clock that counted out the seconds of life left to us. I recalled what Stanley Wilkins had said the first time I had met him, when he was still staggering under that blow that Faust's murderer had handed him. Wilkins had told of the quarrel between Faust and the killer. Wilkins had overheard something about dynamite, and the killer had boasted that he could handle dynamite all right.

That meant, I told myself, that Faust had told the killer something about the dynamite that mined this storehouse. And the murderer, had he obtained the keys and solved the mystery of the location of this place, could have helped himself to the dope, first cutting the electrical connections from the outside.

In all probability the quarrel had been over this store of drugs. The killer knew what he wanted and was going after it. Faust had deliberately taunted him, perhaps by telling him that even if he could find out where the drug was hidden, he couldn't touch it because of the dynamite. Faust had taunted the man because he wanted to be murdered.

AND when the murderer's knife had at last struck home, Faust had not died at once. He had lived to try to tell the police the name of his killer. At first he had tried to write that name, as was indicated by the paper and the pen on Faust's desk. But he had found the pen broken. With his last ounce of strength he had crawled into the library and taken down that book of Tennyson.

Joe Harper interrupted my train of thought.

"Only six more minutes, Ghost. Let's snap it up."

I reached for another armload of dope boxes, stopped halfway between the wall and the pile we were forming beneath that radio speaker in the ceiling.

"Hush," I said to Joe. Outside the room I could hear voices.

"What you mean, this isn't the door?" a voice asked. "Come across. You designed it. You open it."

I looked at Joe.

"Pannard!" I whispered. I thought of what Standish had said about the difficulty of getting to the racketeer. Fate had revised our hope—Pannard had got to us!

"But you don't understand," a timid voice squeaked. "This is the second door. It means that someone is inside there. Someone has beat you to it, Mr. Pannard."

"That's the locksmith," Joe whispered. "I told you someone followed me there. It must have been one of Pannard's men. Well, nothing like a crowd at a big blow-out, is there?"

Mike Pannard pounded on the door with his fist.

"Come out of there!" he yelled. "Come out or I'll blast you out. I've got a tommy-gun out here. You come out before I count ten or by hell, I'll start shooting."

I thought by the time Pannard

counted ten there would probably be some shooting from another quarter.

I went to the door. I tried Emery Faust's own tactics. I summoned my most teasing laugh, being pretty careful that it didn't sound like the Ghost's laugh, however. Scaring Pannard away was the last thing I wanted to do.

"Come in and get us, if you think you can!" I taunted. "We've beat you to the dope and we're sitting on it. If you want it, come and get it."

I hardly had time to push Joe back from the door and get out of the way myself before Pannard opened up with his machine-gun. In the small room in which Joe and I were prisoners, the roar of those slugs pouring into the lock of the door was deafening. Even so, I welcomed every slug that was bent on destroying the lock.

Somehow above the roar, I heard Joe's voice, hoarse and strained.

"My God! Two minutes."

And I wondered at the very moment that the hail of machine-gun slugs broke the lock if there would be time for us to get clear of the building before the blast came. Because we had a little more to do besides just run from the building. There was Pannard to deal with. If we told him the building was about to blow up, he'd think it was a bluff.

AS the door swung back and Pannard nosed his smoking machine-gun into the room, my right hand slipped to a pocket inside my coat. I pulled out one of those self-blowing balloons used in magical productions. I gave it a quick squeeze, broke the acid bulb inside that caused gas to be formed within the balloon immediately. This particular balloon was especially suited to ghosting, for it had an evil face drawn on it in luminous paint. I gave the balloon a little shove and it floated right into the path of Mike Pannard.

Pannard raised his machine-gun, stepped forward to kill the balloon, and I landed on him from the side. My automatic hammered down on Pannard's head. No gentle blow. There wasn't any time to estimate foot pounds of force or the resistance of human bone. Pannard folded down into my arms.

I got him onto my shoulder. Joe Harper, in the meantime, had got clear of the room. He was handling the locksmith, and having an easier time pushing the man ahead of him than I was in carrying Pannard.

We crossed the living room, ran through the wide open door. My heart seemed to have enlarged until it pushed up through my throat and to the bottom of my brain. I spurred fagged leg muscles to keep going, though the weight of Pannard's body was making them feel like fence posts.

I judge we were fifty feet from the house when the explosion came. Something struck me in the small of the back. I pitched forward on my face.

CHAPTER XXIII

I Ghost at Headquarters

WHEN I came to, I was back in the rectory, and Merry White's cool soft hands were gently pressed against my forehead. For awhile I just looked up into her sweet face and was perfectly content not to think.

After a bit I managed to drag my eyes away from Merry's face to discover that Joe Harper was lounging in a chair, his feet on the cocktail table, his drink poised on a footstool beside him. Curious how Joe always got those two articles of furniture confused.

Tiny Tim Terry was curled up in another chair, smoking one of his huge cigars at a furious rate. The electric clock on the modernistic radio cabinet

told me it was one o'clock in the morning.

"You take it easy, darlin'," Merry said. "Joe has taken care of everything. He handed Pannard over to the cops for torturing the poor locksmith into telling where the dope supply house was. Everything is okay. Dr. Demarest was in here to look at you, and he said you weren't ready for the morgue yet for awhile. You just got hit by a piece of stone from the building."

"Thanks, Joe," I said.

Joe lifted his drink to his lips, sipped slowly, which indicated that he had had many drinks. He watched me with his black beetle eyes, said nothing.

"I thanked him for you, darlin'," Merry said. "I kissed him. He hasn't been able to talk since."

I could understand that.

"You mind bringing me the telephone over here, Tim?" I asked the midget. "I'm too comfortable to move."

Tim got the phone, brought it over to me. I told Merry to dial my own house and get Glenn Saunders out of bed. Shortly I was talking to my double.

"Glenn, you know that little theatre over on East Fiftieth Street—the one that's used for amateur theatricals now and then? I want you to call up the Dramatic Club and rent that theatre for tomorrow night. Not in my name or yours either. Then you get over there the first thing in the morning and fix the place up for the Blue Ghost illusion, but with this alteration: I want a high speed camera behind the mirror exactly where the image usually appears. And I'll need plenty of light and fast film in it, because this murderer moves in a hurry."

Glenn promised to take care of everything. I relaxed and went to sleep.

The following morning, the Ghost went to Police Headquarters, but no one saw him go. He went in the disguise of Dr. Stacey and immediately disappeared into a little private chamber just off the commissioner's office. There he underwent certain alterations that made the Ghost of him again. So I was all ready for the group of suspects that were shortly brought in, presumably for a conference with Standish.

STANLEY WILKINS had linked arms with his mother, Nell Lafevre. They were followed closely by Carter Nash, whose disagreeable lower lip was dangling a little more than usual. Henry Fu Chang, his round yellow moon of a face wreathed in smiles, came in and bowed to everybody, but especially to the police commissioner.

Mike Pannard was escorted by Inspector Magnus, that mountain of man from the Homicide Bureau. And Dr. Millais came quietly after Pannard, blinking uncertainly through his thick-lensed glasses. Julian Hornaday brought up the rear. In spite of the thick walls of the building and the presence of the law, Hornaday looked upon everyone and everything with suspicion. The two fingers that remained on his right hand were crossed.

Yes, they were all here. But this was not to be the final scene, nor even the next to the last scene in the bitter and bloody drama to which Emery Faust's laughter had been the tragic, incidental music. This was, and could only be, the preparation for that final scene in which I hoped to drag the murderous key-collector out into the open and pin his horrible guilt upon him for all men to see and condemn! I was laying the groundwork that would compel him to attempt one more kill, with myself the intended victim!

Standish had everyone seated before he began his summing up. He covered the case briefly, adding what information I had given him together with what the police investigation had revealed. He told of Emery Faust's killing of his servant in an effort to fake his own death. Then he brought out that Faust actually wanted to be murdered in order that his son, Wilkins, might realize on the life insurance. He

revealed the relationship between Wilkins and Nell Lafevre.

Next he brought out the fact that the treasure which Faust had left behind was simply a quantity of morphine stored in his house near Tompkin's Cove. This drug supply represented about five hundred thousand dollars retail value.

"Dope?" Carter Nash gasped. "What would any of us want with dope?"

"That, Mr. Nash," Standish said, "is exactly what worried Faust. He had the stuff, had risked most of his money to get it in one grand gamble. And then the Federal authorities got on his trail and were waiting to arrest him as soon as they got any sort of proof. Faust couldn't move the stuff. But some other people might have handled it easily enough.

"The brass keys were left with a single purpose in mind. Faust hated his six heirs. Perhaps he hoped that one of them would be greedy enough to kill the others in order to obtain the key to the supposed treasure. That failing, he had the storehouse mined with dynamite, a trap for anyone who succeeded in finding the place and employing the brass keys. Faust was a man who lived and died by hatred. That hatred has reached out from the grave like a ghost and bred murder! But another 'Ghost' has been working day and night to bring the murderous spawn to book at last!"

Standish paused. It was time enough for me to leave my hiding place, make my appearance before them all. Quietly, I opened the door of the private chamber. I came out backwards, closed the door, then turned around. The Ghost was "turned on" as I faced my audience.

Julian Hornaday saw me, turned deathly white. Nash's lower jaw dropped. Nell Lafevre uttered a faint cry. Pannard cursed. Dr. Millais removed his glasses and cleaned them on his tie before replacing them.

