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MYSTERY

10¢

JULY 1942

GHOST TOWN DOOM

A Novelet of
Death's Legacy

By NORMAN
A. DANIELS

A THRILLING
PUBLICATION



SHRINE OF
THE UNDEAD

A Baffling Complete Novelet

By G. T. FLEMING-ROBERTS

MURDER
IN A CRATE

An Exciting
Manhunt Novelet
By LEO HOBAN

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THRILLING MYSTERY

Vol. XIX, No. 1

July, 1942

Price 10c



A Complete Novelet of Death's Legacy

GHOST TOWN DOOM

By **NORMAN A. DANIELS**

*Peril Stalked the Black Corridors of the
Deserted Mine as Arrows from Bows of
Dead Warriors Sped Out of Nowhere - -*

21

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Tandy Rode Forth to War in '61—and Returned to a Strange World

and

MYSTERY SCOPES - - - - - Chakra 8

Special FREE Mystery-Scope Reading Offer! See Page 112

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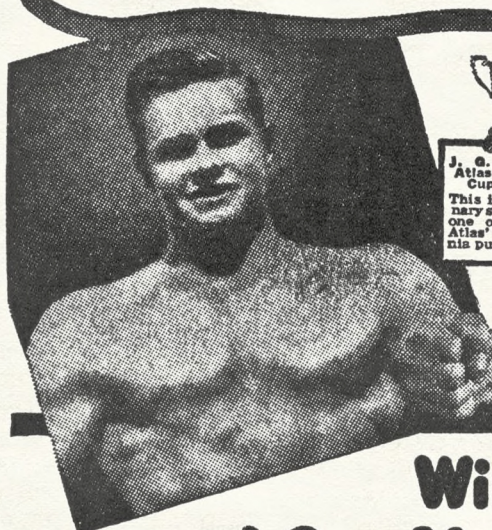
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I can broaden your shoulders, strengthen your back, develop your whole muscular system INSIDE and OUTSIDE! I can add inches to your chest, give you a vise-like grip, make those legs of yours lithe and powerful. I can shoot new strength into your old backbone, exercise those inner organs, help you cram your body so full of pep, vigor and red-blooded vitality that you won't feel there's even "standing room" left for weakness and that lazy feeling! Before I get through with you I'll have your whole frame "measured" to a nice, new, beautiful suit of muscle!

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Strange stories will always be popular, especially when these strange stories are true. The person who has a number of odd and mystifying stories at his fingertip will always be the center of attraction in any conversation.

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Send in Coupon on Page 112

"Devil Things"

ON Christmas Day, 1938, Chalmers Daglin of Melbourne, Australia, was sitting in his living room admiring a bowl of tropical fish that his chauffeur had given him for Christmas.

The chauffeur told him the fish were a rare variety. They were about two inches long, silver, with green stripes—and vicious looking. They came from the "Lost River" in Northern Australia.

Natives called them "Devil Things"—because it was believed that anyone swallowing a devil-thing alive could see into the future.

Daglin laughed as he thought about the foolish superstition. He had no intention of swallowing one. As he watched the large bowl, the light so reflected his shoulder in the water, that it looked as though he were being attacked by one of the fish.

Then he saw something that made him shudder—his shoulder seemed to be bleeding. The reflection was so realistic that he glanced at his shirt-sleeve to make sure there was no blood on it.

For a moment he felt strange about the queer vision. Then he dismissed the matter as a coincidence.

But, two months later, he wished he had taken the vision more seriously. Let the clipping, sent to this department by Miss Elsie Johnston who reported this story, speak for itself:

"Melbourne, Australia. Feb. 26, 1939:

Chalmers Daglin, whose left arm was amputated at the Queen's Hospital, after he was attacked by a shark, while bathing yesterday, was reported out of danger today, by Doctor Malcomb Long, attending physician. Daglin claims he had been warned by a strange premonition last Christmas and he should have remembered not to swim out beyond the danger zone."

Killer Dog

SELDOM does a true psychic story involve a dog—but the following case has just been verified.

In the Adirondack Mountains, north of Saranac, New York, there is a sheep ranch. Some months ago, several sheep were found dead, their necks badly ripped; and around the bodies were tracks of a dog.

So, one moonlit night, the rancher decided to hunt the savage beast. He realized that dogs which have gone sheep-crazy can be more ferocious than wolves or mountain lions. Thus, armed with a repeating shot-gun, he hid behind a boulder but in clear view of his herd of sheep.

Shortly after midnight, he heard the growl of a dog—about one hundred yards away. It was the vicious sound of a blood-mad canine. Then suddenly the dog struck, throwing itself upon the nearest sheep.

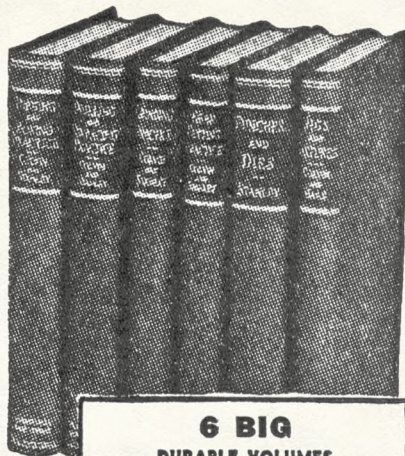
The rancher rushed to the spot to get careful aim at the murderer. As he came close to the scene of the kill, he saw a mass

(Continued on page 10)

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MYSTERY-SCOPES

(Continued from page 8)

of whirling fur and wool. But instead of one dog, there were two. The next thing he saw, the two dogs were fighting over the dead sheep, making it possible for him to shoot both dogs before either one had time to turn on him.

At daybreak, one dog was identified. The other one, the larger of the two, was a stranger. The first dog, called "Sport," belonged to a neighbor who, when summoned to the spot, insisted that he never knew of his dog doing any damage before.

It always had been a loyal pet, protecting both sheep and cows from wolves and other animals.

Then a discovery was made. In the big dog's teeth were strands of wool, proving him a sheep killer. But in the teeth of the neighbor's dog was only dog hair torn from the back of the killer dog. Sport had died trying to save the sheep. The rancher had misjudged the motive.

Naturally, the rancher was sorry. He offered to pay his neighbor who refused, but asked that his mother never learn how her loyal pet had died. It would grieve her too much to know that he had been shot.

The dog was buried. The grave was marked: "Here lies a hero." The old lady was not informed. The son would think of some better explanation when the dog didn't return. Sport was in the habit of roaming away from home occasionally.

But the following morning the mother woke up the son. "Tom," she said, "Sport is dead. I heard him scratching on the door shortly after midnight. I let him in. He greeted me then went to his box behind the stove. But when I walked over to pat him,

he wasn't there. But he looked so happy about something, that I won't feel too bad when you find his body."

The Voice of Death

SOME metaphysicians maintain that a dying person has been known to send his spiritual image thousands of miles away where it can be seen by the human eye. There are numerous cases on record of a mother seeing her son's form in front of her at the time he was killed in battle. This is believed to be a form of telepathic television.

Here is a case recently reported, still more astounding, which indicates that there might be such a thing as psychic sound.

Mrs. Anna Keefer of Manchester, England, received word that her son had been killed in action while fighting in Egypt. Her only response, when the news reached her, was: "I knew it." She refused to explain why she had expected the bad news.

Some weeks later, a wounded officer of her son's regiment returned to England, and he made it a point to call on Mrs. Keefer to tell her that her son had died in the officer's arms. But the officer did not tell her that the son's last words were: "Can you hear me, mother? I am right beside you."

After he revealed to the sorrowful woman that her son had died peacefully and without pain, the mother's words astounded him as she said: "The afternoon that my son died, I was sitting in this room. Suddenly I sensed someone beside me—and at the same moment I heard my son's voice

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say: "Can you hear me, mother? I am right beside you."

Later, the officer, revealing the strange story to a friend, was asked: "I wonder why the son asked his mother if she could hear him, rather than see him. Seeing him would be more comforting and convincing, than just hearing his voice."

"No," answered the officer. "That was the natural question and the most convincing thing for the son to ask . . . you see, the fact is, Mrs. Keefer is blind."

The Human Spider

EGYPTIANS believed that premonitions came in symbols, and that every person had a warning symbol when danger was near. If a person knew what that symbol was, he could be spared much trouble. This might be the basis for the desire to interpret dreams.

An instance of symbolic premonition has just been verified. It happened to a woman residing in a suburb of Chicago. Her name is Grace Laconiger.

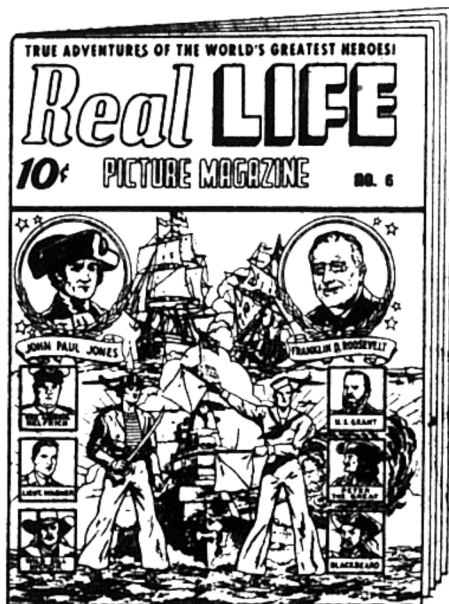
As long as Mrs. Laconiger could remember, she was afraid of spiders. To her they represented viciousness. This abnormal fear must have been hereditary.

Her grandmother had once told her that all her ancestors feared spiders—and that her great grandmother had been told by a gypsy that to dream of a spider meant forthcoming danger, and not to leave the house for three days after such a dream.

One morning, Grace Laconiger was in her house alone. She heard the front door-bell ring. As she neared the door, the

(Continued on page 111)

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GHOST TOWN DOOM

BY NORMAN A. DANIELS

Peril Stalked the Black Corridors of the Deserted Mine as Arrows from Bows of Dead Warriors Sped Out of Nowhere at Intruders!

CHAPTER I

Ghost Town

HE WOULD have been a shade under six feet two if he straightened up, but the man was bent over.

One hand held a .45 automatic and he moved silently, closer and closer to the entrance of the abandoned coal mine.

His name was Kelly Kincaid, as tough a guy as any sand-hog gang had ever produced. The only difference between Kelly Kincaid and the others of his ilk, was that he possessed a few more brains and an insatiable curiosity which helped to make him the best

trouble-shooter the Ajax Corporation had ever hired.

It was ten o'clock and as silent as only an abandoned mine and a ghost town can be. The narrow main street stretched away from the mine. Its ancient frame houses were bent and discouraged-looking. Over it all, hung a weird aura as if a million ghosts held sway there.

Kelly Kincaid was cautious about his approach because he'd spotted two shadowy figures moving toward the mine entrance and one of them had carried a rifle. Kelly slipped around the back of a big tool house and caught a glimpse of the pair again. They were peering into the mine, and then both of them went to the house where



As Kelly fired, he gave the valve a twist, and a long jet of searing flame shot out

the elevator controls were located. So did Kelly Kincaid.

Crouched just outside the door, he could hear them talking. One carried an old kerosene lantern, and he lit this. Kelly had a glimpse of two men with scraggly, unkempt beards, often patched clothing and battered hats.

"We oughtn't to be around here, Dan," one said. "It ain't fittin' to be around here at night."

"Maybe you're right." Dan licked his lips and seemed frightened. "Only thing—that engineer has been down in the mine for two whole days now. We oughta do something."

Kelly moved in then, his gun in his hand, but not pointed at the pair. They whirled around and uttered sharp gasps of fear. Then the lantern illuminated Kelly and they breathed easier.

"Ain't right to sneak up behind a man that way," the one called Dan said. "Specially around these parts, it ain't. Larrabee maybe would have shot you."

Kelly looked at the antiquated rifle and grinned. "Relax, old-timers. My name is Kincaid. I heard you mention an engineer who was sent here to investigate the mine. I see the elevator platform is below, so he must have gone into the mine. Any reason why he didn't come out?"

"Ain't talking," grunted Larrabee, the shorter of the two. "Ain't saying nothing, mister. Less said about what happens around here, the better. That's why Dan and me lived here so long without being bothered by the Indians."

"Indians?" Kelly gasped. "What Indians?"

"Dead ones," Dan snapped back. "Dead for years. But they're still here. Indian burying ground at the end of the mine shaft. Reaches almost to the other side of this hill, and that's where the Indians are buried. Eries, they are, and fighters. Many a good white man went down under their tomahawks and arrows."

KELLY shoved his derby hat to the back of his head. That derby was responsible for his nickname. He was said to sleep with the hard bonnet

on his head. At least, nobody had ever seen him without it. That Kelly was as much a part of Kincaid as his brawny arms and massive fists.

"Look," he said, "I'm working for the Ajax Corporation. They own this mine. It was worked, up until nine years ago, and then abandoned because production became poor. Now the company needs more coal than ever. They're willing to work this mine, even if it doesn't produce the best coal. An engineer named Blake was sent here to inspect it. He didn't report, and I'm here to find out why. Maybe you know the answer."

"Answer?" Dan shrugged. "Sure we do. He went into the mine after we warned him to stay out. Seems like you don't know the whole story, mister. The mine didn't close, nine year ago, because it started to peter out. There was an accident—they called it that, anyway. Six men died and a lot were hurt bad. Explosion. Only we know better."

"I'm listening," Kelly said. "And when you get to it, don't forget about Blake, the engineer."

"As I was saying," Dan went on, "they closed the mine, because nobody would work here any more. They were scared, and I'm betting you no miner will set foot in the shaft. No, sir—they didn't have to have pictures drawn. It's the Indians. The shaft cut into their burying grounds and it happened right after that."

Kelly put his gun away. "And now we come to Blake, at last. When did he go into the mine?"

"Day before yesterday, and he ain't come out. He got us to help fix the machinery to lower the elevator, but we didn't go down with him. No, sir—not us. We got more nerve than the average man, because we live in the ghost town and everybody else is afraid to, but when it comes to entering the mine—leave us out."

Kelly slid his derby to the exact middle of his head, and then pushed it firmly into place.

"For five bucks you'd be willing to run the machinery while I went down, wouldn't you? Sure, I thought so. Then come on. I'm going after Blake. He may be hurt and needing help. In-

dians! You guys have seen too many Western movies."

Kelly led the way to the mine entrance, started the creaky, rusted machinery and brought the lift to the surface. He stepped onto it, drew a flashlight and patted the gun in his pocket.

"Okay," he told the two old-timers. "Lower away, but slow. Watch the signal ropes in case I want you to stop."

"Or bring you up quick, eh, mister?" Dan cackled. "You won't stay down there long."

Kelly felt the platform shudder, and then he started to drop, foot by foot. He passed the first shaft into the side of the hill, but he knew that one had been completely worked out and the lower shaft was the more promising.

He wondered about Blake, who was a hard-headed engineer. Knew how to handle his fists, too, and would have given a good account of himself in a battle. That was what worried Kelly the most. Blake should have come up.

THAT old Indian legend was a queer thing. He'd heard about it from some of the men who'd worked the mine before the explosion. The way they spoke, it seemed just a characteristic superstition of men who work underground in constant danger. He knew their beliefs—no one could whistle in a mine; one accident meant that two more would take place very promptly. A lot more of the same.

Kelly had never believed in this stuff much, but when he bossed mines and tunnel jobs, he never tried to talk his men out of their superstitions.

The floor of the lift hit bottom. Kelly sprayed the shaft with light and stepped off the wooden platform. Almost absent-mindedly, he reached for his gun and felt a little better with the weapon tightly gripped in his hand.

The shaft was very long and curved plenty. Timbers were in good shape. A minimum amount of work would place this mine in operation again. Blake must have seen this. Why, then, hadn't he come out to make his report?

Kelly kept on going and the deeper

he got into the mine, the more intense became the silence and the foulness of the air. A couple of times he thought he smelled methane—fire-damp—the most dreaded of all hazards a miner can encounter. This gas, imprisoned in coal cavities, was released as miners cut deeper and deeper into the vein. Gradually the air would become filled with the gas, and then the slightest spark would cause an explosion that would entomb the men. The gas would kill them if the cave-in didn't.

Then Kelly reached a fork in the tunnel. The main shaft ended, and two more had been dug at twenty-degree angles. He followed the left one. It was narrower, its ceiling lower, and the top of his derby kept scraping loose coal and dirt down his neck.

His flash blazed a trail far ahead until he saw fallen timber and huge blocks of coal—the remnants of the explosion. Rescue parties had dug a lot of it away though and at the flat end of the tunnel Kelly saw something else. The miners had been digging through dirt and stopped suddenly when they came upon a human skeleton. It was still there, half-uncovered, its skull grinning vacantly in a horrible, eternal grimace.

Kelly shivered, and then concentrated on trying to find some sign of Blake. The man couldn't have just vanished—not in a coal mine. This particular shaft gave no clue as to what happened, so Kelly retreated, rather glad to move away from the skeleton which had been uncovered.

Reaching the main shaft again, he yelled Blake's name. It echoed dully through the cavern, but there was no reply. He headed into the right-hand shaft this time and had gone about fifty yards when he stopped in his tracks.

The heavy breathing of a man, either in agony, or the last stages of exhaustion, reached his ears. He raised the beam of his flash. Someone was running toward him. No—lurching, not running. It was Blake, but except for the fact that Kelly knew him well, he would hardly have recognized the man. His clothing was in shreds, his face covered with blood and his

eyes reflected the light from the flash. They were wide in horror.

"Blake—it's Kelly. Kelly Kincaid!" he yelled.

"Kelly—get out! Get out!" His voice rose to a strident pitch. "Get—out!"

But Kelly went forward instead. He heard a twanging sound, a muffled blow, and Blake just pitched forward on his face and lay still. The flash-light beam wavered slightly as Kelly saw what had killed Blake. It was an arrow, buried halfway into his back.

STRAIGHTENING, Kelly stuck his flash and gun out simultaneously. The blank, dead end of the tunnel was all he encountered. He stopped long enough to make sure Blake couldn't talk, and then moved forward. There was nothing but silence—and death. The cave was empty except for him and Blake's corpse.

Yet someone had shot the arrow! Things like that didn't just materialize out of thin air. Kelly started to cut into the end wall of the tunnel with his gun butt. A lot of loose dirt and coal fell down, but that was all.

He shivered and for one of the very few times in his life, Kelly Kincaid felt scared. He'd stand up and fight anything alive, but how could a man battle something he couldn't even see? Something that dealt sudden death and then evaporated.

He returned to where Blake lay, hoisted the corpse to his shoulder and started on a crouching run toward the main shaft. There he straightened up, but kept on going. He carefully placed the body on the elevator platform, took a last look around and prayed that the two old-timers hadn't abandoned their vigil at the machinery. Kelly could think of a lot more pleasant places to spend a night than in this mine. He jerked the signal ropes.

A breath of relief escaped his lips when the platform shivered and started to rise. It reached the surface and both old men came to greet Kelly. His flash centered on Blake and both men started back with yelps of terror. Larrabee, who seemed the bravest, finally walked over beside Kelly, bent

down and without touching the arrow, examined it.

"Yep," he said with a note of satisfied finality, "it's an Indian arrow all right. I can tell by the feathers and the dye on 'em. Been buried down there for a couple of hundred years, but it didn't rot. None of them Indian weapons ever do. Mister, maybe you believe us now, huh?"

CHAPTER II

Attack of the Long Dead

BLAKE'S corpse, decently wrapped in a blanket, lay on the counter of an old grocery store that had been abandoned for years. Kelly, Dan and Larrabee sat on the rotted steps of the building.

Kelly said, "Blake was alive down there for two whole days and made no attempt to get out. That's not like him. He'd been pretty badly beaten up, too. His wrists and ankles show he's been tied plenty tight."

"To a stake, like as not," Dan said judiciously. "Them Indians always tied prisoners to a stake."

"Stop talking about dead Indians," Kelly snapped. "I still don't believe in them. You sure there is no way for me to get word to town without driving there myself?"

"We can't drive," Larrabee said. "There ain't a telephone for miles, and Jewel City is a three-hour walk. No, sir—looks like you have to go, mister."

"Well, I'm not going," Kelly said. "Nothing we can do for poor Blake—anyway, and if I do go, the murderer might get clear. He's in that mine—no question about it. But he won't get out so long as the elevator is at the top, unless there is another exit. Where is this Indian burying mound?"

"Right back of the hill where the mine shaft is sunk," Dan answered. "You ain't going there tonight, mister?"

"Why not?" Kelly asked. "I'm telling you, dead people, cemeteries and such don't bother me. I'm no believer

in ghosts, in spite of what happened in the mine."

Both old men shrugged. Dan said, "We can't stop you, mister. We'll take care of things in the morning, too. Don't worry about that."

"Why should I?" Kelly arose and dusted off his clothes.

"Because you ain't coming back," Dan answered conversationally. "You're a fool and fools die young. We were living here when the mine stopped working after the accident. We stayed on, lived here all alone, miles from anybody. But we minded our own business. Open the mine again and we leave—fast. They'll have to dig right through the burying ground to get at another vein of coal. Just move one skeleton and—well, you know what happened nine years ago."

Kelly laughed harshly and walked away. He paced down the deserted street of the town. There was a weak moon that threatened to be obscured by storm clouds at any moment, but it cast weird, grisly shadows from those old, dilapidated structures. Kelly found himself whistling loudly, but he stopped and grinned to himself in embarrassment. He was like a kid passing by a graveyard.

Fifteen minutes later that was exactly what he was doing. Kelly knew Indian mounds and behind this hill was a huge one. They'd buried the dead tribesmen in the side of the hill and built their mound above the bodies. Perhaps there were a hundred skeletons rotting away right beneath the spot where he walked.

USING his flashlight plenty, and keeping a tight grip on his gun, Kelly searched for some means of leaving the mine by a back way, a narrow shaft dug upward from the depths of the hill. Only by such means could the murderer of Blake have escaped.

Suddenly Kelly stopped short and listened. It seemed as if a steady, eerie throbbing noise was coming out of the night. It grew louder and louder, and then he recognized it. Drums! War drums!

They seemed to hammer out of the night from all sides and concentrate

upon the spot where he stood. Sometimes he thought they came right out of the ground. He stifled an urge to run and, instead, dropped flat on the ground to wait for developments.

They came, with astonishing speed.

He was well below the top of the hill and at its very peak he saw a strange, blue column of light. It came from the ground itself and started to grow taller. Like the flame of a candle, its outer edge was tinged with yellow.

Kelly knew what caused it—burning methane. Firedamp, from the mine. But how was it escaping through tons and tons of earth and what had set it afire?

He started wriggling closer to the phenomenon. That flame was man-made. He was sure of it. Methane never escaped from a mine this way. He could hear the stuff hissing as he approached. Then Kelly rose up and started running. The bluish flame was cut off as if a mighty gust of air had blown it out.

Kelly reached the spot, bent and sprayed his flash along the tall grass, looking for a pipe, anything through which the gas might have been piped. He didn't see the two figures that rose up like grim ghosts from the grass which concealed them. They were stripped to the waist, their bodies gleaming in the reflection of Kelly's flashlight.

He heard them only when they were half a dozen feet away and already leaping in his direction. Kelly's flash was knocked out of his hand in the first attack. He went down under it, too, and had no chance to draw a gun.

One of the attackers landed on him and two amazingly strong hands reached up to encircle his throat. They clamped like a vise and Kelly felt his lungs begin aching.

He reached up, felt along the back of his attacker's head for enough hair to grab. There was none. The man was entirely bald and his whole torso was naked.

Kelly knew that in another minute he'd be unconscious. He gave one last, terrific effort that sent his attacker hurtling aside. The second man leaped, and there was something

in his hand that looked like a hatchet. This swept down, but Kelly rolled over and avoided the blow. His right hand flashed out, grabbed an ankle and tugged.

The man came tumbling down, but Kelly had little chance against the two of them. The first was on his feet already. While Kelly tangled with the second, a brawny arm encircled his throat again and something that felt like a rock, struck him a violent blow on the back of the neck.

His knees buckled, and he went down. Both attackers stepped clear, in the belief that they'd finished him. But Kelly's derby was still on his head, fixed there as if it grew from his scalp, and he was far from unconscious.

HE MANAGED to reach his holster automatic and had it half drawn when the pair landed on him again. This time, both brought down their clubbed weapons squarely on top of the derby.

Kelly rolled over, yanked the gun free and looked for a target. There was none. In a matter of less than two or three seconds, both attackers had completely vanished. He arose, ran a hand across the top of his derby and felt the dent in it. He grinned without much mirth and began looking around.

The tall grass waved in a gentle breeze, but there was no other movement. Kelly found his flashlight, turned it on and saw that the back of one hand was covered with white and red paint. Then he recalled that the two killers had been bald, stripped to the waist and armed with weapons that looked like hatchets.

He shivered again. The hatchets had been tomahawks, the bared torsos and shaved heads meant Indians, and this stuff on his hand was war paint.

Kelly wiped sweat off his face, and then resolutely proceeded to cover every foot of the hillside. He reached the bottom of it and came upon an old-cement road, narrow, cracked and winding. It was a road built around the side of the hill, connecting the mine with a highway, two miles to the east. If he could reach that highway,

stop a car, he'd get help much faster than by any other method.

Kelly started trudging toward the highway, following that ancient, private road. Half a mile from the hillside, it became lined with trees. Their branches formed an arch that made the way very dark and dismal.

Then Kelly saw headlights rolling down the main highway and a certain measure of good spirits returned. Such things as murdered men with arrows in their backs, and naked savages rising out of a burial mound, were almost alien and seemed so far away as never to have existed.

Kelly Kincaid parked himself on the side of the highway and waited for a car to come along. Not that this road was busy. Used mostly by farmers, it became all but deserted at night.

Kelly saw headlights then—moving rapidly. The roar of a truck reached his ears, and then the wail of a siren. More lights appeared. Those at the rear were from a passenger car and it started to edge out as if to pass the truck. The siren was screeching dismally.

Kelly saw a spurt of flame from the truck cab. The passenger car quickly fell back. Jets of flame came from both vehicles now. Kelly drew his gun and waited, tensely. He had an idea what was happening. The truck, either stolen, or loaded with illegal merchandise was trying to get away from a state trooper. It couldn't be a plain hijacking job because crooks don't use sirens.

The truck started to loom up, as big as a house. Kelly saw the trooper's white car roaring behind it. Something happened then. Perhaps one of the crooks in the truck somehow managed to get into the back of it and opened the rear doors. Anyway, a fusillade of shots came from the rear of the truck. The white cruiser zig-zagged crazily, left the road, and turned over on its side.

KELLY didn't hesitate then. As the truck rolled past, his gun centered on the cab and the driver outlined behind the glass. He fired twice. The truck, doing at least fifty, gave a wild jerk. Someone yelled a

string of curses. The truck left the highway, ripped through a couple of trees and, like the cruiser, turned over.

Two men managed to get out. Kelly started toward them. Guns blazed. He ducked, rested one elbow on his knee and took aim. The two men were running across a field, trying to put plenty of distance between themselves and the truck. Kelly fired. One man went down. The other began running like mad and assumed a curving course to make a more difficult target of himself. Kelly went after him, firing high twice, but the man didn't stop.

Finally Kelly was close enough, and he went forward in a lunge. The man fired over his shoulder, missed and then crashed to the ground. He tried to use his gun again, but Kelly smeared him on the jaw.

He arose, puffing from his exertion, and hauled the unconscious man to his shoulder. He began trotting back to where the truck and the cruiser lay.

"Stand where you are!" a voice called out.

The trooper, banged up a little, had his gun pointed straight at Kelly. The big, derby-hatted trouble-shooter, dropped his burden and raised both hands slightly.

"It's okay, officer," he said. "My name is Kelly. I work for the Ajax Company as a private dick and trouble-shooter. Maybe you know me. Most of the troopers do."

The policeman came forward. His gun lowered. "Hello, Kelly," he said. "Sure I recognize you. I'm Hank Marlowe—Riverside Barracks. Say, you must have carried on a little private war with these monkeys. Nice work."

"There's one back there." Kelly jerked his thumb. "I think he's dead unless my eagle eye deceives me. The one I lugged here will snap out of it in a couple of minutes. As for the truck driver——"

"Plugged through the side of the head. Kelly, I've heard about your shooting ability, but I never really believed it. Man, you're perfect. Well, I'll put cuffs on this monkey. We'll try to haul my car back on its tires and go to town. Or better yet, we'll use your car."

Kelly grinned. "Mine is about four or five miles from here and say, Marlowe, I've got a little job for you, too. A neat murder. So damned neat it seems to have been committed by ghosts."

Marlowe groaned. "Here I been, riding around for weeks hoping I'd find some action, and then everything happens at once. Take this truck—there have been so many truck robberies the last couple of years that every man has been assigned to watch out. This is the first time any of us ever caught the crooks before they got the truck and its load hidden. Now there's a murder, too."

Kelly rubbed his chin. "We better clean up this mess first. How's your prisoner? Waking up, is he? Can't have that guy bothering us."

KELLY slugged the man, none too gently, and grinned at Marlowe.

"That's the best method of keeping them on ice. Even better than handcuffs. Now let's see about your car."

They got the vehicle back on the road and succeeded in turning it right side up. While Marlowe did a little checking to see if the car was safe to operate, Kelly went over to the truck. Somehow, the back doors hadn't sprung, so the cargo was intact. The driver was dead. One look indicated that. Kelly walked over to the cruiser.

"Say, Marlowe, I've been thinking. Perhaps it's best if you go to town alone. Send somebody out to clean up this mess, and then you get over to the mine. Bring the medical examiner and a dead wagon. I'll wait for you there."

"Right," Marlowe agreed. "But while you were looking at the truck, I took a walk through the field. If you plugged a guy, he didn't die because there's no corpse. I did find a few smears of blood against a small tree, though, as if the man was wounded and had leaned against it for a couple of minutes. Better keep your eyes open in case he comes back."

Kelly nodded, helped to load the unconscious thug aboard the trooper's car and watched it roll out of sight.

Then he turned down the old road that circled the base of the mine—and instantly began thinking of ghosts, the Indian burying ground and the haunted mine again. After all, that was his main job.

He imagined what Larrabee and Dan were thinking by this time. It made him grin a little. They'd have given him up for lost by now, a victim of the Indian ghosts.

CHAPTER III

The Dead Fight Well

OLD Larrabee and Dan were flabbergasted when Kelly walked back into the ghost town.

"We sure thought you was a goner," said Larrabee. "Saw that tower of flame shoot up, like it does when the Indians prowl. Heard some shooting, too. I guess maybe you believe us now, eh? You didn't shoot any of them Indians, now, did you? Your bullets didn't bother 'em much, did they? I know they didn't, because Dan and me have taken shots at 'em, too. Long ago, before we understood what this was all about."

"Did either of you ever see any trucks or cars moving along the old road at the foot of the hill?" Kelly asked.

"No, sir," Dan replied promptly. "Ain't no call for anybody to drive down that road. Leads no place but here, and this ain't exactly a place where a man can find entertainment or do business. Why?"

Kelly shrugged. "I was having a pipe dream. Forget it. There'll be a state trooper here pretty soon, with the medical examiner to take care of Blake's body. Meanwhile, I'm going back to the mine."

"You ain't going down?" Larrabee gasped. "Good gosh, man, ain't you had enough? The medical examiner will be looking at what's left of you, too, if you ain't careful."

"I'm paid to take chances," Kelly said. "How about coming along to lower the lift? Keep an eye out, too, maybe?"

The two grizzle-faced men looked at each other. Finally Larrabee shrugged.

"I guess for five dollars we could do it, huh, Dan? But, mind you—only to run the machinery."

They trudged over to the mine, both talking at a great rate. From what they said, Kelly realized that the company would have a difficult time reopening this mine.

The workers, jittery at best, would refuse pointblank to operate any diggings menaced by ghosts. One look at the Indian skeleton, and they'd quit in a body. Unless the mystery was cleaned up, the mine might as well be left as it was. The ghost town, too.

Kelly stepped onto the platform. "Lower away, boys," he said. "When I come out this time, one of two things will have happened: I'll either believe in ghosts, or I'll haul up a few choice specimens of ectoplasm."

The elevator machinery groaned, and the lift went down by staggering jolts. Kelly drew his gun and checked it. He groaned because it contained only a partially filled clip, and his extra ammunition was in his baggage stowed away in the car. Kelly would really have enjoyed the feel of a tommy gun instead of an automatic containing only a few bullets.

He stepped off the platform at the bottom of the shaft and strode forward along the tunnel. He paused to pick up an old shovel. It might come in handy, he figured.

First of all, he intended to make a rigid examination of the Indian skeleton, to see if it was a real one. Then he meant to search for a hidden entrance to the other tunnel. Blake hadn't just materialized out of the air. There must be a secret way of entering the narrower tunnel.

If Kelly's luck remained as good as it had been with the truck thieves, he'd probably get some results. Trooper Marlowe ought to be showing up soon, too.

KELLY reached the end of the larger tunnel, saw the grisly skeleton again, and spent about five minutes convincing himself that it was actually the real thing. No ques-

tion about it. By digging alongside the skeleton, he unearthed a tomahawk, several arrows and a bow. All were in a remarkably good state of repair, considering the years they'd been buried.

It was grim, nerve-shattering work. Alone in the silence of the tunnel, with only the ray of a flash for light and a host of shadows for company, Kelly felt his skin prickle more than once.

Finally he headed into the other tunnel, after making sure no one lurked in the main shaft to cut off his retreat. The elevator platform was still there. Larrabee and Dan would be on guard at the engine house. Maybe Marlowe would arrive in time to be of some help.

Kelly invaded the narrower tunnel, moving forward very slowly and studying the side walls intently. But he reached the end without seeing anything. This time he didn't use such ineffectual methods as a gun butt to dig with. He had the shovel. It was rusty, but still good, and he went to work with a vengeance.

The dead end of the tunnel had to reveal a hidden exit of some kind. Unless it did, there was nothing to do but believe in ghosts—believe that Blake had been held by the spirits of the dead Indians and suddenly allowed to materialize just before he was killed. The arrow which finished him must have been ghostly, too—if no hidden exit was discovered.

His flash on the floor, supported by a lump of coal and spraying the blank wall, Kelly began digging. The shovel felt good in his hands. Sometimes he missed the thrill of this kind of work. The battle against the unknown elements that inhabit a mine, the worry lest firedamp smother him or create an explosion. Being a trouble-shooter had its exciting moments, but in his digging, Kelly almost forgot about such things.

He made a good impression on the wall, too. The coal vein was running out here and there was mostly dirt. For more than half an hour he kept it up, while his face became sweat-covered and streaked with coal dust. Then he gave up. There couldn't pos-

sibly be an exit beyond this blank wall.

All of Kelly's hopes were drowned by despair. He began to grow apprehensive again. Were there really ghosts, then? What else could inhabit a mine with only one entrance and exit? What else could vanish so completely? Kelly shivered and stooped to pick up his flash.

There was a sudden hissing sound. He whirled. The whole passage, twenty feet behind him, was blocked by a jet of burning gas. Methane, of course. Its characteristic blue, yellow-outlined flame proved this.

Kelly's gun came up. He didn't need the flash now, but he clung to it just the same. For a moment or two, he was paralyzed by sudden terror. How could a jet of methane burn like this inside a mine without creating a terrific explosion? For firedamp to burn in such a manner meant that the air must be contaminated with the stuff.

SUDDENLY Kelly coughed and felt an ache at the base of his lungs. He knew what that meant. The burning gas was using up the oxygen. In the narrow tunnel, there'd soon be no more and death would come quickly. Kelly's only chance was to charge straight through the wall of burning gas, even if it meant being badly singed.

He thrust his flash into his pocket, curved one arm around his face and lunged toward the jet of blazing gas. Before he reached it, the hissing stopped, the flame was sucked into the floor of the tunnel itself, and an intense silence became almost as complete as the darkness.

Kelly stood, half stunned, for a moment. Then he reached for his flashlight. He heard a low voice. The words themselves were indistinguishable, but the results were quite definite. At least three men came charging toward Kelly.

They couldn't see Kelly any more than he could see them, but in the narrow confines of the tunnel, the roughest guess work would have placed him for the attackers.

Hands clawed at his face and shoul-

ders. Two strong arms grabbed him below the knees. As he toppled forward, he seized a pair of naked shoulders, gave them a tremendous twist and brought another man down, too. In the tangled mass of arms and legs and bodies which Kelly thus created, he was able to wriggle free while the attackers fumbled and fought among themselves.