"The Ghost!" Standish said simply.

In my best graveyard voice I said:

"You have neglected one point, Commissioner. One very important point. If the murderer of Faust simply wanted to get hold of the valuable supply of dope, why did he kill those people from whom he got the brass keys? You will remember that he tortured Clay and Dyer into giving up their keys? Why did he kill them afterward?"

There wasn't any answer. All within the room were too startled by my sudden appearance to speak.

"The reason is," I went on, "that the murderer was recognized by the persons he tortured. Clay knew him and Dyer knew him. Anyone would have known him who saw him in the light."

"Why didn't he wear a mask?" Nell Lafevre asked.

"He did, my dear lady," I said. "He wore a mask. But there was something about him he could not disguise. Not even the greatest makeup artist in the world could have concealed it.

"That," I concluded, "is why the murderer is known to me. If you will all appear at the Dramatic Club Theatre on East Fiftieth Street tonight at eight o'clock, I will show you the face of the murderer!"

I faded back into the private chamber. The stage for the penultimate scene in this case of the laughing corpse was set. I was slated for murder—but forewarned is forearmed!

CHAPTER XXIV

The Murderer's Face

I ARRIVED at the theatre long before the appointed hour. I did so purposely. I was ready for the murderer, I was certain that he would come *before the others did!*

The illusion which is known sometimes as "The Blue Ghost" is most difficult to describe. It

employs hundreds of pounds of mirrors and is one the oldest tricks in the magician's bag. It is really a periscopic effect, in which an image on a lower plane is projected upward so that it appears to be on the stage when actually it is out of sight beneath the stage.

To manage this, there has to be rather a wide slot in the floor of the stage. Beneath the stage, slanting upward toward the slot, is a mirror illuminated by a powerful light. On the stage, but toward the back, is another mirror, set at the same angle, so that it reflects the image in the lower mirror. A number of ghostly effects can be created with this basic arrangement, but I was interested chiefly in being below the stage when the murderer thought I was in a much more vulnerable position.

It was at exactly seven-thirty that I heard the front door of the old building open. Below the stage, I switched on the powerful light, waited for the killer to approach. Glenn Saunders had arranged a camera back of the above-stage mirror so that the jerk of a string would enable me to take a picture of anyone facing the mirror.

I had my back toward the mirror, so that it would seem that I had no way of knowing of the murderer's approach. Yet I heard the quiet footsteps on the boards above me, and when the killer was quite close to the illusion which he undoubtedly mistook for me, I turned around. In the mirror, I could see him as clearly as he could see me!

He was a man of medium height. His face was covered with a black mask. His right hand held an automatic.

"You came a little early, didn't you?" I said.

"Look at me," said the masked man. "Take a good look, Mr. Ghost! Your groaning and chain-clanking may frighten the half-witted criminals with whom you are accustomed to dealing, but you don't frighten me at all. You're about to die."

And, as he brought his gun up for the kill, I pulled the trigger that was to snap his picture!

The shot came. There was a crash of glass as the bullet smashed into the mirror. Realizing for the first time that he had been aiming at an image rather than at a living thing, the murderer turned and ran! Maybe he wasn't afraid of the Ghost nor of the rollicking, ghostly laughter that followed him as he ran from the theatre, but he was certainly afraid of the blunder that he had made.

I CAME up from beneath the stage, rescued the camera from the support back of the shattered mirror. I removed the film, hurried with it to the stage door where Merry White was waiting to take it to Glenn Saunders. And then the thing was done. I had captured the killer on film, and that was as good as having him in irons. I knew he would be back! He couldn't afford not to. He would be back with the others.

Yes, he came back at eight o'clock, with the others! All were searched. He, like several of the other suspects, had his gun taken from him by Inspector Magnus.

It was a rapid scene, this last one. Standish lined the suspects up on the front row—Nell Lafevre, Stanley Wilkins, Julian Hornaday, Dr. Millais, Carter Nash, Fu Chang, and Mike Pannard. Merry White was at the back of the theatre, concealed in a small projection booth with a projector and the negative of the developed film. A glass-beaded movie screen was placed on the stage.

At the appointed time, I stepped out onto the stage. I spoke quickly.

"I have promised you the picture of a murderer! I can make good my promise! I told you that he had one defect which no mask could hide, no makeup conceal. But before I show you that picture, I want you to know that Emery Faust actually tried to tell us who his murderer was! First he tried to write the murderer's name.

Failing to do that, because he found his pen broken and had nothing to write with, he went into his library and got a book of Tennyson's poems.

"Faust knew little about poetry. Or if he did, he certainly hadn't used that particular book much. *But he did know paintings.* Why then, did he pick a volume of Tennyson's verse! Not because of the poems it contained. No, he hoped to find a picture in that book —a picture of Tennyson—a very famous portrait by a famous and well-known painter. Unfortunately, the book did not contain that portrait.

"Do you know who painted the most famous portrait of Tennyson? Faust knew. And because that artist had the

same last name as the man who murdered him, it was *that* painting Faust was looking for when he died!

"And now for our picture of the killer!"

That was my signal to Merry. Lights went out. The beam of the projector flashed to the beaded screen. Clearly the man in the black mask was revealed, standing there with a gun in his hand.

"And now," I cried, "for an enlargement of the face. We will simply put another lens in the projector and fill the entire screen with the killer's masked face. You see, I knew the killer had something about him that he couldn't disguise. Julian Hornaday couldn't have disguised the fact that there were three fingers missing from his hand—"

HORNADAY shouted from the darkness! "That's a lie! I have killed no one!"

"No one is accusing you." I said quietly. "You could not have disguised your maimed hand. But neither could you have handled an automatic with your right hand. No, the defect is in the face!"

And with that, Merry projected a close-up of the killer's face. All in the audience must have seen the glasses through the eyeholes of the killer's mask—the glasses he could not have seen without. All could see the malformed pupils of the eyes where the surgeon's knife had removed the natural eye lenses which had been destroyed by cataracts!

For *that* was the defect which no one could have disguised. Once a victim had clearly seen the murderer's eyes, he could not have forgotten them, for they were as ugly as the crimes of their owner.

"And," I added, "the portrait of Tennyson which Faust was trying to find in the book of poems was painted by *Sir John Everett Millais,* the famous artist, and no relation at all to our *murderer,* Mr. Millais!"

"Lights!" Inspector Magnus yelled.

And there was light—light that found Dr. Millais racing up the aisle, trying to get to the door before Magnus could head him off. Needless to say, the doctor didn't have a chance when Magnus leaped upon him.

What did Dr. Millais want with the dope that he knew Emery Faust had hidden away? Well, we were some time getting the straight of that. But when it all came out, we discovered that Millais had been wholesaling dope to most of the dealers in New York, and getting by with it nicely because of his professional standing. Because he had lost most of his practice since his cataract operation, Millais had used the dope racket to augment his dwindling income.

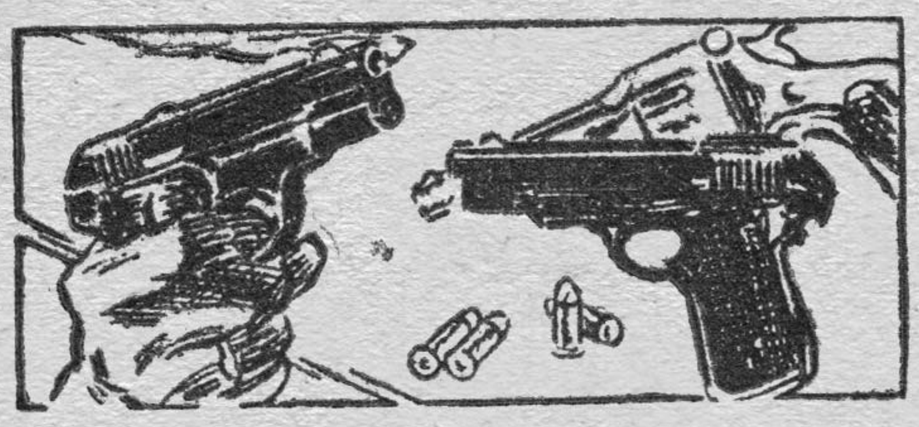
My friends and I spent a good deal of time talking over the case after

Millais had been tried and convicted. The oddest angle of all was the unholy mess of things that dead Emery Faust had made. Many times, when we stop to consider how his hatred had reached from beyond the grave to kill, we wonder if Emery Faust isn't feeling the fires of hell and laughing at us.

"And if he is," Merry White always says, "I hope he gulps in a big mouthful of brimstone and slowly chokes to death."

She forgets, I think, that man can die only once. Even though Faust did make a noble effort to pull a repeat performance.

The Case of the Laughing Corpse was closed. What would be the nature of the Ghost-Detective's next case? Time alone would tell.



COMPLETE BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL NEXT ISSUE

THE CASE OF THE FLAMING FIST

FEATURING MORE EXPLOITS OF GEORGE CHANCE

FLITTERMOUSE

By ARTHUR J. BURKS

Author of "Death Plays Tricks," "Too Many Murders," etc.

Jed swung a hard blow at Smith's face

Fighting the World's Fastest Killer, Detective Marcus Saw a Speedy Ride Ahead Unless He Found a Swift Way of Slowing Murder Down

"I WANT you to take a good look at him, Jed," said Chief of Detectives Mike Slossen, as they sat at a ringside table in the Elite Club, on upper Broadway. "He just beat a murder rap, got turned lose this morning. And he's already back in his old haunts, looking for angles."

Jed Marcus stared at the young man with the dark complexion, the slick hair and perfectly tailored evening duds, who also had a ringside table, but across the floor from the two men from headquarters. The fellow across the way was about Jed's age, twenty-six or seven. But his face and eyes had the wisdom of the devil in them, which made him seem ageless.

He hadn't once looked at Slossen or Marcus, but Jed had the feeling that he still, somehow, managed to subject them to close scrutiny. His eyes never rested more than a split second on anything. He didn't seem to have to

at anything directly. He gave the impression of seeing everything as his head turned, and his eyes roved.

"What's his real name again?" asked Jed Marcus.

Slosson chuckled. "Henry Smith. It's his real name, believe it or not. But until he cracked the newspapers, not one person in a thousand in New York knew anything except his monicker."

"And that?" asked Jed Marcus.

Marcus was an out-of-town detective brought in on special duty, and could not be expected to know all the Broadway characters.

"Give him a good looking over, Jed," said Slossen, "before I spill his monicker. When I do, it'll probably make you jump. Go ahead. He doesn't know me either, strangely enough. I had nothing to do with bringing him in. I wasn't at his trial, but of course, somebody may tip him off who I am. However, I come here three times a week, purely for relaxation, so he won't even think it strange. Twig him, of course, without him knowing who you are. Use some of his own tactics."

Jed Marcus looked swiftly back and forth along the far side of the dance floor, as though he were hunting someone. Once or twice, he lifted his hand, as though acknowledging a nod or a similar salute. But in reality, his eyes kept roaming back to Henry Smith—who had just beaten a murder rap.

Henry Smith's eyes kept roving. His right hand, on the table, kept tapping, as though he were signaling to the men and women with him, in Morse code. Only they paid him no heed, and he scarcely noticed them.

"Part of his old mob," said Slossen, as though he had read Jed's thought. "They're used to him. He pays no attention to them. He pays the check, and beyond that takes the attitude, to hell with 'em."

[redacted]at right hand of Henry Smith's [redacted]s odd tattoo. Then it disappeared below the table, and the other hand came up. It reached onto the table, touched a cruet, a bouquet of flowers, a folded napkin, an ash tray, a book one of the women with him had brought, another woman's pocketbook. Henry Smith touched everything on the table, even while his eyes were roving ceaselessly.

FINALLY both hands were under the table. "Thank Heaven, Slossen!" said Marcus. "That's over."

"What?"

"His hands. Aren't they ever still?"

"Are they now?"

"They seem to be."

"Then look at his feet!"

Jed Marcus lowered his eyes to the impeccably shod feet of Henry Smith. They were dancing, sidewise and back, forward and back, sidewise and back, forward and back. They didn't move more than a couple of inches either way, so that Jed had to look closely to see that they moved at all. And then, Henry Smith rose, came straight across the floor, wending his way through the dancers. Henry Smith looked down at Marcus.

"What are you watching me for?" asked Henry Smith.

"Sorry," said Marcus. "I just wondered if you were ever still? Do you mind?"

"Some, maybe. Don't get too nosey, though. And I'm never still, if it's any of your business. I'll have time enough to be still when I'm dead. Eh, Slossen? This one of your dicks?"

"No. He's from St. Louis," said Slossen. "Have a drink with us, Smith?"

"No. I only drink with my friends. Not often with them. Liquor slows you down."

Henry Smith started back across the floor. In the middle of the floor, he decided he wanted to dance. For a single moment, as he tapped a man on the shoulder, he stood poised on tiptoes, as though for flight. The man

frowned, got a look at Smith's face, stepped back. Smith started dancing with the girl without looking at her, his eyes still roving over the crowd, the floor, the club. He seemed totally uninterested in the girl with whom he was dancing. The urge, the need for movement seemed to possess him. Marcus wondered if his brain were as restless as his body.

"Yes," said Slossen, "and his trigger finger, too, though we never seem able to prove it on him."

The manager of the Elite Club, seeing Smith cut in where cutting in wasn't allowed, started across the floor. One of the men from Smith's table rose, stepped in front of the manager, spoke to him softly. The manager bowed, his face very red, and went back to wherever he had come from.

The man who had relinquished his girl stood on the sidelines and looked unhappy. Finally he settled his coat by pulling on the bottom of it, crossed and cut in in his turn. Without even looking at him, Henry Smith went back to his table.

"I don't exactly blame him," said Jed Marcus. "It must have been pretty confining, being locked up in a cell for a year, awaiting trial for murder, and wondering all the time if he were going to beat the rap or burn."

SLOSSEN chuckled.

"Nix. He's slowed down. Being in a cell slowed him. He's trying to get back his nervousness."

"But what's the idea? Why did you bring me on to tail him?"

"Your reputation, Marcus. You're supposed to be the coolest dick in the business. Henry Smith gets everybody down who ever tries to do anything with him. Makes 'em want to go to the booby hatch—and a couple have gone."

"Isn't he ever still?"

"Never. That's why, in underworld circles, they call him the 'Flittermouse.'"

"Flittermouse? That's a bat, in ordinary language."

"Yes, but a bat flutters around, is never still, always comes back to the same spot to flitter. A dozen men have tried to apply that idea to Henry Smith. He has never yet come back to the scene of a kill, but they still call him the Flittermouse."

"I thought he didn't know you, Slossen," said Marcus.

"One never knows what the Flittermouse knows or doesn't know," said Slossen. "Well, good-night, and don't let this buzzard give you the screaming meemees. He's dynamite."

"But if he's so nervous, he can't possibly shoot straight, and I'm pretty fast with a gun."

"Not as fast as he is. He aims, squeezes the trigger, gets his man, all between bats of the eye. He has to do it fast, so he won't be still too long. Probably scream if he did. Don't fool yourself. When the Flittermouse really gets going, he'll show you something."

Slossen left, and Marcus deliberately turned his back to the dance floor. He seemed to be lost in thought. He hated to admit it, but Henry Smith got his goat. A man who couldn't sit still, or stand still, or hold his head still, was likely to do that to anyone.

Marcus, though, was a man without nerves. Nothing ever really stirred him, except on the surface. Now he drew a pack of tobacco from the inner pocket of his jacket, rolled a cigarette. It was blasphemy in such a place to roll your own, but Marcus always had, saw no reason to change.

He sat in thought a long time, trying to figure out what a man like the Flittermouse, whose brain, they said, was as agile as his body, was likely to do. The unexpected, of course, and between two bats of the eye.

"How can you sit so still?" said that calm voice, at his elbow. He turned. Henry Smith was sitting across the table from him, eyes roving. But right now they were roving all over Mar

"I'd go nuts, but I envy you. How soon do you expect to get me?"

Marcus was taken aback, but didn't show it. He'd expected some such lightninglike stab at him.

"Why should I get you?" he countered.

"Oh, I don't know. There'd be a nice pay-off if you did. In your place, I'd collect, if I could."

THERE was ominous warning in Henry Smith's voice, though it was controlled, well modulated, extremely polite. He grinned at Marcus. Both his hands were on the table-top, tapping out code of some sort.

"You ought to give a guy a break, when he's been jugged for a year," he said. "Somehow a gent should have a chance to fix up the bankroll."

"I'm not bothering you," began Marcus, when the right hand of Henry Smith slid under the table.

Marcus moved, but not fast enough. Henry Smith pushed the table into his lap. Then Henry Smith rose, faced the mob on the dance floor. His men had moved with the speed and grace of cats. The women had their handbags open on their table, and their hands were in their bags.

"Sorry, folks," said Henry Smith. "I need some mouthpiece dough. You all know why, if you read the newspapers. Line up, in the middle of the floor, all of you, and fork over."

The whole club froze. The orchestra had gone silent when Henry Smith pushed the table into Marcus' lap. Now, while Marcus struggled to get his legs free, Henry Smith, without looking, kicked the table, knocking him over again, not even looking at him. Jed Marcus felt like a fool.

"I'll get you for this, Smith," said Marcus, "if I have to live forever to do it."

"Shut up, dick, or I'll drill you," Smith snarled.

"You wouldn't dare!"

There was the glint of electric light on metal, partially screened by a potted palm beside the orchestra. Henry Smith slanted his gun in that direction, apparently not aiming, and fired. A bulky man stumbled forward, fell, slid over the railing onto the floor. Blood spurted from his head. He didn't move after he stopped sliding.

"Think I wouldn't, dick?" said Henry Smith.

The dead man was the manager of the Elite Club. Henry Smith's men were everywhere now, among the guests. Women didn't scream. Something about Henry Smith kept them from it. The men didn't curse, not after seeing what had happened to the manager. Cold-blooded murder, which didn't touch Henry Smith in the slightest.

"Okay, Flit," said one of his men hoarsely, "we've got everything."

"How's it tally?"

"Enough for a little while. Go ahead, scram. We'll cover you!"

Henry Smith went out of the club, without taking his hat and coat from the checkroom, Marcus noticed. The women with him went next, walking leisurely, as though nothing untoward had happened. Then the men backed out. After that there were screams, and a few women fainted, but Jed Marcus didn't wait for aftermaths.

It was the coolest thing he had ever seen, and the coldest. He couldn't hazard a guess at the amount the banditts had got. He wondered, as he left the club without his own hat and coat, why Smith had let him live. Probably held him in contempt. Marcus' face burned when he remembered how ignominiously he himself had been handled.