Drawing back, Kelly estimated the direction of the passage, drew his gun and held it by the barrel. Then he charged forward. At the first encounter with the unseen men, he used the gun butt effectively, smashed a hole through their defense and went springing along the tunnel.

Something twanged, and an arrow hissed by his ear. If they all started shooting blindly, one arrow was bound to hit him. These ghosts, or killers, had to be placed on the defensive. Kelly turned around, raised his gun and fired.

He heard a wild, agony-laden scream. Someone floundered around, and then landed heavily on the tunnel floor. Kelly started to run, intent on reaching the elevator before the killers recovered their wits and came in pursuit.

He was within twenty yards of the elevator shaft when he heard them rushing after him again. He reached for his flash, found it gone and knew it must have fallen out of his pocket while he battled those men. The footsteps were getting closer. Kelly fired one more shot. In the momentary flash of light, he caught a glimpse of two men, naked to the waist, brown as a nut and with faces painted in fantastic colors and designs. Each one held a bow and a tomahawk.

One of them went down, but he was only scratched and bounded back to his feet. Kelly started shooting again. By the hammering footsteps he knew there were others now—probably as many as half a dozen.

Although the sight of them, if only for a fraction of a second, had made Kelly's blood run cold, he had no time to be afraid. He was battling for his life. The gun spat three times, then its mechanism clicked. He hoped the attackers didn't hear that despairing

contact of metal against metal. Kelly's gun was empty.

HOWEVER, the attackers seemed to have drawn back to map some sort of plan. Kelly ran lightly toward the elevator. If he could get onto the platform, signal Larrabee and Dan, they might be able to haul him up before the ghostly fighters got into action again.

But Kelly was due for a surprise and shock. The elevator wasn't at the bottom of the shaft. It had been raised. He cursed the two old-timers, put his back against the wall and determined to sell his life as dearly as possible.

They were coming again and what made their approach seem even worse was the total lack of shouting that usually encouraged killers to keep going. There was just that same silence broken only by the sound of padded feet against the tunnel floor.

Kelly held the gun raised. He couldn't see when they got close to him, but he might be able to feel the air currents as they swept in, or judge their distance by the slithering feet. Maybe they knew his gun was empty, for certainly there was no hesitation in their approach. One thing Kelly did know—they were vulnerable to bullets. To pain also, because the one he'd hit had yowled to high heaven.

Then something struck the ground at his feet. Automatically, he bent, fumbled, and his hand closed on a heavy revolver. He knew instantly what it meant and where it came from. Trooper Marlowe had returned. This gun felt like the type state troopers carried.

Kelly pointed the weapon straight ahead into the passage, waited a second, and then opened fire. He had only six cartridges, but they'd do.

There was another scream, wild confusion as the attackers retreated, and then arrows began flying his way. Kelly felt one of them nick his shoulder. He dropped to his belly, and then wriggled forward quickly because the wheel mechanism of the lift was turning over.

When the platform reached the bottom, he scrambled aboard. The ar-

rows started again and a couple of tomahawks clattered to the wooden floor of the lift. Kelly fired two more shots, and then felt himself being rapidly lifted.

CHAPTER IV

Vanishing Trooper

TROOPER MARLOWE and a white-faced Medical Examiner were at the top.

Marlowe said, "We just got out of the car when we heard the shots. I thought they came from the mine. Then there were more of them and I saw the flash of your gun. I dropped my own when I figured you had no more slugs left."

"Doc," Kelly ground out, "you can work this elevator okay. Marlowe, did you see two old men around the platform when you arrived?"

"Not a soul," Marlowe said.

"Then keep your eyes peeled," Kelly told the doctor, "for two men who look about sixty years old. Maybe they just got scared when the shooting started or maybe they're a couple of rats. I'm not sure. Let's go back down, Marlowe. I plugged a couple of those babies, and I want to see what a dead ghost looks like."

Marlowe stepped onto the platform, too. The doctor started the mechanism, and they went down smoothly. Marlowe had a flashlight and swept the darkness with it as they landed. Then both men boldly proceeded up the tunnel.

They reached its end, inspected the left fork and then the right. There were no signs of any wounded men—not even one of those spent arrows. At least twenty had been shot, but they might as well have been ghost arrows because they certainly seemed to have no substance.

"What's it all about?" Marlowe asked. "I've heard stories that the mine and the town were haunted, but if anybody was in this mine with you, where are they?"

"Wouldn't I like to find out?" Kelly grunted. "I hoped to at least find

some footprints leading to their exit out of this tunnel, but the floor is too hard-packed. There isn't a mark, not even from my own shoes. Let's go back up. I want a talk with those two old duffers, and they'd better have a pretty good excuse for leaving me flat."

With the doctor in tow, Kelly and Marlowe hurried to the abandoned store where Kelly had left Blake's corpse. They found it all right and left the doctor to make his examination. Marlowe, inspecting the crumbling old buildings on the right-hand side of the street, called Kelly over.

"I just heard a groan," he said. "Came from inside this place. You've got the only loaded gun, and I've got a flash. Let's go see what's up."

They invaded the place, narrowly missed falling into sections of caved-in floor, and finally reached the back of the place. Marlowe's flash picked out two struggling, trussed-up forms.

Larrabee and Dan were firmly tied and cruelly gagged. Kelly cut them loose in a moment.

"It was the Indian ghosts," Larrabee cackled. "Sneaked up on us. Next thing we knew, we were here—tied up."

"I'm getting out," Dan said hoarsely. "Right now. Nothing can stop me. I've had enough. You got them dead Indians all roused up, Kelly. They'll kill anybody they see now."

"Maybe," Kelly retorted. "But I think I did a little killing myself. Marlowe, let's go around to the other side of the hill where the burial mound is located. If we can't find the exit from inside the mine, maybe we can from the hillside. There *has* to be a way out. Larrabee, you and Dan stay here. Don't stir, understand? We don't want any more murders."

WITH Marlowe running beside him, Kelly sped around the side of the hill, plowed through the tall grass and finally stopped at about the spot where he'd been attacked before. Marlowe used his powerful light to spray the whole area. Kelly suddenly grabbed the flash and held its ray steady on a portion of ground where the grass grew much shorter

and greener. He hadn't noticed this before with his less powerful light.

Suddenly they both saw a thick finger of metal rise up out of the ground. It looked like an oversize radio aerial.

"Spies," Marlowe gasped. "They've got a short-wave set underground."

"Spies, my eye!" Kelly grunted. "Anyway, we'll see. You circle to the left. I'll go right. If you see anybody, grab him. We'll meet twenty feet the other side of the aerial—or whatever it is."

Marlowe disappeared into the darkness. Kelly advanced cautiously toward the now towering strip of metal. He reached the spot where he should meet Marlowe and waited there. Five minutes went by and there was no sign of the trooper.

Kelly frowned. Marlowe should have reached the place long before. He started to walk closer to the tower, but suddenly ducked into the high grass.

Two men were approaching. They didn't carry lights, but he could see them faintly silhouetted against the background of dark sky. He recognized them a moment later. They were Larrabee and Dan, the old-timers who'd lived in the ghost town so many years.

But there was a change in them. They were no longer bent over like old men, but very erect and moving as silently as some of the ghosts.

One lighted a match and waved it high above his head for a moment. Then both vanished from sight in the grass. Kelly had Marlowe's gun, and it still contained enough bullets to do battle with. He started to move closer.

Once more that hissing sound reached him and the blue jet of burning methane roared high. Its yellow-tinged flame climbed for a dozen yards and then, as quickly as it had appeared, went out.

Kelly waited, his eyes glued on the old road at the bottom of the hill. He heard a rumbling sound, and then headlights blinked a couple of times. Larrabee and Dan answered the signal by running toward a truck which was now visible at the foot of the hill.

Things happened after that. The

doors of the truck were opened. Suddenly the hillside was alive with men. There were at least half a dozen of them. A rigging was run up onto the steel tower, a cable lifted from the grass and in less than three minutes a regular breeches buoy was established.

Over this, came huge crates of goods taken from the truck. At the tower they were lowered and vanished from sight. Kelly, not daring to attack now, watched all this and chewed at his lower lip reflectively.

IT REQUIRED about forty minutes for the truck to be unloaded and its cargo lowered into a well concealed opening in the side of the hill. The cable came down, the truck rolled away and that tower started to disappear.

Kelly went forward then, but he was too late. There wasn't even a sign of where that tower had come from. The only significant thing lay in the fact that the section of hillside covered with short, very green grass was at this exact spot.

Kelly rubbed his chin for a moment, dropped to all fours and crawled toward the edge of that clearing. He spent ten minutes examining the ground, and then gave up. Even if some method of entering the hillside existed here, to use it might not only result in quick death for himself, but even faster death for Marlowe, who must have been captured by the gang.

The big trouble-shooter crawled away until he put fifty yards between himself and the cleared area. Then he began running straight back toward the deserted town. He slipped between two buildings, came out near the mine, and then proceeded to amble casually toward the building where Larrabee and Dan should be waiting.

They saw him coming, but if they were surprised, the darkness hid any change in their expressions.

Dan said, "I thought you was with the trooper, Kelly."

"I went back to the mine," Kelly explained. "Marlowe was investigating the hillside. He ought to be here by now. By the way, boys, didn't Blake

have any baggage when he appeared?"

"Yep, a couple of bags. His car is in one of the barns at the end of the street. Why?"

Larrabee moved a little closer as he spoke, and Kelly had an idea he was set to charge. But Kelly just shrugged.

"So far as I'm concerned, this mine isn't fit to work. Maybe there are ghosts. Perhaps somebody has a reason for not wanting the mine worked. It makes no difference, because there's danger involved and I wouldn't advise anyone to go into that shaft. I thought I'd pick up Blake's stuff and get it ready while I waited for Marlowe to come back."

Larrabee jerked his thumb and started moving across the street. Dan followed behind Kelly. The big mining company investigator started to whistle softly as he trudged along. Larrabee brought him into another old house and motioned toward two valises on the floor.

Kelly picked them up, dumped their contents on a dusty table and moved around so that his back prevented either Larrabee or Dan from observing what he was doing. It required only an instant to slip Marlowe's service pistol beneath the heap of clothes.

Kelly said, "I was just wondering if Blake carried any maps of the mine with him. He was an engineer and certainly should have. You boys see anything of blueprints?"

"Sure we did," Dan answered, and moved to Kelly's left.

Larrabee edged to the right and said, "He was holding a bunch of 'em when he went into the mine. Must be

down there, I guess. You planning on going after 'em?"

"Maybe," Kelly said, and began running through a compact, leather-covered folio of papers and blueprints. "Hey—wait. You must be wrong. Here are the blueprints of the mine. Yes, sir—the whole batch. Now we'll see—"

"Stand just like you are," Larrabee snapped. "Put them blueprints down—right on the edge of the table. Yeah, that's right, wise guy. Now reach into your pocket, nice and easy. Take out a match and set those damned blueprints on fire. Didn't I tell you to see to 'em, Dan? This dick almost tumbled to the whole business."

DAN moved closer, and there was a blued-steel revolver in his hand.

"If you ask me," he said harshly, "I think Kelly is wise already. I watched him and that trooper head for the hillside, and I didn't see Kelly turn back. You're the dim-wit, Larrabee. I told you not to signal the truck until we were sure the boys had both Kelly and the trooper."

Kelly stared at them, but he made no move to obey the orders Larrabee gave.

"What is this, boys?" he asked. "You two are the same pair I met when I arrived in town, aren't you? Somehow you seem different."

"Let's plug him and make sure," Larrabee suggested. "I'll cover the snooper while you let him have it right between the eyes."

[Turn page]



"You darn fool," Dan ground out. "There's a doctor working on Blake's body right now. If he hears the shot, he'll streak for his car and go for help. We can't have anybody butting in until we get the stuff cleaned out—every drop of it."

Larrabee smiled grimly, walked up beside Kelly and gave him a rough push to one side. Dan's gun kept boring into Kelly's ribs now. Larrabee pawed through Blake's possessions until he found a silk necktie. He snapped this between his hands, testing it for strength.

"Okay," he said, "we'll do the job without any noise. Watch him while I tie this noose around his neck."

Kelly tensed. The gun against his ribs was removed as Dan stepped back to give his partner more room. Yet Dan was set to shoot, the moment Kelly so much as flexed a muscle. It was a difficult spot and called for all-out courage.

Kelly might die in his tracks, but if he didn't try to reach the gun that he'd transferred to a spot under the portfolio, he'd die anyhow, in a much more painful manner. Kelly took a long breath.

CHAPTER V

The Iron Hat

KELLY'S voice sounded strained and nervous when he spoke.

"What do you two old-timers want to kill me for?" he asked.

Larrabee grinned and started to raise the noosed necktie.

"We do look the part, don't we? Fooled even a smart guy like Kelly Kincaid, the cleverest private dick around. Well, this will die down. You won't get back, neither will the doctor or the trooper. Anyone comes, we'll just say you went into the mine, all three of you. Whatever happened in there we don't know—it's haunted."

The necktie started to move down over Kelly's derby. Suddenly the private investigator raised one elbow and jabbed it out hard. The sharp bones buried themselves into Larrabee's

stomach because he was standing on tiptoe to get the noose in place.

It doubled him up. Dan fired at pointblank range, but Kelly had moved fast. The bullet ripped through his left forearm. Dan tried to get in another shot, but Kelly had jerked the gun from under its hiding place, and the heavy weapon roared.

Dan straightened up to his full height and a foolish expression crossed his face. He made one final effort to lift his own sagging gun, but he was dead on his feet. He fell forward like a piece of wood.

Larrabee made a dive for the door. Kelly went hurtling after him. On the narrow porch outside, Kelly grabbed one of Larrabee's legs and sent the man crashing down the steps. He let go, leaped on top of the crook and with one well aimed punch, put him out of the fight.

The Medical Examiner came running up. Kelly urged him to more speed. He handed the doctor Marlowe's gun.

"There are only a couple of slugs left, so use 'em well if necessary. Watch this monkey. His pal is dead. I'll be back soon, but just in case half an hour passes, and I'm not here, take this lug to the State Police Barracks and have 'em send every available man here to enter the mine."

"Of course," the doctor called after Kelly's retreating form. "But where are you going?"

"Ghost hunting," Kelly called back.

He raced to the spot where he'd parked his car, rummaged through the glove compartment and found two filled clips for his automatic. He slid one into place and dropped the other in his pocket.

Two minutes later he was at the elevator shaft. Obviously, the doctor was needed to guard Larrabee more than he was to operate this machinery. Furthermore, there was no time to waste. Marlowe's hours were numbered, probably reduced to mere minutes by now.

Kelly grabbed the ropes under the lift and swung himself out and into space. He went down as fast as possible, without burning the skin off his hands. Feet touched the tunnel floor.

He crouched and listened. There wasn't a sound.

He snapped on Trooper Marlowe's flash, unfolded a blueprint and studied it intently for a few moments. Then he began running softly along the main tunnel until he reached the fork. Without hesitation he took the right-hand one, in which Blake had died and Kelly had nearly met his own doom.

Halfway along it he stopped, shut off the flash and moved cautiously over to the north wall. His fingers passed across the projecting bits of coal and rock. One narrow piece was slightly loose. He tried moving it down, but nothing happened. He twisted the thing. There was the bar-

with a secret door. Through it, they could invade the old part of the mine and discourage anyone from making an inspection.

This tunnel was long and Kelly guessed it led right up beneath the portion of hillside covered with the short, green grass which contrasted so completely with the long, wild stuff that grew all over the rest of the hill.

Suddenly the tunnel took a sharp right turn and in the distance Kelly saw lights gleaming. He also heard voices. Placing his back against the tunnel wall he sidestepped closer.

There was a fairly large cavern dug here. Electric lanterns illuminated the place, and Kelly saw seven men sprawled out on rough, hand-made

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est clicking sound and a section of the tunnel swung inward.

GUN thrust out, Kelly stepped through the narrow opening and found himself in another tunnel. It was built high and wide enough to allow ample movement. He risked a quick flash of his torch, and coal seams sparkled like a million diamonds.

He knew then that this tunnel had been dug before the mine was abandoned. It led to rich veins and solved the problem in Kelly's mind as to why the company wanted to start operations at a mine whose main shafts appeared to be worthless.

The crooks had sealed this passage

furniture.

In the middle of the group, tied hand and foot, sat Trooper Marlowe. His face was bloody, his uniform ripped to shreds. Obviously, he'd been given some rather bad treatment, and Kelly's blood started to boil.

One of the men got up, twirled a pistol around one finger and suddenly banged it on Marlowe's head.

"You going to tell us what happened to that big partner of yours? Or shall I start using a knife on you instead of a gun barrel?"

Marlowe just sat there, his eyes half-glazed. Kelly estimated his chances of gunning out three or four of the men before they got into action.

It was a risky business, especially since they might kill Marlowe the moment Kelly moved in.

Then Kelly spotted two tanks, equipped with long hoses and nozzles something like those used in welding. These were the tanks containing methane, which they burned as a signal and to frighten snoopers.

Kelly crouched and moved rapidly toward the tanks. One of the men turned quickly, an inquiring expression on his face. The thug who menaced Marlowe started slapping him around and the suspicious man turned back to watch the trooper.

Kelly picked up one nozzle, hoped the two tanks would both protect him and also the flare of his match. Marlowe was groaning so that sound would overcome the scrape of the match and the turning of the pressure valves. Kelly twisted a valve just enough to allow a tiny stream of gas to hiss out. He lit the match, touched the gas into flame, and then stood up.

The thug who was trying to make Marlowe talk seemed to be out of patience because he stepped back and levelled his gun.

"Here it comes, copper," he snarled. "You asked for this."

Kelly fired, and he didn't miss. Nothing could have made the bullet go astray. The thug was spun around by the force of the slug. The others jumped up, guns flashing. Kelly gave the valve a twist, and a long jet of searing flame shot out.

THE crooks screamed and retreated. One managed to slip away from the flame and rushed at Kelly from the left. He held a fat piece of pipe in one hand. It crashed down on top of Kelly's hat.

The blow should have floored any man, but Kelly seemed to be unaffected. The flame swung around, and the attacker was forced to join the others.

Kelly kept going until he had them in a corner, harassing them with the flame. One by one their guns were thrown into the middle of the cavern at his orders, while he moved over beside Marlowe and cut him loose.

Marlowe was able to stand and hold the gun Kelly gave him. Then the investigator cut off the flame. Six sooty-faced crooks stood with their hands high, yapping for mercy.

Cars from the barracks rolled away with the prisoners. Kelly and Marlowe, inside the cavern, were examining the huge stocks of stolen goods.

"It's a drop for the stuff they hijacked," Kelly grunted. "They swiped trucks, rolled them here quickly and hauled the stuff into this cavern by the use of that steel tower. The stuff wasn't carried here because it would leave a trail. They rigged up a buoy line. Then the empty trucks were taken away and abandoned. A sweet racket, but everything depended on this mine not being opened again.

"Larrabee and Dan were the outside guards, posing as old men who lived in the ghost town. Some of the crooks tied them up to create an alibi. All the stuff about dead Indians returning as ghosts was meant to reach the ears of the former miners. They'd have refused to come back under any circumstances. Some of the gang shaved their heads and dressed as Indians to help the illusion.

"Blake was captured and held. When I showed up, Larrabee or Dan passed the word to the men in the cavern. Blake was then used to intimidate me."

"Believe me"—Marlowe grinned crookedly because of a swollen jaw—"when they landed on me, jerked me into that hole in the ground, I certainly believed in ghosts. It happened so fast I had no time to yell a warning."

"That little patch of short, very green grass gave them away," Kelly said. "It concealed the entrance to the cavern, but instead of planting seed which would grow grass to match the wild stuff, they got some lawn seed. The moment I saw that, I stopped believing in ghosts, but I couldn't find out how to gain an entrance that way so I checked on blueprints of the mine. Looks like we both did a good night's work, Marlowe—you got your truck hijackers, and I cleaned out a mess of ghosts."

"You can take all the credit," Mar-

lowe grunted. "Say, Kelly—one of those mugs slugged you on the head. A blow that should have crushed your skull. How come it didn't flatten you?"

Kelly grinned broadly and removed his derby. "This lid," he said, "gives me my nickname, and that's okay. I like this hat. You see, I worked in

tunnels and mines so long I got used to wearing tin hats. When I started this investigating business, I missed those tin hats so I had my derby lined with sheet steel. It was just a hunch, but, brother, it sure works."

It sure does," Marlowe marveled. "In fact, I think I'll rig up something like that myself."

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I looped a right at the big man first, pivoted and

By
LEO HOBAN

MURDER IN

CHAPTER I

Flying Assignment

SMART egg, I am—yeah! Only an Irisher with pixies for brains could outsmart himself so regularly. Up until now the pixies had been lucky, doing something okay every time I was sure I had flopped and was diving for the last time.

Like when I found myself hitting

the resin too often in heavyweight fights. That was the time I found myself in possession of a commercial limited pilot license, and I'd only been fooling around with aviation, for amusement.

Since danger tastes good and I'm dumb, I took a job testing a new model cabin job. Power-diving, mind you.

The first crate went to pieces at six thousand, rolled and tossed me out when in a daze. The pixies reminded

Punch McCarthy's Pixies Nag Him into the



almost knocked Marty's block off with a left hook

A CRATE

*A Baffling Complete
Crime Novelet*

me, just in time, to pull the rip-cord. The second hack creaked and groaned and its wings fluttered, but she stayed together. But when I went to collect my dough, the company was broke.

I grabbed the lame plane—for fee—patched it and started the "McCarthy Joy Rides." A buck a head for a fifteen-minute canter. And I couldn't make expenses.

Right then and there the pixies doublecrossed me. They gave me an idea

when I was reading a detective magazine. Why not open a detective agency, specializing in aerial service? New, novel, needed. Sure, I said to myself, promptly doing same.

That all I knew of detection was what I read in the mags made no never-mind. As I got it, all a first-class private detective had to do was just go around socking and shooting guys, until everything came out all right.

So now I sat cursing the pixies for

Detective Game—Where Moxie Counts Plenty!

luring me into outsmarting myself.

I stared at the lettering on the office door:

ALOYSIUS McCARTHY SERVICE
FLYING INVESTIGATIONS,
PROTECTION
BRAINS, BRAWN, EFFICIENCY—
WITHIN REASON

The sign had been up for a month—with no takers. And rent due tomorrow. Too many chuckles in the corridor decided me that maybe it was that "Within Reason" part of it, sounding as if my brains, brawn and efficiency might have a tendency to bag at the knees.

Since I couldn't figure out how to make the Greek hamburger king around the corner listen to reason, I got out an old razor blade and peeled away "Within Reason." A heavy pencil put up, "Plenty Cheap."

STANDING back, I was looking the job over, when a little guy in tweeds came through the open door. He was carrying a box that was almost a crate.

Sweat popped out on his face and neck and his paunchy belly was going like a bellows.

Another small guy, but hard and with a mean kisser, trailed him, looked as if he was expecting trouble.

The guy with the box slammed it on my desk, ran a silk hanky across his face and puffed that he was Henry Rables.

I knew of him—a big shot pawn broker. And right away I saw visions of sirloin steaks.

He didn't waste any time. He put five hundred bucks in twenties on the desk and asked me if that would be enough to get the box out to a spot in the Colorado Rockies within thirty hours.

I just nodded. I was too busy, silently patting the pixies, to say anything. But I got hold of that money—quick.

He explained that the box contained repair parts for some valuable mining machinery. That seemed logical enough. But what I didn't figure, and didn't ask any questions about then, was why he didn't send it aerial ex-

press, insured. Or why he needed a special detective to guard it.

"You'll take off immediately," Rables said briskly. "Gas at Cleveland and Kansas City. After you leave K. C., open this." He passed me a sealed envelope. "You'll find your route to the mountain spot beyond Denver inside."

Still I didn't tumble that something smelled pretty high. I didn't have sense enough to ask why I had to gas at certain stops, instead of in Denver or Cheyenne, both nearer the mountains.

"All right, McCarthy," he wound up. "Get out of here within the half-hour—and don't fail to deliver that box. Also"—and his voice took on an edge, "handle it carefully and don't open it. Some of those instruments are fragile."

"A McCarthy never fails," I told him, as confident as if I hadn't already outsmarted myself into a series of failures.

The hard-faced little guy snorted. It was an uncomplimentary snort. But even then it never entered my noggin to question why I should be paid heavy dough by men who doubted my brains and moxie.

Well, they may have been right about my lack of brains, but not about the moxie.

Also, I had pixies.

"I can't see why I should have any trouble delivering machinery," I said.

"It's this way," Rables came back, a little too brightly. "My—ah—clients have put up a big guarantee. They must deliver so much ore by a certain date or they lose their lease. The lease is of immense value. Other—ah—interests are using underhand methods—like tampering with machinery, to make failure certain. If they knew you were delivering these vital parts they might attempt to stop you. Understand?"

"Sure," I nodded. It sounded like the McCoy.

"Be careful," Rables warned.

As he left the office it kind of seemed to me he was relieved to get rid of that box. The hard-faced little guy gave me a mean grin and slammed the door hard.

I looked at the box. It was about three feet long, half as wide and half as deep. It must have weighed close to one hundred pounds.

My back was to the door and my body hid the box. That's why I didn't know anybody had come in until something jabbed me in the back and a hard voice said:

"Where's Rables?"

I TURNED cautiously, being smart enough for that. The man holding the automatic looked like a Hollywood tough extra.

When he saw the box, he grinned crookedly.

"Turn around again," he said. "I'll take the box."

I began to turn, though I knew well enough that when I did he would tap my head with that gun, after which he would tap the box and probably my wad. I may not be too smart, but I'm as good as the next guy when the going gets rough. So I turned all right, but kept right on turning, winding up in a fast pivot, crouched low. I didn't wait until he could bring that gun down.

I left my feet in a diving tackle, ducking below it.

Was he surprised! The mug went down with a crash. Two other guys that had come in after him recovered from their cigar-store-Indian pose and headed for us. But when I ripped the automatic from Mr. Wise Guy's hand they came to such a quick stop I could practically smell their shoe leather burning.

Then they streaked for my office door.

Before I could get a chance to wing them, the mug on the floor came to life and made a grab for the gun. I tossed the gun away and let him have my Sunday punch.

He sailed backward to land flat against the wall. He hung there for a moment, then toppled sideward, as cold as a mackerel.

I felt pretty good. Nobody takes anything away from me but myself, and I'd proved that nobody was going to take that crate easily. Not unless I outsmarted myself.

I pocketed the unconscious bimbo's

gun and rolled him over. His battered wallet told me he was Nicky Popolo. A newspaper clipping inside it was his Public Enemy report card, showing he'd been graduated from the ninety-nine slot all the way up to unlucky thirteen.

I tried not to do too much thinking for fear of making a mistake, but it did come to me that the business men trying to break the mine lease were hiring rather expensive and dark-alley-tough talent. Surprising—but encouraging. I would be right at home with guys who were only hard; not brainy.

I should have tumbled right there that I'd landed myself into the middle of a hoods' convention. This Nicky Popolo had been looking for Rables, had just missed him. And when Nicky made a business call during his short working hours it was not usual for the man he visited to keep any more business appointments.

Rables should have told me that box was being tailed. He had known it, too, or he wouldn't have been in such a hurry to leave it and get away.

I was all hot for yelping for the gendarmes, but I couldn't forget that I was hungry, and that publicity was no way to miss trouble.

So I called the airport and ordered my monoplane—a trim silver and gold job—gassed and warmed up for a long hop. She's a sweet crate, radio-equipped.

I STILL thought the assignment a pipe, and figured I didn't even need a clean shirt and socks. To me a hop to the Rockies and back was just so much hay.

Only an Irisher with pixies for brains could guess so wrong. It wasn't hay and it wasn't play. A smart guy would never have got into such a mess.

I couldn't figure what to do about Nicky. Since it helps me to think when I work, I soaked a rag and got to work on the sign, taking out the word, "Cheap." Then I hauled Nicky out into the corridor and dumped him in the janitor's service closet along with the mops, brooms, pots and other unconscious items.

CHAPTER II

Sherlock McCarthy—In Person

TEN minutes later I was in a restaurant around the corner, a classy sirloin joint. The box was under my table and my legs were draped over the box. No orchestra, nothing disturbing, just the click of busy knives and forks. All was peace and serenity. Even the cash register didn't have a bell on it.

I was looking at a stuffed duck hanging from the ceiling behind the manager, up front—when the shooting started outside. One of the plate glass windows came apart under a tommy's influence. Slugs scarred up the ceiling and ricocheted somewhat. Nobody got creased but the duck got shot directly amidships again.

I found that out from my position under the table. I grabbed the box and snatched a hat. And with the grab some old guy with handle-bar mustaches sitting at a nearby table let out a squawk. When he got up, I saw he was dressed in a hunter's outfit.

He yanked a double-barreled shotgun out of a leather gun case that had been leaning against his table—and the next minute he was chasing me.

I pell-melled it past the cashier who was looking sorrowfully at the punctured duck. Then he let out several squawks also.

Outside, it was enough to give a guy indigestion. Rables' hard-panned bodyguard had been punctured out there. I could tell because some hole-less odds and ends were familiar.

Somebody said a sedan had swung up to the curb and chopped him down while he had been peeking into the restaurant. That he had been peeking at me seemed certain, but for someone to put lead in his pants just for that seemed a trifle more than coincidence.

I took a guess that my Western employers and Rables weren't liked much, and that since I was playing a dumb general in their army they had figured I needed a bodyguard. And since this one had been erased, I would need another one. The thought

made me uncomfortable, for I'd heard that sometimes bodyguards stage mutiny, leaving the protected very much dead.

The old geezer with the handle-bar mustaches and the shotgun saw me and bellowed. Right behind him the restaurant manager was bellowing.

There was much confusion and curious pushing, but I slammed through the crowd, lugging my box. I didn't want to be questioned by any cops, for I couldn't be delayed when I was bucking only thirty hours.

Some of the mob cursed me out for doing the Bronco Nagurski line-bucking act, but some took a hard look at me and began to chuckle right out loud.

I saw the hunter with the shotgun get collared by a cop, and he got slapped down when he waved his arms at me and tried to break away from John Law.

The turn I made just then was pixie luck, for it brought the box around in front of me. There was an ugly *spat* and a dull *clang* and the box jarred in my hands. And I was just in time to see a silenced gun being popped back under the coat of a pink-cheeked youngster whose baby-blue eyes were calloused from seeing too much.

MY ROD jumped into my right hand when I lunged for him. He ducked, and I bumped flush into a fat dame with her arms full of bundles.

The bundles went this way and that and I found myself teetering, trying to balance the box. The dame saw the gun and started to bellow like Martha Raye would after sitting down on a chair that wasn't there. And I suddenly found myself in a clear spot, everybody retreating like I was Mr. Small-pox.

Right then the nice-appearing baby boy came up behind two gaping city yokels and greeted me with the heat again, without sound. I got the box around in time to stop the slug, and I heard it *plop* inside.

I started running for him, raising my automatic. He didn't offer much of a target and though he looked scared, he stayed calm. I was almost

on him when he stuck out a foot in front of a little man beside him who was carrying a rolled umbrella. Then he shoved.

The little man and his bowler hat and his umbrella dived right at my legs and we went down in a piled-up mess. My box sailed away.

I heard more police whistles start to shrill, and the voice of the little guy down with me went them one better. His hat was busted.

I still was holding my gun and I turned my head, trying to spot the smart baby-boy. The turn led me right into a smack on the kisser that dumped me back on my haunches. The restaurant owner had gone nuts screaming about my welching on my bill. He was madder about that than about the front of his beanery being a wreck!

It made me sore, him getting between me and my box. So I raised my feet and kicked his feet from under him. He wobbled back and sat down on the box just as Baby-face appeared again, reaching for the box.

I swung my gun around and Baby-face ducked. I was ready to risk a shot when the umbrella held in the arms of the wrought-up old guy sitting behind me connected with my noggin. Those things should be called thundershoots, not bumbershoots. My head roared that loud.

I made a grab and got the thunder-shoot, twisted it loose, and surged weakly to my feet. Then the fat dame who started all this let loose her last bundle and knocked my gun spinning down with her dropped bananas.

I tried to push her aside. I saw that baby-puss enemy of mine running for a parked sedan that was nosing slowly around the corner.

It was no soap. The dame started giving me a tattoo with her elbows and saying:

"No, you don't! Police! No, you don't. Po—"

She choked off when two cops with drawn guns grabbed me from behind. I got shoved around a bit before I got a chance to flash my credentials.

Then one of the cops looked at me—and laughed.

"A detective?" he said. "Well, well—as I live and breathe. I'd never have believed it!"

THIS was no time for laughter, and I didn't like it, but even dumb Irishers don't argue with cops when they have a job to do. So I simply explained that I had seen a guy who had a "Wanted" out on him and when I had chased him and pulled my gun all this had begun. He didn't ask me anything about the hard-pan who had been chopped down, and I was glad. I couldn't see anything but trouble and delay if I mentioned maybe I was connected with him.

I paid the restaurant guy just as the cops bundled the old geezer in the hunting suit into the Black Maria. Every time he tried to talk, a cop put knucks in his mouth, despite the fact he looked like a banker who liked to rough it and dressed the part. They seemed to be suspicious of his shotgun.

With my gun in the holster and the box under my arm, I took a taxi to the airport. My cabby kept gandering back at traffic as if he expected to see a car full of wacky-house keepers overhaul us and take me back home. As usual, I didn't find out until too late what was so wacky.

I was feeling satisfied. I still had my box. And, like always, my eyes glistened when I got to the airport. There was my li'l darling, her propeller turning idly. She looked eager for the air, yet haughty, sure, proud.

I felt she was my work solely. She had been a crippled bird with strained wings, her shellacked skin loose and dying, when I had brought her safely down from that death-dealing power-dive. My hands had recreated her; and when she soared majestically above the clouds that crazy, sentimental heart of mine was always bursting with joy.

She had been given the care of a baby, and had become a beautiful, poised young lady. Sweet she was to me, as only a plane can be to a man who has nursed it back to health.

Thinking only of that plane of mine, I didn't immediately see the smug Rables standing near her. He

was watching me, open-mouthed, when I heaved up, wrestling the box. He scowled and said:

"There's nothing comic about this mission of yours."

I didn't pay him much mind, because I was beginning to get a terrible hunch. There, on the ground, was another box, with no bullet holes in it! My heart started hammering and I felt a brogue coming on.

"What?"

I pointed and gave him a soft eye. The eye didn't warn or faze him a bit.

"This," he snapped like a pawnbroker, pointing down at the box, "is the real one you're to deliver. I felt certain somebody would try to take the other away from you before you got here. Also, I wanted to shake the tail on me."

I thought of slugs that had been slung my way, of umbrellas, shotguns, managers who poked, fat dames with bananas, cops who mauled.

"My name," I said slowly and distinctly, "is Aloysius McCarthy, and up Donegal way 'tis said no spalpeen ever made a sap of a McCarthy. Though my sainted grandfather—bless 'im—made one of himself when he tried to lick a platoon of Royal Guards that were struttin' the wrong peat. Begorra, 'twould be a shame if New York thought different than Donegal. Don't you think so, Rables?"

"Yes," said Rables, undecided. "But you're not a sap."

"Now I'm certain I am," I said. "'Twould be a cryin' shame to do nothin' about it. Don't you think so, Rables?"

"Only a man with false pride would resent—"

"Aw, well, a shamed-sap I am," I said, "with false pride and all."

I dropped the box and pasted his kisser shut.

I lashed the right crate to the double-rear seats, jockeyed my darling around. Her propeller blast drove a dust storm at Rables and cooled him, coughingly, back to consciousness.

A LOFT, I was cutting back over the field for Cleveland, when I looked down and saw three men grab

Rables just as he was getting into a cab. Also they were busy giving my ship and the other crates above the big port long ganders. I wondered about that, but shrugged it out of my mind. . . .

I gassed at Cleveland in the night. The attendant gave me some odd peeks, and chuckled. I didn't pay him any attention, though. My nose was buried in a newspaper.

Headlines screamed that Federal agents were knocking over a flock of New York pawnshops. Plenty mysterious raids. Also, said the headlines, Henry Rables was blotter-bait, having glided from an office window ten stories above the paving.

That made me somewhat regret having socked him—but I was thankful I'd got the whole fee instead of a retainer.

The attendant took my dough and said:

"Thanks—detective."

"Know me?" I asked surprised.