OUTSIDE, no one apparently had noticed anything. But the alarm had gone in now, for he could hear screaming sirens approaching. He walked around in the cool summer air for a bit, trying to pick up scraps of conversation, something, anything,

that would lead him to the Flittermouse. Nobody could miss the Flittermouse. Obviously, this holdup had been planned while Henry Smith had been locked up, awaiting trial, or during the two weeks the trial had lasted.

"I'll see him burn," Marcus promised himself, "for shooting that manager. There was cold-blooded murder if I ever saw it. And yet, could I myself swear that it was Smith that did the shooting?"

That hadn't occurred to him before. Henry Smith was faster than any gun slinger Marcus had ever seen. Marcus gave Slossen time to get home, then phoned him, told him what had happened.

"Why didn't he bump me?" he asked.

"He never bumps cops," said Slossen. "Against his principles, he says. They do their duty, and should be commended for it. He pushes them around, but he has never shot one yet. No, he does worse than that. He gives them the jeepers creepers."

"What do I do next?" said Marcus, helplessly.

"Follow your nose. You and Smith have made contact. Your nose will lead you to him sooner or later. He'll see to that himself. Maybe a couple of his men will pick you up when you step out of that booth. It would be just like him."

Slossen hung up without giving any instructions. If, Marcus thought, he had had any idea of the hideouts of the Flittermouse, he would have said so. Jed Marcus went back to the club, got his hat and coat. An attendant touched him on the arm.

"Your name Marcus, sir?"

"Yes."

"Telephone, sir."

Marcus took the telephone.

"Aren't sore are you, Marcus?" a soft voice said. "Too bad I had to make you look so silly, in front of everybody. But I couldn't have you spoiling everything, could I?"

Marcus retained control of himself.

"Why no, Flit, of course not. Where are you?"

A foolish question, and the Flittermouse promptly said so, with no venom in his voice.

"I'm glad I'm not as nerveless as you are, Marcus," he concluded. "I'd go nuts."

"Who told you my name, Smith?" asked Marcus.

"Oh, I asked around. A good way to get information, asking around—if you're careful what information you're after. Get me?"

Marcus knew what he meant.

The Flittermouse hung up. Marcus had heard the strains of an orchestra, over the telephone. A haunting melody was being played. It might lead to something, again it might not. Couldn't trace that call now.

Marcus got to thinking about the Flittermouse, how awful it would be to be like him, never able to stand still, or sit still, or to hold still, even while held. A brain like a morass of jumping beans, or squirming worms. A man so different from everybody else that he knew he stood out, and probably had a Jehovah complex. He took what he wanted, held everybody else in contempt and didn't even mind turning his back on his worst enemy.

WHITE-FACED women were passing Jed Marcus. There were two showgirls, heading out, and their faces weren't white. They didn't seem to be disturbed as they walked past Jed Marcus.

"Flit'll be sore if we're too late," one of them said.

Marcus didn't seem to hear, but he didn't miss. He followed the girls. One of them, as she walked, lifted her mirror, patted her hair, and Marcus grinned inwardly. That girl had seen him in the mirror. He was supposed to follow. Near the door, they started to get into a taxicab, and Marcus walked up to them.

"Do I go right with you, or p

to be tailing you to Flit?" he asked.

"Not with us, dick," said the girl he had heard. "Flit wouldn't like it. Doesn't like strange men even to speak to his girl friends, though nobody knows why. He pays no attention to them himself."

A strange thrill coursed through Jed Marcus. That girl had been told to drop a tip. He was supposed to follow to the hideout. The Flittermouse was proving to be the strangest quarry Jed Marcus had ever followed. Of course, if he, Jed Marcus, managed to get the cops on his trail, those two girls would simply have the cabby drive them around, and never arrive anywhere. Blast the Flittermouse for a nut! But a deadly, dangerous nut, with a queer, twisted sense of humor.

Marcus wished he could grab the Flittermouse and hold him perfectly still for as much as a minute. Just what would happen if he did, he wondered? The Flittermouse's lips would probably skin back from his teeth, his eyes would get wild, and he would start screaming.

Maybe that was a way to handle the fellow, a way nobody else had ever thought of. Dicks had shot at him, but it was like shooting at a flea. Moving all the time, as he was. Never still. Mind just like that, too. Marcus, trailing the girls in a second cab, wondered what sort of a background Henry Smith had. No way of telling, with that name. Marcus wondered if it was his right one, after all. The Flittermouse had probably been slapped around all during his childhood. Then he had grown up and started slapping other people around.

Easy, Marcus thought, to be influenced by such a man. He understood why Smith's men and women, at the club, didn't look at their leader. They couldn't, without getting a bad case of nerves. Nobody, nobody normal, that is, could keep on looking and not get nervous.

The two cabs went out Broadway to a Hundred and Twenty-Fifth Street. Then there was some aimless wandering around. Then the first cab stopped. Marcus, getting out, gallantly offered to pay both fares, but the girls refused. He glanced around, before going up the steps of the house with the two girls. There was a cop on the corner phoning in. Marcus could almost hear him saying:

"Halloran reporting. All secure. Nothing new."

He didn't signal the man. That queer thrill was running high in him, and no matter how nutty all this was, how queer, he wanted to see it through himself. He confessed he was fascinated by the utterly unorthodox behavior of the Flittermouse. When you played games with the Flittermouse, you might as well play it his way, watching for the breaks to begin playing it your own. And the one who found such breaks would have to be fast on his feet, and in his head. The Flittermouse was chain lightning.

Jed Marcus followed the two girls up to the door of a cheap apartment house. One of them pushed a button. A buzzer answered. They went in. The girl Marcus had spoken to held the door open for him, without looking at him, and without saying anything to him. The whole thing was screwy as the devil!

He followed the girls up two flights of stairs. He heard the outer door click shut when he reached the first landing. There was something final about it, like a shot through the heart. Jed Marcus was acutely conscious that he wasn't packing a rod. It wouldn't have gone well with white tie and tails, and he hadn't expected to work tonight, hadn't expected to get more than a glimpse of the Flittermouse, alias Henry Smith.

THE girls rapped lightly on a door. Strains of eerie music floated through the panelling. The Flittermouse himself opened the door. He

let the girls pass. He held out his hand to Jed Marcus. In spite of himself, Marcus took the hand of the killer. He wanted to laugh—and realized that if he had, it would be hysterical laughter. Smith pulled him into the room.

"Nice of you to come, Marcus," he said. "We need an impartial referee. Take off your things. You clean?"

"Absolutely. Gats don't go with dinner jackets."

"Matter of opinion," said the Flittermouse. "I manage all right! Boys, this is Jed Marcus, from Saint Louis. You've heard me speak about him. Jed, meet the boys and girls."

They were the outfit which had held up the Elite Club, and the two showgirls who hadn't been spotted, at least by Marcus.

"This young lady, Jed, is Marion Prouty. This one is Jean Carson."

"Flit!" said the girl just named.

"Never mind, Jean," said the Flittermouse. "It won't matter. Jed's a good guy, or will be."

It was then that Marcus realized the deadly danger to which he had foolishly exposed himself. He wasn't the cat in this crazy drama, but the mouse, and just a poor weak field mouse at that. The Flittermouse was now playing cat. Henry Smith had neatly pulled him in, intended to kill him, but wanted to have his fun first. Henry Smith continued the introductions.

"This gentleman is Mike Raines, wanted for murder in three states, including Missouri, Jed," said the Flittermouse.

Marcus started. He knew the name of Mike Raines, all right, and that he *was* wanted in Missouri for murder! This thing became crazier every minute. He looked at Raines, expecting to see him turn truculent, reach for a gat. But Raines grinned, laughed, shook his head and winked, as though he would say:

"Ain't Flit a card, Jed?"

And then, right afterward, he said exactly that. Smith told him to shut up, which he did, his face going white. Men did what Smith told them, apparently. Only then, did Marcus realize how deadly dangerous the Flittermouse was. He wondered how many other cops and dicks had been played with like this by Henry Smith.

"This other chap is Jack Riegel, Jed. Fourth-time offender. If caught stealing an apple, he'll get life. It would be a feather in your cap to get this mob, Jed. Maybe you should really have made a stab at it, instead of—"

"Walking right into the parlor?" said Jed Marcus, softly.

"That's the idea. Got it right off, didn't you?"

"Well, I'm here. What do you want of me?"

The Flittermouse pointed at a table Marcus hadn't noticed until now. On it was piled all the stuff that had been taken from patrons of the Elite Club. Diamonds, pearls, rubies, sapphires, emeralds, bracelets, rings, tiaras, necklaces, and a big wad of currency. Marcus saw at least one thousand-dollar bill. He looked a question at Henry Smith.

"Divide it for us, Jed," said Henry Smith, grinning.

He teetered back and forth, heel and toe. His thumbs fastened in his lapels, held for a moment as he rocked. Then he stood still, took his hands down, began to snap his fingers, thumb and forefinger of each hand, as though he were trying to think of something.

"It'll make me an accomplice," said Jed Marcus, but he moved toward the table, trying to think as fast as he knew the Flittermouse must be thinking, and fully expecting a bullet in the back at any moment. "I hate being an accomplice."

HE wanted to turn around, but he kept going.

"You can't help it, Jed," said the Flittermouse. "And by this time tomorrow morning nobody will care"

"Meaning I'll be dead. Oka·

I'll call you. Write down the percentages for me. But I don't know the values of jewelry. Somebody will have to tell me."

"Jack Riegel knows," said Henry Smith, "and what he doesn't know I do. If he doesn't tell you within a grand, it'll be just too bad for Jack Riegel. Start, Jed."

Jed Marcus tossed aside his coat and hat. Raines caught them and carried them to a divan where two of the four girls were sitting, one at either end. Marcus picked up a bracelet. It sparkled brilliantly under the cluster of lights from the ceiling. This room must have been a gambling joint at some time, Marcus decided. He held up the bracelet.

"Ten grand," said Jack Riegel.

"Twelve!" snapped Henry Smith.

"It's worth thirty thousand if it's worth a penny," said Marcus.

"I forgot, Jed," said Henry Smith apologetically. "We figure by fence prices. This stuff is hot, remember?"

"Okay, twelve grand." He held up a bracelet.

"Seven grand," said Jack Riegel.

Henry Smith did not correct him. Jed Marcus went swiftly through the stuff, his mind working fast. This was really a terrific haul, even figured at prices obtainable from fences. Over a hundred thousand dollars. And forty thousand in cash.

"I make it a hundred and forty grand, Flit," said Marcus, calmly.

He waited for a moment, then took out his sack of tobacco, rolled a cigarette. His hands did not shake. Henry Smith seemed fascinated by that fact.

"Hell," said Henry Smith, "haven't you any nerves at all? How the devil do you *live?*"

"I live right," said Jed Marcus.

"And you've forgotten something, or at least we did, at the Elite."

"So? What?" asked Jed Marcus.

"Your own dough, Jed. Sorry, but I ve it a rule to make a clean sweep T plumb forgot the guy I had fast under the table. Silly of me, eh?"

"I've got about a grand," said Jed Marcus. "I guess I'm not going to need it after tonight."

"Frisk him. I never take a sucker's word for anything," said Henry Smith.

The Flittermouse, all during the counting of the take, had never for a single instant been still. Jed Marcus backed away. Henry Smith hadn't patted him when he had come in. Been too sure of himself. Knew his men would halt any gunplay the stranger could possibly pull.

Henry Smith's grin faded. Jed Marcus had tossed his wallet on the table, showing the thick sheaf of paper money. Raines had counted it out, nine hundred and eighty-seven dollars.

"Lot of dough for a dick to be carrying," said the Flittermouse. "But what are you backing up for? Why don't you want to be frisked?"

Jed Marcus stopped, his back against the wall. Raines and Riegel grabbed him. The Flittermouse went through his clothes. He came out with a long flat wallet that didn't look a bit like a money container. He opened it, gasped, moved to the light. Raines and Riegel, surprised, released Marcus and followed.

"My God," said the Flittermouse, "the Blakesley Emeralds!"

THE four girls, chattering excitedly, jumped up, ran to stand around Henry Smith. Now the Flittermouse came back, stared into Jed Marcus' face.

"Who the devil are you, anyway? Where did you get the Blakesley Emeralds? You don't deny they *are* the Blakesley Emeralds, do you?"

"No," said Jed Marcus, "I don't. They are exactly what you say, the Blakesley Emeralds, the very stones you murdered Jonathan Blakesley for. You didn't get the stones, I did. Does that mean anything to you, Henry Smith?"

"Only that I've got the stones final-

ly, anyway, that I didn't pull an empty bump-off. But if you're not a dick, who the devil are you? Where do you fit in?"

"I'm just a jewel thief, working out of Saint Louis, where competition isn't so tough," said Jed Marcus.. "I came on to New York a year ago, and heard it whispered that you were after the Blakesley Emeralds. I kept an eye on you, followed you, let you do the dirty work, take the rap, while I got away with the emeralds."

"And the cops blamed me for it! They used the hose on me in the Tombs. I told 'em I didn't have 'em. They wouldn't believe me for a minute. And all the time you—you—"

Henry Smith, while the faces of his men went grave, masklike and white, and the four girls retreated to the divan again, swung a swift right at the face of Jed Marcus. Jed scarcely seemed to move. But his left shot straight and true to the jaw of Henry Smith. The blow landed. Henry Smith tottered. Jed Marcus got him with his left hand, in his coat, and held him up while he got his gat with his right, pushed it against Henry Smith's belly.

Then, carefully, with Henry Smith looking glassy-eyed, Jed Marcus spun him, so that Henry Smith faced away from Jed Marcus.

"I'll drill the first one of you mugs that makes a move for a gat," he said, quite calmly.

"Hank, hold still, or I'll let daylight through you! And when I say *still* I mean *still!* Cut out the blasted jittering. Hold your feet still, and your hands. I'm ready to scream, from watching you, as it is. You've done that to other men, Flit. You know what they can be driven to by whatever your affliction is. What do you do, Hank, sniff it, shoot it in the arm, or dangle on the bamboo?"

He didn't care much what the Flittermouse answered, knowing him to be no addict, even of whiskey. His eyes played over the faces of the other four men. The Flittermouse was very still, perhaps for the first time in his life. He was watching the faces of his four men—and reading in them exactly what Jed Marcus was reading. They were quick to double-cross, to shift allegiances.

"Take Flit's divvy, Marcus," said Raines, "and we'll play ball with you, after this. We didn't go for that club knockover tonight, and you wouldn't go for that, either. We like your style—"

HENRY SMITH couldn't take it any more. He yanked free of Jed Marcus, flung himself, spitting and snarling like a cat, on Raines. He had Raines' gat, was whirling on Jed Marcus—when Marcus shot him in the mouth with his own gun. The Flittermouse went down. All eyes were on him. One of the girls squealed, then put both hands over her mouth.

"The rest of you," said Jed Marcus, his eyes on them as he stooped and gathered up the emeralds, "march to the door and out. There's a cop on the corner. I'll get a Black Maria."

Then they realized that he really was a cop, and started shooting. So that, when the smoke cleared, all he had to take in were the four girls who were laughing and crying hysterically.

"Flit was still, still as a mouse, for the first time since I knew him!" one of them kept saying. "I can't believe it—simply can't."

Later Slossen grinned, a bit whitely, at Jed Marcus.

"You were right, though it was an awful chance to take with the Blakesley Emeralds — even to throw that wacky Flittermouse off guard for a minute or two, and excite the cupidity of his pals."

"Not to mention the awful chance I took," said Jed Marcus, dick extraordinary. "But when I realized Flit played with coppers and

(Concluded on page 11)

DRUMS OF THE DEAD

By

HAL G. VERMES

Author of "The Day I Die," etc.

THE old frame house creaked in the winter wind. The sky was leaden, and flurries of snow whistled along the rutted road. The wind shrieked down the stone chimney, chased under doors, through secret crevices, and rattled yellowed papers on a dusty table in the deserted upper story, making quarrelsome sounds like the whispering of angry spectres.

The weird noises crept into the large living room where two men sat at their evening meal. One was old, palsied; the other middle-aged, grey and grim.

"Looks like it's going to be a hard winter," Walter Leavitt, the elderly man, said in a high, cackling voice.

"Yes," Farn Mantell muttered, his head bent low over the table. "We'll probably be snowed in again for at least a month." His voice suddenly was filled with anger. "It's enough to drive a man mad!"

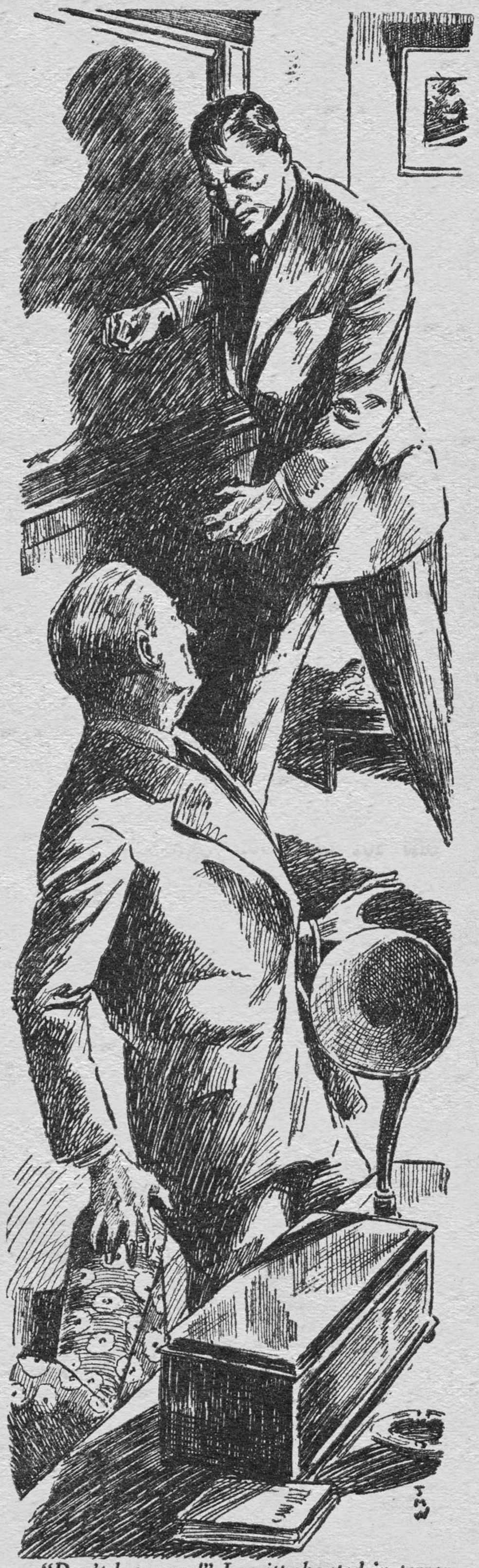
"Why, Farn," the old man said placatingly, "we've got everything we need: plenty of provisions; lots of fuel for the furnace. And"— he lifted a trembling hand toward the shelf-lined walls—"there's a wealth of good books to read."