"Anybody would know you, detective," he said, and walked away, grinning.

Puzzled and uncomfortable, I climbed into the dark. An open speed job got on my tail and dogged my tri-colored lights.

Curious, I went to twelve thousand. So did the fast hack. I dropped to seven. It dropped. I climbed again and, staying right above me, it did likewise.

It gave me the jitters. I had a feeling right then that I was in for trouble, and decided that maybe this aerial detective business had its drawbacks. A guy could be shot out of the air and pile up, and the wreckage would burn up any clues to what had happened.

We hammered on, an up-and-down tandem team. I felt like a pioneer in the wilderness with whooping Indians closing it. Then, about a half-hour out of K. C., the other crate roared ahead and out of sight.

It was taking off just as I came into K. C. It disappeared, going west. I didn't feel too comfortable. I had to head for Denver, also.

I took on gas, put two guards around the plane and strolled into the airport restaurant. A transport was

in and the passengers and crew were taking on ham and eggs and such.

All were eating busily—that is, all except a knockout piece of fluff sitting at a table near the entrance. She didn't have the traveling look of the others. She gave me the up and down, moved her head in satisfaction, and, as I made for the washroom I was feeling that I was pretty hot stuff.

I didn't even hear the chuckles of the transport gang. I was thinking about that girl. She was not only a looker, but she must be cool and competent and smart—and I knew instinctively that she had moxie.

I was sloshing water around blissfully when a bull-necked dark guy I thought was a transport passenger, came in the washroom.

"Hiya, detective," he rumbled. "Read this."

He pushed a telegram into my wet hands. He was grinning at me.

"I'm Marty," he said. "Bodyguard to you."

"What makes you think I'm a detective?" This grinning and laughing was getting under my skin.

"The wire," he said. "But I wouldn'ta needed it. You look like Sherlock Holmes on a binge."

I turned quick—and went back on my heels when I looked into the mirror above the wash basin.

I remembered, then, the guy in the hunter's outfit, my hasty grab for a hat when I scrambled out of the restaurant, and understood. I was wearing a loud black-and-white plaid hunting cap that looked like a capsized rowboat, pointed front and back, with long earmuffs pulled up and tied in

a bow over the top. I only needed a pair of bloodhounds straining on their leashes to make a perfect picture of a comic Sherlock Holmes!

CHAPTER III

Hoods' Convention

NO McCARTHY has ever been known to blush, so I didn't. I just got mad. I made a great to-do about reading the telegram Marty had given me:

SPECIAL DETECTIVE McCARTHY
CARRYING BOX WILL ARRIVE K.C.
AIRPORT ABOUT DAWN IN SILVER
AND GOLD CABIN JOB. PUNCH-
DRUNK WATCH IS DECENT.

RAB.

"Rables," the grinning mug explained. "I'm joining you for the last leg of this hop."

Well, what could I say? Maybe he was and maybe he wasn't the McCoy. But I had to take the chance. Remembering the speed job that had gone ahead, I had an idea a guard was in order.

I stuck the darned cap in my pocket and asked:

"What's that 'punchdrunk' crack mean?"

Marty hesitated, but not too long.

"Oh, that. Well, I—I gave Rables a watch. It was always going haywire. I guess he had it fixed. Funny guy, Rables—funny way of speaking. Ha, ha!"

I can think pretty well when I'm
[Turn page]

The Green Ghost Is Headed This Way!

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sore, and that "decent" part in the telegram let me know I was in for something shady. But I couldn't turn back now. I decided, however, to learn what I could.

"Rables is dead," I said. "He fell out of a window."

That didn't startle Marty.

"Yeah, I know," was all he said. "My pards, the mining men, will miss him."

I couldn't see him as a mine operator or promoter. There was something too smooth and—yep—ratty, about him. Anyhow, there was nothing funny about Rables dying.

"His bodyguard," I said, "got chopped while he was keeping a peeker on me. Some lug tried to drop me and get this box. Three guys grabbed Rables before he went and took up window gliding. The Federals are raiding New York pawnshops—and I've had a fast crate tailing me from Cleveland."

His grin just kept getting wider until I mentioned the other plane. That made him frown.

"It seems to me," I said, "that you guys are minin' for nothing less valuable than diamonds."

"Mining?" he said vaguely. "Oh—sure—yes—mining . . . Know where you're going?"

I took the envelope Rables had given me from my pocket.

"Rables said to open it when I was up and out of K.C.," I said.

"Nuts!" the mug snorted. "I'll take it—just to see that it's right."

He reached out a hairy paw. But the envelope was back in my pocket, and I was giving him the soft eye.

"I follow orders," I said, "and nobody takes anything away from me but myself."

His hand started up under his coat and I thought maybe I'd started a brannigan. But a sly look crept across his mug, and he grinned, real friendly-like.

"Sure, McCarthy, always obey orders. Horatio Alger did—and just look what he amounted to. Come on—let's get going."

I was sorta disappointed. I felt pretty sure I could've held onto the envelope, if I'd been opposed. Might

have learned something, too. Instead he left me practically defenseless, so I knew I was odds-on-choice to out-smart myself.

"But I gotta eat," I protested. "We'll hop in fifteen minutes."

"Now, McCarthy, always obey orders." He sounded as righteous as a church deacon. "After all, you're working for us."

WELL, he had me. So we trooped outside to the plane.

My two guards were busy helping gas another ship, but the box was still in my deserted ship.

We took off fast, circled and pointed to Denver. The crate handled heavier, especially the tail, but I thought maybe the extra-heavy load of black thoughts I was carrying in my mind could account for that.

I got out the envelope, ripped it open, and saw that my route side-tracked Denver, led over some high and dangerous mountains and petered out in rough country almost a hundred miles west and north of Denver. That sent a chill up my spine. It was dangerous down-draught country and a treacherous Sargasso sea for planes.

But that wasn't what froze me—I consider myself more than an average-good pilot. It was the fact that when I finished my hop I wouldn't have enough gas to get out of the mountains again! I was beginning to see that I was likely to be in a real jam.

I didn't get to examine the route further. But I got rough facts about the whole mess when Marty snatched the note—and I found myself looking right into the muzzle of his big automatic.

He pocketed the note.

"Forget that," he said. "We had to change plans. We've moved our headquarters."

I thought of arguing. But there I was plying a joy stick to prevent my li'l darling from cutting up some violent high jinks. Besides it's difficult to win in an argument with an automatic.

Marty grinned at me and said:

"Cut south for ten minutes, then turn due west and climb as high as this

crate will go. We'll be over the mountains and the spot before noon."

"Just what the devil is this?" I snapped. I knew I was being played for a sap. You don't move mining machinery and headquarters just like that.

"A game." He reached over and got my automatic, pocketed it. "You got something in that box we want."

I got it then—I was in the hands of the "business men" who were seeing to it that the mine didn't get its machinery.

Then it came to me that on my first detective job I was flopping—and I got to hoping that my lucky pixies would do something about it. This mob was pretty rough, with ideas



about shooting people, even on crowded streets. Apparently they were nationwide.

I got to wondering if maybe I didn't have a cargo of narcotics in that box. I couldn't think of any other big-money racket that was worth the risk of bump-offs and kidnappings. But then I knew nothing about mining. . . .

Marty was having a hard time of it, keeping a peeper on me and watching the pitch-black skies. All of which made me remember the fast crate that had tailed me from Cleveland. That was slight encouragement, for I thought maybe it might be a body-guard. Any way you took it, it was a mess in which I found myself—and no mistake.

When the ten minutes were up, I started climbing west.

"So Rables fell out the window?" I said, making conversation. I'd been thinking aplenty about those screwy New York happenings.

"Yes he did," said Marty. "Only he got pushed. But first he told some friends of mine about you and I got a phone call, and then the telegram to

make it look good to you. We didn't want no trouble at the airport. Too public."

"Oh," I said, "then those pawnshop raids were hooked up, too?"

"Sure. Only you got in the box what the G-men are looking for."

THAT left me stymied. It was chilly up there, but I found myself sweating.

"The other plane's a guard Rables arranged for?" I asked.

"Maybe," Marty said doubtfully. "Or maybe these Federals ain't so dumb. I don't like it."

He was still looking in the dark, but keeping his gun on me. I felt somewhat better that Marty hadn't shown enough sense to make me douse my tri-colored lights. If good old Uncle Sammy's hired hands were aloft, I wanted to be very noticeable.

Suddenly that other crate cut right across my nose, lights out and going like the wind. I watched it zoom into the darkness up and to my left.

Marty was cussing, and had a gun in each fist now. He stuck one in my ribs, opened his window, and held the other gun out in the breeze, ready for action.

I switched on my short-wave radio. Marty promptly raised his gun and smashed the radio to pieces.

I couldn't spot the fast job in the dark. I decided to help Uncle Sam—if those were his boys in the other crate. And it certainly was beginning to look like it. All I needed was an opportunity to bash Marty.

The plane came so close that it must have touched its wheels to my wing top. My monoplane pitched downward, then shot up with a rush that left my stomach fifty feet below.

Marty's automatic was cracking and he had his head turned. I grabbed the jerking stick with my right fist, looped my left over and down, catching Marty at the base of his skull. Iron it was. He simply turned and tried to get the automatic back in my ribs. I let loose the stick, twisted at his gun and socked with the left as we rolled.

I was conscious of four things all at once—that we were over the flat Kansas lands, a swell, forsaken place to

crash, that Federal men wouldn't be such dummies as to try to force a landing in the dark, that the box must have come loose, for behind me there was a thud and a grunt as the plane pitched wildly, and that when my fist crashed again, luckily, Marty slumped.

My darling had got herself into a spin. I fought her grimly, wondering when the prairies would jump up to meet us. Frantically I worked rudder and stick. Marty's body kept thudding against me, and that didn't help.

Then with a woman's inconsistency the li'l darling became responsive. But when she did and I took a look over the side, I went cold all over. The field was thick with corn stalks and my wheels were shaving off the taller green tops. I went into a climb, snapped off the lights, turned due south.

But the fast crate which had followed me down, came up on my left again, overhead.

All at once flame spurted from its front cockpit. Slugs whistled past my nose, smashing out windows on both sides.

I tried to get the automatic Marty had dropped on the floor. I couldn't find it. The open crate came closer, making sure this time. And I knew I was ground-bait, done for.

The shots that came then, from a different direction, from right in back of my head, through the window, almost smashed my eardrums. My mouth hung open in a silly gape. The open crate swung out of control, then pitched downward.

I SWIVELED—and found myself looking into the smoking muzzle of a man-sized gun held in a steady ladylike hand. A girl's slim body was draped across the box, and I knew that this girl—the girl of the airport restaurant—had been hiding behind it. The weight of the plane should have told me something like that had happened.

Right then I was almost petrified with amazement. Not only because she had saved my life, but because of what she looked like, and was—a honey and full of moxie. There was a girl who knew how to handle herself

in a brannigan. There was one who could wear the name Mrs. "Punch" McCarthy as a queen wears a crown.

Sweet she was, with her black hair and blue eyes and her red lips, not to mention the cocky way she held her head. My heart started hammering, and I felt a brogue coming on.

But I didn't even get a chance to thank her. Her gun stayed pointed at my head, and her eyes were stormy. It came to me slowly that instead of meeting a beautiful life-saver I had come face-to-gun with another Nemesis.

"Just keep going right ahead and keep your hands where they are," she ordered, and made herself more comfortable on the box.

I looked down over the side and saw flame spouting up from the cornfield. I knew then that when I set my crate down at an airport—if I ever got out of this jam—I was going to have some tall explaining to do. And since I couldn't explain anything more than that the fast crate had used me for target practice, I was odds-on to get bundled in bars. Though it didn't seem so important when considering my other numerous troubles, I also was fugitive from Federal agents.

All this because I simply accepted without asking any questions, an assignment to deliver a box!

And I knew why I had been given that box to deliver. An up-and-up detective, one known to be a dumb Irisher, might get the box safely through when a mobster couldn't. Rabies had been afraid of another gang muscling in, or the Feds clamping down. The fast crate, now burning, had been a guard for me, I figured, but when Marty had edged himself into the picture they had turned rough.

I wasn't meant to go free, either, from all I could figure. I couldn't get away in my plane without gas, after reaching the mountain spot. The whole set-up had been to get rid of me, to keep me from talking, once the box had been delivered. Nice action merry-go-round—and deadly.

And now this beautiful piece of fluff had dealt herself and her gun a hand!

CHAPTER IV

Kidnaped Father

IT WAS impossible to talk.

The wind was screaming through the broken windows. The girl's hair was blowing, blinding her. I cut the motor.

"Cap in my pocket," I said.

She reached for it warily and pulled it on.

A McCarthy is never at a loss what to say to a sweet colleen whatever the time and place. But Irishers have laughed for centuries amidst trouble, and I ruined everything by laughing out loud right then just after doing my fine work. It was that black-and-white hunter's cap. She was still beautiful, even in that cap, but it would have shamed the goblins themselves.

First she looked mad, then puzzled and surprised, then she jerked the thing off like maybe she thought there was a mouse inside it.

"'Tis beautiful it makes you," I hurriedly spread the blarney, "like a wee drop of a sprite. Aye, you are a ver-ry remarkable woman, and it's McCarthy tellin' you that."

"McCarthy," she said, wrinkling her nose, "is too good a name for a hoodlum."

"A hoodlum, am I?" I roared. "'Tis very disappointed I am in such thinking. I am a hard-working detective, except I'm the only one that's being detected doing anything."

She looked steadily and suspiciously at me, put the cap back on and dimples showed in her cheeks. It was highly encouraging.

She motioned with her rod at the sleeping Marty.

"He did pull a gun on you and take your route map away, didn't he?"

"Unless the wine in your eyes has made me forgetful, he did," I said. "And it's about time I got it back and started learning what this is all about. Now if you'll just put that automatic of yours away—"

She hesitated, then jammed it into the pocket of her sports coat.

"I really believe you don't know what this is all about," she said wonderingly.

"Faith," I said, "your belief is right."

I reached over and got the route from Marty's pocket. I still couldn't find the gun he had dropped somewhere inside the ship.

She let out a startled chirp, and I looked up to see that the earmuffs on the cap had come untied, and that with the untying the cap had just spread out and came down over her face and head like a curtain.

She clawed it away from her eyes, looked suspiciously at me, then smiled again.

"I thought it was a trick of yours. I'm getting so I don't trust anyone."

"That's a lamentable policy," I said. "And shamed I am to admit it, but my policy has got to be much the same. Just why did you stow away and shoot the plane down?"

She bit her lips, frowned.

"Well, it was the only way I could save Father's life," she said.

"Your father's life!" I gasped.

I was beginning to feel a little groggy, like maybe I was back in the ring and stopping too many on the button in the late rounds. But I wasn't surprised. Nothing could surprise me any more. Or so I thought—then.

"You see," the girl went on, "the gang this Marty is connected with kidnaped Father to keep him silent."

"Kidnaped?" I said feebly.

BUT I was thinking—here I'd been aiding and abetting snatch artists, even if unknowingly. Uncle Sam right then became a tough gent with bristling whiskers. Bars were yawning for a dumb lug named Aloysius Mularkey.

"Start at the beginning and work up," I yelped. "What's that box got to do with all this? And who are you and who's your old man?"

She pointed a painted nail at Marty.

"We better do something about him first. He's waking up."

Hurriedly I pointed out some loose strut wire in the rear baggage department. She was right. Marty might

be more than fretful when he came around, and my hands were full of plane.

The girl bound his wrists and ankles, searched him and brought out another route map. She was efficient, cool and competent, as I had sized her up to be, and she seemed to enjoy making Marty snug. An admirable lass all around. Then she climbed back atop the box.

I had been climbing due west, pushing for Denver. And I intended to drop down there, too, and have some chats with local cops and Federal men. A stitch in time sometimes saves a scalp.

But then the girl started talking, and when she finished I knew that I couldn't go to Denver, that I had to go into the mountains, and that, though I might be a sucker I couldn't leave this sweet colleen in distress without doing something for her. And telling the police about all this would make her distress so much more distressful, that I was absolutely on my own to clear it up.

I knew I had to do that, but I also knew I had two strikes on me and a Sunday pitch coming up. I would be attending my own wake, but silently.

"I'm Nora Mullins," she told me, in starting out, "and this whole mess is all about some one-, two- and three-cent stamps that Dad bought. He owns a chain of coast-to-coast stores."

I didn't even grunt at this. I still thought I was past surprise. Dinky little stamps—and two mobs killing each other over them! It sounded even screwier than everything else that had been going on. But you never can tell.

"Well," I said smartly, "ones and twos and threes can be ver-ry valuable if they're old enough. Lots of rich guys save old stamps."

"True," she said. "But these were new stamps. Dad is a notorious tightwad in business dealings, always getting into some trouble. These were just regular stamps that he bought from a pawnbroker, through this Marty, at a discount."

I cussed a bit, but silently. The old fool had probably bought some hot

stamps and now the Feds were after him. He wasn't kidnaped at all, just staying under cover for awhile. I didn't tell Nora about this idea, for it might make her feel bad that her old man was just a no-good crook.

"Why are you so sure he's been kidnaped?" I asked her.

"Because in the last twelve years, whenever I've been away from home, he hasn't written a letter to me," she told me. "He always telegraphed or telephoned. But two days ago he mailed me a penny postcard, saying he would be out of Kansas City for several days and not to think anything about it. It was so odd that I knew he was in some sort of trouble."

"Also, he had an appointment with a Federal agent, and he didn't keep it. I knew about this Marty having business dealings with Father, so I began to trail Marty around to learn what I could. At the airport I heard him inquire if a silver and gold monoplane had come in from the east. He told the ticket agent that he would be a passenger on it when it flew west. So I came along, too."

"That being the case," I said, "we'll drop down at the Denver port and have a chat with cops."

That was when Marty decided to open his yap. He had come around and was taking it all in.

"Sure, sucker," he said. "But you've got nothing on me. You've shot down a plane, and her old man is on the dodge, not snatched. He's at camp, waiting, an' he won't come back from that camp unless I show you where it is—and that box gets delivered safely at the same time."

"Just what's in that box?"

"Murder!" He laughed. "Just plain murder. What's in it is worth millions."

I DIDN'T say anything, but my noggin was working. I can add two and two. I had an idea what was in that box. Something to do with stamps. They couldn't be just hot. That didn't fit in with the box angle. But they could be phonies! Sure, and the stuff in the box could be plates to make them!

Maybe Nora's old man was inno-

cent, after all. He might have got wise to the stuff he was buying, and been snatched before he could get to talk to the Feds.

The two gangs? Well, from what Marty had said, the racket was being broken up by the Feds. Those pawnshop raids looked like it, too. One gang was trying to slide out from under and get away with the plates. The other maybe was doublecrossing them, or just going in for some plain hijacking. This Marty had been mixed up with the bunch that had sold old man Mullins stamps through a pawnbroker, a distributing agency. So it looked like an inside job—a double-cross.

I stopped thinking. I wasn't used to it. Nora was frowning as if she had some pretty dark thoughts about her old man. But she took it like a thoroughbred. She looked at me a long time, and I had an idea I knew what she was thinking about.

Because I was thinking the same thing—that I could drop into Denver and clean my own skirts, or take a chance on clearing her old man, maybe save his life, by risking my own neck.

Well, just looking at that colleen warmed the cockles of my heart and I wasn't thinking as a smart detective should. I took the maps from my pocket, studied them, then changed my course to miss Denver and land in the mountains. Nora looked so worried that I didn't mention that I wouldn't be able to travel far, once I got there. In other words, I was risking Nora and myself by going in—with escape shut off—and wondering what my pixies could do about this.

I climbed, opened the throttle, and shortly before noon we were pitching and bumping in the rough air over the high white peaks. The destinations marked on the two maps were separated by ten minutes by air, but a long twisting and killing distance on foot.

I spotted a cabin and a small clearing at my original stop, then crossed a town with a graveyard and three buildings—and went down to meet Marty's pals.

There was a cleared spot in the valley between the mountains. Near it smoke drifted from the chimney of a

small cabin. The cleared spot might have been the vegetable garden of a lazy miner around the turn of the century. It looked that small. Tall weeds sprouted where man-sized boulders didn't jut.

"A sweet place," I said to myself, "for a murder."

Hearing the plane, three men ran from the cabin, looked up.

Marty stuck his head out the window and started to yell. They couldn't hear him.

"What about him?" Nora asked, pointing with her gun.

"Bop him," I said.

Nora did. Marty sagged.

Pines rimmed the clearing. I slipped in almost tail-first at the north end, came around, put her down and prayed. With the help of a few rocks scattered here and there we stopped before crashing into timber at the far end of the field. I jockeyed the crate around until she pointed north, noticing that—as I'd expected—the gas was almost gone.

THE three men were running up. The one in front was a big, bald-headed, money-looking sort of guy, who looked fat, but wasn't. Maybe he had seen the slumping Marty, and maybe he was just smart, but he drew his gun as he came forward.

Hastily Nora pushed her automatic into my hand. I pushed it right back. My getting shot now wouldn't help Nora. Besides, I had to find out how her father stood in this thing before acting. I told her so.

"Hide that gun," I told her, and she did. I heard her let out a "*Bur-r-r*" like maybe she had found a cold piece of ice down her neck.

We sat still until the big guy, whose eyes were too small and too steady, came up to the door, peeked in.

"Come out—with your hands up," he said. "And bring Marty." His gun was as steady as his eyes.

Nora stepped down. I made a jack-knife of Marty, lifted him over the seat, and tossed him out. Then I bent my head and started to step down.

That was where I made a mistake.

My mitts were on the door jamb. A gun rose and fell as I tried to jerk.

I did a swan dive straight down and out.

CHAPTER V

Mountain Brannigan

WHEN I came around I was sitting in a chair, my head down between my knees. I couldn't see well and knew my eyes were puffed and blackened, probably from my dive from the plane.

"I tell you I heard it on the radio," a bull voice was saying. "G-men know we're somewhere in these mountains—with the evidence. We'd have got away with taking over control of the combine if Pete and Al hadn't broken under questioning. They admitted killing Rables, told about our hijack-plan, and about his dumb dick."

"Five can fit in that plane of his," I heard Marty say. "He's the only one who can fly. Mexico will be cool for us. We'll bury the box and the dame right here."

It took an extra long time for this to sink into my aching skull. Then I knew fear and horror for the first time in my life.

They were discussing Nora's death! Maybe they already had killed her!

I jumped to my feet, staggered on rubbery legs, and found myself covered by two guns in the hands of two sleek-looking youngsters, the sort that liked money and disliked work. The box was standing in the middle of the room, still unopened. But Nora was nowhere in sight. Neither was her old man.

Marty and the big fellow were facing me.

"Where's the girl?" I yelled.

The big fellow raised a placating hand.

"She's a wildcat. We had to lock her up."

He motioned to a trapdoor in the floor, a metal-locking latch across its top.

Marty had been giving me an ugly stare. Suddenly he swung. He missed as I stepped back, but the two youngsters earned their pay by grabbing my

arms. Then Marty went to town on my face and bum eyes until the big fellow pulled him away.

I suppose, right then, that I even forgot Nora somewhat in the raging caldron that was my brain.

"My name," I said slowly, "is Aloysius McCarthy. Nobody ever yet has slugged a McCarthy an' got away with it. Begorra, 'twould be a shame if a spalpeen like yourself should start such a habit. Don't you think so, Marty?"

With which I looped a right at the big man first, pivoted and almost knocked Marty's block off with a left hook. Marty went down. The big fellow did not. He just staggered back, screaming to the gunmen:

"Don't shoot, you clucks! He's got to get us away from here!"

He started tossing punches and he was no amateur. I was pumping lefts and rights, circling to his left, trying to put him between myself and the gunmen. A good man he was, with a granite jaw and a rawhide middle.

The sleek youngsters came at me with upraised guns. I turned on the heat, swarming at the big fellow, driving him back by the fury of my attack. His big hulk got in the kids' way. They stopped in confusion for a split second. That was sufficient. I leaped to my left, slashed down with a right past the big fellow's shoulder.

One of the gunmen said "Ugh" and went out like a light. His gun slid across the floor. The big fellow and I both made a dive for it.

Neither of us got it. We simply froze—for the door had opened and a little man in a pin-striped blue suit who stood in it snapped:

"Hold it!"

We did. Despite his size he seemed big as a house. Authority was written all over him and the gun in his fist wasn't the cause of it, either. Here was a guy—ruthless, competent—born to be a boss.

I BLEW out a relieved breath of thanks, figuring it was the Law, one of the G-men.

The first words he said dashed that hope.

"Doublecrossing," he spat at the

big fellow, "always pays out one way or another."

The snub-nosed .38 revolver belched down at the floor. I heard the singing whine of lead passing close to me. The big fellow didn't even twitch, just going still, blood seeping from his head.

"Bring him in!" the little guy turned his head and yelled. "The flyer and the box are here."

Through the open door I saw a sedan. Two plug-uglies dragged a little white-haired man inside. I knew this was Nora's pa, and that the little bossy guy and the plug-uglies were from the camp where I originally was supposed to land. And you can take it from me they were not miners!

The little boss looked at the big fellow and Marty and the sleek-haired punk and myself, all on the floor—and staying there—and at the trembling sleek gunny still upright.

"Drop it," said the little guy.

The automatic in the sleek kid's hand thudded against the floor.

"Sure, Rich—sure," he quavered. He jerked his head at the bloody big fellow. "Scruggs made me do it—made all of us. He knew if he got the stuff you ordered Rables to ship out of New York that he'd be boss—and you on the outside lookin' in."

Rich showed white teeth in a tight smile.

"I build up the best and newest racket in the country and my own men try to shill me out of it. But if that's done, it's going to take a man to do it, not a chump like Scruggs."

That made me blink. I'd just mixed it with Scruggs—and he was anything but a chump. So, right then I knew Rich was no soft tomato.

But those few words I'd heard had told me something. Certain members of a well-organized mob had tried to depose a king—Rich—which accounted for me being trailed across the country. Why, I couldn't figure yet, and didn't want to. I was too busy trying to find a way out of this new mess. With every minute I was getting more anxious about Nora.

Nora's old man looked scared. He might be a power behind a desk, but I could see he'd be no good in a brannigan.

Marty groaned and sat up. When he saw Rich he went white as a Saturday sheet.

Rich's teeth weren't showing in a grin now. His calm eyes started to glisten and he held his revolver in the palm of one hand and patted it.

Marty watched Rich unblinkingly.

"You," Rich murmured, "started all this. Swell-headed, sure of the power you thought I had, you let slip Rables' name. You mentioned that pawn-brokers all over the country had a way to sell stamps at a discount. When Mullins"—he jerked his chin at Nora's trembling old man—"found out they were phonies and threatened to tell G-men, you made me into a snatcher. You know what a snatcher's rap is.

"Then, when I get him up here, I find that he's playing with the Feds, has already told them. I expected the stuff would be safe in this wilderness but you, not satisfied with starting all this by talking too much, join up with Scruggs to hijack the stuff. Now we're all plenty hot because of you. What you think you got coming?"

DESPERATION had been growing in Marty's eyes. He made a sudden grab beneath his coat, got the automatic out.

I pulled my feet under me and leaped for Rich, just as his gun blasted four times in a blind fury. There were two sharp *bangs* from Marty's gun, a choked-off scream, the *thud* of a body falling.

But I had my left hand about Rich's neck, shaking him as a terrier would a rat, and my right twisted the smoking revolver from his hand. He clawed at me. I raised my right fist and knocked him spinning through the door, then leaped backward.

The pixies were with me. Marty's outthrust, still feet saved my life. I saw the two plug-uglies turn loose the old man, draw, level and shoot over Rich's shoulder.

Just then I struck Marty's feet and went down.

My snatched revolver sent its last bullet into the ceiling. And there were bursts of whining lead just over me, past where I'd been. My head

crashed hard against the floor and my scalp ripped as it skidded across the metal of the trap-door.

I lay there waiting for guns to keep crashing. The room was swirling and I couldn't even hear the referee counting.

I thought my shoulders jarred, like someone was trying to help me up. I remembered Nora then and came alive.

Rich was standing over me, looking down, his mouth open, eyes slits.

"You're lucky, flyer, that nobody else can pilot that crate outside. Scruggs was going to leave the box. I'm not. But I'm going to make use of what I overheard and go to Mexico. When the heat cools off, I'll start the racket again. You—you stay in Mexico."

He didn't say how I'd stay. He didn't need to. Something in his eyes said it would be under the sod.

"Now get up," he said. "All roads are blocked."

I got up because I couldn't do anything else. But my dumb brain was starting to work again. Two of Scruggs' men were still alive and there were Rich and his two plug-uglies. The plane could carry four, counting myself, if the box wasn't brought along. And each of these five men here were desperate to go!

So I stammered around, trying to explain it slowly, until I could get my strength. But to myself I was vowing that Nora and her old man wouldn't be left here, dead or otherwise.

As I talked, telling of the plane's capacity, and that only one of the three men besides Rich could go—if the box went—I could see each was determined to be that man. Each would battle like a mad wolf for the privilege—and that would be a nice brannigan.

CHAPTER VI

The Pixies Take Over

RICH understood that I was trying to work the hired gunmen up into a desperate recklessness, but he couldn't stop it. Possibly he didn't want to. Nora's old man understood

too—and he looked more fearful than ever.

Anything would set off the fireworks. So, hoping my pixies were on duty, I grabbed Rich to me as a shield, took a long step, and bent for the automatic in Marty's hand.

Slugs sent slivers flying from the floor against my hand. But I got the gun.

Scruggs' sleek-haired boys didn't care who they got, so they fired at Rich, trying to blast through to me. The plug-uglies mussed up the sleek youngsters, and I took the plug-uglies, getting no more out of the rapid-action, smoking inferno than a shoulder nick from a slug that had passed through Rich.

Quiet came, deep, penetrating, and the gasps of Nora's old man seemed to echo.

I don't know how long I stood there, swaying, feeling dizzy. A thin scream of horror, quickly quelled, directly beneath me, made me drop Rich's body and leap.

I found the trap-door, tossed it wide. In the dim light I saw Nora lying on the floor in the shallow cellar. Then I was beneath the floor myself, holding her to me, murmuring crazy Irish things.

Her eyes fluttered. She looked up unbelievably, then sighed and smiled.

"I—I guess I fainted," she murmured. "I thought they'd killed you."

"Everything's all right," I declared. "Your old man is upstairs, unhurt."

"The box—what was in it?"

I told her pretty much what I had figured out was in the thing—besides a lot of death and destruction. What had happened since we had landed here had simply made me surer.

"'Tain't possible," I said, "that it's more than plates—engravings—to make counterfeit stamps. It's a nice racket, hard to detect, even if it's only one, two and three cents apiece. Stamps are easy to make. All that's needed is distributing agencies. And this Rich was a fairish business man. He had pawnshops. With big chain-store customers like your father, there was plenty of dough in it." I grinned at her. "Even a dumb Irisher couldn't go wrong figuring that out."

"You're not dumb," said Nora indignantly. "Of course you're not like Dad, when it comes to fancy thinking, but I'm going to need a man who can hold on to what Dad makes, keep him out of trouble. I want—"

"Want?" I said, knowing opportunity when it punches me on the nose. "You cannot want what you already have—and, colleen, you have me cold."

"Well, what can a gal say to that?" she asked, getting her arms about my neck. "Everything is just perfect."

"It sure is," said a voice from above. "Get the devil out of there."

An Irishman is never without his troubles, and I'm solid Irisher. I had a few things to say about Nora's old man, who had just stood like a dummy when Scruggs had scrambled to his feet upstairs.

Yes, it was Scruggs, with a bullet crease along his head and a gun in his fist. I couldn't see too good with my bad eyes, but I could see that. And Scruggs, as I knew, was quite a man.

He paraded us outside past the shambles that was the cabin. I told him that Nora and her old pop came along or we didn't fly, guns or no guns. He gave in when there seemed nothing else to do, for he wouldn't think of trying to go out by car.

I COULDN'T see any reason for telling about how I couldn't see to get off that field, or about the amount of gas left. We simply got into the plane. My pixies were whispering, telling me of a helpless, crazy sort of plan. I told old Pop and Nora to fasten their belts. I did likewise. Scruggs, keeping the gun trained on my head, did the same.

Nora put her hand on my arm and I could see her blood-red fingertips. They made me shudder. We'd all be that color if my pixie plan failed.

It was sheer desperation, I suppose. I didn't give a hoot if we cracked a wheel or not on the rocks. I just slammed my darling across the clearing and practically lifted her bodily into the air.

The wind screamed through the shattered windows. I went into a circling, steep climb.

I kept looking back at Scruggs, with

his gun. His blowing hair was bothering him, getting in his eyes. My pixies got to work.

"Put on that cap!" I screamed to him, nodding at the black-and-white plaid hunter's cap near Scruggs' feet. He pushed it over his head.

Lucky, those pixies, and real pals. If Scruggs could be taken alive, everything would be okay, with a prisoner to do the explaining. But it had to be done quickly before the gas ran out and we crashed. His gun was forestalling any sort of action. But with that cap—

I kept going higher, climbing, keeping in a tight circle. My darling never had performed sweeter with a heavy load. She was sure, proud, nothing like the crippled bird I'd reclaimed. I had sworn that nothing could ever make me harm her again—but that was before Nora.

Scruggs growled about the height. I yelled that we couldn't try for distance until I was high enough to avoid down draughts.

I could barely see my instruments. I yelled at Nora to try to spot that graveyard. There was a road near it. She spotted it. I kept right over it, climbing. Eight thousand.

"I never thought," I said to Scruggs, "a gangster would take me for a ride—especially in a plane."

"There's lots o' things you can't think of, Dick!" he bellowed. "Why, you're so dumb—"

It was right then and there that that crazy cap decided to come untied. Like a curtain rolling down on the finale—the last act—it went over his eyes and nose. He choked, reached with both hands to pull it up. The gun pointed at the ceiling.

My right hand swept Nora's head against the crash pad. My left put the stick straight forward. I opened the throttle.

Last act!

We were in a power-dive, going straight down, motor wide open. Two hundred, three hundred, three-fifty miles per hour, going with the swiftness of rushing death—and in a red mist the panels on the board disappeared.

A cabin job shouldn't be put into

a dive—and never with the load this crippled baby was carrying. If I pulled out, provided I could, after four thousand feet the plane would have to hold a relentless drag of more than six times her own weight, enough to pull her apart and shatter her in mid-air.

I had braced myself. So had Nora. I heard the thud of two heads in the back above the scream of wind that mounted until it was a banshee wail.

MY HEAD was being driven down between my knees and my body became an inanimate thing in a vise with all life squeezed out. The whole world seemed to press in and I was no more than an atom floating into oblivion.

The stick seemed as tall and heavy as the Empire State Building—but it came back ever so slowly. The red haze left my head then and I raised

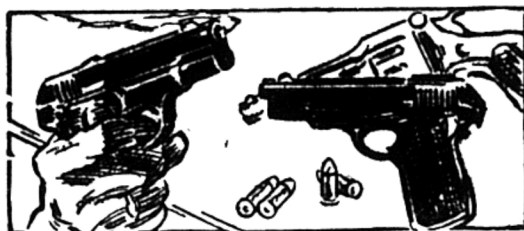
it a bit. We were leveling off and there was a flutter in the wings—but she held.

I was right over the cemetery, and limped down to the road, still in a dizzy fog.

Nora and her dad and Scruggs were unconscious.

I stumbled out of the plane, carrying Nora. From the nearby little hamlet, figures were running toward us. They could keep Scruggs under control. I didn't feel up to it. Besides, there was some unfinished Nora business. . . .

Scruggs had a lot to tell his friends in the Federal penitentiary about the "ride" he'd lived through. It was my last dive also. I'm busy these days, keeping Nora's old man out of trouble and squaring the boy Nora and I have with the neighborhood. He's a sweet roughneck, a smart Irisher, born to brannigan.



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The voice came to Hannigan out of the jungle, mingled with the pounding, dim clamor of the drums

THE DIAMONDS OF DEATH

By HENRY KUTTNER

Revenge Stalks on the Heels of Vicious Killers Who Hound Down Their Quarry to the Tune of Hollow Native Drumbeats!

JERRY Malone came up the hard way, and went down by the same route. His story started in a cheap burlesque house in Evanston, where he was billed as a one-man show; it ended in the haunted, drum-throbbing shadows of the Yucatan jungle, with the bodiless whisper of a dead man bringing fear and terror and madness.