Farn Mantell glanced across the table from under heavy brows. His ebony eyes glowed with hatred.

"I've been in this hell-hole for six years!" he spat out the words. "And I'm sick of it!"

"But," Leavitt protested, "you want

Farn Mantell Couldn't Wait for His Inheritance— nd There Are More Ways Murder to Kill a Man!



"Don't leave me!" Leavitt shouted in terror

to comfort your old uncle for his few remaining years, don't you?"

"I have been taking care of you!" Mantell shouted.

"Yes," the old man hesitantly agreed.

"But I don't want to rot here!" Mantell went on. "Why don't you give me some money so I can hire a nurse for you? Then I'll be able to go out into the world—and live!"

"You'd just spend it foolishly like you did before." The old man's eyes were thoughtful, kindly. "We're comfortable here and there's hardly any work to do since you closed the upper floor four years ago. We could be happy enough, you and I, if you'd only forget about gambling and whiskey."

"What else is there to live for?" Mantell angrily demanded.

"Peace, contentment, and rest."

Mantell snorted in disgust.

"Don't you see?" his uncle patiently explained. "Money goes through your hands like water through a sieve. If I gave it to you now, you'd just throw it away; and there'd be nothing left to take care of me. After I'm dead you can have it all, and do what you like with it. But in the meantime," he smiled whimsically, "you never can tell. Maybe I'll live to be a hundred."

Mantell glared angrily, and slamming fork and knife on the table, got up and stalked out of the room.

"Don't take on so, boy," the old man said soothingly. "Perhaps it won't be so very long—"

FARN MANTELL slammed the door, cutting off the feeble string of murmuring words. He stopped in front of a circular mirror in the hall and ran thin, nervous fingers through his greying hair.

He was geting old—old! Wasting the best years of his life waiting for a palsied fool to die. What difference did it make how he spent the money?

Just because he had run through half of his inheritance—the twenty-five thousand dollars he received when he reached his majority—Leavitt wouldn't give him another penny. And being broke, he'd had to come back to the old homestead. He'd taken care of his uncle for the past six years. Just the two of them in this isolated spot, nine miles to town and a half-mile to the nearest neighbor.

But he had to stay on. If he left now, his uncle would cut him off without a cent. And how could he leave without even money enough to get down to Chicago? Yes, he had to stay and continue serving his uncle, waiting hand and foot on a soft-spoken but determined old man until he died.

Until he died!

When would that be? When he, too, was white-haired and feeble? What good would the money do him if he was old when he got it? If his voice was cracked and his trembling hands couldn't lift a glass of whiskey? If women laughed into his wrinkled, toothless face? What use would the money be to him then?

But he could stand one more winter here if Leavitt died by spring—or maybe sooner.

Farn Mantell went into his own room and, standing by the window, looked out speculatively at the falling snow. The wind had died down now and the white flakes fell softly, covering the woods and the fields, wrapping the lonely house in a blanket of deep silence. It was cold in his room but, as he stared unseeingly into the storm, his hands tightly gripping the back of a chair, glistening globules of sweat broke out on his forehead.

Uncle Leavitt had a gun. It was small—a .22 pistol. But it was deadly; it could kill. Mantell knew just where it was. His uncle always kept it in the living room in an unlocked wooden box underneath the couch on which he slept.

Mantell had held it in his hands a month before—while the old man w? sunning himself and dozing in fro the house. The revolver was oi chamber fully loaded. Livin-

the country, his uncle always kept it handy, ready for an emergency that never came to pass.

If the old man should die in a little while—

His uncle had lived too many years already, he thought. For the past four years he hadn't been able to travel up or down stairs. That was when he had started to sleep in the living room; and Mantell had shuttered and locked the upper floor so that he needn't bother to clean it, and wouldn't have to fire the furnace so often in winter.

A curious staccato sound tapped through the deadly quiet. Mantell jerked up his head, listened. But the noise drifted away into silence.

Yes, the old man had lived too long—

Mantell strode out of his room and glanced into the kitchen, where his uncle was fumbling with the dishes, slowly and painfully washing them and putting them away.

Then Mantell went in to the living room and, crouching beside the couch, slid the revolver silently out of the wooden box. Strange, he thought, holding the gun in his hand, how such a small, innocent-looking thing of smoked steel could be so deadly. With just one click of the trigger it could blot everything out of a man's mind in an instant: the past, the present, and all of the future.

HEARING his uncle's slow, creaking footsteps coming down the hall, Mantell thrust the gun into his pocket and sprang to his feet. Slowly pushing open the door, the old man crossed the rug and dropped wearily into his chair with a sigh.

Mantell stared at the drooping figure, a grey shadow in the gloom. Fierce excitement rose within him, tightening the tendons in his throat. He gripped his hands, the fingernails biting into his palms. His feet slipped noiselessly ss the floor, a murderous despera- iving him toward the back of his air. His right hand jerked up automatically and slid into his coat pocket, tense fingers determinedly gripping the gun.

Then the startled sound of rhythmic rapping swept through the house again.

"What's that?" the old man asked, without looking up.

They both listened intently to the sharp tap, tap, tap as it rose and fell, racing through the house, seeming to come from everywhere and nowhere. Suddenly it died and mysteriously faded away.

"What was it?" Leavitt asked again.

"Nothing," Mantell snapped curtly.

He was only a step behind the old man's chair now. The gun metal warmed under his hot hand. He pointed the muzzle of the revolver at the back of his uncle's head—at the spot where the flury of white hair made a V on the thin, leathery neck. One shot and he'd never have to listen to that broken, quavering voice again. He wouldn't have to spend another winter in the damned, ghostly old house. He'd be free! But it was murder!

At the sudden realization, Mantell trembled with fear. If he killed his uncle he'd hang! Quickly he loosened his grip on the gun and, thankful that he had caught himself in time, he broke into a storm of violent, hysterical laughter.

"What's so funny?" Leavitt piped.

Mantell fell back on the couch, tears streaming from his eyes. He slipped the revolver back into the wooden box and rubbed his palms together, wiping the feel of the steel from his hands.

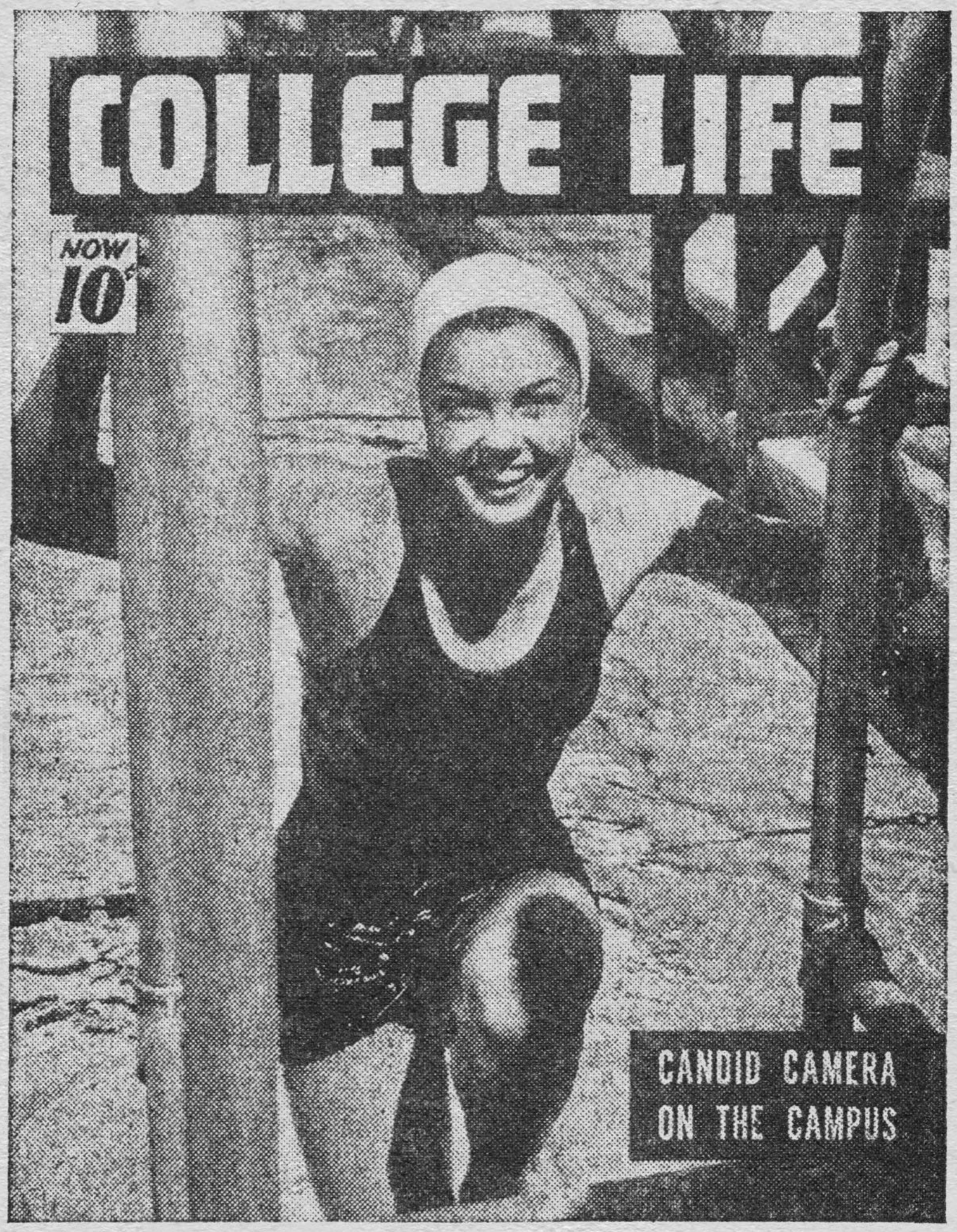
"Be careful," the old man warned, "or you'll be going crazy from laughing at nothing."