Jerry Malone — those who remember the Prohibition Era will recall the name. He wasn't as big a shot as Capone, but he was still sufficiently powerful in the underworld. Chicago knew him and drank his bootleg whisky. Yet Malone wasn't a killer, like so many of the others. He simply saw a way to make easy money, and took it.

Vaudeville was dying. Malone was, a good burlesque man—no question about that. He knew every trick of the trade. Sandy, his wife, had been a strip-teaser, but Malone put a stop to that when he married the blond, laughing youngster. He loved Sandy quite a bit more than his life, and perhaps it was because of her that he got involved with criminal activities in Chicago. The town was wide open then, roaring with contraband liquor, rackets, and murder.

Malone took a job running a beer-truck without lights, and worked his way up.

He wasn't stupid. Unless, perhaps, it was stupid to have scruples. In those days ruthlessness was the only thing that counted. Inside of a year, Malone was the leader of a bootlegging outfit, coining money, and handling a small crime empire. But even his enemies admitted he was a square guy.

He looked—well, nondescript. No one could imagine what Sandy had seen in him. She blossomed into a gay, thoughtless butterfly, enjoying every moment of a luxurious life entirely new to her. She never knew the details of Malone's business.

He tried to keep her out of it completely.

Then there was a mix-up over income tax evasions. Malone went to jail, after salting away a rather incredible sum of money.

All that may not seem important, but it was, in view of what happened later. Malone was released at last, chastened and miserable because of Sandy. She knew the truth about his criminal career now, but she had stuck with him regardless, promising to wait for him till he came out of the big house. Only she insisted that he go straight now. One thing she did ask him—whether he had ever committed any murders, or paid to have any done.

Quite honestly, Malone said no. He had scruples. He had forgotten that only an outlaw wolf could survive among an outlaw pack.

Hannigan, Keenan, and Dana met him when he was freed. They had been members of his mob. Hannigan

was Malone's lieutenant, and it was he who directed operations when the former gang chief was kidnaped and taken to a hide-out on the outskirts of Chicago, near the lake.

It was the old doublecross. Four men were involved in it, but the fourth, a dope-sodden, nervous rat named Penny Packard, stayed in the background, and Malone didn't even know he was involved in that night of terror. But Hannigan and the two others were enough. They were devils.

They did not have Malone's scruples, for one thing. They wanted the money he had salted away. Malone intended to use that fortune as a nest-egg when he and Sandy went away from Chicago. He had promised to go straight, remember.

But Hannigan and the others put the screws on Malone. They had kidnaped Sandy, too. What they threatened to do to the girl made the gang chief turn white as paper. But first they tortured Malone a bit, and when he refused to talk, they turned to Sandy. Before they could touch her, Malone told them where the money was hidden.

Hannigan's cold eyes gleamed through his thick-lensed spectacles. He took out his gun and got ready to use it. Because Malone and Sandy would be dangerous to him if they kept on living.

Somehow Malone broke free then. The smoky, dim cellar echoed with yells and shots. Sandy got a bullet through her head, and her husband was shot down, too, though he left his mark on his betrayers. But the noise brought police, with sirens screaming, and they found Sandy dead on the floor, with Malone unconscious beside her. There was no trace of Hannigan or the others. They got the money Malone had hidden, and vanished for a while.

What happened to the former gang chief after that was of little importance. He lived, after a month of hovering on the edge of death, and he came out of the hospital a wreck, shaking with nerves, his eyes brimming with horror. Hannigan had taken his place as leader of the mob,

and the word was out to kill Malone. So the deposed gang-ruler vanished.

Quick curtain. Keep it down for ten years or so. Behind it things went on. Prohibition ended, and the gangs went out. Hannigan, Keenan and Dana gradually changed from little Caesars to hunted public enemies, with prices on their heads, and with the G-men tailing them remorselessly. The fourth member of the quartet, "Penny" Packard, became a bum, drifting around the banana ports, for he dared not cross the border into the States, where death in the chair waited for him.

Then lift the curtain again, with the letter Packard sent Hannigan. It was postmarked at a little coastal town in Yucatan. And its contents made the cold eyes gleam behind the thick-lensed spectacles.

By accident, Packard had run across Jerry Malone. Malone had recognized his former henchman, and he did not know that Packard had been among his betrayers. He had offered Packard a job on his plantation in the interior, and now Packard wrote:

We didn't get all the dough Malone salted away. He fooled us there. After he got out of that hospital, he picked up the rest of it before he disappeared—eighty grand, more or less, and bought ice. Figured it would be safe to invest in diamonds, and he would always have them if he needed the cash. He's got those rocks with him now, and he won't touch them. Says he promised Sandy he was going straight, and is satisfied to make a few chips running that plantation of his. I'll cut you three in on this. I can't handle the business alone. We'll split four ways, head for Buenos Aires or somewhere they can't extradite us, and we can live like kings.

There was more. A good deal more. So Hannigan talked to Keenan and Dana, and presently three men sailed for Yucatan to finish a murder they had begun a decade before.

One was wise, the second was a brute, and the third was half mad. And they were all killers. They landed at Progreso and followed the coast to Boca de Tsilam, where the native guide Packard had sent down met them.

Then they went inland, through the green inferno of Yucatan, their minds

turning always to the thought of diamonds.

The first man. Bill Hannigan. He was gaunt and cadaverous and skull-faced, with an immense bald head and glittering, thick-lensed spectacles. His voice was as dry as his leathery face, though not quite as arid as his heart. He sweated in the tropical heat, moisture fogging his glasses, and stumbled often in the overgrown path as he followed the half-naked, brown-skinned native, Manuel. But he said never a word.

The second man. He was the brute, Arnie Keenan. He was short and thick and ugly, with a scarred and hideous face, and he was blind in one eye. His head was cropped, and he had cauliflower ears. He cursed thickly as he plodded along, shirt torn open to reveal a hairy, muscular torso.

And the third man, Dana—he was drunk with the wine of murder. He was slim and well-built, looking like a handsome gigolo, with his sleek black hair scarcely disarranged by the hardships of the journey. His blue eyes were diamond-hard.

FIVE days they struggled on. From the distance came the low throbbing of native drums, jarring on taut nerves. The three kept their guns close, though Manuel said there was no danger.

"I guide you, *si*," he said, his dark face shining with sweat. "The Senor Packard has make all the arrangements. And I ask no questions and you will pay me well. *Bueno!*"

"Yes," Hannigan said coldly, "we'll pay you, all right. But don't try any tricks. We've got guns."

Manuel's teeth flashed. "The drums bother you? They are nothing. Always they beat in the forest."

"Well, I don't like 'em," Keenan growled, his thick lips twisting.

Dana said nothing, but he whistled as he cleaned his gun. Keenan whirled.

"Shut up! You're worse than the drums!"

Dana smiled. "Because Jerry Malone always whistled that tune?" Mockingly he hummed:

Oh, the days of the Kerry dancers. . . .

It almost came to a fight, but Hannigan stopped it with a few terse words and his hand on his automatic.

"We're almost there. Tonight we're meeting Penny. You boys keep quiet."

There seemed no threat in the cool voice, but Dana and Keenan subsided, plodding on through the green, lush heat.

Night came on swiftly, and a dim moon rose. Presently Manuel turned into a smaller side path.

"We are almost there. At the ruined temple—that is where Senor Packard will be. Here!"

"Whew!" Dana whistled softly. "Quite a joint!"

It was. In a clearing in the forest stood the ruins of an ancient temple, half-hidden in the quick-growing vegetation. It was old—old. An air of dusty antiquity seemed to blow out from it, chilling the sweat-moist faces of the men.

Manuel led them to a dark alcove. "Better not go in," he warned. "There may be snakes."

"Where's Packard?" Hannigan asked.

"I find him and bring him here." Before the white men could object Manuel had slipped away and was gone in the darkness. Keenan cursed and whipped out his gun, but Dana's slim hand closed on the squat giant's arm.

"Take it easy, Arnie!"

"If he's trying to doublecross us—"

"You're nervous as a cat," Hannigan said. "Everything's going just as we planned. Sit down and wait. No—no smoking. Just keep quiet."

They did, while the minutes dragged past. Something stirred in the luminous darkness.

"Hannigan?" a low voice called.

No one spoke.

"It's Penny," the voice said, "Penny Packard."

"Over here," Hannigan said. His gun was out.

But it was Packard. They could recognize the beak of a nose, the crinkled scar across one cheek. Packard seemed doped to the eyes. He kept running his tongue nervously across his thin lips.

"Lord, I'm glad you came," he whis-

pered. "I was getting cold feet."

"What about the diamonds?" Hannigan asked. "Will there be any trouble?"

"Not a bit. I know where they're hidden. Malone keeps the key under his shirt all the time, but I slipped a powder into his liquor tonight. He's dead to the world."

"What's the program?" Dana said.

Again Packard moistened his lips. "The Indians like Malone. If we just steal the rocks and scam, he may send natives after us."

Hannigan nodded. "I get it. That's why you didn't dare pull the trick yourself. You always were yellow, Penny."

Packard didn't resent the words.

"Manuel's gone," he said. "I paid him off. I know the way back to the coast. We'll get the rocks, take care of Malone, and head for Boca de Tsi-lam. Right?"

Hannigan jerked his head.

"Come on, then," Packard said. "But keep quiet."

HE led the way into the jungle. Ten minutes later they came out in another clearing, where a crudely built house stood.

"Malone's," Packard whispered.

They moved silently to the veranda and stepped into the front room. They had eyes only for the man who lay asleep on a cot by the wall, breathing harshly in drugged slumber.

"He's changed," Dana said, "but I'd know him anywhere."

Packard looked at Hannigan, who drew his gun. Then the drug-addict went stealthily to the cot. He opened the sleeping man's shirt, cut a thong with his knife, and drew out a key.

He went to the wall, slid aside a disguised panel, and worked for a moment at a key-hole. Then he drew out a little bag of tanned skin and gave it to Hannigan.

The killer shook a cascade of gleaming stones into his palm. His eyes, behind the thick spectacles, took on an oddly luminous appearance.

"More than eighty grand here," he said thickly. "Nearer a hundred."

He looked at Dana. The sleek-

haired gangster's lips curled into a smile. He went to the cot and took steady aim with his automatic. The sound of the shot crashed through the night.

Dana's face was alight with something akin to madness. He was drinking the wine of murder.

"Let's get out of here," Packard said nervously. "Quick!"

"Okay," Hannigan said. "We can be thirty miles away by morning."

They went out, no one glancing at the still figure on the cot. Dim moonlight slanted down from overhead. Far away, drums were beating. They started along a path new to the three from the States.

"Short-cut," Packard explained. "It'll save us five miles. We cross the river gorge by a rope bridge."

Soon they heard the muffled roar of a cataract. On the edge of the ravine they halted. The cleft was so deep that moonlight could not reach the bottom. The noise of racing waters came up. A crude rope bridge crossed the gap.

Packard started along it. And then the accident happened. "Snake!" he yelled. "Look out!" He tried to spring back off the precariously swaying bridge.

Hannigan made a vain clutch at him. For a moment Packard windmilled his arms on the edge of the gulf. Then he went over.

A scream mingled with the roar of an avalanche. After that there was only the sound of water.

"Snake?" Dana said, and raised his gun.

"He must have carried it over with him," Hannigan said, no trace of emotion in his icy voice. "Can you see him at all?"

They craned over the edge. A patch of moonlight suddenly broke through the darkness. Far below, a crumpled form was visible, half-hidden by a boulder which had quite obviously smashed down on the body's spine.

Keenan laughed, a nervous, harsh sound.

"Tough on Penny," he said. "He loses his cut."

"Yeah?" Dana asked. "Well, how

do we get back to the coast?"

"I remember the way," Hannigan said, but his voice was uneasy. Suddenly the sound of the drums seemed louder, more ominous. He shook his shoulders impatiently. "Come on!" He turned back.

"The bridge?"

"We'll go back over the trail we came in by, Arnie," Hannigan told Keenan. "It'll be safer. We won't get lost."

So they tried to retrace their steps. They must have traveled for an hour before they came on a familiar figure, curled up under a hardwood tree. It was Manuel, clutching a bag of coins in his grimy hand, and smiling even in sleep. "Luck!" Keenan exclaimed. He kicked the native awake.

Manuel jumped up, stuffing the bag into his shirt.

"I have nothing! I have no money!" He recognized the white men. "Ah, senores! You have not come to rob me?" But his eyes were frightened.

Dana laughed. "Keep your chips. We need a guide."

"A guide? But the Senor Packard told me I was no longer needed."

"The Senor Packard suffered a slight accident," Hannigan said, with grim humor. "We want you to guide us back to the coast."

MANUEL looked shrewd. "Then you must pay me well—very well!"

Keenan growled an oath and lunged forward, but Hannigan barked a command, and the brute man subsided.

"Sure, we'll pay you well. We can afford it, Arnie. We can't afford to make enemies. I'm handling this." His eyes glittered. "Remember it."

So it was settled, a price was agreed upon, and the three men went on with their guide. Before dawn they camped. There was no need to hurry now. They lit a small fire and listened to the drums.

None of them slept well, except Manuel, whose nerves seemed to be of iron. Dana tossed and muttered uneasily, his face flushed. Keenan breathed heavily, gasping and moaning. Hannigan stood it for a time, then got up and drank whisky.

Missing Page

Missing Page

and there. He kept telling somebody to stay dead.

"Shut up, Malone! You're dead!"

"Give me back the diamonds."

Dana ran away into the jungle. After a time his screams stopped. Hannigan got up languidly and gestured for Manuel to follow.

They found Dana dead, and his face was no pleasant sight.

Hannigan's hand went to the pouch of diamonds under his shirt. He gripped Manuel's shoulder and made the native lead him back to the path. The drums beat on.

"Got to get to the coast. Pretty soon now. Keep going, Manuel, or I'll blow your head off."

That afternoon was worst of all. The voice kept on whispering. The trees were alive. And they harbored half-visible shapes of horror. Hannigan emptied his gun at shadows, reloaded and fired again and again. He finally discovered there was only one bullet left, and he had sense enough to keep this in reserve. Boca de Tsilam couldn't be far away now.

The swift tropic night came down. Manuel built a fire. Hannigan crouched by it, gun in hand, shaking horribly. The voice murmured incessantly now.

"Give me back the diamonds or I shall drive you mad!"

A howler monkey screamed far away, and Hannigan jerked convulsively. He turned to ask Manuel.

"How far to the coast now?"

But the native was gone. There was only moonlit darkness, and the red glow of the fire, and the sweetly stifling smell of the jungle. And the trees moved, and shapes of nightmare crept beyond the darkness.

"Manuel!" Hannigan's voice rose to a scream.

But it was the other voice that answered.

"You won't see Manuel again, Bill."

"Malone!"

Hannigan jerked up his gun. The voice from the darkness said sharply:

"Don't fire! That's your last bullet, remember."

"You're dead!" Hannigan repeated it, as though for comfort. "You're dead!"

"I'm not dead, Bill," the voice said. "But Dana is, and Keenan, and you will be soon. Like Penny Packard."

Hannigan licked his lips. "You're dead. Dana killed you."

Remorseless, quiet, the low voice went on:

"The comedy's nearly finished, Bill. And it's time for explanations. Listen . . . I planned this whole business."

"You're dead," Hannigan said dully.

"Part of me died when you killed my wife. But a little bit was left. I came down to Yucatan to get away. I worked and managed to get a plantation in the jungle. Sandy had wanted me to go straight, so I did. Then I ran into Penny Packard on the coast, and he asked me for a job. I wanted to kill him at first. Because I'd found out he was one of the four men who had murdered Sandy."

Hannigan lifted the gun, his glowing eyes searching the darkness.

"Don't shoot, Bill. One bullet, remember. I'll go on . . . I laid my plans carefully. I'd have left you alone, but when Penny Packard came along, things changed. I—remembered Sandy. Packard saw that bag of stones I kept behind the wall panel, and wrote you a letter. I intercepted and read it. Then I laid my plans."

"You—"

"I used to be in burlesque, Bill. The one-man show. That was how they billed me. It wasn't hard for me to disguise myself as a native. I was Manuel. I met you at Boca de Tsilam, and you didn't penetrate my disguise. I guided you into the interior, left you at the ruined temple, and came back disguised again as Penny Packard. That wasn't hard in the dim moonlight. A putty nose, a collodion scar on my cheek—I'm a good make-up artist."

"Dana killed you!" Hannigan croaked.

"He killed Penny Packard. I doped Packard and disguised him to look like me. You were in a hurry. That wasn't hard, either."

"Penny fell down that gorge."

"Not Penny—me. I'd planned that. I'd planted a dummy at the bottom of the gorge before you arrived. I

pretended to fall, swung on to a ledge below, and waited till you'd gone. Then I climbed back, changed my disguise to Manuel again, and circled around to wait for you on the trail. After that it was easy. The one-man show . . . I'm a pretty clever ventriloquist, Bill. And, besides, you weren't in any condition to think clearly."

"What d'you mean?" Hannigan's finger shivered against the automatic's trigger.

"I poisoned you all. On the way in from the coast. I doped you with nitrobenzol, Bill. When I planned this business, I checked every detail. Nitrobenzol's a powerful drug—a narcotic. It affects the brain. Makes you see visions. You've been almost delirious for days now."

"You didn't slip anything in our grub—"

"Nitrobenzol can be absorbed through the skin," the voice said quietly. "I poured some of it into the shoes of all of you. When your feet sweated, they absorbed the poison. It worked faster on Dana than on Keenan or you. But it worked."

Hannigan staggered upright. His free hand brought out the skin bag from inside his shirt.

"I've got the diamonds, blast you! And I'll get through to the coast! A few hours—"

"There's no cure for you now," the voice said. "You're dying, Bill. You'll go completely insane soon, and then there'll be convulsions—and death. Nothing can save you. As for the diamonds—they belonged to Sandy. I kept them. I had nothing else of

hers. After I got out of the hospital, I took them away with me. They're paste, Bill. When I was in prison, Sandy sold the diamonds I'd given her. She spent the money trying to get me free. I didn't know that till—till she was dead. Her lawyer told me."

"Paste!" Hannigan croaked. His voice broke in an inarticulate scream of fury.

"You should have been satisfied with killing only a part of me," said the cold, remorseless voice from the jungle. "I wanted only to stay here in Yucatan, living with my memories of Sandy. But you couldn't leave me alone, Bill. I'm dying now. Ten years ago you put a bullet through my lung, and it's been torturing me ever since. In six months or less I shall be dead. Meantime, I'll go back to my plantation, and wait till I can be with Sandy. You forgot—I loved her."

Hannigan swayed on his feet, his face the twisted, fear-crazed mask of a devil. He lurched forward, the gun jutting.

"I'll kill you!" he mouthed. "This time I'll do it right!"

"You have one bullet," the voice said. "And within a few hours you will be in agony. The poison has been absorbed by your system."

In the distance the drums beat dully, mockingly.

"I'm a ventriloquist, Bill. Your bullet couldn't find me."

Hannigan started to laugh crazily. Then he jerked up the automatic and put a bullet through his head, just where he had shot Sandy Malone ten years ago.

COMING NEXT ISSUE

THE CASE OF THE MURDEROUS MERMAID, *a Complete Green Ghost Novel* by G. T. FLEMING-ROBERTS—SHADOW
OF THE KILLER, *a Colonel Crum Novelet* by
JOHN H. KNOX—and *Many Other Stories!*





By
G. T. FLEMING-ROBERTS

SHRINE

CHAPTER I

Count Basil of Kapuvar

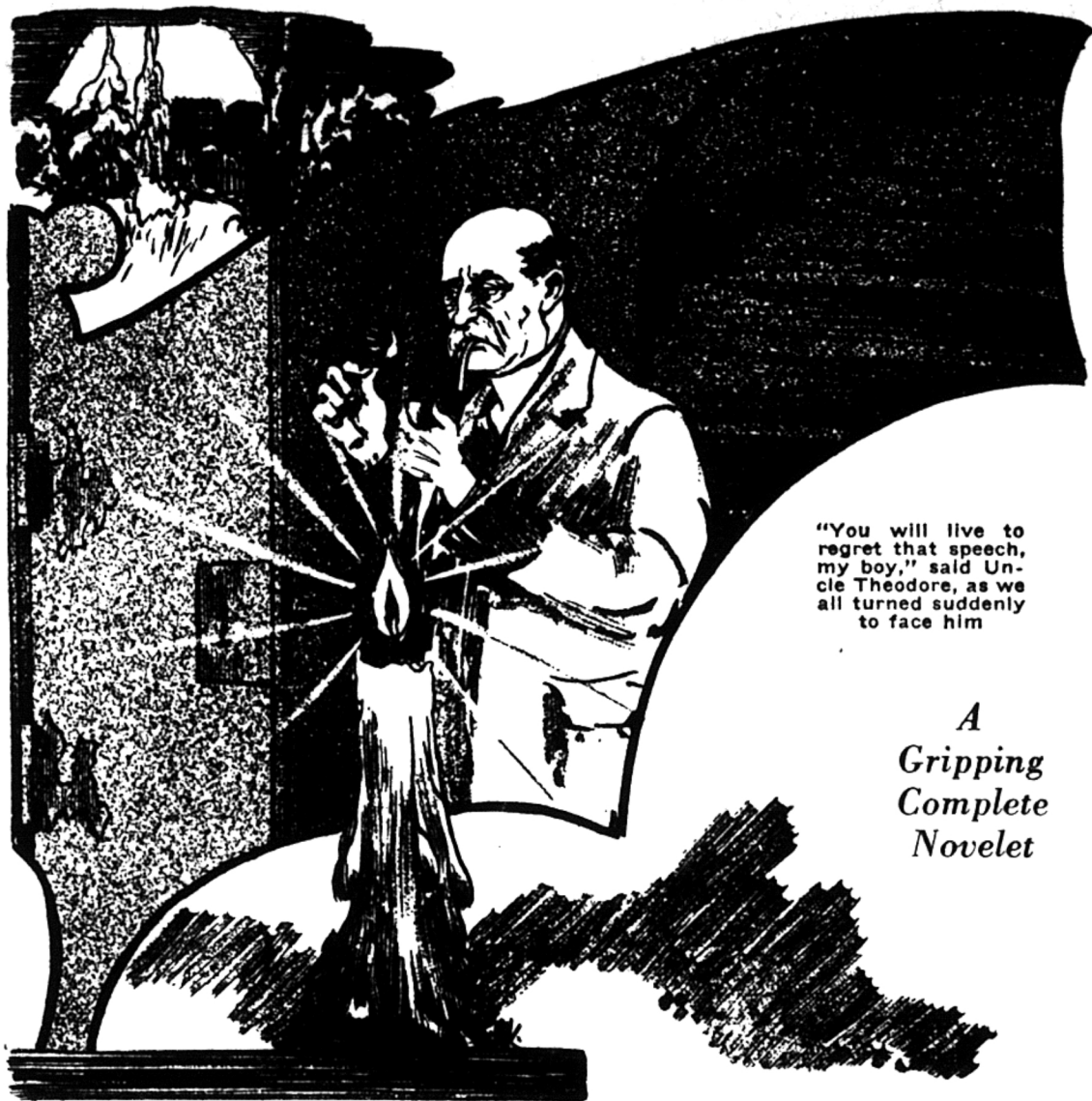
IT WAS nine o'clock Saturday night when we reached the home of Theodore Loeder, ten miles out of Kaaterskill. We had left New York, much against my better judgment, at about four in the afternoon. Stopping for dinner had killed some of the time, and after we were out of Kaaterskill I discovered that all little mountain roads look exactly alike in

a snowstorm, especially if you're trying to find a place you haven't seen in six years.

When I pointed out the house to Kennard Haas who was driving, Haas twisted his wheel, nosed into the white teeth of the storm, and headed for what he thought was the driveway. We stopped completely with the radiator grill more than half buried in a drift.

Haas sat there helplessly, looking out through the area of windshield cleared by the frantic wipers.

Fear Grips the Snowbound House as a Thing



"You will live to regret that speech, my boy," said Uncle Theodore, as we all turned suddenly to face him

*A
Gripping
Complete
Novelet*

OF THE UNDEAD

"Engine died," he explained unnecessarily.

"Did it?" I said acidly. "If I had known it was going to do that, I'd have ordered a funeral spray from the florist. Won't it be nice if old Loeder just doesn't want company, and we have to spend the night out here listening to our joints freeze."

Margaret, my wife, tugged at my coat sleeve.

"Stop being a kill-joy!" she said.

To which I might have retorted that if all this was her idea of joy it

ought to have been killed a long time ago. None of this was my idea. It just happened that when I had been in college I had got quite chummy with a fellow named Franz Loeder. He was of German extraction, although since Hitler, he preferred to trace his ancestry clear back to Hungary.

In a moment of confidence, inspired by too much beer, Franz Loeder had told me the story of Count Basil of Kapuvar, one of the roots of his family tree. Count Basil had been a Hun-

from the Ancient Past Rides the Night Wind!

garian nobleman who had earned quite a reputation for himself by turning vampire a short time after his earthly remains had been assigned to the family burial vault. In fact, Franz had told me, it was because of the nocturnal prowlings of the dead count that the family had been forced to move to Germany.

One week-end, Franz Loeder had taken me up into the Catskills to visit his Uncle Theodore who could speak much more convincingly of Count Basil than Franz could. Although our friendship ended when I left school, I had probably repeated the story of Count Basil to a score of people, including my friend Kennard Haas who was program director for one of the local radio stations.

I hadn't seen Franz Loeder since college days until that Saturday morning when I had seen his odd, protruding, heavy-lidded eyes looking out at me from the changing pattern of hats and faces in a crowd at Grand Central Station. And while I remembered him distinctly, as soon as he found me looking at him he fairly burrowed into the crowd.

That same afternoon, Kennard Haas called me on the phone at my Bronx apartment. He had a guest from out of town, a man named Walter Uhlray. Uhlray was writing a book on demons, witches, vampires and other unpleasant company. Would I kindly introduce Uhlray to Franz Loeder so that Uhlray could get the story of Count Basil for his book. I told Haas I had no idea where Franz Loeder could be found. And then Haas recalled that if I couldn't find Franz Loeder we could all drive up into the mountains and see Franz's Uncle Theodore.

A PROTEST started from my lips, but Margaret twisted the phone out of my hand. Kennard Haas has the sort of voice that makes a public address horn out of a telephone, and Margaret had heard both ends of the conversation. She told Haas that of course we would go. And although I cited the fate of a certain cat that had been overwhelmed by curiosity, nothing could dissuade her.

So where were we? Margaret, Ken

Haas, Walter Uhlray, and I were stuck in a snowdrift and about to become the uninvited and probably unwelcome guests of a square-headed, chop-whiskered old German who certainly wouldn't have picked so secluded a spot for a home if he was in the habit of having "welcome" written on his door mat.

Walter Uhlray stared out of the car window at the huge house dimly outlined against the dark sky.

"A queer-looking place," he muttered.

It was all of that. It was one of those structures that had grown of necessity to accommodate an expanding family. The original architectural plan was entirely lost in the maze of subsequent additions.

"Young woman," I said to my wife as we stamped through the snow to the house, "you are going to wish you hadn't butted in."

"Pooh! I'm not afraid of spooky houses or vampires."

"I was thinking of pneumonia. I don't know anything about vampires, but I'm a firm believer in steam heat. You're going to regret this."

And she did. But not because of pneumonia.

We were ushered silently into the great library of the old house by Waldo, the pink-eyed albino servant who remembered me from my first visit. Waldo said he would go find out if Theodore Loeder would see us, and backed out of the room, giving us a final suspicious glance through the crack of the closing door.

"What a creepy old man!" Margaret whispered.

Ken Haas, his back to the roaring open fire, agreed with her.

"He looks like something the undertaker forgot to call for, doesn't he?"

Waldo certainly didn't have the virility that Kennard Haas had. My friend was a huge, blond man, slightly thicker through the chest than through the waist. He had lived so well in the past few years that he was sponsoring his second chin.

Haas's writer friend, Walter Uhlray, on the other hand, had the lank, loose body of a puppet. At dinner, I

had discovered that his face held a strange fascination for me. The features were ordinary enough. It was simply that, although middle-aged and growing grey, he hadn't a line in his face. His skin seemed a sort of tightly stretched mask over another face you didn't see. It was this face you didn't see that owned the shrewd black eyes that examined you so closely.

The door of the library was opened suddenly and the last person I had expected to see made his appearance. Franz Loeder, my friend of college days, stood there in the doorway. I don't know which of us was the most surprised. For just a moment I thought he was going to turn and run back into the shadows from which he had come, much as he had burrowed into the crowd at Grand Central Station where I had seen him that morning. Then he seemed to change his mind.

HE CAME forward to shake my hand.

"Tim Rainey!" he exclaimed. "I'm glad to see you."

"I'm glad of that," I said. "For a time, I thought I was going to be able to write a book on how to lose friends and alienate people."

Franz flushed. He was a little shy about acknowledging introductions to Margaret, Kennard Haas, and Walter Uhlay. He helped us off with our coats, and then piled them high in the arms of the albino servant who had just reappeared to announce that Theodore Loeder would see us in a little while.

"Bring some wine, Waldo," Franz said, and turning to me: "Remember Uncle Theodore's wine, Tim—as innocent-looking as water and much easier to drink, and with the bad habit of hitting you on top of the head when you least expect it?"

I remembered all that, especially the part about it hitting you on top of the head.

When the wine had come and Franz Loeder had shyly offered a toast to Margaret, we settled ourselves in the worn leather chairs and our host turned to Walter Uhlay.

"So you are writing a book about vampires, eh?" he asked.

"Yes," Uhlay admitted, "and yet that is not quite all there is to it. The purpose of my book is to establish a definite association between the supernatural and scientific facts. For instance, there is a definite connection between that form of insanity known as lycanthropy and the old were-wolf story, you see?"

Franz Loeder regarded Uhlay gravely. When he was serious he reminded me a lot of Peter Lorre, that soft-spoken menace of the movies.

"As a Loeder," he said, "I should resent a scientific approach to Count Basil of Kapuvar, for instance. There are some things better left alone. Scientific explanations of our religion are frowned upon. Yet it is the supernatural in all religions which is generally accepted as fact. Calling a were-wolf a lycanthrope does not explain were-wolfery, I might add."

"Tell us about Count Basil," Margaret urged. Perhaps she sensed an unpleasant argument between Uhlay and Franz. "I assure you I'll believe every word."

Franz smiled at her.

"I would not ask that, Mrs. Rainey. It is simply that Count Basil is a family tradition. I might have been born in Hungary, instead of the United States, had it not been for that lecherous old count. For that reason, I propose a toast to Count Basil and his incredibly long teeth!"

WE ALL had another glass of wine, and then Franz sat down on the arm of my chair and told us of Count Basil of Kapuvar.

"He wasn't a nice person at all, even when he was alive. As I said, he had long, sharp canine teeth which I am told grew considerably after his death."

"Can you explain that, Uhlay?" Kennard Haas asked.

"It is a known fact that hair and fingernails continue to grow for a time after death," Uhlay said.

"Which would have nothing to do with Count Basil's teeth," Margaret objected. "Please go on, Mr. Loeder."

"After Count Basil died," Franz

continued, "it was supposed that he left his tomb at dusk and, until dawn, prowled around, sinking his fangs into the throat of many a poor peasant. Mr. Uhlay might explain the shortage of blood among the peasants as due to a lack of vitamins in the diet, or perhaps to pernicious anemia. But he would also have to find an explanation for the teeth marks on the throats of Count Basil's victims.

"It became evident to Count Basil's family that something would have to be done before the countryside rose up against them. So they went to the tomb and severed the count's ugly head from his body."

"I thought that a holly stake driven through the heart was the approved remedy," Haas said.

"One of them," Franz admitted with a shrug. "Both methods deprive the vampire of a means of locomotion, certainly. At any rate, my family has taken particular pains to make sure that the head and body of Count Basil remain separate. Always, the eldest male is guardian of the vampire's head, now fortunately reduced to a skull. It went with my family to Germany. And now Uncle Theodore has it here."

"In this house?" Walter Uhlay's dark eyes showed considerable animation. His face, however, was still a mask.

Franz stood up.

"Yes. Would you care to see the skull, Mr. Uhlay?"

Margaret's blue eyes were very wide and bright as we followed Franz Loeder from the room. It wasn't all the effect of the wine. This strange house cast a spell over you after a little while—a spell that crept upon you like a shadow encroaching upon a dying fire.

"Having a grand time, lady?" I whispered in her ear, as we stood at the top of a narrow stone staircase which led from a storeroom off the kitchen down into the basement.

Margaret looked up at me and made an unbecoming face. But she said nothing.

At the bottom of the steps was an iron-bound door. It had no lock. But a little netting bag filled with garlic

was tacked to the panel. It was a charm, Loeder explained, which was supposed to prevent any vampire from crossing a doorsill.

"I give the stuff a wide berth myself," Ken Haas said, and laughed alone.

For at that moment, Franz opened the door.

A BLACK oak table stood in the center of the stone-walled, windowless room. At either end of the table candles burned in tall holders resting on the floor. On the table itself were two iron crosses so placed that the candle light cast their shadows on the center of the table. Where the shadows meshed rested the skull of Count Basil.

There was nothing remarkable about the skull except its teeth. Time had given it the hue of old ivory. Loops of rusty wire kept the lower jaw in place. The four canine teeth were fully an inch long, and those sharp tusks lent an unholy expression to the thing—almost as if it were laughing at us in diabolical glee.

Franz Loeder's short, nervous laugh broke the dead silence within the room.

"Count Basil," Franz said, "you'd better see to it that Uncle Theodore lives a long, long time. Because when you come into my hands I'll probably have to make a tobacco jar out of you!"

It was undoubtedly the Rhine wine in my head, but I thought for a moment I saw pale angry flashes of light deep in the cavernous eye sockets of the skull.

Behind us someone coughed dryly. Margaret, Uhlay, Haas, Franz, and I all turned to see Franz's Uncle Theodore standing in the door of the room drawing a yellow tongue of match flame into the huge bowl of his tasseled pipe. He was a heavy-set man, square-headed, with grey mutton-chop whisps. He took a great deal of time lighting his pipe, and when he had finished he put one hand into the side pocket of his grey smoking jacket.

"Such a smart speech, my boy," he said to his nephew. "Very, very

smart. You will live to regret it, Franz."

Franz ran fingers through his blond hair. His heavy eyelids blinked.

"If I live," he said, "I won't mind the regretting."

It was some time before I fully understood that last remark.

CHAPTER II

Voices in the Night

DESPITE the first unfavorable impression Theodore Loeder must have made upon his guests, he proved himself a gracious host.

"I am afraid we're stuck here for the night, Mr. Loeder," I said, as we walked up the steps.

"Sure, sure," he said nodding his square head. "Such a snowstorm up here I have never seen. You and your wife and friends will not be the only over-night guests."

I asked him if he was expecting anyone else.

"No, but a Mr. John Clark arrived already this afternoon," he explained. "A Mr. Clark to see my collection of butterflies. In February, can you imagine!"

It did seem a bit odd, but I said I supposed a person could talk about ice hockey in August if they wanted to.

Theodore Loeder took hold of my arm, held me back so that the two of us remained in the storeroom at the top of the steps while the others went on ahead through the kitchen. Franz's uncle had a worried scowl on his short, broad forehead.

"This Mr. Clark," he whispered, "this supposed hunter of butterflies who does not know a cecropia from a cabbage moth, carries up here a gun." He patted his left under-arm.

"Stout medicine for butterflies," I said.

"Yes. So I am not sorry you are here, Tim. Franz has told me about you and football in college. You are good, eh?"

I did not bother to explain to old Mr. Loeder that football tactics were

not particularly effective against a man with a gun. The presence of this Mr. Clark only served to further my opinion that there was something as fishy as Friday going on in the house.

Mr. John Clark, I discovered when we reached Theodore Loeder's huge living room, was a tall, rawboned man with hair nearly as red as mine, a nose like a potato, and a jaw that looked like a product of a foundry. He tried to crack my knuckles in a handshake to express how pleased he was to meet me. He gave Walter Uhlay a cool appraisal and said:

"Oh, a writer, huh?"

Waldo, the albino servant, appeared once more with clear, tangy Rhine wine, and I noticed that Margaret, who was sitting on the davenport beside Kennard Haas, was rapidly developing a taste for the stuff. I went over to her, leaned across the back of the davenport and said quietly:

"Watch out for that stuff, hon. It's a sap in a lady's velvet evening purse."

"It's good," she said. "It's awfully good."

At eleven-thirty we were all shown to our respective rooms. The one assigned to Margaret and me was a good deal larger than our entire apartment in the Bronx. The floor was bare and cold, the fireplace inadequate in size. There was a marble-topped dresser and a canopied bed which Margaret swore she wouldn't sleep in.

"I'd be afraid that thing on top would fall down and smother me," she said. "All those frills remind me of the lid on a coffin. And besides, I'm not sleepy, and I've no nightie or toothbrush."

I WENT over to a window, parted heavy, dusty-smelling drapes. The window pane was a solid mass of ice that radiated more cold than the fireplace radiated heat. Both of us ended up cuddled into a single wing rocker, a blanket from the bed wrapped around us, our faces toward the fire. And I went to sleep.

I was awakened by Margaret wriggling out of my arms to sit bolt upright on the edge of the chair.

"Tim! Tim, what was that?"

I blinked, not fully aware of where

I was for the moment. The fire had burned pretty well down. I think without the rosy flush from its coals Margaret's face might have been pale with terror.

"What was what?" I asked.

"A cry. I'm sure that's what it was. I was just dozing off when I heard it."

"Maybe Walter Uhlay has nightmares," I suggested. "He's in the next room, isn't he?"

"I don't know. I can't get this house straightened out. I'll bet even old Uncle Theodore needs a map to get around. Listen a moment, Tim."

I listened. Ice that was layering in on the window pane crackled. The wind had gone down and there was no other sound.

"Darn, it's cold!" I got out of the chair and replenished the fire from the woodbox. My right shoulder was cramped with the chill and the uncomfortable position it had assumed in the chair.

"Listen, Tim!"

"Cut it out, hon," I complained. "There isn't anything——"

I let my words hang. Because there was the sound of footsteps in the corridor—a heavy tread, yet swift and attempting stealth. They stopped outside our door.

Margaret got out of the chair in a hurry, tripped over the blanket, fell into my arms. We stood there, stiff with listening. Whoever was outside tapped at our door with finger tips.

"If—if that's that awful albino servant," Margaret said, "I'm going to scream."

"Come in," I said, and I've spoken with more assurance than I did at that particular moment.

The door opened and Ken Haas came in. His plump cheeks were pale and the end of his button nose red. He was shivering.

"What's the matter with you?" I asked.

"I'm cold. There are dampers in the chimney in my room which have disproved the old adage about where there's smoke there's always fire. What is going on around here?"

"That is what I'd like to know," Margaret said. "Did you hear somebody cry out?"

"I heard voices," Haas said. "Queer voices."

"There's no law against talking," I said.

Haas looked at his watch. I asked him what time it was and learned that it was five minutes past one o'clock.

"This wasn't exactly talk I heard," Haas said. "Step out in the hall a minute."

MMARGARET and I went out into the hall where one tiny light globe was backed to the wall by an army of shadows. Haas did some heavy tiptoeing, with us following, down the corridor in the direction of the room which had been assigned to Walter Uhlay. Haas stopped in front of the door and put his finger on his lips. Then he stooped and listened at the keyhole. Margaret and I pressed our ears to the door. Within the room sounded a deep, foreboding voice:

"The vampire's kiss. The unescapable contagion of it! Whosoever shall be host to my thirst, shall thirst as I have thirsted, shall ride the night wind, hungering for blood. There is no death for the undead. No charm prevails against me."

"Tim," Margaret whispered, "I'm going to scream!"

"Don't," I said flatly.

I seized the knob of the door and gave it a twist. It turned, but the door didn't open.

"Locked," I said unnecessarily.

I pushed Haas aside and stooped to the keyhole. I couldn't see a thing. I thought the key must be inserted in the lock from the inside.

"The voice," Haas whispered, "has stopped."

I went to the other side of the hall, turned, charged the panel with all I had. In the movies the panel always gives way, but this time the hero nearly splintered a shoulder blade, and the door hardly quivered.

Nursing my shoulder, I turned to see Haas coming out of our room with a heavy poker in his hand. Margaret was looking on with wide eyes.

"Let's not open the door," she suggested. "Maybe no one is in there."

Haas ignored her and attacked the insert panel nearest the knob.

"Maybe," Margaret said hopefully, "Mr. Loeder won't like this."

Haas hit the panel again, and it cracked.

"What's going on here?" an angry voice stage-whispered from the end of the hall.

I looked toward the stair. Theodore Loeder, dressed in a peaked nightcap, woolen nightshirt, and grey bathrobe appeared at the top of the steps.

"Uhlray," Haas grunted, "must be sick or something."

He brought the poker down on the weakened panel with all his strength, opened a hole large enough to get his hand through. He fumbled for a moment on the other side of the door, gave the key a twist, withdrew his hand. He took hold of the knob, twisted, gave the door a shove. Nothing happened.

"Here, let me try it," I said.

"Is something wrong?"

I didn't try opening the door just then, because the voice that asked that question was that of Walter Uhlray, and it didn't come from the locked room he was supposed to be occupying. Walter Uhlray had just come up the steps from the hall below. His face was that same impassive mask. The forefinger of his right hand was inserted in the leaves of a book he was carrying.

HAAS pointed at the locked room, glared at Uhlray.

"Why—why aren't you in there?" he demanded.

"Because," Uhlray explained simply, "I have never been able to be two places at once. Unable to go to sleep, I went downstairs into the library."

"Well, who is in there?" I demanded.

"Nobody," Margaret insisted. "I hope nobody."

"We heard voices. And the door's locked from the inside."

I thrust my hand through the opening. My groping fingers passed across the handle of the key and up along the edge of the door. I found a sleeve bolt shoved into place. When I pulled it back the door opened readily enough.

The room successfully combined living room and bedroom, for it contained lounge chairs, a study table, bookcase, console radio, and a comfortable-looking cot which bore the impression of a body. All this I saw a little bit later. My first glance went to the study table and remained there quite a while.

Franz Loeder lay across the study table, arms wide spread, head twisted so that his cheek was against the table top. The skull of Count Basil faced him, jaws wide, long, cruel teeth sunk deep in the flesh of Franz's throat. There was blood on the fangs of the vampire's skull—the fresh red blood of Franz Loeder.

I walked slowly toward the table, staring into the hollow eyes of the skull.

"Keep—keep Margaret out," I said hoarsely.

Franz was dead.

I took a quick look around the room, because my mind was dictating that I ought not to believe my eyes; because since the door had been locked on the inside and we had heard a voice within the room, there ought to have been some human being hidden there somewhere. But there was no visible living thing in the room except Kennard Haas and I.

In the doorway, Theodore Loeder tottered, would have fallen if Uhlray hadn't caught him.

"Count Basil," the old man whispered. "Count Basil, after all these centuries."

CHAPTER III

The Man with the Gun

KENNARD HAAS took Theodore Loeder by the shoulders and shook him. The old man's dignity was offended, if nothing else. He straightened, glowered at Haas, and stopped his mumbling about Count Basil.

"Is there another way into that room besides the door and the windows?" Haas demanded. "There's got to be. Anything else is crazy."

Uncle Theodore shook his head.

"There is no other way. A vampire does not need other ways. Through a locked door, a wall——"

I went back into the room. I had seen one movie trick—the shoulder-shattered door—fail to pan out. I don't know why I thought I might have better luck with the secret panel. But I certainly didn't.

The walls of the room were of ordinary plaster covered with a floral-pattern wall paper. I thought of trap doors in the floor, and discarded the idea at once when I saw that the floor was covered with inlaid linoleum tightly cemented in place.

I moved out the sectional bookcase far enough to see that it concealed nothing but webs of dust. I did the same with the radio console. The windows were locked and the latches rusty enough so that I doubted if a burglar could have opened them.

I took another look at poor Franz's body. The wound in his throat, made by the teeth of the skull, was not deep. There hadn't been enough blood spilled for the cruel tusks to have struck a large blood vessel. Possibly he had died of fright. I wouldn't have blamed him for doing so.

As I bent over the body, I got a whiff of garlic and saw a little netting bag containing several garlic cloves clutched in the dead man's hand. The charm hadn't done much good.

Why had Franz been in Uhlray's room? There wasn't anything around that belonged to Uhlray; none of us had any baggage, since we hadn't expected to stay all night. Who had been in the room with Franz and how had he got out? Nobody, was the obvious answer. But in this house, if you believed the obvious, you were crazy.

I went out into the hall and closed the damaged door behind me. Margaret got up from a stiff oak bench on which she had been sitting with Uhlray and Theodore Loeder. Uhlray also stood, his shrewd eyes closely watching my face. Poor old Uncle Theodore was bent over, his hands covering his face.

"Ken went to call police," Margaret said. "Isn't it awful, Timmy?"

"It's that, all right. Maybe Mr. Uhlray could explain this little bit of the supernatural scientifically."

Uhlray moistened his lips.

"I wish I could."

"How long were you in that room before you decided to go down into the library?" I asked him.

"Not more than half an hour. There was no heat in the place."

"And you didn't hear anything—anything suspicious?"

He shook his head, remarking that he was engrossed in his book.

HAAS came puffing to the top of the steps.

"Mr. Loeder," he said, "where do you keep your telephone?"

"Telephone?" The old man raised his head. He hadn't shed a tear, but his face was grey and his eyes haggard. "I have no telephone."

"That's that," Haas said. "But somebody has to get hold of the county sheriff or the state troopers."

"Where's this fellow, Clark?" Uhlray asked suddenly.

I had been wondering the same thing. Theodore Loeder said that Waldo had put Clark in one of the bedrooms on the ground floor. We all trooped down the stairs, following Loeder's lead, turned off the central hall into what I recalled was known as the west wing of the house.

Loeder stopped in front of a door and opened it, disclosing a comfortable bedroom heated by an oil stove. There was a lighted electric lamp on one end of the dresser, but there was no one in the room, and no sign that the bed had been slept in.

"I remember, Mr. Loeder, that your nearest neighbor is about a quarter of a mile down the road. Margaret and I are going there and try to telephone the law."

"Why should you be the one?" Uhlray eyed me suspiciously.

"Because," I said, "I know I didn't kill Franz. And Margaret is my alibi to prove it."

I might have added that I wasn't quite so sure about Uhlray's not having killed Franz. Uhlray with all his scientific explanations for vampires—why, maybe he knew a scientific way

to get in and out of a locked room and play vampire himself.

I got my coat and Margaret's out of the hall closet. Kennard Haas handed me the keys to his car and suggested that I try to get the thing out of the snowdrift. Margaret and I went through the front door and out into the night.

There was no wind now, but the air was a lot colder.

Snow flakes were finer and coming down in a silent steady curtain of white.

"Tim Rainey," Margaret said, "I'm cured. If we ever get out of this alive, you can spend every Saturday afternoon at home reading."

"If we ever get out of here alive," I echoed.

"Tell me, Tim, what was it like in that room where poor Franz was?"

"Sometime on a hot, sunny Sunday afternoon at Coney Island, I'll tell you," I replied. "Let's get to the car and see if we can back out of that drift."

"But do you believe a—a vampire did it? Or the skull of Count Basil, or something like that?" she persisted.

"I believe anything from now on. I even believe——"

I stopped. We had been walking with our heads down, keeping the snow out of our eyes and trying to pick the shallow spots in which to walk. I knew that not far ahead of us was a tree. It wasn't until I raised my eyes that I noticed the tree wasn't more than ten feet from us. The figure of a man was pressed close to the trunk.

"Where do you think you're going?" the man asked.

THE voice was that of Mr. John Clark, the supposed butterfly collector who packed an under-arm gun. He stepped out from the tree and stood directly in our path.

"Well, Mr. Clark!" Margaret said. "We were just looking for you."

"Isn't that a coincidence!" Clark said. "You can just turn around and go back."

"We're going for the police," I told him.

"No," Clark said. "The kid's been

killed, hasn't he? Nobody's going anywhere. Including you."

"How did you know Franz had been killed?" I asked.

"Waldo said so. I expected something like this. Go on back to the house. I'll get the cops."

"You mean," I said, "you'll lam away from here as fast as you can make it?"

I had kept on moving until I was about six feet from John Clark. I figured that I could fall on my face and still reach his knees in a tackle. What I didn't figure was that this wasn't football and there was no referee to inform Mr. Clark when he was down.

It was a very good tackle I made. Clark went down on his back and my face was buried in the snow. When I turned over to get a better hold on Clark, he slugged me with what was probably the barrel of his gun. Anyway, it was a little while before I discovered I wasn't dead.

I wasn't out more than five minutes. Margaret brought me around by rubbing snow on my face. I sat up and looked around. The falling snow and my semi-dazed condition gave me the idea that I was on a rocket shooting up into the sky.

"You get into the house," I said to Margaret. "You want to catch your death of cold?"

"Timmy!" She was half laughing, half crying. "Timmy, I'm so glad you're all right. I thought at first—I thought——"

"Never mind what you thought. Where'd he go?"

"Who?"

"Clark," I said.

"I don't know. For the police, maybe."

"I bet!"

I got to my feet with Margaret's help. My head was so cold from the snow that I couldn't feel any ache. But I couldn't walk without hanging onto Margaret's shoulders.

"We'll go back to the house," I said. "We know Clark's our man. We can tell the others and maybe decide what we ought to do."

"Tim, that's silly," Margaret argued. "Mr. Clark could no more get

out of that locked room than you could!"

I knew that. Anybody knew that. But I wasn't going to swallow the idea that Count Basil had gone through a solid wall as if it was so much mist.

Wind had swept a section of the lawn close to the front wall of the house comparatively clean of snow. There were a few drifts, but the walking was considerably better.

"I'm glad you're half-pint size, hon," I told my wife. "You're a much better crutch than if——"

I stopped, listened.

"What's the matter, Tim?" Margaret asked.

SHE heard it when it came again, this time louder—a shrill cry of agony. And it seemed to be coming from directly beneath our feet.

"Tim," Margaret whispered, "isn't that an outside entrance to the basement?"

I got the same idea at just about the same time. The sound had come from what I had at first taken to be a snow drift directly in our path. I kicked out with my foot into the supposed drift and struck solid planking. I got around to the front and center of the slanting door and pawed into the snow with my bare hands until I got hold of a handle, a hasp or something.

Footsteps were pounding beneath me as I lifted the door that was weighted with snow. I stared down into darkness. There were no footsteps now, but at the foot of the basement steps someone was gasping for breath.

"Don't go down there, Timmy!" Margaret pleaded.

But I had already gone down three of the rickety wooden steps and I thought I might as well go the rest of the way.

I drew a book of matches from my pocket, scuffed one into life, held it in cupped hands. There was a man at the bottom of the steps, lying on his side. Both of his hands were clasped at his throat, and from the difficulty he was having with his breathing you might have thought he was choking himself.

I couldn't see his face from that angle, but I didn't have to. The silky white hair was a give-away. The man was Waldo, the albino servant.

I went all the way down the steps, got around in front of the man. My match went out just as I glimpsed his pink eyes protruding from their sockets. I think I tried three times to strike a match that didn't have a head, cast it aside, finally had a light. By that time Waldo wasn't breathing any more. His hands had fallen away from his throat.

On the albino's scrawny neck was a shallow wound through which blood seeped slowly. And it could have been made only by something with teeth.

"Something with teeth," my brain kept repeating. Something had fastened its teeth to Waldo's throat and killed him. I looked down at Waldo's shoes. They were gray with ashes—wood ashes.

I looked up the steps just in time to see Margaret starting down them.

"You go to the house," I told her. "Go in the front door and bring help. Bring Ken Haas. I don't know whether whatever did this thing is still in the basement or not, but I'm going to find out."

"Timmy, you'll do no such thing!"

My second match went out. I turned around and groped back into the darkness. It seemed that the farther I got from that doorway the more hairs stood up on the back of my neck. Darkness and something with sharp teeth was a pretty good argument for striking another match. But there was something else I had to consider: If I couldn't see the thing, neither could it see me.

So I kept on groping.

CHAPTER IV

The Thing in the Ashes

I WAS not alone in the dark. I discovered that shortly after I encountered a stone wall that blocked all further progress in that direction. I had turned, was feeling my way

along the wall, when I heard light footsteps on the floor. I listened. The footsteps stopped, and I could swear I heard the sound of someone breathing rapidly.

I fixed the source of the sound, leaped from the wall, both arms out to grapple with whatever I found.

"Timmy!" The shrill cry came from directly beneath my nose, from the person who was struggling in my arms. Margaret, of course.

"Lady," I said, not relaxing my grip on her, "the next time I marry remind me not to allow anybody to strike the word 'obey' from the marriage contract!"

"But, Tim, I was afraid something would happen to you!"

"Something ought to happen to you," I retorted. "Just because your parents never spanked you is no sign I'm going to be as soft as they were."

"Why do you have to walk around in the dark, anyway?" she asked. "If you'd struck a light you'd have known me and everything would have been jake."

The way we yelled at each other, if there was anything in that basement that wanted to attack us it could have found us without a light. So I let go of my wife and struck another match. It showed us the opening of another room, and when we went through that we saw a stairway leading up into the house. There was nothing more to this basement which was evidently entirely separate from the cellar where Count Basil's skull had been kept.

Over against one wall of this second room was a little heap of grey wood ashes. It had apparently come from the clean-out door of one of the fireplaces on the floor above. The clean-out door was open and ashes tracked away from the heap. Apparently, Waldo had been searching for something in the ashes when the thing with the teeth had caught up with him.

There was a small fireplace shovel over by the clean-out door. I picked up the shovel and went to work hunting for whatever it was Waldo had been looking for.

"Maybe," Margaret suggested, "the

vampire took the thing away from Waldo. Maybe Waldo already found whatever it was, see?"

"I see," I said, and sneezed. I'm allergic to ashes. "The only thing wrong with that theory is that this place hasn't been cleaned out in a long time, and if the thing we're looking for was dropped in here tonight it will be somewhere at the top."

I kept on digging until I could see sparks dropping from the burning fire in the fireplace above. It was about that time I uncovered some burned papers and one piece of paper that had not been completely consumed.

It was a piece of letter-size bond, the bottom half of which had been charred so badly you couldn't read the typing on it. But the top of the sheet clearly showed a page number, and in the left-hand corner was:

KISS OF THE VAMPIRE/Uhlray.

"Looks like a sheet from one of Walter Uhlray's stories," I said. "Probably that's what the rest of this paper ash is—a manuscript."

"It's a play, silly," Margaret said. "A radio play. See there, it says, 'wind machine fade out.' That looks like instructions to a sound effects man."

IN THE left-hand margin of the paper, up near the top, somebody had written some figures in pencil. There was an eight, a dash followed by a five and a two. Farther down there were more figures—an eight, dash, five, three.

I brushed off the charred bottom of the sheet, folded it, stuck it into my pocket.

"Let's go upstairs," I said. "I've got an idea. Remember when we were listening outside that room where we found poor Franz? There was a voice in that room—a strange voice. It said something about a vampire's kiss, how it was contagious or something."

"You're thinking the radio was the voice?" Margaret asked, as we hurried up the basement stairs.

"I'm thinking that," I said.

"But was the radio turned on when you went into the room?"

It hadn't been. The voice had

stopped before we had succeeded in breaking into the room. If there was anything to my theory, who had turned the radio off? Franz, who was dead? Or Count Basil, who was only a skull?

The basement stairway, oddly enough, brought us out in the dining room. We crossed into the central hall and hurried up the stairway that was so wide you could have driven a hearse up it.

I began to think I had a reason for the killing of Franz occurring in Uhlray's room. Franz had been forced into that room because it had a radio. The radio had something to do with that voice we had heard behind the locked door. It looked like what Uhlray would have called "a scientific explanation of the supernatural."

"Stay out in the hall," I told Margaret when we had reached the damaged door. "And I mean stay out in the hall."

"I will, Timmy," she promised, and I pushed open the door.

For a moment I stood there and felt the cold sweat break out on my body.

"What's the matter, Tim?" Margaret whispered.

"Nothing," I said weakly. "Nothing at all."

I forced myself to enter the room. I closed the door behind me. I took a cigarette out of the pocket of my coat, shoved it into my lips, had a little trouble sticking it into a quivering match flame. A couple of things were all wrong in that room.

First of all, the skull of Count Basil wasn't there. Second, Franz Loeder's body wasn't lying across the study table. It was slumped down in a chair on the other side of the room, legs sprawled out, hands crossed on the vest. The mouth was wide open and the exposed teeth of Franz Loeder dripped fresh-let blood.

For a minute, the voice we had heard within this locked room was to me no longer that of a radio actor. Rather, it seemed a disembodied, supernatural voice which had foretold an unbelievable thing. For the blood on Franz's teeth wasn't Franz's blood. A corpse won't bleed. But down in the basement only a short time ago

somebody, some *thing* had fastened its teeth in the throat of Waldo, the servant.

And what had the hollow voice within the locked room said?

"The vampire's kiss. The inescapable contagion of it! Whosoever shall be host to my thirst shall thirst as I have thirsted, shall ride the night wind, hungering for blood."

Was that what had happened to poor Franz? Had he not been host to the vampire's skull? Did Franz now thirst for human blood as Count Basil had thirsted?

A short, harsh laugh escaped me.

"What's so funny, Tim?" Margaret asked me from the hall.

AND I think it was that perfectly sane question from my perfectly sane wife that brought me suddenly back to reality. All this stuff about a vampire's kiss had been written into a radio script by Uhlray. The voice must have come from the radio.

I crossed to the radio console and turned the off-on switch only to discover that the switch was already turned on. But the set wasn't working. Not so much as a hum came from behind the grill cloth. If the radio was broken, then I was right back to the supernatural vampire theory again. I first checked the wall plug. No broken wires, nothing out of order that I could see.

I pulled the console out from the wall so I could take a look at the chassis. I didn't know much about radio, but when I saw that a loop of wire had been drawn from underneath the chassis and deliberately cut, I had a faint idea that was why the radio wasn't working. I brought the two ends of the wire together, holding on to the insulation. The tubes lighted and pretty soon a voice came out of the loud speaker:

"West Coast voice of the Continental Broadcasting Network, signing off at exactly two minutes past twelve, midnight, Pacific Time."

The voice stopped and pretty soon the carrier wave of the station was silent. I let go of the wires and looked at my watch. It was a few minutes after three in the morning, according

to New York time.

Then I discovered how the set had been turned off without human agency. There was a blob of wax on top of the tube nearest the two ends of the cut wire. The bare ends of wire had been pressed into the wax while the set was off. Whoever had left the room had turned the radio on just before stepping out. Four or five minutes later, the tube would have been sufficiently hot to melt the wax and let the severed ends of the wire spring apart, turning the set off. And there was nothing supernatural about that.

"What are you doing in there, Tim?" Margaret called from the hall.

I told her I was playing detective. I went over to the corpse of Franz Loeder. Blood had dried on the wound in the throat and *rigor mortis* had begun to set in. I ran my hand through the thick, fair hair, and failed to find the lump I thought might be there. You see, I figured Franz must have been unconscious when the teeth of the vampire's skull had been pressed into his throat, for there had certainly been no signs of struggle. But there wasn't any sign that he had been knocked out.

In the hands of the corpse was that netting bag of garlic which I had noticed before. I wondered if Franz was superstitious enough to carry garlic around with him as a charm against vampires. Or did the garlic have another purpose? Had it been placed there by the killer, its strong odor to mask the smell of some poison that had been employed?

If poison were discovered, the whole supernatural fabric of the case would fall apart. And I had an idea that the murderer wanted somebody to believe this was the work of a vampire. Somebody, I figured, was supposed to be sufficiently terrified by the vampire idea to do something that was to the killer's advantage.

Then I noticed that the tongue of Franz's right shoe wasn't visible beyond the lacings. Either it had been torn out or had been stuffed down inside the shoe, making for considerable discomfort, I should have imagined.

I knelt in front of the corpse, removed the shoe. The tongue had been

stuffed down inside. Somebody, in quite a hurry, had forced that shoe back on after Franz was dead, or at least unconscious.

I removed the sock that covered the dead man's foot. The toes and sole of Franz's foot had been burned badly in several places. He had been tortured—why, perhaps his was the cry Margaret claimed to have heard while she and I were in our room. And that pretty well upset the vampire idea.

"Tim, you'd better come here quick!"

There was fright and anxiety in Margaret's voice. I got to my feet and ran to the door. Looking out in the hall, I saw Mr. John Clark coming toward Margaret. He had his hands in his trousers pockets, but I didn't know but what he had a gun in one of his pockets as well.

CHAPTER V

In the Dark

CLARK stopped and stared hard at Margaret and me.

"Listen, you Rainey," he said, "what's your angle in this?"

"Do we have to have one?" I asked him.

"Were you down in the basement a while ago?" Clark was looking at the ash dust on my shoes.

"That's right," I said. "Something got old Waldo. Something that had teeth and——"

"I know, I know," he said impatiently. "Cyanide killed Waldo. You can smell the stuff on that wound in his throat. The only reason you couldn't smell the poison on Franz Loeder was that the killer had put that bag of garlic in Franz's fist."

"Cyanide?" Margaret gasped. "That's poison, isn't it?"

"It's death, Mrs. Rainey," Clark said. "Death when you inhale the fumes, death if it gets into the blood stream, death if you spread it on your bread. Cyanide crystals were on the teeth of that old skull used to kill Franz. But what was used to give the bite to Waldo?"

"Maybe," I said, "if you'll give us your angle, we'll cooperate. What are you doing here besides looking at old Loeder's butterfly collection?"

Clark reflectively scratched the iron casting he used for a lower jaw.

"Fair question," Clark said. "And I'll answer since you've got such a dumb, honest look on your face. I'm working for the Congressional Committee for the Investigation of un-American activities. Franz Loeder was a member of one of the various bund organizations that go in for funny-colored shirts, but which are really Nazi spies. But Franz was a volunteer counter-spy, reporting to the people I work for, and as good an American as anybody.

"He was to testify before this Congressional Committee. He knew who was the leader of the spy ring. Then he got wind of something up here and lammed out of town this morning."

"I saw him at the station," I said.

"Well, I followed him up here. He didn't know me, of course. And I didn't know he knew about his Uncle Theodore."

"What about Uncle Theodore?" Margaret asked.

"Uncle Theodore has—or I ought to say had—seventy-five thousand dollars in cash that belonged to the German government. The Nazis knew that they would soon be at war with the United States and tried to liquidate all German assets in this country as fast as possible, to get the money out of the country before the break came. But they needed some money here to pay for espionage, so they handed some of it to private German-born citizens. Theodore Loeder is one of several who got some of this money. Legally, it's his, but Germany was counting on his loyalty to the Fatherland to use it to that country's advantage. But it seems that Uncle Theodore's loyalty to Hitler is questionable, so the Nazis here wanted to get the dough away from him. And, of course, they had to shut Franz up before he testified."

"And Theodore has the money hidden here?" I asked.

"Well, that's the idea," Clark admitted.

I TURNED abruptly and re-entered the room where Franz Loeder had met death. I pointed to Franz's burned foot.

"He was tortured. They must have had an idea that he knew where the money was. Either he didn't know or kept his mouth shut. He fainted with the pain of the torture, and the killer used the poisoned teeth of the skull to finish him, poor devil."

"Looks like it," Clark said.

He went over to where Franz's body lay in the chair. I saw him glove his fingers with his handkerchief and reach into the dead man's open mouth.

"Did you know, Rainey, that Franz had false teeth?"

I hadn't remembered that. Franz had had false teeth when I knew him at school. His own teeth, he had told me once, hadn't been much better than chalk.

"And," Clark went on, "there are cyanide crystals on the teeth, Rainey. You know, this set of teeth could be a pretty dangerous weapon. Just tie the upper plate to the fingers of one hand and the lower plate to the palm. Then you sneak up behind somebody, clamp your hand over their throat and squeeze. That's how the killer got Waldo. Then he put the teeth back, thinking to hide his weapon."

"There's another reason," I said. "Old Theodore Loeder believes this stuff about Count Basil's being a vampire. The legend goes that if you're bitten by a vampire you become a vampire, too. The idea was to get old Theodore to believe that Count Basil had killed Franz, and that Franz, in turn, had become a vampire and killed Waldo. Don't you see, the killer will play up this vampire stuff to try and get old Theodore so scared he'll tell where the money is hidden."

"Where is Theodore Loeder?" demanded Clark.

"Where's anybody?" I asked. "Where are Haas and Uhlray?"

Clark and I went out into the hall where Margaret waited. Clark slipped a revolver into my hand; he said he had an extra.

"You take the lower floor," he said. "I'll cover the two top stories. There must be at least a dozen places to

hide in this house."

"What do I do?" Margaret asked, blinking fearfully at the gun in my hand. "Sit here and worry myself sick?"

"You can worry yourself sick with me," I said.

I don't know why it had to be Margaret and I who drew that portion of the house where all the trouble was. It was while we were going through the storeroom off the kitchen that we heard the sound of a voice coming up from the cellar where the skull of Count Basil had been kept for so many years. I told Margaret to go after Clark while I stood guard at the top of the steps.

"You're sure you won't go down?" She eyed me suspiciously.

I crossed my heart I wouldn't, but when I did that I crossed my fingers, too. As soon as she was out of sight I tiptoed down the stone steps and listened at the door.

A STRAINED and obviously disguised voice was saying: "The time has come, Theodore Loeder, for you to join the ranks of the undead. Blood of vampires runs in your veins. Do not doubt it, Theodore Loeder. You have seen Franz Loeder die this night, and you have seen what he became after death. You have seen blood on the lips of dead Franz Loeder, and you know that was not Franz's blood.

"Do you suppose you can escape the taint of the vampire's kiss? You can escape only if you do as I say. Otherwise, you will hunger after death. You will be doomed to a grave by day and to walk the world at night, seeking the life blood of others."

"What—what do you want?" came faintly in Theodore Loeder's voice.

"The money. Where have you hidden the money?"

I pushed open the door of the room. I had the gun in my hand. My heart was somewhere up near the roof of my mouth.

"That's enough of that stuff, Haas," I said into the total darkness of the room. "You're wanted for murder and a couple of other things."

The beam of a flashlight cut across the room, caught me squarely. I

ducked out of the beam and fired. Having had a revolver in my hand all of two times in my life, I missed the flashlight and the man who held it.

I tried again as I kept moving across the room. The flashlight went out, not because I'd hit it, but because Kennard Haas feared I might miss it just far enough next time—just far enough to hit him.

We kept moving in the darkness—silently, trying to draw each other's fire in order to aim at a gun flash.

"You won't get out of here alive," I said. "You can't make it, Ken. That man Clark is a government agent. Your goose and all your goose-stepping Nazi partners are going to be cooked."

Haas let go with three shots in quick succession. I heard them all go by. And then Haas ran for the steps. I suppose he figured that even if he did get me, Clark would take him when he reached the top of the steps, if he didn't pull off his blitzkrieg in a hurry.

What he hadn't taken into account was the uncanny luck of the Irish. My next wild shot took him in the leg just as he reached the door. He went down on his face, lost his gun. I tossed my gun over my shoulder, let out a yell, and landed on his back.

"Tim Rainey!"

That was my wife calling to me from the top of the steps. I landed a couple of fists, one right after the other, right at the base of Ken Haas's skull. He went limp under me. I stood up just as Margaret came down the steps behind John Clark.

Clark had a flashlight. He beamed it down into Haas's face. Then he shifted the light across the room, picking out Walter Uhlay lying on the floor, and Theodore Loeder tied down to the oak table where the vampire's skull usually rested. The skull was beside him, conveniently placed near the bare throat of the old man.

UHLRAY had been knocked out by Haas, but was otherwise not greatly damaged. Old Loeder was badly frightened, but he had not been injured physically.

Uhlay told me afterward that in

his effort to find out a scientific explanation for that vampire business he had gone up to the room where Franz's body was and caught Haas in the act of replacing Franz's false teeth. It was a wonder Uhlay hadn't been killed on the spot.

"How did you figure it was Haas?" Clark asked me.

I explained how the radio in the room where Franz had died had been rigged up. I showed the piece of radio script I had dug out of the ashes.

"For a moment," I said, "I thought Uhlay was our man. He had written that vampire radio play that was aired tonight. But then I got to thinking that if the play went on the air tonight, Uhlay wouldn't be likely to have the original script in his possession. Somebody on the radio staff would have, though, and Haas happens to be on the production staff of the radio network that puts on that 'Tales of Terror' program, for which Uhlay had evidently written the script. And you'll notice on the margin of this piece of paper somebody has scribbled in some figures. Those figures indicate the exact time when certain parts of the script are to have been completed in the broadcast. Uhlay wouldn't have timed the thing that closely, but Haas might have.

"Haas needed the script with him tonight, because his alibi depended on getting some witnesses to the door of the room in which Franz had been murdered at just the time when the radio play was giving out with that line about vampires. I noticed just before he took Margaret and me to the room he had looked at his watch. He had the thing timed to a hair."

"Yeah," Clark said, "but that 'Tales of Terror' program is on the air around eight o'clock. It was about one when you broke into the room and found the body."

"That same program is repeated for the West Coast by a station in California," I said. "It's repeated by electrical transcription made up in the New York studios. Haas checked his time with the transcription so he could hit it on the nose."

"Why did Haas kill Waldo?" Clark asked.

"Because Waldo must have seen Haas burning the radio script in the fireplace," I said. "Probably caught him in the act. Haas heard somebody coming, quickly shoved the burning paper down the ash chute. Ashes in the pit below smothered out the fire on this particular piece of paper.

"Waldo simply went down to the basement to clean out the ash pit and find out what Haas was up to. Haas was laying for Waldo."

We went over to the table and untied the ropes that held Theodore Loeder.

"I've got that seventy-five thousand dollars," Clark told old Loeder. "It's yours legally, and I don't think you'll try to pay any of Hitler's lousy spies with it."

"You have it?" the old man gasped. "But I had it hidden——"

"I know. You had it hidden in the hollow of that tree out in front. Waldo saw you hide it there. Before Haas got him, Waldo told me about it. I thought I'd better take it over before Franz's killer got it."

"So," I said to Clark, "that's what you were doing out in front of the house tonight."

CLARK nodded.

"When you jumped me," he said, "I thought you were after the dough. So I had to slug you. I'm sorry about that."

"Oh, Mr. Clark," Margaret said, "don't worry about that. Timmy has a headache nearly every Sunday morning on account of Saturday night. But what I don't see is how a big man like Ken Haas got in and out of that locked room where you found the body of poor Franz."

"That, my dear," I said, "was easy. If it hadn't been for the mysterious voice inside the room and finding what we found after we entered the room, Haas wouldn't have fooled anybody there. After he had killed Franz and set his stage for the vampire effect, Haas simply came out, locked the door from the outside, removed the key, and put it in his pocket. He inserted a match stick in the keyhole from the outside, so it would appear to anyone looking into

the keyhole that the key was inserted on the other side.

"Then, in opening the door, he battered a hole in the panel, reached through to the other side, the key in his right hand. The first thing he did was to lock that sleeve bolt on the other side of the door. Then he inserted the key from the back, pushing the match stick or whatever it was out the front of the lock. He turned the key, unlocking the door, then tried the knob. He still couldn't open the door because of the bolt he had just shoved home on the other side. I tried, reached in, found the bolt, and opened it. So it actually looked as if I was the opener of the door."

Old Loeder wagged his head up and down.

"And all the vampire business was to frighten me. And I was frightened, but not so much that I would have turned over the money to those dirty Nazis. I will use the money to help

beat that swine Hitler—give it to the America that has been so good to me, no?"

"Don't give it," I said. "Invest it in Defense Bonds. The dough is yours, you know."

"You're a pretty lucky man, Mr. Loeder," Clark put in. "If Haas had worked the money out of you, and we hadn't caught him, you would probably have been held for the murder. The cyanide he used came from the cyanide supply you use to kill the butterflies for your collection. If the police had come here and heard all this stuff about vampires, they'd have grabbed you sure, saying the vampire stuff was just your idea to shift the blame."

"Yes, Mr. Loeder, it was pretty lucky for you I happened to be here."

Margaret looked at Clark somewhat scornfully. I knew what she was thinking. And I don't mind being a hero to my wife.

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MURDER'S HOW YOU FIND IT

By
LAURENCE DONOVAN

*They Said Devlin Was
Through as a Cop, but He
Had One Last Mystery
to Solve!*

BIG JIM DEVLIN had thought he would never go soft again. But he had difficulty keeping his broad mouth grim. His thick fingers touched tentatively the last sawbuck folded into his vest pocket.