His laughter spent, Mantell's face set into a mask of hatred, his anger mounting sharply again at the sound of Leavitt's high-pitched, grating voice.

"It's easy to go crazy here," his uncle continued, "unless you've got some way of occupying your mind. I used to do it by reading, but my eyes are too feeble

(Turn to page 104)

Glorifying the 1940 Coed



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now. You ought to read, Farn."

Mantell only grumbled in reply.

"I've got some mighty interesting books," Leavitt went on. "There's a lot of war books, histories of flagellation, tortures of the Chinese, the Spanish Inquisition." He smiled reflectively. "I've lived such a peaceful, quiet life that I had to get all my excitement and thrills out of books."

Leavitt would go on talking like that all evening, until he finally dozed in his chair. But Mantell had heard him too often already and he couldn't stand it any more. Getting up abruptly, he went down into the cellar to fire the furnace so the water pipes wouldn't freeze.

KILLING the old man wasn't going to be as easy as he had thought. Not that he had any hesitation about doing it; he'd hated his uncle for years. The only thing that had stopped him from pressing the trigger was the realization that he couldn't get away with it. But he was determined not to wait any longer for the old man to die. There must be another way to get rid of him. Some other way—

He shoveled coal half-heartedly into furnace, his tight, tense face reddening at the blasts of heat puffing out of the open iron door. Then he slammed the shovel on the cement floor, kicked the door shut, and adjusted the drafts for the night.

Standing there in the semi-darkness, the silence, he was shocked into rigidity at the echoing sound of ghostly tapping. It sounded like the pounding of a light hammer on the top of an empty keg.

It was the same curious noise he had heard several times before. Now it was growing louder. He listened, straining his ears, trying to locate its source. But it is difficult to discover the direction of sound. He learned that from his experience while hunting, when he tried to find his way back to camp by tracing the report of the guide's gun.

The tapping first seemed to come from overhead; then from the left, and then from the right. He groped around the dimly lit cellar, stumbling over boxes and barrels, cursing as he tore his hands on nails and wire. But he found the source of the sound at last. And the simple explanation made him chuckle mirthlessly.

The noise came from a laundry sink in a far corner. The rusty faucet leaked. The drops of water falling into the deep wooden tub, which acted as a sound box, were amplified into a drum-like tattoo that rose and fell regularly.

An interminable, insistent tapping like that was enough to drive any man insane. It reminded him of the Oriental torture he had chanced to read about in one of his uncle's books: how Chinese bandits drove a man mad by binding him in a chair beneath a water keg, tying his head back, and letting the water drip slowly, drop by drop, on his forehead.

Mantell sweated profusely as he imagined the agony of watching a crystal drop form and hysterically waiting until it fell on one's head. Then another and another— a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand drops of water, falling, falling, until to the victim's tortured mind they struck into his brain like smashing blows of a heavy sledge hammer.

Mantell licked his dry, fevered lips and vainly struggled to force his thoughts back to sanity. But the vision of Oriental cruelty flamed in his imagination, and when he went to his room and threw himself on the bed, it would not let him rest.

All night he stared fixedly out of the window, his eyes glowing with the reflection of the falling snow. The hatred he had been nursing so long pounded in his heart and pulsated through his veins.

The old man had childishly complained about the strange sounds. He was nearing his dotage and little things like that irritated him beyond endurance. It made no difference to Mantell

whether his uncle died—or went crazy. In the latter event, he would be declared incompetent to administer the affairs of his estate. Then he could get the other half of his inheritance, and all the rest of the old man's money, too.

When the light of day filtered through the still drifting snow, Mantell's eyes were bloodshot and bubbles of saliva were caught in the corners of his mouth. But his eyes gleamed and his thin lips pressed against his teeth in an evil smile.

GETTING up quickly but quietly, he went down into the cellar to the laundry sink. Then he opened the leaky faucet a little. He adjusted it carefully until the drops of water fell with regular, hollow rapping that was reflected against the floor above and ran between the wooden walls, finally spending itself in ghostly echoes somewhere in the deserted rooms on the second floor of the old frame house. . . .

"Breakfast is ready," Mantell announced, noting with grim satisfaction that the slow drumming sound was heard with particular distinctness in the raftered living room.

The old man was half through his meal before he noticed it. Then he cocked an ear and listened.

"What's that?" he mumbled, toothless gums munching soft toast.

Mantell cracked an egg and, carefully peeling the shell, made no answer.

"What's that noise?" Leavitt repeated.

His nephew casually glanced outdoors. It was still snowing and the drifts had already crept up to the windows.

"Farn!" Leavitt shouted.

If he admitted hearing the sound, it would lose most, if not all, of its effect on the old man. Mantell smiled to himself because his plan was much more clever than that.

"What is it, Uncle?" he finally asked.

"That regular, muffled tapping."

"Why," Mantell said slowly, after pretending to listen, "I don't hear anything."

"Clean out your ears then," the old man grumbled. "It's a dull hollow noise; like the rap of a light hammer on a drum. It's coming from the cellar, or upstairs; or somewhere."

"Sorry," Mantell insisted, "but I don't hear it."

"You're a blasted fool."

Mantell's teeth clicked but he forced a grin to his lips.

"Somebody's hammering, I tell you!" Leavitt's fork dropped to his plate with a clatter and, getting up, he painfully shuffled across the floor. "I'll look in these rooms," he said. "And you search the upstairs and the cellar."

"But it can't be anything on the second floor," Mantell protested, following him. "It's been boarded and nailed up for four years. Besides, there's nothing in the cellar, either. I went down to fix the furnace before breakfast. I don't hear anything, anyway."

"I hear it out here, too," Leavitt cried from the hall. "In your room and the kitchen. Everywhere!"

"You'd better go back to your chair and rest," Mantell soothed. "I'll look."

He went down to the cellar and kicked the empty pails and boxes around. Then he returned to the living room, where his uncle waited impatiently.

"What was it?" he demanded.

"I didn't find anything. And," Mantell slowly emphasized the words, "I don't hear any noise."

"I'm not crazy!" the old man screamed. "I tell you there's somebody, something!" His voice rose to a piercing shriek. "I hear a hammering, hammering! It must be upstairs. Search upstairs, I tell you!"

"Get hold of yourself," Mantell said sternly, helping him to the armchair. "Read a book and you'll forget about it."

"You've got to—Don't leave m
the old man begged, as Mantell s
to leave the room.

But Mantell wasn't able to conceal his elation any longer. Running to his room, he fell on the bed and burst into a paroxysm of hysterical laughter.

HIS plan was working like a voodoo charm. He'd tell the old man that he'd searched the upper floor. He'd even create a racket to pretend he was unboarding the closed portion of the house.

He rubbed his hands together impatiently, as he listened to the ghostly tapping of the drops of water in the wooden tub. He went down to the cellar and adjusted the faucet again, tightening it a little so that the water would leak more slowly, so that the drops forming would fall with tantalizing regularity.

Mantell kept away from the old man all day, leaving him to focus his attention on the mysterious sound. Though it echoed in Mantell's ears, too, he could forget the noise because he knew what it was. But his uncle wouldn't be able to shake off the insidious hammering because he didn't know!

At nightfall, exhausted with the tension of waiting, Mantell finally fell asleep to the accompaniment of the steady, never-ending rapping of the drops of water.

In the morning he was still tired but, going out on the small front porch, he rubbed his face vigorously with a handful of refreshing snow and felt better. Even outdoors, the dripping of the water could still be plainly heard.

Before going back into the house, he noticed with satisfaction that the snowdrifts hid the road completely, its cold white arms imprisoning them in the old house.

When he took their breakfast into the living room, his uncle's pale blue eyes burned with a growing horror.

"Farn!" he cried, his high voice racking. "I heard that unholy noise all ·ht! It never stopped for an instant. awake, listening, waiting, listen- kept on and on! I still hear it! You searched upstairs didn't you? Wasn't there anything—anything at all?"

"I'm sorry, Uncle," Mantell softly said, lowering his eyes so that the old man could not see his look of triumph. "I'm afraid you need a doctor."

"That's right. Get a doctor!"

"We're snowbound," Mantell pointed out. "We have no telephone. Nobody can get to us and it will be at least two weeks before I can break through those deep drifts."

"Farn," Leavittt pleaded, his lips wet, slobbering. "Can't you hear that hellish hammering? Listen, Farn. There it is: tap—tap—tap! It drums on my ears, in my brain. Listen, Farn!"