"But I haven't any use for a secretary, Miss Lane," he said with a wry grin. "That sign *private investigator* means more than you think. I'm so private I talk to myself."

Miss Lane's pathetic, washed-out face looked even more hungry when she forced a smile.

"I wouldn't want much, Mr. Devlin, and I'd do anything—clean up the office—anything," she said wistfully. "You see, my mother's sick here at the beach, and I can't go to the city. You did advertise, you know."

"Three weeks ago, yes, Miss Lane," said Devlin. "But Beach City doesn't seem to run to private investigators. And I'm staying only for a personal reason."

He wondered if there were some way he could slip her the sawbuck and make it look all right? He guessed though she wasn't that kind.

"The newspaper ad was old," said Miss Lane. "I'll be a help, Mr. Devlin. I once thought I had a chance in the theater. I'm good at impersonations, but it's a tough racket. I don't understand about your business being bad. Gorko said a shamus—"

Devlin came from his chair. His gray eyes lost their kindly expression. Funny how two little words made him



Behind Devlin, Davis fired once

see so much. Miss Lane's face appeared so faded because her drawn skin was all dried out by rouge and cosmetics. Impersonations, huh? "Grinner" Grogan should have picked some dame with more gray matter.

"Gorko Kram sent you, huh?" He clipped the words with his teeth. "Shamus? Tough racket? So your mother's sick, sob sister? Get out, Miss Lane! If you weren't so dumb, I'd lift you halfway to the elevator with my number ten, broad-A! Weren't you told not to mention who sent you—or was that a slip?"

Her face had appeared faded. Yet she was still pretty. But her eyes were suddenly as hard and as green as jade.

"It wasn't a slip, you big cluck!" she blazed. "You told me all I came to find out! Don't bother about trying the number ten! So you're staying for a personal reason only! I'm to tell you that a one-way ticket from Beach City back into the Big Town will be your only health insurance!"

Devlin made one stride around his desk. Miss Lane's faded, old purse came open. The automatic was toy-like but deadly. She backed toward the door. Devlin stood there, letting her go.

"So they figure I'm still soft," he muttered. "But Grinner and his boys can't rest easy, having an idea I'm still prying around. Well, I was soft, and I asked for it. Only they twisted it around to make me look like a sucker for a dame."

He lifted his feet to the desk. A month before he had been a detective, first grade, and going places. He had nearly all the angles to burn Grinner Grogan and his Beach City boys. All he had needed was to break down one, unaccountably unwilling witness.

Then, driving to Beach City, he had picked up the little girl hitch-hiker. She had been a forlorn, rain-soaked figure. She had told him a story of having run away from home in Philadelphia, and she had been robbed of her purse.

She hadn't known what she could do, but she heard they were hiring hotel help in Beach City. Big, soft Jim Devlin rented an auto camp cabin

for her, it then being midnight. His business with one of the Grinner Grogan's boys in Beach City that night did not include arriving with a rain-soaked pickup, feminine.

DEVLIN hadn't even entered the cabin with the forlorn hitch-hiker. He didn't have to enter. The magnesium bulbs of cameras caught him outside, with the little hitch-hiker standing in the cabin door, her coat and dress somehow suddenly dropped from her shoulders.

He quit being soft so suddenly that he made the mistake of slapping the little Jezebel of the rainy night right on her rounded chin. And the camera boys of the news sheets where Grinner Grogan rated best got that punch, too.

Right afterward, Devlin took it right on the chin. The newspapers went for his scalp—and got it. He went walking without his badge for the first time in twelve years.

He was grim about it. Enough of the real Big Boys resided out at Beach City to make private investigation look promising. Tonight he had only the sawbuck he had been about to try giving to the dame who had been sent along by Grinner Grogan's crowd to line him up on his intentions.

"Okay, they've made sure I haven't quit," he said softly, opening the top drawer of his desk. "Might as well put a card—well, what the—"

His one gun, the old Police Positive .38 that he had carried since his rookie days had been in that drawer. Now it was missing. Ten minutes later, he knew it wasn't in the office.

"That comes of trusting the help about the place," he said grimly. "I'll rake the janitor over in the morning."

For a long time he sat staring out the window at surf whitening the beach under the boardwalk lights two blocks away.

The phone rang. Devlin jumped, it had been so long since he had received a call.

"Yes, Devlin! Private investigator!"

"Mr. Devlin?" The woman's voice was husky as if with panic. "Can you meet me? I'm ready to talk now. I'll

tell you what I'll—"

There was a scream. A blow thudded. The phone connection closed.

This being Beach City, Devlin had the operator back quickly. You called your numbers here instead of dialing.

The woman's voice had been that of Mary Marline, the daughter of the late Thomas Marline whose body had been found on his small fishing cruiser. There had been some evidence that Mary Marline, heiress and glamour girl generally, might have been with her father at the time of his death, but she had stubbornly insisted she had not been there.

She was the witness who Devlin had failed to break down to get Grinner Grogan's mob for the murder. The Grogan mob had a monopoly of pirating rich men's boats, and the police had got nowhere, until it had seemed that Thomas Marline intended to volunteer some evidence.

But Thomas Marline hadn't had a chance before he died.

The Beach City operator was slow. She had to be convinced that Devlin, as a private dick, had a right to know the address of a number from which he had been called.

"West End 457," the girl finally said. "It's a connection with a houseboat at the Larch Street pier."

PERHAPS Devlin should have called the Beach City police. But he had too much at stake. It was nearly midnight and the pier lights were out. Devlin saw only one old houseboat moored near the end of the plank wharf.

There was no light on the lower deck. He saw a faint glimmer come from a shaded window on the top deck. If the manner of his leaving the force hadn't been a bitter lump inside, Devlin might have employed more caution.

As it was, he wished he had got another gun after missing his old Police Positive. He tried a door back of the foredeck and it was locked. His number ten served as a knocker, and he held one clenched fist cocked and ready.

The door opened slowly at first, and

he jammed it back with his knee as he saw a narrow, dope-white face.

"So it's you, rat!" he grated. "Where's Mary Marline? Grogan can't get away with some things, even in Beach City!"

"Ferret" Lomer, one of Grogan's cheapest, sniffing heat men, let out a loud squawk and started back toward a stairway that led to the upper cabin deck.

"Gorko! Cheese it! The sneakin' cop, Devlin!"

Devlin smacked the narrow, twitching nose with the hard back of his hand, slamming Ferret Lomer to the floor. He went up the little stairs in two jumps, convinced he heard the moaning of a woman.

Even if Mary Marline had given him the runaround on talking of her father's murder, Devlin had liked the girl. His shoulder rammed open the white door of the upper cabin.

He did not know the apparently hopped-up, hard-faced woman who swayed drunkenly in the middle of the upper cabin. But he did identify the figure of the man lying stupidly drunk on the floor.

The strange woman was dressed and wearing her coat as if she were about to go out. She stared blankly at Devlin as he burst into the cabin.

"Where's Miss—"

That was all he got out. The roof of the houseboat seemed to collapse on his skull. As his senses blacked out, he had a vague feeling he had been dumb all the way to have walked into this.

Whether it was seconds or minutes later, Devlin had no means of knowing as his eyes opened. He raised himself instinctively from the floor. Some object slid from his fingers, but he did not look at it, for the cabin was in utter darkness.

Devlin swore, stumbling over a body, as he hunted for a light switch. He found his cigarette lighter and snapped it on. The strange woman was still here. She couldn't go anywhere with a bullet hole in her throat.

Then there was a roundish blot of blood over her heart, soaking through her dress and light coat.

Holding the cigarette lighter, Dev-

lin stood there, balancing on his toes. His aching head was not yet quite clear. He was still trying to tie up the Grinner Grogan waterfront pirates with the knife murder of Thomas Marline on his fishing cruiser.

Mary Marline had been the one link that had stopped him cold from tying up Grogan's mob with the killing. A woman had been on the fishing cruiser with Marline when he had been knifed. Anyway, a compact had been found.

IT had Mary Marline's initials, so she could not deny that it belonged to her. But the playgirl heiress had resisted all of Devlin's best questioning, and repeatedly asserted that she had missed the compact since she had been fishing with her father several days before the murder.

As his brain cleared, Devlin saw the light switch. With the instinctive caution of a trained cop, he refrained from touching the woman's body. He did not have to be told this was an attempt to frame him.

"Almost as dumb as sending that dame up to feel me out," he said harshly. "Seeing there's no tie-up between me—"

The light illuminated all of the cabin. Then Devlin swore heavily.

"Grinner Grogan wouldn't overlook any bet," he grated. "And Gorko Kram had the heat on him for some outside stuff. Seeing I beat the tar out of Gorko Kram when he got in my road, it makes the frame just about perfect, except—why haven't they put in a call for the cops? Maybe my head's too hard, and I haven't been out long enough."

Gorko Kram apparently had been shot as he lay on the floor. A blue hole above a cheek bone showed the bullet must be in his brain.

"Which makes the setup perfect so far," said Devlin grimly, as he saw that an automatic rod had been placed under the dead man's hand. "That other hitch-hiker woman frame does the business to me in the department, and now I hated Gorko Kram and it seems I had a battle with him over another dame."

He recalled now that something had

been in his hand when he woke up. His old Police Positive .38, with his initials on the butt lay on the floor.

Sound carries far in Beach City. A police siren sounded more than a mile away. Devlin sucked in his breath. He picked up his gun.

"Four minutes more, Grogan, and it would have been your trick," he said softly. "But I've too much bone in my head. Without the gun to tie it up—"

On his way to the stairs, Devlin halted.

"I might as well leave the darn gun right here," he said. "At least then I can claim it was stolen. The police will be tipped off, and they can find plenty of slugs fired from my gun where I've always used the target pad in my basement."

Devlin determined there was scarcely a mark where the sapper had put him out. He had to get away to work this thing out. Then he thought of Mary Marline's voice calling him.

"Some of her kind do go off their bean for mugs like Grogan," he muttered. "She could have been on that boat when her father was bumped off."

Then another idea hit him. If he lammed out now, he had everything but an alibi. He made sure that Ferret Lomer, the coker, had disappeared from downstairs.

"And I have a star witness," he mused. "The central girl will no doubt recall me insisting on having this address. It's only the question now of how smoothly Grinner Grogan works his tip-off stuff. If he had someone like Mary Marline on the front, they might as well begin hooking up the hot seat."

He walked toward a small window, looking out.

THERE was a quick step and he pivoted. Mary Marline stood there. Her bosom was heaving and it was evident she had been hurrying. Her brown eyes had a luminous light and Devlin noticed that in a formal evening gown she had even more glamour than when he had talked with her. But he was bitter inside.

"A little late, aren't you?" he said harshly. "Or were you supposed to

be a witness after tricking me here?"

The girl's lovely face went chalk white as she saw the bodies on the cabin floor.

"Please, Mr. Devlin!" She cried out, her small hands clenched. "You must get away! The police are coming for you!"

She was close to him, and her fingers gripped his arm.

"Is this the play you're supposed to make, Miss Marline?" he said harshly. "Am I supposed to be with you when they put the pinch on me?"

She slapped him across the mouth so hard that it staggered him. He couldn't have had a better argument. Then she was contrite.

"I'm sorry I did that, Mr. Devlin—Jim," she said quickly. "But please! You can't wait! Come with me! I've my boat and a car! Give me a chance to explain!"

The police siren sounded within a few blocks.

As the tide drifted the dark motorboat away from the houseboat, the police car was stopping at the pier. Mary Marline was smart enough to allow the boat to float far enough away in the darkness.

When she started the motor, she sent the boat across a neck of the bay toward the more exclusive residence district. Devlin had the murder gun in his coat pocket.

"Whatever crackbrained idea you have, Miss Marline, it won't work," he said. "But perhaps you can now explain something I've wanted to know. Unless you have been linked up with Grinner Grogan, you wouldn't have come to that houseboat, so let's have all the answers?"

Her white face and the shine of her eyes was all he could see.

"Suppose I say I am friendly with Grinner Grogan?" she said quietly. "He has many friends. And if I were one, what would you do about it, Mr. Devlin?"

"I think I would break your pretty neck, Mary Marline," he said and meant it. "But if you have been close enough to the Grogan crowd to know what was happening to me tonight, why are you making this play to get me away?"

She was bringing the small boat to a landing. Her voice was strained.

"Perhaps I just don't want to be a party to causing the crime of murder to be pinned on an innocent man, Mr. Devlin," she said. "I want to have a talk with you."

"Would that be why you called me and tricked me?"

"If you think that, let it ride that way," the girl said quickly. "Anyway, perhaps I liked you when I first met you. You have the police gun that was used in the murders?"

Devlin's knuckles itched. The girl did know all about this. The boat was stopped and she was tying it up. Devlin controlled his anger.

"You know then that Grogan can tip off the police where to match up the slugs they'll find in Gorko Kram and that woman?" he said.

"That's what I heard Grinner Grogan say, Mr. Devlin," the girl replied. "Here's my car. We'll have to hurry."

BIG JIM DEVLIN had never been in a stranger situation. Just how he was helping himself by permitting the society girl to keep him away from the police, he could not judge.

But, if possible, now that he was into this, he intended to have from her all she knew of her father's murder, if he had to choke the truth from her. As they reached her small coupe, a street lamp showed the trunk at the rear.

Devlin was closest to the trunk. He suppressed an exclamation and stayed close beside Mary Marline as she got into the driver's seat. For what he had seen seemed even more incredible than the position in which the society girl had placed herself.

A human finger, apparently the little finger, had been caught when the trunk lid had been slammed down and locked. The finger was sticking from the lower corner of the lid.

It followed that the finger must be attached to a hand and a body. It was unlikely that a living and conscious passenger would be riding in the trunk with a finger nearly pinched off.

The girl was driving fast toward the eastern beach of the city. Devlin

just had time to reflect that Grinner Grogan had his own private, sea-going cruiser tied up out here since war menace virtually prohibited safe pleasure cruising.

"You wouldn't by any chance be making it more positive by taking me directly to Grinner Grogan?" he said.

He glanced at the girl's features. Her face was lovely, but bloodless and set. Devlin did not like to think as he did, but he had another thought. He recalled that Grinner Grogan had a reputation of playing around with women, then getting rid of them.

She had not replied to his question.

"Perhaps you been given the brush-off and you're thinking it'll be a good idea to have me visit Grinner Grogan now, the way I'm feeling?" he said.

He knew when he said that he wasn't being honest with what he really thought about Mary Marline. He hadn't been on the force twelve years without learning something of human nature.

He was no more successful with his second question.

"We'll stop at my place and talk about this," the girl said. "I am perhaps what you have been intimating. Anyway, Grogan's party boat is only about two blocks from here. I didn't call you on the phone. The woman who did impersonated my voice, but she's had enough trouble, and I'm not naming her."

Devlin instantly believed that. He thought of the hard, little lady who had called herself Miss Lane. She had said she was an impersonator. But she didn't matter.

When the girl ran the car into a shed garage alongside her cottage, Devlin could see the wharf where Grinner Grogan's cruiser was tied up. He kept his eyes on Mary Marline.

Just once he saw her gaze flick over toward the trunk of the car as they passed it, but her face was already too white for him to get any change of expression.

DEVLIN followed the girl inside a spacious room. Outside lights gave outlines of furnishings. He saw a desk, a typewriter and other evidence that Mary Marline might have

a serious side.

"Where's a light switch?" he said.

"No, wait," the girl said quickly. "My lights can be seen from Grinner Grogan's boat. I want to ask one question. Do you believe that Grinner Grogan killed my father, and have you any way of pinning it on him?"

"I would have had it pinned on Grogan," said Devlin bitterly. "But it seems I'm soft where dames are in trouble. Possibly I'm putting on the same act all over again. Yes, Grogan and his boys murdered your father, Miss Marline."

"That's all I wanted to know," she said quickly. "Over here, you can see along the beach to Grogan's cruiser, at this window."

Devlin stepped past her, his eyes upon the window. He was wondering how right or wrong he might be. Why did Mary Marline fear to have her cottage lights seen from Grogan's boat?

He was on the alert now. Perhaps all of this was a part of the frame against him. The girl might signal he was here.

And what would be found in the trunk of her car, when that protruding finger she evidently had not noticed was traced to the body to which it must be attached?

For the second time that night, it seemed to Devlin the ceiling slammed down upon his head. He was not conscious long enough to think that Mary Marline had maneuvered him into a position to hit him from behind.

Devlin's wrist watch showed he must have been out more than ten minutes. His head ached as the result of the second sapping. He swore harshly, as he thought of how Mary Marline had tricked him.

Perhaps this time he had been left for Grinner Grogan's boys to pick up.

Devlin reached instinctively toward his side pocket. His Police Positive was missing. One little detail was queer. As he had come out of the fog, he discovered that his head had been lifted and a cushion placed under it.

"If this isn't the screwiest setup—"

He lost no time reaching the outside. To his surprise, Mary Marline's coupe was still under the shed. And the small human finger still stuck out,

almost certain evidence that it must be attached to a corpse.

The girl had left her keys in the car lock. When Devlin lifted the trunk lid, a young man's body rolled partly over. Rigor mortis had set in some time before, evidently, but the dead man's right hand still gripped an automatic.

The blasted condition of the head from the wound at the right temple was almost sure proof that the dead young man had ended his own life. Devlin held a light over the dead face.

He did not require a second look. The open, glazed eyes and the dark hair were the same as those of Mary Marline. He recalled some mention of a son of Thomas Marline supposed to be in South America at the time of the murder investigation.

There could be no doubt but that the dead young man was Mary Marline's brother. The instant this came to him, Devlin snapped the trunk lid shut, covering the little finger this time.

Five seconds later, he read the driver's license strapped to the steering post. From the date, it had been issued since Thomas Marline's death. It was made out to Vincent Marline.

Answers, right and wrong, buzzed through Devlin's brain. Only one thing was clear. He must get to the Grinner Grogan cruiser without delay.

HE RAN along the beach, keeping in the darkness. There was every evidence that Grogan's cruiser was the scene of a real party.

The little wharf, the open deck and the upper cabin were roaring with merriment. Because he had been aboard that cruiser during the murder investigation, Devlin picked out a window of the after cabin, when he saw that the after-deck was in semi-darkness.

Knowing Grogan's boys would be around, Devlin slipped into the water. He reached the after-deck along the rudder shaft and a mooring rope. This deck, projecting into the bay, was concealed by the cabin structure from the party in front.

Devlin crouched below a window of a stateroom in which he knew Grin-

ner Grogan had his private office. The shade was down, but he could just see Grinner Grogan's slim figure, and enough more to set his pulse pounding madly.

For Mary Marline was sitting in a big chair, apparently on the best of terms with the killer. And Mary was holding a glass of liquor in her hand and smiling up at Grogan.

Devlin inched the window up quietly. He heard Grinner utter a hard laugh.

"So you've decided to take that cruise with me, after all, babe?" he heard Grogan say, and the look in his face was something to boil Devlin's blood.

"Well, why not, Grinner?"

Mary Marline's reply was given with a little laugh. Devlin got the window up a little more. Grinner got up, walked over, and bent as if to kiss the apparently willing girl.

"You're sure the kid won't get hot-headed about it, babe?"

Devlin was beginning to get it. The kid probably meant Vincent Marline, Mary's brother.

"I'm sure he won't oppose me in anything."

Beach City police had been smart. They had kept their sirens quiet until two squads of coppers were pouring from cars onto the cruiser wharf. Then the sirens screamed, and the voices of Grinner Grogan's women guests joined in.

Grinner Grogan heard the alarm. Devlin saw him jerk erect. And then Mary Marline threw the contents of her liquor glass squarely into his eyes. As the police were boarding the cruiser, Devlin saw Mary Marline reach the stateroom door, jerking it open.

There, the girl deliberately tore her dress at the neck line. She was screaming as she started through the doorway. But as she saw the police pushing into the cabin, evidently seeking a reason for having been called, Mary turned back, still screaming.

Grinner Grogan was clawing at his eyes, blinded. Then he was feeling about his desk, as Devlin saw Captain Harden and half a dozen other coppers barge through the doorway.

Mary tripped and fell to the floor. Grinner got the top drawer his desk open, just as Captain Harden punched him hard and knocked him to one side.

A weapon jabbed into Devlin's side. The thin voice of Ferret Lomer spoke in his ear.

"Come on, before I blast out your ribs!"

At the same instant, a fist slammed Devlin's head from the other side. Devlin was smart enough to make it seem he was going out. As he slumped, the coked-up Ferret made the error of removing the gun from his side.

BIG JIM DEVLIN really exploded then. He knocked Ferret Lomer cold and staggered Blacky Davis.

He was tempted to finish the mobster off. But he knew he had a fast job to do. After one swift glance into Grinner Grogan's stateroom office, Devlin raced down the wharf. Davis fired once.

"The crazy, little fool!" he was muttering, and he meant Mary Marline.

Devlin had seen that Grinner Grogan was all tied up by Captain Harden as another copper lifted two guns from Grinner's desk. And one of these was Devlin's Police Positive.

Devlin hoped he would have time to work what he had in mind. He felt he could trust Mary Marline to have all the right answers for the police. It was open and shut that she had planted his own Police Positive, the gun that had murdered a woman and Gorko Kram, in Grinner Grogan's desk, and had played him along until the police had arrived.

"But I'm making it more than that," promised Devlin, wading ashore some distance from the Grinner Grogan cruiser. "It's certain that Grinner doesn't know Mary's brother is dead."

It was easy to understand why Mary Marline had refused to talk after her father had been murdered. Without doubt her brother must have been with Grinner's mob of killers.

Only tonight had it become possible for Mary Marline to act.

"And what a gal when she gets going!" said Devlin, reaching the girl's cottage where the coupe still stood

under the garage shed.

He realized that the next few minutes could make or break his own future, and possibly that of Mary Marline. The newspapers would make the most of what had just happened on the Grogan cruiser.

Devlin was inside the cottage only two minutes. He had to risk light just long enough to use the typewriter.

When he drove the Vincent Marline car from the cottage, the body of the dead youth was huddled down in the seat beside him. He sent the little car directly between the two police cars, stopping just as he saw Mary Marline beside Captain Harden, coming from the boat.

Devlin held down the horn button until coppers pushed out, demanding him to be quiet. Devlin smiled a little as he saw that Grinner Grogan had failed to talk himself out of the hands of the law.

Mary Marline was staring at her car and at Devlin, as she walked out beside tough Captain Harden. Ferret Lomer and Blacky Davis had regained consciousness, and were being supported by a pair of policemen.

Three more of Grinner's best boys had also got tangled with the unexpected appearance of the police. Devlin was soaked, but that went unnoticed, as he had removed his coat and placed it over the corpse beside him.

"Jim Devlin?" exclaimed Captain Harden. "Funny, we've been looking for you. Had a phone girl's tip you might know something of a man and woman on a houseboat who went out suddenly. Then we recalled you and Gorko Kram had it tough once, and this rub-out seemed to be over a woman."

DEVLIN nodded.

"That's right, I did get a call from a houseboat and started there, when I got sidetracked and came onto this car, so I never got to the houseboat."

"He's lyin'! He come onto the boat—"

Grinner Grogan tried to slam Ferret Lomer with his fist, but a copper

nailed him and Ferret shut up.

"That's adds up, Grinner," said Captain Harden. "Ferret here was in on it, huh?"

"I don't know what you're talking about!" snapped Grinner. "I never saw that police gun before."

"Keep Miss Marline from the car, Captain Harden," Devlin said. "This is what I ran into in a side street."

He pulled away his coat. The sightless eyes of Vincent Marline were staring and they were directly in line with Grinner Grogan. The Beach City killer uttered a hoarse oath, but coherent speech failed him.

Devlin passed a folded paper to Captain Harden.

The note was typewritten.

"My sister Mary has threatened to kill Grinner Grogan to avenge our father's death. I cannot stand it any longer, knowing that I am one of those who caused my father's death. However, I was with my sister and my father the night he was killed and could not save him. Grinner Grogan and Ferret Lomer and Blacky Davis were there that night. I did not know it was going to happen. Please forgive me, Mary, and now you can tell what you know to the police—Vincent."

As Captain Harden intoned the words aloud, Ferret Lomer tried to break free. He was screaming.

"Tell them, Blacky, it's a lie! I was too sick to drive for you and Grinner the night you bumped off Marline!"

"Shove off, boys!" rapped out Captain Harden. "I'm afraid, Grinner, that anything you say, any way you say it will be against you. You even have to get tough with this poor lad's

sister when she goes to see you, her being smart enough to call the police first."

"Too bad you had to borrow my old gun to knock off a woman and one of your own boys, Grinner," said Devlin quietly. "You should have thrown it in the bay, for I'll be having more use for it now against rats of your kind."

Grinner Grogan looked at Jim Devlin. He looked at the Police Positive in Captain Harden's hand. Grinner had an idea there was something all wrong with what had just happened, but he could do nothing about it.

Mary Marline looked at Devlin and the typewritten note. Through the lines of grief for her brother came a sad, little smile. She spoke low to Devlin.

"I think, Jim, you and I rather crossed each other up," she said. "But we've got one thing in common. We're both pretty fast-thinking liars."

"It takes a liar to catch a liar, Mary," said Devlin quietly. "Too bad you've all that money."

"There isn't any left, Jim," she said quietly. "All we'll have will be what you bring home when you're back in the department."

Captain Harden came over, holding the suicide note.

"This not being signed, it won't get anywhere in court, Jim," he said. "But seeing Ferret Lomer busted wide open, and that murder gun was found on Grinner, the note won't be needed."

"It's well that it isn't," said Devlin with a hard grin. "You see, Captain, I wrote it myself."

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KILLER, KEEP MOVING

By SAM MERWIN, JR.

Jimmy Didn't Figure on Mixing in a Murder Racket

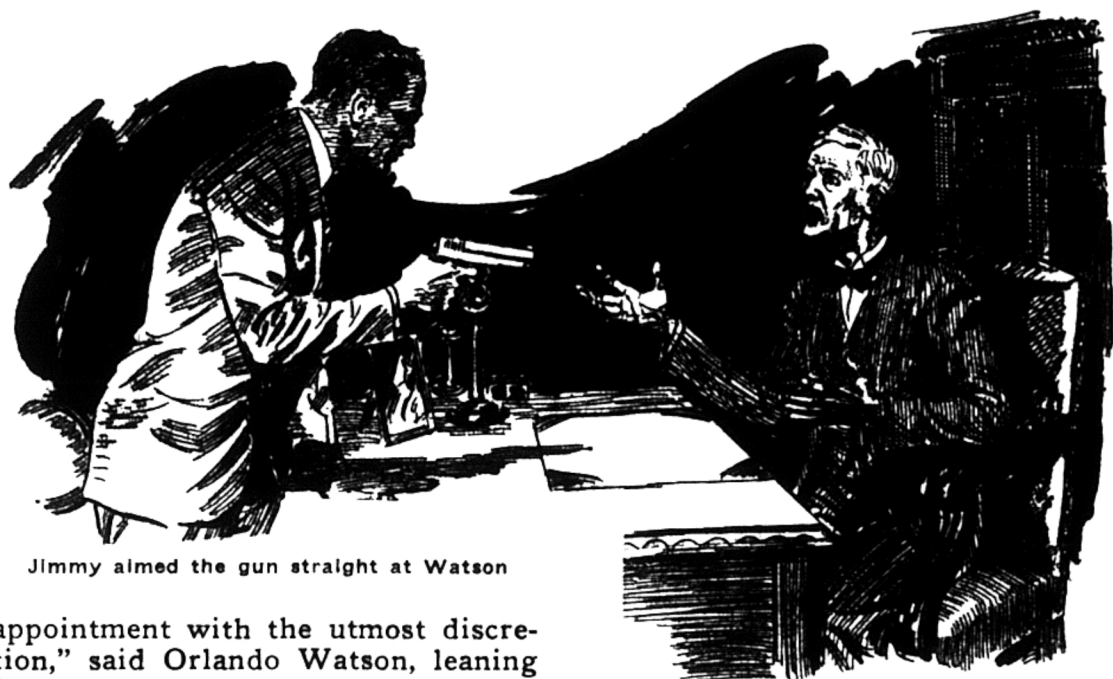
WATSON was sitting behind the ornate mahogany desk in his study, but even sitting down, Jimmy Brent could read the power in him. A trifle uncomfortable in these luxurious surroundings, Brent assumed a pose even more pugnacious than usual, tugged inconspicuously at his sleeves to make sure they covered his worn shirt-cuffs.

"I trust that you have treated this

for you," said Watson. "Jackson, my secretary, who brought you here, checked up on you. You've done good work in New York, I believe."

Here it comes, Brent decided. He nodded grimly, waited for Watson to ask him why he'd left the big city. But the question he had come to dread didn't come.

"One of the reasons I'm employing you," the millionaire said instead, "is



Jimmy aimed the gun straight at Watson

appointment with the utmost discretion," said Orlando Watson, leaning forward.

"You needn't worry about that," said Brent with a tinge of bitterness. "Who would I talk to?"

Watson permitted himself a smile. His eyes, enormously magnified behind his heavy, horn-rimmed spectacles became grotesque, amiable slits. Yet, even here, in his own castle, the millionaire seemed ill at ease.

"The lot of a stranger in town is not easy," he said. "New England has a tendency to keep to itself. You have been here, I believe, four months."

"On the button," said Brent. "And I don't mind telling you that this is the first job that's come my way."

"That is one of the reasons I called

that you need a job. Therefore, and considering your experience, you'll do it well. We'll overlook your past. The other reason is that you're a comparative stranger."

"I take it," said Jimmy, "that you want someone watched."

"Right," said Watson, smiling his approval. "But it's not the usual shadowing job, I believe. This is a bit embarrassing for me. You see, I'm being blackmailed."

"Oh-oh," said Jimmy. That didn't sound good.

"My reputation here has always been excellent," said Watson. "I believe I am known as a philanthropist.

I should be. My interest in the welfare of those less fortunate than myself is entirely sincere. My record speaks for itself. Unfortunately—"

He paused, removed his thick glasses, wiped them with a fine linen handkerchief. His eyes, without their protection, were puffy and inflamed. He was obviously almost blind. No man could use such lenses if he weren't.

"Some people," he resumed, "spend their lives finding blemishes in the careers of men like myself and turning these blemishes to their own advantage. I have paid heavily in the last year for an early mistake."

"And you want me to get something on this guy?"

"No," said Watson, readjusting his spectacles, "I want you to keep him alive."

"I don't get it," said Brent. And he didn't.

"It's like this," said the millionaire, smiling again, obviously relieved to have his glasses on again. "In this man's possession is manufactured evidence that will make me look bad, to say the least, if anything happens to him. And I've just learned that he is in danger of his life. He hasn't confined his dastardly attentions to me, you see."

JIMMY BRENT stared at the "big shot," then grinned. "If he is murdered, his 'evidence' will put the finger on you."

"Exactly," said Watson. "Naturally, I can't afford to have him murdered. If I put a local detective on his trail, he will spot him, probably find out I've hired him, and expose me—and while I could win in court, he's in a position to cost me a great deal none the less."

"So I'm your pigeon," said Jimmy. "Okay. What about—"

"You'll receive fifty dollars a day and expenses until the threat is removed. That should be satisfactory. Here are pictures of McGrew, the man you're to keep alive. You shouldn't have trouble spotting him with that moustache. He lives at One Thousand Broad Street in Apartment Eleven. He spends his afternoons at Cavan-

agh's playing the horses. His evenings, he usually spends in the Mayfair or the Grove."

"Got it," said Jimmy, repeating his instructions quietly, masking his excitement.

It had a screwy sound, but he was in no position to look fifty dollars a day in the face and say, "no!"

"He sleeps mornings," said Watson. "You'll sleep then, too. His apartment is well protected—three floors up and no fire escape. Stick close to him otherwise. Make friends with him if you think it advisable. He likes horses, remember."

"Who'll I watch out for?"

"He usually picks old women or people like myself, who are helpless, for his victims," said the millionaire. "However, he has been blackmailing a man called Peter Johns, a small businessman with a hardware store and a family. And Johns is desperate. Here are his pictures and facts about him. The poor fellow went overboard for a blonde."

"I see," said Jimmy, studying the data with brief intensity, then stuffing it into his breast pocket. "And what if I fail to protect McGrew?"

"Then," said Watson, "we both lose." He made an expressive gesture, smiled, pushed a thick envelope across the desk. "Here is five hundred dollars—a week's salary in advance and a hundred and fifty for expenses. If you need more, call me on my private wire. Here's the number."

Jackson, the secretary, drove Jimmy back to town. He was a middle-sized man with an alert, intelligent face. He kept looking at Brent curiously.

"Great man, Mr. Watson," he said as they passed a big block of modern buildings. "He put up the new high school there last year. Donated half the money himself and promoted the drive for the rest. Did you get along with him all right?"

"We got along all right," said Jimmy.

He was feeling apprehensive about the job now that he'd taken it. But the rustle of the envelope in his pocket allayed his fears. Five hundred dollars and more to come—he could take a lot for that.

They reached the business and amusement center of the small manufacturing city without further conversation. But Jimmy could sense the intense curiosity of the man at the wheel. He flipped a good-by to Jackson in front of the dingy building that housed the cubicle he called his office, wondering where he could buy some decent clothes in this New England town.

WHEN the tail lights of Jackson's coupe had vanished around the corner, Jimmy walked the three short blocks to the Mayfair. It was a tawdry neon and chromium copy of any of two hundred lesser Manhattan nightspots. Within, a pair of bar-men served one-ounce drinks in thick glasses and a bad four-piece orchestra blared stock arrangements.

But the place was jammed. Thriving war industries in the valley were paying big money for skilled and unskilled labor. White-collar men and workers in polo shirts and their girls mingled with a smattering of the town's tuxedoed and evening-gowned "society." He had to fight his way to the bar.

He had to start from scratch. A fading bank roll, thin to begin with, had forbidden him even the questionable pleasures of a place like this since his arrival in town. When the music stopped and the dancers had unsorted themselves, he made his way slowly to the men's room, checking the occupants of each booth and table on his left.

When he emerged, he did the same to the parties seated on the other side. He saw no one who answered to McGrew's description.

Certain that his man was not there, he left, hailed one of the town's few taxicabs, rode the mile or more across town to the Grove. This club was slightly higher class. It was a bit out of the center of things, had a velvet cord stretched across its entrance. Since he was wearing a jacket, Jimmy passed muster with a black-browed head waiter.

He repeated his men's room routine. On his return trip, he spotted his quarry. McGrew was seated in a dim

corner table talking earnestly to a blonde in a tweed suit. Or, as Jimmy made out on second look, listening to a blonde who was talking to him. His part seemed to be confined to shaking his head.

The band struck up, and Jimmy pretended an interest in it. He had already spotted an empty table next to the one his quarry was sitting at, walked over to it and sat down, ignoring a sign which stated that the table was reserved. The head waiter came over, his black brows drawn together.

"This table is reserved," he said.

"I'll clear out when you need it," said Jimmy, eyeing the half dozen unoccupied cloths nearby significantly. "I like the music." He slipped five dollars to the man.

"It's quite all right," said the waiter, entirely affable. "It's a Dire Mavis orchestra—from New York."

"I thought so," said Jimmy, pretending to listen to the uninteresting strings. He ordered rye and ginger ale, a drink he detested. When it came, he poured the ginger ale himself.

He put his thumb over the top of the ginger ale, heard the blonde mention "Peter and I" earnestly. John's first name was Peter. Perhaps this was the girl Watson had mentioned. He wondered what it was all about. Was she pleading for her boy friend or doing a little double-crossing behind his back?

He jiggled the bottle, heard it fizz, let a thin stream of yellow fluid escape into his glass. Taking covert aim, he lifted the bottle, caught McGrew from heel to head with ginger ale.

THE rest was easy, easier even than he'd expected. He was terribly apologetic, managed to slip in a remark about being lucky on a horse. Within two minutes, he was sitting with them. McGrew seemed to welcome the invasion, especially as Jimmy said the least he could do was pay for the drinks.

McGrew had a surface affability that was denied by the shallow hardness of his eyes and the tight mouth of the gambler who spends his life in debt to his bookmaker. To Jimmy, he

seemed, at first impression, more weak than evil. But a weak man can be vicious.

The girl, on the other hand, was angry. She relapsed into sullen silence as soon as Jimmy sat down, spoke in monosyllables and only when necessary. Looking at her, Jimmy caught her eyes looking far away—or perhaps at the bar near the entrance. He didn't dare look around to check.

Otherwise, she was a surprise. Her blond hair was a perfect setting for a well-bred, intelligent face that was a pleasing cross between pretty and beautiful. Her figure, what he could see of it, lacked nothing essential, and her voice, when she used it, was low and cultured. She didn't fit into the picture of a small merchant's mistress.

"The music's not bad," said Jimmy in an interval of the monologue on daily doubles McGrew was delivering.

The girl's answer was a discouraging glance that showed her eyelids. McGrew rolled his eyes to suggest to Jimmy that she was a cluck.

"It's slick stuff—from New York," he said. "Got the Boston outfit they had here last week licked hollow. But Miss Roberts doesn't like it."

McGrew made an insult out of her name. She ignored him. Again her eyes drifted past Jimmy's shoulder. Then suddenly they came alive. They were cobalt and sparkling. She turned a smile on both of them that warmed the tablecloth.

"I'm sorry if I was rude," she said. She was all friendliness now. "I should have a better time, I suppose. I was worried."

"You weren't kidding," said McGrew.

He showed signs of feeling his liquor. Miss Roberts continued to smile.

"We'll let bygones be bygones," she said. "Just to prove it, I'm going to ask Mr. Brent to dance with me."

"It's all right with me, babe," said McGrew.

As Jimmy took her into his arms, he told himself that this was all wrong. Neither the girl nor her behavior fitted into the pattern of his case. And contact with her, even on the dance floor,

stirred him more than he liked. He told himself he was crazy to let a girl like the one he knew her to be interest him.

"Just a moment," she said as they reached the other end of the room. "I see someone over there I'd like to speak to. Excuse me." With a quick squeeze of his hand, she was gone.

She went directly to a man who seemed to be alone. And unless the camera lied, this man was Johns. Jimmy felt a little grim. Then he put the girl from his mind, concentrated on the case. It didn't look good.

MCGREW had obviously refused whatever the girl had requested. She was Johns' girl friend. He had as obviously come here to learn how she'd come out. Now she was consulting with him. Johns was red-headed, compact, of medium height. He listened to Miss Roberts, slammed a fist into his other palm. Then he turned on his heel and left.

When they got back to the table, Jimmy paid the bill for the table and left. Outside, he found a cab, got in, told the man to wait. A moment later, Johns drove by in a blue sedan. Jimmy lit a cigarette, sat back in a corner of the cab where he couldn't be easily seen. His job was protecting McGrew.

They emerged twenty minutes later, went to a small roadster in the parking lot. Jimmy tapped on the cab window, and his driver took up the chase. The girl was at the wheel of the roadster, drove it out along Broad Street. McGrew, a bit unsteady, got out and stood on the sidewalk in front of his apartment house. The roadster pulled away.

Dismissing his cab, as he was not far from his hotel room, Brent waited under the shadow of an elm tree fifty yards down the street. When McGrew was tucked away in bed, his job was done for the night.

Then the blackmailer went inside. A minute later, lights went on in a third story apartment. Moving cautiously, Jimmy approached the apartment building. He might as well case it, make sure it was a safe haven.

It was modern, without fire escapes,

a five-story red brick structure. He went in, asked if a fictitious Mr. Brown lived there, was greeted by an alert night man at the switchboard. He was about to leave, satisfied, when a phone rang, and the man stuck a plug in the eleven hole. Eleven was the number of McGrew's apartment.

Jimmy waited till the call was finished, thanked the attendant and went outside. He had gone only ten steps when he saw the blue sedan. It pulled to a stop across the street from the apartment house, and Peter Johns got out, stood hesitantly in the street. A moment later, McGrew came hurrying from the building, stood looking up and down the street.

"There you are, you rat," said Johns, coming across the pavement with his fists hanging clenched at his sides.

"Don't!" said McGrew thickly.

He swayed a little, turned back toward the hotel. Jimmy decided it was time to act. He stepped into the picture, got between the men, gave Johns a sharp shove.

"Get out of this!" said the merchant.

He swung a vicious one-two. Jimmy ducked the left and took the right on his shoulder. Even so, it hurt, spun him halfway around. Another wallop jolted his jawline, sent him to his knees.

He came up swinging, doubled up the merchant with three savage smashes to the wind. He told himself he hadn't started it, turned to see what McGrew was doing. The blackmailer was staring at them stupidly. Then Jimmy realized he wasn't looking at them but at something past them on the street. He turned again, and the world exploded.

He barely heard the shot.

HE COULDN'T have been there on his hands and knees more than a few seconds, but a lot of things seemed to be happening in a fuzzy, kaleidoscopic sort of way. McGrew fell forward on what had been his face an instant before. Racing footsteps sounded, then something clattered beside him.

When he came out of it, he had to sort out four factors in quick succession. McGrew was dead or something

so like it the difference was a matter of splitting hairs, Johns and the blue sedan had vanished. A pair of twin tail lights moved furiously down the street. The night clerk was charging him with clubbed fists. And a revolver lay on the sidewalk by his right hand.

Jimmy came up in a crouch as the clerk ran up to him, and he belted the clerk twice on his outthrust jaw. One factor was dealt with. He swung around, hoping his cab had waited. It hadn't. But the roadster, blonde and all, was moving slowly along on the other side of the street. Even as he looked, it picked up speed. He made the running board in three leaps, managed to scramble in.

"Keep after that car!" he said grimly.

She looked at his eyes, at the clenched fist held six inches under her chin, stepped on the gas. The roadster set out in pursuit, took a right-angle turn on two wheels. The sedan was no longer in sight. Nor did its tail lights show when they reached the next corner.

"Where to now?" the girl asked quietly.

"Slow down and keep moving," said Jimmy.

This, he thought, was a heck of a spot to be in. In a way, it was a perfect fit for the sort of luck he'd been running in. A good Manhattan newspaperman he'd uncovered a racket that had led straight to his publisher, and Jimmy'd been thoroughly blacklisted in his chosen profession.

Thanks to a couple of bits of shell casing acquired in Spain that still rested in his leg, he had been judged unfit for the Army. And a series of "opportunities" away from reporting had fizzled out without profit. He'd come to the New England city in the hope of filling a city-room vacancy, but met with the usual headshake and hung on more for lack of funds than anything else.

Now, on his first chance to make good, he'd botched it wretchedly. The man he'd been hired to protect had been slain almost at his feet within a couple of hours of his getting the job. He came out of it then, realizing that

the girl was looking at him curiously. The car radio was playing softly.

"Why did you kill him?" she asked.

"I didn't," he said. "Why did that cute boy friend of yours do it? He just cost me my first job in months."

"My boy friend?" she countered. "Oh, you mean Peter. He wouldn't kill anybody. But what sort of a job was this?"

"Was is right!" he said. The girl puzzled him. "Well, it's no secret now. A man named Watson hired me to keep McGrew alive. He was being blackmailed and was afraid that if brother Johns knocked McGrew off, he'd be blamed for it."

"So Watson hired you," she said with venom.

"So you're John's girl friend," said Jimmy, getting angry.

"What gave you that idea?" she asked.

"It's all over town," said Jimmy quietly. "Stop kidding."

"It so happens," said the girl, "that Peter Johns is my brother-in-law. I came up here to help him and Mae—who happens to be my sister—right an injustice your fine employer did them. Furthermore, I think your story is redolent. And I've seen Romo Vincent do that soda water pickup on the stage a thousand times better than you."

JIMMY found himself unexpectedly pleased over the girl's respectable status. She hadn't looked the type to be what he'd thought her to be. But he was plenty angry.

"My story will hold water," he said grimly, wondering how it would sound in a courtroom. "But there's one quick way to settle this. Take me to this brother-in-law of yours."

"That would be very smart," said the girl. "After you frame him for murder. You and your precious Mr. Watson!"

"I didn't frame him," said Jimmy. "If you saw it, you know that. I nearly got my brains knocked out twice."

"I got there just—afterwards," she said, shuddering a little. "You and Peter and McGrew were there. The man from the hotel ran out. So if

you didn't—why pick on Peter?"

"Stop thinking of your sister," said Jimmy. "This is murder. You can't cover it up. Take me to him. He had a motive."

"No more than you did if you're working for Watson!" she snapped. "You just told me McGrew was blackmailing him. That story of trying to keep him alive is silly. I don't know what your employer told you, but Watson bilked Peter's father out of a lot of money a long time ago. It killed the old man."

"I stumbled across some old papers, digging up something for Peter in New York a few weeks ago. It looked as if we could prove Orlando Watson was a crook and get some of Peter's own back for him. Peter hired McGrew to work it at this end."

"And McGrew turned it into blackmail on Peter."

"He did not," she said angrily. "There's nothing to blackmail Peter in it. But he didn't seem to get anywhere. I came up to see what I could do and found he was no good. He as much as told me he wasn't going to reveal the information he'd learned. I made a play for him. I had to. But it didn't work. You saw that tonight. I couldn't get out of the batter's box."

"If my story sounds bad, how about yours?" he asked. "And it still makes a pretty good motive for murder. Listen, Miss Roberts, I'm no babe in arms. Take me to him."

There was a stubborn silence as they cruised aimlessly through the streets. The radio droned popular tunes with occasional static interruptions as they passed another vehicle. Then music ceased, and a news announcer came on.

"Jimmy Brent, a former New York newspaperman, was seen fleeing from the scene of the murder of Michael McGrew less than an hour ago. It is believed he commandeered a car at the time and is fleeing the city. City and state police have thrown a drag-net around all roads surrounding the city. The alleged killer may be armed according to police reports. He is desperate."

Jimmy switched off the radio, then turned it on again. He couldn't af-

ford to miss anything. But the announcer was talking about the war. He turned on the girl, his eyes flinty.

"Nice going!" he said softly. "You've stalled me into this."

"I only did what you told me," she snapped.

"You didn't take me to your brother-in-law."

"That *would* be smart!" she exclaimed. "About as smart as you seem to have been, Mr. Jimmy Brent. What now, desperado?"

"Stop the car," he growled. He was more afraid than he liked to think about, his stomach muscles tight. "I suppose your next move would be to drive me to police headquarters and turn me in."

"I'd be doing my duty as a citizen," she said sweetly.

JIMMY slammed the car door as he stepped to the sidewalk. He stood in the shadow of an elm tree until her lights had disappeared. This was a mess, and there was only one thing to do. He was not far from the center of town.

Feeling like a fugitive from a chain gang, he walked to an all-night drug-store, called Orlando Watson's private number. The millionaire's voice was smooth as he asked Jimmy's identity.

"Well," he said when he'd learned who was calling, "I'm disappointed in you, Brent. I never thought you'd be a sellout to my enemies so soon." His tone was unutterably sad.

"I'll admit the job got away from me," said Jimmy. "But I'm no sellout. I want a chance to explain. I'll return your money when I've finished."

"From the radio, I gather you may need it," said Watson.

"I didn't kill him!" said Jimmy. "Johns is our baby, all right. I'll be out there as soon as I can collar a cab."

"I appreciate your fine honesty," said Watson with unctuous irony. "But I'm afraid it's a little bit late."

"Listen," said Jimmy. "You got me into this and I need help."

He hung up and risked hailing a cab. He hoped they wouldn't be stopped by a police patrol, but that

was a chance he'd have to take. He thought of the blond Miss Roberts and did some silent swearing.

Then, forcing his fears into the back of his mind, he went over the killing mentally with all of his resources as a trained news reporter. Someone had called McGrew immediately after his arrival, and the call had brought him out onto the sidewalk. Johns had been waiting for him there, crossed to attack him.

He, Jimmy, had stepped in to protect McGrew, taken a belting from Johns, then given as good in return. Then something had hit him. He remembered now that he'd looked at McGrew and seen that the blackmailer was staring past him. It was then the shot had come.

The next few seconds had found him tangled with the night clerk from the apartment house. After which he'd fled in the car with Miss Roberts. Going over it again, it occurred to him that there might, just *might* have been a fourth party present who had done the actual shooting. In his dazed condition at the time, he had seen two figures.

He tried to deduce the plot—for it was all too evidently one. The telephone call proved that. Whoever killed McGrew had planned that call to bring him out on the sidewalk. And it pointed, if Johns were innocent, directly to Miss Roberts.

In that case, her sister, Mrs. Johns, must have made the call. But he didn't like to think of the blonde as a killer. And she had tried to put the blame on his boss. He considered this possibility in detail.

Orlando Watson was out as the murderer. Whoever had done the killing had not worn glasses. If that second figure had been real, and he couldn't have sworn whether it were man or woman, it wasn't Watson. He'd had a glimpse of white face, and that face had not worn glasses. Watson obviously couldn't see a foot without his. And the killer had had to see to shoot straight.

It could have been Jackson, the secretary, he decided. In which case, Watson would have made the phone call. He tossed the possibilities

around—Johns, Jackson, Miss Roberts. He was certain only of himself. Any of the others could have done it.

AT ANY rate, he, Jimmy Brent, had been nicely pinned with the murder. And it was a charge that might well stick. No one but Jackson knew of his visit to Watson, and even this might be misconstrued as an attempt to do a little blackmailing on his own. They'd think he rubbed out McGrew to get rid of competition.

He swore, came back to the present as the cab drew up toward the gates of the Watson estate. A car was parked close to them—a blue sedan.

Jimmy paid off his cab, walked over to it. It was empty, but the radiator was warm. Wondering what went on, he vaulted a low stone wall, walked the hundred yards of driveway to the front door.

Jackson let him in. The man was obviously frightened and excited. Jimmy collared him there in the big hall, looked him over coolly.

"When did you get back?" he asked sharply.

"Why," the secretary said, blinking, "right after I let you off downtown. This is awful, Mr. Brent. You shouldn't have done it. Mr. Watson is very upset."

"You don't say so!" said Jimmy.

He gripped Jackson by the coat lapels, pulled him close. The man goggled with fright. Jimmy let him go disgustedly. Jackson wasn't the killer. He was obviously scared to death. Experience told the ex-reporter it wasn't an act.

Orlando Watson was still sitting behind his desk. His eyes were gigantic slits behind his powerful spectacles, his forehead knotted as if he were suffering from a headache. He managed to smile faintly as he motioned Jimmy to a chair.

"Well, young man," he said, "you got both of us into a very fine mess if what I hear by the radio is true."

"You're telling me," said Jimmy. He lit a cigarette, was thankful that his hands were steady. He then gave a curt account of what had happened and concluded by saying, "I didn't do it, but I didn't fulfill my assignment.

You may have your money back. All I want is your testimony in court."

"I'll be glad to help of course," said Watson gravely. He removed his glasses as if they hurt him too much to bear, closed his eyes. They gleamed oddly when he reopened them. "You have cost me a great deal by your—ill fortune."

"Not as much as I've cost me," said Jimmy.

He stood up, unable to sit still, pounded the desk. Startled, Watson dropped his spectacles on the carpet. Jimmy stopped to retrieve them, but the millionaire beat him to it, put them on again. And again his forehead knotted in pain.

"It might interest you to know," said Jimmy, "that Johns is around here somewhere. He told of the car with the warm radiator. 'You'd better have your servants keep an eye out.'"

"They have the night off—except Jackson," said the millionaire quietly. "You can see how much good he'd be in a jam. The man's a born rabbit."

"So I see," said Jimmy.

He was thinking fast. But before he could speak, the doorbell rang harshly. A moment later, a furious Peter Johns came storming in, pushing the secretary aside as if he hadn't existed. He stamped to the desk.

"Nice going!" he snarled. "Oh, I'm not afraid of you and your hired killer. You'll have a heck of a time explaining my death. But you're going to take the beating of your life. Take off those glasses."

JIMMY got to his feet. The merchant swung to face him. He had a bruise under one eye where the ex-reporter had hit him earlier.

"You stay out of this," he snapped. "Aren't you in enough trouble already? I'm having this out with Watson now!"

"The way you had it out with McGrew?" Jimmy asked. "Remember, Johns, I was there too."

He ducked as Johns swung at him, came inside and chopped with both fists at the man's midsection.

Johns grunted, doubled up. A pair of sharp uppercuts sat him down on

the carpet, dazed. Satisfied he'd been slowed sufficiently, Jimmy turned back to Watson. The millionaire, his face screwed up with pain, was holding an automatic taken from a desk drawer. It was pointing in the general direction of Jimmy.

"It's all right, Watson," said Jimmy quietly. "You can put that away now. Brother Johns won't make much more trouble."

The doorbell rang again, insistently. This time it was the police. A squad of men in blue burst into the room, seized Jimmy by the collar and cuffed him into a corner.

"Thank you, gentlemen," said Orlando Watson sweetly. "Here is your man. You got here just in time. Brent had just manhandled poor Mr. Johns here and threatened me again. It's a good thing I called you when I got his call."

"You so and so!" barked Jimmy, realizing the extent of his betrayal.

Then, in spite of himself, he grinned. The expression on Johns' face was ludicrous, a mixture of bewilderment and surprise. A policeman gave Jimmy a savage smack, told him to wipe off the grin. The ex-reporter shook his head to clear it.

"And so, gentlemen," Watson was saying smoothly, "this blackguard, Brent, at the end of his rope, attempted to shake me down. Now it is one of my cardinal principles never to pay blackmail, but he had me over a barrel.

"However, poor McGrew agreed to help me out. You know what happened to him when he tried to put a crimp in Brent's nefarious plans. He called me to tell me that he'd talked to Brent at a cafe—the Grove, I believe it's called—and that Brent was going to talk it over with him in private.

"The next thing I heard on my radio was that Brent had shot McGrew. I'd asked Johns, another of Brent's victims, to come out here. I thought perhaps we could work it out better together. Then Brent called here, said he was coming out. He threatened physical violence but seemed in his senses.

"That was when I called you, gen-

tlemen. But Brent got here first. When he saw Johns, he knew his game was up and went berserk. He knocked him down, tried to kill him. I was forced to draw my gun. You gentlemen arrived in the very nick of time."

"He won't be on the beating end for awhile, Mr. Watson," said a burly lieutenant, and the millionaire looked distressed.

"No violence, please, gentlemen," he said. "Remember, you are agents of the law, and the law must take its course."

"You're tellin' us, sir?" said the lieutenant.

"Just a minute," said Jimmy savagely. Somehow, he managed to get a ring of authority into his voice. "I've got two questions to ask before you lock me up."

"Tell them to the judge," jeered a harness bull.

"Let him ask them," said a cool voice.

Jimmy looked around into the level gray eyes of a state trooper. He gave a sigh of relief. Watson might have the town police in his pocket, but not the troopers.

FEELING a whole lot better, Jimmy swung on Johns.

"This is as much of a surprise to you as it is to me, isn't it?" he demanded.

"I—I don't get you," said the merchant.

"In the first place, you attacked me just now, didn't you?"

"Well, yes," said Johns.

He was still bewildered, obviously didn't know what course to take. But his admission was enough.

"After the murder you followed a car, didn't you?"

"That's right," said Johns, regaining his composure. "I followed it out this way. The killer got into it. I left my car outside the gate and wondered how I could get in here. Finally I worked a mad up and rang the doorbell. I found you and Watson and his secretary here."

"Get it over with," snapped the police lieutenant. "This ain't getting us nowhere."

"I agree," said Watson sonorously,

and Jimmy turned on him.

"Of course you do," he snapped. "I've knocked two holes in your sweet little frame already. If Johns followed the killer here right after the murder, he didn't follow me. I was with his sister-in-law, Miss Roberts, for the twenty minutes following, came here in a cab—after making the phone call you mentioned from a drugstore downtown and asking for help. Johns, the car you followed didn't make any stops did it?"

"No," said the merchant thoughtfully. "It didn't."

"Here's my second point," said Jimmy. He had their attention now. "The operators in this town are apt to listen in on calls from this house if I know human nature. I want to know if anyone from here called McGrew's apartment house around midnight."

It was quickly settled. The call had been made. Jimmy turned on Jackson, who cringed in a corner.

"You made that call, didn't you? You lured McGrew from his apartment to certain death. As soon as you got word he was home, you phoned him, held out some lure. Talk, or be an accessory before the fact of murder."

Jackson turned to milk. He looked piteously at his employer, who gave him a glance of flint, wrung his hands, tried not to see the hard stares of Jimmy and the policemen.

"That's enough for me," said Jimmy. "You boys can get it out of him without wearing out a hose. This was a carefully arranged job."

He told how Watson had hired him earlier that night, showed the money he'd received to be fall guy in a murder case. Then he described his movements of the evening.

"Watson knew Johns and Miss Roberts were getting too insistent. He didn't mind paying McGrew, but he knew the man was weak, was afraid he'd crack. So he followed all of us, called Jackson when McGrew got home, told him to get the man out on the sidewalk—with, I should guess, a promise of money.

"There's your killer, boys, Orlando Watson, the great god whatisit. You can have him." Jimmy lit a cigarette.

"Hey!" said Johns. "I was pretty confused when the killing took place—I was mad, and your wallops hadn't done me any good, Brent—but I got a glimpse of the killer, and I'll swear he didn't wear glasses. And Watson can't see a foot without his. That's a known fact."

"Well," said the millionaire, his tone reeking with irony, "what does that do to your fine theories, Brent?"

"Nothing," snapped the ex-reporter. "When I saw you earlier tonight, your eyes hurt unless you wore your glasses. This time, they only hurt while you're wearing them."

Reaching quickly across the desk, he plucked the spectacles off.

WITH a snarl of rage, Watson reached for his pistol. But Jimmy was ready for him. His hand slashed down and caught the gun first. He aimed straight at Watson's head.

He grinned as he saw the astonishment on the cops' faces.

"Watson's wearing eyeball lenses," he said. "I caught their gleam when he took his specs off a little while ago. And he hasn't had time to take them off since. He figured the night wasn't over, that he might have to do some more killing, and he wanted to keep them as a last out."

"Good work, Brent," said the state trooper. "Well, boys. You know what to do."

The town police, thoroughly bewildered, got busy. Johns, a relieved and grateful man, took Jimmy home with him.

"If you'll take a hand in my affairs, I'd be grateful," he said. "And if you need a job, I still have a little influence in this town."

"Thanks, and okay on both. With Watson in a jam, that slick sister-in-law of yours and I should be able to break your case somehow. By the way, what's her first name? I never did get it."

"You will," said Johns, smiling. "You will."

Next Issue: SHADOW OF THE KILLER, by JOHN H. KNOX



The man held his hands to Marylin's temples

FRONTAL ATTACK

By ARTHUR T. HARRIS

When Lieutenant Forsythe Was Asked to Cheer Up a Fellow Flyer's Girl, He Made John Alden Look Like a Piker—and He Uncovered a Hornet's Nest of Crime!

I SUPPOSE I'd never have met Dr. Marcel if I hadn't been stationed at Camp Forde.

Not that that was my intention, or that Dr. Marcel was stationed on the post. But this is wartime and a lot of funny things happen—particularly to me.

I have a job with a lovely title at Camp Forde, which is up in Massachusetts, near Boston. We train fly-

ing cadets how to fly. Sometimes, when something goes wrong psychologically with one of our recruits, it's my business to take him apart.

That's my job. They call it, officially, "assistant morale officer." Actually I pry into the personal affairs of screwball cadets. I am a sort of male Beatrice Fairfax.

Is Johnny homesick? I write a letter to his folks, on the q. t., telling

them to drop down for a day if they can make the trip. Did Johnny have a fight with his roommate? I bring the boys together and patch up the squabble.

But the worst problem is the girl friend angle. Some cadets get an idea somebody else is beating their time with Sally Mae, back home, and it sends them into a tailspin.

So you can see that after six months of this, with more cadets arriving every day, I'm fed up and somewhat of a problem myself. I asked and received week-end leave, and started to pack for a good old-fashioned binge in the oases of New York.

I glanced at my wrist watch. Noon. Sparing my tires, that would get me into Gotham at least in time for dinner. I gave my suitcase a last inspection, locked it, and in walked this tall, dark-haired kid.

"Cadet Sherman, sir," he reported. "They sent me here from your office. I—er—"

"Omigawd!" I moaned. "Another problem child. No, I'll be darned if I will! Come back Monday morning, Sherman. No, better make it Tuesday. I won't be in any condition to dissect your complexes before then."

"But you don't understand, sir!" he blurted out. "She—she doesn't answer my letters. She doesn't write to me. I think I've lost her and—"

Actual tears came to his eyes.

I said something evil under my breath. I led the kid over to my bunk and sat him down.

"Please," I said, "be brief. Very brief. You say your girl doesn't write. Why? Have a fight?"

"No, not a thing," he insisted. "She wrote me in her last letter that she couldn't bear to be without me—we were to have been married in April. I wrote her that I'd get a short furlough and visit her for a few days, and then—"

This was getting nowhere fast.

"Now look, son," I said. "What's her name and address? I'll drop her a line and see if we can't straighten things out."

He wrote it down on a piece of paper—Marilyn Stone. A suburban residence near Greenwich, Connecticut.

All of which gave me a sudden idea.

"Look here, Sherman," I told him. "I'm driving down to New York in about five minutes. Haven't been there in a couple years, and I don't suppose my old telephone numbers are much good now. Suppose—"

"Gee, that's swell of you!" said the kid. "Sure, you can take her out." His face was one big grin. "Gee, that's swell!" he repeated. "Only—"

"Don't worry, Sherman. My life is complicated enough as it is," I assured him hastily, and got him to carry my luggage to my car.

TWILIGHT etched the old Post Road in somber overtones when I drew up to the Stone mansion after an uneventful drive. Spring winds had come up, and the still-barren trees leaned together in a low, rising cadence. I drove into the estate under lowering clouds and found the old brass knocker.

Presently a little wisp of a woman came to the door. She opened it cautiously, and peered at me with bright, birdlike eyes.

"Miss Stone here?" I said. "I have a message for her from Cadet Sherman."

"But Miss Stone isn't in," the little woman protested. I saw the shadows of alarm on her face. "We—we haven't seen her for ten days. We don't know where she's gone."

I took off my hat and mopped my brow.

"Now, look," I said. "I can swallow just so many problems at one time. Let me see Miss Stone's mother, please. We'll straighten this out right away."

"Oh, but you don't understand! Miss Stone has no family. Her parents were lost at sea on the way home from Europe, after war was declared. My husband Tom and I are the only people she has left. And now we don't know what to do!"

I eased my way into the mansion. "She must have gone somewhere," I said. "Nobody just disappears. I think I'll take a look around, if you don't mind."

I prowled around the place for a bit, and presently found myself upstairs

in the girl's sitting room. I sat down at her writing desk and began fumbling through papers, hoping I'd find a clue.

There was a packet of letters from Camp Forde—Sherman's. Unblushingly I read a few, those with the latest postmarks. And that confirmed my own idea, of course.

This kid Sherman's girl was a bit off center mentally. Not a bad case. But a brooder. I read between the lines of his letters to her, and he kept advising her to keep her shirt on, everything would be all right in the end, and so forth.

I glanced inside a box of stationery, and there was an unfinished letter which the girl had started ten days ago:

Dear Paul,

I must tell you that at last I have found a consultant, who promises to help me through these depressing spells that have come over me lately. Dr. Marcel is a famous European psychologist, and— Oh, there's his chauffeur now. He's sent his own car for me. I'll tell you everything he advises me later this afternoon, after the consultation.

Dr. Marcel. I'd majored in psychology at college, read most of the standard and current European works on the subject, and never had I come across any reference to a specialist with that name.

Downstairs I thumbed through some Connecticut and Westchester phone books. There he was, Dr. Henri Marcel. He had a North avenue address, in New Rochelle.

I told Marilyn's housekeeper to keep calm, piled into my roadster. A half hour later I drew up before Dr. Marcel's establishment.

It was quite a showplace. The estate spread out in the pre-1900 tradition, with an old, gabled house, iron stags on the lawn and a heavy wrought-iron fence that frowned somewhat forbiddingly at the visitor.

The front gate, however, was unlatched. I threw it open and drove up to the huge, rambling house.

Twilight had deepened to night now, and the wind had risen steadily. As it will in communities on the

Sound, the temperature had dropped, and I felt chilled waiting there for somebody to answer my knock.

THE man who came to the door finally didn't help much. Muscles bulged through the jacket of his servant's attire. His eyes, gleaming there on the shadowed threshold, struck me with unwavering intensity.

"I'm Lieutenant Forsythe, United States Army," I said. "I should like to see Dr. Marcel."

"Certainly," said the man. His voice had an oddly foreign accent. "Please come in."

He closed the door behind me and regarded me with those ice-cold eyes.

"Dr. Marcel is attending to a patient. I will show you to the waiting room."

I followed at the fellow's heels on a thick Chinese rug. The house was ornately furnished, and the faintest trace of some highly subtle perfume seemed to permeate the air. Or perhaps it was Oriental incense.

I never made up my mind about that, because my ears caught the echo of a high-pitched, semi-hysterical voice.

"No, I wish no further treatments . . . Let me go, please let me go! But you are wrong, I feel perfectly all right—I should never have come here! I—oh-h-h!"

"What's that?" I demanded, as Dr. Marcel's servant swung around to face me. I saw his fists were already clenched.

"Why—nothing at all," he assured me coldly. "We have a few mental patients here, you see. This is a private sanitarium. Sometimes they get violent and—"

He shrugged, and I had to let it go at that.

But not for long. The fellow left to attend to his duties, and after fifteen minutes I began to fidget. I got up, smoked a cigarette, then moved toward the hall, trying to crystallize certain suspicions which still refused to come out and be pinned down.

I heard no more cries, but as I came to a door far down the hallway, the faint whir of an electrical instrument vibrated in my ears. Glancing about

and seeing the coast was clear, I bent down and fastened my eye to the keyhole. There was a key in it from the inside.

Cursing, I straightened and looked for a crack. I found one, plastered myself against the door and stared. That look will last me for the next fifty years—and then some.

Marilyn stood facing the door, behind tables choked with chemical and electrical apparatus. I knew it was she from her picture I'd seen on her dresser. Except that now Marilyn was swathed in strips of white bandage.

Her white flesh showed through the bindings, and I think I must have blushed. Certainly the girl never consented to these mummy-like wrappings of her own free will.

BUT even stranger was the tall, satanic man who stood behind her. In a white surgeon's gown, his turned-up mustache and heavy, pointed beard made the fellow even more saturnine. Distended, almost fanatical eyes gleamed from under bushy black brows, as the man held his hands to the girl's temples.

A peculiar yellow aura rose from behind the mountain of apparatus to surround Marilyn in an unholy shroud. The girl herself stood rigid, staring with fixed eyes before her. Their focus was directed at a radio-like panel on the table.

Dr. Marcel's assistant stared up at the girl, his hands manipulating the dials. Over toward the left, behind some bottles of chemicals, was a grinning skull, smirking behind its glass casing.

"Repeat after me," Dr. Marcel intoned. "I, Marilyn Stone, being distressed by worldly cares, do hereby signify my intention of appointing Dr. Marcel as my financial consultant.

"I will confer upon him power of attorney to manage my estate. To this end, I will sign the necessary papers."

I stared at the pale, distraught, hypnotized girl and shuddered. Then I rose on my feet, ready to race down the hall and outside to my car, where I had a gun.

My intentions were too late. Some-

thing hard cracked mercilessly, stunningly against my skull, and I slipped into a whirlpool of dazzling lights.

A million needles stabbing at my brain brought me awake. I retched, sick at my stomach, found presently that I was still in one piece.

I lay on a bed in a dark room. I moved my hands, my legs. I wasn't tied up, at least. But it didn't take me long to discover that the window had bars, and the oaken door would have defied an assault platoon.

Footsteps crunched soddily on the carpet outside. Someone inserted a key in the lock. My fists clenched, and I began, to think, harder and quicker than I'd ever thought it necessary.

I crept back to the bed, throwing my burnt-out match away. I lay down, sprawled myself loosely on the bedspread, made my eyes wide and staring and opened my mouth.

The door opened, and a flashlight probed suspiciously.

"*Sacre bleu!*" Dr. Marcel's bruiser servant swore hoarsely. "I have killed him. Marcel will have my ears for this. He wished to question him."

Mumbling angrily, he moved toward the bed. He shone the flashlight in my face, bent down to roll my eyelid back. I held myself absolutely rigid, not breathing.

He stepped back, puzzled. My eyes were staring straight at the ceiling, but I sensed his reactions. He bent down again, his own mouth gaping open, unwilling to believe he had done me in.

THEN I struck. I didn't hit him, because there wasn't enough room or leverage. I rolled myself into a ball and struck with my feet, hard into the pit of his stomach.

He let out a *whoosh* and slammed back against the wall, holding his belly. I gave him no chance to collect his wits. There was a heavy flower vase on a nightstand, and I used it for everything it was worth. I picked it up, jumped up and down on the bed for the spring, launched myself hard at the cold-eyed bruiser.

The vase broke against his skull, and so did his scalp. It split open

and blood cascaded from a deep gash as the man gave a strangled grunt and collapsed slowly to the floor.

Sweating for fear someone had heard the racket, I searched the bloody hulk and found the sap he'd smacked me with. I also found a Luger.

I crept out into the hall and down the stairs. At the last step, nausea again overtook me, and I had to double over until my stomach stopped heaving.

I got to my feet finally, feeling sick and sweaty, and reeled rather than walked to the door of Dr. Marcel's laboratory.

Again I heard his suave, insistent voice, but there was a harsh ring in it.

"You are no longer Marilyn Stone. You have come to me voluntarily, of your own free will. I am rendering you into the mental cast of our cult. In your past life, you were unquestionably an Egyptian princess. I seek only a splendid reincarnation for you, so that you may walk forever in peace.

"Repeat after me now what I have already advised. I, Marilyn Stone for this last act in my temporal destiny, do hereby—"

I shot the lock off and slammed the door open.

"Dr. Marcel, I presume?" I mocked. "Put your hands up, Brother Rat. And you too, Gaston. Say! Don't the two of you look like a couple Vichy french politicians, though!"

Dr. Marcel's bulging eyes almost popped from his head.

"Who are you?" he screamed, as his assistant twisted around, a malignant gleam in his close-set eyes.

"I'm Heinrich Himler!" I snapped. "You're a French refugee. I'm sticking you in a concentration camp. *Al-lons!*"

He didn't appreciate my Yank humor. But he did appreciate the spot he'd got himself into. He grabbed for a heavy bottle and threw it at me.

I ducked and the stuff splattered against the wall. It drenched the wall-paper, and little flakes began to peel off.

"Aha!" I said. "Acid. Playing rough, are we?"

I was mad all the way through. I

lunged for Dr. Marcel's assistant and knocked the surgical shears he'd snatched up from his hands. I clutched him about the waist and lifted.

"Get out of the way, Marilyn!" I yelled. "We're coming through!"

THE girl had been staring steadily before her while the fracas was going on. A glimmering of intelligence came into her eyes now. Mechanically she stepped back out of the way.

Dr. Marcel was reaching for another acid bomb, but I gave him no second chance. I weigh one seventy-five, and it's all muscle. I picked up his assistant by the collar and the seat of the pants, and I heaved.

The assistant didn't quite make it. He came down a foot from Dr. Marcel and his head went *pop!* against one of the tables. I circled round the tables. I'd thrown the gun into a corner, too sore to want to use it. This Dr. Marcel was no coward. He maneuvered into position and then lunged.

We met halfway across a table. And I think I was a bit quicker. He rocked back on his heels from a right jab to the jaw, and then I was on him. It was over all too soon to please me.

I got to my feet, my knuckles split open and my face cut at the mouth. My lips were puffed and I was reeling a bit, but it was a grand feeling, staring down at Dr. Marcel. He looked like the first and second battles of the Marne.

"Oh, you poor man!" came a feminine cry.

I turned slowly, and Marilyn was running toward me. The mummylike wrappings still revealed too much, and I had the decency to blush again.

"Oh, you poor fellow!" Marilyn repeated, on the beam once more. She saw my officer's uniform. "Oh, I just knew Paul would send someone to find me. I just knew it!"

So you figure out how a woman's mind works.

At that, the week-end was not a total loss. Not when I'd got Dr. Marcel and his two stooges locked up in the

(Concluded on page 113)

BEWITCHMENT*

By SEABURY QUINN

*Tandy Rode Forth to War in '61—and Then He
Returned to a World That Had No Right to Exist!*

BEHIND them gleamed the Rappahannock, sliding lazily upon its way toward the Chesapeake. Beneath, the road was fetlock-deep in dust, white as the half-healed scar of a sword cut. Yellow clay showed through the threadbare grass of unkempt fields each side of them. Far to the west, the blue hills shouldered up to meet the sky. The sun was going down behind them. Around their bases lapped pools of purple shadow, creeping up the freshly verdured slopes like waves of slowly rising tide.