"I'll try." Mantell cupped his hand to an ear, hearing the steady, subtle sound plainly. "No," he said with an air of hopelessness, "I can't hear it. The house is as silent as a tomb."

"Then I must be going mad," the old man chattered, sinking back into his chair. "Take the food away. I can't eat. I can't sleep!"

Mantell watched as his uncle's mind slowly broke and went to pieces. Two weeks had passed now. By that time Leavitt was completely insane. Sitting in his chair all day and all night he muttered madly to himself, saliva drooling from his trembling lips.

Mantell stood in the doorway each day, bright black eyes following his uncle's hand as he automatically lifted and dropped it on the arm of his chair, keeping time with the steady stamp of the drops of water. The sound at times seemed louder, then softer. Now sharp, metallic hammering; then deadly, measured drumming. Rising and falling but never stopping as the eternal minutes marched by.

ONE stormy night, while Mantell lay fitfully sleeping, he was suddenly awakened by the sharp report of a gun. He jumped out of bed and, in his haste stumbled over a chair. Springing to his feet, cursing, he ran into the

living room. The place was dark except for a wide ribbon of moonlight that enveloped the still form in the armchair in a soft, glowing radiance.

The old man's head had fallen to his chest. And at the temple, just below the unruly shock of snow-white hair, a thin rivulet of blood crept slowly over his cadaverous cheek. A living red scar. which glistened in the moonlight! Clasped in the death grip of long, bony fingers was the little revolver.

"You old fool!" Mantell yelled savagely at the dead figure. "Listen! Cock your dead ears, you dithering idiot, and listen to the pounding hammers of hell! What?" He widened his eyes in mock surprise. "You don't hear it any more? You're damned right you can't hear it—you're dead!"

He was breathing heavily.

"But *I* can hear it!" He laughed shrilly. "I've heard it all along, day and night, the same as you. And I still hear it. Because I'm alive—alive!"

He shot a look of black hatred at the quiet, shriveled form, transfixed in death. Then he turned on his heel and hurried out of the room.

The snow had piled against the outside door and the wind blew it into the hall when he went out on the porch. The deep drifts still undulated in high waves over the land, making it impossible, he realized, for him to get away for at least another week. But he could stand a few more days alone, now that the old man was dead.

"By heaven," he shouted over the silent landscape, beating his chest, "I'm alive!"

As soon as the roads were cleared he'd go straight to Chicago. There he'd see Leavitt's lawyers and arrange for a substantial advance while the estate was being settled. There wouldn't be any trouble about that, because it was perfectly obvious that his uncle had committed suicide. He'd tell the doctor in the village below that Leavitt had been ailing, and because they were

(Continued on page 108)

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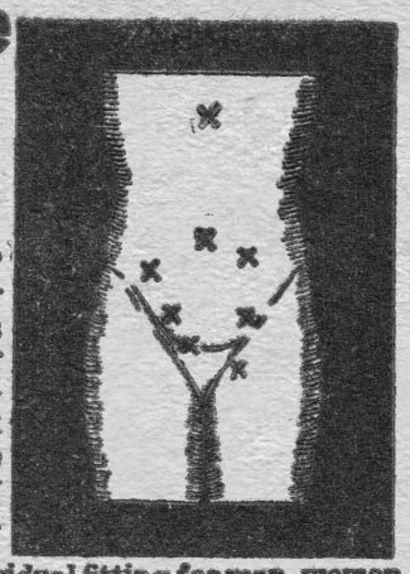

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(Continued from page 107)

snowbound he couldn't go for help. That story would check perfectly.

When he got his hands on some money he'd go south for the spring racing season. This time he would use his head. He had already figured out a fool-proof system that would start the money rolling in. And he'd bet his winnings after each killing, piling up the money until he was enormously rich!

Then he'd have his own stable, and he'd buy a stud farm. He would race his own horses in the Preakness and the Kentucky Derby. Nothing could stop him now for luck was with him again. The old man had done him a favor by shooting himself. That was a real break. And now, everything else would come his way.

The rhythmic tapping noise slipped out through the open door and whispered in his ears, reminding him again that his uncle was dead. He rubbed a hand over his hot face and grinned. In his excitement he had forgotten to shut off the water.

Running down the cellar stairs, he grabbed the handle of the faucet and closed it tightly. Then he went to his room and began to pack.

There wasn't much to put in his suitcase, just some well-worn clothes which he would throw away after he bought a new wardrobe in Chicago. He had a carton of cigarettes to keep him in smokes while he hung around the village until the old man was buried. His razors; the best one he had put away years ago and couldn't find.

HE thought at first that perhaps he had left it on the upper floor when he and his uncle were sleeping up there. But he finally located it in the medicine chest in the downstairs bathroom. Then there was a pair of patent leather pumps. He chuckled as he jammed them into the suitcase. He'd make good use of them soon!

That was all. Now there wasn't anything to do but loaf around until the

FUN, FICTION AND FOTOS IN

snow had cleared off the road. Maybe, he thought, he might pass the time pleasantly by reading a couple of the old man's curious books. He'd get some from the shelves and then lock up the living room.

A dull, smoky sun rose in the East as he went in. The crouched form in the armchair seemed to have shrunk still smaller. The livid red lines of blood stamped a ghastly look of horror on the tired old face. The room was deathly quiet except—

As he was crossing the rug, Mantell suddenly stopped abruptly, frozen into sheer terror. His jaws shut with a snap, his face turned scarlet; and fear swelled the veins in his temples, making them bulge out in bursting purple cords. Straining every muscle to keep motionless, he shut his eyes and listened intently.

The hammering!

He heard it again! It echoed against the walls louder and louder. His tongue slid over his dry lips and he bit them. It must be his imagination he argued. He'd heard the sound for days and weeks, and naturally he thought that he still heard it.

But he actually did hear it! The slow, measured pounding: one, two, three—drop; one, two, three—drop. It had beaten against his ears a hundred thousand times, and it was going on and on!

What a fool he was, he thought, abruptly laughing. The faucet was leaky and rusted, and evidently he hadn't closed it all the way off. He raced down into the cellar again and banged on the faucet until it was shut tight.

But he still heard the hammering!

The faucet leaked no longer. He could clearly see that there weren't any drops forming on the nozzle. But the steady pounding kept on ringing in his ears!

Mantell rushed upstairs and, poised in the hall, listened while the tapping boom of the hammers continued to re-

(Continued on page 110)

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(Continued from page 109)

verberate in his mind. He ran from one room to another but the demoniacal sound followed him everywhere. The noise was high, metallic, victorious.

Wherever he went, he couldn't escape from it. Breathing heavily, sweating, he tore in agony at his ears. Blood rushed to his head, amplifying the deadly beating in his brain. He slammed open the front door and the noise swept outside with him, making him tremble from the vicious vibration.

He struggled into the deep snow but, after a few steps, fell headlong. Clammy perspiration ran in icy rivulets all over his body. Crawling to his feet, wildly swinging his arms in the sparkling white drifts, he stumbled back into the house. He was shivering with cold and his teeth chattered madly.

In his burning tortured brain the deadly drops of water seemed to hammer ever louder. They rang with the heavy crash of cymbals, echoing with the deep-toned clang of large brass gongs.

Tripping, falling, he ran from room to room, striking futilely at the closed faucet in the cellar and the others in the kitchen. He banged insanely at the locked and barred door which led to the deserted second floor. Blood spurting from his hands breaking the windows with his fists, he vainly sought to escape from the tormenting violence which engulfed him.

SOME evil force drew him back into the living room to the rigid, grey old man in the armchair. Mantell's head swelled ready to burst as the sound swirled around him. Agonized, he shouted curses, trying to drown out the pounding of the drops of water. But it mounted ever higher and higher.

He would stop that devilish noise! By heaven, he'd stop it forever!

He tore at the gun in Leavitt's hand, but the dead man clutched it in tenacious, stiffened fingers. Swearing incoherently, Mantell ripped it from the

FUN, FICTION AND FOTOS IN

nand of the corpse. He snapped up his arm and pressed the small muzzle of the revolver against his ear. He jammed the cold steel hard against the maddeningly vibrating eardrum and pulled the trigger.

There was a sharp report. Mantell slumped to the floor writhing in pain. His eyes, fixed with fear, became glassy and sightless. His ears dulled in death and he heard no more.

Now there was no one left to listen. But the slow metallic pounding kept on. On the deserted upper floor that Mantell had neglected to search, water continued to drip from a faucet that had developed a slow leak.

The ghostly sound echoed in the tin sink and, like the insistent rapping of a vengeful ghoul, seeped eerily all through the dead, desolate old house.

FLITTERMOUSE

(Concluded from page 99)

for his personal amusement and that of his friends, I knew the emeralds would do the trick!"

"*Will* you stop that?" said Slossen.

Jed Marcus had his hands on Slossen's desk. He was tapping with all his fingers, as thought he were hammering a typewriter, and *fast!* He went very pale for a moment. Then he stuck his hands in his pockets, and balled them into fists, as he rose to go.

"I'm taking the next train back, Slossen," he said. "Back to Saint Louis, where a man can relax. Look, Slossen, if you ever send for me again, make it for a nerveless, cold-blooded murderer, will you? Preferably a human jellyfish! I like something predictable!"

Slossen grinned. Jed Marcus stood a moment, tapping the floor impatiently. Then he caught himself at that. He swore savagely, and hurried away to catch his train.

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