They were exhausted. The whole night through they'd ridden in their futile quest, looking for one man whose left leg had been broken, another with no marks to distinguish him. Farmers had been roused, whole villages turned out for questioning, with no results. Then that morning Colonel Conger caught the scent. The ferryman at Port Conway had taken two such men

across the river to Port Royal. They were on their way to Bowling Green, he guessed, for with them had been

Captain Willie Jett of Mosby's command. Willie had a girl at Bowling Green.

"He can't escape us now!" the colonel bellowed. "We're on his trail at last. Forward—trot—gallop!"

But there was not a gallop left in the tired horses. Like their riders, they were drugged with hunger and fatigue. The cruelest spurring did no more than lift them from a stumbling walk to shambling trot.

"Blast Booth!" the troopers muttered sullenly. "Blast John Wilkes Booth and Colonel Conger, too. Let someone else get the reward for taking him. All we want's a

AGED MAN OF MYSTERY BURIED AS "JOHN DOE"

* The aged man found dead on Washington Ave. between Gates Ave. and Fulton St. last Tuesday was buried in Cypress Hills today, the Sons of Union Veterans, Ladies of the Loyal Legion and survivors of the G.A.R. cooperating to provide burial.

Extended search had failed to provide a clue to his identity. From the fact that he was wearing a Union uniform, it was assumed he was a veteran of the Civil War who had been seeking some of his old comrades at Grant Post, G.A.R., which used to occupy the building at 487 Washington Ave., and dropped dead from exhaustion and heat almost at the gateway of the house he sought.

The Civil War uniform he wore was nearly new, but military men who inspected it at King's County morgue declared it showed some signs of saddle-wear. The insignia on blouse and cap showed it to have been issued to the 16th New York Volunteer Cavalry. Thorough search of the roster of that organization failed to help identify the shriveled old man.

However, in view of his advanced age and the fact that the uniform, though much too large for him, had evidently been fitted to him at one time, the patriotic organizations provided him with decent burial. His tombstone will be inscribed:

"John Doe, a Soldier of the Union Army Who Died Unknown and Unattended, Far From His Kindred and Loved Ones."

—Brooklyn (N. Y.) *Daily Falcon*, July 11, 1942.

chance to sleep."

They swung dispiritedly around a bend in the highway. Lights blinked at them from the half-shuttered windows of a wayside tavern with a sort of mild, inquiring surprise. About

A Strange Story of Unearthly Mystery



As he stumbled, he recalled Irena's parting words

the whitewashed walls of the inn, lilac bushes drooped their unformed cones. Faint but perceptible, their scent came through the gathering April dusk.

"Halt!" The colonel raised his arm. "We'll have a look around in there."

"Co'nel Conger, suh." The prisoner, Rollins, taken from his ferry and compelled to act as guide, spoke softly. "You all won't be findin' yo' man there. That's the Halfway House. There's lickar there and girls, but nary a sick man, Ah'll be bound. They got no use fo' wounded men."

"Hold your tongue!" snapped Colonel Conger. "Lieutenant Doherty, surround the house." He added in a whisper: "Don't let the men dismount. We'd have the devil's time remounting 'em, if once we let 'em put those saddle-pounded legs down."

Doherty turned to the reeling troop-

ers, barking orders in a hard, high voice. Tired, were they? Wasn't he as tired as they? Did they think he enjoyed taking orders from these staff men? Who the blazes did Conger think he was?

"Corporal Tandy, take your squad out to the rear of the clearing and deploy. Don't let anyone get past you, man or woman. If you have to shoot—" He paused significantly. There was no reason to complete the order. "One thing more. There's a summary court-martial waiting for the man who dares dismount for any reason. Understand?"

Van Doren Tandy brought his hand up to the visor of his fatigue cap.

"Yes, sir." He drove spurs in the raw sides of his bay gelding. "Come up, Toby!"

The rattle of equipment was hardly

audible as he and his squad wheeled left out of line.

Sunlight had vanished and blue-purple dusk trod on the heels of day. The shadows that had overwhelmed the hilltops washed down again across the flat lands in long waves of transparent blue mist. In the western sky a star came out and twinkled knowingly. The breeze sighed in the lilac bushes. A drowsy bird stirred in its nest and scolded with low musical chirrups. The chill that follows when the sun drops past the horizon struck into his fatigueracked muscles. Hunger gnawed at his stomach like a maggot.

Why the devil was he there? Why wasn't he back home in Brooklyn? He'd been sixteen when he joined the Army, answering the President's call for volunteers in '61. Three years he marched and drilled and counter-marched, resting when he could and fighting when he must. At nineteen he had been a veteran. He had fought through Bull Run, Fair Oaks, Mechanicsville. When his period of enlistment expired, like a fool he'd reenlisted in the cavalry, thinking he'd escape the grueling work of marching.

Despite the order to keep silent, he laughed aloud. The joke was on him. If he had been an infantryman, he could lie down in the new, soft grass for a moment. He eased a cramped foot from the stirrup. His legs were dead from the hips down. He looked up at the single star that showed like a bright lamp in a window—like the gas lights shining over Fulton Street, or a steamboat's lights on Gravesend Bay. Why had he reenlisted?

"Soldier!" From the little clump of lilac bushes almost under Toby's forefeet came the whispered hail, in a voice as small and still as the night breeze. "Soldier!"

"Who goes there?" he challenged sharply, drowsy senses suddenly alert.

The lilac bushes parted with the tiniest suggestion of a rustle. A snake or prowling cat would hardly make less noise, he thought. He looked down into a pair of glowing eyes that were set in a small, pale face, framed in a cloud of midnight hair.

"Who goes there?" he repeated, hand on the stock of his revolver.

The bushes parted farther and a girl stood almost at his saddle-bow, lips slightly parted, her eyes upturned to his. They were unusual eyes, great and dark as a gazelle's, sensuous and humble at the same time. Yet there was something impish, something wise, something absolutely thrilling in their velvet depths.

"Who are you?" he demanded. "You'll have to go back—"

His voice stopped suddenly, for she was looking up at him and smiling. The shadowed eyes in the pale face seemed to be probing right into the inmost secrets of his soul, reading his weariness, his homesickness.

"I'm only poor Irena," she replied, "and I want to go home to my mountains."

"Want to go home, eh? So do I, but I can't. Neither can you. Colonel Conger'll want to question you."

He felt a light, soft weight upon his left foot. She had put one hand upon the pommel, raised herself and set her little foot on his. Now, nearly level with him, she laid her free hand on his lips.

"Hush, soldier!" she whispered.

HER voice was throaty, soft, almost caressing. Her long, dark eyes beneath their fringe of curling lashes seemed suddenly drowsy. Insensibly he felt languor stealing over him. It was not the utter numbness of fatigue, but a gentle, soothing lassitude. He shook his head to clear his eyes. For a second it seemed that his vision had failed.

"Get down," he ordered sharply. "I'll have to turn you in. The—colonel's—orders—"

His voice blurred out, ended in a sleepy whisper. She had mounted, seating herself before him, as if on a side-saddle. One arm she flung across his shoulder. He felt the supple play of muscles, firm and hard as though they were a youth's. Her hair brushed lightly on his cheek. Her breath was on his face and in it was the spicy, bracing tang of mint.

"Take me away, soldier—brave sol-

dier-boy!" she begged in a voice as softly soothing as a lullaby. "Take Irena back to her mountain." A purring undertone, sardonically provocative, cynically seductive, ran through her voice and joined her syllables as though they were the notes of a ballad. She almost sang while her arm tightened round him and she laid her head against his shoulder. "Take poor Irena home and come with her, brave soldier-boy!"

The clouds were veiling the stars in the light of coming day. The glow that heralds dawn was brightening in the eastern sky when he regained full consciousness. He must have traveled twenty miles and more while in the lethargy, for they were in the mountains now. He could see the ocean of pale mist that filled the valleys like a cup. Up before them were the higher ridges, crouching on the rim of morning. The torn shreds of their everlasting haze hovered around them, like the flying locks of white-haired beggars who sat by the roadside, crying "give—give!" with mute insistence which there was no satisfying.

He reined his mount in with a chill of consternation. What had come over him? How had he dared to leave his post? They'd shoot him as a deserter! The girl before him on the saddle gave a little trembling sign and clasped her arm more tightly round his neck.

"Ride on, brave soldier-boy," she murmured sleepily. "It's just a little farther to home."

He shook himself free of her embrace.

"Ride on?" he echoed. "We're going back. They'll think I deserted!"

"And so you did," she replied quietly. "You were told to watch the house and not let anybody pass, but you rode off with Irena. If you go back, they'll surely shoot you. There is no way but forward, soldier-boy."

He had no answer. What she said was true, but what was he to do? Where could he go? She read his thoughts, as if he'd put them into words.

"Yonder in the mountains is Irena's place, brave soldier-boy. Flowers

bloom around her door. Birds sing and bees hum all day long. There is neither storm nor frost, war nor winter there, just peace and happiness and quiet. Will you come there, soldier-boy? Will you sit before the door and watch the blossoms drifting from the trees like sweet, warm snow in which there is no chill? Don't you want to see the green fruit blush to redness in the kisses of the sun? We can gather in the ruddy apples and the purple grapes and drink the sweet, cool wine and cider that we press from them."

There was an indefinable quality to her voice, a slurred and languorous undercurrent that seemed to lull his senses into helplessness. Her little hand was on his face. The fingers, soft as falling rose-leaves, fluttered in a soft caress against his cheek. Her touch removed all resistance.

"Which way?" he asked in a dull, choking voice. "Tell me the way to go, Irena."

A low laugh rippled from her lips.

"Wise soldier-boy! You shall find happiness with Irena. No wars shall trouble you, no labor tire you. Never shall you want for food, or rest, or comfort, or"—her red lips brushed against his mouth as lightly as a butterfly upon a flower—"love!"

IT might have been noon when they reached the clearing in the woods along the mountainside. The house was wooden and unpainted, but weathered to a lovely silver-gray. A walk of turf-ringed flagstones led up to the door, where gnarled old apple trees were decked in shawls of lacy blossoms. Grapevines clambered over rustic arbors. A rosebush sprawled across a trellis.

In a patch of brilliant sunlight basked a herb-garden, with sage and thyme, marjoram and mint, rue and tansy shaking out their first leaves. Beside the house, a little brooklet widened to a pool in which the tender green of water-lily pads showed hesitantly. Then it clattered off again across moss-grown stones to find the smoothly flowing Rappahannock.

"Home!" his saddlemate cried with

a gurgling laugh. "We're home at last, brave soldier-boy. Welcome to Irena's house!"

She slipped down to the green grass and ran across it to the pool, above which she bent, as above a mirror. It was the first real chance he had to see her. Darkness had enveloped her at their meeting and her very nearness had obscured his vision as she rode before him on the horse.

She made a charming picture, leaning above the pool. The clustering black hair, shoulder-long and unbound, framed a face of piquant loveliness. It was ivory-toned and without color, save for the red, ripe lips, behind which gleamed small teeth as white as milk. Her costume consisted of a white chemise that hung to the waist and a short, full petticoat of scarlet cloth that reached halfway to her ankles. Her arms were bare from the shoulder, her legs and feet unclad.

He thought that never in his life had he beheld such lovely, slender hands, or feet so narrow, with such high-arched insteps. Pretty girls he had seen in abundance, for Brooklyn had been famous for its pretty girls since Peter Minuit ruled Nieuw Amsterdam. This girl was not merely pretty. If she had been placed among a hundred pretty women, she would have been as noticeable as a portrait by da Vinci in a room filled with calendar-chromos.

She cupped water in her hand and drank avidly, then dashed another handful on her face and hair. The water gleamed against her sable tresses, like dewdrops caught in a cobweb, as she rose to her feet and walked toward him. She moved with a peculiar lightness, as if an unfelt zephyr wafted her along. Everything about her was desirable. She was utterly exquisite in each line and feature. Her loveliness was ethereal and unearthly.

He felt a sudden blind, unreasoning fear as she came toward him, her tiny white feet hardly seeming to press down the new, fresh grass. Somewhere in his brain a memory stirred, a recollection of the stories old Annette, his mother's Breton servant

girl, had told him in the firelit kitchen long ago. Stories of the *loup-garou*, the man-wolf coursing through the darkling forest, of the dead denied the boon of burial, who go scrabbling through the graveyard from sunset to cockcrow, seeking peace, and of the *femme fatale*, the vampire, the ruin of men's souls and bodies.

She stood beside him, poised on tip-toe, head thrown back and dark eyes glowing in a smile.

"Dismount, brave soldier-boy," she commanded. "For you and your horse there shall be no more battles, no more war."

Her arms received him as he slipped from saddle. They twined about him like the ivy-vine that clasps the oak in an unbreakable embrace. She drew him to her with resistless urgency. One slender hand came up behind his head and bent it forward till his mouth was against hers. She kissed him hungrily, avidly, ravenously.

He tried to push her away from himself, struggled to break from the twining arms that held him tight against her. His very heart and blood were leagued against him. Flame raced through his veins and crashed against his brain.

She pushed him from her, as one might discard a cup. A smile lay deep in her great eyes, wise and secretly amused.

"Now you are mine for always and for always," she told him.

There was no boastfulness in the words, merely a statement of fact.

LIFE was idyllic in the clearing on the mountainside. The drifting days flowed slowly by, with moon-washed, star-jeweled nights between. Time was suspended. They ate no meat. From the cellar underneath the cabin, she brought apples, pears and peaches and heavy clusters of rich, purple grapes. These and the sweet, heady wine which she poured gurgling from a stone jug, and sups of water from the lily-pond, were all their sustenance.

Turned out to graze, old Toby grew as fat and barrel-sided as a farmer's plow-horse. No one would have

thought that once he had been a lean and hard-mouthed cavalry mount.

There were no books or papers in the cabin. Its single room had but two articles of furniture—a rough bedstead with a woven leather mattress and a man's-height chest of drawers, upon which gleamed a multi-colored scarf of silk that spilled breath-taking hues into the half-gloom of the room.

They were never at a loss for entertainment. She had an instrument resembling a guitar, but with four strings instead of six. From it she would call strange music, till the cabin echoed to its chords. Or she would sing for him, old songs the like of which he'd never heard, some in softly lilting foreign tongues, some in a sort of stilted, precise English which betrayed translation from an older language.

Unhappy lover!

By the side of thy beloved

Thou tallied not the hurrying days.

They fled too quickly for thy computation.

Strange tunes they were, with secret rhythms moving subtly underneath their melodies. Insistence and abandon fluttered like a black moth in the lingering echoes of their haunting cadences.

The world was full of new experiences. He would be lying on the sun-warmed grass, watching the always changing forms of slowly drifting clouds. He would hear her call, run to her to find she wished to show him a humming bird nuzzling in the cones of hollyhocks or trumpet-runner. Perhaps a heavy-laden bumble-bee droned and scolded as a blossom turned beneath its weight. Presently they would go hand in hand down to the lily-pond to bathe in its cool, flower-studded depths. Shouting with childishly gay laughter, they splashed the cold, clear water on each other.

Sometimes she told him stories of the olden days, relating happenings of the siege and sack of Haarlem, or of Wallenstein's campaign against the Hanseatic towns as factually as if she had been present. When she talked so, he was uneasy. She troubled him.

Once, as a lad, he'd gone with his

father to an art gallery and had felt the same sense of mysterious awe. Some of the pictures were five hundred years old, they told him. He had marveled at the freshness of the lovely painted ladies, who looked down serenely from their gilded frames. All who lived when they had been created had moldered into dust long centuries before. They were not old, they were not young, but ageless.

So, it seemed to him at such times, was Irena. Had she told him frankly that she had been old when Caesar led his legions into Gaul, he would not have been surprised. Had she sworn she had not yet beheld her eighteenth summer, he would not have doubted her. When he asked her of her birth and parentage, she laughed softly, shook her head and kissed him.

"Ah, my beloved." She would take his cheeks between her palms and draw his face to hers. "What are time and place, that we two should take account of them? Age and youth, what are they but fools' names for that which cannot be named? The man who died but yesternight is dead as he who died a century ago. The infant to be born today at sunset knows no more of the world than the babe who will not see the light for a thousand years. Days come not back, nor can you hoard them as a miser lays up gold. You have to spend them as they come. Let us be about their spending!"

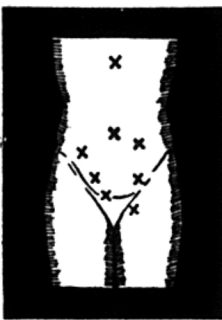
Then her mouth was on his. Her arms gleamed whiter than the moonlight lying on the lily-pond as they crept about his neck and drew him downward to the sweetness of her lips. And in her embrace he forgot all thought of questioning.

SPRING advanced to summer. Blossoms fluttered from the trees. Apples, pears and peaches changed their green for deeper tones of rich maturity. Grapes hung purpling in the sun.

They gathered in the fruits, pressed cider from the apples and red wine from the grapes, stored the surplus harvest in the cool dark cellar. Then through the blue haze of the moun-

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tains blazed the reds and golds of autumn leaves. But winter did not come. The leaves fell wavering from the trees and spread a carpet, bright as any from the looms of Hamadan beneath their feet. A chill crept in the waters of the brook. The lily-pond became too cool to play in, though they still could bathe in it.

Once or twice they saw great wracks of leaden storm-clouds sweep across the sky. But there was neither frost, nor snow, nor real chill in the air. Presently the blossoms laid a lacy scarf across the bare limbs of the trees. The phlox and hollyhock and larkspur bloomed about the house. The grass grew bright and tender with soft yellow-green, and spring was once more with them.

Despite the tranquil quiet of the lazy, time-suspended days, he had a sense of vague unease. It was not natural for the year to have but three seasons. Providence ordained that winter follow autumn. The paradisaic aloofness of their lonely Eden palled on him. He was hungry for the sound of pavements echoing to the pound of hurrying feet, for the shoulder-brushing press of city streets.

What was happening in Brooklyn? They'd been singing von Weber's "*Der Freischutz*" at the Academy during his last furlough, and playing "Peter Piper, the Man About Town," at Hooley's Opera House. The memory of gas lamps flaring along Fulton Street drew him as a candle lures a moth. With that subtlety that sometimes pleased, but oftener frightened him, Irena read his thoughts.

"You are unhappy, little soldier-boy of mine?" she asked gently. "Something troubles you, O heart of my heart's heart?"

He was embarrassed. How could he say that he was wearying of Eden, drunk past satiation with the lotus-flavored wine of indolence and love?

"If I could see my old home for a little while," he murmured tentatively. "Just for a day or two. . . ."

There was a new expression in her great, dark eyes as they came slowly up to his, beneath their fringe of silken lashes. It was not pain, exactly, but not far from it.

"You will come back?" she asked in that rich, throaty voice, which had

a trick of stopping suddenly, as if the emotion within her sought to break through.

"Come back?" The reply trembled breathlessly upon his lips. "My dear, where could I go in all the world but back to you? Where else could I find happiness and peace like ours?"

She smiled at him, the dimples deepening in her cheeks. It was as if a candle had been lit behind the somber velvet of her eyes. Her little teeth were white behind the ripe red of her lips.

"You will swear it?"

A BOYISH grin flashed across his face.

"Cross my heart and hope to die!" he answered, tracing an X on his chest with his right hand. "Satisfied?"

"Of course"—she drew the syllables out slowly, with a sort of purring hesitancy—"an oath may be said lightly, but it still has power."

She plucked a blossom from the rosebush growing by the door. It was bridal white and glowing with the morning dew.

"Like a funeral flower," he thought with vague discomfort.

"Put this in your bosom, beloved, and keep it next your heart till you return to me," she whispered. Her gleaming lower lip began to tremble as she turned away. "Go—go quickly, soldier-boy, before I change my mind and keep you with me always."

"Which way?" he asked. "I didn't notice how we came here."

There was an undercurrent of bitterness in her voice as she replied, eyes still averted,

"Walk any way you choose, beloved. All roads lead from Irena and all lead back to her. Follow where your footsteps lead and you will come at last to your goal. When you would come back to me again, turn and walk where your heart inclines. I shall be waiting through the long— Oh!"

Her sentence broke upon a sobbing cry.

"Go quickly, soldier-boy, before I say that which would root you to the soil as movelessly as these!" She gestured toward the trees that grew on each side of the flagstone walk, then at the flowers nodding on their stems.

[Turn page]

To People who want to write but can't get started

Do you have that constant urge to write but the fear that a beginner hasn't a chance? Then listen to what the editor of Liberty said on this subject:

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"Go! go!" Her voice thinned with intensity, until it seemed to be a file biting into hard metal. "Quickly, quickly! Make haste, beloved of my heart!"

He turned as he reached the trail's bend. Her eyes were on him hungrily, shining with unshed tears, soft with renunciation. Then the wall of breeze-stirred mountain laurel shut her from his sight.

A mist seemed to be marching from the woods to meet him. It shrouded tree and bush and clinging vine, till all outlines were vague and indistinct. Yet through the yellowish, steaming fog he caught blurred, shadowy tableaux. Giant buildings, dwarfing all imagination, seemed to shoot up from the earth. Overhead droned monster, birdlike shapes. He saw, or rather sensed, the rush of charging men, had an impression that great metal monsters crawled across shell-smitten fields.

Fiery tentacles of living flame lashed out and withered all within their reach. Clouds of poisoned vapor swirled against long ranks of marching soldiers, killing them as insects die before the farmer's poisoned spray. Terror gnawed at his brain like a famished dog. It touched the very soul of him like a cold blade. His breath made rushing noises in his throat. He felt as if he walked through an inferno.

"These are not men, but devils!" he whispered through chattering teeth. "This is not war, but Hades!"

Then the fog lifted suddenly, without warning, as if the rising sun had driven it away. He stood on the pavement of a city street.

HE did not recognize his surroundings. The buildings on each side of him reached up until it seemed they scraped the sky. Down the center of the roadway came a metal monster, painted vivid red and moving faster than a horse could gallop. Yet how it moved he could not tell, for there was neither horse nor engine to pull it. A roar like distant cannon split the air. Overhead there streaked a long black train, engineless, yet rushing with a greater speed than any locomotive he had ever seen.

The people passing in the street

seemed oddly alien. The women's faces glowed with paint. Their lips were red as fresh-spilled blood. Their eyes were hard, intent and knowing. Their high heels clicked and clattered on the paving stones with an insistent, driven clamor. Most of them wore their dresses to their knees, yet there was nothing wanton in their looks or manner. Some of them gave him curious, half-amused glances, but no one stopped to speak or turned to stare as he walked slowly on.

He looked up at a street sign. Myrtle Avenue. Could this be Brooklyn? Wondering, flinching from the thunderous noise, he walked a little farther. Navy Street. A high brick wall loomed in his path. Beyond its gate he saw men in strange uniforms.

The sudden blare of martial music struck him like a blow. Its tempo raced his pulses like a draught of heady wine. Here at last was something familiar!

Glory, glory hallelujah,
Glory, glory hallelujah,
Glory, glory hallelujah,
As we go marching on!

The marching men were strange to him. Their uniforms were tannish-brown. Their hats were like the hats of Western scouts. Their rifles, slanting precisely, were tipped with flashing bayonets. But the flag—the flag was still the same Old Glory! His right hand came up in salute as it went rippling past.

"What outfit's that, son?" he asked a barefoot urchin lounging at the curb.

"Who ya tryin' to kid?" the gamin demanded. "Think I don't know the 'Nited States Marines?"

The heat was dreadful, oppressive. His uniform was sodden. His heavy boots were weighing down his feet as he tramped wonderingly from one street to another. Gone were the little houses, gone the long, smooth, open meadows. Side by side, like soldiers in close-order drill, the massive buildings lined the streets on either side. Though the street names struck his eye familiarly, he could not place a single landmark. The very names he knew seemed to mock him. Lafayette Avenue, Cumberland Street, Vanderbilt, Clinton. . . .

[Turn page]

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Here was a street with arching trees that threw long, grateful shadows over red-brick sidewalks. He halted, resting for a moment in the shade. Behind him was Gates Avenue. The sign ahead said Fulton Street.

"This is not my Brooklyn, not my home!" he sobbed. "It's changed, bewitched!"

Now he knew that she'd put a spell on it and him. He'd always felt she had unearthly powers. She'd laid this witchcraft on him so he'd hurry back to her. If only he could break the charm. . . .

The rose! In that her power lay, as long as he was wearing it.

He thrust his hand into his blouse, tore the flower from beneath his shirt. He crushed its petals between vengeful fingers, tossed it in the street.

FAR, far away a voice seemed to sing in a throaty pizzicato. It seemed to reach him through thick mist and the slow, solemn tolling of funeral bells. The song it sang was fraught with yearning sadness and a passionate longing.

Unhappy lover!

By the side of thy beloved

Thou tallied not the hurrying days.

They fled too quickly for thy computation. . . .

A pain past all endurance racked him. He felt as if all strength and power and life were oozing through his pores, as if a giant claw of white-hot iron crumpled him to a dry skeleton.

He staggered, stumbled, fell dying on the red-brick walk. An aged, shriveled man, so worn, so withered, no one could have recognized in him the eager, flush-cheeked lad who marched away to war in answer to the President's call for volunteers in 1861.

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MYSTERY-SCOPES

(Continued from page 11)

upper part of which was glass, she could vaguely see the reflection of a man. But just as she was about to open the door to ask him his business, she looked through the glass.

Instantly horror vibrated through her from head to foot. It was not a man on the other side of the door at all. It was a giant spider, with gleaming black eyes that stuck out from its head—his mouth was a fiendish slit on a monster face. Claws seemed to stretch out from all parts of its body.

Instinctively she backed away from the door—rushed upstairs, screaming. And by the time she had gathered her wits and looked out the upper window, the man or spider was gone.

Why that man should suddenly take on the appearance of a gigantic spider, she couldn't understand—but she resolved not to leave the house for three days; for she had recalled the family tradition and the symbol of danger.

The next day, the newspaper carried a revelation. A woman, residing only three blocks away, had been attacked and strangled by a peddler. The time of the crime was only a few minutes after Mrs. Laconiger had had her fright.

She was sure the killer had been the same one who had rung her bell, although she knew she could never identify him even if the police found him. All she had seen was a vague form of a man who had turned into a spider as she approached him. The spider symbol had saved her life. There was no question about it.

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But the morning of the wedding day, her lover was killed by a horse. The grief-stricken girl had wept beneath "the tree of her heart." No one could get her away from that tree for several days.

Years passed. The girl never married. She moved to another town to live with her sister, but once in a while would manage to visit the old garden and sit beneath her tree for hours. Everybody understood.

A few years ago, the spinster was ill for a long period, and when she was able to visit her tree again, she found to her sorrow that it had been cut down. Someone said that it had been sawed into lumber. She tried to find just any piece of the tree,

[Turn page]

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but there was no trace of it. The last remaining symbol of her love had gone. There were only memories now.

Months passed. She would dream of her tree and the heart containing the initials of two eternal lovers.

Then a strange thing happened. A niece of the spinster visited her unexpectedly and offered to take the old lady for a long drive in the country. Instantly the spinster asked to be driven to her lover's grave more than a hundred miles away. For years she had wanted to go there.

As she entered the cemetery and walked to the grave, she noticed a grave-digger in the next plot. He was standing on a slab of wood evidently to keep his feet out of the mud. The spinster gasped as she looked at the rough slab, for on it was the heart design containing her initials and those of her lover.

She asked the grave-digger to hand it to her. "Where did you get this?" she demanded.

He looked at her, bewildered, then replied: "Why—I didn't know it was valuable. It was lying on this grave here (pointing to the grave of her lover). I thought somebody had used it to stand on. No one ever visits that grave."

Thus, that priceless slab now hangs above the doorway of the spinster's house.

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7-42

It is her sacred shrine. She believes her lover's spirit brought it to his grave so she would find it—just like the story of eternal lovers in "Smiling Through."

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Dear Chakra: What is meant by the term "psychic amnesia?"

Joseph Dunn.

Dear Mr. Dunn: This is the basis for belief in reincarnation. The reason we do not remember our previous lives, is because our conscious mind is born with psychic amnesia, blotting out direct memories but not the subconscious characteristics of the ego. There are a few cases on record where persons have remembered certain things and places of previous life.

Dear Chakra: I heard that there was a Victory Tree which when struck by lightning recently, showed a perfect V with the three dots and a dash. Where is that tree?

George Wisner.

Dear Mr. Wisner: It is located in Houston, Texas.

Dear Chakra: I heard that dogs in a town often howl in unison when some person who has been friendly to dogs, dies. Are there any actual cases of this?

Burke Matson.

Dear Mr. Matson: Many people in Pompton Lakes, New Jersey, reported being kept awake by the howling of dogs one night recently. It was the night before the death of Albert Payson Terhune, the famous author of dog stories.

Dear Chakra: Is there such a thing as a ghost painting—that is, a picture not done by the hands of man but accepted as a work of art?

Gloria Rickson.

Dear Miss Rickson: Yes. In Lily Dale, New York, there is a painting of Abraham Lincoln which has no brush marks. It was done at a seance when paintings were placed before a blank canvas. In a few minutes, the painting was completed but no scientist can explain how it was done.

CHAKRA.

FRONTAL ATTACK

(Concluded from page 99)

New Rochelle cooler. Not when I asked the local cops to contact the FBI, and check on the man's passport for possible forgery. He was a thoroughly evil lot, had been after the girl's wealth from the first.

Not when Marilyn Stone sat by my side, finally, in a Greenwich Village nightclub, finding my lips on the other side of the bandage, as a dance band saluted midnight with a raucous serenade.

"This is strictly for Paul," I murmured uncertainly.

"Oh, but of course!" she said. "But I just have to show my appreciation." She did a very convincing job.

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Coal Mining | <input type="checkbox"/> Machinist | <input type="checkbox"/> R. R. Section Foreman | <input type="checkbox"/> Toolmaking <input type="checkbox"/> Welding |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Concrete Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Management of Inventions | <input type="checkbox"/> R. R. Signaller <input type="checkbox"/> Refrigeration | <input type="checkbox"/> Woolen Manufacturing |

BUSINESS COURSES

- | | | | |
|--|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accounting <input type="checkbox"/> Advertising | <input type="checkbox"/> College Preparatory | <input type="checkbox"/> First Year College | <input type="checkbox"/> Railway Postal Clerk |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bookkeeping | <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial | <input type="checkbox"/> Foremanship <input type="checkbox"/> French | <input type="checkbox"/> Salesmanship |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business Correspondence | <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial Illustrating | <input type="checkbox"/> Good English | <input type="checkbox"/> Secretarial <input type="checkbox"/> Spanish |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Cost Accounting | <input type="checkbox"/> High School | <input type="checkbox"/> Showcard and Sign Lettering |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cartooning <input type="checkbox"/> Civil Service | <input type="checkbox"/> C. P. Accounting | <input type="checkbox"/> Managing Men at Work | <input type="checkbox"/> Traffic Management |

HOME ECONOMICS COURSES

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Advanced Dressmaking | <input type="checkbox"/> Home Dressmaking | <input type="checkbox"/> Tea Room and Cafeteria |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Foods and Cookery | <input type="checkbox"/> Professional Dressmaking and Designing | <input type="checkbox"/> Management, Catering |

Name.....Age.....Address.....

City.....State.....Present Position.....

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REDUCE FAT

HERE'S PROOF—AMAZING FREE TRIAL

Reduce Pounds and Inches Without Danger from Abdomen, Chin, Neck, Legs, Hips, Thighs, Arms

Modern science now shows that most fat people don't have to remain overweight any longer. Except a comparatively few cases, every one of these thousands of persons can now reduce *quickly and safely* . . . without unwarranted diets, exercise or discomfort.

SOMETHING NEW . . . SAFE, EASY, QUICK

Are you one of these thousands, most of whom have tried to reduce by following food fads, menus, etc. . . . and failed? If you are, here's something new, what modern science has discovered on reducing foods, drugs and devices. Here's how you can reduce scientifically, with new health and attractiveness . . . and without unnecessary exercise, dieting, massage, etc.

Simple Directions.. Guaranteed Harmless

The "Complete Weight Reducer," a wonderful new book, has just published these marvelous reducing revelations. No matter how overweight you may be from non-glandular dysfunctions, these measures will help slim you considerably in a few short weeks. Just follow the simple directions on general reducing and spot reducing on abdomen, double chin, neck, thighs, arms, legs, hips, etc., at once and your reducible pounds and inches of excess fat will go down, down, down . . . until you soon feel like a different person, with new pep and popularity.

Endorsed In Medical Journals

Illinois Medical Journal says: "Can be used quickly and easily." Michigan State Medical Journal says: "Gives positive advice and instructions." Medical World says: "Should be read from cover to cover before starting any treatment." Journal of American Osteopathic Assn. says: "Of value to physicians and laymen alike."

Also praised by many editors and columnists all over U. S. A.



Send No Money Examine It Free

You need send no money—just mail coupon now. We will send you the "Complete Weight Reducer" for 5 days' free examination. When it arrives, deposit \$1.98 (plus a few cents for postage and handling) with the postman. Follow its simple instructions immediately and start reducing. If within 5 days you are not convinced that this shows you the way to considerable weight loss, pounds and inches, you may return it and we will instantly refund your deposit of \$1.98 in full. Remember you risk nothing in mailing the coupon. This is your great opportunity of becoming slimmer and slimmer. So act NOW!



Mail This Coupon Today!

HARVEST HOUSE

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Please send me at once in plain package, for 5 days' free examination, the COMPLETE WEIGHT REDUCER. When it arrives, I will deposit \$1.98 (plus a few cents for postage and handling) with the postman. If within 5 days of following its simple reducing instructions, I am not completely satisfied, I may return it and you will refund my full deposit of \$1.98. Otherwise, I will keep it and the deposit will be considered payment in full.

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ADDRESS.....

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

☐ Check here if you want to save postage. Enclose \$1.98 with coupon and we ship prepaid. Same return privilege with refund guaranteed.

FREE OFFER FOR FALSE TEETH



JUST 3 EASY STEPS

Tightens False Teeth or No Cost!

Here's new amazing mouth comfort without risking a single cent . . . enjoy that feeling of having your own teeth again. Satisfy your desire for food . . . eat what you want. **CROWN RELINER TIGHTENS FALSE TEETH OR NO COST.**

Don't suffer embarrassment and discomfort caused by loose dental plates. Apply **CROWN RELINER**. In a jiffy your plate fits like new and stays that way up to 4 months. **No old-fashioned heating to burn your mouth.** Just squeeze **CROWN** from tube and put your teeth back in. They'll fit as snugly as ever. Inventor is a recognized authority in dental field. A patent has been applied for **CROWN RELINER** to protect you from imitators. After you reline your plate with **CROWN**, take your false teeth out for cleaning without affecting the **CROWN RELINER**. **CROWN RELINER** is guaranteed . . . it's harmless.



**No.1
CLEAN
WELL**



**No.2
DRY WELL
UNDER BULB**



**No.3
SQUEEZE CROWN
RELINER FROM
TUBE, SPREAD
EVENLY, PUT PLATE
BACK IN MOUTH**

READ WHAT A USER WRITES

J. Clements of Algonac writes: "My plates were so bad they rattled when I talked." "Now I can eat steaks, corn on the cob." E. W. W. of Virginia writes—"I have found Crown Reliner all you claim for it and more."—Many more attest to same excellent results. Reline your plates with **CROWN**. It's tasteless. Has that natural pink color. Order a tube of **CROWN RELINER** today . . . enough to last a year. We include **FREE** a tube of **CROWN** plate cleaner.

NOT A POWDER or PASTE

Crown Dental Plate Reliner is not a powder or a paste. It is a scientific discovery that you use without fuss or bother. Just squeeze it out of the tube onto the plate and in a jiffy your plate will again feel as tight and comfortable as it did when it was new . . . **feels comfortable too!** **Doesn't burn or irritate.** Order today and enjoy this new oral comfort right away.

SEND NO MONEY

You take no risk when you order Crown Plate Reliner. You must be one hundred per cent delighted or no cost. Try it for four months and then return it for a full refund if not satisfied. Order at once and we'll include free with your order a tube of Crown's Dental Plate Cleaner. You'll be delighted with both and the Crown Cleaner will always make your mouth feel clean and refreshed. Rush coupon sending name and address. Pay postman one dollar for combination plus postage, or send cash and we pay postage. Act now and enjoy this new happiness.



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